

## Systems Approach to Improved Stroke Care in the Pacific Northwest

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*Abstract:* The Pacific Northwest has a higher proportion of frontier communities and a higher stroke death rate than the US. In 2007, the Northwest Regional Stroke Network (NWRSN) was funded by the CDC as a five state partnership composed of clinical champions, public health professionals and American Stroke Association representatives from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington to improve stroke systems of care in the region. To help understand stroke burden in the NW region and guide the direction of the NWRSN, a regional burden report and regional needs assessment were conducted. In brief, despite the higher stroke death rate in the NW region than in the US, prevalence of stroke risk factors was lower in the NW region than the US and prevalence of stroke was similar in the NW region than in the US. Approximately 20% of the population of Oregon and Washington and 50% of the population of Alaska, Idaho and Montana live too far away from the Primary Stroke Centers in their state to receive treatment for ischemic stroke within the required time window. Acute stroke care capacity and services are lacking at many hospitals in the NW region and wide disparities exist in capacity and services between urban and rural hospitals. Access to key stroke personnel, written protocols, professional education opportunities and use of telemedicine were areas of particular concern in hospitals in the NW region. To help address these issues, the NWRSN is leveraging resources to facilitate equal access to high quality stroke care in both rural and urban communities through distance learning opportunities for pre-hospital and hospital providers, increased use of stroke protocols and policies, and collaboration of rural hospitals with urban stroke centers using telemedicine.