

"From my home, it's 98 miles to the White River Junction VA Medical Center. But since I've been placed in a wheelchair, **my life has been made a lot easier** getting to the VA with the VA Transportation Service."

— R. Stetson, rural Veteran

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Caring for Veterans in Rural Communities

Vision

America's Veterans thrive in rural communities.

Mission

To improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans by increasing access to care and services.

Strategic Goals

- ▶ Promote health and well-being in the rural Veteran population
- ▶ Generate and diffuse knowledge regarding rural Veterans' health
- ▶ Strengthen community health care infrastructure where rural Veterans reside
- ▶ Inform health care policy that impacts rural Veterans and rural health delivery

Sources

- Rural Health Research and Policy Centers
- VA Office of Connected Care, Telehealth Services, fiscal year 2015
- VA Office of the Actuary, fiscal years 2014 and 2015
- VHA Support Service Center, fiscal year 2015
- VA Survey of Veteran Enrollees, 2013 and 2015

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Learn more at www.ruralhealth.va.gov



VA



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VA Office of Rural Health

Caring for Veterans in Rural Communities



Rural Health

77%

rural communities

currently experience shortages in primary care providers, which impacts the health care received by nearly 25 percent of Americans. There are also shortages of specialty providers. For example, there are only 16 psychologists per 100,000 rural patients. Compounding this issue are rural Veterans' long drive times to care facilities, limited options for integrated health care, lack of public transportation, limited broadband access and socioeconomic challenges. Combined, these factors can impede the wellness of rural individuals, and ultimately the community.

Rural Veterans

5.2

million rural Veterans

or about one quarter of all Veterans in the United States returned from active military careers to reside in rural communities. Veterans choose rural communities for a variety of reasons, such as closer proximity to family, friends, and community; open space for recreation; more privacy; lower cost of living; or less crowded towns and schools. While they may enjoy the benefits of rural living, these Veterans may also experience typical challenges accessing health care in rural areas such as provider shortages, distance to obtain care and lack of transportation options. These rural challenges may be exacerbated by injuries or illnesses related to one's military service.

Rural Solutions

In 2006, Congress passed legislation (Public Law 109-461, Sec. 212) to establish the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH). ORH implements a targeted, solution-driven approach to increase access to care for the 2.9 million Veterans living in rural communities who rely on VA for health care. As VA's lead advocate for rural Veterans, ORH works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To accomplish this, ORH leverages its resources to study, innovate and spread enterprise-wide initiatives through partnerships. By collaborating with other VA program offices, federal partners, state partners, and rural communities, ORH optimizes the use of available and emerging technologies, establishes new access points to care, and employs strategies to increase health care options for all rural Veterans. ORH invests in primary care, mental health, specialty care, workforce training and education, ancillary support services, and rural studies and analysis at more than 75 percent of VA medical centers. For example:



Telemental health: 10 rural telemental health hubs offer mental health services to 18,000 Veterans, many in rural communities, through approximately 165 spoke sites



Workforce training: More than 10,000 provider, staff and student attendees completed training to support rural Veteran care



Transportation programs: More than 60,000 unique rural Veterans used ORH-provided transportation services in fiscal year 2015

Enrolled Rural Veterans in 2015

- ▶ 57% 65 or older
- ▶ 6% women
- ▶ 9% racial or ethnic minorities
- ▶ 54% earn an annual household income of less than \$36,000
- ▶ Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and California had the highest number of enrolled Veterans in rural communities
- ▶ 15% Operation Iraqi Freedom/ Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation New Dawn service
- ▶ 44% military service-related disabilities
- ▶ 45% of VA telehealth patients
- ▶ 36% do not access the internet (FY13)
- ▶ Top diagnoses are high blood pressure, post-traumatic stress disorder, Type 2 diabetes, depressive disorder and at least one service-related disability (FY14)