

Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

Federal advisory committees allow federal officials and the nation to access information and advice on a broad range of issues affecting federal policies and programs.

In 2008, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) chartered the Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee (VRHAC) to “advise the Secretary accordingly on health care issues that affect Veterans residing in rural areas.” Members meet as necessary with rural subject matter experts at the federal, state, and local levels to discuss programs and policies that impact the provision of VA health care to rural Veterans. VRHAC members:



Examine ways to enhance or improve VA services for rural Veterans by assessing the current rural environment, existing health care opportunities, and challenges or barriers to access



Recommend solutions to the Secretary designed to enhance or improve VA rural health care services for Veterans

The 12 appointed VRHAC members include Veterans; leaders of local, state and national-level rural health organizations; representatives of Veterans Service Organizations; researchers; and other rural health stakeholders. These meetings offer members a forum to study emerging trends and discuss new ideas to increase rural Veterans’ access to health care services. Led by the Committee Chair, members work throughout the year to understand how the rural health landscape is changing for Veterans. Each year, members convene to collect and share information, hear national policy updates, and engage with other experts.

The Committee also works to see how national policy, health care and services work at the local level. VRHAC members have participated in rural site visits to engage with Veterans in town hall meetings, tour VA and community health care facilities and mobile clinics, meet with local Veteran Service Organization (VSO) leaders, hear expert presentations, and see technologies and programs at work. The Committee uses these visits to identify barriers to care and to elevate successful initiatives.

Past committee visits include:

Augusta, Maine

Johnson City, Tennessee

Reno, Nevada

Chillicothe, Ohio

Iowa City, Iowa

Salt Lake City, Utah

Helena, Montana

Phoenix, Arizona

Uvalde, Texas

Spokane, Washington

Biloxi, Mississippi

Morgantown, West Virginia

A Think Tank for Veterans and Rural Health Access Issues

VRHAC's recommendations highlight the importance of understanding the rural Veteran population, the potential of health care technology, and opportunities for local collaboration. Most recently, the Committee has investigated solutions to the staffing, recruitment, and retention challenges that many rural VA facilities face. Previous recommendations centered on expanding rural transportation access, developing peer and social support groups, and increasing VA enrollment of rural women Veterans.

Committee Member Nominations

Appointments to VRHAC rotate and are term limited. Members serve an initial two or three-year term, and the Secretary may reappoint members for an additional term of service. Committee members are expected to attend all meetings and to contribute their time and expertise to Committee projects. ORH actively seeks nominations for new members throughout the year. Submit third-party or self-nominations, including a letter of interest, letters of recommendation, and a resume to vrhac@va.gov.



The Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee in Washington, D.C., 2019

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.