

Office of Rural Health Overview

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Rural Health (ORH) was founded to address a single profound challenge – the unique health care needs of rural Veterans require equally unique solutions.

Established by Congress in 2006 ([38 U.S. Code § 7308](#)), ORH fulfills its mission by supporting targeted research, developing innovative programs and identifying new care models for the more than 2.8 million rural Veterans enrolled in the VA health system. Working through its three Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers as well as partners from academia, state and local governments, private industry and non-profit organizations, ORH strives to break down the barriers separating rural Veterans from quality care.

Programs

To enable VA to rapidly address systemic health care and access challenges experienced by Veterans in rural communities, ORH funds two categories of programs:

- ▶ **Enterprise-Wide Initiatives** (EWI) expand national VA program offices' health care efforts to sites that serve rural Veterans.
- ▶ **Rural Promising Practices** are field-tested innovative projects which demonstrate improved access to care for rural Veterans.

Together, these programs address ORH's key focus areas (health care workforce shortages, transportation, primary care, mental health, telehealth and specialty care), highlighted by the following EWIs and Rural Promising Practices:



Teleprimary Care establishes teleprimary care hubs with spoke sites to ensure access to primary care in rural areas where providers are unavailable.



Veteran Transportation Service provides medical transportation services for rural Veterans and funds salaries for drivers and mobility managers as well as vehicle leases.



Tele-Intensive Care Units use telehealth to connect VA intensivists with facilities nationwide to increase access to emergency services and specialty inpatient care for rural Veterans.



Telemental Health Hubs connect mental health specialists with rural sites where Veterans require same-day or urgent access to mental health services.

ORH Components

- ▶ **Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRC)** are ORH's field-based satellite offices which serve as hubs of rural health care, located at host VA medical centers in Iowa City, Iowa; Salt Lake City, Utah; and White River Junction, Vermont. As part of the White River Junction VRHRC, the **GeoSpatial Outcomes Division (GSOD)** team applies geospatial solutions to support rural policy analysis, strategic planning, rural geographic database design, and implementation in support of rural Veteran health care.
- ▶ **Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) Rural Consultants (VRC)** serve as communication conduits between VA Central Office, ORH and VHA field operations. The United States is divided into 18 VISNs, each with a VRC. VRCs advise ORH on matters affecting rural Veterans.

Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

The Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee (VRHAC) is a chartered federal advisory committee that advises the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on health care issues affecting rural Veterans. ORH supports VRHAC in its mission to identify health care access barriers facing rural Veterans and provide recommendations to enhance VA's rural health care services.

VA Partner Offices

ORH collaborates with other VA offices to identify, support and disseminate innovative solutions that address challenges in mental health, primary care, telehealth, workforce development, community engagement and innovation.



4.7

million Veterans
are rural

6%

of enrolled rural
Veterans are women

15%

of enrolled rural
Veterans report
being racial or
ethnic minority

56%

of enrolled rural
Veterans are
65 years or older

52%

of enrolled rural
Veterans earn
annual income less
than \$35,000

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 2.8 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.



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Office of Rural Health

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