

Blue City

Out west, Blue City faces the unique problem of an aging population. Young people are having children at lower rates, later in age, if at all. Young people that are starting families are leaving Blue City and moving to more urban places like Red City. An aging population creates specific concerns for a community. With an older population, you need to be concerned about long-term health care, health care facilities, chronic health issues, retirement living, shortage of qualified workers, and more.

In 2018, the Office of National Drug Control Policy identified that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) is a highly intense drug trafficking area. During the pandemic, overdosing and drug use in the area only got worse. Addiction is a growing pandemic in its own right and is purported by problems rural communities face: poverty, living inside food deserts, and access to healthcare.

Access to internet is an issue that was made increasingly important in an online-based world during lockdown. Many families in the western part of Tar Heel Girls State already knew that internet access is important. High cost internet is not financially feasible for many families. There are also limited options for internet in the mountains, only being able to choose from high-cost satellite internet options.

Rural parts of central Tar Heel Girls State have their eyes on the \$6.2 million awarded to the state to boost tourism in order to recover the state economy. Highways being built around small towns that rely on tourism are losing revenue because travelers are not forced to drive through their towns. Additionally, the cost to maintain roads and attractions for the tourists that DO stop in small towns outweighs any profit that could be made. Rural towns around Blue City have already begun drafting possible ways to allocate the \$6.2 million for their attractions.