U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
*Office of Rural Health*
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# ORH PROJECT OVERVIEW

# Recruiting and Retaining Rural Nurses: A Literature Review

## Background

Primary care is the largest aspect of the U.S. health care system with high demand and expectations; however, its rural workforce is in crisis.[1–3] Staffing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) workforce in rural areas is also a challenge. Although 20% of Americans live in rural communities, only 16% of registered nurses (RNs) work in rural areas.[4]

In 2018, there were 65.3 RNs per 10,000 people in rural areas compared to 93.6 RNs per 10,000 people in urban areas.[4] Further exacerbating this maldistribution, only 10% of RNs work in primary or home care and nearly one million RNs are over the age of 50 with a third of the workforce projected to retire in the next decade.[4,5] Public and private entities have invested considerable resources towards addressing rural physician shortages; however, less is known about the existing programs and incentives with the focus on recruiting and retaining rural RNs.

## Goals and Objectives

The VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) Veterans Rural Health Resource Center-White River Junction project, *Recruiting and Retaining Rural Nurses: A Literature Review*, aims to investigate and analyze the literature to identify and understand the different types of rural nurse recruitment and retention programs. This project has the potential to gain valuable knowledge necessary to recruit and retain rural nurses to improve rural Veteran access and quality to care.

The three study aims are:

1. Conduct a literature review to identify existing programs or incentives focused on recruiting or retaining RNs in rural areas.
2. Examine whether diverse and appealing incentives are offered in the most vulnerable areas and how these incentives compare to one another.
3. Compile the best recruitment and retainment practices of RNs in rural health.

## Methodology

To better understand the unique programs and incentives offered to recruit and retain rural RNs, we plan to conduct a literature review of the interventions and programs utilized to recruit and retain RNs in health professional shortage areas (HPSAs). Specifically, publicly available rural health workforce resources and published rural workforce incentivization literature will be compared to federally designated geographic primary care HPSAs.

Thematic analyses and descriptive statistics will be produced and provide relevant themes, topics, and patterns for RN recruitment and retainment in rural areas.

## Impact on Rural Veteran Health

While all primary care team members contribute to patient care, RNs play a critical role with responsibilities in care coordination, patient education, and chronic disease management.7,10 Given the role of RNs in patient care coordination, the absence or turnover of RNs in team-based care may negatively impact more immediate patient care activities.

Due to limited understanding of the types of programs and incentives offered and evaluation of their effectiveness, this project focuses on identifying variables that add value to RN focused recruitment and retainment. Several areas that could potentially affect rural Veterans, will be collected and aggregated, including:

- Funding and/or incentive type
- Funding and/or incentive mechanism
- Recruitment versus retention focus
- Geographic area
- Service time commitment required
- Whether the incentive/program prefers RNs that are from rural areas

## Key Takeaways

This project has the potential to offer valuable knowledge necessary to recruit and retain rural nurses, which could improve rural Veteran access and quality to care. The results of this research will provide a better understanding of current program and resource allocation to subsequently provide insight for rural nurse workforce development.

- This literature review showed that the majority of programs focused on recruitment but a large portion of programs also focused on retention or both (recruitment and retention)

## References


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