

Rural Veterans Health



Nearly one quarter of veterans (4.4 million) live in rural America.

2.11 million, or 48%, of these rural veterans are enrolled in the Veteran's Affairs (VA) healthcare system.

Rural Veterans:

- Experience higher levels of poverty, with **44% earning less than \$35,000 annually.**
- Are older, with **more than 60%** of rural veterans **over the age of 65.**
- Experience **worse health outcomes**, including **higher rates of cardiovascular deaths and suicide.**
- **60%** are affected by at least one **service-related condition.**
- **15%** of VA healthcare enrolled rural Veterans are **minorities.**
- **32%** of **homeless** Veterans reside in rural areas.



Mental Health & Substance-Use Disorders:

- Barriers for rural Veterans seeking mental health care include stigma associated with mental illness and health care and a lack of trust in the VA as a caring organization.
- Among recent VA healthcare users, suicide rates were elevated for residents of rural areas. In 2022, the Veterans' suicide rate in rural areas was **48.9 per 100,000** compared to 38.1 per 100,000 for those in urban areas.
- A 2019 study found that rural Veterans were prescribed **30% more opioids** than their urban counterparts.

Telehealth:

- **Nearly 1 in 3** Veterans can not access the internet at home.
- **40%** of Veterans who used VA health care received some of their care through telehealth in 2023.
- **More than 770,000** Veterans living in rural communities participated in **over 2.9 million telehealth** episodes of care in 2023.

The VA **Office of Rural Health** was established in 2006. In 2022, it served **547,000 Veterans** by supporting targeted research, developing innovative programs, and identifying new care models.

NRHA Supported Legislation

S. 784/H.R. 1733

Rural Veterans Transport to Care Act

Sens. Ossoff (D-GA), Collins (R-ME) & Rep. Gluesenkamp Pérez (D-WA), Cisconmani (R-AZ)

Expands and makes permanent the VA grant program that provides medical transportation to veterans in rural and tribal areas.

S. 1868 Critical Access for Veterans Care Act

Sens. Cramer (R-ND) and Sheehy (R-MT)

Creates a new option for veterans living in rural America, allowing them to seek health care services at their local critical access hospital or rural health clinic under the VA Community Care Program.

VA Clinician Appreciation, Recruitment, Education, Expansion, and Retention Support (CAREERS) Act

(S. 10 in 118th Congress)

Sen. Tester (D-MT) & Boozman (R-AR)

Modernizes the VA's pay system for physicians and other high-level clinicians, expands eligibility for healthcare professional education reimbursement, and collects data to help improve VA's hiring and onboarding process, all of which will bolster the workforce in hard-to-hire rural areas.

H.R. 210 Dental Care for Veterans Act

Rep. Brownley (D-CA)

Authorizes the VA to provide dental care to all veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system.

Expanding Veterans Options for Long Term Care Act

(S.495 /H.R. 1815 in 118th Congress)

Sen. Tester (D-MT), Moran (R-KS), & Reps. Slotkin (D-MI) & Steil (R-WI)

Creates a three-year pilot program for eligible veterans to receive assisted living care paid for by the VA.

H.R. 2068 Veterans Patient Advocacy Act

Reps. Moolenaar (R-MI) & Dingell (D-MI)

Requires the Office of Patient Advocacy within the VHA to ensure that rural veterans may access the services of patient advocates.