

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER:

# Rural Americans are at Risk for Cardiovascular Disease

### LACK OF CARDIOLOGISTS



**Almost ½ of counties** in the United States have **NO** practicing cardiologist; **over 82%** of these counties are rural.<sup>1</sup>

### MORE HEART DISEASE



Rural populations are **40% more likely to develop heart disease** and have a **30% higher risk of experiencing a stroke**.<sup>2</sup>

### LACK OF TESTING



**Rural adults are less likely than urban adults to have ever had a cholesterol screening** or even a recent blood glucose test.<sup>3</sup>

### REDUCED ACCESS TO CARE



The rising rate of cardiovascular disease mortality **disproportionately impacts rural adults because of the great number healthcare access barriers** affecting rural populations.<sup>4</sup>

### SHORTER LIFE SPAN



The life span of rural Americans is **3 years shorter** than their urban counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

1. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/nearly-half-us-counties-dont-single-cardiologist-rcna160229>  
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5015359/> 3. <https://www.jacc.org/doi/10.1016/S0735-1097%2822%2902457-3> 4. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0246813> 5. <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/health-disparities-among-the-many-unique-challenges-for-people-in-rural-america>

**Access to cardiovascular care is a serious problem throughout rural America for patients of all ages.** Adults, particularly older adults, who are more likely to require such care, must routinely face the problem of there being fewer cardiologists, medical specialists, hospitals, and pharmacies, to diagnose and provide treatments for their conditions. They have to travel longer distances to receive treatment and care, are more likely to be un/under-insured and experience longer time intervals between care. These impediments are also further complicated by lengthy insurance processes like step therapy which requires patients to try and fail on one or more lower-cost or generic medication before the insurer will cover a more expensive or brand name drug. Given the scarcity of rural providers and pharmacies and distances to them, this extra burden can increase costs for patients for tried and failed drugs and put them at even greater risk.

It is critical to address the complexities, both patient and economic, that are created by the disproportionate burden of cardiovascular disease on rural Americans. There is also a great need for much more patient and provider engagement to encourage adults and their clinicians to address their much higher health risks. Patient education about the importance of routine checkups that include cholesterol screening, the value of prescribed medicines, and the necessity of regular follow up care, particularly for older and at-risk patients are critical.

**The National Grange is the only organization focused upon all aspects of rural America.** The health disparities facing rural populations are of enormous concern to all of us and we stand ready to work with all interested parties to find real life solutions that improve all of our lives.

