

INFORMATION SHEET

Rural health is at a crossroads. Facing the dual threats of a provider shortage and an aging workforce, rural communities across the United States are experiencing unprecedented health care challenges. Nearly 80 percent of rural America is considered medically underserved, and the number of rural physicians, nurses, mental health specialists, and associated health care professionals is predicted to decline significantly over the next decade¹.

To help reverse this trend, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) collaborated with the VA Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) to develop the Rural Interprofessional Faculty Development Initiative (RIFDI) - a two-year training program designed to attract providers, improve clinician job satisfaction and retention, and develop teaching and training skills for educators in rural settings.

Program Components

RIFDI regularly solicits applications from VA facilities which have been identified by OAA as targets for expanded training activities. Once a site has been accepted into the program, its participating providers complete the RIFDI curriculum, which is divided into six components.



Conferences

Virtual professional development sessions featuring guest speakers delivering new and emerging VA training activities for clinicians serving rural Veterans



Peer Groups

Cohorts designed to create communities of practice with OAA staff



Webinars

Interactive group trainings which address current learning needs, teaching skills, and other educator topics



Experiential Projects

Educational expansion projects which each RIFDI participant completes with an OAA staff mentor; projects are designed to help RIFDI participants develop and expand training opportunities locally



RIFDI-Fundamentals in Teaching

Online, self-directed faculty development modules co-sponsored by the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine (STFM)



Site Workshops

Six-hour virtual workshops hosted at each site by a STFM facilitator

¹ Washington Post, 2019 https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/out-here-its-just-me/2019/09/28/fa1df9b6-deef-11e9-be96-6adb81821e90_story.html

Benefits & Impact

The RIFDI program provides both instructors and participants with multiple benefits, including:

- ▶ **Clinician Satisfaction** - A VA employee survey found that clinicians involved in teaching have higher satisfaction and retention rates
- ▶ **Increased Recruitment** – A 2018 VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report found that the top barriers to recruiting critical VA occupations are lack of qualified applicants and geographic locations, both issues that RIFDI helps combat
- ▶ **Collaboration** - RIFDI provides an opportunity for enhanced interprofessional learning
- ▶ **Trainee Satisfaction** - Participant satisfaction surveys demonstrate that trainees who have higher satisfaction with VA training are more likely to seek employment through VA

Impact

The RIFDI program has achieved measurable results. Highlights include:

- **70%** of the 40 most rural VA medical centers have added physician residents through the [Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act \(VACAA\)](#)
- **79** VA clinicians, students and residents received interprofessional training through the first two RIFDI cohorts
- RIFDI's virtual format reduced travel costs by **nearly \$80,000** in 2020

Health professions represented in RIFDI

Disciplines represented among participants in the RIFDI program include:

- Physician
- Nurse Practitioner
- Nurse
- Pharmacist
- Psychologist
- Dietician
- Physician Assistant
- Podiatrist
- Optometrist
- Chiropractor
- Recreation Therapist
- Social Worker

Opportunities for Collaboration

RIFDI can be implemented by health care partners in the federal and non-federal space. Agencies can explore opportunities for virtual classroom sharing wherein rural-serving trainees from across the federal space (VA, IHS, HRSA) can participate in classes together. Course curriculum and teaching materials can be also shared across agencies and health care systems. For more information about RIFDI, contact VHAOARIFDI@va.gov

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. To learn more, www.ruralhealth.va.gov.