Outreach and Education to Rural Black and African American Populations

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, more than five million Black and African American people lived in rural settings, representing nearly eight percent of the rural U.S. population. It is important to try to reach the underserved communities of rural Blacks and African Americans.

**Where do Black and African American rural/small town residents live?**

Nearly 90 percent of U.S. rural populations of Blacks and African Americans live in the Southern U.S. Blacks and African Americans represent 20 percent or more of the rural population in only six states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percent of Blacks and African Americans in State’s Rural Populations²</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although screening rates are similar among Black and African American women living in rural and urban areas, women in rural areas report more barriers to receiving breast cancer screening³. There are barriers to working with people in small towns and rural areas that should be considered when conducting your outreach and education programming.

**Barriers include the following⁴,⁵,⁶:**

- Lack of transportation
- Hospitals/clinics and mammography services that may not be located nearby
- Lack of cellular telephone service, which limits the number of outreach methods
- Limited large-scale media outlets compared to urban environments
- Lack of trust for “outsiders”
- Concerns about embarrassment during screening
- Limited willingness because of religious beliefs

New and recent immigrants most frequently settle in urban areas of the U.S.
There are benefits to working with small town or rural populations that can be used to your advantage.

**Benefits include the following:**
- Word-of-mouth information can spread quickly in rural areas and small towns.
- Developing a good reputation can build community trust for you/your program.
- Recommendations/referrals between community members can be especially effective in small towns.
- Lower mobility of the population may mean that you can develop long-term professional relationships with your audience.
- Physicians and nurses are often held in high esteem and are seen as very trustworthy in rural areas and small towns.

**Evidence-based methods you can use to reach rural Black and African American populations include the following:**
- Use images of Black and African American people in your materials.
- Bring services to your audience; if possible, identify where they congregate on a regular basis in order to overcome transportation barriers. If you know of public transportation or ride-share resources in your community, provide audience members with information about these services.
- Provide audience members with a landline telephone number that is answered by a trained staff member and/or plays a professional message when receiving a voicemail recording.
- Use multiple methods for outreach. Calling only a cellular phone number may reduce the response rate in areas with limited or no cellular service.
- If you or your agency are new to the community or have not yet established a reputation for breast health/public health education, take time to establish community trust. Building trust takes time and effort.
- Build physicians and nurses into your recruitment efforts, as they are generally well-trusted in rural settings.
- Establish a personal referral network using word-of-mouth advertisement.
- Encourage women to ask their health care providers about getting a mammogram. Research shows that not receiving a recommendation from a physician is one of the top reasons women report for not having a mammogram in the past year.
- Make consistent telephone contact with those you are serving. Reminder calls before events or scheduled screening appointments can increase attendance. Calls after scheduled screening or to “check-in” can make your audience feel that you care about them and their well-being, which also increases participation and helps to build rapport.
Include services that reduce feelings of social isolation in your audience. Older, rural, minority women are especially likely to experience feelings of isolation and can benefit from programs that make them feel more connected to others\(^9\). Examples include weekly or monthly support groups, regularly-scheduled events and telephone social support networks.

Use local newspapers. Recognize those who you have served or who completed some aspect of your program. Ask for permission to use success stories, quotes or photos in local newspapers\(^6\).

Make a commitment to the community. Rural populations are untrusting of temporary programs that pull services to move to another community once their goals are reached\(^10\).

Remember that rural populations are not homogeneous. Do not make assumptions that people living in a rural area/small town all have the same beliefs, attitudes, lifestyles, etc. Get to know your audience well before deciding how you will develop and implement services\(^11\).

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2  HAC Tabulations of the 2010 Census of Population and Housing, SF-1.