Centers for Independent Living: Rural & Urban Distribution

Tom Seekins Ph.D.
University of Montana - Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities

Bill Innes
University of Montana - Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities

Alexandra Enders
University of Montana - Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities

University of Montana Rural Institute
scholarworks-reports@msoumt.edu

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RTC: Rural staff often encounter questions about rural centers for independent living (CILs) that are surprisingly difficult to answer:

“How many rural CILs are there?”

“How are they located?”

“Are there enough rural CILs?”

The answers depend on how you define a “CIL,” and how you define a “rural” program.

Our research indicates that there is a total of 336 centers for independent living scattered across the nation. Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act funds many – but not all – of them. Federally-funded CILs typically receive funds from several other sources as well. All 336 meet the standards for CILs. Map 1 shows the distribution of CILs by their location in metropolitan or non-metropolitan counties.

We’ve counted eighty-eight CILs that are located in non-metropolitan counties. We know that many metropolitan CILs also provide services to non-metropolitan, rural areas. Research Triangle Institute’s (RTI’s) study showed, however, that a vast majority of a typical CIL’s consumers live in the county where the program is located.
If most consumers live in the county where their CIL program is located, outreach programs become more important. Many CILs operate “subordinate offices” (satellites, branch offices, outreach offices, and others) which extend the reach of their advocacy and services. Table 1 defines each type of subordinate office or program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satellite</th>
<th>Sometimes called “mentored centers”, these meet all CIL criteria, but share a board of directors with the main CIL.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Fiscally and administratively part of another CIL and has a staff person in the local community less than half-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch</td>
<td>Fiscally and administratively part of another CIL and has a staff person in the local community at least half-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Unique or unclassifiable programs/offices, frequently in rural communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map 2 shows the location of the 245 subordinate offices and programs for which we have a geographic location in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas. (We have found a total of 278 to date.)
Are there enough CIL programs to provide advocacy and other services to all those who might find them useful — in all areas of the United States?

One way to address this question is to look at how centers and subordinate programs/offices are distributed across three types of counties. A city CIL may target subordinate programs and offices in areas of the city with a minority population, or may cover a suburban area. Its subordinate programs/offices may also be located in non-metropolitan, rural counties surrounding the city.

Subordinate programs and offices operated by CILs in non-metropolitan counties are almost always designed to serve areas that are even more rural and remote. These may also serve minority populations (for example, a subordinate program located on tribal lands).

Table 2 shows estimates of how the 336 CILs and their subordinate programs and offices are distributed across three types of counties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metropolitan County</th>
<th>Non-Metropolitan County Adjacent to a Metropolitan County</th>
<th>Non-Metropolitan County, Non-Adjacent to a Metropolitan County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main CIL Offices</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate Program or Offices</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Counties*</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>1303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties per Main Centers</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties per Subordinate Program or Office</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Ratio of Counties per CIL Site</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: "Total Counties" equal the national count for each county type: 835 metro + 1003 non-metro adjacent + 1303 non-metro, non-adjacent = 3141 total counties. We lack complete data for some main CILs and many subordinate offices; therefore counts of "counties covered" or "counties served" are incomplete. Our best estimates appear in our submitted manuscript (see References). Data for subordinate offices are less complete than that for main offices. A higher proportion of subordinate offices are in non-metro counties, so figures based on data received to date exaggerate the rural deficit.

Another way to determine whether there are enough CILs to serve rural areas is to examine the distribution of people receiving CIL services. As we mentioned, the RTI study found that most of a CIL’s consumers live in the county where the CIL is located. Although CIL advocacy efforts can have wide-ranging effects, our research shows that rural residents with disabilities are still under-served when compared to urban consumers. If we look at the data on the total number of people who potentially might benefit from independent living services (those with severe disabilities), even urban people with disabilities appear to be under-served.
Table 3 shows our estimates of: 1. Counties in which CIL services are actually provided; 2. The number of people actually receiving services; 3. The population of people with disabilities who might benefit from services; and 4. Relevant ratios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Non-Metro Adjacent</th>
<th>Non-Metro, Non-Adjacent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counties Served</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Receiving Services</td>
<td>188,893</td>
<td>7,511</td>
<td>15,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with Severe Disabilities</td>
<td>19,182,047</td>
<td>3,309,889</td>
<td>2,704,848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of People Served to People with Severe Disabilities</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, the glass appears to be about half full. Although there are many CILs serving rural America, nearly 40% of the country still has no access to services. Neither urban nor rural areas have the capacity to meet the potential need for independent living services.

For more information, please contact us at:

RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER ON RURAL REHABILITATION SERVICES
52 CORBIN HALL ● THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA ● MISSOULA, MONTANA 59812
(406) 243-5467 (V/TT) ● (406) 243-2349 fax ● (888) 268-2743 toll-free
http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/rtcrural/

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES


Seekins, T., Innes, W., & Enders, A. (1999). A geographic analysis of independent living center services: Equitable distribution between urban and rural areas. Missoula, MT: Research & Training Center on Rural Rehabilitation, University of Montana.


Independent Living Research Utilization: http://www.ilru.org

Association for Programs in Rural Independent Living: http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/rtcrural/APRIL/

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