

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Office of Rural Health



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)
Office of Rural Health (ORH) Long-Range Operational Plan, FY 2025-2029

January 2025

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Executive Summary

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) implements a diverse range of programs that help improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans by increasing their access to care and services. These national programs stem from the Office's model to *research, innovate, and disseminate* new programs to support the 2.8 million rural Veterans enrolled in and rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system.

Congress passed legislation (38 U.S. Code § 7308) in 2006 that established ORH. Appointed by the Under Secretary for Health, the Executive Director leads ORH to address rural Veterans health care challenges through targeted research, programs, and new models of care.

Rural Veterans are more dependent upon the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for health care than are urban residing Veterans. Of the 4.4 million rural Veterans, 61% are enrolled in VHA. By comparison, 41% of the 13.8 million urban Veterans are enrolled.

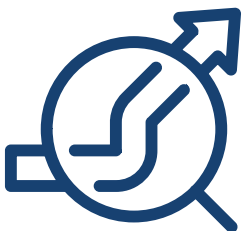
The purpose of this operational plan is to define the **ORH vision, mission, goals, and objectives**.

The **vision** of ORH is to *lead the future in delivering unparalleled health and well-being to rural Veterans*. ORH has developed four goals, along with the associated strategies and objectives, to illustrate how ORH will achieve the **mission to honor America's rural Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being**.



ORH serves the 2.8 million rural Veterans who are enrolled in and rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system.

ORH FY 2025-2029 Operational Plan Goals



GOAL 1

Support delivery of accessible, high-quality, integrated health care to rural Veterans.



GOAL 2

Optimize VHA health care workforce capacity to meet the needs of rural Veterans.







GOAL 3

Enrich research, quality improvement, and innovation to serve rural Veterans.



GOAL 4

Embrace I-CARE values to maximize employee performance and well-being to serve rural Veterans.

ORH Goal Crosswalk to VA and VHA	ORH Goals			
	Goal 1 	Goal 2 	Goal 3 	Goal 4 
ORH FY 2025-2029 Long-Range Operational Plan seeks to demonstrate alignment with the VA Fiscal Years 2022-2028 Strategic Plan and the Fiscal Years 2022-2025 VHA Long-Range Plan Framework.				
<u>VA Strategic Goal 2</u> <i>VA delivers timely, accessible, high-quality benefits, care, and service to meet the unique needs of Veterans and all eligible beneficiaries</i>	✓	✓	✓	
<u>VA Stewardship Goal 4</u> <i>VA ensure governance, systems, data, and management best practices improve experiences, satisfaction, accountability, and security</i>				✓
<u>VHA Goal 1</u> <i>Veterans choose VHA as their health care provider and coordinator, built on trusted, long-term relationships</i>		✓		✓
<u>VHA Goal 2</u> <i>VHA delivers high-quality, accessible, and integrated health care</i>	✓			
<u>VHA Goal 3</u> <i>VHA maximizes performance through shared ownership and is on the forefront of innovation</i>			✓	✓

ORH Mission

Honor America's rural Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.



ORH Vision

Lead the future in delivering unparalleled health and well-being to rural Veterans.



ORH GOALS ARE SMART

Specific • Measurable • Achievable • Realistic • Timely

Each ORH Operational Goal includes **strategies**, **key actions**, **milestones**, **growth targets**, and **measures** of **key outcomes** and **Veteran experience**.

The objectives and strategies actualize the goals by defining quantifiable and achievable outcomes identified in the evaluation framework.

GOAL 1



Support delivery of accessible, high-quality, integrated health care to rural Veterans.

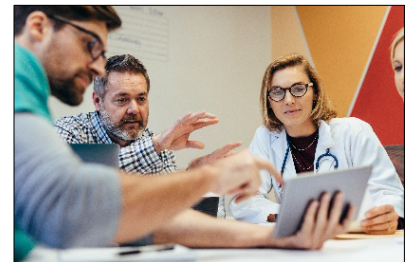
ORH Goal 1 reflects the charge of ORH to enhance access to high-quality healthcare for rural Veterans. Access to healthcare is facilitated through in-person care as well as telehealth programs. Goal 1 also responds to the direction from Congress for ORH to develop, refine, and promulgate innovative and successful programs to improve care and services for rural Veterans.

OBJECTIVES

- Support rural Veterans' access to care.
- Support high-quality, integrated health care to rural Veterans.

STRATEGIES

- ☐ Encourage the use of telehealth to support Veteran whole person health and wellness.
- ☐ Support programs/projects that provide in-person care to rural Veterans.
- ☐ Enhance rural Veteran mental health.
- ☐ Promote partnerships with VA and communities to optimize rural Veteran health care access and delivery needs.
- ☐ Promote ORH programs and projects that foster care coordination.
- ☐ Foster innovation to enhance care for rural Veterans.
- ☐ Assess the ORH Portfolio to reflect the broad need of healthcare for rural Veterans.



ORH Goal 1 aims to connect rural Veterans and their providers to improve health care quality and outcomes.

VA/VHA ALIGNMENT



VA Strategic Goal 2: VA delivers timely, accessible, high-quality benefits, care, and service to meet the unique needs of Veterans and all eligible beneficiaries.

VHA Goal 2: VHA delivers high-quality, accessible, and integrated health care.

GOAL 2

Optimize VHA health care workforce capacity to meet the needs of rural Veterans.



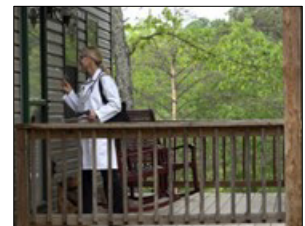
ORH Goal 2 reflects the high impact of the workforce serving rural Veterans. This includes understanding the rural health workforce, initiatives to enhance the ability to serve rural Veterans, and supporting recruitment best practices.

OBJECTIVES

- Expand understanding of current rural workforce retention and recruitment challenges such as employee burnout, staffing, and professional development opportunities.
- Support use of staffing resources to optimize service delivery for rural Veterans.
- Equip VHA staff to meet the needs of rural Veterans.

STRATEGIES

- ❑ Promote programs and projects seeking to expand knowledge of the rural workforce.
- ❑ Expand workforce data availability to ORH staff.
- ❑ Promote rural recruitment and hiring strategies.
- ❑ Promote the benefits of being employed at a rural VA facility (Medical Center or Clinic).
- ❑ Facilitate knowledge sharing to enhance care to rural Veterans.



ORH Goal 2 aims to support rural healthcare workforce development.

VA/VHA ALIGNMENT



VA Strategic Goal 2: VA delivers timely, accessible, high-quality benefits, care, and service to meet the unique needs of Veterans and all eligible beneficiaries.

VHA Goal 1: Veterans choose VHA as their health care provider and coordinator, built on trusted, long-term relationships.

GOAL 3

Enrich research, quality improvement, and innovation to serve rural Veterans.



Congress directed ORH (38 U.S. Code § 7308) to develop, refine, and promulgate policies, best practices, and lessons learned to enhance healthcare for rural Veterans. This is highlighted in the objectives and strategies of Goal 3.

OBJECTIVES

- Advance rural Veteran health research and quality improvement.
- Disseminate research and innovation to address rural Veterans' health care needs.
- Inform and promote policies, programs, and practices to optimize health and wellness for rural Veterans.
- Promote ORH as a leader in rural Veteran health research.

STRATEGIES

- ❑ Support research and quality improvement aimed at improving or understanding rural health.
- ❑ Establish a standard on technical assistance to federal and community partners conducting research and quality improvement about rural health.
- ❑ Conduct research and quality improvement to improve rural health.
- ❑ Develop a deeper understanding of barriers and facilitators of dissemination to rural sites.
- ❑ Disseminate ORH products (e.g. toolkits, briefs, guides).
- ❑ Facilitate participation of rural sites in ORH research or quality improvement.
- ❑ Participate in conferences, work groups, and other meetings to identify and promote best practices for addressing the health needs of rural Veterans.
- ❑ Collaborate with partners to promote the interests of rural Veterans.



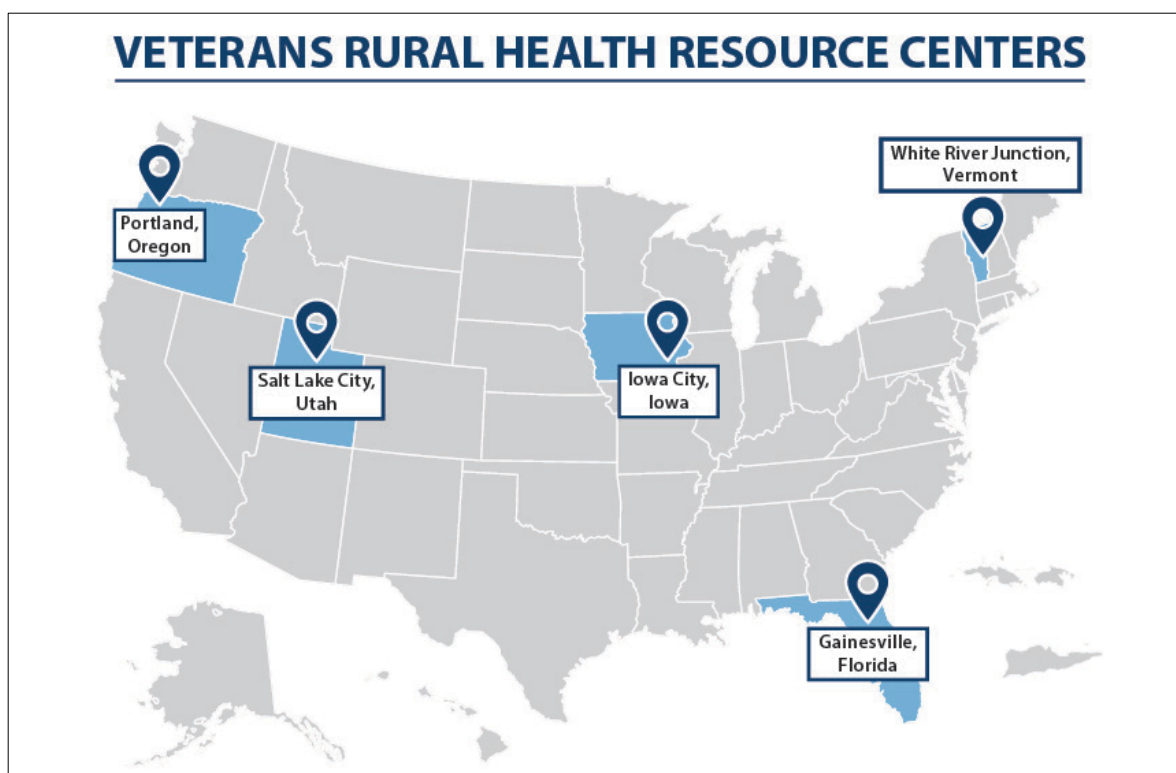
ORH Goal 3 aims to drive the rural research agenda and innovations in rural healthcare delivery and operations.

VA/VHA ALIGNMENT



VA Strategic Goal 2: VA delivers timely, accessible, high-quality benefits, care, and service to meet the unique needs of Veterans and all eligible beneficiaries.

VHA Goal 3: VHA maximizes performance through shared ownership and is on the forefront of innovation.



Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRCs) are ORH field-based satellite offices that serve as hubs of rural health care research, innovation, and dissemination. Congressional mandate 38 USC § 7308 defines VRHRCs' mission to:

- *Improve understanding of the challenges faced by Veterans living in rural areas.*
- *Identify disparities in the availability of health care to Veterans living in rural areas.*
- *Formulate practices or programs to enhance the delivery of health care to Veterans living in rural areas.*
- *Develop special practices and products for the benefit of Veterans living in rural areas and for implementation of such practices and products in the Department systemwide.*

Learn more about ORH VRHRCs here: <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/vrhrc.asp>.

GOAL 4



Embrace I-CARE values to maximize employee performance and well-being to serve rural Veterans.

ORH values the impact of employees facilitating the mission of ORH. To support employee performance and well-being, ORH developed a new strategic goal that is solely employee focused. This goal incorporates ORH High Reliability Organization (HRO) action steps, focused on improving work processes and employee experiences. Goal 4 supports the development of ORH employees while facilitating a collaborative work environment. Employee well-being and whole health are also emphasized in Goal 4.

OBJECTIVES

- Provide comprehensive resources to support a collaborative workforce and enhance employee recruitment and retention.
- Cultivate a supportive and collaborative work environment that prioritizes employee well-being.



STRATEGIES

- ❑ Explore and support employee professional development through conferences, meetings, and trainings.
- ❑ Support employee engagement through team building, employee development, and use of consistent review and improvement processes.
- ❑ Foster knowledge sharing of developmental opportunities.
- ❑ Foster and promote teamwork within ORH.
- ❑ Integrate employee well-being initiatives within ORH.



ORH Goal 4 aims to create an environment where all employees can maximize their potential to serve Veterans.

VA/VHA ALIGNMENT



VA Stewardship Goal 4: VA ensure governance, systems, data, and management best practices improve experiences, satisfaction, accountability, and security

VHA Goal 3: VHA maximizes performance through shared ownership and is on the forefront of innovation.



VA Core Values describe how VA will accomplish its mission and inform every interaction with our customers. These Core Values are Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence — better known as “I CARE.”

Learn more about I CARE and the Core VA Mission and Values here: <https://department.va.gov/icare/>.

Background

ORH completed a thorough process to create the ORH Fiscal Years 2025-2029 Long-Range Operational Plan and ORH Fiscal Year 2025 Operational Plan, beginning in September 2023 and concluding in June 2024. In September 2023, ORH completed reviews of the ORH Fiscal Years 2020-2024 Long-Range Operational Plan and Fiscal Year 2024 Operational Plan. The team focused on developing a new long-range operational plan for Fiscal Years 2025-2029. This process began with staff meetings to review and update the ORH Mission and Vision.

The team completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats analysis via an anonymous. The form was sent to ORH staff in Veterans Health Administration Central Office (VHACO) and the Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers (VRHRCs), with twenty-four respondents. The team was also provided with thought questions in preparation for a collaborative discussion during the scheduled ORH Strategic Planning Meeting.

In November 2023, ORH held a two-and-a-half day Strategic Planning meeting, with participants engaging both in person and virtually. The meeting began with a review of VA and VHA: Mission, Vision, Long Range Priorities, & Goals presentation from the VHA Deputy Chief Strategy Officer. The team reviewed the SWOT analysis feedback and engaged in discussion related to the thought questions. This information was then used to review and update ORH Goals 1-3. ORH has identified employee engagement as a crucial element of success and created a fourth goal dedicated to ICARE Values. A consultation with the National Center for Organizational Development (NCOD) enhanced the progression of the employee-focused goal. Upon conclusion of the ORH Strategic Planning Meeting, the team had developed four goals and sixteen objectives.

ORH established workgroups for each objective developed for the first three ORH Goals. These workgroups included self-assigned members from all five VRHRCs, ORH VHACO, and ORH. The teams were organized into Microsoft Teams Channels, allowing for focused collaboration and resource sharing. The objective workgroups worked together to create the operational components for each objective, including key actions, milestones, and targets. Meetings were held from January through April 2024.

ORH developed the operational components of Goal 4 in a larger group format by having multiple sessions open to all ORH staff with consultation from an NCOD organizational psychologist. Through that format, ORH leadership, ORH VHACO, and VRHRC team members developed the operational components of ORH Goal 4 in May 2024.

The listening sessions with ORH and rural health internal and external subject matter experts were conducted in April and May 2024. The subject matter expert feedback was used to inform the ORH FY 2025-2029 Long-Range Operational Plan and ORH FY 2025 Operational Plan. ORH identified the collaboration and engagement with subject matter experts to promote the interest of rural Veterans as an implementation strategy and key action within the ORH FY 2025-2029 Long-Range Operational Plan and ORH FY 2025 Operational Plan respectively.

Fiscal Year 2022-2025 Veterans Health Administration Long-Range Plan Framework

This Framework outlines goals, objectives and strategies to establish and align VHA's efforts and resources over the next several years.

JUNE 2022

GOAL 1
What We Are Aiming For

Objectives

Where We Are Going

Strategies

How We Will Get There

Veterans choose VHA as their health care provider and coordinator, built on trusted, long-term relationships

1.1 Understand and employ what matters most to the Veteran and their care team.
1.2 Increase communications that promote the use of learning tools and the understanding of available resources to Veterans, employees and stakeholders.
1.3 Increase national recognition of VHA as a provider of high-quality health care services.

1.1.1 Enhance customer satisfaction and experience by providing high-quality care, ease of access and coordination.
1.2.1 Improve outcomes and knowledge sharing by employing bi-directional communications with Veterans, their families and caregivers.
1.3.1 Leverage media to spread VHA's specialized knowledge and leadership in clinical outcomes within the health care landscape.

GOAL 2
What We Are Aiming For

Objectives

Where We Are Going

Strategies

How We Will Get There

VHA delivers high-quality, accessible and integrated health care

2.1 Enhance Veterans' care by building an integrated delivery network with internal and external partners.
2.2 Provide greater choice for care across the VA system at facilities and through virtual care, community care and collaborative opportunities.
2.3 Tailor care to serve every Veteran, ensuring equity for those who are underserved.
2.4 Increase access to and use of a broad spectrum of services that encourage and support lifelong whole health and wellness.

2.1.1 Foster information exchange and organizational alignment with government and non-government partners to establish a high-performing integrated health care delivery network.
2.2.1 Expand virtual care giving Veterans the choice to receive appropriate care at home and in the community.
2.3.1 Synthesize outcomes for Veterans' mental health, suicide prevention, homelessness and aging Veterans.
2.3.2 Offer comprehensive women's health services.
2.4.1 Empower and equip Veterans and employees to take charge of their health and well-being by utilizing VHA to live life to the fullest.
2.4.2 Continue to improve the support, transparency and investment of caregivers and survivors of Veterans.

GOAL 3
What We Are Aiming For

Objectives

Where We Are Going

Strategies

How We Will Get There

VHA maximizes performance through shared ownership and is on the forefront of innovation

3.1 Fully transform VHA into a High-Reliable Organization by deepening a culture of shared ownership, accountability, stewardship and collaboration.
3.2 Integrate and leverage best practices and technological advances in health care into clinical practice and health professions education.
3.3 Promote VHA as an authoritative thought leader in health care delivery and training by conducting clinical research and providing health care-related data that benefits Veterans and the general public.

3.1.1 Cultivate a positive climate and foster a safety and improvement culture with movement towards zero harm.
3.1.2 Provide tools, resources and experiences in support of employees in collaboration with the PF3000 task force.
3.2.1 Drive ongoing improvement and innovation in health care quality, education, training and advancements in scientific research.
3.2.2 Innovate through shared ownership, improved outcomes and cultural transformation.
3.3.1 Set the industry benchmark in health care for Veterans, their families and caregivers' resiliency, outcomes and quality of life.

GOAL 4
What We Are Aiming For

Objectives

Where We Are Going

Strategies

How We Will Get There

VHA optimizes assets across the enterprise

4.1 Modernize and enhance business and health information systems and enterprise data.
4.2 Evolve from a holding company to an operating company model.
4.3 Optimize the use of physical resources and infrastructure modernization efforts.
4.4 Provide comprehensive and robust human resources HR investments to acquire and develop diverse talent and engage employees from onboarding to retirement.
4.5 Improve coordination, communication and transparency across VHA.

4.1.1 Modernize electronic health records.
4.2.1 Transform the supply chain and management of capital asset investments.
4.3.1 Advance the alignment of health care infrastructure needs through the appropriate implementation of market assessment recommendations.
4.4.1 Streamline and standardize HR processes for recruitment, increased retention and competitive employee incentives, development and recognition.
4.5.1 Refine the governance structure and cooperative work across Program Offices and VONs.

VA PRINCIPLES
ADVOCACY | ACCESS | OUTCOMES | EXCELLENCE

VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES

- Hire faster and more competitively
- Connect Veterans to the safest and best care
- Serve Veterans with military environmental exposures
- Accelerate VA's journey to a High Reliability Organization
- Support Veterans' whole health, their caregivers, and survivors
- Prevent Veteran suicide

VHA STRATEGIC ENABLERS

- Retain, invest in, and support our people
- Scale best practices and drive innovation
- Improve our technology systems and workflows
- Drive equity for women, minority and LGBTQ+ Veterans
- Modernize our facilities into the future
- Partner with VSOs, tribes, states, advocates, and agencies

VHA MISSION STATEMENT

Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

VHA VISION STATEMENT

VA will lead the future in delivering unparalleled health and well-being to our nation's Veterans, and to the nation.

I-CARE Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence define who we are and our culture. They serve as a guide in providing world-class care and services to Veterans, their families and beneficiaries.

Access the Veterans Health Administration Long-Range Plan Framework, Fiscal Year 2022-2025 here: https://www.va.gov/VHASTRATEGY/Docs/FY2022-2025_VHA_LongRangePlanFramework_62623.pdf.

Learn more about the VHA Chief Strategy Office here: <https://www.va.gov/VHASTRATEGY/index.asp>.

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