



**Department of
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News Release

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Secretary Shinseki Announces \$215 Million in Projects for Rural Veterans

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has provided \$215 million in competitive funding to improve services specifically designed for Veterans in rural and highly rural areas.

“This funding signals a substantial expansion of services addressing the health care needs of our rural Veterans,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki said. “These funds will allow VA to establish new outpatient clinics, expand collaborations with federal and community partners, accelerate the use of telemedicine deployment, explore innovative uses of technology, and fund pilot programs.”

The selection process was competitive and transparent. Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), VA’s regional health care networks, and Veterans Health Administration program offices were allowed to submit up to eight proposed projects each. These proposals were prioritized and then sent to the Office of Rural Health (ORH), where they were evaluated based on, methodology, feasibility and intended impact on rural Veterans.

After careful review, ORH selected 74 programs, many of which were either national in scope or affected multiple states. Program offices validated these proposals to ensure that projects and programs were consistent with the VA mission, strategic direction, program standards, and did not duplicate existing efforts.

The new funding is part of an ambitious VA program to improve access and quality of health care -- both physical and mental -- for Veterans in geographically rural areas, with an emphasis on the use of the latest technologies, recruitment and retention of a well-educated and trained health care workforce, and collaborations with non-VA rural health community partners.

To address the unique issues facing rural Veterans, the Department created an Office of Rural Health in February 2007. In the past two years, VA formed a 16-member national committee to advise on issues affecting rural veterans, opened three Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers to study rural Veteran issues, rolled out four new mobile health clinics to serve 24 predominately rural counties, announced 10 new rural outreach clinics to be opened in 2009.