

One quarter of all Veterans in the United States, 5.2 million, 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.

Who are Rural Veterans?

Rural Veterans are a diverse group that range from young men and women who served in recent conflicts to elderly Veterans from World War II.

Of the 5.2 million rural Veterans, 2.9 million are enrolled in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system. Compared to urban Veterans enrolled in VA's health system, these enrolled rural Veterans are more likely to be:

- ▶ Male (six percent are women, a small but growing number)
- ▶ Caucasian (nine percent report being a racial or ethnic minority)
- ▶ Older (more than half are 65 years or older)
- ▶ Unemployed or low-income (54 percent earn an annual income of less than \$36,000)
- ▶ Married (more than 65 percent are currently married)
- ▶ Less technologically connected (36 percent do not access the internet)
- ▶ Living in Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and California (i.e., states with the highest numbers of VA enrolled rural Veterans)
- ▶ Using VA health care (nearly half consider VA a primary source of health care)

"The challenges delivering care to Veterans in rural communities calls for VA and community health care organizations to work together in constructing a high performing network to support the entire rural health care community through innovations in workforce enhancement and the use of technology across health care organizations to meet the demands of a modern, rural health care system."

— Jennifer Lee, M.D., VA Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services
(*"The Journal of Rural Health," Autumn 2016*)

Enrolled Rural Veterans by State

State	Enrolled Veterans (total)	Enrolled Rural Veterans (total)	Enrolled Rural Veterans (percentage)	Enrolled Veterans (total)	Enrolled Rural Veterans (total)	Enrolled Rural Veterans (percentage)
Alabama	172,000	80,000	47%	144,000	83,000	58%
Alaska	33,000	17,000	52%	135,000	49,000	36%
Arizona	226,000	58,000	26%	57,000	41,000	73%
Arkansas	117,000	66,000	56%	150,000	29,000	20%
California	749,000	109,000	15%	134,000	10,000	7%
Colorado	159,000	36,000	23%	229,000	95,000	41%
Connecticut	76,000	10,000	13%	163,000	85,000	53%
Delaware	26,000	8,000	31%	100,000	64,000	64%
District of Columbia	14,000	0	0%	200,000	105,000	52%
Florida	716,000	89,000	12%	50,000	37,000	73%
Georgia	300,000	96,000	32%	69,000	34,000	49%
Hawaii	45,000	15,000	33%	107,000	19,000	18%
Idaho	59,000	27,000	46%	44,000	22,000	50%
Illinois	279,000	86,000	31%	142,000	11,000	8%
Indiana	186,000	75,000	41%	75,000	36,000	48%
Iowa	100,000	62,000	62%	390,000	107,000	27%
Kansas	87,000	46,000	53%	324,000	138,000	42%
Kentucky				28,000	17,000	60%
Louisiana						
Maine						
Maryland						
Massachusetts						
Michigan						
Minnesota						
Mississippi						
Missouri						
Montana						
Nebraska						
Nevada						
New Hampshire						
New Jersey						
New Mexico						
New York						
North Carolina						
North Dakota						
Ohio						
Oklahoma						
Oregon						
Pennsylvania						
Rhode Island						
South Carolina						
South Dakota						
Tennessee						
Texas						
Utah						
Vermont						
Virginia						
Washington						
West Virginia						
Wisconsin						
Wyoming						

Source: Veterans Health Administration Support Service Center, fiscal year 2015

Note: Data in this table has been rounded

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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Learn more about ORH at www.ruralhealth.va.gov