

Physical Therapy in Florida's Rural and Urban Assisted Living Communities

BACKGROUND

Assisted living communities (ALCs) in Florida play an important role in the long-term care of over 4 million older adults throughout the state.¹ However, older Floridians living in rural regions have limited access to ALCs and the services they provide.² Physical therapy is a type of healthcare service offered in many of these ALCs. This therapy is especially important because it assists older adults in the maintenance and promotion of physical functioning.³ In particular, it has been found to build balance, encourage flexibility, enhance mobility, and reinforce strength.⁴ Also, engagement in physical therapy can minimize fall risks, which is important in ALCs, where an average of 58% of the resident population faces walking difficulties. Despite this information, it remains unclear as to how many of Florida's ALCs offer physical therapy services. Additionally, the varying availability of ALCs with physical therapy services in rural and urban areas is also an issue of concern. Therefore, it is the aim of this brief to describe the availability of physical therapy services in ALCs across Florida and how it varies by rural and urban locations.

STUDY METHOD

Data on Florida's ALCs, their location, and whether they offered physical therapy were collected from the Florida Agency for Health Administration (AHCA)*.⁵ AHCA mandates that all ALCs in the state report information regarding their location, size, services, and activities offered. The county-level

addresses ALCs reported to AHCA were then identified as urban or rural based on data provided from the 2010 U.S. Census. According to the census, counties are considered rural counties if there are less than 100 people per square mile.⁶

FINDINGS

In Florida, 876 ALCs (28%) provide physical therapy. Of these ALCs, 1.1% are in rural counties, whereas 98.9% are in urban counties (see Table 1). Additionally, only 8 of the 30 counties identified as rural have at least one ALC with physical therapy services. Furthermore, the ALCs within these 8 counties account for only 12.7% of the total 79 rural ALCs in Florida. However, all of Florida's urban counties have at least one ALC incorporating physical therapy into the services they offer.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence of physical therapy services in ALCs across Florida, as well as how service availability differs between rural and urban areas. The findings suggest physical therapy is scarcely provided in both rural and urban counties. However, rural counties are grossly underserved regarding this service. Additionally, a majority of ALCs that provide physical therapy are concentrated in a small number of larger counties, such as Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach. This is of concern because of the mobility deficits experienced by most of this older population and the need for activities (e.g. for balance, flexibility,

*Data was collected on February 6, 2020

strength) to help bolster their independence. Moreover, older adults tend to occupy more rural areas compared to urban areas, highlighting the importance of physical therapy services in these areas.² Policymakers should work to increase the number of ALCs that provide physical therapy throughout Florida. Moreover, they should target ALCs located in rural counties to ensure that residents within these communities can take advantage of such a service.

REFERENCES

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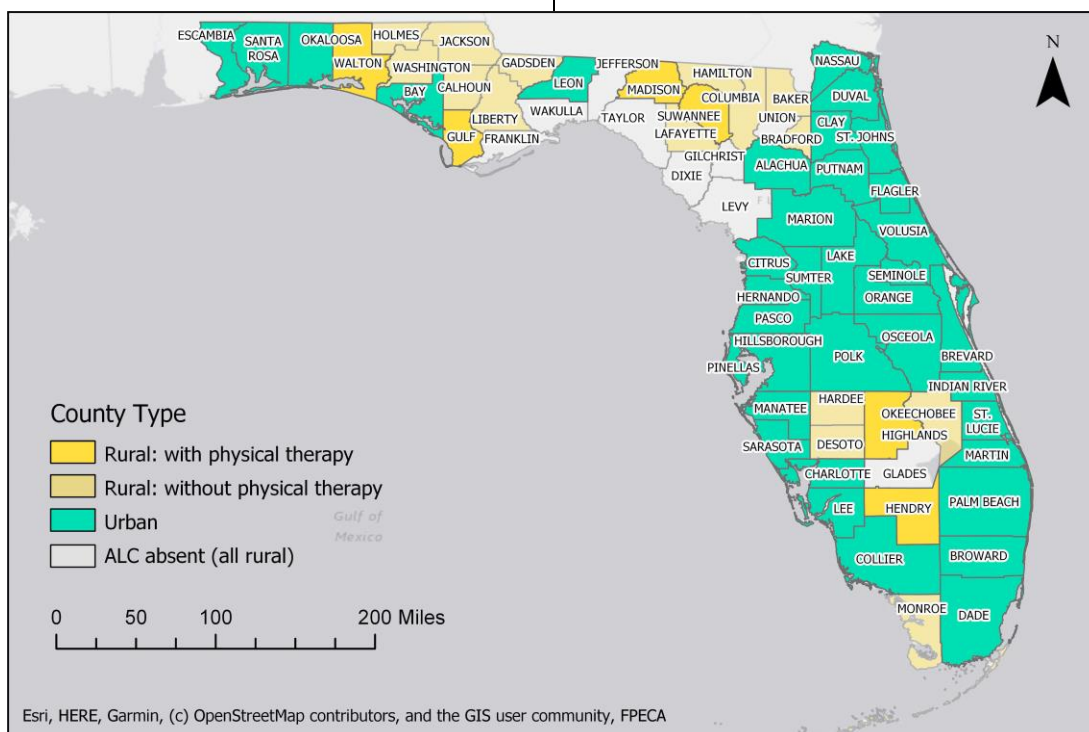


Figure 1. Florida Counties With and Without Assisted Living Communities with Physical Therapy.

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Table 1. Florida Assisted Living Communities By County (2020)

Counties (N=67)	Rural (Y/N)?	Physical Therapy Offered (Y/N)?	ALCs with Physical Therapy (N=876)
Alachua	N	Y	1
Baker	Y	N	0
Bay	N	Y	3
Bradford	Y	N	0
Brevard	N	Y	31
Broward	N	Y	105
Calhoun	Y	N	0
Charlotte	N	Y	7
Citrus	N	Y	4
Clay	N	Y	2
Collier	N	Y	16
Columbia	Y	N	0
De Soto	Y	N	0
Dixie	Y	N	0
Duval	N	Y	28
Escambia	N	Y	9
Flagler	N	Y	6
Franklin	Y	N	0
Gadsden	Y	N	0
Gilchrist	Y	N	0
Glades	Y	N	0
Gulf	Y	Y	0
Hamilton	Y	N	0
Hardee	Y	N	0
Hendry	Y	Y	1
Hernando	N	Y	7
Highlands	Y	Y	1
Hillsborough	N	Y	74
Holmes	Y	N	0
Indian River	N	Y	8
Jackson	Y	N	0
Jefferson	Y	N	0
Lafayette	Y	N	0
Lake	N	Y	16
Lee	N	Y	26
Leon	N	Y	1
Levy	Y	N	0
Liberty	Y	N	0
Madison	Y	Y	1
Manatee	N	Y	17
Marion	N	Y	10
Martin	N	Y	5
Miami-Dade	N	Y	173

Monroe	Y	N	0
Nassau	N	Y	1
Okaloosa	N	Y	4
Okeechobee	Y	N	0
Orange	N	Y	43
Osceola	N	Y	8
Palm Beach	N	Y	83
Pasco	N	Y	10
Pinellas	N	Y	55
Polk	N	Y	7
Putnam	N	Y	1
Santa Rosa	N	Y	2
Sarasota	N	Y	28
Seminole	N	Y	25
St. Johns	N	Y	10
St. Lucie	N	Y	14
Sumter	N	Y	8
Suwannee	Y	Y	1
Taylor	Y	N	0
Union	Y	N	0
Volusia	N	Y	21
Wakulla	Y	N	0
Walton	Y	Y	3
Washington	Y	N	0

Source: Surveying Agency for Healthcare Administration.

Note. ALC= Assisted living community.