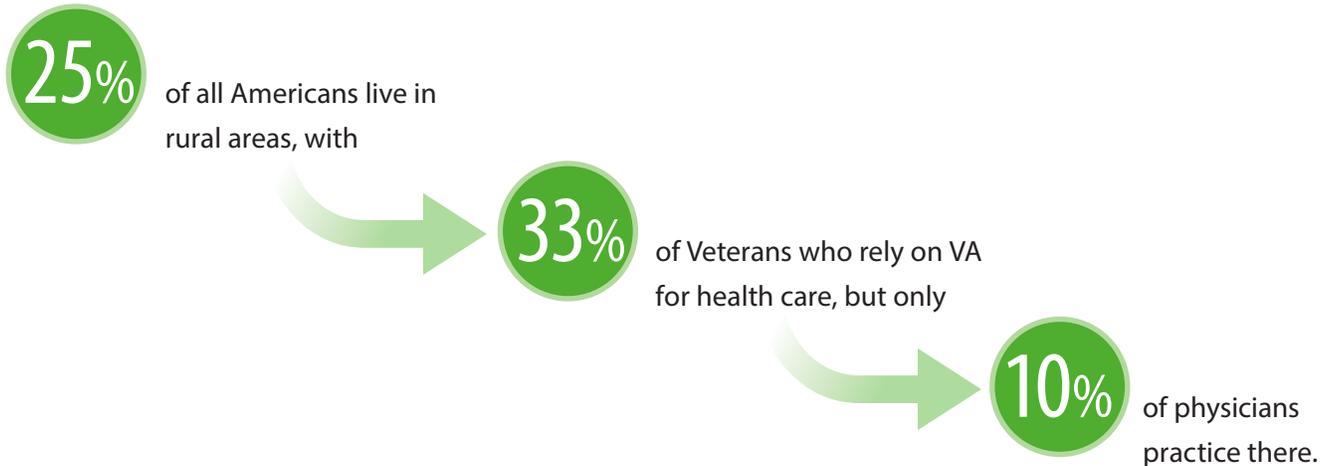


Long distances between hospitals and a limited number of local primary care providers and specialists can seriously affect the health and well-being of Veterans who live in rural communities.



By the Numbers

Although nearly 25 percent of Americans live in rural communities, only about 10 percent of physicians practice there.¹ Of the 9.1 million Veterans who are enrolled to receive health care from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), about 3 million (33 percent) live in rural communities across the United States.

VA's workforce initiatives increase Veterans' access to health care, which translates to less travel time, fewer missed appointments and more preventative care. VA's Office of Rural Health (ORH), along with its partners, creates and implements national programs known as enterprise-wide initiatives. Some of these initiatives aim to provide programmatic support at VA medical centers that serve rural Veterans by strengthening VA's rural health care workforce (e.g., doctors, nurses, administrators) and facilities where Veterans receive care.

Through collaboration with its partners, ORH supports the recruitment of qualified doctors, nurses, physician assistants, social workers, psychologists, technicians and administrators to VA's rural workforce. ORH also sponsors education and training for existing professionals so they can better meet the needs of rural Veterans.

Spotlight: Community Based Outpatient Clinics

VA's network of nearly 800 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) provide primary and preventative care closer to home for Veterans. In fact, 41 percent of CBOCs are located in rural communities. These smaller facilities offer annual physicals, routine lab work, mental health screenings and other services.

Spotlight: Rural Provider Staff Training Initiative

Patients in rural areas may ask their rural primary care provider about specialty health issues, since fewer specialists practice there. The Rural Provider Staff Training Initiative provides virtual continuing education opportunities specifically for rural providers and staff. This gives rural doctors and nurses the ability to expand their knowledge of specialty health issues without sacrificing time on travel that they could spend with patients.

Spotlight: SimLEARN

This initiative expands infrastructure and provides resources to develop and implement simulation-based training programs to enhance the quality of rural providers' skills by bringing the training opportunity to their location.

Spotlight: The Geriatric Scholars Program

This program, an ORH Rural Promising Practice, trains clinicians already practicing in a rural community on specialty health care skills to improve older Veterans' access to and quality of care in the communities where they live. It is a collaboration between ORH, VA's Geriatric Research Education Clinical Centers, the VA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care, VA's Employee Education Service, academic affiliates and the Indian Health Service workforce development program.

Spotlight: Rural Health Training Initiative

This program increases rural clinical training sites for health professions students and residents. Trainees include social workers, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, psychiatrists, optometry students, and dental and family medicine residents.

ORH funds enterprise-wide initiatives that educate and train existing health care professionals so they can better meet the needs of rural Veterans.

¹ Rural Healthy People 2010—"Healthy People 2010: A Companion Document for Rural Areas." Volume 1. <http://srph.tamhsc.edu/centers/rhp2010/Volume1.pdf>.

Office of Rural Health

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) implements a targeted, solution-driven approach to increase access to care for the 3 million Veterans living in rural communities who rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (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 increase rural Veterans' access to care and services. To learn more, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov.



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