



# Improve Access and Quality of Care by Empowering Veterans

**The VA MISSION Act provided millions of veterans new pathways to timely and quality care, but too many veterans are still trapped in a broken VA system because the agency has undermined the law. Congress should streamline veterans' access to the treatment options that work best for them and reduce opportunities for administrative interference by passing "full choice" legislation.**

## THE ISSUE

Too often, the VA focuses on protecting its bureaucratic interests instead of its core mission of serving veterans, leaving our nation's heroes trapped in a broken system. Instead of empowering veterans to make the best health care decisions for themselves, the VA sees community care as a threat. Internal guidance [directs](#) schedulers to dissuade veterans from accessing community care. Reports have emerged of VA administrators [overturning](#) VA doctors' recommendations for their patients to use community care options to get treated faster. The VA Undersecretary for Health even [told staff](#) that they should "press the easy button less with community care" to drive more veterans to VA facilities. Amid an ongoing veteran mental health crisis, policymakers need to focus on making timely treatment available to those who served our country, not on forcing them to go to a particular doctor.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

### VA COMMUNITY CARE EDUCATION

The VA rarely tells veterans that community care exists, let alone whether they are eligible. Congress should require the VA to inform veterans of their community care eligibility when they request an appointment.

### SELF SCHEDULING AND BENEFITS PORTALS

Most Americans can easily schedule their health care appointments and review their benefits online. This process should be no different for veterans. The VA should create an online portal where veterans can request appointments either at VA facilities or community care providers, track the VA's decisions on referrals and appeals, and review guidelines for accessing different benefits at various stages of their lives.

### CODIFY ACCESS STANDARDS

Veterans deserve certainty about what treatment options they can rely on. Congress should codify current wait time and drive time access standards for determining community care eligibility, including existing language requiring wait times to be measured from the date a veteran requests an appointment to the date he or she receives treatment.

### BENEFIT FLEXIBILITY FOR DISABLED VETERANS

Veterans with the highest disability ratings should have the maximum flexibility to seek coverage that best meets their individual needs. Congress should allow veterans in priority groups I-III the option to enroll in TRICARE Select or TRICARE for Life, if Medicare eligible, rather than the VA system, if they prefer. These plans would allow disabled veterans to access treatment in the community without pre-approval, as active duty servicemembers and military retirees using these plans already can.

### FULL HEALTH CARE CHOICE

Veterans should not need to jump through complex administrative hoops to be able to choose where to use their health care benefits. Congress should allow veterans the choice of using their health benefits at VA or community facilities without preapproval by passing full health care choice.