Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit: Country experience - England

WHO Lessons in Rural Proofing Webinar

15th July 2021
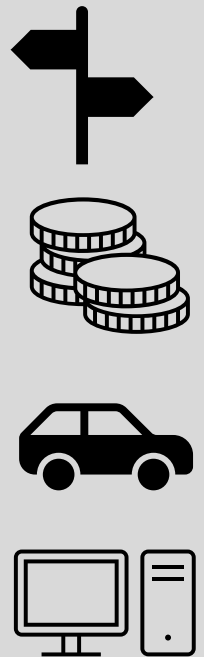
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What is the Toolkit?

A tool to help local/regional organisations or partnerships in the health and care sector to address the needs of their rural populations when they are developing policies or service delivery plans.

To manage rural challenges which can affect both service users and providers:

o Distance from services

o Lost economies of scale

o Downtime and costs

o Infrastructure gaps

Whilst realising rural opportunities

Structure of the Toolkit

It has six main themes:

1. Main hospital services
2. Primary and community health services
3. Mental health services
4. Public health and preventative services
5. Social care services
6. Workforce

Plus some cross-cutting themes:

o *Accessibility and transport*
o *Health inequalities and data*
o *Adoption of IT and digital*
o *Role of the voluntary and community sector*
o *Patient and public involvement*
o *Service collaboration and integration*

Other reasons to use rural proofing

Rural proofing can help to:
o Optimise service outcomes

o Achieve more equitable benefits

o Assist locality-based approaches

o Address unintended (spatial) gaps in service provision

o Identify opportunities to innovate

o Support good practice in policy making

Factors blocking or facilitating rural proofing – both policy and process issues

Blockers:

x **Centralisation** of specialist health services

x **Cost** of rural service provision is often higher

x **Understanding** of rural issues can be poor in organisations

x **Data** at a rural (spatial) level may not exist to inform service design

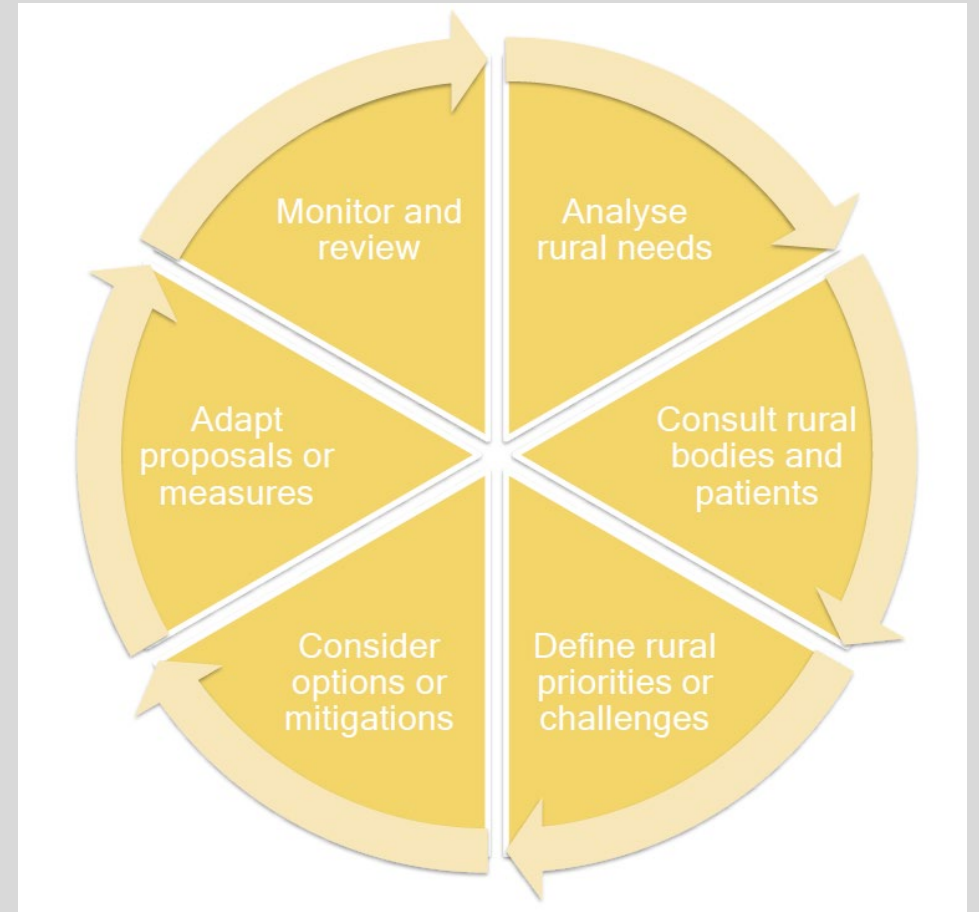x **Other agendas** with higher profile (including, now, the pandemic)

Facilitators:

✓ Adoption of **online** or remote health services

✓ Creation of local **health hubs** and outreach clinics

✓ More **integration** of primary and community health professionals

✓ Use of **voluntary and community** sector to deliver support services

✓ Health **inequalities** agenda (in terms of equality of access)

How might rural communities be involved in rural proofing?

Communities could usefully contribute to rural proofing at various points in the policy making cycle.

Examples include:

o Public consultations about health reforms – analyse rural responses

o Patient Participation Groups – include rural residents on such groups

o Local health watchdogs (Healthwatch) – monitor rural service user feedback

Rural areas – the Covid-19 experience

Rural areas faired relatively well:

o Infection rates have mostly been lower (than in urban areas)

o Vaccination take-up has been higher (than in urban areas)

o Communities have typically supported vulnerable or older neighbours

Rebuilding rural health systems – three priorities:

✓ Improving access to mental health services

✓ Improving access to public health initiatives

✓ Retaining the community groups and support networks

The Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit can be accessed online from the two organisations that funded it.

Rural England CIC

https://ruralengland.org/rural-proofing-for-health-toolkit/

National Centre for Rural Health & Care

https://www.ncrhc.org/workstreams/research

Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit

How to address the needs of a rural population

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