



OREGON DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Serving Oregon Veterans Since 1945

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Oregon's hugely successful Highly Rural Transportation Grant Program cleared its latest milestone this quarter, crossing the million-mile mark in only three and a half years. Funded by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs and administered by the state, this program is crucial in helping connect veterans who live in extremely rural areas with their VA-sanctioned health care providers and other medical needs.

The program is a state, federal and local partnership, working in conjunction with transportation providers in each of the state's 10 "highly rural" counties (fewer than seven residents per square mile): Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Lake, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa and Wheeler.

For veterans living in these areas, the nearest VA medical centers are in Boise, Walla Walla, Portland and Roseburg — round trips that encompass several hundred miles, at least.

"Veterans should be free to live where they choose, without having to worry about how they'll be able to access their VA doctors," said Sheronne Blasi, director of Statewide Veteran Services for the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. "This program, with the support of the VA and our incredible partners in these areas, is helping make that possible."

Since the program's inception in late 2014, Oregon's transportation providers have logged 1,012,790 miles. They've also spent nearly 37,000 hours on the road during a total of almost 18,000 trips. That's a tremendous return on investment from the annual grant — which provides only \$50,000 for each participating county.

"It is the creativity and dedication of these county and transportation districts that has made this program such a success," Blasi said. "How they are able to do so much with the limited resources available is truly remarkable. It is our privilege to be able to support and continue that work."

"It has really helped our rural veterans," said Angela Lamborn, executive director of the Harney County Senior and Community Services Center, ODVA's transportation partner in Harney County. "Out here, we are so far from everything. Besides us, most veterans don't have any option for transportation other than their own vehicle, and can you imagine driving 170 miles or more when you're not feeling well?"

If you are a veteran living in one of the 10 participating counties and would like more information about the Highly Rural Transportation Program, please contact your local county or transportation office. A complete list of the appropriate contacts can be found on ODVA's website at <http://wp.me/p60SnD-Nf>.