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CARING FOR RURAL VETERANS

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RURAL VETERAN HEALTH CARE CHALLENGES

Almost a quarter of all U.S. Veterans return from active military careers to reside in rural communities. Veterans choose to call rural communities home for a variety of reasons, including lower cost of living; less crowded towns and schools; open space for recreation; more privacy; and proximity to family, friends and community.

While many Veterans enjoy these benefits, they may also experience health conditions created or intensified by combat-related injuries and illnesses. These challenges are often complicated by other difficulties common in rural areas, including:



Fewer housing, education, employment and transportation options



Greater geographic and distance barriers



Limited broadband internet



Shortages of primary and specialty care providers



Difficulty of safely aging in place in rural America



Hospital closings due to financial instability

For all these reasons, rural Veterans may face critical access challenges that threaten their long-term health and well-being. Our nation's rural Veterans need a host of solutions – from advanced technology to enhanced care coordination – to connect them with the quality health care they have earned.

RURAL SOLUTIONS

In recognition of the complex challenges facing rural communities, Congress established the Veterans Health Administration Office of Rural Health (ORH) to build rural-focused health solutions that enable Veterans, regardless of where they live, to obtain a similar standard of care to their urban counterparts.

38 U.S. Code § 7308 directs ORH to:



Conduct, coordinate, promote and disseminate research into issues affecting rural Veterans



Develop policies, best practices, lessons learned and innovative and successful programs to increase access to care for rural Veterans

ORH's five Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers innovate to create new programs, from health IT modernization to novel approaches to the delivery of mental health services and the coordination of care for rural Veterans. Many ORH-supported programs use technology to overcome barriers, such as lack of nearby medical facilities or providers. For example, some ORH programs use telehealth technology to link rural Veterans with primary care and mental health service providers located thousands of miles from their homes.

By collaborating with other VA offices, Federal and state partners, and rural communities, ORH optimizes available and emerging technologies to increase health care options for rural Veterans nationwide. But technology is only half the story. ORH also supports a range of programs focused on recruiting and retaining a high-quality rural physician work force. These initiatives combine in-person and remote learning opportunities to expand clinician skillsets and empower them to treat a wider array of patients.

To learn more about how ORH is helping America's rural Veterans thrive in their communities, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov or call 202-632-8615.

RURAL VETERAN DEMOGRAPHICS

4.7

million rural and highly rural Veterans

2.7

million rural Veterans are enrolled in the VA health care system

55%

of rural enrolled Veterans have at least one service related disability

55%

earn less than \$35,000 annually