



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Rural Health Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Report Summary

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot (RVCP) grant program executes and evaluates different models that provide support to meet the health and social needs of Veterans and their families in rural America as they transition from military service to civilian life. This report highlights the impact that the five RVCP grantees have had on Veteran communities after finishing its first year of the two-year grant period.

RVCP Purpose

A number of factors make providing health care in rural areas challenging. Health care workforce shortages, hospital financial instability, subsequent facility closings, and complexities in coordination of care, coupled with the additional health care access challenges that rural life presents, mean that rural health requires a community-based approach to foster the health and well-being of Veterans successfully.

RVCP provides means to expand programming and conduct outreach activities specifically geared towards rural Veterans and their families. Upon completion, the results of the pilot will help establish an effective model under which state and local entities can successfully coordinate multi-sector benefits for Veterans and their families who reside in rural or underserved communities.

RVCP Year One

The RVCP evaluation team conducted an analysis to determine the impact of federal funding on improving services targeted toward Veterans and their families during their transition from military service to civilian life. The RVCP program achieved a number of successes since it began in 2015. In its first year, RVCP:

- Completed intake assessments for more than **700 Veterans and 150 family members**
- Established **more than 500 new partnerships** (partnership networks included nearly 80 medical and 60 mental health benefit-providing organizations)
- Conducted more than **150 outreach events** (e.g., state fairs, job fair partnerships, sponsored concert partnerships, etc.), which reached more than 11,000 Veterans and nearly 6,000 family members
- Provided more than **600 referrals**¹ to Veterans and family members across all sites (of which, more than 90 percent were for Veterans and the remaining for primary and secondary family members)
- Established nearly **50 service sites** within the community for Veterans and families can access assistance services

An analysis of RVCP first year data refined the program's focus area for year two, which will:

- Focus on serving recently-transitioned Veterans, per legislation
- Address the need to provide services across the age continuum (Veterans and primary family members who sought assistance from RVCP sites in rural areas were from a number of service areas)
- Continue to adopt a holistic approach to improving the quality of life for Veterans and their family members by engaging and coordinating many different types of services and organizations beyond the medical establishment based on identified client needs. Identify methods to overcome transportation challenges that prevent access to services
- Assess Veteran and family member satisfaction of services to better understand the sources that are helpful to Veterans as they transition to civilian life.

¹ The veterans that received referral services include veterans who received multiple referrals. The total number of referrals includes 261 unique Veterans and 38 unique family members, some of whom received multiple referrals for services.

RVCP National Impact

The five RVCP grantees selected to participate in the two year pilot program established nearly 50 service coordination sites located in concentrated areas in several states across the country: Maine, Washington, Oregon, New Mexico, North Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska.

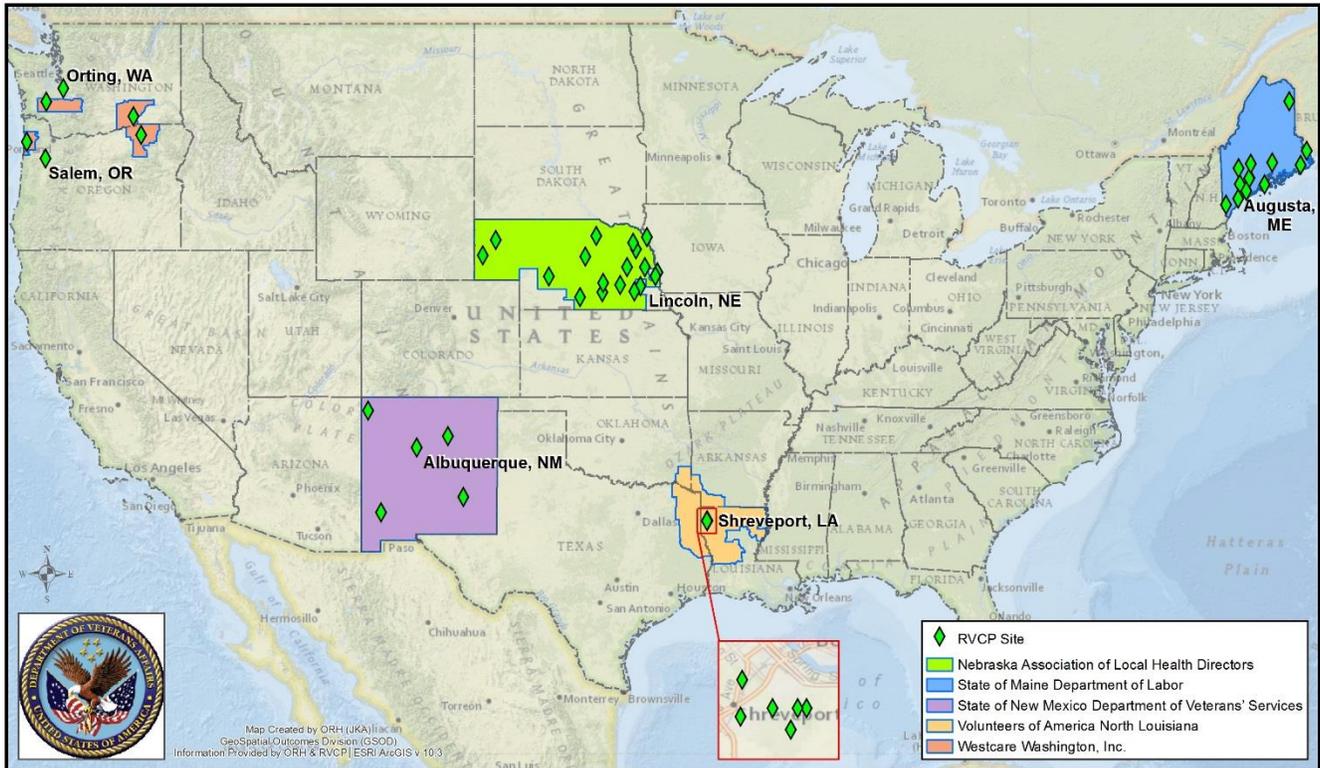


Image 1 - RVCP Grantee Service Areas: This map represents the 48 RVCP locations.

RVCP grant recipients support local Veterans in ways that are appropriate to the unique challenges faced by these rural areas. Each site has its own area of focus and reported a number of achievements at the completion of the first year of the funding period.

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The **Maine Department of Labor (MDOL)** connects Veterans—particularly the thousands of which returned home from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom—with career counselors who help identify opportunities, arrange training, and translate military skills to civilian jobs. A portion of the funding also helps Easter Seals of Maine expand their Veteran outreach services. MDOL public and non-profit service providers are trained on Veterans' benefits to provide appropriate referrals to Veterans in need.

MDOL RVCP Program Achievements

- Launched regional Veterans' Service Provider workgroups in two of Maine's most rural counties to coordinate activities (e.g., regional job fairs) and address service gaps
- Exceeded its goal and created more than 1,600 job opportunities for Maine Veterans
- Provided Flexible Employment Funds to approximately 200 Veterans or qualified family members to address employment barriers
- Provided intensive case management and referrals to 300 transitioning Veterans and family members in rural Aroostook and Washington Counties



The **Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors (NALHD)** trains local health departments and community organizations on how to address Veteran-specific needs and provide more comprehensive, patient-centered care to Veterans and their families. NALHD's VetSET program focuses on increasing military cultural competence among community-based organizations, training them to recognize and address the unique culture, experience, and language of military service members and their families. VetSET Coordinators champion multi-disciplinary, cross-sector partnerships and use tools such as the Network of Care to facilitate connections between organizations to provide employment, financial, health, educational, and spiritual assistance to rural Veterans.

NALHD Program Achievements

- Completed four outreach events attended by 3,730 Veterans and 4,225 family members
- Established 43 partnerships: 2 Medical, 6 Mental Health and 35 non-medical, non-mental health



The **New Mexico Department of Veteran Services (NMDVS)** provides job counseling, benefits advice, benefits fairs, and free mental health services to transitioning Veterans and their families. NMDVS' Veterans and Family Transition Program establishes Veterans and family transition centers in four regions of the state to help returning families gain access to four critical needs: health care, education, job placement and housing. This growing network of VA and community partners creates additional access points for Veterans to connect with health care and services.

NMDVS RVCP Program Achievements

- Established more than 120 partnerships at the site, of which 67 percent were with non-medical or non-mental health providers
- Coordinated health care with providers across the state
- Held more than 100 outreach events, which were attended by more than 2,500 Veterans and more than 600 family members



The **Volunteers of America of North Louisiana** organizes telemedicine care and works to prevent homelessness among rural Veterans and their families in parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas. The site also coordinates transportation for rural Veterans and uses telehealth technology to increase access to health providers. Its Rural Veterans Health Outreach program relies heavily on telehealth technology to connect rural Veterans and their families to physical and mental health services.

Volunteers of America of North Louisiana RVCP Program Achievements

- Connected Veterans and their family members to physicians, physician extenders and health professionals through nearly 100 partnerships
- Established new, fully-functional mobile clinic and a Veteran Health Information Exchange in partnership with Overton Brooks VA Medical Center to address transportation and access barriers
- Sponsored the 2015 Barksdale Air Force Base Defenders of Liberty mud run



The **WestCare Washington Foundation** provides health services, benefits advice, and phone counseling to Veterans and their families in Washington and Oregon. WestCare’s “navigators,” many of whom served in the military themselves, conduct personalized outreach to Veterans in their rural communities. The foundation’s “Home Base” program uses Community Navigators to help Veterans access food, housing, 24/7 military helpline referrals, crisis intervention and other resources.

WestCare Washington Foundation RVCP Program Achievements

- Exceeded goal and established more than 124,000 outreach contacts, including nearly 1,800 Veterans nearly 400 family members
- Completed more than 15 outreach events, articles, and the “Home Base” webpage
- Received a 90 percent Veteran satisfaction rate
- Completed more than 300 Veterans intakes for Veterans and their families

RVCP Background

The RVCP was created in accordance with Section 506, Public Law 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. Eligible grant recipients are either community based organizations and/or local, state or tribal government entities.

In September 2014, VA’s Office of Rural Health (ORH) administered a total of \$10 million dollars in grants to five selected sites, each of which were awarded \$2 million dollars for a two-year period (i.e. fiscal years 2015 and 2016). RVCP grantees use the funds to aid Veterans transitioning to civilian life by addressing one or more of the following areas:

1. Increase coordination of health care and benefits for Veterans
2. Increase availability of high quality medical and mental health services
3. Provide assistance to families of transitioning Veterans
4. Conduct outreach to Veterans and their families

ORH hosted a four-part national training series to provide guidance to the RVCP program leaders about the national Veteran rural health landscape, how to expand community partnerships, and how to develop program best practices. Grantees managed a variety of services and reported the numbers of Veterans served by these services. ORH provided oversight, guidance, and evaluation of RVCP throughout implementation.

At the end of the two-year pilot, in 2016, ORH will assess the RVCP grantees’ progress and compile a report to Congress on the impact of RVCP.

For more information on the VA Office of Rural Health, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov.



Released August 2016