



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*



Veterans Health Administration Office of Rural Health Update

2014 USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum - Arlington, VA - February 21, 2014

“Strengthening Rural Economies: Technology Focus”

Gina Capra, MPA - Director, Office of Rural Health

Veterans Health Administration/U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Today's Presentation: "Strengthening Rural Economies"

- **Background/Orientation**

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) & Office of Rural Health (ORH)

- **Inter-Agency Efforts**

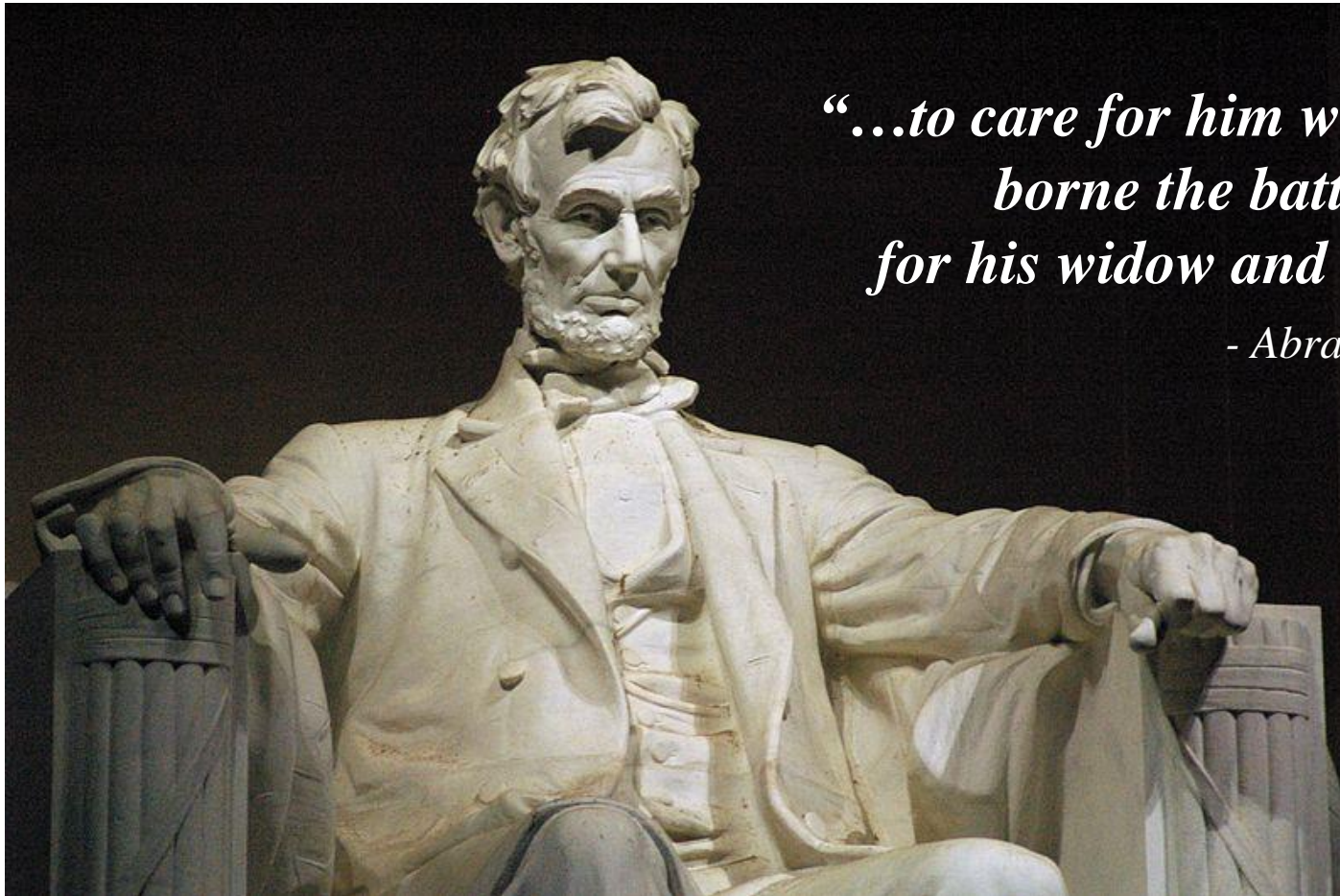
Increasing Healthcare Access for Rural Veterans via Technology

- **Additional Resources**

Promoting Healthy Communities via Focus on Social Determinants of Health

Spotlight on Veterans' Vocational Rehab/Employment Efforts

Mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)



“...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan...”

- Abraham Lincoln, 1865

Photo by Jeff Kubina



What is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?

- Established in 1930
- Elevated to Cabinet level in 1989
- Federal government's 2nd largest department after the Department of Defense
- Three components:
 - **Veterans Health Administration (VHA)**
 - Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)
 - National Cemetery Administration (NCA)



Veterans Health Administration “Footprint”

(end-of-fiscal-year 2013)



151 Medical Centers

985 Outpatient Clinics
(Hospitals, Community,
Independent and Mobile)

135 Community Living
Centers



300 Readjustment Counseling Centers
Vet Centers

103 Domiciliary Resident Rehabilitation Treatment
Programs



Eligibility for VHA Healthcare

- Eligibility for VHA health care services depends on a number of qualifying factors, including:
 - The nature of a Veteran’s discharge from military service (e.g., honorable, other than honorable, dishonorable)
 - Length of service
 - VA adjudicated disabilities (commonly referred to as “service-connected disabilities”)
 - Income level
 - Available VA resources



VHA Eligibility Priority Groups

Veteran eligibility for VA healthcare is based on category group (“Priority Enrollment Group”)

- **Priority Group 1**
Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50% or more disabling
- **Priority Group 2**
Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% or 40% disabling
- **Priority Group 3**
POWs, Purple Heart recipients, those rated 10% or 20% disabled, or those eligible under Title 38, U.S.C., Section 1151
- **Priority Group 4**
Veterans who receive aid and attendance or housebound benefits or are catastrophically disabled
- **Priority Group 5**
Veterans whose income and net worth are below established VA thresholds of \$31K - \$46K annually, (depending on family size), those on VA pension and/or are eligible for Medicaid benefits
- **Priority Group 6**
WW I, Mexican Border War Veterans, disorders associated with exposure to herbicides (Agent Orange) while serving in Vietnam, exposure to ionizing radiation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Gulf War illness.
- **Priority Group 7**
Veterans who pay co-payments with income and/or net worth above the VA threshold
- **Priority Group 8**
Veterans who agree to pay specified co-payments with income and/or net worth above the VA threshold and HUD geographic index who were enrolled before January 2003. Income requirements may change from year to year.



Rural Population Served

- Of 8.9 million enrolled Veterans, 3.2 million enrolled Veterans live in rural/highly rural areas
 - 22 million Veterans nationwide, 6.1 million Veterans living in rural areas
 - 36% of total enrolled Veteran population live in rural/highly rural areas
 - Approximately one-third (31 percent) of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) users of the VA Health Care System in FY12 reside in rural or highly rural areas.
- 25 VA medical centers are designated as rural or highly rural facilities
 - 340 VA community based outpatient clinics are considered rural or highly rural

Data source: VHA enrollment files as of end-of-fiscal-year 2013



How are rural communities (and Rural Veterans) unique?

- Status/Health Equity
 - Older, sicker, and poorer population
- Options for integrated health care and coordination
 - Primary and Specialty Care
 - Mental Health Care
 - Healthcare Workforce
- Geography/Transportation
 - Longer travel distances to receive care
 - Lack of public transportation
- Limited internet/broadband connectivity



VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH)

- The VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) was created by Congress in 2007 under Public Law 109-461, Sec 212
- Mission: Improve **access** and **quality** of care for enrolled rural and highly rural Veterans
- Works across VA and with external partners to develop policies, best practices and lessons learned to improve care and services for rural and highly rural Veterans



ORH Investments: Project Focus Areas – FY 2014

Category	# of ORH Projects
Rural Telehealth, including Home Telemonitoring, Store and Forward Image Transmission, and Clinic Based Video Telemedicine	24
Rural Primary Care / Patient Aligned Care Teams (PCMH)	16
Rural Specialty Care: Cardiology, Audiology, Prosthetics, Optometry, Radiology, Dermatology	112
Rural Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Outreach Clinics, Mobile Clinics	68
Rural Education Initiatives	37
Rural Facilities Improvement	26
Rural Home Based Primary Care	28
Rural Homelessness	6
Rural Mental Health, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	28
Other Categories	46
Rural Outreach Activities	22
Projects Focused on Rural Special Populations, including Women, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and Asian American/Pacific Islanders	20
Rural Veteran Transportation Programs, including ground and air transportation	14
TOTAL	447



Strengthening the Bridge with Rural Community Providers: VHA-Enrolled Veteran Reliance on VA Healthcare System

- **It is estimated that all VHA-Enrolled Veterans receive:**
 - 70% of their pharmacy needs from the VA
 - 34% of their outpatient procedures from the VA
 - 35 % of their outpatient diagnostics from the VA
 - 42% of their evaluation and management (office visits) from the VA
 - 20% of their inpatient services from the VA
- **It is estimated that VHA-enrolled Veterans over age 65 receive:**
 - 60% of their pharmacy needs from the VA
 - 20% of their outpatient procedures from the VA
 - 25 % of their outpatient diagnostics from the VA
 - 30% of their evaluation and management (office visits) from the VA
 - 12% of their inpatient services from the VA
- Data Source: VA Survey of Enrollees -2012

Strengthening the Bridge with Rural Community Providers: Enrolled Veterans Health Care Coverage

- Many VHA-enrolled Veterans obtain their healthcare services via multiple coverage options:
 - VA coverage only: 22.5%
 - VA plus Medicare: 49.9%
 - VA plus Medicaid: 7.4 %
 - VA plus TRICARE: 18.13%

Data Source – VHA Survey of Enrollees - 2012



Interagency Pilot Initiative: Health Information Exchange (HIE) and Care Coordination in Rural Communities

- **VA/Office of Rural Health and VA/My HealtheVet and HHS Office of the National Coordinator of Health Information Technology**
 - Veteran Initiated Coordination & Transformation of Rural Health Information Exchange (VICTOR-HIE)
 - Who: VA providers and rural community providers who dually care for rural Veterans
 - What: Utilizing Blue Button Technology located on My HealtheVet, VA's online personal health record and patient portal
 - Where: Pilot sites - 10 rural communities – in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, Kansas, Florida and Maine



My Health, My Care: 24/7 ^{Online} Access to VA

Interagency Initiative: MOU to Increase Access to Care for AI/AN Rural Veterans

- **VA/Office of Rural Health and HHS/ Indian Health Service Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**
 - VA and IHS partnership to impact American Indian and Native Alaskan Veteran access to care.
Goals:
 - Increase access and quality of care for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans
 - Improve health-promotion & disease-prevention
 - Encourage patient-centered collaboration and communication
 - Consult with tribes at the regional and local levels
 - Ensure appropriate resources for services for AI/AN Veterans
 - Leverage strengths, including technology.



Inter-Agency Initiatives: Supporting the Rural Health Workforce

RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVES (VA, HHS)

- Provide student trainees with exposure to rural health care practice and its unique opportunities
- Provide rural primary care provider teams with “connection” to specialty network of colleagues and related support
- Promote Health Information Technology (HIT) Workforce Utilizing Veterans

GOALS:

- Increase retention and reduce professional isolation
- Increase provider capacity to operate at top of provider license
- Extend specialty services across long geographic distances
- Cultivate needed supply for broad spectrum of health workforce



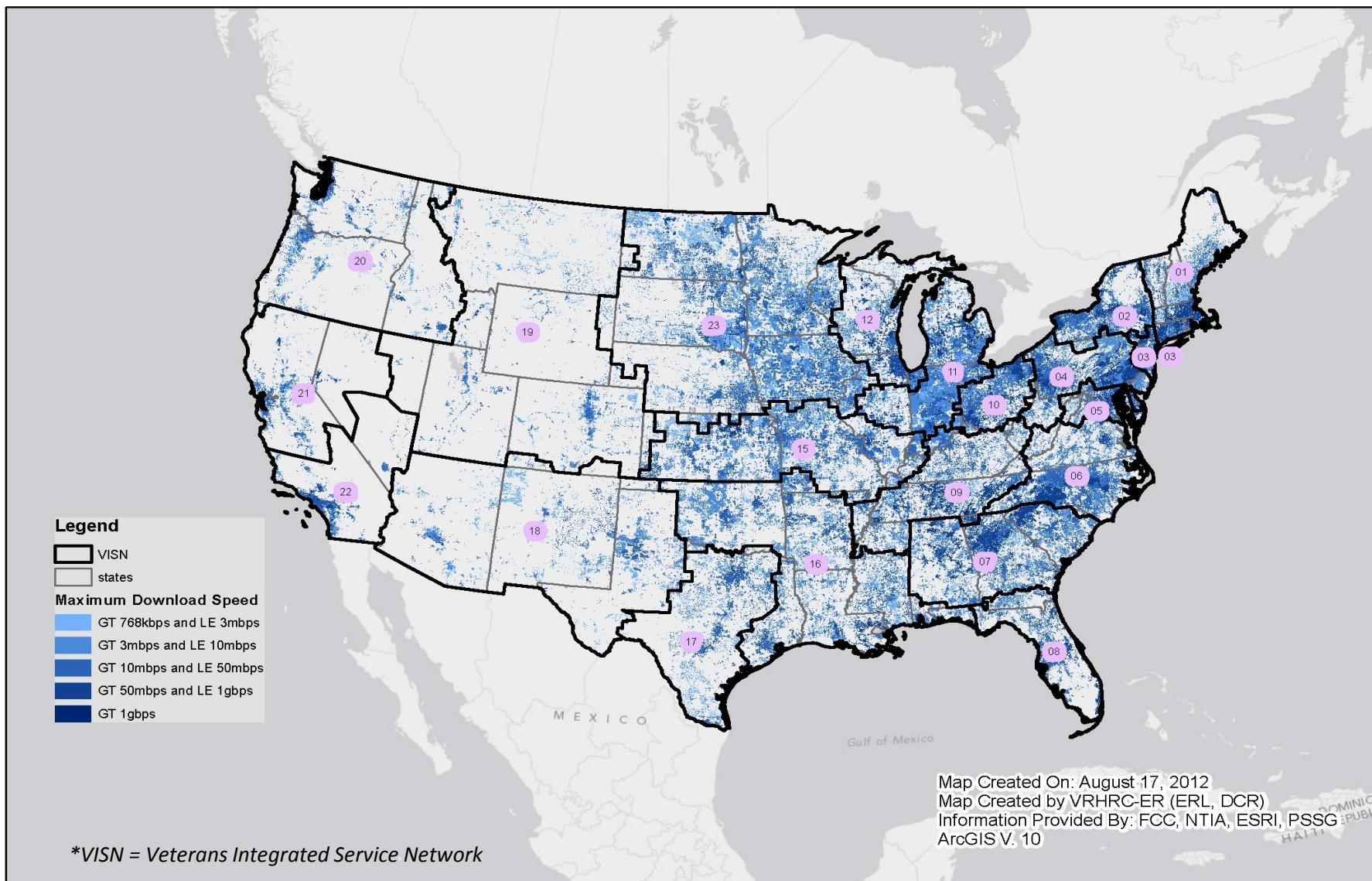
Interagency Initiative: Promoting Internet/Broadband Expansion to Rural Areas

- **VA/Office of Rural Health & USDA/Rural Utilities Service & Department of Commerce/National Telecommunications and Information Administration**
 - These agencies, and private sector partners, through the Rural Broadband Association are working to promote the expansion of broadband offerings to rural and highly rural Veterans in the communities where they live

ISSUE: Telehealth Implications/Access to Care

- At least 350,000 enrolled Veterans live in communities in which broadband is unavailable
 - In rural areas, broadband is less widely available AND median income of population is lower compared to urban
- VHA's Survey of Enrollees (2013) preliminarily indicates that 30% of the 8+ million Veterans enrolled in VA Health Care have no access to the internet

Broadband Maximum Download Speed By VISN *



Interagency Federal/State Partnership Pilot: State Rural Veterans Database

- **VA/Office of Rural Health (ORH) & State Department of Veterans Affairs**

GOAL: Identify all rural and highly rural Veterans in a State to enable outreach, benefits coordination and health service delivery to eligible Veterans.

- Facilitate local VA collaboration to find and help rural Veterans enroll for VA benefits.
- Targeted outreach to individual rural Veterans to make sure they understand all of the benefits they have earned via their military service.

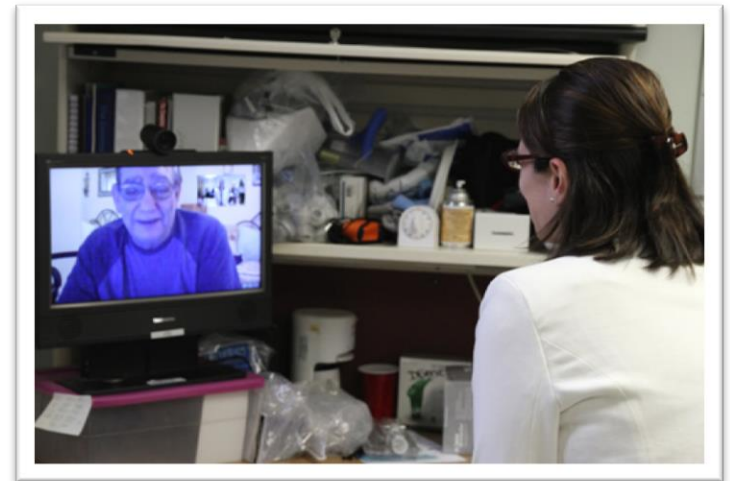
ISSUE: Every State (not VA) receives information from DOD about departing service persons via DD214, the gold standard for establishing Veteran status.

PILOT PHASE I: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ORH-Western Region and the Utah Department of Veteran Affairs to develop a secure, Internet relational database. State integrates DD214 information with existing state databases (driver licenses, etc.) into a unified, updatable, searchable database for all Veterans living within the State

PILOT PARTNERS: State Offices of Veterans Affairs in NV, MS, AK, WY, and SC

Where are We Headed? Eye on the Environment

- **Population Migration, Demographics and Definitions**
- **Affordable Care Act Implementation**
- **Rural Economies and Service Markets**
- **Outreach, Coordination and Collaboration**
- **Workforce Development**
- **Technology Impact**
- **Effective Use of Resources**



Vets Focus! Thank You for Your Service





**Strengthening Rural Economies:
Promoting Healthy Rural Communities and
Healthy Veterans via Employment
Opportunities**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Social Determinants of Health: Employment Veteran Employment Resources/Federal Efforts

- **e-Benefits Employment Center**

- A joint venture with VA, Dept. of Defense (DOD), Dept. of Labor (DOL), Office of Personnel Management and Small Business Association.
- Provides Veterans with a career/occupation assessment tool, military skill translator and resume builder
- VetSuccess.va.gov – part of the e-Benefits Employment Center providing a virtual transition and employment resource center to connect e-Benefits users seeking employment directly to registered employers
- www.ebenefits.va.gov



Social Determinants of Health: Employment Veteran Employment Resources/Federal Efforts

- **VA's Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program**
 - Assists Veterans with service – connected disabilities to prepare for, find, and keep suitable jobs.
 - Other services include:
 - Comprehensive rehabilitation evaluation to determine abilities, skills, and interests for employment
 - Employment services such as job-training, job-seeking skills, resume development and other job accommodations
 - Post-secondary training at a college, vocational, technical or business school
 - On the job training, apprenticeships, and non-paid work experience
 - www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre



Social Determinants of Health: Employment Veteran Employment Resources/Federal Efforts

- **Veterans Job Bank**

- Located on the eBenefits Employment Center; powered by the Department of Labor (DOL)'s National Labor Exchange
- Searchable Jobs Database
- Employers can post their vacancies at www.us.jobs

- **National Resource Directory**

- A website created by DOD, VA and DOL; available on eBenefits March 2014
- Connects Wounded Warriors, Veterans, Service members and their families with those who support them
- Will provide access to services at the National, State, and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation and community integration. Will also provide information on topics like education and training, health and homeless assistance
- www.nrd.gov



Social Determinants of Health: Employment

Veteran Employment Resources

- **US Chamber of Commerce Foundation – Hiring our Heroes**

- Nationwide initiative to help Veterans, transitioning Service members and military spouses find meaningful employment. Employers can use this resource through the Employer Roadmap at www.EmployerRoadmap.com
- Job Fairs. Find out about upcoming job fairs at www.hiringourheroes.org
- Fast Track. The institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University created Fast Track to guide Veterans and transitioning service members about education and employment opportunities. www.hiringourheroes.org/fasttrack

- **Veterans Service Organizations**

- Together with state, county and local Veteran Service representatives, help Veterans and their families understand and navigate Veteran-focused programs
- To locate Veteran service partners, please visit www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp



Additional Resources: ORH Website

www.ruralhealth.va.gov

The screenshot shows the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Rural Health (ORH) website. At the top, there is the VA logo and the text "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs". A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for Home, Veteran Services, Business, About VA, Media Room, Locations, and Contact Us. The main content area is titled "Office of Rural Health (ORH)". On the left, there is a sidebar with a "Rural Health" dropdown menu containing links to Home, Resource Centers, VISN Rural Consultants, Native Domain, Library, Training & Education, Resources, About, and Contact Us. Below the sidebar is a "QUICK LINKS" section with buttons for Hospital Locator, Health Programs, Protect Your Health, and A-Z Health Topics. The main content area features a "Rural Health Resource Centers" section with three images: a lighthouse, a field, and a mesa. Below these images are three tabs: "Resource Centers", "Native Domain", and "Rural VA Careers". The "Resource Centers" tab is active, showing a featured article about a mobile medical unit. The article text reads: "Through collaborations with other VA program offices, Federal partners, state partners, and rural communities, the VHA Office of Rural Health works to optimize the use of available and emerging technologies, establish new access points to care, and employ strategies to increase health care options for all rural Veterans. We are committed to honoring service and empowering health." The article includes a photo of a mobile medical unit and a link to "Read about this mobile medical unit." On the right side of the page, there is a "RESOURCES" section with links for In-Home Dementia Caregivers Videos, Outreach Toolkit, Co-Managed Care Toolkit, and ORH Strategic Plan. Below that is a "CONNECT WITH VHA" section with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr, and an email subscription form.



Thank You!

For additional information, please contact:

Gina L. Capra, MPA

Director, Office of Rural Health

Gina.Capra@va.gov

Thomas Klobucar, PhD

Deputy Director, Office of Rural Health

Thomas.Klobucar@va.gov



Using Innovation and Technology to Improve Access and Quality

VHA Office of Rural Health - 1100 First Street, NE Room 633 -Washington, DC 20002

Phone: 202.632.8615

