

# IMPROVE ACCESS AND QUALITY OF CARE



It has been over two years since the COVID-19 pandemic hit and many veterans found even with the VA MISSION Act, they lack health care choice. [Delayed](#) and denied health care has real impacts on our veterans. It can be the difference between timely treatment and a diagnosis that permanently changes the life of a veteran and their family. Congress should act to provide aggressive oversight to protect our veterans.

The VA MISSION Act was passed in 2018 and launched some of the most significant reforms of the VA in decades. This included creating the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) that gave greater health care choice to millions of veterans. However, the VA has chosen to selectively pick and choose what regulations and sections of the law to follow. From [reports](#) of VA staff overruling VA doctors and cutting off access to community care to the VA [blowing past](#) deadlines to modernize its infrastructure, advocating for the VA MISSION Act to be properly implemented is critical.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

**Hold VA Accountable to VA MISSION Act Requirements:** While significant portions of the VA MISSION Act have been implemented, details that have emerged from [external investigations](#) reveal a federal agency with a history of denying and delaying care for veterans is doing it again. The Government Accountability Office [wrote](#) Secretary McDonough in May 2021 and outlined why the VA's current scheduling practices leave wait time calculations being "subject to interpretation and prone to scheduler error." This comes on top of nearly [20 million](#) appointments canceled in 2020, many of which lack documentation of follow-up from the VA.

Apart from community care, the VA MISSION Act also created a commission to examine modernizing the VA's infrastructure, yet in early 2022 [announced](#) they would not be meeting deadlines established in the law. Examining the VA's aging infrastructure is long overdue as the geographic distribution of the veteran population shifts and health care delivery methods change dramatically.

Oversight is needed by Congress to course-correct and hold the VA accountable to following the law.

- **Codify VA MISSION Act Access Standards.** The GHAPS Act (S.1863/H.R.4624) by Sen. Moran and Rep. Bost includes language to codify the current VA MISSION Act Access Standards for community care. By passing this legislation, Congress can ensure veterans continue to receive community care without the threat of administrative changes rolling back progress.
- **Conduct oversight hearings and demand an Inspector General investigation into community care wait times.** Investigations have uncovered internal documents used by the VA that make it clear the VA is using improper methods to calculate wait times and denying community care. Furthermore, the VA is canceling and rescheduling appointments and failing to offer community care al-

ternatives, actively dissuading veterans from choosing community options, over-riding clinician community care referral recommendations, and using cost to determine whether to refer a patient out to the community. [\[Read CVA's key findings here\]](#)

- **Confirm AIR Commissioners and ensure VA meets deadlines.** The White House has missed the deadline to submit nominees to the Senate for confirmation and punted on meeting the deadline for submitting their report that outlines recommended infrastructure modernization changes. Following the law is important and any efforts to delay or rollback the AIR commission should be rejected.

**Grant Full Health Care Choice:** The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the weaknesses within our health care systems. Veterans learned first-hand the barriers that exist for them to access non-VA care. It is time for policymakers to support legislation to give veterans full choice through a portable health care benefit that includes flexibility to choose the health care that meets their unique needs.

**Pursue Transformative VA Reforms:** While the VA MISSION Act set in motion some of the significant changes the VA health care system has seen in decades, the VA remains in need of further reforms. The Commission on Care recommendation #18 urged the VA to determine who and what services the VA is best positioned to provide for veterans. Congress should:

- Support legislation like the Modernizing Veterans Healthcare Eligibility Act (H.R. 1216) by Rep. Bost to create a commission to examine the issue by bringing together an expert panel to assemble more data and provide policy recommendations.

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