ABOUT RURAL HEALTH

- Veterans are more likely to live in rural areas than Americans who did not serve in the military. While 18 percent of Americans live in rural areas, a quarter of Veterans do.

- More than half (57 percent) of rural Veterans enrolled in VA health care are 65 years old or older. In addition, 6 percent are women; 9 percent report being members of racial and ethnic minorities; and nearly 435,000 are Veterans of our recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. About 44 percent of rural Veterans have one or more service-related disabilities.

- Rural Veterans have lower average household incomes than other Veterans; they often face long driving distances to access quality health care; and there are fewer health care providers and nurses per capita in rural areas.

- VA’s Office of Rural Health (ORH) strives to eliminate the barriers between rural Veterans and the services they have earned and deserve, thus improving Veterans’ health and well-being by increasing access to care.

VA RESEARCH ON RURAL HEALTH: OVERVIEW

- In the past 10 to 15 years, VA has launched a number of initiatives to expand and ensure access to high-quality health care for Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system who live in rural areas. VA researchers have been instrumental in these efforts by developing and evaluating new technologies, interventions, and models of care.

- Veterans who live in remote areas of the country have faced challenges in accessing VA care. VA researchers have focused on understanding these Veterans’ health care needs, and on developing and evaluating new initiatives to fill the gaps. Some VA studies focus specifically on Veterans in rural areas, while others have a broader focus but explore issues or possible solutions that are relevant to rural health care.

- With support from the Office of Research and Development, a Collaborative Research to Enhance and Advance Transformation and Excellence (CREATE) group, Improving Rural Veterans’ Access/Engagement in Evidence-Based Healthcare, is working with VA’s Office of Rural Health to ensure rural Veterans receive adequate levels of mental health care.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

2011 - Published a systematic review of rural vs. urban ambulatory (outpatient) health care, a reconceptualized model of access, and numerous articles on VA access to rural health in a special issue of the Journal of General Internal Medicine

2013 - Established the Improving Rural Veterans’ Access/Engagement in Evidence-Based Healthcare CREATE and several centers to research rural health

2013 - Established the Charleston Health Equity and Rural Outreach Innovation Center (HEROIC) to improve health outcomes among rural Veterans by examining the increasing role of technology in ensuring access.

2014 - Published a study of the population demographics and health care needs of female rural Veterans enrolled in VA care

2015 - Established the Virtual Specialty Care QUERI Program and QUERI for Team-Based Behavioral Health to improve rural access to health care through technology

2016 - Established the QUERI-Office of Rural Health Partnered Evaluation on Healthcare Resource Needs and Program Implementation for Rural Veterans

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

- Women Veterans living in rural and highly rural areas were older and more likely to be married than their urban counterparts, according to a study of the population demographics and health care

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VA researchers have been instrumental in developing and evaluating new technologies, interventions, and models of care to help Veterans living in rural areas.

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