

Geographical Aspects of Healthcare Access
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Healthcare access is a multifaceted and complex concept and can be defined in a variety of ways. First of all it refers to geographic availability. A far broader definition identifies geographical, temporal, financial, cultural, and digital dimensions.

Geographical access is a measure of distance or travel time between locations, and the number of services in comparison to the number of potential users of the service. World Health Organization (WHO) recommends using travel time, rather than distance, to assess geographical accessibility.

Temporal access includes the time it takes to be seen by a provider, or time spent receiving treatment.

Economic or financial access refers to the affordability of services, insurance access, etc.

Social or cultural healthcare access tends to refer to acceptability of services, social norms, or language issues.

Digital access refers to recent innovations in e-health technologies, use of information and communications technologies (ICT) in healthcare fields.

Geographical healthcare access is considered as the base for describing and understanding the overall access picture. It can be increased through identifying areas with low geographical access, analyzing the effects of opening, closing, or relocating healthcare facilities. Thus, accurate and detailed representations of geographical access are important for further development of healthcare system.

Social, economic, and environmental factors affect geographical healthcare access. Healthcare access tends to be worse for vulnerable groups - low-income people, racial-ethnic minorities, older people, low-literacy people etc.

Usually in geographical healthcare accessibility works are assumed that each person experiences the same travel conditions, therefore variation in factors influencing travel time such as climate or other environmental factors are held constant. However, environmental factors, for example landslides, mudflow, rock fall, climate conditions etc affect on travel time, thus geographical accessibility should be evaluated with wider understanding.

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