

Community Care

VFW's Concerns:

With 145 medical centers, 1,235 community-based outpatient clinics, and a total of nearly 1,700 points of care, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system is tasked with providing timely and high-quality health care to nearly seven million veterans, their families, and survivors every year. The VA health care system has consistently outperformed private sector health care systems in independent assessments. The VFW's numerous health care surveys have also validated that veterans who use VA health care are satisfied with the care they receive. In fact, our latest survey found that 77 percent of veterans report being at least somewhat satisfied with their VA health care experience. When asked why they turn to VA for their health care needs, veterans report that VA delivers high-quality care which is tailored to their unique needs, and because VA health care is an earned benefit.

VA has made significant strides since the access crisis erupted in 2014 when whistleblowers across the country exposed how long veterans were waiting for the care they have earned and deserve. However, VA still has a lot of work to do to ensure all veterans have timely access to high quality and veteran-centric care. Due to a continuous increasing demand for health care from veterans, under-resourcing, and system-wide problems, VA has faced many challenges in meeting its obligations to deliver timely and high-quality care. Veterans deserve reduced wait times and shorter commutes to their medical appointments. This means turning to community care when needed, but also means improving VA's ability to provide direct care.

The VFW calls on Congress to swiftly pass S. 2193, the *Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2017*, which would:

- Improve and consolidate VA's disparate community care programs to eliminate confusion among veterans, VA staff, and community care doctors as to when and how veterans access private sector.
- Authorize veterans and their health care teams to determine when and where veterans receive their health care.
- Expand VA's caregiver program to give veterans of all eras the opportunity to live at home with their loved ones as long as possible.
- Ensure VA remains the coordinator of care for veterans to make sure veterans receive timely, high-quality, veteran-centric health care.
- Establish a much-needed community walk-in care benefit to reduce the reliance on emergency room care when veterans have urgent care needs.
- Improve oversight for opioid prescribing by community care doctors who contract with VA, which is crucial after findings that VA community care providers are prescribing opioids at higher rates than VA.
- Increase graduate medical education residency positions at VA medical facilities across the country, including rural, tribal, and underserved areas.
- Enable VA doctors to provide telemedicine regardless of where the veteran is located.
- Improve recruitment and retention benefits so VA can hire and retain high-quality health care professionals.
- Provide VA with much-needed supplemental appropriations and improved authorities to expand and improve its aging capital infrastructure.