

# THE SENIOR HEALTHCARE DIVIDE IN TEXAS

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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

The Bush School

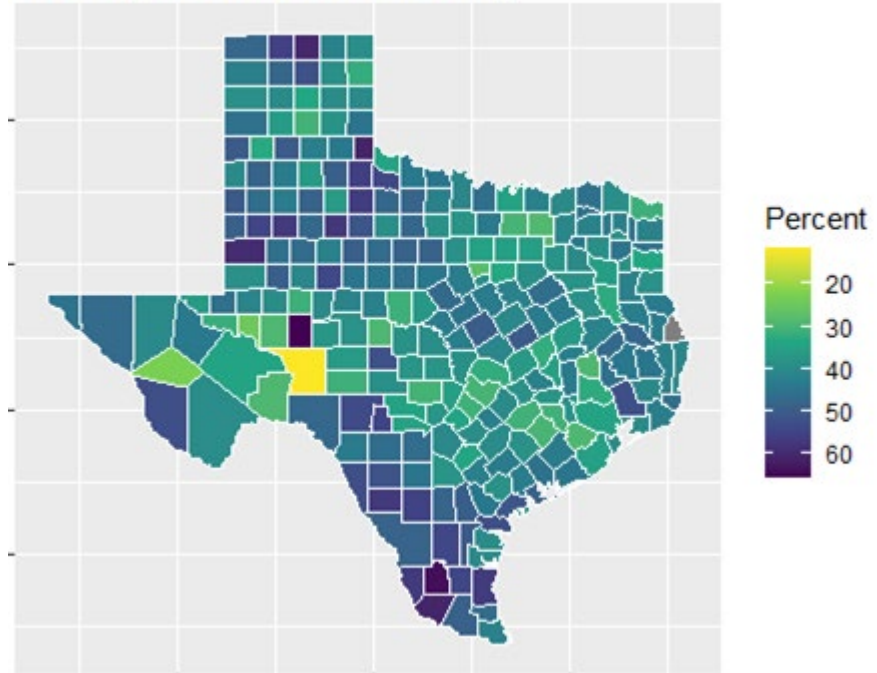
of Government & Public Service

Thanks to The Texas Lyceum for Funding.

# Rural Aging Health

- Rural counties have older populations  
(Texas Demographic Center, 2019)
- A greater proportion of seniors in rural area have a disability
  - Vision, hearing, ambulatory, cognitive
  - Hardships with self-care and independent living

65+ Population with a Disability



(data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a)

# Barriers to Healthcare

- Ability to Pay
- Rural Hospital Closures
- Distance from Providers

# Barrier 1: Ability to Pay

## For Texas Seniors

- Senior care costs are among the lowest in the country (Lisa, 2017)
- 6% skipped care due to cost in 2019 (United Health Foundation, 2020)
- 95% covered by Medicare (u.S. Census Bureau, 2019b)
  - 14.1% also on Medicaid
  - 51.1% with private insurance
- 10% in poverty (United Health Foundation, 2020)

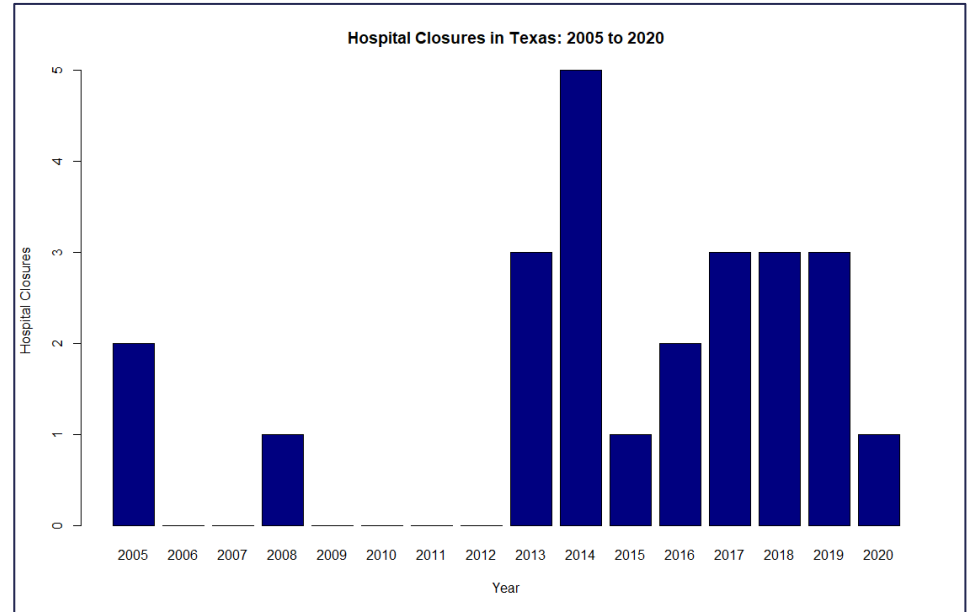
## How this hurts rural communities:

(GAO, 2018)

- They are older, poorer, less educated, and have lower insurance coverage
- Lower ability to pay > lower economic incentives for providers to operate in poor areas

# Barrier 2: Hospital Closures

- 24 rural hospitals have closed between 2005 and 2020 (the highest of any state)
- Factors in closures: lower volume, reduction in Medicare payments (GAO, 2018)
- Rural hospitals in states where Medicaid was expanded had a better survival rate
- Consequences of closure: job loss, population loss, decreased economic pull for future providers



Data from Sheps Center 2020

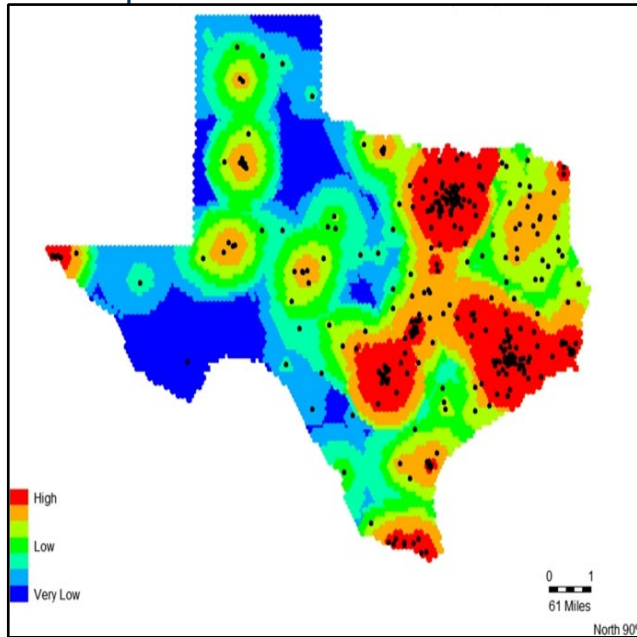
# Barrier 3: Distance From Providers

- Distance is a greater barrier than ability to pay or supply (Bolin et al., 2015)
- Many Texans are far from providers
  - There are 95 physicians per 100,000 Texans (de Mello-Sampayo, 2018)
  - 347,000 Texans live 30 mins away from emergency medical services (Koeze et al., 2020)
- Greatest along the U.S.-Mexico Border and into the Panhandle
- Rural areas have less access to pharmacies and long-term care facilities (Collins et al., Hawes et al., 2006)

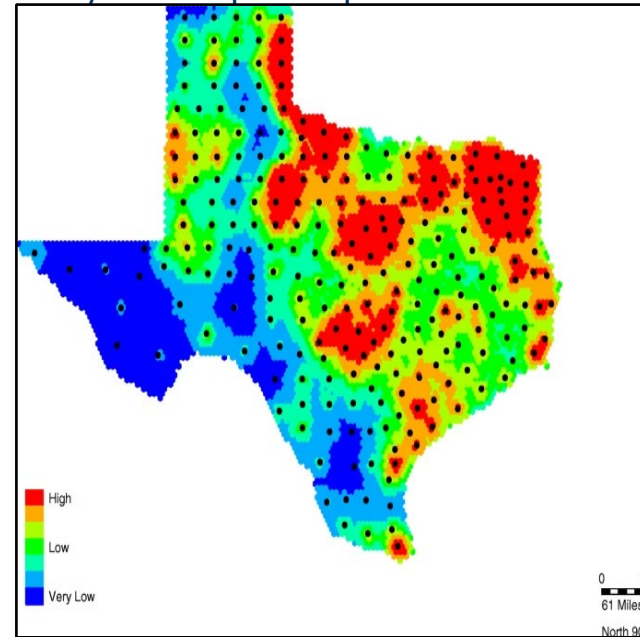
➡ Decreased preventative behavior and the decision between fewer care services or aging further from home

# Barrier 3: Distance From Providers

Beds per Patient




Physicians per Capita



(de Mello-Sampayo, 2018)

# Points of Action

- Ability to Pay
  - Rural Hospital Closures
  - Distance from Providers
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- Medicaid Expansion
  - Public Transportation Expansion
  - Telehealth Expansion



# 1st Point of Action: Medicaid Expansion

- Help secure rural hospital financial viability
  - \$5.4 billion in federal funding annually (Dague & Hughes, 2020)
  - An additional \$5 billion over two years from the American Rescue Plan (Lopez, 2021)
- Invest in the health of 1.3 million uninsured Texans (Dague & Hughes, 2020)
  - Lower health costs in the future
- HB 3871 and SB 117

# 2nd Point of Action: Public Transportation

## Rural Transportation Systems

- 36 rural transportation systems covering all but 8 counties (TDOT, 2018)
- Expand curb-to-curb services
  - Weekends
  - greater hours
- Discounted or free services for medical appointments and for seniors
- Increased advertisement about offered services

## State and Federal Actions

- Investment in transportation infrastructure

# 3rd Point of Action: Telehealth Expansion

- Fills gaps in access due to distance by eliminating the need for transportation to many types of appointments
- Gives patients access to a larger pool of doctors

## Regulation

- State: Make permanent the temporary pay parity
- Federal: Make permanent the temporary allowance for coverage of telehealth services

## Connectivity

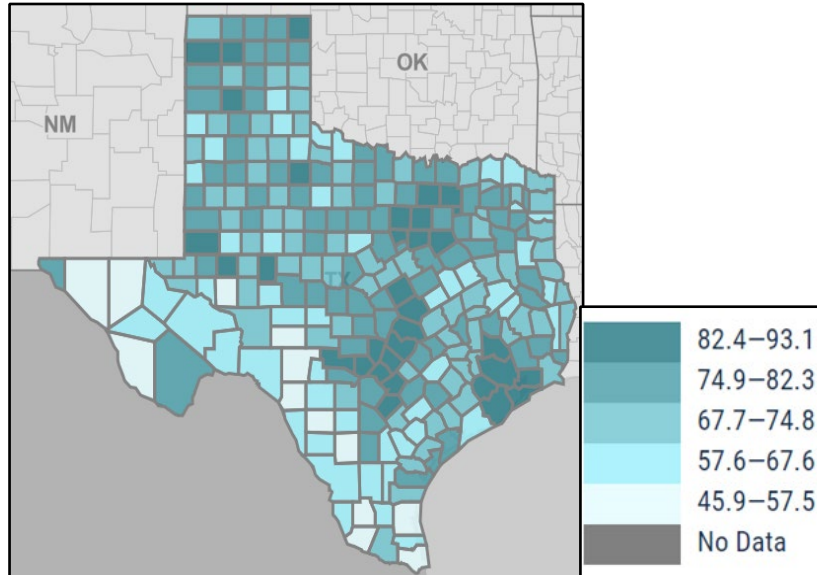
- Enact a state broadband plan like the one recommended by the Governor's Broadband Development Council (HB 1446 and SB 506)

# 3rd Point of Action: Telehealth Expansion

- Expanding broadband would help those who could most benefit from telehealth
- Research during the COVID-19 pandemic shows these populations are willing to use telehealth

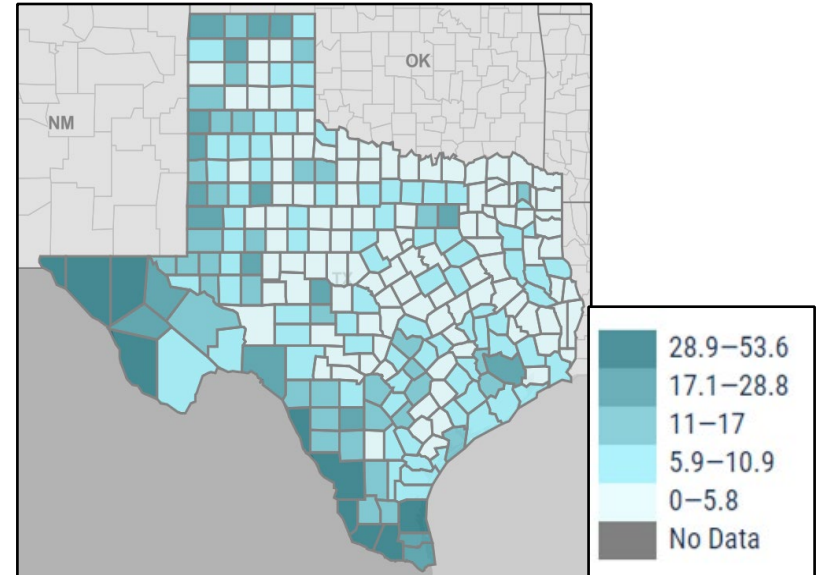
(Ghaddar et al., 2020)

Percent of Households with a Broadband Subscription



(U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d)

Percent Who Does not Speak English "Very Well"



# Conclusion

Texas is getting *older* as Texas seniors are facing *higher rates of preventable, non-communicable diseases*.

*Ability to pay for care, rural hospital closures, and distance from providers* are major barriers to healthcare access, especially so for *rural seniors*.

*The expansion of Medicaid, public transportation services, and telehealth* could lower these barriers.