

# Esri News

## for Health & Human Services

Summer 2013

### Visualizing Choices to Better Serve Veterans

The Veterans Health Administration Leverages the Power of Geospatial Technology and New, Innovative Methodologies to Improve Veterans' Access to Health Care

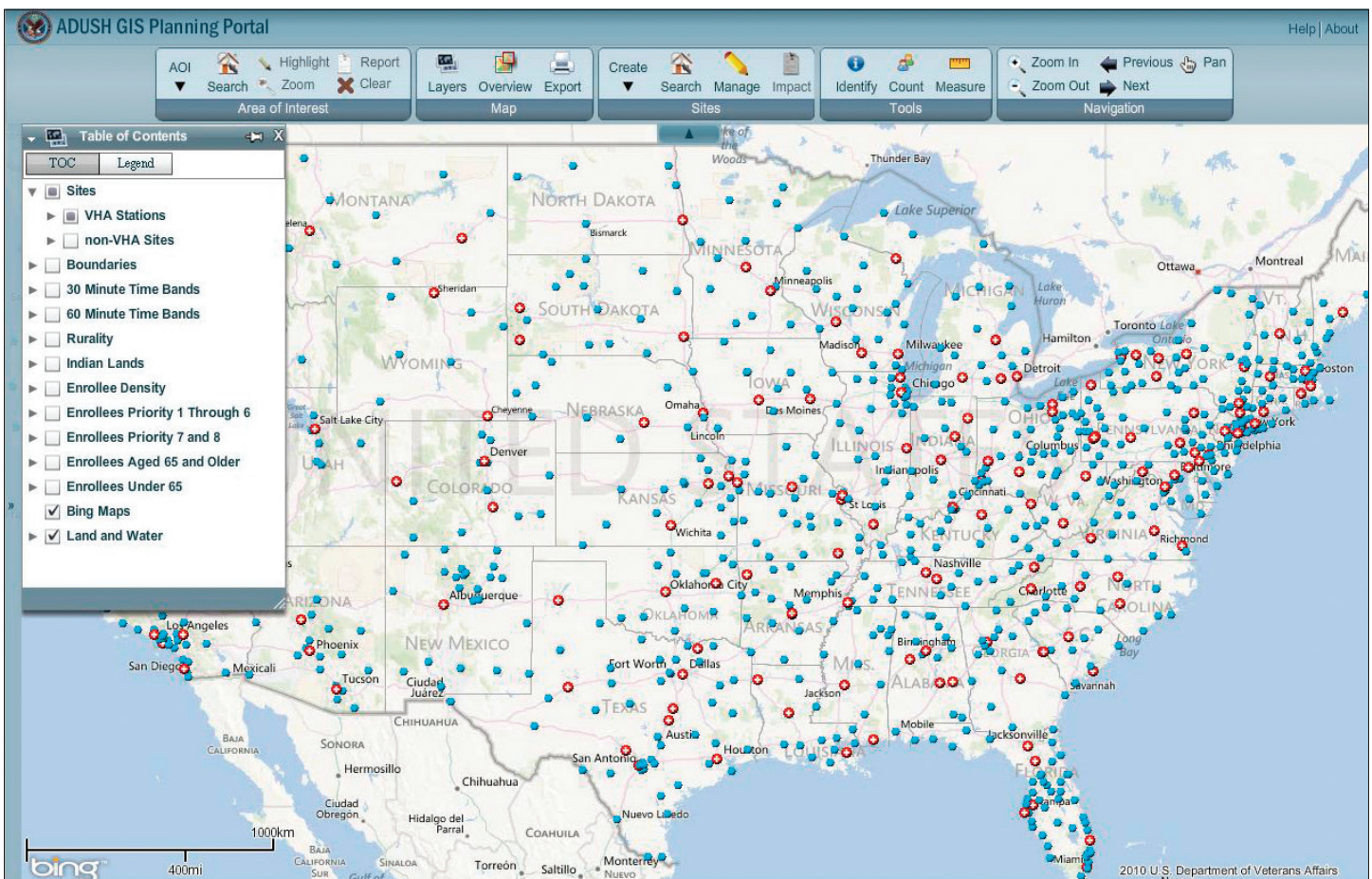
By Kevin J. Willis, Supervisory Geographer, Planning Systems Support Group, Veterans Health Administration

Located in Gainesville, Florida, the Planning Systems Support Group (PSSG) is a field unit of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health (ADUSH) for Policy and Planning. Its primary mission is to assist US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) planners in improving veterans' access to health care via the application

of advanced GIS tools and geospatial analysis. The goal: to turn geographic information into the strategy needed to optimize VA resources and provide the right services to the greatest number of veterans.

The PSSG is the primary source of geographic data and analysis needed to evaluate access and to plan new sites of care. Using

data from the VA Site Tracking System (VAST) and the enrollee travel time file, PSSG computes drive time to the nearest VA primary, secondary, and tertiary site of care for more than eight million enrollees.



↑ Geographer Chris Richmond of PSSG created this map showing location-allocation analysis in action to assist the Readjustment Counseling Services (RCS).

## PSSG and the Planning Portal

PSSG data and services directly support the VA Enrollee Health Care Projection Model used to develop estimates for approximately 95 percent of the VHA medical care budget. Also, this model is required for all new VA site planning. In addition to VHA strategic planners, past PSSG clients have included the White House Health IT Task Force, the Indian Health Service, the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, and numerous VHA program offices and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) offices.

A broad range of VHA GIS users find the geospatial tools to be highly valuable in their pursuit of ensuring that more veterans have access to care given finite resources. The GIS Planning Portal helps accomplish this by allowing planners to visualize how decisions regarding their facility locations spatially relate to the residential locations of veteran beneficiaries. The ADUSH GIS Planning Portal is a handy starting point for VA planners to identify

access gaps in geographic coverage and how to best allocate existing and future resources for our veterans.

## Combining Collaboration with Innovation

Since mid-2011, PSSG has been applying advanced location-allocation analysis, a feature of ArcGIS software, to assist planners who are contemplating where to best locate new facilities. Analyses conducted by PSSG have assisted numerous planners and high-level stakeholders in estimating the future impact of site openings and closings given certain criteria and projected data. The group would like GIS technologies to be considered the “tool of choice, to help visualize choice” within VA.

The PSSG was honored when the Readjustment Counseling Services (RCS) asked it for preliminary location-allocation analysis to assist with the placement of 20 new Mobile Vet Center vehicles nationwide.

The PSSG supplies VA offices with VISN and national maps and Health Care Planning Model (HCPM) maps. In addition to these tools, PSSG oversees the development of a Geographic Access Report that provides county- and market-level summary data for primary care, acute care, and tertiary care, using the end-of-fiscal-year geographic access summary data.

Regardless of the task, project, or initiative, PSSG strives to help veterans and those who serve our veterans to better “visualize choice” utilizing GIS technologies and methodologies.

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