Telehealth Mental Health Services for Veterans

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The Rural Mental Health program uses telehealth technologies “to increase access to high quality mental care for rural veterans” in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The service eliminates the need for veterans to travel to Veterans Administration facilities for mental health services. It provides diagnostic interviews, therapy, group therapy, and medication management.

In FY 2010-2013, the program served more than 1,700 veterans via email, telephone calls, and real-time interactive video-conferencing (either from VA clinics or from the veterans’ homes using webcams). The authors estimate that during this period, telehealth allowed patients to avoid a total of more than 1 million miles of travel. Many of the diagnoses made and treated by clinicians using the telehealth system are associated with suicide risk. These include posttraumatic stress disorder (41 percent), depressive disorder (32 percent), anxiety disorders (17 percent), alcohol use disorder (7 percent), bipolar disorders (6 percent), substance abuse disorders (4 percent), and psychotic disorders (4 percent).