

PURSUE RESPONSIBLE SPENDING AT THE

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



For two decades, the VA has operated with dramatic unchecked spending increases. With a new generation of veterans entering the VA with different needs, services, and preferences, the VA should right-size its spending priorities to reflect a changing veteran population. Congress should seek to align VA spending and pursue an external audit of the VA. Too many programs and services are set to autopilot without evaluating their effectiveness or measuring whether they are a good use of VA resources or truly benefiting the veterans they were designed to serve.

Overview

If you compare spending across every federal agency over the last ten years, no other department comes close to competing with the VA's dramatic 100 percent budget increase (excluding the growth in interest payments on federal debt). And when Congress passed the Budget Control Act of 2011, the only department-level agency where all discretionary spending was exempted from potential cuts or sequestration was the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

The VA budget for FY2021 is already record-breaking. Since 2001, the VA budget has increased 400 percent from \$45 billion to exceeding [\\$240 billion for FY2021](#). Additionally, the CARES Act included an additional \$20 billion in supplemental emergency funds for the VA to respond to COVID-19. From FY2014 to FY2017, the number of VA patients grew by a mere 3.6 percent while the number of department personnel [grew by 12.5 percent](#).

We know a massive infusion of funding over the last two decades has failed to prevent waitlist scandals, fraud, abuse, failed IT systems, and mismanagement in the VA system. Even with an increase of funding and personnel, the VA's core problems have persisted. Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs should take a step back and evaluate what is working and not working for current and future veterans.

CONGRESS SHOULD

- **Audit the VA** – Spending at the VA has grown exponentially under the leadership of both President Obama and President Trump. Where and how dollars are being spent should be subject to an independent audit to examine how to slow spending and identify waste and efficiencies. While the VA is already subject to an annual financial audit, the allocation of VA resources and veterans served should be examined. This could include, but is not limited to, the following: metrics on staffing levels, justifications for expanding the VA workforce, a full list of pilot programs currently operating with the number of veterans being served and an understanding of their effectiveness.
- **Examine Expiring VA Programs** – Instead of simply authorizing extensions of VA programs at the end of every fiscal year, the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees should hold hearings and require the VA to justify the continuance of those programs.
- **Keep VA Spending On-Budget** – Since the VA MISSION Act passed, appropriators have tried to designate accounts within the community care program and others as emergency spending to [exempt it from the defense base and non-defense base budget limits](#). Congress should not use our nation's veterans and budget gimmicks to justify spending increases. This disincentivizes Congress and the VA from taking a tough look at budget priorities and how to provide the quality services and health care our veterans deserve.