The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Rural Health’s (ORH) congressional mandate (38 USC § 7308) directs the Office to develop, refine and promulgate best practices and innovative and successful programs to improve care and services for Veterans who reside in rural areas of the United States. ORH carefully evaluates rural health innovations, and the strongest are designated ORH Rural Promising Practices. During the past three years, these programs expanded from 22 to 357 sites – increasing rural Veterans’ access to these programs 1,523 percent.

The primary goals of ORH Rural Promising Practices are to:

- Develop special practices and products for the benefit of Veterans living in rural areas and for implementation of such practices and products in the Department systemwide;
- Formulate practices or programs to enhance the delivery of health care to Veterans living in rural areas;
- Mentor new program champions to implement ORH Rural Promising Practices; and
- Share operational and clinical knowledge with professional providers and staff who serve rural Veterans.

ORH monitors and evaluates innovations throughout their lifecycle to track their effect on the health and well-being of rural Veterans. When an innovation demonstrates outstanding performance, and addresses a gap in rural care and services delivery, it may be nominated to ORH as a Rural Promising Practice. ORH rigorously reviews nominations to ensure they address each of the six ORH Rural Promising Practices criteria. ORH Rural Promising Practices are available to providers, practitioners and program advocates through the ORH dissemination process—both within and beyond VA.

Those interested in ORH’s Rural Promising Practices can access materials, adoption toolkits and contact information for subject-matter experts on the ORH website. ORH also selects some Rural Promising Practices for mentored implementation, wherein ORH project managers work directly with site staff.
in the adoption of an ORH Rural Promising Practice. This technical assistance (available exclusively to VA sites of care) includes funding during the adoption period, training, technical site visits when required, and continuous performance monitoring during setup and launch of the program. Rural Promising Practice subject-matter experts share what they’ve learned in developing the practice through the innovation and implementation processes and connect participants in a mentoring network. Rural Promising Practices encourage collaborative open-source learning among stakeholder participants.

**Spotlight: Home-Based Cardiac Rehabilitation**

Studies show that people who complete a Phase 2 cardiac rehabilitation program can increase their life expectancy by up to five years and have 27 percent lower cardiac death rates, 25 percent fewer fatal heart attacks, 21 percent fewer nonfatal heart attacks, and improved quality of life. However, many rural Veterans cannot participate in a cardiac rehabilitation program due to the geographic, transportation and other barriers that often affect rural Veterans and their families.

To overcome these obstacles and to provide life-saving cardiac rehabilitation, the ORH Veterans Rural Health Resource Center in Iowa City, Iowa pioneered rehabilitation at home using VA-provided supplies and monitoring equipment along with professional telephone-based lifestyle and activity coaching. Compared to in-facility rehabilitation, this program showed higher completion rates and greater patient satisfaction, all for similar costs. Remote, Home-based Cardiac Rehabilitation became ORH’s first Rural Promising Practice in fiscal year 2015 and expanded from 11 initial sites in fiscal year 2015 to 19 sites in fiscal year 2017—a 73 percent increase in three years.