



Rural Health State of the Art Meeting

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Health Services Research & Development Service

Welcome to the SOTA on Rural Health

- Background
- Goals and Process
- Perspectives on Rural Health in VA
- Charge to work groups



Why Rural Health?

- Rural Veterans are an important population
 - 4.7 million rural and highly rural Veterans
 - 2.7 million enrolled in VA
- 7% of enrolled rural Veterans are women;13% are minorities
- Older and medically more complex
- Impacts of MISSION Act on care of rural Veterans
- Partnerships between HSRD and ORH

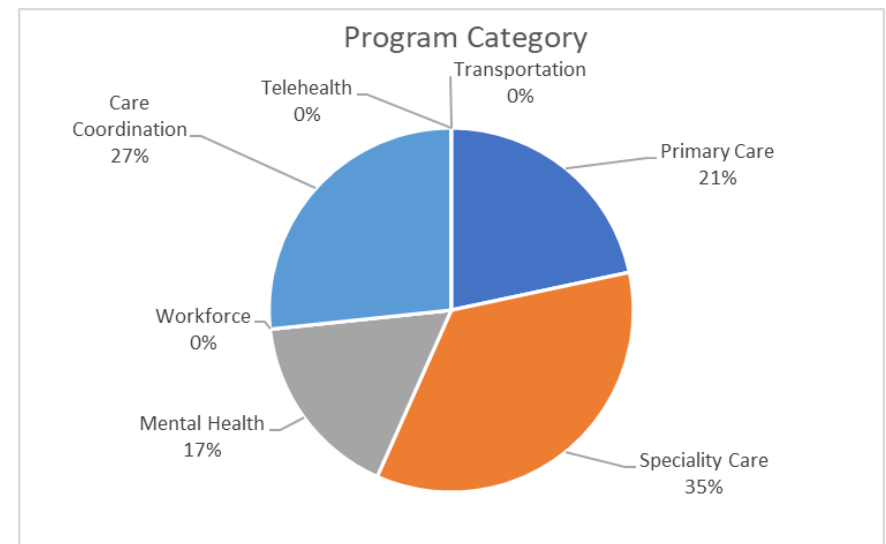
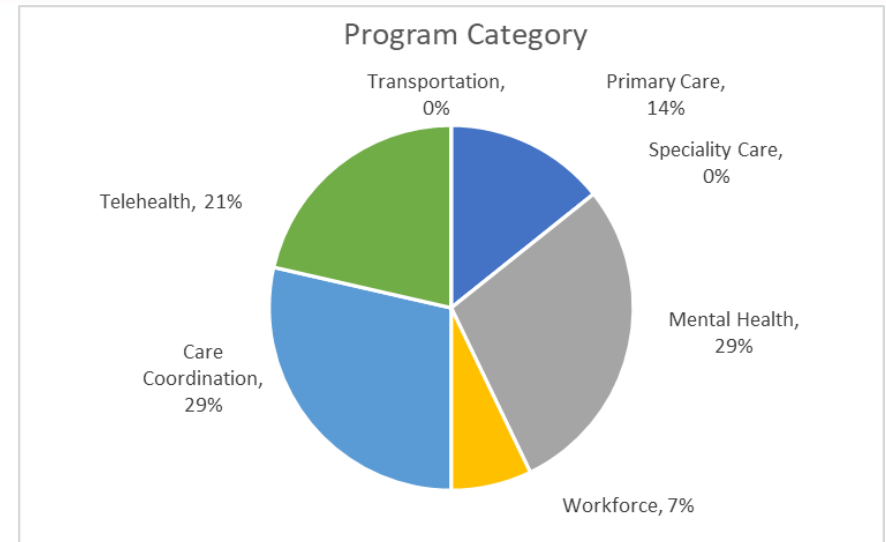


Need To Broaden Scope of Research

- Currently HSRD does not even have a specific portfolio dedicated to rural health
- Much of rural health lumped under research on access and telehealth
- This ignores unique problems of rural veterans, trends in health of rural communities
- “Deaths of despair” – suicide, overdose, alcohol
- Isolation and loneliness
- Disparate effects of COVID on rural communities

Why Rural Health? – Need for more research

- 14 currently funded HSRD projects specifically target rural Veterans (as of 10/5/21)
- 60 HSRD currently funded projects consider rural in study design (as of 10/5/21)



SOTA Process – What We Have Done Already

- Planning Committee : HSRD and Office of Rural Health
 - Reviewed HSRD and ORH portfolios
 - Identified main topic areas
 - Refined key questions
 - Identified subject matter experts
 - Determined scope and aims
- Three topic areas for this conference:
 - COVID-19 and public health emergencies
 - Rural health workforce
 - Care in the community
- Cross-cutting themes:
 - Mental health, cultural considerations, access
 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion



Aims for each workgroup

- Identify key research questions within broad topic area
- Consider the state of the evidence for key research questions
- Determine which questions have sufficient evidence to guide practice and policy
- Reach consensus on recommendations for a research agenda.
- Prioritize 2-3 of the most important questions.
 - Clarify scope of question that could be included in a call for proposals

SOTA Agenda

March 28th

- Plenary presentations
- Charges to Work Groups
- Work Groups begin discussions

March 29th

- Work Groups continue discussion
- Work group comes to consensus on priority research agenda
- Co-facilitators present 2-3 top research questions to full group

General Recommendations for SOTA

- Consider your knowledge of the evidence to identify areas of greatest uncertainty
- Use your individual clinical experience and expertise to provide context.
- Distinguish recommendations based on available evidence from those that may be based on expert consensus in absence of evidence
- Focus research recommendations on most important gaps
 - Likely to change practice
 - Important to VA patients
 - Unique opportunity for VA to study



Hints for Identifying Useful Questions

- Is the obstacle to progress truly a “knowledge” question – i.e. what to do? – or is it an implementation question – i.e., “how to do it?”
- Avoid the tendency to catalogue every question in rural health
- Focus on questions that have best chance of contributing to problems which the VA has capacity to address
 - Do interventions to reduce social isolation reduce mental health problems in rural Veterans?
 - NOT : Are measures of community economic health associated with mental health problems in Veterans?

HSRD Post-SOTA Actions

- Develop “request for applications” that targets highest priority questions
 - Developed from work group consensus items
- Develop process for Rural Health Portfolio management and ORH partnership
 - SPM = Crystal Henderson
- Explore roles and responsibilities of different funding mechanisms: ORH vs. HSRD
- Identify mechanisms for collaborations between HSRD and ORH

Thanks

- Planning Committee Members
- Work Group Chairs:
 - Kristin Mattocks and Naomi Tomoyasu (Community Care)
 - Matt Vincenti and Charlene Pope (Workforce)
 - Mike Ohl and Travis Lovejoy (COVID-19)
- Dr. Laura Zimmerman—HSRD Lead on the Rural Health SOTA Planning Committee
- PFS: Seong Kim