Rural Veterans
Introduction & Overview

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Definitions: What is rural?

**Based on the US Census Bureau definition of rural**

**Urban Areas**—defined by U.S. Census as continuously built up area with a population of 50,000 or more

**Urban Places**—incorporated areas outside UA with a population of at least 2,500

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**Definitions: What is rural?**

**Based on the US Census Bureau definition of rural.**

**Rural**—All other areas excluded in U.S. Census defined as urbanized areas and less than 2,500 persons outside of UA

**Highly Rural**—Any rural area within a county with less than 7.0 civilians per square mile

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**Veteran Population: Enrollees**

**Veteran Enrollees by U/R/H EOY 06**

- **Urban, 62.2%**
  - (4,879,424)

- **Rural, 36.3%**
  - (2,850,173)

- **Highly Rural, 1.5%**
  - (118,685)
Difference in Total Population by Census Tract 2000–2007

Geographic Distribution of Enrolled Rural & Highly Rural Veterans by VISNs

Rural Veterans Demographics
Key Findings

• 1 out of 3 enrolled Veterans resided in rural and highly rural areas in FY08

• Majority of enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans lived in the central and southern U.S. (VISN 16 and 23 had more than 200,000 rural and highly rural Veterans in FY08)

Key Findings

• One third of enrolled Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veterans lived in rural or highly rural areas

• It is estimated ~15% of homeless Veterans live in rural areas, and another 11% of those being in urban/rural mixed areas
**Key Findings**

- Enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans (FY08) were older than urban Veterans, on average.
- Nearly 3 out of 4 enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans were 55 years old or older.
Key Findings

• 95% of enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans are male
• The median self-reported income is lower for enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans than for enrolled urban Veterans

Rural Veterans Healthcare Utilization

Outpatient Visits by Condition (FY08)
Top 10 conditions of Rural & Highly Rural Vets Receiving Outpatient Care vs. Urban Vets (National, FY08)

Key Findings

1 out of 5 inpatient admissions for enrolled Rural and Highly Rural Veterans was for circulatory-related diagnoses
Key Findings

On average, enrolled Urban Veterans received a higher number of outpatient visits per condition than enrolled Rural and Highly Rural Veterans.

Rural Veterans
Healthcare Access

Enrolled Veteran:
Travel Time to VA Primary Care…

![Graph showing travel time to VA primary care for enrolled veterans in rural and highly rural locations compared to urban locations.](image-url)
**Key Findings**

- Approximately 1 in 3 Enrolled rural Veterans are within 30 minutes of a VA primary care facility
- 48% of Enrolled highly rural Veterans are within an hour of primary care
Key Findings

• ~60% of rural (30% of highly rural) veterans are within 60 minutes of acute care

• Greater than 90% of rural veterans are within 4 hours, but 70% of Enrolled Highly Rural Veterans must drive more than four hours to receive VA tertiary care

Enrollee Access for Primary Care

- 52% of all enrollees and 16% of rural & highly rural enrollees meet access standard
- VHA meets the access standard nationally for all enrollees (70%), but not for rural & highly rural enrollees (37%)
- 19 States and the District of Columbia meet the access standard
- No state or Puerto Rico met the access standard for their rural & highly rural enrollees

Mortality Rates by Residence
Premature Death

Rural areas are more likely to die prematurely (before 75).[i]


Death Rates

Death rates among the most rural adults aged 25-64 years were found to be 32% higher than among suburban residents.

Key Findings

Among veterans over age 65:

• Rural dwellers have higher mortality than urbanites, 6% higher.
• Controlling for socio-economic characteristics (especially education and zip code median income), rural dwellers are better off than urbanites.
• They have 15% less mortality before age 70, but this advantage disappears by age 75.
How are rural vets different?

**How are rural veterans different?**

- Poorer health status, more medical diagnoses but fewer mental health diagnoses
- Long term and mental health care access difficult
- Poorer control of chronic conditions (e.g. HTN and PTSD)

- Use fewer health services overall than urban veterans (VA and non-VA)
- Insurance status influenced system of care used
Conclusion

Rural/Highly Rural Veterans

- Significant numbers live in rural or highly rural areas
- Have less access to healthcare
- Have fewer healthcare services

Rural/Highly Rural Veterans

- Have greater travel distances to access services
- Access fewer healthcare
- Have poorer healthcare outcomes for chronic illnesses
- Have higher mortality rates
For more information on rural veterans, contact:

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