

# Social Work Effectiveness for Rural Veterans Evaluation (SERVE)

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Quality Enhancement Research Initiative

## A Partnered Evaluation to Serve Veterans' Social Needs

Social workers in the VA address Veterans' need for better access, coordination, counseling, and community support. Beginning in FY2016, the National Social Work Programs Office, in cooperation with the Office of Rural Health, implemented the Social Work PACT (Patient Aligned Care Teams) Staffing Program. The program placed additional social workers in rural, VA-based primary-care settings. This QUERI partnered evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the program and will design tools to support the VHA Social Work Practice Model.

## Social Workers Support Wellbeing

- Veterans who live in rural areas often face challenges in getting the right care at the right time because providers may be unavailable in their vicinity or geographically dispersed.
- Social workers embedded in primary care teams serve as integral members of the care team and address the social and emotional needs and challenges that Veterans and their families experience.
- These social workers assess Veterans for suicide risk as well as experiences of intimate partner violence, abuse, neglect, substance use, and homelessness.
- Social workers who offer case management may help patients get financial, nutritional, or housing assistance; arrange respite or in-home services for caregivers; and identify mental health needs or social isolation.
- Additionally, social workers educate patients, family, and staff as well as participate in evaluation and quality improvement efforts to identify gaps and advocate for needed resources and services.

### Effectiveness of Social Workers in PACT

Among Veterans with high risk of hospitalization, adding a social worker to PACT can lead to:

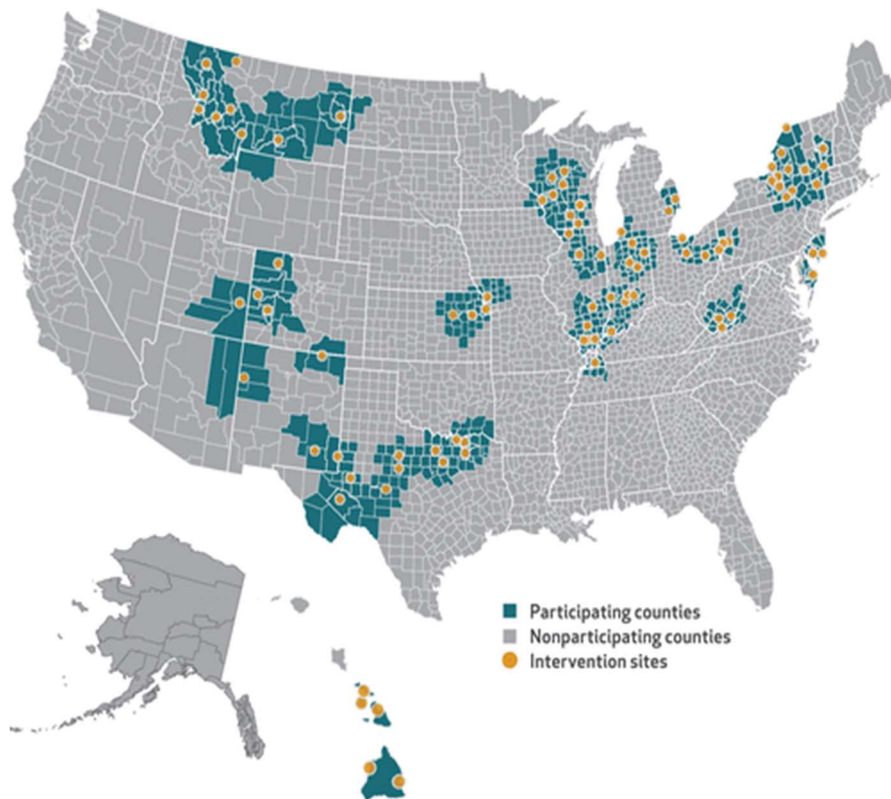
- Increased access to social work services by 30%
- Reduced risk of emergency department (ED) visits by 4.4%
- Reduced risk of hospital admissions by 3%
- 7,900 fewer ED visits
- 9,300 fewer hospital days

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## Participating VA Medical Centers and Community Outpatient Clinics in the Social Work PACT Staffing Program



## Assessing Whole Health: Social Work Practice

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When given a manageable case load, social workers who are co-located in a primary care team can manage patients with a complex mix of medical and social needs and provide more comprehensive services and case management.

## Transforming Knowledge to Action

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- Design, pilot-test, and evaluate a Social Work Practice Model resource bundle to transform knowledge into action.
- Provide feedback-and-audit reports to social-work teams about program implementation and impact.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer coaching.
- Evaluate the effect of the resources bundle.

If you would like to learn more or partner with us,  
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