

# 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 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 VHA-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 the importance rural Veterans place on independence, self-reliance, and stoicism; stigma associated with mental illness and health care; and a lack of trust in the VA as a caring organization.
- Among recent VHA 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:

- **27%** of Veterans can not access the internet at home.
- In fiscal year 2023, **40%** of Veterans who used VA health care received some of their care through telehealth.
- In fiscal year 2023, **more than 770,000** Veterans living in rural communities participated in **over 2.9 million telehealth** episodes of care.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) **Office of Rural Health** was established in 2006. In 2022, it served about

**547,000 Veterans**

# NRHA Supported Legislation

## Rural Veterans Transport to Care Act

(S. 784/H.R. 1733)

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

Improves how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) measures rurality, helping more veterans living in rural areas get transportation to VA or VA-authorized health care facilities.

## Critical Access for Veterans Care Act

(S. 1868)

*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.

## Dental Care for Veterans Act

(H.R. 2413 in 118th Congress)

*Rep. Brownley (D-CA-26)*

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.

## Veterans Patient Advocacy Act

(H.R.2068)

*Reps. Moolenaar (R-MI) and Dingell  
(D-MI)*

Requires the Office of Patient Advocacy within the VHA to ensure that there is not fewer than one patient advocate for every 13,500 veterans enrolled in the VA health care system and that highly rural veterans may access the services of patient advocates.