



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health's (ORH) congressional mandate (38 USC § 7308) directs the Office to develop, refine and promulgate best practices and innovative programs to increase access to care for rural Veterans. These innovations are carefully evaluated and, beginning in fiscal year 2014, the strongest are designated ORH Rural Promising Practices. During the past three years, these programs expanded from 22 to 86 sites—increasing rural Veterans' access to these programs by 291 percent.

The primary goals of the Promising Practices initiative are to:

- ▶ Increase access to care and services for rural Veterans and their families in the communities where they live;
- ▶ Share operational and clinical knowledge with professional providers and staff who serve rural Veterans;
- ▶ Mentor new program champions to implement these Rural Promising Practices; and
- ▶ Contribute to long-term improvements in rural care and services delivery.

ORH-funded innovations are monitored and evaluated throughout their lifecycle to track their effect on the health and well-being of rural Veterans. When an innovation demonstrates outstanding performance and addresses a gap in rural care and services delivery, it may be nominated to ORH as a Rural Promising Practice. Nominations undergo a rigorous review to ensure the nominated project addresses each of the six ORH Rural Promising Practices criteria. ORH Rural Promising Practices are made available to providers, practitioners and program advocates through the ORH dissemination process—both within and beyond VA.

Those who wish to adopt an ORH Rural Promising Practice will find all the necessary materials on the ORH website, including an adoption toolkit, contact information for subject-matter experts, and the option to request technical assistance. Some Rural Promising Practices are also selected for mentored implementation, wherein ORH project managers work directly with site staff in the adoption of an ORH Rural Promising Practices. This technical assistance (available exclusively to VA sites of care) includes funding

ORH Promising Practice Criteria

- ▶ *Improvement in access to care*
- ▶ *Evidence of improved direct program impact or clinical results for rural Veterans*
- ▶ *Patient, provider and/or caregiver satisfaction*
- ▶ *Return on investment via reduced cost of care, but not at the expense of quality*
- ▶ *Operational feasibility and replicability at other facilities or service sites*
- ▶ *Strong partnerships or working relationships that maximize efficiency or effectiveness*

during the adoption period, training, technical site visits when required, and continuous performance monitoring during setup and launch of the program. Rural Promising Practice subject-matter experts share what they've learned from test phase and connect participants in a mentoring network. Rural Promising Practices encourage collaborative open-source learning among stakeholder participants.

Spotlight: Telephone-Based Cardiac Rehabilitation

Studies show that people who complete a Phase 2 cardiac rehabilitation program can increase their life expectancy by up to five years and have 27 percent lower cardiac death rates, 25 percent fewer fatal heart attacks, 21 percent fewer nonfatal heart attacks, and improved quality of life. However, many rural Veterans cannot participate in a cardiac rehabilitation program due to the geographic, transportation and other barriers that often affect rural Veterans and their families.

To overcome these obstacles and to provide life-saving cardiac rehabilitation, an ORH program in the VA Iowa City Health Care System pioneered rehabilitation at home using VA-provided supplies and monitoring equipment, along with professional telephone-based lifestyle and activity coaching. Compared to in-facility rehabilitation, this program showed higher completion rates and greater patient satisfaction, all for similar costs. Remote, Telephone-Based Cardiac Rehabilitation became ORH's first Rural Promising Practice in fiscal year 2015, expanded from 11 initial sites in fiscal year 2015 to 27 sites in fiscal year 2017—a 145 percent increase in three years.

Rural Promising Practices

- ▶ *Community Clergy Training to Support Rural Veterans' Mental Health*
- ▶ *Geriatric Scholars Training Program*
- ▶ *Remote, Telephone-based Delivery of Cardiac Rehabilitation*
- ▶ *Telehealth Collaborative care for Rural Veterans with HIV Infection*
- ▶ *Using Clinical Video Telehealth to Provide Comprehensive Care to Rural Veterans with Multiple Sclerosis*

Office of Rural Health

As VA's lead advocate for rural Veterans, 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 establishes and disseminates Enterprise-Wide 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. To learn more, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov.

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