



# Caring for Rural Veterans

**VA**



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



## Rural Veteran Health Care Challenges

Almost a quarter of all U.S. Veterans return from active military careers to reside in rural communities. Veterans choose to call rural communities home for a variety of reasons, including lower cost of living; less crowded towns and schools; open space for recreation; more privacy; and proximity to family, friends, and community.

While many Veterans enjoy these benefits, they may also experience health conditions created or intensified by combat-related injuries and illnesses. These challenges are often complicated by other difficulties common in rural areas, including:



**Fewer housing, education, employment and transportation options**



**Greater geographic and distance barriers**



**Limited broadband internet**



**Shortages of primary, specialty, and mental health providers**



**Difficulty of safely aging in place in rural America**



**Rural hospital closings**

For all these reasons, rural Veterans may face critical access challenges that threaten their long-term health and well-being. Our nation's rural Veterans need a host of solutions – from advanced technology to enhanced care coordination – to connect them with the quality health care they have earned.

## Rural Solutions

In recognition of the complex challenges facing rural communities, Congress established the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) to build rural-focused health solutions that enable Veterans to obtain a similar standard of care to their urban counterparts, regardless of where they live.

38 U.S. Code § 7308 directs ORH to:



**Conduct, coordinate, promote, and disseminate research into issues affecting rural Veterans**



**Develop policies, best practices, lessons learned, and innovative and successful programs to increase access to care for rural Veterans**

ORH's five Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers innovate to create new programs—from opioid research to novel approaches to the delivery of mental health services—and the coordination of care for rural Veterans. Many ORH-supported programs use technology to overcome barriers, such as lack of nearby medical facilities or providers. For example, some ORH programs use telehealth to connect rural Veterans with primary care and mental health service providers located thousands of miles from their homes.

By collaborating with other VA offices, federal and state partners, and rural communities, ORH optimizes available and emerging technologies to increase health care options for rural Veterans nationwide. But technology is only half the story. ORH also supports a range of programs focused on recruiting and retaining a high-quality rural provider workforce. These initiatives combine in-person and remote learning opportunities to expand clinician skillsets and empower them to treat a wider array of patients.

To learn more about how ORH is helping America's rural Veterans thrive in their communities, visit [www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov).

## Rural Veteran Demographics

**4.7**

million rural  
Veterans

**2.7**

million rural  
Veterans are  
enrolled in the VA  
health care system

**62%**

of rural enrolled  
Veterans have at  
least one service-  
related disability

**31%**

earn less than  
\$35,000 annually





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**For more information on the Office of Rural Health:**

**[www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov)**

**[rural.health.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:rural.health.inquiry@va.gov)**

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