



# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES & POLICY INITIATIVES

118TH ★  
CONGRESS



## Rural Veterans Access To Veteran-Centric Healthcare

According to Veterans Health Administration's [Office of Rural Health](#) (ORH), 58 percent of the 4.7 million rural veterans are enrolled in the VHA healthcare system. Fifty-five percent of these rural veterans are 65 years and older, and 56 percent of them are affected by a service-related condition.

### *Understanding the Issue*

A disproportionate share of veterans live in rural or remote areas of the country. According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Rural Health (VA-ORH), of the twenty million veterans in the U.S., 4.7 million live in rural America. Fifty-eight percent, or 2.7 million of these rural veterans are enrolled in the VA healthcare system. Of those rural, VA-enrolled veterans, 55 percent are 65 years and older, and 56 percent are affected by a service-related condition.

These statistics are particularly important because veterans living in rural areas may have difficulty accessing health services for reasons shared by other rural residents. Some rural veterans may also face poverty, suicide, homelessness, and substance-use disorder, some or all related to their service, which can exacerbate their health issues. In most cases, many veterans are unaware of the benefits, services, and facilities available to them through VA, and it may be even more difficult for rural veterans and their caregivers to access healthcare and other services, due to rural delivery challenges.

Congress established the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) in 2006 (38 USC §7308) to conduct, coordinate, promote, and disseminate research on issues that affect the nearly five million veterans who reside in rural communities. The mandate also requires ORH to develop, refine, and promulgate policies, best practices, lessons learned, and innovative and successful programs.

To best meet our obligations to these veterans, Congress must: Expand access to accessible, culturally sensitive primary care, behavioral health, specialty care, and other support services; improve coordination and co-management of veterans between VA and community-based service systems; increase availability of community-based care services; expand the use of technology and transportation programs to increase access and outreach; and VA must continue the expansion of the VHA Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers.<sup>1</sup>

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*Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only national Vietnam Veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families.*

[www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRCs) are Office of Rural Health (ORH) field-based satellite offices that serve as hubs of rural health care research, innovation, and dissemination. Congressional mandate 38 USC § 7308 located in Iowa City, Iowa; Salt Lake City, Utah; White River Junction, Vermont; Gainesville, Florida; and Portland, Oregon VA medical centers.