



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY OF RURAL SENIORS ACROSS THE U.S.

Methodology: On behalf of Tivity Health, Public Opinion Strategies conducted a telephone survey among N=400 seniors living in mostly or completely rural counties across the United States as defined by the U.S. Census. The survey was conducted July 17-21, 2018. The margin of error for N=400 is $\pm 4.9\%$.

1) Most rural seniors are dealing with multiple health conditions and issues. Though a majority tend to evaluate their own health as fairly positive overall, at least one in four report themselves to be in fair or poor health.

- Roughly one in four (27%) rural seniors say their own health is fair (21%) or poor (6%). Another 34% say their health is good, and a combined 39% rate their health as very good (29%) or excellent (10%).
- We asked rural seniors if 11 different health issues apply to them – from arthritis (a condition 55% of rural seniors say applies to them) to cancer (8% applies) and including unspecified mental illnesses (1% applies).
 - Of all rural seniors, 34% have four or more of these health issues, while 40% have two to three of them, and only 26% of rural seniors have just one or none.
 - Among the 34% of rural seniors with four or more health problems, a 45% plurality rate their health as fair or poor, 36% rate it good, and just 18% rate it as very good or excellent.

2) Sixty-four percent (64%) of rural seniors see a direct connection between feelings of loneliness and isolation and negative impacts on physical health.

- Among all rural seniors, 64% believe that loneliness or social isolation a person can experience in old age usually has a negative impact on their physical health.
 - Seniors under 70 are most likely to believe there are negative health impacts of loneliness (73% agree).
 - Rural seniors on Medicaid are least likely to believe there are negative health impacts of loneliness (46% agree).

3) Majorities of rural seniors are looking to elected officials in their state and the business community to help address their needs.

- Two-thirds (66%) of rural seniors say officials in their state need to be doing more to address the needs of older residents in rural communities, including healthcare costs, public transportation, and financial assistance, including property tax relief.
- Another two-thirds (67%) of rural seniors say businesses and corporations have a role to play in addressing the needs of seniors in rural communities.

4) About a third (32%) of rural seniors reported at least three of nine indicators of social isolation apply to them.

Using these nine indicators of social isolation:

Social Isolation Matrix Items % Among Rural Seniors	
Do not attend church/synagogue	40%
# friends you can talk to about private matters (2 or less)	35%
Most days you do not see friends or family	29%
Widow or widower	25%
Live alone	25%
# friends you could call on for help (2 or less)	23%
No member of family within driving distance	14%
# friends you hear from at least once a month (2 or less)	10%
Do not have people to turn to for support	5%

We separated rural seniors into four groups...

- **Most Isolated** -- Thirty-two percent (32%) report that **THREE OR MORE** of the nine isolation markers apply to them.
- **Two Isolation markers** -- Twenty-five percent (25%) report that only **TWO** of the nine isolation markers apply to them.
- **One Isolation marker** -- Twenty-five percent (25%) report that only **ONE** of the nine isolation markers apply to them.
- **Not Isolated** -- Just 18% of the respondents report that **NONE** of the nine isolation markers apply to them.

5) There are demographic and behavioral differences between the most isolated rural seniors and those who are not isolated based on the nine indicators of social isolation we measured.

In addition to being more likely to report feelings of loneliness, compared to the not isolated seniors, the most isolated rural seniors are different in other significant ways:

- Demographically: They are more likely to be female, have a high school education or less, and describe themselves as poor or working class;
- Behaviorally: They are more likely to keep the TV on all day and less likely to be on social media;
- And, the most isolated seniors are more likely to want state elected officials to do more to meet the needs of seniors like them.

Additional Survey Findings on America’s Rural Seniors

- ❖ Rural seniors are a relatively small cohort when it comes to national policy – just 5% of the adult population.
- ❖ There are many indicators in this survey to suggest the rural seniors we reached are comfortable and connected in their community, including satisfaction with their social lives and community ties.
- ❖ Seniors in general have lower levels of formal education and about a third of rural seniors report being poor/working class, but these seniors still report higher economic satisfaction and 90% own their homes.
- ❖ Rural seniors’ top concerns in their community are drug addiction, poverty, and access to public transportation.