



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Fact Sheet

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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Veteran Community Care – Eligibility VA MISSION Act of 2018

Under the VA MISSION Act of 2018, Veterans will have better access and greater choice in health care either at VA or a community provider through improved eligibility criteria. The new eligibility criteria are projected to go into effect in June 2019 after final regulations are published and effective. These criteria are not yet final.

Key aspects of community care eligibility are noted below:

- Veterans must receive approval from VA prior to obtaining care from a community provider in most circumstances.
- Veterans must either be enrolled in VA health care or be eligible for VA care without needing to enroll to be eligible for community care.
- Eligibility for community care will continue to be dependent upon a Veteran's individual health care needs or circumstances.
- VA staff members generally make all eligibility determinations.
- Veterans will usually have the option to receive care at a VA medical facility regardless of their eligibility for community care.
- Meeting any one of six eligibility criteria listed below is sufficient to be referred to a community provider—a Veteran does not have to meet all of them to be eligible.

Eligibility Criteria

1. Veteran Needs a Service Not Available at a VA Medical Facility

In this situation, a Veteran needs a specific type of care or service that VA does not provide in-house at any of its medical facilities.

Example: If you are a female Veteran and need maternity care, you would be eligible for community care because VA does not provide maternity care in any of its medical facilities.

2. Veteran Lives in a U.S. State or Territory Without a Full-Service VA Medical Facility

In this scenario, a Veteran lives in a U.S. State or territory that does not have a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, and the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Example: If you are a Veteran living in Guam, you would be eligible for community care because you reside in a State without a full-service VA medical facility.

3. Veteran Qualifies under the “Grandfather” Provision Related to Distance Eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program

For this element, there are a few different ways that a Veteran could be eligible for community care. Initially, there are two requirements that must be met in every case:

- Veteran was eligible under the 40-mile criterion under the Veterans Choice Program on the day before the VA MISSION Act was enacted into law (June 6, 2018), **and**
- Veteran continues to reside in a location that would qualify them under that criterion.

If both of these requirements have been met, a Veteran may be eligible if one of the following is also true:

- Veteran lives in one of the five States with the lowest population density from the 2010 Census: North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Alaska, and Wyoming, **or**
- Veteran
 - lives in another State,
 - received care between June 6, 2017, and June 6, 2018, **and**
 - requires care before June 6, 2020

Example A: If you are a Veteran who has lived in Kansas since 2012, your home is 41 miles driving distance to the nearest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician, and you received VA care between June 6, 2017, and June 6, 2018, you would be eligible for community care until June 6, 2020.

Example B: If you are a Veteran who lives in Wyoming and you qualified under the 40-mile criterion under the Veterans Choice Program on June 5, 2018, you would be eligible for community care.

4. VA Cannot Furnish Care within Certain Designated Access Standards

To be eligible under this criterion, VA would have to be unable to schedule a VA appointment for a Veteran at a facility within a specific average drive time **and** within a certain number of days (wait time). If VA could not schedule an appointment that is within both the average driving time standards and the wait-time standard, then the Veteran would be eligible for community care.

The specific access standards are described below. (**Important:** Access standards are proposed and not yet final).

Average drive time to a specific VA medical facility

- 30-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services (including adult day health care)

- 60-minute average drive time for specialty care

Note: Average drive times are calculated by VA using geo-mapping software that uses inputs such as traffic to calculate the average driving time.

Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility

- 20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with their VA health care provider
- 28 days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with their VA health care provider

Example A: If you are a Veteran and live 10 miles from the nearest VA primary care provider, but it takes you over an hour to drive there on average due to heavy traffic, you would be eligible for community care.

Example B: If you live an average drive time of 25 minutes from the nearest VA medical facility and need a primary care appointment, but cannot be scheduled for one for 25 days, you would be eligible for community care.

Example C: If you live an average drive time of 50 minutes from a VA hospital, but that hospital doesn't offer the specialty care or service you need, and the closest VA facility that does offer that care or service is a 75-minute drive away, you would be eligible for community care.

5. It Is in the Veteran's Best Medical Interest

In this situation, a Veteran may be referred to a community provider when the Veteran and the referring clinician agree that it is in their best medical interest to see a community provider.

Example: If you are a Veteran with a certain type of ovarian cancer that your VA oncologist is not experienced in treating, and you live close to a community medical facility where there is specialist for that type of cancer, you could be eligible for community care if the clinician and patient agree that this treatment should be furnished by the community medical facility.

6. A VA Service Line Does Not Meet Certain Quality Standards

In this scenario, if VA has identified a medical service line is not meeting VA's standards for quality based on specific conditions, Veterans can elect to receive care from a community provider under certain limitations.

Example: If VA has identified that the cardiology service line at a local VA medical facility is not providing care that meets VA's standards for quality, you may be able to elect to receive your cardiology care in the community. However, there may be limits on when, where, and what is available under this criterion.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. I like the care I get at VA and don't want to go to a community provider, even if I'm eligible. Can I still go to the VA?** Yes, Veterans who are eligible for community care will continue to have the choice to receive care at VA or a community provider.
- 2. I'm currently receiving community care through the Veterans Choice Program. Will I still be eligible under the new eligibility criteria?** The new criteria are designed to ensure that Veterans currently eligible for community care, especially those who are wait-time or drive-time eligible, have access to the care they need. However, a final determination on your eligibility for community care will continue to depend on the specific type of care you need, your circumstances, whether or not the care is available through a VA medical facility, and other factors. Beginning June 6, 2019, VA will no longer be able to furnish care and services through the Veterans Choice Program, so VA will need to determine your eligibility under one of the six criteria described above.
- 3. I am receiving community care right now, and I like the clinician who is taking care of me. With these changes, will I still be able to see my clinician?** Eligibility for community care will continue to be dependent upon your individual health care needs and circumstances, available care at a VA medical facility, and other factors. VA staff will work with you to determine your eligibility and if you can continue to see your clinician.
- 4. Why did VA switch from distance to average drive time criteria?** Veterans in urban areas can experience drive times that are as long or longer than Veterans in rural or remote areas. The switch to average drive-time criteria provides Veterans located in urban areas with improved choices for community care when average drive times to the nearest VA facility are long. Drive time is also commonly-used in the public and private health care sectors.
- 5. Are Choice Cards valid after June 5, 2019?** No, Choice Cards are not valid under the new community care program.
- 6. I'm a community provider and currently see Veterans in my practice who are distance-eligible under the Veterans Choice Program. Will they still be eligible for community care?** Veterans eligible under the 40-mile criterion under the Veterans Choice Program may still be eligible depending on their individual health care needs or circumstances. Veterans should contact their local VA facility to determine if they are still eligible for community care.

Understanding the changes in Community Care for Veterans

This will help you understand how community care will work when the new **VA MISSION Act** goes into effect **in June 2019**. Veterans can expect better access and greater choice in their health care, whether they receive it at VA or through a community provider.

► *This information is current as of March 29, 2019. Additional details regarding the new program and how you can use it are expected in the coming months so please check back at www.va.gov for updated information.*



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

ChooseVA

What is the VA MISSION Act?

On June 6, 2018, President Donald J. Trump signed landmark legislation known as the [VA MISSION Act of 2018](#). The Act affects many VA programs, including changes that make dramatic improvements to how Veterans receive health care provided outside of VA facilities.

Will I be eligible for community care under the MISSION Act?

You may be eligible for community care if:

- You need a service that's not available at VA (e.g. maternity care).
- You reside in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility.
- You met previous distance criteria or live in one of the least populated states (ND, SD, MT, AK, WY), received care prior to June 6, 2018, and receive care within two years after June 6, 2018.
- You meet average drive time or appointment wait-time requirements.
- It's in your best medical interest to be referred to a community provider.
- You need care from a VA medical service line that isn't providing care that complies with VA's quality standards.

When will these changes occur?

The new program will start when VA publishes final regulations. This is expected to occur in June 2019. At that time, all existing community care programs, including the Veterans Choice Program, will end.

Proposed Access Requirements

Drive Time

You may be eligible if your average drive time to a specific VA medical facility exceeds:

- *30 minutes for primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services (including adult home day care)*
- *60 minutes for specialty care*
Average drive time is based on the distance from your permanent residence to the closest VA medical facility offering the care or service you need. It is based on geo-mapping software that accounts for a variety of factors, such as rush hour traffic.

Appointment Wait Time

You may be eligible if the wait time for an appointment at a specific VA medical facility exceeds:

- *20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services*
- *28 days for specialty care from the date of request with certain exceptions*

FAQ:

Will VA still need to officially authorize the care I receive through a community provider?

Yes, usually. Regardless of which eligibility criterion you meet, community care must be formally authorized in advance by VA before you can make an appointment and receive care from a community provider. However, you may not need to come to a VA facility to obtain the authorization. The law requires that VA provide authorization before they can pay for non-VA care. There may be exceptions for emergency and urgent care.

Who will schedule my community care appointments?

As VA implements its new Community Care Network (CCN) in 2019 and 2020, community care appointments will be scheduled directly by VA, not a third party. You will also continue to have the option of making your own community care appointments.

Will I be able to go to any community provider I want?

If you are eligible for community care, you will be able to receive care from a community provider who is part of VA's Community Care Network (CCN).

Will the process for getting prescription medication change?

There are no changes to how prescriptions are processed. You'll be able to get urgent prescription medication in your community, while long-term prescription medication will be provided by a VA pharmacy.

Will I have a copayment for community care?

Copayment charges work the same way with community care as they do if you receive care at a VA medical facility. Usually, this means you'll be charged a copayment for non-service connected conditions. Copayment charges and payments are made through VA, not through your community provider.

Will VA pay beneficiary travel expenses if I am referred to a community provider?

If you're eligible for beneficiary travel, your eligibility will not change. It's paid the same way whether the care is provided at a VA medical facility or through a community provider.

Is this information final?

Since some parts of the new eligibility criteria aren't final and must formally be established in a Federal regulation, this is a preview of the final eligibility criteria. The final criteria are expected in June 2019.

How can I get updates?

- Visit us online at www.missionact.VA.gov.
- Visit us in person at your local VA Medical Center. You can locate a VA Medical Center near you at www.VA.gov/find-locations/.

VA MISSION Act

Key Elements



What is the MISSION Act?

The MISSION Act puts Veterans at the center of care to coordinate their care whether it's at a VA facility or in partnership through a community provider.

The VA MISSION Act:

1. Improves community care
2. Expands eligibility for Caregiver Support
3. Enhances VA's ability to recruit and retain top notch employees
4. Strengthens VA's building infrastructure

VA's High Quality of Care:

- A 2018 RAND study found VA health care performed similarly or better than the private sector. The study was issued by an American nonprofit organization that analyzes national inpatient and outpatient quality of care measures.
- A 2019 Dartmouth College study found the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) may provide better care than the private sector in every local area. It also found VA health care was significantly better than non-VA care in 14 out of 15 quality and patient safety indicators.



Key Elements

Access to Care – VA offers same day services for Mental Health and Primary Care at all sites across the country.

Improves Community Care – The MISSION Act streamlines VA community care programs making it easier to navigate, for Veterans, their families, community providers, and VA employees.

Expand Eligibility for Caregiver Support - The MISSION Act expands eligibility for VA's Caregiver program. It will now include eligible Veterans from all eras of service. The expansion will occur in two phases. The first starts with those who were injured on or before May 7, 1975. Further expansion will occur two years later. The expansion timeline is still under development.

Strengthen VA's Infrastructure - The Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) process in the MISSION Act will provide VA the necessary flexibility to improve older buildings, bringing them in line with modern standards to help us support new and high tech equipment.

Strengthen VA's Ability to Recruit and Retain - VA is focused on recruiting top notch health care experts to ensure Veterans are receiving the care they have earned. This Act will allow for a new scholarship program, greater access to VA's education debt-reduction program and improved flexibility for providing bonuses for recruitment, relocation and retention.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Caring for Veterans

Community Care Programs

- New and improved Veterans Community Care Program
- Access to walk-in care
- Veterans Care Agreements between VA and non-VA providers
- Agreements with state Veterans' homes
- Market assessments and strategic plans

Paying Providers & Improving Collections

- Prompt payment to providers for authorized care
- Collections ability for non-service connected disabilities

Education & Training Programs

- Education program for Veterans on health care options
- VA and contract staff training program on non VA-health care
- Medical education for non VA medical professionals

Telehealth, Care and Payment, Live Organ Donors

- Licenses for VA health care professionals providing treatment via telemedicine
- VA Center of Innovation for Care and Payment
- Providing live donor transplant procedures for Veteran

Other Matters – Non-VA Providers

- Safe opioid prescribing practices by non-VA providers
- Information sharing with community providers
- Competency standards for non-VA providers
- Access to state prescription drug monitoring programs

Non-VA Health Related Matters

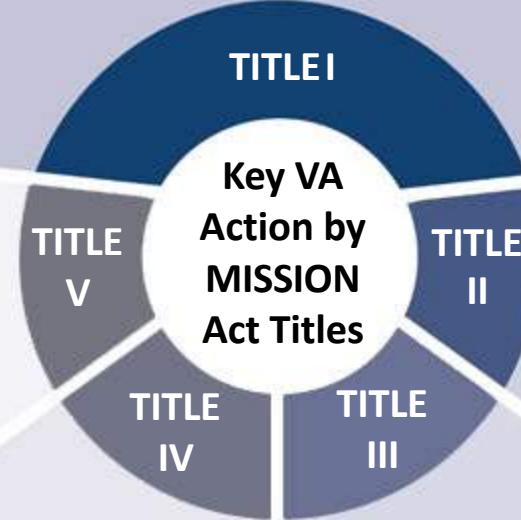
- Planned requests for new funding
- Veterans Choice funding assistance for non-Choice community care
- Ending of the Veterans Choice Program

Caregivers

- Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers
- IT system to assess and improve the family caregivers program

Other Matters

- Report on staffing levels (Hiring)
- Role of podiatrists in VA
- Outline of major medical facility projects
- Major medical facility projects in Livermore, California
- Peer specialists in Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) settings
- VA medical scribe pilot program



Care in Underserved areas

- Rules to classify a facility as underserved
- Pilot program for mobile deployment teams to underserved facilities
- Pilot program on graduate medical education and residency

Strengthening VA's Workforce

- Scholarships for VA physicians and dentists
- Student loan repayment increases
- VA Specialty Education Loan Repayment program
- Veterans Healing Veterans Scholarship Program
- Recruitment, relocation and retention incentives

Strengthening VA's Infrastructure

- Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission to align VHA facilities
- Improve training of construction personnel
- Review of enhanced use leases
- Assess health care in Pacific territories

Veterans Affairs Educational Initiatives

The Veterans Affairs MISSION Act of 2018,

signed into law on June 6, will strengthen VA's ability to deliver the quality care and timely service Veterans have earned.

The VA health care system will:



Ensure easy and reliable access to care when Veterans need it.



Provide exceptional care to Veterans anytime, anywhere.



Serve as a trusted, caring partner, helping Veterans and their families be healthy and well.



About the Office of Academic Affiliations

Since 1946, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has conducted education programs for trainees in over 40 different health professions. This statutory mission is accomplished through coordinated programs and activities in partnership with over 1,800 affiliated U.S. colleges and universities. VA plays a leadership role in educating future healthcare professionals to meet the changing needs of healthcare delivery for Veterans and the nation.

These education initiatives are in partnership with VA's Office of Workforce Management and Consulting. For more information, contact the Office of Academic Affiliations:

- www.va.gov/oaa
- www.vacareers.va.gov/Benefits/EducationSupport
- (202) 461-9490



- Medical and Dental Scholarships
- Education Debt Reduction Program
- Specialty Education Loan Repayment Program
- Veterans Healing Veterans Program
- Graduate Medical Education Expansion into Rural Areas





Veterans Affairs MISSION Act of 2018 Office of Academic Affiliations Educational Initiatives

Congress enacted five educational initiatives as part of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 to recruit and retain physicians. The VA MISSION Act empowers VA to improve recruitment through scholarships and loan repayments. VA particularly needs professionals:

- **From underrepresented populations.**
- **Who are Veterans.**
- **Willing to practice in underserved and rural areas.**
- **In specialties critically needed by VA.**

These initiatives, authorized by Congress in 2018, are under development.



Medical and Dental Scholarships

- VA's Health Professionals Scholarship Program provides scholarships to medical and dental students in exchange for service at VA.
- Includes tuition, fees, books and equipment, and a stipend for 2 to 4 years with an obligation of 18 months of service for each year of support.
- Applicants must agree to specialize in a field applicable to VA and are required to complete training leading to licensure and board eligibility.
- Minimum number of scholarships is 50 annually, or 10% of VA's physician shortage when that number falls below 500.
- Anticipated beginning date of the program is FY 2020.



Education Loan Repayment

- The MISSION Act increased debt relief available through the **Education Debt Reduction Program** to full- or part-time providers from \$24,000 to \$40,000 annually, and a maximum level of support from \$120,000 to \$200,000 over five years. Search "EDRP" in USAJobs.gov for positions offering EDRP.
- Authorizes VA to establish a new **Specialty Education Loan Repayment Program** to recent medical school graduates with at least 2 years remaining in residency in exchange for a service obligation at VA facilities.
 - The commitment for service is one year for each \$40,000 of loan repayment with a minimum obligation of 2 years.
 - Qualified loans must be for educational expenses, with a maximum limit of \$160,000.
 - Applicants must be in a specialty applicable to VA and must agree to complete training leading to licensure and board eligibility.
 - Specialties and locations will be determined by VA based on projected staffing needs.
- Anticipated beginning date of the program is July 2021.



Veterans Healing Veterans Program

- Creates a pilot program to provide scholarship support to two Veteran medical students at each of the five Teague-Cranston and the four Historically Black College and University medical schools in exchange for a four-year service obligation at a VA facility.
- Scholarships cover tuition, fees, equipment and books, a stipend, and costs for two rotations at a VA facility during the senior year of medical school.
- Recipient must not have separated from the Armed Forces for greater than 10 years, not be simultaneously receiving GI Bill benefits, agree to maintain acceptable academic progress, and complete residency training leading to board eligibility in a specialty that is applicable to VA.
- Participating schools must agree to reserve two seats for the highest-ranking Veteran applicants who meet the acceptance criteria for that school.
- Unused scholarships may be transferrable to the other covered schools.
- Anticipated start date for this program is for the entering class of 2020.



Graduate Medical Education Expansion into Rural Areas

- Authorizes VA to assist in the expansion or creation of graduate medical education programs in certain underserved settings.
- Allows VA to support residents' costs, at covered non-VA facilities.
- Supports startup costs for qualified new graduate medical education residency training programs, such as faculty recruitment, accreditation costs, and curriculum development.
- Covered facilities include those operated by tribal organizations, the Indian Health Service, VA, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Department of Defense, and other qualified centers.
- Uses numerous selection criteria; priority will be given to Indian and tribal organizations and those in other underserved regions.
- Anticipated beginning date of the program is 2024.

For More Information:

- www.va.gov/oaa
- www.vacareers.va.gov/Benefits/EducationSupport
- (202) 461-9490