An astounding 40% of Veterans enrolled in the VA system live in rural or highly rural areas. In response to the great need for timely access to quality health care for rural veterans, Congress created Office of Rural Health (ORH) in 2006 by enacting Public Law 109-461 (also known as the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006).

ORH was established in March 2006 within the Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health (ADUSH) for Policy and Planning, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The mission of ORH is to:

- Conduct, coordinate, promote, and disseminate studies and analyses of issues affecting Veterans living in rural and highly rural areas.
- Work with all VA personnel and offices to develop, refine, promulgate policies, best practices, lessons learned, and innovative and successful programs to improve care and services for enrolled Rural and Highly Rural Veterans.

The strategic goals of ORH are to:

- Improve access and quality of care for rural and highly rural Veterans.
- Optimize the use of available and emerging technologies to enhance services to Veterans residing in rural and highly rural areas.
- Maximize the utilization of existing and emerging studies and analyses to impact care delivered to rural and highly rural Veterans.
- Improve availability of education and training for VA and non-VA service providers to rural and highly rural Veterans.
- Enhance existing and implement new strategies to improve collaboration to increase service options for rural and highly rural veterans.
- Develop innovative methods to identify, recruit and retain medical professionals.
VA Office of Rural Health (ORH): Mission, Strategy and Focus

**ORH Areas of Special Focus**

In an attempt to promote easy access to quality care for all rural veterans, ORH has chosen the following areas of special focus:

- Access and Quality
- Technology and Telehealth
- Studies and Analyses
- Education and Training
- Building Collaborations
- Workforce Recruitment and Retention

**Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers**

ORH has also created special centers known as Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRCs). There are three regional centers:

1. White River Junction, Vermont—Eastern Region
2. Iowa City, Iowa—Midwest Region
3. Salt Lake City, Utah—Western Region

Each VRHRC functions as field-based clinical laboratories for demonstration projects/pilot projects. They also serve as educational and clinical repositories and have rural health experts who are available to help with specific questions.

**Veterans Integrated Service Network Rural Consultant**

Additionally, each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) has a VISN Rural Consultant (VRCs). The VRCs serve as primary interface between ORH and VISN rural activities. They help in the development of rural health service plans based on the individual VISN’s needs for care. They also facilitate information sharing across the VISNs and perform outreach to develop community relationships:

- Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee (VRHAC)
- Federal advisory committee to the Secretary of VA
- Evaluate current program activities and identify barriers to providing service
- Advise the VA Secretary