

Public Law 117–21
117th Congress

An Act

June 30, 2021
[H.R. 2441]

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expand the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study to assess certain mental health care resources of the Department of Veterans Affairs available to veterans who live in rural areas.

Sgt. Ketchum
Rural Veterans
Mental Health
Act of 2021.
38 USC 101 note.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021”.

38 USC 1712A
note.

SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF RURAL ACCESS NETWORK FOR GROWTH ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Determination.

(a) **EXPANSION.**—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish and maintain three new centers of the RANGE Program.

(b) **LOCATIONS.**—The centers established under subsection (a) shall be located in areas determined by the Secretary based on—

(1) the need for additional mental health care for rural veterans in such areas; and

(2) interest expressed by personnel at facilities of the Department in such areas.

(c) **TIMELINE.**—The Secretary shall establish the centers under subsection (a) during fiscal year 2022.

(d) **FUNDING.**—There is authorized to be appropriated \$1,200,000 for each of fiscal years 2022 through 2024 to carry out this section.

SEC. 3. GAO STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE FURNISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO RURAL VETERANS.

(a) **STUDY REQUIRED.**—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study to assess whether the Department of Veterans Affairs has sufficient resources to serve rural veterans who need covered mental health care. Such study shall include assessments of—

(1) whether the mental health care furnished by the Secretary (through resources including the RANGE Program, Enhanced RANGE Program, mental health residential rehabilitation treatment programs, inpatient mental health services, and PRR centers) is sufficient to meet the covered mental health care needs of rural veterans;

(2) how best to expand and to appropriately locate resources described in paragraph (1);

(3) whether to require the establishment of a PRR center at a medical facility of the Department that serves 1,000 or more veterans on the National Psychosis Registry;

(4) the demand by rural veterans for mental health resources specified in paragraph (1);

(5) the average wait time for a rural veteran for mental health resources specified in paragraph (1); and

(6) how many rural veterans died by suicide or overdose—

(A) while on a wait list for mental health resources specified in paragraph (1); and

(B) during the term of the study.

(b) **REPORT REQUIRED.**—Not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report containing the results of the study under this section.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

38 USC 1712A
note.

In this Act:

(1) The term “covered mental health care” means mental health care that is more intensive than traditional outpatient therapy.

(2) The term “PRR center” means a psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(3) The term “RANGE Program” means the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(4) The term “rural veteran” means a veteran who lives in a rural or highly rural area (including such an area in a Tribal or insular area), as determined through the use of the Rural-Urban Commuting Areas coding system of the Department of Agriculture.

Approved June 30, 2021.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 2441:

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 167 (2021):

May 17, considered in House.

May 18, prior proceedings vacated; considered and passed House.

June 24, considered and passed Senate.