

# Promising Approaches for Reducing Substance Misuse-Related Health Disparities in Rural Context

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The opinions expressed herein are the view of PTTC Network and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

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Post in the chat the words that best describe living and/or working in a rural community.



# Learning Objectives



1. Describe the importance of addressing health disparities in rural communities.



2. Identify risk factors for health disparities in the rural context



3. Develop strategies for addressing unique challenges to prevention in rural settings



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# Defining Rural

- The U.S. Census Bureau defines “rural” as anything not urban.
- All localities with a small population (less than 10,000) outside an urban cluster. These can include different types of localities such as:



Small Towns  
Densely Settled



Exurban Pockets  
Outskirts of Cities



Frontier Areas  
Sparsely Populated



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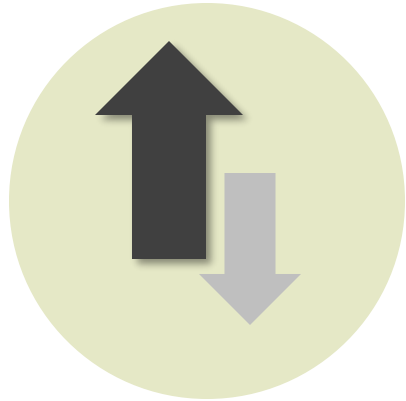
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# Shifts in Rural Demographics: Key Findings

Racial diversity increased in nonmetropolitan America over the past decade, though the population remains 76% non-Hispanic White.



Diversity increased in rural America, as the rural population declined.



The rural child population is more diverse than the adult population



Growing rural diversity presents challenges and opportunities

# The Importance of Addressing Health Disparities in Rural Communities.

Health Disparities



Health Equity



Health Inequity





# The Prevalence of Substance Misuse in the Rural Context

- Substance use disorders
- Risky alcohol-related behaviors including binge drinking
- Tobacco



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# The Prevalence of Substance Misuse in the Rural Context

- Illicit drug use including heroin, prescription medications, and methamphetamines (meth).
- Prescription opioids



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# The Prevalence of Behavioral Health Disorders in the Rural Context

- Depression
- Suicidality
- Mental Distress
- Subpopulations  
(women, low-income children, veterans, non-Hispanic Blacks, and American Indian/Alaska Natives)



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# Key Health Disparities in Rural Context

- In general, rural populations experience worse health status than urban populations.
- Life expectancy is generally lower in rural than in urban counties.
- The consequences of greater opioid use in rural areas include increases in opioid-related overdose deaths and increased exposure to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV).
- The high rates of injection drug use and the resistance to needle exchange programs also pose an ongoing and growing risk to many rural communities.



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A photograph of a rural setting. In the foreground, a dark metal park bench sits on a concrete pad. To the left of the bench is a large, dark tree trunk. Further left, a black street lamp stands on a sidewalk. In the background, a large, multi-story building with many windows is visible, possibly a school or community center. The sky is overcast and the overall tone is somewhat somber.

# Risk Factors for Health Disparities in Rural Context





**ACCESS**



**ACCESSIBILITY**



**AVAILABILITY**



**ACCEPTABILITY**



**CULTURE**

**Conditions in Rural Communities (Four A's & C)**

# Factors Contributing to Substance Use in Rural America

- High rates of poverty, unemployment, and community disorganization
- Community norms that encourage (or do not discourage) substance use
- Low academic achievement
- Lack of hope and opportunity for the future
- Low neighborhood attachment
- Fewer opportunities for positive social involvement



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# Factors Contributing to Behavior Health Disparities in Rural America

- Rural behavior health disparities are closely linked to the socioeconomic characteristics of rural populations and communities.
- Higher proportion of families living below the poverty level, more unemployment, and a greater percentage of residents who have public insurance or are uninsured than do urban areas.
- Rural individuals also experience a greater sense of stigma, a higher sense of isolation and hopelessness, lower education rates, and higher rates of chronic illnesses.

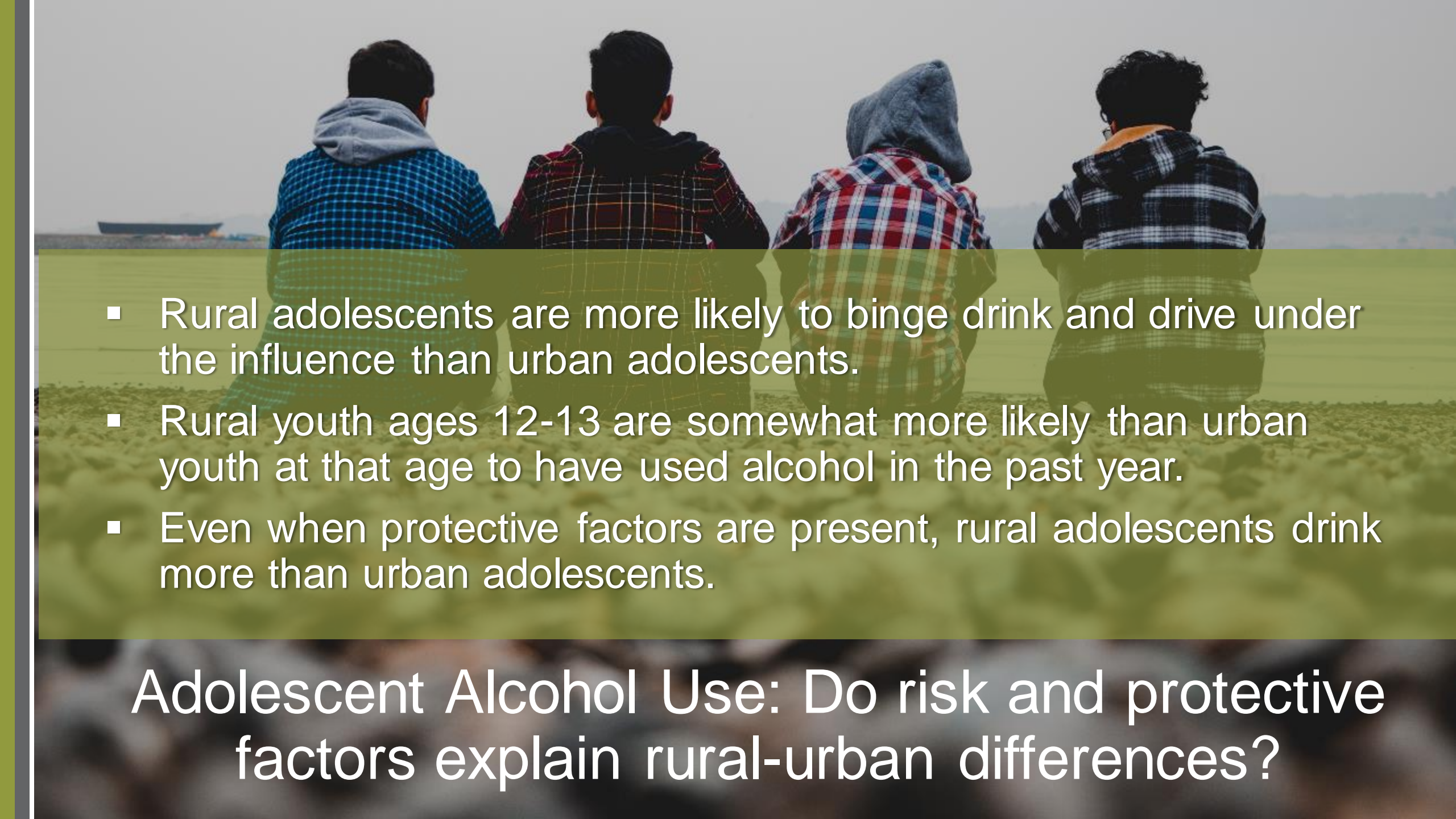


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- 
- A photograph of four adolescents sitting on a grassy field, looking out over a body of water. They are wearing plaid shirts and hoodies. In the background, a ship is visible on the water. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green box containing text.
- Rural adolescents are more likely to binge drink and drive under the influence than urban adolescents.
  - Rural youth ages 12-13 are somewhat more likely than urban youth at that age to have used alcohol in the past year.
  - Even when protective factors are present, rural adolescents drink more than urban adolescents.

Adolescent Alcohol Use: Do risk and protective factors explain rural-urban differences?





# Chat Question

Which population(s) are you most concerned about in your community?

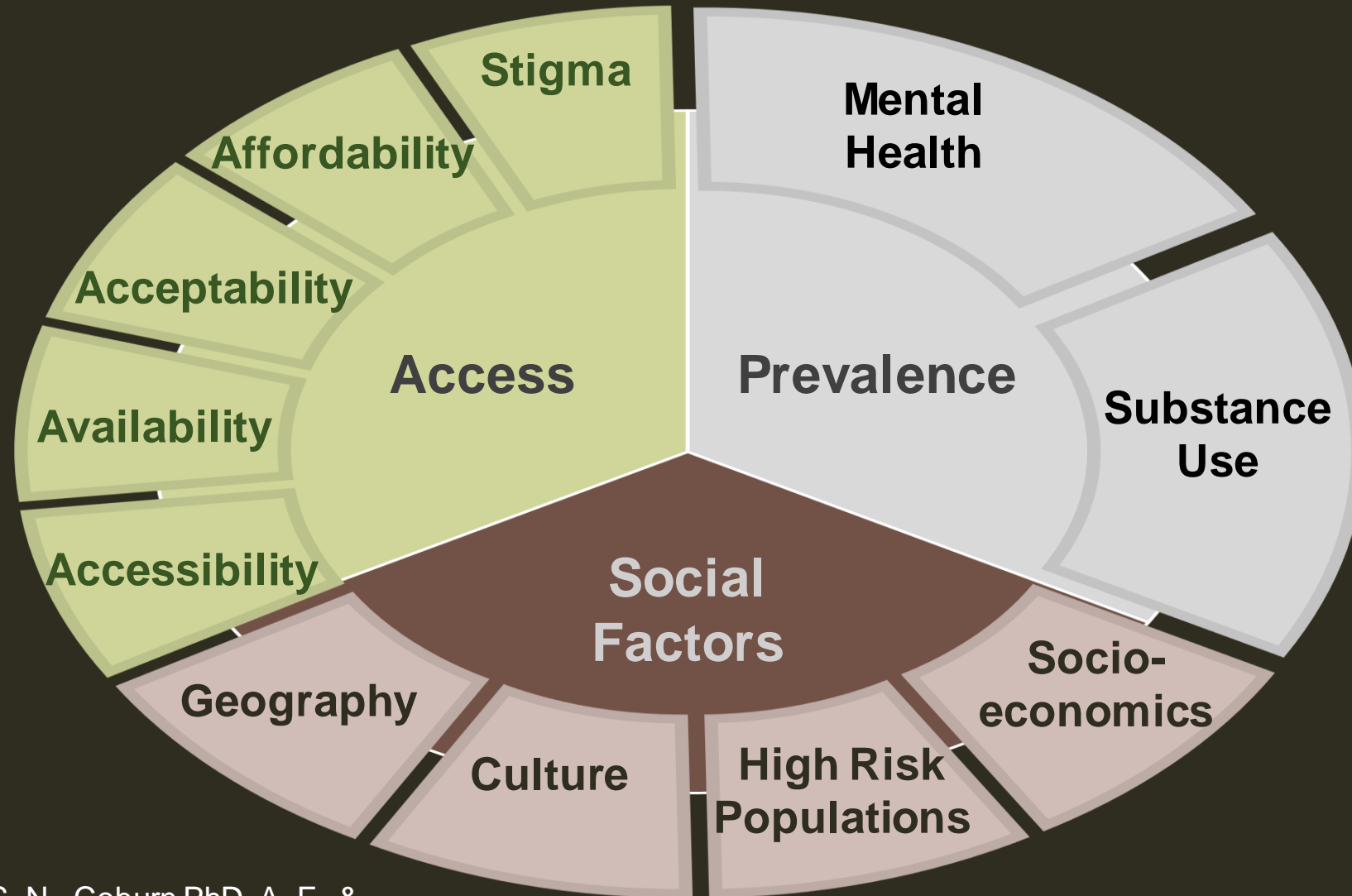
What rural context, circumstance, or condition creates greater risk for them?

## Rural Subpopulations at High Risk

- Women
- Children and Adolescents
- Veterans
- People of Color
- American Indian, and Alaska Native Populations
- Older Adults
- Individuals with Co-occurring Conditions



# The Context for Understanding Rural Mental Health and Substance Use







# How Can Rural Communities Combat Substance Misuse?



# Policy Change



"[Policy](#) is a tool for achieving health promotion and disease prevention program goals. Policy decisions are made by organizations, agencies, and stakeholders. Policy approaches include legislative advocacy, fiscal measures, taxation, and regulatory oversight."

Source: RHI Hub

## Policy Change Examples

# Policy Change in Rural Context



## Policy Change



## Systems Change



“Systems change refers to a fundamental shift in the way problems are solved. Within an organization, systems change affects organizational purpose, function, and connections by addressing organizational culture, beliefs, relationships, policies, and goals.”

Source: RHI Hub

## Systems Change Examples

# Systems Change



## Policy Change



“Environmental change strategies involve changing the economic, social, or physical surroundings or contexts that affect health outcomes. Environmental strategies address population health outcomes and are best used in combination with other strategies. Examples of environmental strategies for health promotion and disease prevention include increasing the number of parks, greenways, and trails in the community ”

Source: RHI Hub

## Environmental Change



## Environmental Change Examples

# Environmental Change in Rural Context



## Policy Change



“Environmental change strategies involve changing the economic, social, or physical surroundings or contexts that affect health outcomes. Environmental strategies address population health outcomes and are best used in combination with other strategies. Examples of environmental strategies for health promotion and disease prevention include: Increasing the number of parks, greenways, and trails in the community ”

Source: RHI Hub

## Environmental Change



## Environmental Change Examples

Examples of Policy, System, Environment (PSE)  
Change Interventions



## Policy Change



“Environmental change strategies involve changing the economic, social, or physical surroundings or contexts that affect health outcomes. Environmental strategies address population health outcomes and are best used in combination with other strategies. Examples of environmental strategies for health promotion and disease prevention include: Increasing the number of parks, greenways, and trails in the community ”

Source: RHI Hub

## Environmental Change



## Environmental Change Examples

# Considerations for Implementation



- 
- A photograph of a white church with a brown steeple and a blue roof. In the background, there are trees with autumn foliage and two industrial smokestacks emitting smoke. The church is situated on a grassy field with a small body of water in the foreground.
- ✓ Healthcare
  - ✓ Social services
  - ✓ Law enforcement
  - ✓ Schools

- ✓ Local and tribal governments
- ✓ Faith-based organizations
- ✓ Businesses
- ✓ Consumers

# Community Engagement





# Case Examples

**Success Stories in Rural Context**

**Policies to Limit Access to Substances**



A photograph of a rural street scene. A paved road leads towards distant hills under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. On the left, there's a white building with a gabled roof and a utility pole. On the right, a large green tree stands next to a building. The text is overlaid on this image.

# Case Examples

**Success Stories in Rural Context**

**Community Coalition-based Prevention**



A photograph of a rural street scene. A paved road with yellow double lines runs down the center, flanked by green trees and grass. On the left, there's a white building with a brown roof and a red pickup truck parked nearby. On the right, a large, leafy tree stands next to a white building. In the background, rolling hills are visible under a blue sky with a few white clouds. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

# Case Examples

## Success Stories in Rural Context

### Youth Prevention Programs



A photograph of a rural street scene. A paved road stretches into the distance, flanked by green trees and grass. In the background, there are rolling hills under a bright blue sky with a few white clouds. On the left, there's a white building with a brown roof and a utility pole. On the right, there's a large, leafy green tree and a yellow diamond-shaped road sign.

# Case Examples

**Success Stories in Rural Context**

**Parents and Family Prevention Programs**

# Finding Promising Programs



Toolkits



Specific Drug  
or  
Consequence



Populations



**Handout: Promising Approaches for Reducing Substance Misuse-Related Health Disparities in Rural Context**



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# Moving Forward

- Do Your Homework
- Leverage Healthcare Providers
- Partner with Faith-based Organizations
- Get to Know Leaders at Local Schools
- Use Social Networks
- Empower Residents to Act as First Responders
- Increase Access to Online Treatment
- Take the Long View
- Focus on Protective Factors





Let's hear from you!

What are your questions?



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For further questions, contact:

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## About the Rural Health Information Hub

Your *First STOP* for *RuralHealth* INFORMATION

The Rural Health Information Hub, formerly the Rural Assistance Center, is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy to be a national clearinghouse on rural health issues.

The RHIhub is your guide to improving health for rural residents—provide access to current and reliable resources and tools to help you learn about rural health needs and work to address them.

([ruralhealthinfo.org](http://ruralhealthinfo.org))



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