



# ORH FACT SHEET

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

## VHA Office of Rural Health

### Background

- The VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) was established in 2006 by 38 U.S. Code § 7308 to address the specific needs of rural Veterans and the challenges of accessing and delivering health care services in rural and highly rural areas.

#### Key Health Care Challenges for Rural Veterans

- **Geography** – Long travel distances and limited transportation.
  - **Workforce** – Shortage of health care providers in rural areas.
  - **Digital Divide** – Limited broadband access affects telehealth.
  - **Social Determinants of Health** – Issues like housing, employment, and food security.
- ORH collaborates with VHA clinical and operational services and research to develop, refine, and innovate successful programs to increase access to care for rural Veterans.
  - The **Mission** of ORH is to improve health care access and outcomes for rural Veterans. ORH's **Vision** is to lead the future in delivering unparalleled health and well-being to rural Veterans.

#### ORH Goals (Fiscal Years 2025–2029)

1. **Deliver** accessible, high-quality, integrated care.
2. **Strengthen** the rural health care workforce.
3. **Advance** research and innovation.
4. **Promote** employee excellence through VA's I-CARE values.

### Veteran Demographics

- 17.5 million living U.S. Veterans: 12.97 million urban, 4.52 million rural.
- 9.1 million enrolled in VA healthcare: 6.14 million urban, 2.99 million rural.
- Rural Veterans enroll at a higher rate (66%) than urban Veterans (47%).
- 2 million rural Veterans have service-connected health care needs.
- 370,000 rural Veterans are eligible for VHA health care due to low income.

## ORH Programs & Projects

- **Enterprise-Wide Initiatives (EWIs):** Innovative nationwide programs developed to rapidly address rural Veterans' access and health care challenges. ORH EWIs are conducted in collaboration with other VHA clinical and operational programs.
  - *In FY 2025, ORH supported 34 EWIs across primary care, specialty care, mental health, geriatrics, transportation, and workforce training.*
- **Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRCs):** ORH's VRHRCs are led by a Clinical Director and an Operations Director. Investigators at these centers conduct quality improvement and research studies and their findings are used to develop and pilot innovative solutions to rural health challenges.
- VRHRCs are located across the United States and bring firsthand understanding of geography on access to care: White River Junction, VT; Gainesville, FL; Iowa City, IA; Salt Lake City, UT; and Portland, OR.
  - *The five VRHRCs conducted more than 127 projects in FY 2025, covering topics like chronic disease, mental health, telehealth, and workforce development.*
- **Rural Mentored Implementations (RMIs):** Proven models of care being scaled nationally, including programs for cardiac rehab, diabetes care, and geriatric services.
  - *There were seven RMIs supported by ORH in FY 2025.*

## ORH Leadership

**Dr. Peter Kaboli**, Executive Director, appointed in January 2024.

- *Practicing physician (Hospitalist) at the Iowa City VA Medical Center (VAMC)*

**Dr. James Watts**, Deputy Director (Veteran), appointed in January 2025.

- *Former Associate Director and Chief of Social Work Service at the Lexington (KY) VAMC*

## References

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, VHA Support Service Center. (2026) *Veteran Enrollment by Priority Status and Rurality, Fiscal Year 2025 (June)*. Retrieved from VHA Support Service Center secure intranet.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2025). *VetPop2023 Urban/Rural FY2023-2025*. VetPop2023. Retrieved from [https://www.data.va.gov/dataset/VetPop2023-Urban-Rural-FY2023-2025/rcxd-k8v8/about\\_data](https://www.data.va.gov/dataset/VetPop2023-Urban-Rural-FY2023-2025/rcxd-k8v8/about_data).

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