Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-163, Section 506), directed the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish an external grant program designed to aid rural Veterans with their transition to civilian life. The two-year pilot program assessed “the feasibility and advisability of using community-based organizations and local and state government entities” to:

1. Increase coordination of community, local, state and federal providers of health care and benefits;
2. Increase the availability of high-quality medical and mental health services;
3. Provide assistance to families of transitioning Veterans; and
4. Conduct outreach to Veterans and their families about the availability of benefits and services, and connect them with the appropriate program.

In response to this mandate, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) created the Rural Veterans Coordination Pilot (RVCP). VA’s Office of Rural Health (ORH) provided oversight, guidance and evaluation of RVCP. Starting September 2014, ORH administered grants of $2 million each to five grantees comprised of community-based organizations and local and state government entities, totaling $10 million. Each grantee provided services designed to meet one or more of the four stated purposes of the pilot program. Grantees were responsible for day-to-day management and reporting on the types of services provided and numbers of Veterans served.

The five grantees – Maine Department of Labor, Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors, New Mexico Department of Veteran Services, Volunteers of America of North Louisiana, and WestCare Washington – piloted program models that together provided more than 4,700 referrals and direct services to more than 2,500 rural Veterans and their families. Additionally, grantees established more than 1,600 community partnerships in two years.

ORH evaluated the performance of grantees through standardized quantitative and qualitative metrics linked to the four legislative requirements. The evaluation team collected data quarterly on partnerships, outreach events, referrals/direct services, and client satisfaction. In addition to these quantitative measures, the ORH evaluation team secured qualitative data on program efficacy from interviews with grantee leaders and Veterans served by their local programs.

At the end of the two-year pilot, ORH reported findings to Congress on the impact of RVCP. The report included best practices in the delivery of Veteran transition services coordinated by community-based organizations, as well as local, state and tribal government entities.

Major Pilot Findings:

1. **Increased transportation services are essential** to rural transitioning Veterans’ ability to access care and benefits.
2. **Mobile navigators with Veteran experience** are vital to guiding transitioning Veterans through the complex processes for benefits and services.
3. **Integrated public/private partnerships deliver holistic solutions** that address rural Veterans’ complex needs, and enable each organization (federal, state, local) to focus on the services they are best suited to provide.
RVCP Across the Country

The Maine Department of Labor connected Veterans with career counselors who helped identify opportunities, arrange training, and translate military skills to civilian jobs—especially for thousands of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans returning home. A portion of the funding also helped Easter Seals expand their Veteran outreach services deeper into rural Maine.

The Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors trained local health departments and community organizations to address Veteran-specific needs so they could provide more comprehensive, patient-centered care to Veterans and their families. Project coordinators also linked Veterans to other benefits.

The New Mexico Department of Veteran Services arranged job counseling, benefits advice and free mental health services to transitioning Veterans and their families. They hosted benefits fairs and established Veteran and family transition centers in four regions of the state. This growing network of VA and community partners meant more access points for Veterans to connect with health care and services.

The Volunteers of America of North Louisiana organized telemedicine care and worked to prevent homelessness among rural Veterans and their families in parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas. They also coordinated transportation for rural Veterans and used telehealth technology to increase access to health providers.

WestCare Washington Foundation provided health services, benefits advice and phone counseling to Veterans and their families in Washington and Oregon. Boots-on-the-ground “navigators,” many of whom served in the military themselves, conducted personalized outreach to other Veterans in their rural communities.

Timeline

2010  The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 included a provision for community grants to assist rural Veterans.

2011-12  ORH distributed grant funding to support transitioning rural Veterans and their families.

2013  A competitive grant process garnered nearly 100 submissions from community-based organizations, or local, state or tribal government entities.

2014  The VA Secretary announced five grant recipients that began expanding programs to support rural Veterans and their families during the transition from military service to civilian life.

2015  The Office of Rural Health hosted RVCP program leaders in a four-part national training series to provide guidance about the national Veteran rural health landscape, developing and expanding community partnerships, and program best practices.

2016  The Office of Rural Health assessed the RVCP grantees progress.

2017  The Office of Rural Health reported pilot program findings to Congress.

2018  RVCP concludes, based on the terms laid out in Congressional legislation.

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.