



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Differences in health-related quality of life in rural and urban veterans”

Weeks, William B., Lewis E. Kazis, Yujing Shen, Zhongxiao Cong, Xinhua S. Ren, Donald Miller, Austin Lee, and Jonathan B. Perlin. / [Full Report](#)

Quick Takeaways:

- Veterans living in rural areas tend to have worse physical health and mental health than veterans living in non-rural areas.
- Veterans living in rural areas lived a greater distance from Veterans Health Administration (VHA) hospitals and non-VHA hospitals.

Study:

Researchers examined data from the 1999 Large Health Survey of Veteran Enrollees to understand the differences in physical and mental health between rural and non-rural veterans. Rural status was determined based on ZIP code and using a Department of Agriculture measure. Physical and mental health were scored using the common Veterans SF-36 survey, which measures: physical functioning, role limitations owing to physical problems, bodily pain, general health perceptions, energy/vitality, social functioning, role limitations owing to emotional problems, and mental health.

Findings:

Researchers found that veterans living in rural areas had worse outcomes across the board in comparison to veterans living in suburban and urban settings, even when controlling for demographic factors such as age and ethnicity. Rural veterans were also older than non-rural veterans, and they often had additional age-related care needs.

Rural veterans had worse physical and mental health scores than non-rural veterans. The difference in physical health was greater than the difference in mental health. Rural veterans were also further from VHA and non-VHA hospitals and had less access to care and services.

Conclusion:

Rural veterans have worse physical and mental health than non-rural veterans. Their greater need for services is compounded by less access to those services, either through VHA or private hospitals. Rural veterans were also significantly older and poorer than non-rural veterans. Increasing access to VHA care could help to address the disparities faced by rural veterans.