Heartland Heroes
America’s Rural Veterans

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A note about definitions

There are several inconsistent definitions of rurality across major national data sources and federal agencies.

Census, DoD, and VA data all use different metrics, as do specific study measures.

These different metrics may imply differences that aren’t “real”, and can lead to quite different conclusions.
More than 1/3rd of new enlistees come from rural & small town areas

Source: DoD Population Representation 2015
This fraction is down from 40% in 2007.
Rural young men are 34-39% more likely to enlist than non-rural peers, controlling for family income, parental education, test scores, race, college expectations.

Source: ELS 2002 data, courtesy of Alair MacLean.
Rural and non-rural veterans are older than non-veterans

Source: American Community Survey 2011-2015
Rural veteran demographics, in brief

- 6% are women
- 69% are married, 14% divorced
- 92% are white
- 9% served since 9/11
- 95% have health insurance:
  - 37% VA insurance
  - 13% Tricare
  - 59% Medicare
- 35% have 1 or more health limitations
- 33% working age out of Labor force
  - 10% VA disability rating 50%+
- Avg income $39,945

Source: American Community Survey 2011-2015
## Rural veterans’ challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health care</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Provider &amp; specialist shortages</td>
<td>• Jobs</td>
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<td>• Fewer health care facilities</td>
<td>• Federal employment</td>
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<td>• Hospital closings due to financial instability</td>
<td>• School</td>
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<td>• Geographic barriers</td>
<td>• Transportation</td>
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<td>• Limited internet access</td>
<td>• Institutional capacity</td>
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<td>• Higher uninsured rates</td>
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<td>• Higher poverty rates</td>
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### Social Isolation
- Young veterans

Source: [https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp](https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp)
States with highest percentages of veterans living in rural areas

Source: Rural Veterans Health Care Atlas 2014
Realistic difficulty of going to a VA medical center

Source: Rural Veterans Health Care Atlas 2014
Telemedicine improving access, but broadband services limited in rural areas

Source: Rural Veterans Health Care Atlas 2014
We do not know enough about what rural-origin service members do when they leave the military.

Longitudinal transition experiences and migration dynamics of rural veterans

Social processes involved in leaving military service and returning (or not) home to rural communities?

Who leaves but doesn’t come back to rural communities? And why not?
Thank you!

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Summary charts from ACS-backup
Veterans are older than non-veterans
Rural residents are older than non-rural
Veterans are much more likely to be men
Rural veterans are more likely to be married and divorced.
Rural veterans are disproportionately white
Veterans have low rates of being uninsured
Veterans have unique sources of insurance coverage

- Has insurance through employer/union
- Has insurance purchased directly
- Has insurance through TRICARE
- With public health insurance coverage
- Has insurance through Medicaid
- Has insurance through Medicare
- Has insurance through VA
- Has insurance through Indian Health Service

Legend:
- Urban Civilian
- Rural Civilian
- Urban Veteran
- Rural Veteran
Veterans less likely to be dropouts, similar education otherwise
Many rural veterans are not in the labor force

![Bar chart showing the distribution of employment status among Urban Civilian, Rural Civilian, Urban Veteran, and Rural Veteran populations. The chart indicates a higher percentage of rural veterans who are not in the labor force compared to other categories.]
Rural veterans least likely to be employed in private sector
Disability ratings among veterans

- 0 percent disability rating
- 10 or 20 percent disability rating
- 30 or 40 percent disability rating
- 50 or 60 percent disability rating
- 70 percent or higher
- Has disability rating, level not reported

Urban Veteran
Rural Veteran