

VHA Rural Health COVID-19 Decision Support Tool

Background

The novel coronavirus poses unique resource access and clinical capacity challenges for rural health care providers. Faced with hard to predict outbreaks and evolving hot spots, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) staff need accurate, on-demand projections that identify areas facing potential resource strain and enable VHA to shape response efforts.

To address this need, VHA designed the Rural Health COVID-19 Decision Support Tool, a data visualization dashboard for mission-critical insights. Using multiple data sources, the Tool enables users to not only examine key trends based on current data, but also to predict future challenges at the county level, identify places where demand for hospital beds may exceed supply, and configure [Fourth Mission](#) planning accordingly. The Tool leverages a “Watch County” methodology to measure clinical capacity and social factors such as poverty rate to identify regions that may face significant stressors on health care resource supply and demand.

Capabilities

The Tool provides powerful analytical capabilities when and where they are needed. Using the Tool’s dashboard, VHA staff can:

View “Watch Counties”

- ▶ Quickly identify rural Watch Counties that exhibit potential for supply-demand stress and are socially vulnerable. View may be filtered by Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), VA Market, state, or county.

Monitor Current and Projected State of COVID-19

- ▶ Track COVID-19 case and death data to monitor trends and visualize emerging clusters.
- ▶ View projected county hospitalizations to assess supply readiness of health care facilities in the area.

Explore Key County Statistics

- ▶ View key descriptive data including demographics, geography and supply-demand statistics.
- ▶ Compare and contrast the profiles of multiple counties.

Engage Fourth Mission Planning

- ▶ Examine Watch County proximity to VA medical centers.
- ▶ Visualize the health care facility landscape for a selected area to inform community outreach planning.

Using the Tool Beyond COVID-19

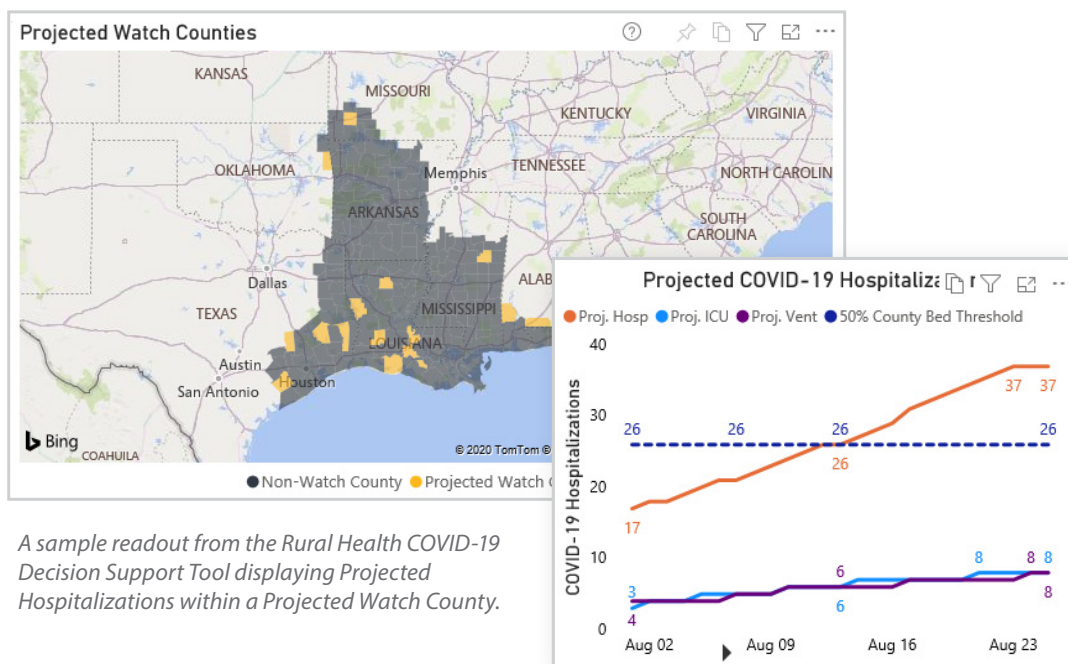
The Tool stores extensive data for all counties in the United States, including rural and non-rural areas. In the future, its capabilities may be adapted for strategic, operational, and tactical planning purposes and to examine other public health occurrences.

Accessing the Tool

VHA staff can access the Rural Health COVID-19 Decision Support Tool [here](#).*

Supplemental training materials are also available on the [VA SharePoint site](#).

Please contact Dan Palmeri at Daniel.Palmeri@va.gov if you have any questions or suggestions.



A sample readout from the Rural Health COVID-19 Decision Support Tool displaying Projected Hospitalizations within a Projected Watch County.

* Disclaimer: Please note that you must be within the VA network and use Google Chrome as your browser to gain access.

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To support the health and well-being of rural Veterans, ORH and its Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers establish and disseminate initiatives that increase access to care for the 2.7 million rural Veterans enrolled in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system. Key focus areas include programs that address workforce shortages, transportation, primary care, mental health, telehealth, and specialty care.