

Washington, DC - The members of Vermont's Congressional Delegation - Sen. Patrick Leahy (D), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I) and Rep. Peter Welch (D) - welcomed the announcement Monday that the VA Medical Center in White River Junction has been selected to host the East Coast's Rural Health Resource Center. The Vermont lawmakers have pressed for steps to increase VA medical access in Vermont's rural areas.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plans to open the White River Junction Rural Health Resource Center on Oct. 1, along with two other centers in other parts of the country. Leahy, Sanders and Welch noted that the facility will draw additional resources and staff to Vermont's VA medical center, with details to be solidified soon. These centers will serve as satellite offices for the VA's Office of Rural Health and will help identify disparities in health care for rural veterans and develop programs to improve the delivery of care.

In June the Vermont Delegation sent a letter of support to the VA for one of the centers to be based in White River Junction. The White River Junction Medical Center already produces policy research on rural veterans, which will continue in the new center.

"For several years the congressionally mandated Rural Health Care Initiative provided added support for quality health care at White River Junction VA Medical Center," said Leahy. "The new resource center will build on this expertise, deepening the Medical Center's commitment to bringing quality health care to veterans, no matter where they live. This is another constructive step forward to help bring these services to veterans in and near Vermont."

"It is no secret that many rural veterans have a difficult time accessing the VA health benefits they have earned through their service. This new program at White River Junction will help us develop the innovative solutions we need so that every veteran gets access to the care he or she deserves," Sanders said.

Welch said, "This is a significant step in assuring the VA is innovative and effective at meeting the needs of rural veterans. Establishing these Rural Health Resource Centers recognizes the unique needs of rural veterans and also the disproportionately high number of veterans who live in rural areas like Vermont."