

“Increasing Service to Montana’s Veterans through Training, Team Building, and Technology”

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Montana is home to more than 108,000 veterans, representing 16.2% of the total state adult population; the second highest population density of veterans in the United States. The very rural nature of the state, with an average of fewer than six persons per square mile, creates unique challenges in the delivery of mental health care and crisis intervention services to veterans and all Montanans.

“Increasing Service to Montana’s Veterans through Training, Team Building and Technology”, is a grant request, through the Flex Rural Veterans Health Access Program, to reach out to more than 30,000 veterans in the most rural areas of the state. Today nearly 60% of veterans statewide are not enrolled in VA Montana Health Care Services - a tremendous unmet need. There is an urgent call for Montana to create a program of early identification, eligibility determination, enrollment, referral and coordination with VA medical services to assist Montana’s rural veterans in accessing behavioral health services and other vital health care programs.

This three year project will focus on three specific rural regions of the state. The 15 counties in these regions have a population density of veterans double that of the national average, illustrating the demand for targeted and innovative outreach to meet veteran mental health care needs. Through utilization of numerous partnerships, various teaching methods and resources, the Training component of this proposal will provide access to and increase delivery of quality mental health service, including crisis intervention services, by improving the ability of rural health care providers to identify and treat post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other combat related illnesses and injuries. Crisis intervention and opportunities for diversion from the criminal justice system will be created through increased training for first responders and justice professionals including law enforcement, emergency medical technicians, fire departments and court personnel. Community Team Building efforts will improve networking among providers and first responders, identify local resources and needs, and will reduce the stigma associated with behavioral health disorders that veterans may be facing. Local coalitions will become a strong intercept for veterans who may be experiencing symptoms of PTSD or TBI and will create a positive referral network to appropriate VA services. To complement the Training and Team Building initiatives, this project will utilize Technology to improve access and increase delivery of mental health service to veterans in rural Montana. DPHHS, the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program grantee, will partner with the Montana Hospital Association (MHA...An Association of Health Care Providers), to increase availability of telehealth resources in rural critical access hospitals and to utilize technology to bring a higher level of care to the most rural of Montana communities.