

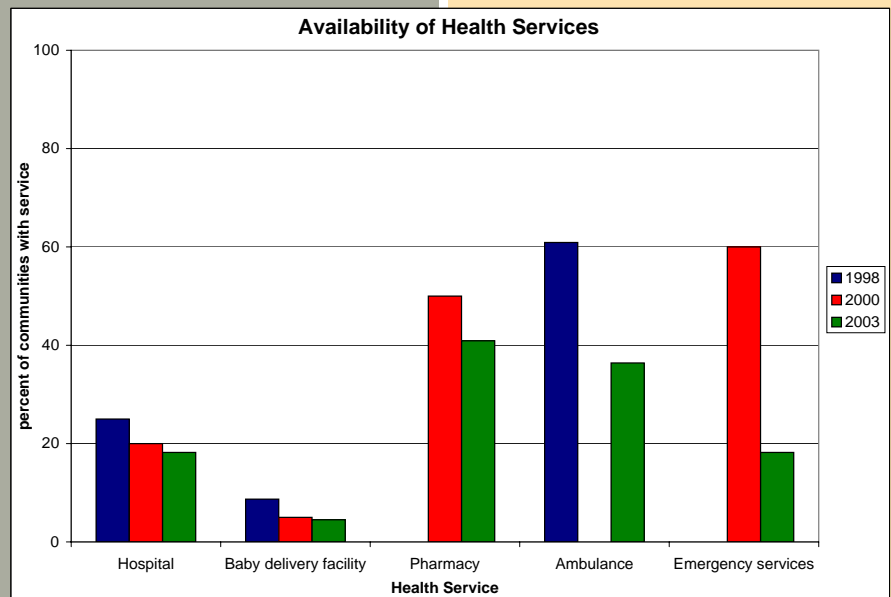
Regionalization of Health Services Across Canada.

Services provide stability and quality of life in rural places; these, in turn, provide a strong base for attracting economic activity, retaining residents, and maintaining communities. Rural and small town services are especially critical to community sustainability during times of economic and social change.

Services in small places face very specific accessibility and availability issues. Rural Canada, with its large distances and low population densities, faces a significant challenge to maintain services with higher delivery costs relative to urban areas. This is exacerbated where population numbers are falling due to out-migration. Over the past twenty years, government policy aimed at reducing public sector expenditures has included rural service reductions. The implications are reduced accessibility and availability of services in rural and small town locations. Since 1998, the New Rural Economy Project of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation has been tracking a range of health service changes in 22 sites across Canada.

The implications of health service change, and the processes by which rural and small town places respond to such change, underscore why an interest in service provision is important to any study of community capacity. When examined

over time, it is apparent that the availability of health care services is being reduced across our study sites. Of particular interest is that only 40% or fewer of the examined sites have a local hospital or pharmacy, and only about one-third of the



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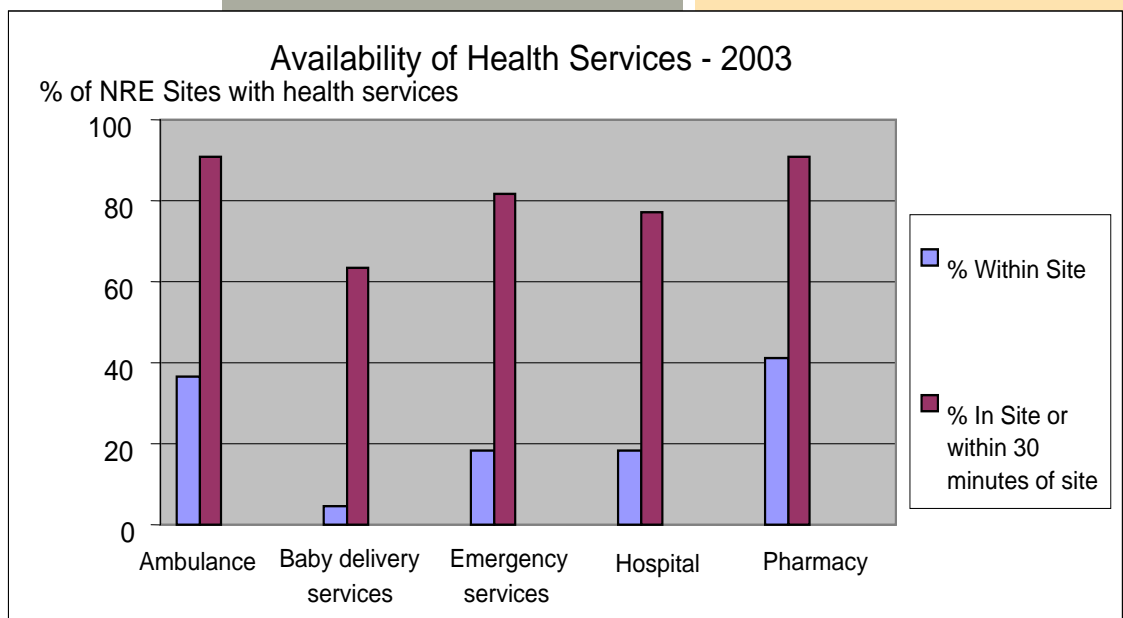
sites have local ambulance services.

Moving from the local to the regional level, a majority of our study sites across Canada are within 30 minutes of most of the noted health care services. However, access to limited health care services in rural and small town locations imposes significant costs (time, distance, and economic) on people, especially given inadequate public transportation and harsh winter climates.

In Canada, health care services are often funded, managed, and evaluated against criteria developed for metropolitan areas. Such criteria are inappropriate to the social and geographic landscape of rural and small town places. As well, with the regionalization of services to larger centres,

rural and small town places may have difficulty in providing or accessing even basic health services. Overall, tracking change across these rural and small town places indicates that health service provision is declining. Such declines are occurring in an arena of social and economic restructuring in an

residents and businesses within these places. Such places will need to explore innovative ways, through new technologies or partnerships, to provide and improve services that will be important to their communities in an era of increased specialization and regionalization.



increasingly global economy. This places pressures on residents and businesses who must travel to nearby centres to access certain services. The challenge for rural and small town Canada will be to enhance local quality of life that will retain

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