

IMPROVE ACCESS AND QUALITY OF VA HEALTH CARE



Veterans deserve access to quality health care in a timely manner. In 2021, Congress should ensure the bipartisan VA MISSION Act is implemented as designed and eligible veterans can access community care. Key sections of the law remain in the early stages of implementation and require ongoing oversight by policymakers. To continue modernizing the VA health care system, Congress should support maximum health care choice for our nation's veterans and examine eligibility for VA health services.

Preserve VA MISSION Act Progress

In the middle of a global pandemic, the VA should be using all the tools Congress gave it to afford veterans quality and timely care. It is alarming to hear the pandemic has resulted in [nearly 20 million canceled appointments at the VA](#) and [millions of those lack any indication of follow-up from the VA to reschedule](#). Congress should provide oversight to ensure continued progress on implementing the VA MISSION Act, including:

- Oversee Community Care Access and Wait Times:
Wait times and appointment backlogs will only grow unless the VA leverages the options given by the VA MISSION Act to provide care via community providers. Congress should provide oversight over the Community Care Network (CCN)

contracts to ensure adequate network capacity to meet the access standards. Congress should monitor community care authorization and appointment wait times as well as [paying community providers in a timely manner](#).

- Protect Access Standards:
The current access standards for the Veterans Community Care Program should remain unchanged, and if anything, further expanded to give more veterans choice. They closely match access standards for DoD healthcare, other networks and appropriately account for the differences between primary, specialty, and mental health care.
- Implement the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission:
The VA MISSION Act included the creation of an independent commission charged with realigning VA's infrastructure to meet the changing needs and demographics of the veteran population. The process of confirming commissioners, setting up the commission, and publishing necessary criteria will kick off in earnest in 2021. Read more in CVA's [explainer document](#).



Give Full Health Care Choice

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many veterans learned even with the VA MISSION Act, they lack health care choice. Veterans should have the freedom to choose where they take their health care benefits based on what suits their unique needs. Congress should pass:

- [Veterans' True Choice Act](#) (Rep. Steube, H.R. 364) would expand health insurance options for disabled veterans and enable service-connected veterans to use TRICARE Select and TRICARE for Life.
- [The Veterans Health Care Freedom Act](#) (Rep. Biggs, H.R. 2910) would carry out a pilot program to improve the ability of veterans to access medical care in medical facilities of VA and in the community by providing the veterans the ability to choose health care providers. This is in line with [Commission on Care recommendation #1](#).
- [The Veteran Access to Direct Primary Care Act](#) (Rep. Roy, H.R. 1520) would establish a pilot program to provide veteran health savings accounts to allow veterans to receive primary care furnished under non-Department direct primary care service arrangements.

Continue VA Health Care System Reforms

While the VA MISSION Act set in motion some of the significant changes the VA health care system has seen in decades, yet the VA remains in need of further reforms like examining eligibility and conducting an audit to understand how the VA is utilizing resources. Legislation that puts the VA on the pathway to modernization includes:

- [The Modernizing Veterans' Healthcare Eligibility Act](#) (Rep. Bost, H.R. 1216) would create a bipartisan commission to assess veterans' eligibility for care within the VA and make recommendations for how to revise and simplify a system that has not seen any significant reforms since 1996. We know the veteran population is changing rapidly and assembling more data and expert analysis is needed. This aligns with Commission on Care recommendation #18 that urges the VA to determine who and what services the VA is best positioned to provide to veterans.
- [Conduct a VA Audit](#)
Where and how dollars are being spent at VA should be subject to an independent audit to examine how to slow spending and identify waste and efficiencies. Legislation is currently being drafted, but not yet introduced.