

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1631

To authorize the establishment in the Department of Veterans Affairs of a center for technical assistance for non-Department health care providers who furnish care to veterans in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 23, 2011

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

A BILL

To authorize the establishment in the Department of Veterans Affairs of a center for technical assistance for non-Department health care providers who furnish care to veterans in rural areas, and for other purposes.

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. CENTER FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR**
4 **NON-DEPARTMENT HEALTH CARE PRO-**
5 **VIDERS WHO FURNISH CARE TO VETERANS**
6 **IN RURAL AREAS.**

7 (a) ESTABLISHMENT IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
8 AFFAIRS AUTHORIZED.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
2 Affairs may establish in the Department of Veterans
3 Affairs a center for technical assistance to assist
4 non-Department health providers who furnish care
5 to veterans in rural areas.

6 (2) DESIGNATION.—The center authorized by
7 paragraph (1) may be known as the “Rural Vet-
8 erans Health Care Technical Assistance Center” (in
9 this section referred to as the “Center”).

10 (b) DIRECTOR.—The head of the Center shall be the
11 Director of the Rural Veterans Health Care Technical As-
12 sistance Center, who shall be appointed by the Secretary
13 from among individuals who—

14 (1) are qualified to carry out the duties of the
15 Director; and

16 (2) have significant knowledge and experience
17 working for or with a non-Department health care
18 provider that furnishes care to veterans in rural
19 areas.

20 (c) LOCATION.—The Secretary shall select the loca-
21 tion of the Center. In selecting the location of the Center,
22 the Secretary shall give preference to a location that—

23 (1) has in place infrastructure appropriate for
24 the functions of the Center;

25 (2) is located in a State that has—

1 (A) a high number of veterans in rural and
2 highly rural areas (including veterans not en-
3 rolled in the system of annual patient enroll-
4 ment established under section 1705 of title 38,
5 United States Code); and

6 (B) a history of strong collaboration—

7 (i) between the Veterans Health Ad-
8 ministration and non-Department health
9 providers who furnish care to veterans; and

10 (ii) between the Veterans Health Ad-
11 ministration and a State institution of
12 higher education that maintains links to or
13 contracts with a State office of rural
14 health and another rural health program;
15 and

16 (3) is in proximity to one or more entities car-
17 rying out programs and activities relating to health
18 care for rural populations (including rural popu-
19 lations of veterans), including an institution of high-
20 er education carrying out such programs and activi-
21 ties that is willing to enter into a partnership with
22 the Center to assist and collaborate with the Center
23 in the discharge of its functions.

24 (d) FUNCTIONS.—The functions of the Center shall
25 be as follows:

1 (1) To develop and disseminate information,
2 educational materials, training programs, technical
3 assistance and materials, and other tools to improve
4 access to health care services for veterans in rural
5 areas and to otherwise improve the health care pro-
6 vided veterans by non-Department health care pro-
7 viders.

8 (2) To improve collaboration on health care
9 matters, including exchange of health information,
10 for veterans receiving health care from both Depart-
11 ment and non-Department providers of health care
12 services between the Department and other health
13 care providers serving rural populations, including
14 rural health clinics, community health centers serv-
15 ing rural populations, critical access hospitals serv-
16 ing rural populations, small rural hospitals, tele-
17 health networks, and other rural health care pro-
18 viders and systems.

19 (3) To establish and maintain Internet-based
20 information (including practical models, best prac-
21 tices, research results, and other appropriate infor-
22 mation) on mechanisms to improve health care for
23 veterans in rural areas.

24 (4) To work with existing Government offices
25 and agencies on health care for rural populations

1 and veterans health care, including the Office of
2 Rural Health of the Department of Veterans Affairs
3 and the Office of Rural Health Policy of the Health
4 Resources and Services Administration of the De-
5 partment of Health and Human Services, on pro-
6 grams, activities, and other mechanisms for improv-
7 ing health care for rural veterans.

8 (5) To track and monitor fee expenditures of
9 the Department relating to non-Department health
10 care providers serving rural populations and to
11 evaluate the Center through the use of an inde-
12 pendent entity experienced and knowledgeable about
13 rural health care matters, such non-Department pro-
14 viders, and programs and services of the Depart-
15 ment.

16 (e) DISCHARGE OF FUNCTIONS THROUGH PARTNER-
17 SHIPS.—For purposes of discharging its functions under
18 subsection (d), the Center may enter into partnerships
19 with persons and entities (including small business con-
20 cerns owned by veterans or veterans with service-con-
21 nected disabilities) that have demonstrated expertise in
22 the provision of educational and technical assistance for
23 veterans in rural areas, health care providers serving rural
24 populations, and persons and entities seeking to enter into
25 contracts with the Federal Government in matters relating

1 to the functions of the Center, including the provision of
2 educational and technical assistance relating to telehealth,
3 reimbursement for health care, improvement of quality of
4 care, and contracting with the Federal Government.

