U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
*Office of Rural Health*
***May 2026***

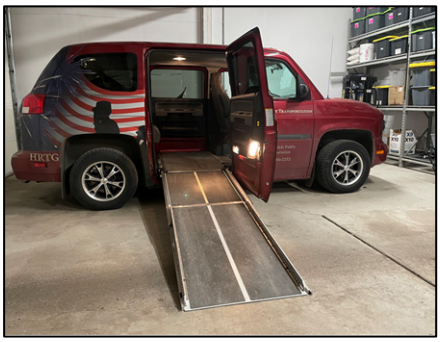
# ORH PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Highly Rural Transportation Grants Program

### Background

The *Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG)* program was established in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2013 to address lack of transportation as a barrier to care. HRTG is authorized by the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010[1] and is open to Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and State Veterans Service Agencies in eligible highly rural counties.[2]* The grant offered the chance for funding to support implementation of innovative approaches to transport Veterans in highly rural areas to VA-authorized healthcare appointments. Veterans can utilize the program for long trips and overnights during extended treatment or surgery, and for day trips to healthcare appointments including primary, specialty care, and mental health.

HRTG grant applicants provide a detailed description of their transportation solution, staffing plan, resource needs, community partner relationships, and program implementation timeline.[3] In 2025, grantees were awarded $50,000 per county to serve the designated highly rural are where they will provide transportation services. Grantees can partner with local transportation companies or provide the transportation themselves.



*HRTG grantee organization vehicles include vans and shuttle buses. Many are wheelchair accessible.*

### Goals

The goal of HRTG is to improve highly rural Veterans access to transportation to/from health care appointments with Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and authorized community health care providers; ensuring highly rural Veterans can access the care they need to be healthy.

**"Highly Rural" is an area consisting of a county or counties having a population of less than seven persons per square mile.*

## Methodology

In October 2022, the VHA Veterans Transportation Program and Office of Rural Health (ORH) partnered to expand transportation access for highly rural Veterans through the HRTG Enterprise-Wide Initiative (EWI). The HRTG EWI supports HRTG operations and oversight, including salaries, vehicle purchases and maintenance, marketing/advertising, and other program operational costs.

The HRTG Program Manager works with grantees to ensure successful implementation of their innovation . The ORH Center for the Evaluation of Enterprise-Wide Initiatives assesses adoption, reach, and effectiveness of the HRTG and grantee sites provide quarterly reporting of completed trips, miles traveled, number of highly rural Veterans served, number of locations served, and Veteran satisfaction.

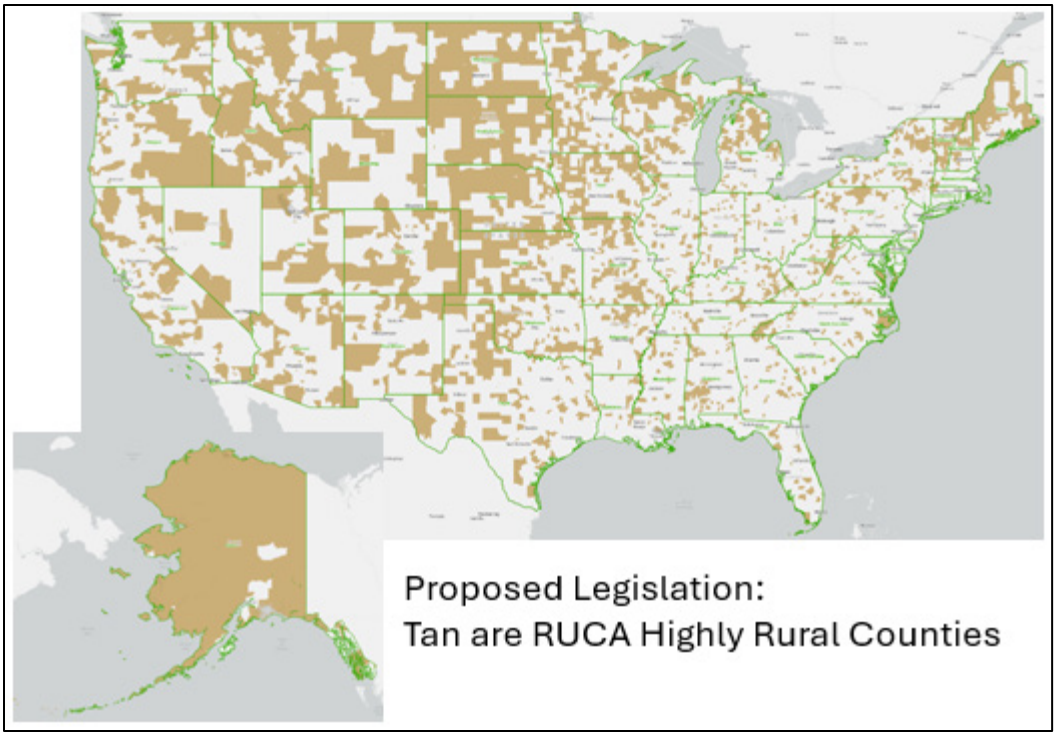
There are currently 11 HRTG grantees serving Veterans in 179 highly rural counties in 12 states:[4]

- Alaska
- Maine
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Mexico
- North Dakota
- Oregon
- South Dakota
- Texas
- Washington
- Wyoming

A full list of current HRTG Grantee Organizations, highly rural counties served, and contact information can be found on the **Veterans Transportation Program website, HRTG page:**
https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/highly_rural_transportation_grants.asp

## Impact on Rural Veteran Health

- From September 2024 – September 2025 HRTG grantees provided an estimated 4,946 Veterans with 18,304 rides to health care appointments including primary, specialty care and treatment visits such as dialysis, and radiation.
- Customer satisfaction is high; Veterans highlighted the need for the program, and explained how HRTG filled a critical transportation gap, enabling them to get to medical appointments. They were also pleased with the service they received from grantee and transportation partner staff.
- HRTG grantees reported high levels of satisfaction working with Veterans to meet their transportation needs.
- HRTG grantees report wanting to expand to neighboring counties, some which don't qualify under existing legislation.
- Proposed legislation would update the highly rural definition from the current standard, 7 or less persons per square mile, to the use of Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) Codes, expanding program eligibility.




*"Thanks [to] the VA for sending us the grant money. That's been a Godsend. Without that, I don't know what these Veterans would have done. I don't know what they did before this money. All I know is that some guys, once in a while, they do start to cry when they say 'thank you'… I'm just glad we're here to help them."*

*~ HRTG Grantee*

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*"I think in many cases it's truly a lifesaver for people. I know that some people would not be able to get to their appointments, their aftercare, their surgeries. I mean there's just a myriad of things that the Veteran is going for, and honestly, sometimes having that connection with our drivers or even staff people here, really makes a big difference to them."*

*~ HRTG Grantee*

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*"… there's people that literally can't get to the hospital…this service and the fact you guys pick up the tab…if it wasn't for the VA… There's no question when they pick me up. You know, there's no fiddling with fare cards, which may or may not have money on them and that sort of thing. You know, it's just really a benefit."*

*~ Veteran HRTG Rider*

## Key Takeaways

- HRTG directly contributes to highly rural Veterans health by providing the transportation they need to access health care from VHA or local VHA-approved community providers.
- HRTG is especially valuable for older highly rural Veterans, who rely on these services for longer trips (often five or more hours one way). Geography in highly rural areas and travel distances can be challenging for elderly drivers and HRTG helps remove that barrier to getting health care.
- HRTG grantees are VSO and State Veterans Service Agency organizations; They often have more flexibility to transport Veterans longer distances and across state lines to receive needed health care.

## References


1. Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-163, § 307, 124 Stat. 1132 (2010). https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-bill/1963
2. United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013). *Grants for Transportation of Veterans in Highly Rural Areas*. (38 CFR 17). Washington, DC Retrieved from https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2013/04/02/2013-07636/grants-for-transportation-of-veterans-in-highly-rural-areas
3. United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2024). *Grants for Transportation in Highly Rural Areas (VA-HRTG-NEW-2024)*. United States Department of Health and Human Services,. Retrieved March from https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/354414
4. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG). Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/highly_rural_transportation_grants.asp#what. Last updated: September 15, 2025


### Contact

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