VA Rural Health Career Development Award (CDA) Program

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Rural Health

INFORMATION SHEET

Research is the driving force of sound public health policy. Investigators play a critical role in identifying emerging health challenges and proposing targeted strategies to improve patient outcomes. But while millions of Veterans nationwide reap the benefits of these evidence-based policies, a shortage of rural health-focused researchers often means these patients' unique needs are overlooked.

To close the rural research gap, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) partnered with the Center for Access & Delivery Research and Evaluation Center (CADRE) at the Iowa City VA Health Care System to launch the Rural Health Career Development Award (CDA) program. The program cultivates the next generation of rural health researchers by providing mentorship and financial support to investigators studying health care issues facing rural Veterans.

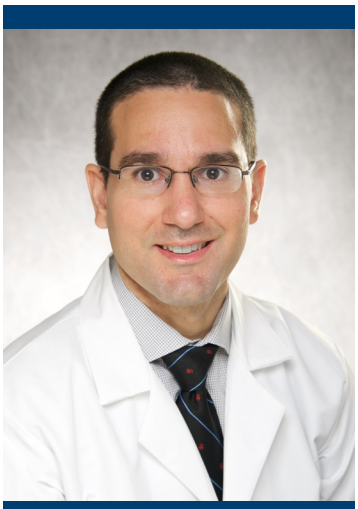
Program Structure

Applications to the Rural Health CDA program are scored by a panel of VA reviewers who select recipients based on a comprehensive scoring rubric and review format that mirrors the VA Health Services Research & Development process. Rural Health CDAs are two years in duration. At the end of the award period recipients may apply for further VA funding to expand their research in the rural Veteran space.

Rural Health CDA recipients are guaranteed dedicated time and financial compensation to support their research. During that time, recipients work with a mentorship team as they develop their research approach, draft manuscripts, and make plans for future research and grant applications. At the end of the award period, recipients produce a Rural Health Brief detailing their research findings that is reviewed by the program directors and advisory committee.

Current Rural Health CDA recipients

Individuals currently participating in the Rural Health CDA program include:



Dr. Spyridon Fortis, Clinical Associate Professor,
University of Iowa Department of Internal Medicine
Dr. Fortis's research focuses on urban-rural disparities in outcomes for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)—a disease that inflames the lungs and obstructs airflow. Previous research has found that rural Veterans with COPD are at a higher risk for 30-day mortality—meaning a death within 30 days of a specific event (e.g., hospital admission, diagnosis, surgery)—than their urban counterparts. With the support of his Rural Health CDA, Dr. Fortis is conducting a quantitative analysis of VA patients nationwide to investigate the causes of this disparity between rural and urban Veteran populations.

Dr. Amy O'Shea, Assistant Professor,
University of Iowa Department of Internal Medicine
Dr. O'Shea's research project aims to understand the factors that could impede equitable delivery of telehealth care to underserved populations, including rural residents. Recognizing that 30% of enrollees reside in rural areas, VA has invested heavily in telehealth service deployment to regions where people cannot easily receive in person care. Dr. O'Shea will use her Rural Health CDA to study the extent to which financial, broadband access, or educational barriers affect delivery of telehealth care to rural Veterans compared to their urban counterparts.

Looking Forward

A robust workforce of rural health-focused researchers is critical to continue improving rural Veteran health outcomes. The Rural Health CDA program recruits the most exceptional candidates to conduct research and generate solutions to improve care for millions of Veterans in rural communities across the country.

For more information about the Rural CDA program, contact **Marin Schweizer** at Marin.Schweizer-Looby@va.gov.

Office of Rural Health

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To support the health and well-being of rural Veterans, ORH and its Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers establish and disseminate initiatives that increase access to care for the 2.7 million rural Veterans enrolled in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system. Key focus areas include programs that address workforce shortages, transportation, primary care, mental health, telehealth and specialty care. To learn more, **www.ruralhealth.va.gov**.