

## Occupational Therapy in Florida's Rural and Urban Assisted Living Communities

### **BACKGROUND**

The state of Florida has the largest percentage of older adults in the U.S., with a 65-and-older population of over 21%.<sup>1</sup> With older age, individuals are more likely to experience changes in their ability to perform activities of daily living (ADLs), such as eating, bathing, or toileting, and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), such as cooking, shopping, or taking medications.<sup>2</sup> Occupational therapy (OT) provides support for older adults who experience changes in their functional abilities.<sup>2</sup> This type of therapy involves cognitive, physical, and psychological exercises designed to improve older adults' abilities to perform everyday activities. Additionally, occupational therapists customize unique emotional, physical, environmental, and psychological interventions for each patient.<sup>2</sup> Access to OT is especially important for older adults who live in assisted living communities (ALCs)<sup>3</sup> because it can increase their independence, well-being, and sense of self.<sup>4</sup> The goal of this research was to examine access to OT services in ALCs across Florida and how availability differed in rural versus urban counties.

### **STUDY METHOD**

Data on ALCs in Florida, including their location and OT services were collected from the Florida Agency for Health Administration (AHCA)\*.<sup>5</sup> Each county was determined to be either rural or urban based on 2010 U.S. Census data. Counties are

considered rural if there are less than 100 people per square mile.<sup>6</sup>

### **FINDINGS**

Of the 3,090 ALCs in Florida, 850 (27.5%) offered OT to their residents (see Table 1). Almost all of these ALCs offering OT were located within urban counties. Additionally, every urban county had at least one ALC with OT services. Miami-Dade had the largest number of ALCs with OT (n=174). Only 8 ALCs in Florida's rural counties provided OT services, and they were located in only six counties (Hendry, Highlands, Madison, Walton, Washington, and Suwannee), of the 30 rural counties in Florida.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The goal of this study was to investigate access to OT in Florida's ALCs, and how this differed based on an ALC's rural or urban location. The findings indicate access to OT services in rural ALCs is extremely limited. Previous research examining older adults living in rural areas has found that these individuals are significantly more likely to have ADL difficulties and that such difficulties are related to lower health-related, social, and emotional quality of life.<sup>7</sup> The present research suggests that older adults living in rural areas may be unable to access care needed to maintain their functional abilities. Policy makers should take steps to increase access to OT services in ALCs across Florida, especially in rural counties. This has the potential to improve older adults' ADL

\*Data was collected on February 6, 2020

performance, health, social and emotional states, and quality of life.

## REFERENCES

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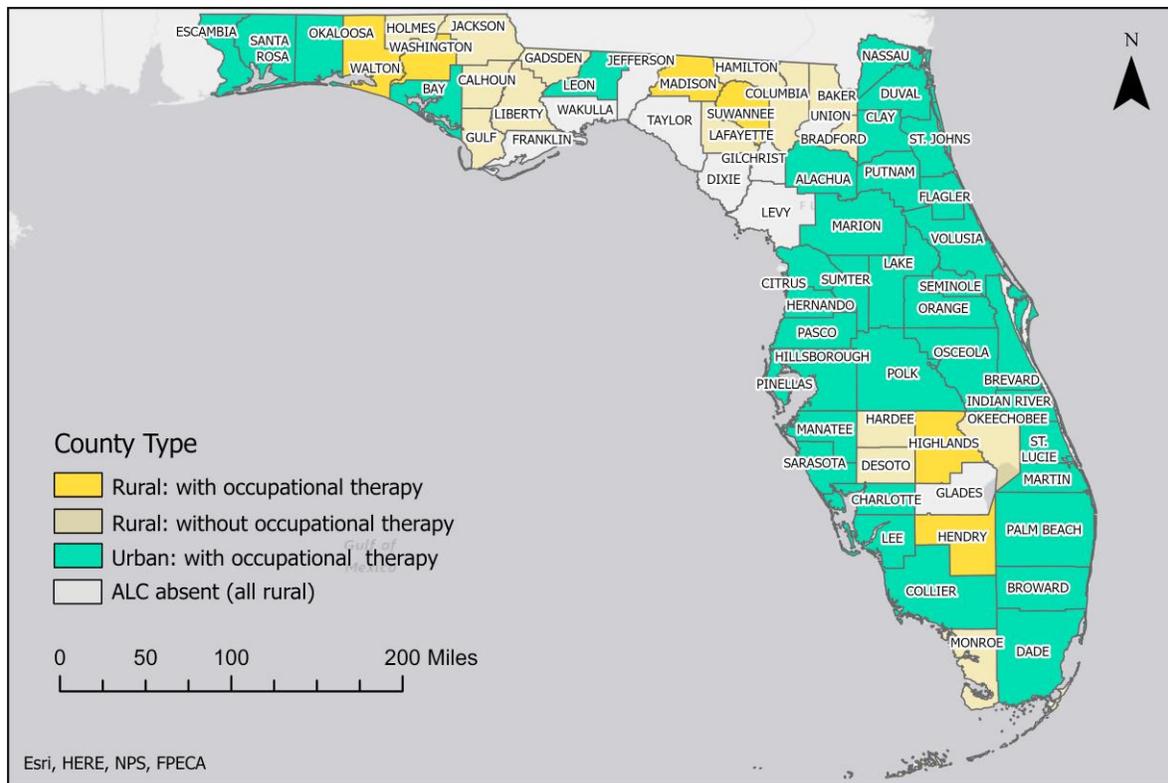
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**Figure 1.** Florida Counties With and Without Assisted Living Communities with Occupational Therapy.

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

| Counties (N=67)  | Rural (Y/N)? | Occupational Therapy Offered (Y/N)? | ALCs with Occupational Therapy (N=850) |
|------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Alachua          | N            | Y                                   | 1                                      |
| <b>Baker</b>     | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Bay              | N            | Y                                   | 3                                      |
| <b>Bradford</b>  | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Brevard          | N            | Y                                   | 30                                     |
| Broward          | N            | Y                                   | 97                                     |
| <b>Calhoun</b>   | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Charlotte        | N            | Y                                   | 6                                      |
| Citrus           | N            | Y                                   | 5                                      |
| Clay             | N            | Y                                   | 2                                      |
| Collier          | N            | Y                                   | 15                                     |
| <b>Columbia</b>  | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>De Soto</b>   | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Dixie</b>     | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Duval            | N            | Y                                   | 28                                     |
| Escambia         | N            | Y                                   | 11                                     |
| Flagler          | N            | Y                                   | 6                                      |
| <b>Franklin</b>  | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Gadsden</b>   | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Gilchrist</b> | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Glades</b>    | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Gulf</b>      | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Hamilton</b>  | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Hardee</b>    | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Hendry           | Y            | Y                                   | 1                                      |
| Hernando         | N            | Y                                   | 5                                      |
| Highlands        | Y            | Y                                   | 1                                      |
| Hillsborough     | N            | Y                                   | 72                                     |
| <b>Holmes</b>    | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Indian River     | N            | Y                                   | 8                                      |
| <b>Jackson</b>   | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Jefferson</b> | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Lafayette</b> | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Lake             | N            | Y                                   | 16                                     |
| Lee              | N            | Y                                   | 25                                     |
| Leon             | N            | Y                                   | 1                                      |
| <b>Levy</b>      | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| <b>Liberty</b>   | <b>Y</b>     | <b>N</b>                            | <b>0</b>                               |
| Madison          | Y            | Y                                   | 1                                      |
| Manatee          | N            | Y                                   | 14                                     |
| Marion           | N            | Y                                   | 12                                     |
| Martin           | N            | Y                                   | 4                                      |

|                   |          |          |          |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Miami-Dade        | N        | Y        | 174      |
| <b>Monroe</b>     | <b>Y</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>0</b> |
| Nassau            | N        | Y        | 1        |
| Okaloosa          | N        | Y        | 2        |
| <b>Okeechobee</b> | <b>Y</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>0</b> |
| Orange            | N        | Y        | 42       |
| Osceola           | N        | Y        | 9        |
| Palm Beach        | N        | Y        | 77       |
| Pasco             | N        | Y        | 10       |
| Pinellas          | N        | Y        | 55       |
| Polk              | N        | Y        | 7        |
| Putnam            | N        | Y        | 1        |
| Santa Rosa        | N        | Y        | 4        |
| Sarasota          | N        | Y        | 27       |
| Seminole          | N        | Y        | 25       |
| St. Johns         | N        | Y        | 9        |
| St. Lucie         | N        | Y        | 11       |
| Sumter            | N        | Y        | 7        |
| Suwannee          | Y        | Y        | 1        |
| <b>Taylor</b>     | <b>Y</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>0</b> |
| <b>Union</b>      | <b>Y</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>0</b> |
| Volusia           | N        | Y        | 20       |
| <b>Wakulla</b>    | <b>Y</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>0</b> |
| Walton            | Y        | Y        | 3        |
| Washington        | Y        | Y        | 1        |

Source: Surveying Agency for Healthcare Administration.

*Note.* ALC= Assisted living community.