



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

# **News Release**

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**VA Names 13 to Rural Health Advisory Committee**  
***Peake: Group Includes “Strong Advocates” for Vets in Rural Areas***

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake has appointed 13 people to a new Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee, which will advise him on health care issues affecting veterans in rural areas.

“This distinguished panel includes strong advocates for the needs of VA patients in rural areas,” Peake said. “This is an important step in expanding access to VA’s world-class health care system for veterans.”

The 13-member group will examine ways to enhance Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care services for veterans in rural areas by evaluating current programs and identifying barriers to health care.

The committee, chaired by James F. Ahrens, former head of the Montana Hospital Association, includes affected veterans, rural health experts in academia, state and federal professionals who focus on rural health, state-level veterans affairs officials, and leaders of veterans service organizations.

A list of the members of VA’s Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee is attached.

## **Membership**

### **VA's Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee**

- James F. Ahrens of Cascade, Mont. Former member of Montana governor's task force on health care.
- Dr. Robert Moser of Tribune, Kan. Physician who practices in rural Kansas and Colorado.
- Cynthia Barrigan of Centreville, Va. Veteran, now acting executive director of Virginia Telehealth Network.
- Charles Abramson of Missoula, Mont. Air Force veteran who served on the medical staff ethics committee of St. Patrick Hospital.
- Maj. Gen. John W. Libby of Sidney, Maine. Adjutant general of the Maine National Guard.
- Hilda Heady of Morgantown, W.Va. Social worker and associate vice president for West Virginia Rural Health Association.
- Dr. Ronald Franks of Theodore, Ala. Psychiatrist and vice president of the College of Medicine at the University of South Alabama.
- Bruce Behringer of Johnson City, Tenn. Assistant vice president at East Tennessee State University for Rural and Community Health.
- Rachel Gonzales Hanson of Uvalde, Texas. Member of National Association of Community Health Centers.
- Tom Ricketts, Ph.D., of Chapel Hill, N.C. Director of North Carolina Rural Health Research Program.
- Michael Dobmeier of South Grand Forks, N.D. National Judge Advocate of the Disabled American Veterans and president of the North Dakota Veterans Home Foundation.
- Terry Schow of Ogden, Utah. Veteran and executive director of the Utah Division of Veterans Affairs.
- James Floyd of Salt Lake City. Native American and director of the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center.

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