

To: House Appropriations Human Resources Division

From: Benjamin Galbreath, DVM

Subject: Commentary on **HB 1012 – Appropriations for the Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)**

Date: 2/4/25

Members of the committee,

I am writing neither in support or opposition to funding of this program, but offering background & insight on the current true need and hopefully some useful suggestions on how to determine if funding is appropriate and then allocate the funds to areas of true need.

As one of the earliest recipients of veterinary student loan funding in 2008 I am aware of the positive impact this funding can have on an individual. However, over the past 15 years I have seen funding from both the state & federal programs diverted from areas of true need or shortage based upon very subjective criteria. When I was awarded funding there were a total of 6 veterinarians offering large animal services in the combined counties of Lamoure, Ransom, Dickey & Sargent. There are currently at least 15 veterinarians in this 4 county area now. The cattle population has also steadily declined in this region, resulting in a massive over-supply of veterinarians in this area. As a matter of fact, numerous new graduates have been lured to the area under the false notion of a need or shortage, some of whom started up their own large animal practices, only to find there is not sufficient work. Some are even seen working second jobs at emergency small animal clinics to get by. To compound matters, there have been numerous attempts to secure loan repayment funding through the federal VMLRP program based upon falsified data and statistics in this area. The ND253 VMLRP nomination, for example, contains numerous misleading and outright false statements.

Similarly, the counties to the north of my area (Barnes, Stutsman & Cass) have shown a steady and predictable decline in cattle populations, resulting in less need for large animal veterinarians. To compound declining numbers in these counties, the livestock auction market in Stutsman county utilizes veterinary services from a clinic in

Kidder county. This results in many producers using that clinic for routine work and then expecting the local county clinics to be available for emergencies. I have personally had numerous cattle producers from the Jamestown area ask if I would do their calving emergency since it is inconvenient to haul animals all the way to Kidder county. They all, however, wanted to continue to utilize the sale barn vet clinic for routine work since they come to the area weekly with extra help. This does not constitute a shortage of veterinarians. There is adequate access to veterinary care, but the producers are not fully supporting their local clinics. This is not likely a sustainable business model when cattle numbers are declining. Recruiting a subsidized veterinarian to this type of business climate will not solve the underlying problems. In fact, the ND254 VMLRP nomination fully acknowledges that there is insufficient cattle business to financially support another veterinarian.

There are obvious areas adequate veterinary access in the state of North Dakota. There are also certainly areas of true need. The problem appears to be how to apply a more objective criteria for selection of shortage areas and then funding those applicants. I have attached copies of numerous documents that are available to the public & easy to access that can be used to determine the need for veterinary services without subjective & emotional bias.

A very useful document could be the USDA Cattle & Calves inventory maps with county statistics. This can be easily Google searched and show yearly trends. It took about 10 minutes of time to put the values from the counties in my area into a spreadsheet and show the trend. As a result, it is very obvious that the 4-year trend of cattle populations in this region is declining. It is very easy for a potential applicant to say there is 160,000 cattle in this area and state that there must be a need for more vets. However, the truth is that there are more vets in Ransom, Dickey, Lamoure & Sargent counties now than any other time in the last decade, and the cattle population continues to drop steadily. It would seem difficult to defend funding this area to any citizen wondering if their tax dollars are being utilized effectively.

Another resource that has become available is the Veterinary Care Accessibility Project. <https://www.accesstovetcare.org/vcas-map>

This study offers tremendous insight into ACCESS to veterinary care. As you can see in the attached documents, both the ND & NIFA Loan Repayment Programs utilize access to veterinary care as a selection criteria. While this study is geared toward access to companion animal care, it can still be utilized more broadly since EVERY veterinary practice in Ransom, Dickey, Lamoure, Sargent & Richland counties advertise availability of cattle/large animal veterinary services. This study clearly outlines that, for the most part, the state of ND is blessed to have better access to veterinary care than many states in the US. Additionally, it is evident which counties or areas are truly in need of access to veterinary care. For example, Rolette & Benson counties have obvious lack of access and very low access scores, while Ransom & Sargent counties have extremely high access and corresponding scores. When researching the ND Health Profession Loan Repayment Programs, I easily found the shortage area maps for Primary Care, Mental Health & Dentistry. There were no maps for veterinary professionals. The Veterinary Care Accessibility Project seems to be a valid tool to apply the same logical approach to designating shortage areas and thus allocating funding where it is truly needed.

My final comments on this matter should be considered a mixture of fact and opinion. Cattle prices are currently at record high values. Many of the wealthiest individuals in rural communities are farmers & ranchers. If livestock producers in these communities are not willing to support veterinarians financially when revenue is historically high, then it is an indication of a deeper, fundamental problem with how a large animal veterinarian is valued by the producers. Farmers & ranchers are rarely nostalgic for sitting on a combine with no cab or mowing hay with no air conditioning. They embrace those upgrades in technology and modern convenience. They do, however, tend to cling to nostalgic attitudes toward veterinary services. This attitude often revolves around memories of not being charged for a service out of the goodness of a veterinarian's heart. While charity & kindness do have their place, it seems to be often expected and under-appreciated when it involves the veterinary profession. To utilize taxpayer funds to

incentivize practice owners to offer lower wages will perpetually enable livestock producers to expect to spend less on veterinary services. Farmers and ranchers do have access to multiple subsidies and payment programs. Additional indirect subsidies in the form of reduced cost veterinary care through reduced wages are damaging and disrespectful to our profession in the short term and long term.

The information provided herein is accurate to the best of my knowledge. The opinions I have included should be taken as my personal opinion only. I do not speak for any other individuals or groups and have not been approached to comment on this matter. This information is provided voluntarily. My commentary on this matter is for the sole purpose of offering optional tools for designating funding for veterinary loan repayment. I fully support tax dollar funding being judiciously utilized in Health Profession Loan Repayment Programs. If any information today is unclear or if you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me via telephone or email as provided below. Thank you for your time & consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

*Benjamin Galbreath, DVM*

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Edgeley Veterinary Service

Edgeley, ND

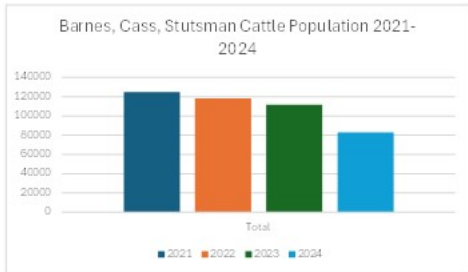
[benbgalbreath@gmail.com](mailto:benbgalbreath@gmail.com)

701-210-2496

	Barnes	Cass	Stutsman	Total
2021	36500	13500	75000	125000
2022	34500	12800	71000	118300
2023	32500	12100	67000	111600
2024	16800	6000	60000	82800

cattle per vet 11829

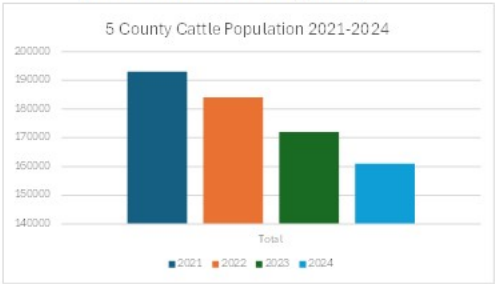
(at least 7 LA or mixed vets currently practicing)



	Lamoure	Dickey	Ransom	Sargent	Richland	Total
2021	30000	56000	47000	25000	33000	193021
2022	28500	53000	45000	24000	31500	184022
2023	27000	50000	42500	22500	30000	172000
2024	28500	40500	45500	23000	21500	161024

cattle per vet 8833

(at least 18 LA or mixed vets currently practicing)



#### **43-29.1-04. Community selection criteria.**

1. In selecting a community with a defined need for the services of a veterinarian, the department of health and human services shall consider:
  - a. The size of the community and give priority:
    - (1) First to rural communities having a population under five thousand;
    - (2) Second to communities having a population between five thousand and ten thousand; and
    - (3) Third to communities having a population greater than ten thousand.
  - b. The number of veterinarians practicing in the community and the surrounding area.
  - c. The access by residents to veterinarians practicing in the community and the surrounding area.
  - d. The degree to which residents support the addition of a veterinarian within the community.
2. The department of health and human services shall give priority for participation to a community that demonstrates a need for a veterinarian.
3. In evaluating communities for participation in this program, the department of health and human services may consult with public and private entities and visit the communities.

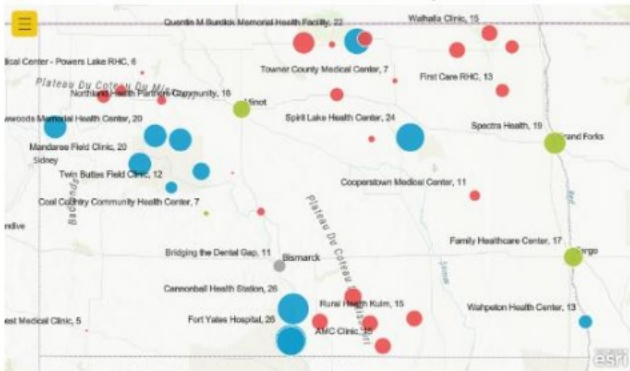




North Dakota Dental Health HPSAs

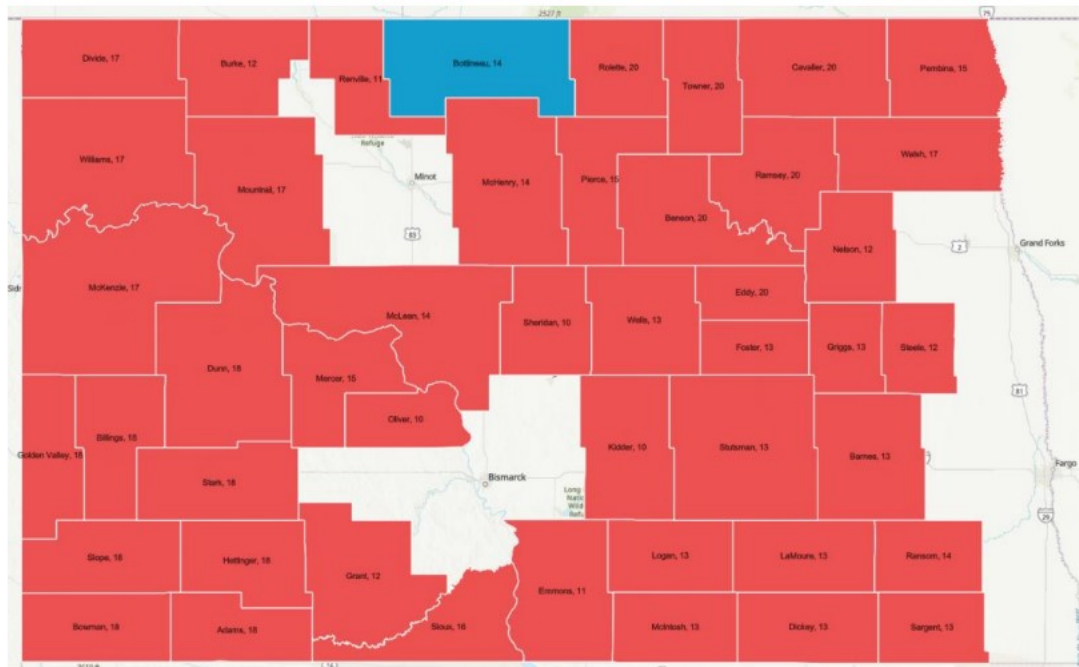


North Dakota Dental Health Facility HPSAs



# NORTH DAKOTA MENTAL HEALTH HPSA - 2023

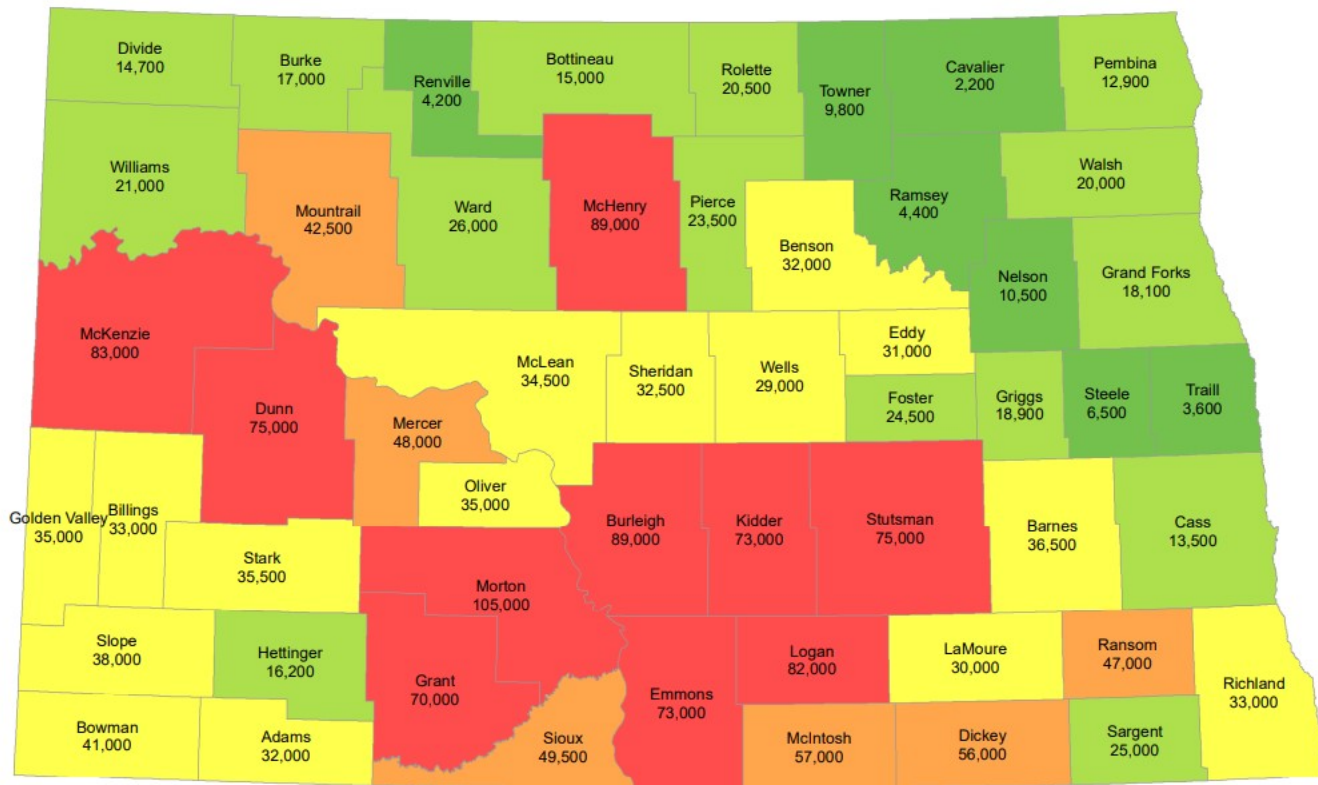
## Mental Health - Health Professional Shortage Areas



- Hpsa Geographic High Needs
- Hpsa Geographic
- Other

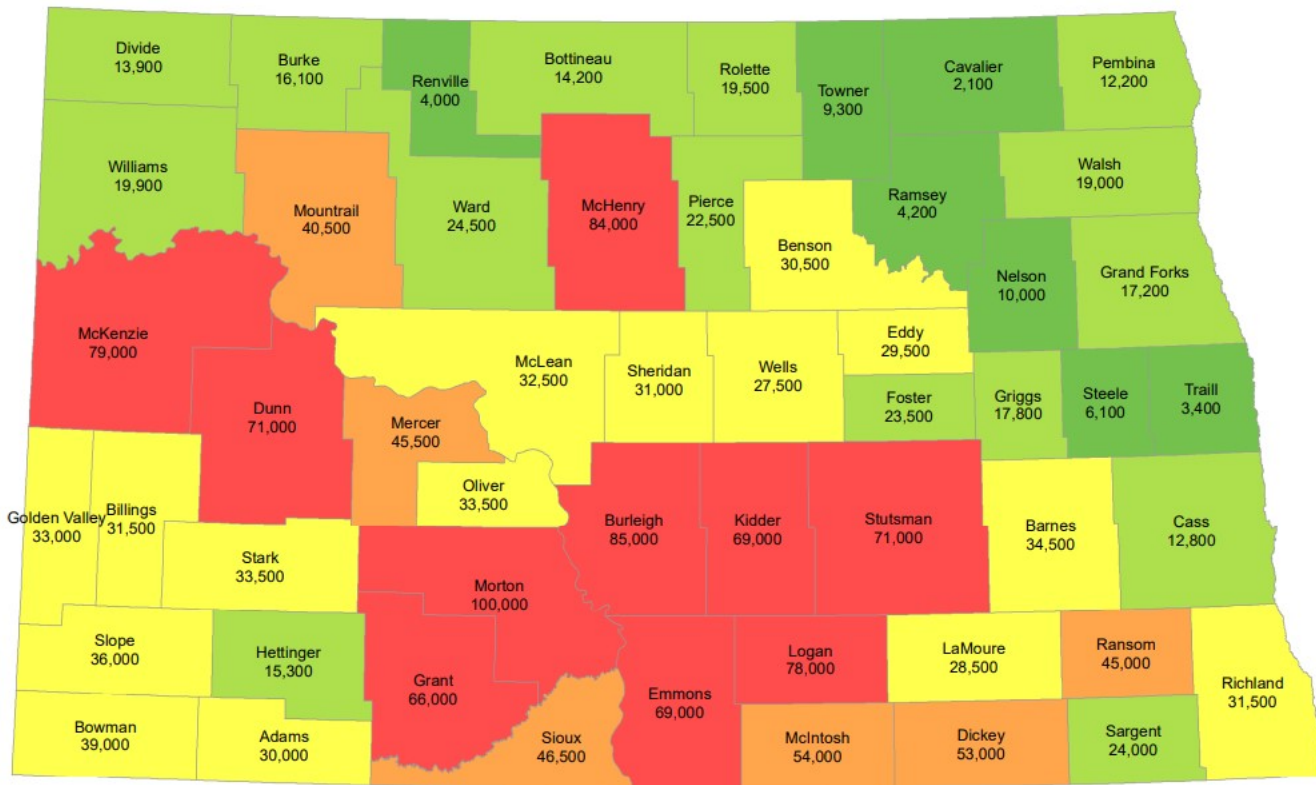


## 2021 All Cattle and Calves Inventory North Dakota



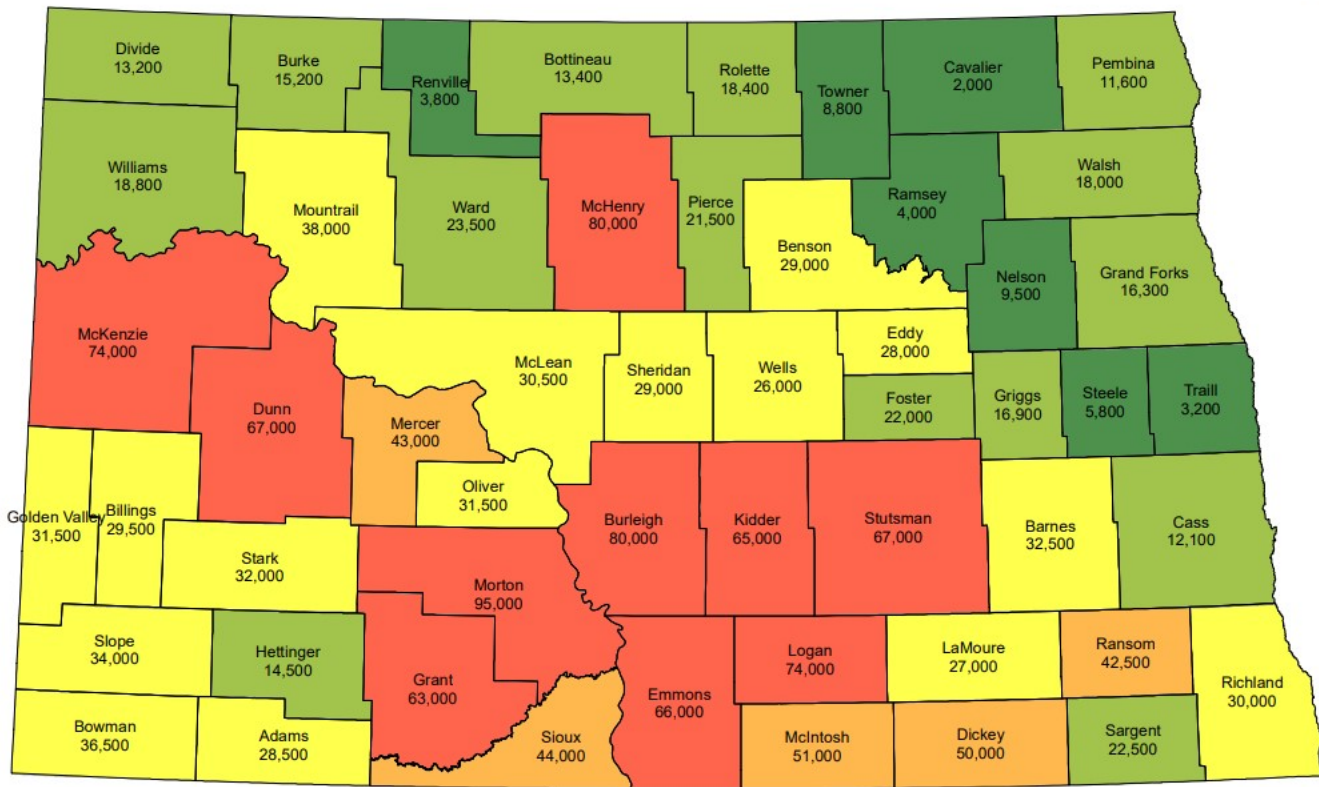


## 2022 All Cattle and Calves Inventory North Dakota





## 2023 Cattle and Calf Inventory North Dakota









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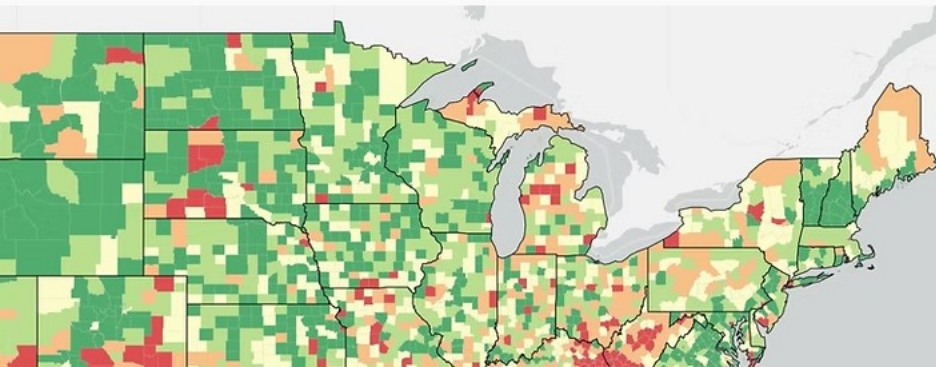
[Maps](#)

[Data](#)

[About](#)

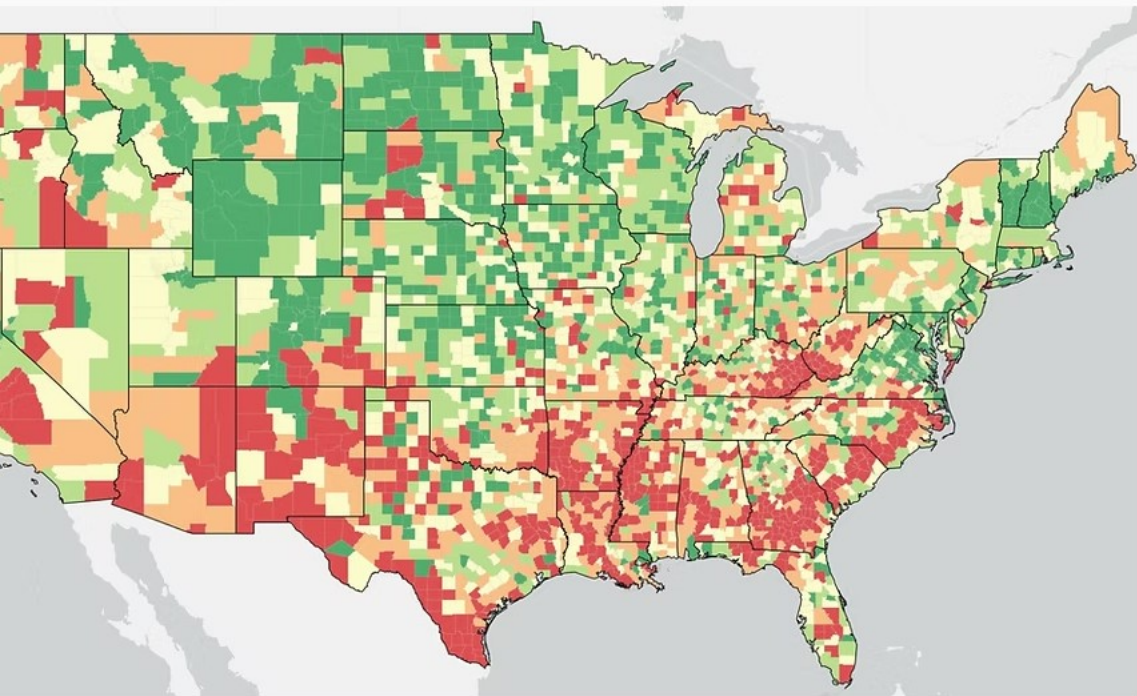
# The Veterinary Care Accessibility Project

Access to veterinary care is a complex and challenging issue. The Veterinary Care Accessibility Project is an effort to better understand and address these complexities. We gather, analyze, and use data to build tools to shed light on the issue and help inform efforts to improve access to veterinary care.



## Veterinary Care Accessibility Score

The Veterinary Care Accessibility Score (VCAS) is a new way of looking at the challenging, complex issue of inequities in the



# Veterinary Care Accessibility Score

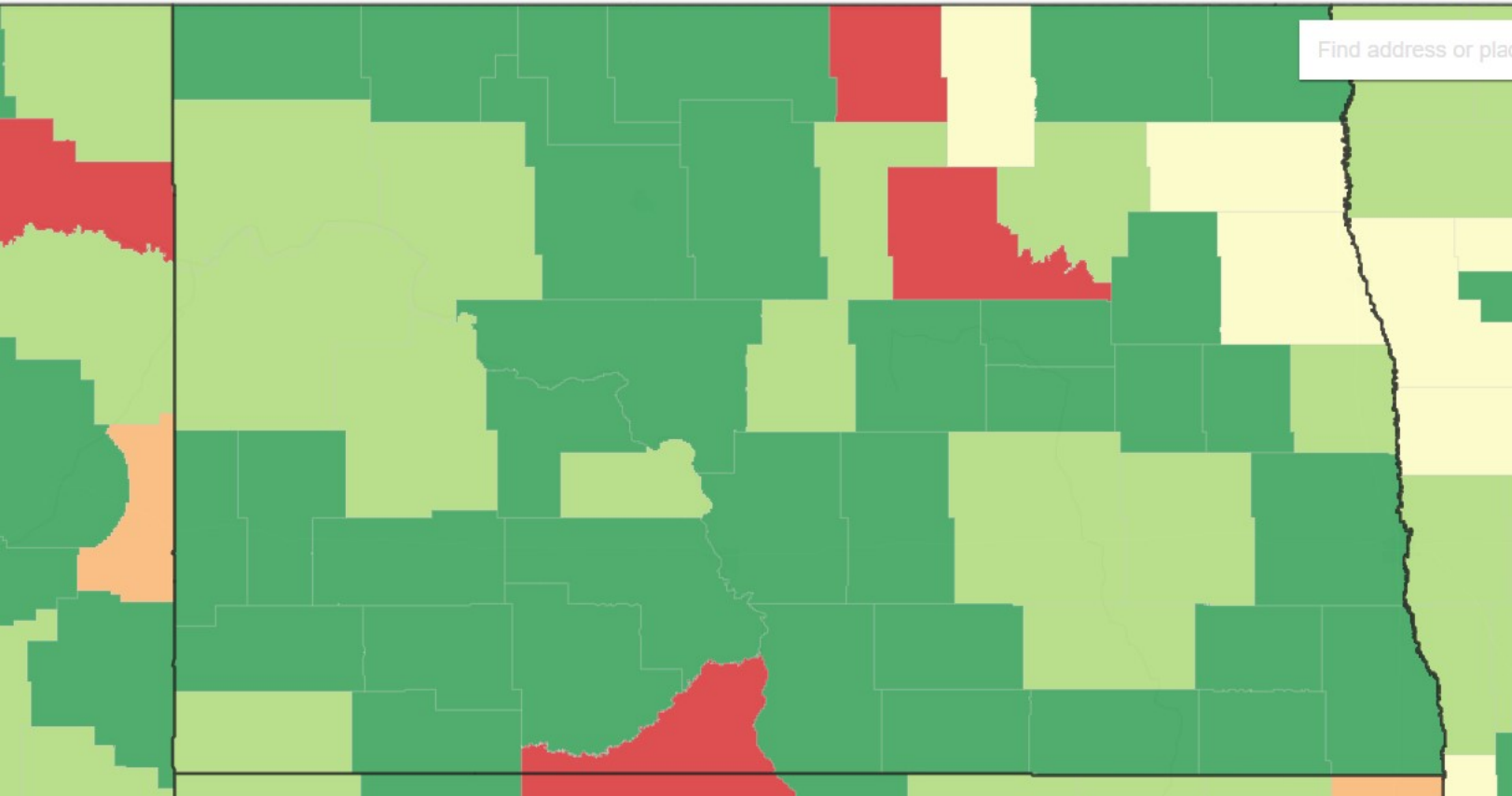
The Veterinary Care Accessibility Score (VCAS) is a new way of looking at the challenging, complex issue of inequities in the accessibility of veterinary care throughout the country. It uses data from a wide array of sources to account for key factors that affect access to vet care: The result -- A single number that helps answer a complex question: How accessible is veterinary care in my community?

[Explore the VCAS Map](#)



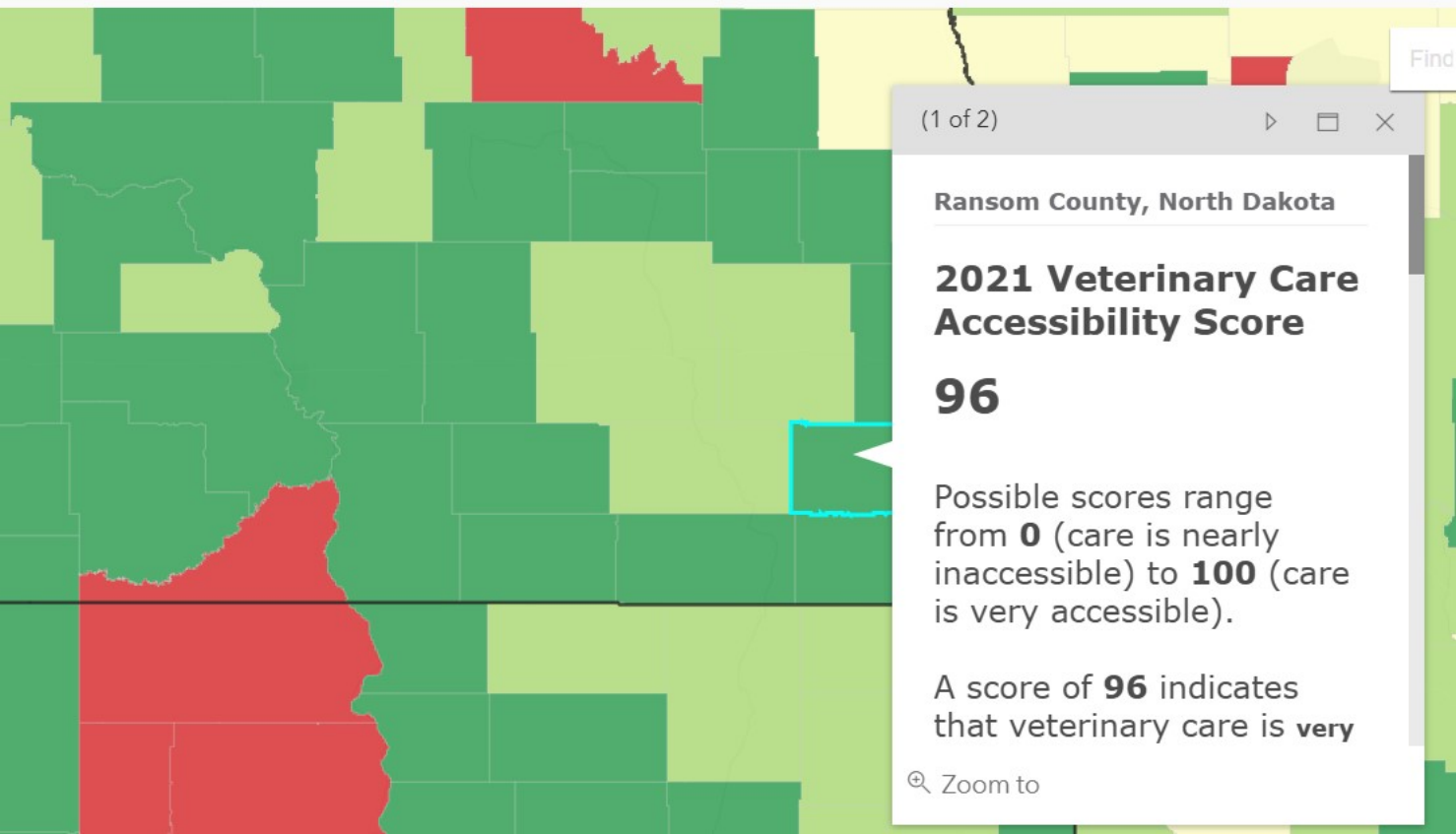
# COUNTY LEVEL VCAS

This map shows the VCAS for every county throughout the contiguous 48 states. Click on any County to see its Veterinary Care Accessibility Score

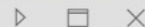


# COUNTY LEVEL VCAS

This map shows the VCAS for every county throughout the contiguous 48 states. Click on any County to see its Veterinary Care Accessibility Score



(1 of 2)



Ransom County, North Dakota

## 2021 Veterinary Care Accessibility Score

**96**

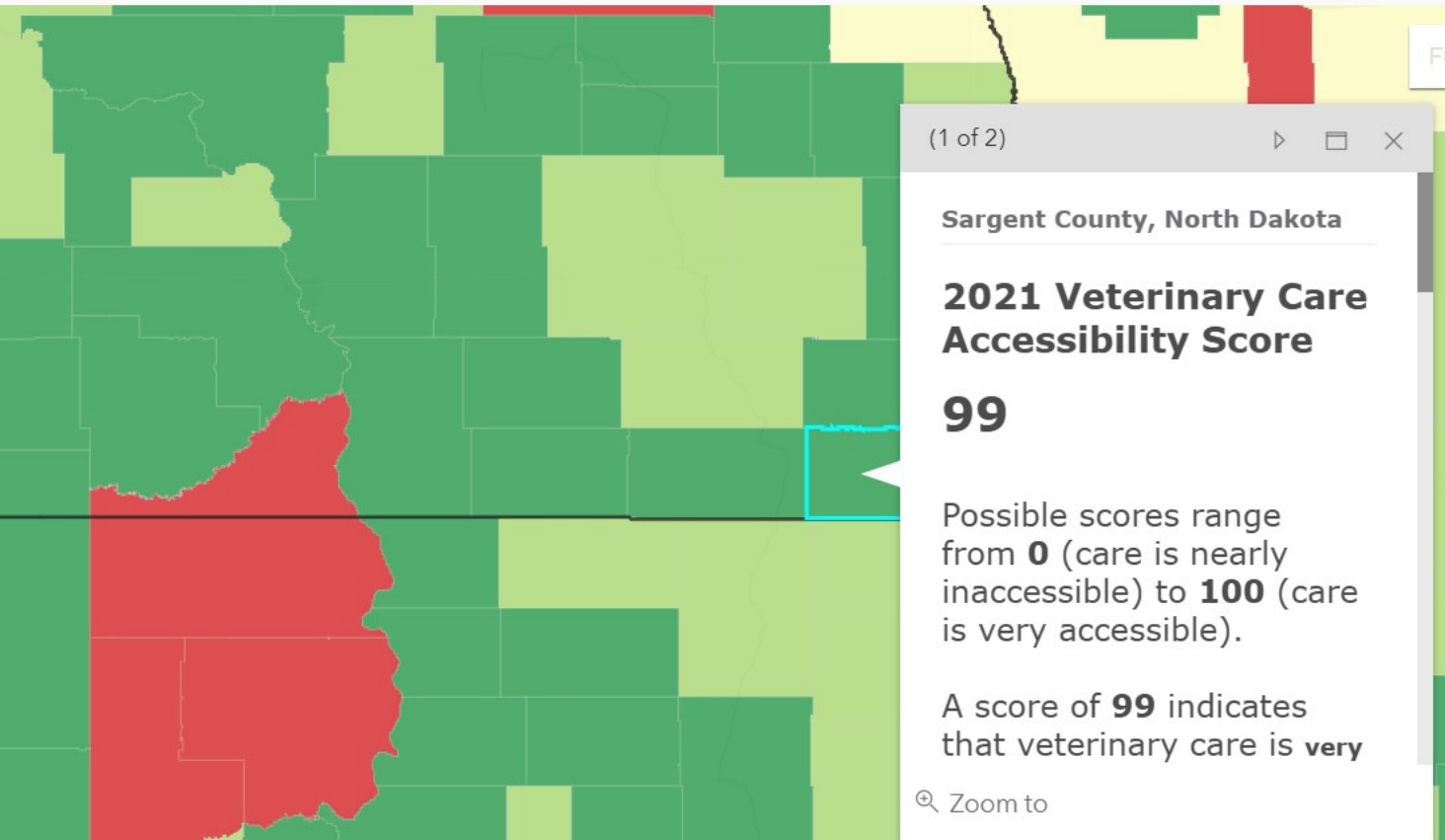
Possible scores range from **0** (care is nearly inaccessible) to **100** (care is very accessible).

A score of **96** indicates that veterinary care is **very**

🔍 Zoom to

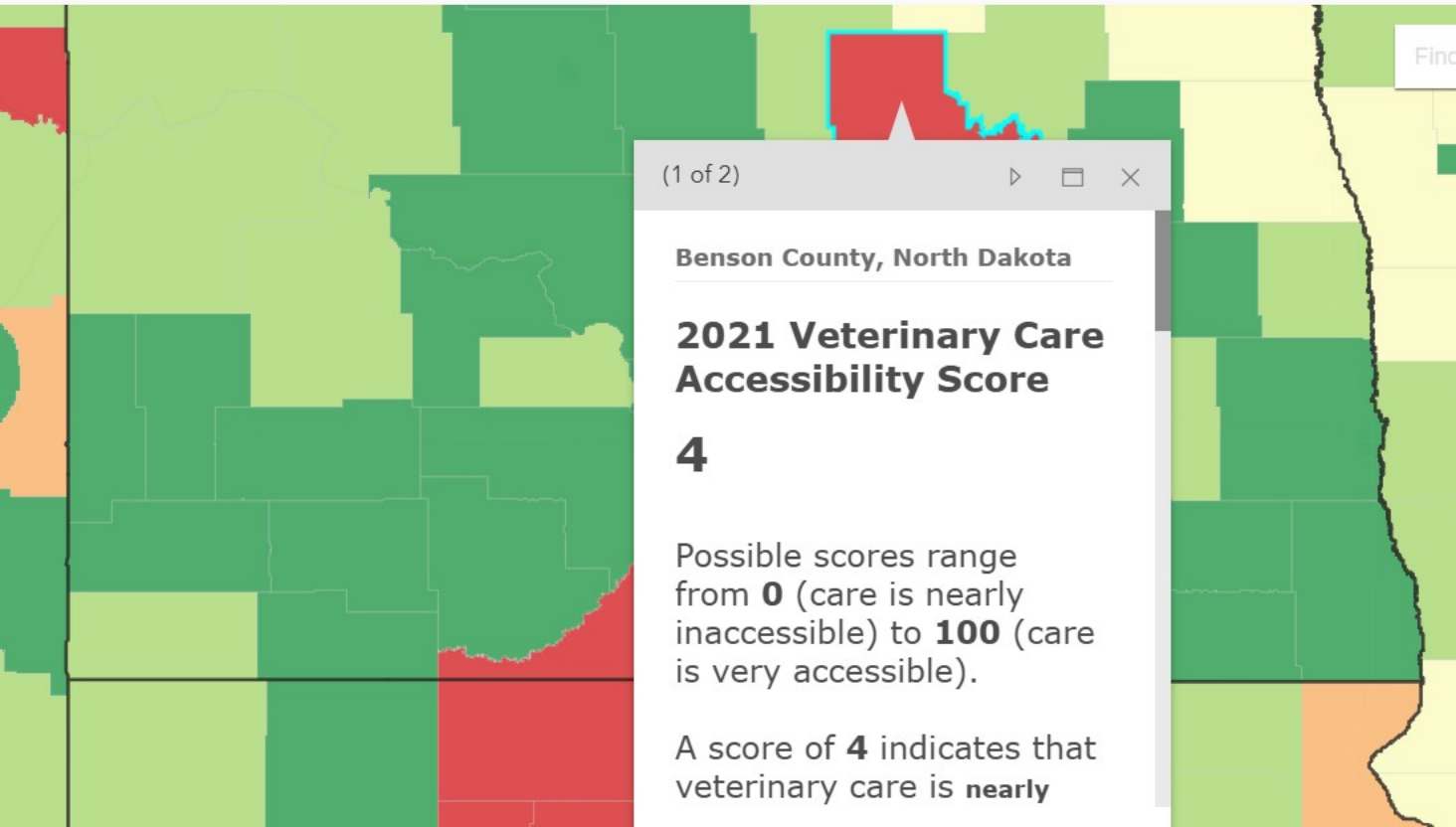
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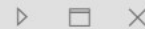


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This map shows the VCAS for every county throughout the contiguous 48 states. Click on any County to see its Veterinary Care Accessibility Score



(1 of 2)



Benson County, North Dakota

## 2021 Veterinary Care Accessibility Score

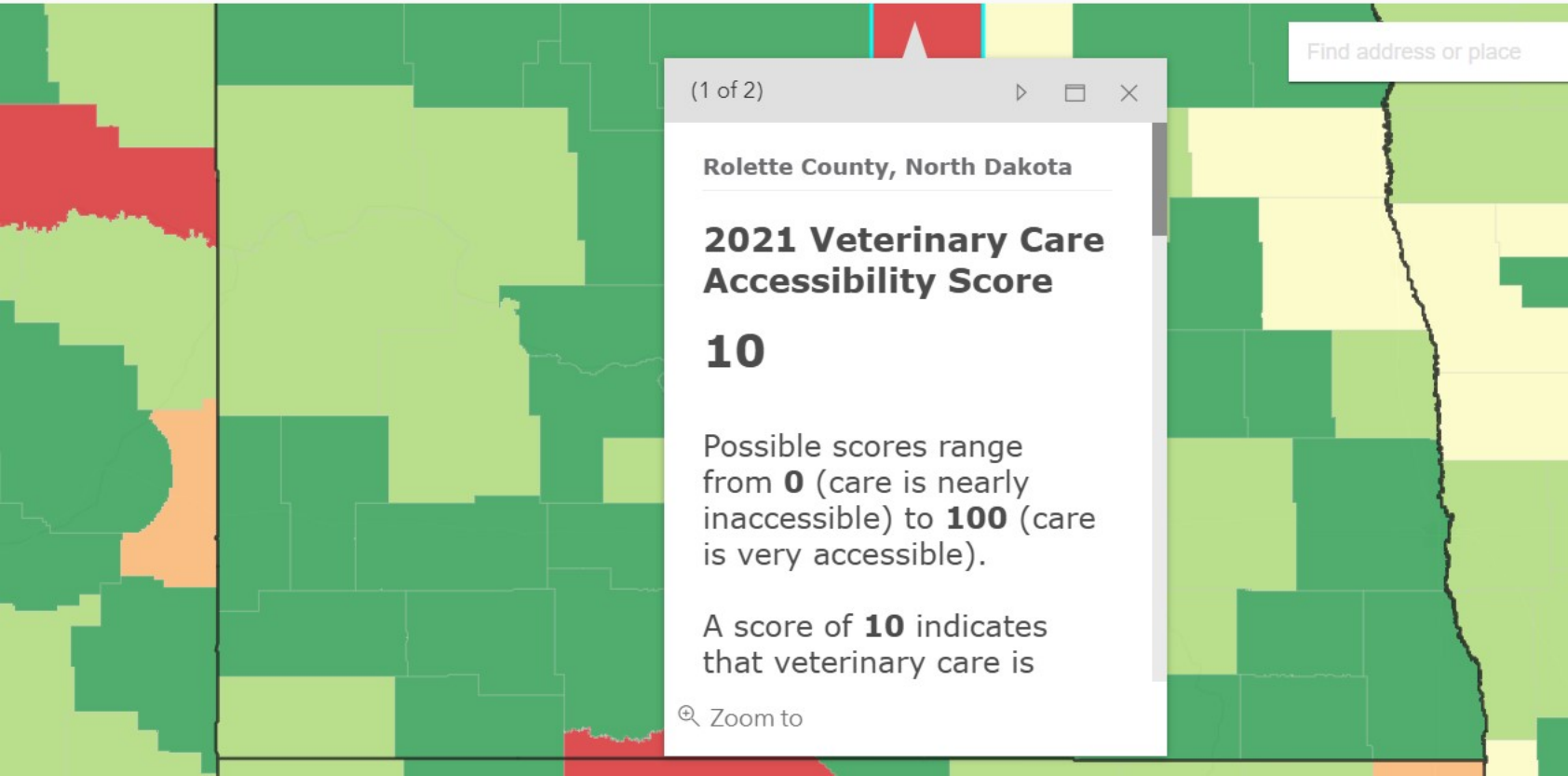
**4**

Possible scores range from **0** (care is nearly inaccessible) to **100** (care is very accessible).

A score of **4** indicates that veterinary care is **nearly**

# COUNTY LEVEL VCAS

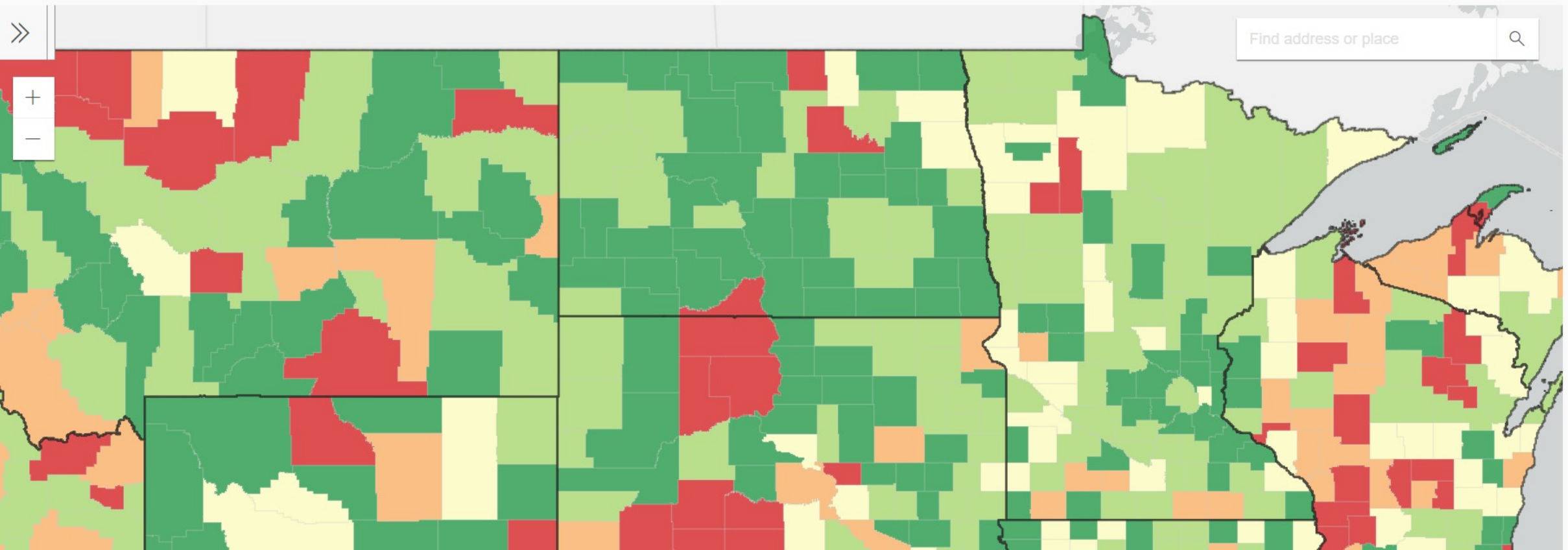
This map shows the VCAS for every county throughout the contiguous 48 states. Click on any County to see its Veterinary Care Accessibility Score





# COUNTY LEVEL VCAS

This map shows the VCAS for every county throughout the contiguous 48 states. Click on any County to see its Veterinary Care Accessibility Score



# State Level VCAS

By aggregating data at the state level, every state is given a VCAS

