

Barriers to accessing public healthcare services in rural South Africa

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Introduction and purpose: Access to healthcare is a basic right enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. Despite efforts made to achieve universal access to healthcare, most low medium income countries (LMIC) continue to face major challenges related to health care service delivery. Research on access to public healthcare shows unequal access, however more research is needed in rural context, to allow for development of interventions that are tailored to rural communities. This study seeks to establish barriers to accessing public healthcare services in rural South Africa and provide recommendations for improving access. **Methods:** This is a qualitative desktop study. Data collection methods included a review of the existing literature and academic research on access to healthcare services in rural settings using electronic databases and published resources, to understand the challenges faced by people in rural areas face when accessing public health care services.

Results/findings: The findings reveal that poor infrastructure (public roads, transportation, public hospitals), planning, institutional arrangement and systems, shortages of healthcare facilities, personnel, medicine, mistrust, and financial constraints (indirect care cost such as transport) were barriers to access to healthcare services in rural settings. Inadequate budget, infrastructure, and staffing shortages resulted in long waiting times, delayed services, overloaded and stressed healthcare workers with bad attitudes, which served as a deterrent to access and use of healthcare services in rural settings.

Conclusion: Access and provision of high-quality public health services in South Africa's rural communities is critical to attaining equitable health outcomes for all citizens. If citizens have no access or do not make use of healthcare services, they are at risk of contracting diseases and losing lives, that could have been saved. The study findings highlight the need for the government to prioritize the construction of suitable infrastructure and address budget and personnel shortages in public health institutions to increase access to care in these communities, as failure to do so might result in non-use of healthcare services and deterioration in health status of rural community members and inability to attain equitable health outcomes in South Africa.

Keywords: *Access, barriers, community, public healthcare services, rural.*