

Rural Health Care Workforce Development

Across the United States, rural communities face a critical shortage of qualified health care providers. According to the National Rural Health Association, a 1-to-2,500 physician to patient ratio exists in rural communities, creating severe health care access challenges for residents.¹ These shortages can seriously affect the health and well-being of America's nearly 5 million rural Veterans.

To overcome these challenges and increase rural Veterans' access to quality health care, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) devotes more than \$5.7 million to fund initiatives that provide training to rural clinicians nationwide.

Rural Health Training Initiatives

ORH training initiatives combine in-person and virtual learning to enhance rural providers' skills in specialty care areas including geriatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, nephrology, and psychiatry. This expansion of clinical skills helps offset the specialty care provider shortage in rural communities by focusing on provider and student learning.

Rural-focused health training programs include:

- ▶ **Rural Career Development Award Program:** Supports early career researchers in developing a research project focused on issues relevant to rural Veterans
- ▶ **Rural Scholars Fellowship:** Supports rural VHA primary care clinicians by providing activities to learn quality improvement (QI), measurement, and leadership skills, as well as mentorship for project completion in their rural-serving clinic
- ▶ **Rural Interprofessional Faculty Development Initiative (RIFDI):** This faculty development program provides teaching and training for rural residency proctors. These faculty then train, mentor, and monitor residents serving rural areas
- ▶ **Rural Suicide Prevention:** Connects Veterans to comprehensive suicide prevention services and resources for high-risk individuals
- ▶ **Women's Health:** Rural clinicians receive on-site education from a mobile training team to provide fundamental women's care to Veterans, such as breast and pelvic exams
- ▶ **Mental Health:** Expands access to high quality Evidence-Based Psychotherapy by supporting VA and non-VA community-based mental health providers
- ▶ **Rural Workforce Training & Placement:** Examines factors associated with rural workforce placement and explores key results to inform a rural workforce training and education module for dissemination to current and future rural providers
- ▶ **COVID-19 VA-ECHO Expansion in Specialty Care:** Through VA's Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO), ORH provides virtual trainings on COVID-19 for rural providers

¹ "Fixing the Medical Staff Shortage Problem in Rural Areas"
<https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/population-health/fixing-the-medical-staff-shortage-problem-in-rural-areas.html>

In FY22:

612

ORH-funded CME and CEU credit training courses conducted

975

VA rural sites of care participated in ORH-funded training courses

27,129

employees received ORH-funded training

Rural Workforce Incentives

Health care workforce recruitment and retention are instrumental in solving the rural clinician shortage. That's why VA is dedicated to promoting the multiple benefits of practicing medicine in a rural setting.

Clinicians enjoy several advantages in pursuing a rural health care career, including:



Leading-Edge Technology: VA's telehealth solutions empower clinicians with industry-shaping technology



Professional Training: VA offers rural clinicians unique residency and specialty training opportunities



Quality of Life: Rural clinicians enjoy less traffic, lower costs of living and reduced stress. A 2019 study also found that rural family physicians even experience significantly lower rates of burnout²



Financial Incentives: VA programs can help reduce rural clinicians' financial burdens, such as student debt

To learn more about ORH workforce training and education initiatives, visit:

<https://ruralhealth.va.gov/RURALHEALTH/providers/courses.asp>

² Family Physician Burnout Rates in Rural versus Metropolitan Areas: A Pilot Study: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31461585>

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.