

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1849

To require a five-year strategic plan for the Office of Rural Health of the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs for improving access to, and the quality of, health care services for veterans in rural areas.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 10, 2011

Mr. FRANKEN (for himself and Mr. BOOZMAN) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require a five-year strategic plan for the Office of Rural Health of the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs for improving access to, and the quality of, health care services for veterans in rural areas.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Veterans Health
5 Care Improvement Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR OFFICE OF**
2 **RURAL HEALTH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF**
3 **VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

4 (a) STRATEGIC PLAN REQUIRED.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
6 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Di-
7 rector of the Office of Rural Health of the Veterans
8 Health Administration of the Department of Vet-
9 erans Affairs shall develop a strategic plan for the
10 Office of Rural Health for improving access to, and
11 the quality of, health care services for veterans in
12 rural areas that covers the five-year period com-
13 mencing on the date of the issuance of the plan by
14 the Director.

15 (2) CONSULTATION.—The Director of the Of-
16 fice of Rural Health shall develop the plan in con-
17 sultation with the following:

18 (A) The Director of the Health Care Re-
19 tention and Recruitment Office of the Depart-
20 ment.

21 (B) The Director of the Office of Quality
22 and Performance of the Department.

23 (C) The Director of the Office of Care Co-
24 ordination Services of the Department.

1 (b) ELEMENTS.—The plan required by subsection (a)
2 shall include, for the period covered by the plan, the fol-
3 lowing:

4 (1) Goals and objectives for the recruitment
5 and retention by the Veterans Health Administra-
6 tion of health care personnel in rural areas.

7 (2) Goals and objectives for ensuring timeliness
8 and improving quality in the delivery of health care
9 services by the Veterans Health Administration in
10 rural areas through contract and fee-basis providers.

11 (3) Goals and objectives for the implementation,
12 expansion, and enhanced use of telemedicine services
13 by the Veterans Health Administration in rural
14 areas, including through coordination with other ap-
15 propriate offices of the Department.

16 (4) Goals and objectives for ensuring the full
17 and effective use of mobile outpatient clinics by the
18 Veterans Health Administration for the provision of
19 health care services in rural areas, including goals
20 and objectives for the use of such clinics on a fully
21 mobile basis and for encouraging health care pro-
22 viders who provide services through such clinics to
23 do so in rural areas.

1 (5) Procedures for soliciting from each Vet-
2 erans Health Administration facility that serves a
3 rural area the following:

4 (A) A statement of the clinical capacity of
5 such facility.

6 (B) The procedures of such facility in the
7 event of a medical, surgical, or mental health
8 emergency outside the scope of the clinical ca-
9 pacity of such facility.

10 (C) The procedures and mechanisms of
11 such facility for the provision and coordination
12 of health care for women veterans, including
13 procedures and mechanisms for coordination
14 with local hospitals and health care facilities,
15 oversight of primary care and fee-basis care,
16 and management of specialty care.

17 (6) Goals and objectives for the modification of
18 the funding allocation mechanisms of the Office of
19 Rural Health in order to ensure that the Office dis-
20 tributes funds to components of the Department to
21 best achieve the goals and objectives of the Office
22 and in a timely manner.

23 (7) Goals and objectives for the coordination of,
24 and sharing of resources with respect to, the provi-
25 sion of health care services to veterans in rural areas

1 between the Department of Veterans Affairs, the
2 Department of Defense, the Indian Health Service
3 of the Department of Health and Human Services,
4 and other Federal agencies, as appropriate and pru-
5 dent.

6 (8) Specific milestones for the achievement of
7 the goals and objectives developed for the plan.

8 (9) Procedures for ensuring the effective imple-
9 mentation of the plan.

10 (c) TRANSMITTAL TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 90
11 days after the date of the issuance of the plan required
12 by subsection (a), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall
13 transmit the plan to Congress, together with such com-
14 ments and recommendations in connection with the plan
15 as the Secretary considers appropriate.

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