



Rural Survivors of Sexual Violence

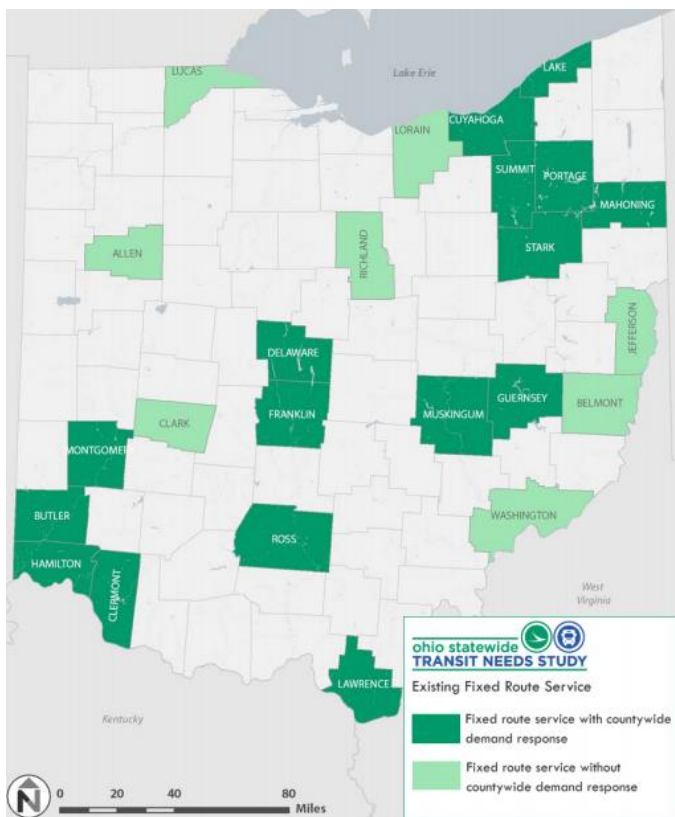
Rural Ohio

A significant portion of the state of Ohio is rural. According to U.S. Census data, 50 of Ohio's 88 counties (57%) are considered entirely rural, and there are 94 individual tracts within 22 counties that are considered rural.¹ Over two million Ohioans – 20% of the state's population – live in rural areas. Based on 2015 data, the poverty rate and unemployment rate are higher in rural Ohio when compared with urban areas.²

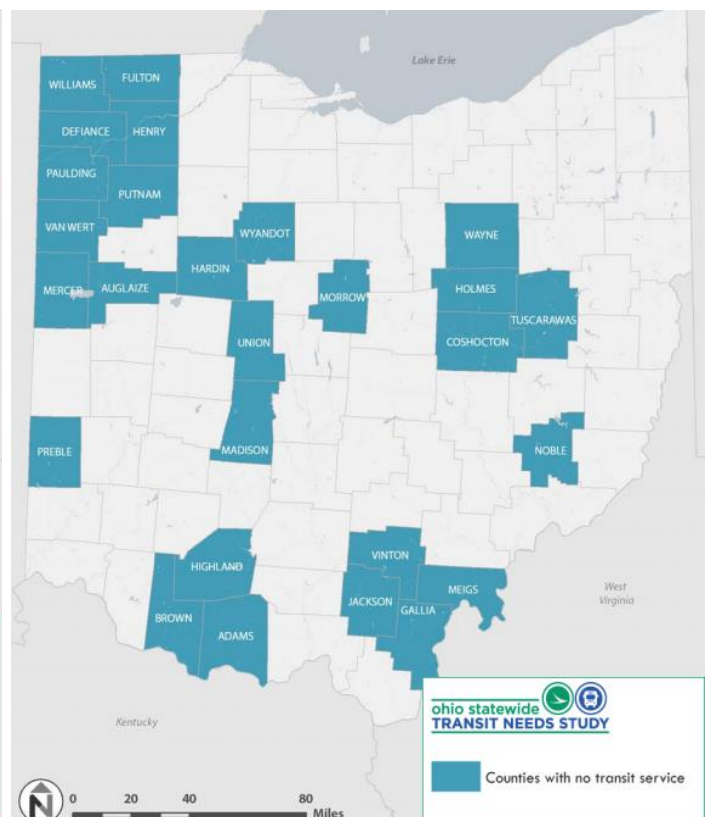
Transportation in Ohio

One of the most consistently-identified challenges for rural Ohioans, including survivors of sexual assault, is access to transportation. Often individuals in rural areas must travel long distances to access health care and social services, or to go to and from work or school. The following maps from the Ohio Department of Transportation Transit Needs Study (2015) illustrate access to public transportation in Ohio:

Counties with fixed route services



Counties with no transit service



¹ U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration (2016). "List of Rural Counties and Designated Eligible Census Tracts in Metropolitan Counties." Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/ruralhealth/resources/forhpeligibleareas.pdf>

² Rural Health Information Hub. Retrieved from: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/ohio>

Rural Survivors of Sexual Assault

While the prevalence of sexual violence in rural communities is not significantly different than in urban or rural communities, the challenges for survivors in rural areas are unique and include:

- **Lack of anonymity:** With a low population density, most individuals in rural communities know each other. In addition to the likelihood that the survivor knows the offender (as is the case in the majority of sexual assaults generally), representatives from response services are more likely to be known to survivors as well as their friends and family. Remaining anonymous and being able to access confidential services is often difficult.
- **Physical isolation:** Many survivors in rural communities are physically or geographically isolated from supportive services. They may have difficulty accessing services due to lack of anonymity, transportation difficulties and the time it takes to travel to and from service providers, or both.
- **Cultural norms or expectations:** While not true of every community or area, many rural communities regard family and community identity and reputation as being more culturally important than personal or social justice. Survivors may feel pressured to keep the assault or abuse secret or private so as not to embarrass their family or community. Additionally, individuals in rural communities are more reluctant to trust outside organizations when dealing with personal or private matters.

Due to these and other factors, rural survivors are generally less likely than survivors in urban or suburban areas to report their assault or abuse, and are less likely to seek services to support their healing.

Resources for Rape Crisis Programs in Rural Communities

Rape crisis programs and allied organizations serving rural communities face barriers of their own, including funding difficulties and programming expectations that are compared with urban service models and characteristics. Rape crisis programs in rural areas are frequently required to travel long distances for trainings and meetings, in addition to traveling more than urban and suburban programs to provide services to survivors. Given that rape crisis programs in rural communities face the added barrier of trying to reach survivors who are often reluctant or unable to seek services, a significant amount of time must be invested in building trust and partnerships within the community.

Resources to assist rape crisis programs and allied organizations in rural communities include:

- Sexual Violence in Rural Communities, special project from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center: <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/rural/>
- Sexual Assault in Rural Communities, applied research from VAWnet: http://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/AR_RuralSA.pdf
- Sexual Assault Training for Rural Law Enforcement Personnel, University of Arkansas Criminal Justice Institute: <http://www.cji.edu/programs/sexual-assault-training-for-rural-law-enforcement-personnel/>
- Rural Training and Technical Assistance Project, from the Resource Sharing Project: <http://www.resourcesharingproject.org/rural-training-and-technical-assistance>
- Violence and Abuse in Rural America, from Rural Health Information Hub: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/violence-and-abuse>
- Stopping the Stigma: Changing Public Perceptions of Sexual Assault in Rural Communities, from the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault: <http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Rural-Info-Packet-v2-FINAL-UPLOAD-12.28.10.pdf>

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence: 216-658-1381 / 888-886-8388 / info@oaesv.org / www.oaesv.org

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