

Appendix P - Measuring Access

The goal of identifying Access Planning Initiatives for market areas throughout VHA is to improve access to primary, acute hospital and tertiary care services. Veteran enrollee access to VHA health care was measured by the travel time from the enrollee's zip code to the nearest VHA or VHA-affiliated facility offering primary, acute hospital, and tertiary care services. Once market areas and their underlying zip codes were clearly defined by each VISN, and each VHA facility was accurately identified as offering primary, acute hospital and/or tertiary care, the VHA Planning Systems Support Group (PSSG) used a transportation network analysis to identify the closest VHA facility and compute travel times. VSSC and NCPO classified each county as urban, rural, or highly rural. The Department of Transportation provided a file of all major roads including interstates, secondary roads, access roads, ferry routes, state and country roads. The 2002 Urban Mobility Report was used to estimate average travel speeds over different types of roads for different population density areas.

The VSSC then applied these driving time data to the veteran enrollment data at the zip code level. Driving time guidelines were used to develop driving time polygons (30 minutes, 60 minutes, 90 minutes, 120 minutes, 4 hours) around each facility. This was done for all primary care, acute hospital and tertiary hospital facilities, using the driving time polygon corresponding to the rural standard (below). The number of veteran enrollees with a zip code that fell within one of those driving time polygons was summed for each market area in all VISNs. Access was assessed by the proportion of enrollees within a market achieving the standards for access to primary, acute hospital and tertiary care.

Driving Time Guidelines for Driving Time Polygons

TYPE OF CARE	Urban	Rural	Highly Rural
Primary Outpatient Care	30 minutes	30 minutes	60 minutes
Inpatient Hospital Care (Med/Surg/Psych)	60 minutes	90 minutes	120 minutes
Tertiary Hospital Care	3-4 hours	3-4 hours	Within VISN

Primary Care Access Planning Initiatives were identified for any market with less than 70 percent of their enrollees, or more than 11,000 total enrollees, who did not meet the driving time guidelines for primary care. Hospital and Tertiary Care Planning Initiatives were identified for any market with less than 65 percent of their enrollees, or more than 12,000 total enrollees, who did not meet the driving time guidelines for those categories. These criteria were developed based on national average compliance with the driving time guidelines. Further details on the methodology used to calculate access can be found in the Reference Section.