

# News Release

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## **Iowa City VA Medical Center Awarded Rural Health Resource Center**

The Iowa City Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) was awarded funding from the VA Office of Rural Health to establish the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23 VA Midwest Rural Health Resource Center. The five-year, \$10 million grant will support a number of new initiatives to enhance health care delivery to rural veterans and close gaps in quality and access to care that may result from the geographic isolation faced by rural veterans. Iowa City was one of three sites to receive funding in this national competition.

The establishment of the Rural Health Resource Center represents a partnership between several Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers within VISN 23 (the network of VA hospitals and community-based clinics located in Iowa, Western Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota). Center participants include the Iowa City VAMC, Fargo VAMC, Minneapolis VAMC, VA Nebraska Western Iowa Health Care System, and their affiliate universities, including the University of Iowa, University of North Dakota, University of Minnesota, and University of Nebraska. Although the Center will be housed within the Iowa City VAMC, all the partnering organizations will collaborate to provide faculty and staff for the new Center. In addition to developing and disseminating strategies to optimize care for rural veterans, the Center will also assist the VA Office of Rural Health in Washington, DC in synthesizing policies to eliminate potential disparities in care faced by rural veterans.

Barry Sharp, Director of the Iowa City VA Medical Center, noted, "The VISN 23 VA Midwest Rural Health Center represents the culmination of a tremendous amount of prior collaborative work within VISN 23 in developing research and programs that seek to improve the quality of care received by rural veterans. This award will bring together the collective strengths of VA medical centers and community-based clinics and the four academic partners to put VISN 23 at the forefront of national rural health work within the VA."

The Center Director will be Peter J. Kaboli, M.D., M.S., VA Staff Physician, and Associate Professor of General Internal Medicine, University of Iowa. The Center Co-Director will be Alana Knudson, Ph.D. from the Fargo VA Medical Center and Associate Director for Research at the Center for Rural Health at the University of North Dakota. Dr. Kaboli is an experienced health services scientist who has conducted landmark research in patient safety and implementing best practices. Dr. Knudson is an accomplished investigator and program leader

whose research includes population health, quality and safety, and financial access for rural and frontier populations. Drs. Kaboli and Knudson have brought together an outstanding research team that includes a talented cadre of VA and university investigators from throughout VISN 23.

The VISN 23 VA Midwest Rural Health Center will focus its research on identifying gaps in rural health care and unique barriers to care faced by rural veterans. The Center then hopes to use this knowledge to develop and test innovative strategies to improve access and quality and eliminate disparities. Kaboli noted that, “VISN 23 is ideally positioned to serve as a Rural Health Resource Center due to the large population residing in rural areas, exceptional infrastructure for health services and health policy research, an existing focus on innovative programs for rural health care delivery, strong academic affiliations, and a stable and visionary administrative and clinical leadership, including a network director who has been one of VA’s strongest advocates for rural health during his 12 year tenure.” The funding will allow the VA research team to bring together experts in health services research, public health, health care policy and financing, and dissemination and implementation of best practices.

According to Robert Petzel, M.D., Director, VISN 23, the Midwest Rural Health Center is an important element in the VA’s effort to promote quality and accessibility in meeting the needs of all veterans.

“The VISN 23 Strategic Plan has emphasized rural health as a priority for a number of years. The establishment of the Center will help us in developing novel approaches to providing care, including improving access to specialty care, and collaborating with community health care providers. Some of the innovative initiatives we have recently undertaken, such as home telehealth care coordination, hospice veteran partnerships, and tele-rehabilitation, will benefit from the new Center,” Petzel said.

Other goals of Midwest Rural Health Center include establishing a research network involving community-based clinics in VISN 23, developing specialized research teams in data analysis, program evaluation, and health policy analysis, and enhancing capacity to actively disseminate best clinical practices to rural health providers and effective self-management strategies to rural veterans with chronic illness.

“This is a distinctive award that will allow us be a leader nationally in disseminating new knowledge about rural health systems so that they better meet the needs of the rural Midwest population and veterans throughout the nation,” Kaboli commented. “Our research team is thrilled to begin this exciting new phase.”

**If you would like more information on the center please contact Peter Kaboli at (319) 338-0581 x 7716) or [peter.kaboli@va.gov](mailto:peter.kaboli@va.gov)**