



Returning Veterans and their Families in Rural America: A Brief Lay of the Land

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Interesting Rural Stats

- Rural individuals serve at higher rates than their proportion of the population.



- 20% of the nation lives in rural America, **HOWEVER...**
 - 44% of U.S. Military recruits are from rural areas
 - Almost one-third of those who died in Iraq are from small towns
 - 40% of veterans from sparsely populated areas



“...There is [a] tremendous shortfall between benefits earned and current access for our rural Soldiers.”

Brigadier General Thomas Katkus, Commander, Alaska Army National Guard

Where in rural America are veterans from?

- National average of veterans in rural areas = 12.1%
- In 18 states, that proportion even higher
 - Montana (16.2%)
 - Nevada (16.1%)
 - Wyoming (16%)

U.S. Census; [National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics](#); National Rural Health Association



Rural Veterans



- Disproportionate number of rural Americans serving in the military creates a disproportionate need for veteran's care in rural areas
- Access to VA medical facilities: distance, transportation, and geographic barriers
- Average distance for rural veterans to get care is 63 miles
- Specialty care even more limited

Psychiatric News; Psychiatric Services, National Rural Health Association

Different Veteran Composition

- Reserve and National Guard units have taken a more active role in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan than in past wars
- Returning in higher numbers to rural areas



http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,SS_080505_TRICARE,00.html

Disparities Between Rural/Urban Vets

- Older
- Poorer health patterns
- Greater disease burden
- Greater health care costs



Source: The Veterans Administration's Health Services and Outreach Network

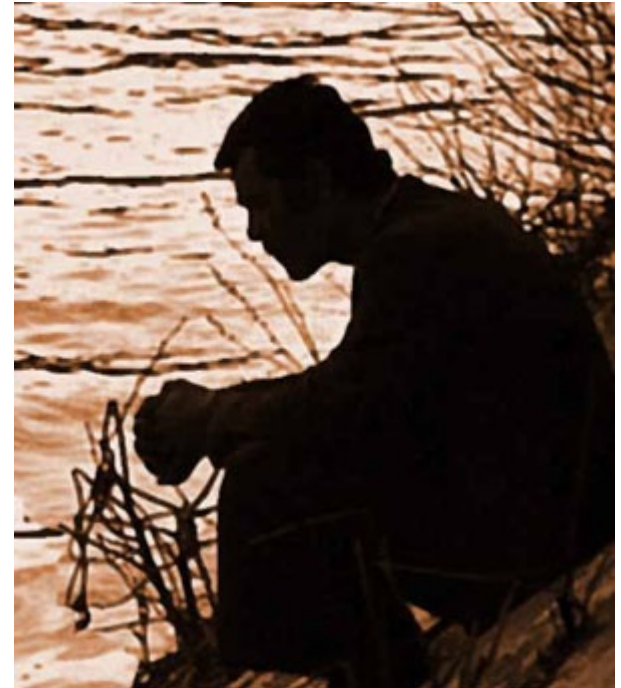
Some Gaps in Tricare

- Tricare: military insurance system
- Finding doctors who accept military patients in rural areas is difficult
- Federal community health centers sometimes do not accept VA payments
- Medications sometimes must be mailed



Signature Wounds of Afghanistan and Iraqi Wars

- Report psychological symptoms
 - 38% Soldiers
 - 31% Marines
 - 49% National Guard
- Increase in PTSD
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
 - Highly specialized services located in 2 of the 18 states with high numbers of rural



Source: Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health. (2007). An achievable vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health. Falls Church, VA: Defense Health Board

National Rural Health Association; Written Testimony, By Andy Behrman, April 18, 2007

What does this mean for rural vets, providers, and communities?

- Link VA and civilian services in existing rural health safety net infrastructure
- Increase training to primary care providers on PTSD and TBI
- Rural PCPs – ask about prior military service as routine part of medical history
- Increase number of rural providers accepting Tricare

What does this mean for rural vets providers, and communities?

- Rescreening
- Involvement of families in recovery
- Need for increased TBI case managers
- Peer military specialists
- Citizen Soldier program
- Locate Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs)



A Great Resource

[Military OneSource](#): provides resources to help military families face everyday challenges 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-342-9647

Check out the rest of the resource list following all presentations...

Questions?

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