

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) studies, innovates and spreads creative solutions to increase access to health care and services. Established by Congress in 2007, ORH works across VA and with external partners to eliminate barriers to care so 5.3 million rural Veterans can thrive. ORH accomplishes its mission through four strategic goals.

ORH'S FOUR-PRONGED APPROACH

Promote rural
Veterans' health and
well-being

Generate and
diffuse knowledge

Strengthen community
health infrastructure

Inform health
care policy

Studies and programs

For many rural Veterans, barriers to accessing care include long driving distances or lack of specialty physicians in rural areas. For others, social determinants of health like limited job opportunities and housing may impact their well-being. ORH studies the need, then identifies and pilots innovative programs that may alleviate these barriers and increase access to care. Examples include:

- ▶ The use of telehealth technology to deliver critical health care services
- ▶ Workforce training for rural practitioners
- ▶ Transportation initiatives

ORH supports tailored specialty care programs to meet rural Veterans' needs, including geriatrics, oncology, radiology and mental health support. Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers serve as ORH's on-the-ground hubs for program study, innovation and dissemination. During its tenure, ORH has provided initial support to more than 1,870 local programs. More than 1.6 million rural Veterans benefitted from these projects.

Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006, Public Law 109-461, Section 212

Rural delivery and expertise

To facilitate learning about rural care delivery, ORH develops and disseminates clinical knowledge through its Rural Promising Practices initiative. Innovative models of care that improve patient outcomes are pioneered, nominated and, after a rigorous review, dispersed for implementation and peer mentorship at other facilities. Rural and urban facilities within and beyond the VA network can learn from these emerging programs. As of 2015, six Rural Promising Practices have been spread to multiple sites through mentored implementation and 20 Rural Promising Practices identified for further dissemination.

Partnerships

VA alone cannot address the barriers to care that rural Veterans face. ORH representatives teach at conferences, host webinars, and collaborate with federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations to build partnerships with other rural health leaders. One such collaboration, the Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot grant, was launched in 2014 to promote care coordination with community providers in rural areas. ORH contributed resources to five state or community grantees to support Veterans transitioning from military service in rural areas across the country.

Inform policy

ORH reports on the state of rural Veterans' health and supports other federal agencies that do work related to rural health policy. In addition, the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee visits rural communities, engages with local Veterans to understand the realities and challenges they face, and makes recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Education and awareness

If you are a **medical practitioner or a program administrator**, go online to explore Rural Promising Practices and consider if any are relevant for your facility or community.

If you are an **advocate for Veterans or rural communities**, visit ORH's website to learn more about current programs and ways you can partner with ORH.

Office of Rural Health (ORH) implements a targeted, solution-driven approach to increase access to care for the 3 million Veterans living in rural communities who rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for health care. As VA's lead advocate for rural Veterans, ORH works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To accomplish this, ORH leverages its resources to increase rural Veterans' access to care and services. To learn more, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov.



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