

Background

Rural health coalitions are becoming more common, however, there does not appear to be standards or guidelines on how these coalitions should operate. There is no blueprint for organizing or creating the leadership structure, bylaws, mission, or function of these coalitions. Thus, each coalition operates differently from similar coalitions.

Purpose

The objective of our research is to provide an overview of the current state of rural health coalitions and examine how they are formed, leadership structure, & what outcomes are being measured.

Methods

Databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, BASE

Keywords: rural, health, consortium, coalition, Appalachia, Appalachian, alliance, south

Number of articles: 9

Inclusion criteria: discussion of mission, leadership structure, formation, and outcomes

Exclusion: published prior to 2000, not directly relating to rural health, or research that was behavior-based.

Formation

Fig 1: Factors that influence the formation of rural health coalitions

- To pool resources across jurisdictions
- Different jurisdictions have similar goals
- Shared issue/problem
- Shared excess burden of disease
- Complimentary knowledge and expertise
- Increase population involved in intervention

Leadership Structure

Fig 2: The role and development of leadership within rural coalitions

- There is evidence that strong leadership is essential to community health improvement coalitions that involve cross-jurisdictional sharing.
- Leadership was integrated into existing partnerships or programs
- Coalition leadership is often assigned to those who are considered community “leaders” or given to those who are in positions of leadership within the involved communities.
- Collaborative leadership structures may be beneficial to help maintain long-term partnerships

Outcomes

Fig 3: Outcome based research

- Combined resources and intervention strategies of coalition members and their partners can improve health outcomes

Discussion

While the formation of rural health coalitions appears to be well understood, there is very little in the literature in terms of developing the leadership structure of rural health coalitions. Current research appears to focus on the how leadership affects coalitions as opposed to the actual development and structure of leadership. There is literature that discusses leadership structure, however, that literature does not address the complexities of rural coalitions. The process of policy, procedure, and bylaw creation was absent in this literature review.

Discussion of outcome research was limited to 1 of the 9 articles. This low return would indicate that there is current lack of data & understanding regarding outcomes.

Relevance to Rural Health

Although it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of rural health coalitions currently operating due to a lack of cohesive organization, there does appear to be a significant amount operating at some capacity throughout the rural US. Therefore, it is important to understand the development, function, and success of these organizations. While the literature does indicate reasons for formation, any data beyond initial formation appears to be severely lacking.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Anthony Bardo for his guidance & expertise on this project.