



# State of Louisiana

## Louisiana Department of Health

# Rational Service Area Plan

## January 2020

The Well-Ahead Primary Care Office (PCO) has been tasked by HRSA to create a guideline to determine rational service areas (RSAs) for health professional shortage area (HPSA) designations. A RSA is an area chosen to be designated as a HPSA. Identifying the RSA is the first step in creating the designation. The area surrounding the RSA must be substantially different from the area included.

The general requirements for RSAs of all types are:

- A group of census tracts (CT), a group of county subdivisions, a whole county, or multiple whole counties can be selected to create a service area.
- The population designated in the RSA should not ideally exceed 250,000.
- A whole county, or multiple whole counties with centroids within 30 minutes of each other are considered rational for an RSA.
- A Sub-County RSA, meaning a group of census tracts called a cut-out area, can be rational if the following is true:
  - RSA cannot be smaller than a single CT.
  - RSA components must physically connect without a break and may not contain interior gaps (i.e. donut holes).
  - RSA cannot include components that are already designated.
- User must also provide an explanation, with evidence, of why a Sub-County RSA is valid using based on at least one of the following:
  - Distinctive travel patterns. (i.e. if there is a highway that brings patient to a certain area so that they may choose not to use an area that is closer but more difficult to get to.)
  - Physical barriers such as a bayou or a river that prevents the population from traveling
  - Strong self-identity of a neighborhood that has a minimum population of 20,000. (i.e. an area that may be one ethnicity that will not use providers outside of their community)
  - At least 2/3 of the providers in the RSA must be usable for the designation type.

In Louisiana RSAs are mainly established by parish borders. If the entire parish is not eligible, Well-Ahead PCO will look at census tracts that have similar demographics. These designations are called cut-out areas. These areas must not be smaller than a census tract, cannot make an interior gap, also known as a donut hole, and cannot consist of census tracts already designated. Well-Ahead PCO must provide an explanation of how the census tracts are alike using distinctive travel patterns, physical barriers, strong self-identity of a neighborhood (with a minimum population of 20,000) or similar socio-economic characteristics. The one exception to this is Beauregard Parish which also includes two census tracts from Calcasieu Parish. These census tracts are different from the census tracts around it and are similar to Beauregard Parish. They have been included with Beauregard Parish since its inception as a HPSA.

Currently, HRSA requires the use of 100% and 200% Federal Poverty Levels (FPL) to separate census tracts for the RSA. The following calculations are used:

- a) If the census tract statistic is less than 15%, add 15% to the percentage to be compared to the adjacent census tracts.
  - i. If the census tract has a statistics percentage greater than or equal to the adjacent census tract + 15%, this will be confirmed as a demographic disparity.
  - ii. If the census tract has a statistics percentage less than the adjacent census tract + 15%, then there is no demographic disparity for this factor.
  
- b) If the census tract statistic is greater than or equal to 15%, the system will double the census tract % ( $2 \times \text{census tract \%}$ ) to be compared to the adjacent census tract.
  - i. If the census tract has a statistic percentage greater than or equal to  $2 \times \text{census tract \%}$ , then this can be confirmed as a demographic disparity for this factor.
  - ii. If the adjacent census tract has a statistic percentage less than  $2 \times \text{census tract \%}$ , then there is not a demographic disparity for this factor.

Once the census tract area (Cut-Out Area) has been developed and no donut hole exists, the area can be considered for a RSA.

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