

Rural Promising Practice: COVER to COVER – Connecting Older Veterans to Eligible Resources

This model of care shows promise to increase rural Veterans' access to care and services, and is recommended for replication at other facilities.

Medical Issue

Many non-medical factors impact health and well-being of rural Veterans who rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for health care. Age is a significant factor, as more than half of these Veterans are 65 years or olderⁱ. Economic stability is another, as 38 percent earn an annual income of \$26,000 or lessⁱⁱ. Other factors include education, transportation, employment and housing options.

Access Challenge

Veterans can increase their access to care through enrollment in VA health services and benefits. Access to VA benefits and community services support rural Veterans' ability to thrive physically and mentally. However, rural community service providers may have limited knowledge of VA benefits, are unsure how to navigate the VA system, and may not have VA partners to help connect rural Veterans to VA services and benefits. As a result, Veterans, particularly those 65 years and older, may be unaware that they are eligible for VA benefits (e.g., pension, home loans) and health care services they earned.

Solution

The COVER to COVER (Connecting Older Veterans [Especially Rural] to Community or Veteran Eligible Resources) model uses the expertise of benefits counselors at community agencies such as Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Area Agencies on Aging, and Centers for Independent Living to help older Veterans access available resources from VA and community agencies.

Counselors at these direct access points within rural Veterans' existing communities provide guidance and assistance on Veteran benefits, application documents and the application process.

VA benefits experts provide training to community agency staff about military culture, VA's organizational structure, state-sponsored Veteran programs, Veteran eligibility and benefits, and the VA claims process. These benefit trainings help VA and local community agency staff build partnerships that assist Veterans. These collaborations help reach more Veterans, fill service gaps and streamline the application process. The community partners also educate VA providers about specific resources that are available to help Veterans in rural communities where they live.

These partnerships between VA and community agencies reach older Veterans at a time of need when they seek help locally. Through these growing networks, Veterans receive community agency services in rural areas where VA has a reduced presence. They also create local access points for rural Veterans and their families to connect with VA care and services.

To Learn More

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) 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 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 study, innovate and spread enterprise-wide initiatives through partnerships.

To discuss implementing a Rural Promising Practice at your facility or to learn more, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov or email rural.health.inquiry@va.gov.

ⁱ Veterans Health Administration, Service Support Center Enrollment Cube, Fiscal Year 2015

ⁱⁱ VA Survey of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Use of Health Care, Fiscal Year 2015