

THE VETERANS ACCESS, CHOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2014
(Expected to be approved by the President as of August 5, 2014)

For access to care, the bill would:

- Require VA to provide authorization to any veteran to receive private health care who is enrolled in VA as of August 1, 2014; or who is a newly discharged combat veteran; is unable to secure an appointment at a VA medical facility within 30 days (or any future published waiting time limit VA establishes); or resides more than 40 miles from the nearest VA medical facility—with certain exceptions.
- Require VA to provide a “Veterans Choice Card” to all enrolled veterans to facilitate care provided by private providers if and when they are authorized to receive private care. The bill gives VA 90 days from enactment to implement this policy.
- Provide \$10 billion in emergency funding for deposit into a “Veterans Choice Fund” to cover the cost of private health care. These funds may not be spent for any other purpose.

For further review of VA, to extend programs, and for other purposes, the bill would:

- Require an assessment of VA by an outside group, and establish a Congressional Commission on Care to evaluate access and other related matters. All reports are to be made public.
- Extend the Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH) pilot program for two years, for private rural care.
- Extend for three years a pilot program to provide private assisted-living services to veterans with traumatic brain injuries.
- Expand eligibility for survivors of military sexual trauma by adding the “inactive duty for training” category.
- Expand certain services for Native Hawaiian and Native American veterans.

For improving VA’s internal capacity, the bill would:

- Provide \$5 billion to VA to increase capacity by hiring physicians and other medical staff and by repairing some of VA’s physical infrastructure.
- Authorize 27 new leases in 18 states and Puerto Rico, primarily for new VA community-based outpatient clinics.

For VA Senior Executive Service (SES) managers, the bill would:

- Authorize VA to fire or demote SES employees and Title 38 SES equivalent employees for poor performance or misconduct.
- Provide expedited and limited appeal process for employees disciplined under this authority. Appeals would go to a Merit Systems Protection Board administrative judge, who would have 21 days to decide on the appeal. If a decision is not reached within that 21-day period, then VA’s decision is final.
- Prohibit SES employees from receiving pay, bonuses and benefits during the appeal process.
- Reduce funding for all bonuses available to VA employees by \$40 million each year through FY 2024.

For education benefits, the bill would:

- Require public colleges to provide in-state tuition to veterans and eligible dependents in order for the school to remain eligible to receive G.I. Bill education payments.
- Expand the Sgt. Frye Scholarship Program to provide full Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits to spouses of service members who died in the line of duty after September 11, 2001.

Cost:

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the bill would cost nearly \$17 billion over a 10-year period, including offsets of \$5 billion.