

# Rural Health Care Workforce Development

**Across the United States, rural communities face a critical shortage of qualified health care providers. According to the National Rural Health Association, a 1-to-2,500 physician to patient ratio exists in rural communities, creating severe health care access challenges for residents.<sup>1</sup> These shortages can seriously affect the health and well-being of America's nearly 5 million rural Veterans.**

To overcome these challenges and increase rural Veterans' access to quality health care, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) devotes \$12 million to fund initiatives that provide training to rural clinicians nationwide.

## Rural Health Training Initiatives

ORH training initiatives combine in-person and virtual learning to enhance rural providers' skills in specialty care areas including geriatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, nephrology, and psychiatry. This expansion of clinical skills helps offset the specialty care provider shortage in rural communities by focusing on provider and student learning.

Rural-focused health training programs include:

- ▶ **Rural Interprofessional Faculty Development Initiative (RIFDI):** This faculty development program provides teaching and training for rural residency proctors. These faculty then train, mentor and monitor residents serving rural areas.
- ▶ **Rural Suicide Prevention:** Connects Veterans to comprehensive suicide prevention services and resources for high-risk individuals.
- ▶ **Women's Health:** Rural clinicians receive onsite education from a mobile training team to provide fundamental women's care to Veterans, such as breast and pelvic exams.
- ▶ **SimLEARN:** This distance learning initiative offers simulation-based training programs to rural clinicians regardless of location.
- ▶ **VA-ECHO Expansion in Specialty Care:** Through VA's Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) expansion, rural providers use telehealth technology to train on a wide variety of specialties, including treatment for chronic kidney disease, hepatitis C and pain management.



<sup>1</sup> "Fixing the Medical Staff Shortage Problem in Rural Areas" <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/population-health/fixing-the-medical-staff-shortage-problem-in-rural-areas.html>

In FY19:

557

ORH-funded CME  
and CEU credit training  
courses conducted

828

VA rural sites of care  
participated in ORH-funded  
training courses

11,331

employees received  
ORH-funded training

## Rural Workforce Incentives

Health care workforce recruitment and retention are instrumental in solving the rural clinician shortage. That's why VA is dedicated to promoting the multiple benefits of practicing medicine in a rural setting.

Clinicians enjoy several advantages in pursuing a rural health care career, including:



**Leading-Edge Technology:** VA's telehealth solutions empower clinicians with industry-shaping technology



**Quality of Life:** Rural clinicians enjoy less traffic, lower costs of living and reduced stress. A 2019 study also found that rural family physicians even experience significantly lower rates of burnout.<sup>2</sup>



**Professional Training:** VA offers rural clinicians unique residency and specialty training opportunities



**Financial Incentives:** VA programs can help reduce rural clinicians' financial burdens, such as student debt

To learn more about ORH workforce training and education initiatives, visit: [www.ruralhealth.va.gov/providers/training.asp](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/providers/training.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Family Physician Burnout Rates in Rural versus Metropolitan Areas: A Pilot Study: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31461585>

# Office of Rural Health

Congress established the Veterans Health Administration Office of Rural Health (ORH) in 2006 (38 USC § 7308) to conduct research, innovate new health care solutions, and disseminate best practices system-wide to benefit the nearly five million Veterans who reside in rural communities. The mandate also requires ORH to develop, refine and promulgate policies, best practices, lessons learned, and innovative and successful programs. Learn more at [www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov).



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Rural Health

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Learn more about ORH at [www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov)