



ISSUE BRIEF: MEETING VETERANS' NEEDS FOR LONG-TERM SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

The Situation

- VA's program of geriatric and extended care includes a broad range of long-term supports and services (LTSS) to assist veterans, regardless of age, who have lost the ability to function independently and be full participants in their communities.
- VA has committed to provide patient-centered LTSS in the least restrictive setting, honoring the veteran's preference for care placement to the extent possible. Generally, this means inpatient nursing home care is reserved for those veterans with the highest priority for care who have post-acute or rehabilitative needs, or those without a family caregiver or who can no longer be cared for safely at home.
- VA projects demand for long-term care will continue to increase, driven by growth in numbers of veterans who are at least 85 years old (who are at the highest risk for need of LTSS) and veterans with service-connected disabilities. VA is required to ensure that veterans in the highest priority group—priority 1a—who are determined to require long-term care have access to appropriate long term care in a VA community living center, medical foster home, State Veterans Home or private community nursing home through contract.

The Challenge

- Increased demand and the more medically complex needs of individuals using long-term care continue to strain availability and access to appropriate VA-furnished and purchased care for LTSS.
- According to VA's latest Geriatric and Extended Care Strategic Plan for fiscal years (FY) 2020 to 2024, even as the number of veterans overall is expected to decline between FY 2019 and FY 2039, the number of veterans who are 85 years of age or older will increase by 37.6%. The number of priority group 1a veterans and women in the 85+ age cohort will increase by 588% and 278.3%, respectively.
- Home and community-based services help fill gaps for care, are often less expensive and preferred by veterans. Growth of these services has not kept pace with demand though, as the number of veterans receiving these services increased by about 29% between fiscal years (FY) 2015 and 2019. For some programs, such as adult day care and medical foster home, utilization has actually decreased.
- VA now has authority to reimburse for care in medical foster homes for a 5-year period, starting December 29, 2022. However, it is not to exceed covering such costs for more than a daily average of 900 veterans. With the significant growth in an aging veteran population, the number of veterans VA is authorized to reimburse costs for should not be limited. In addition, many services, including veteran-directed care, where veterans are given a budget to find their own services, and other non-institutional care programs, are not available to veterans across the

system.

- LTSS are most effective when they target the populations most in need. While there are many validated needs assessment instruments available to target and tailor those services, there is no national standard used consistently throughout VA to determine veterans in need of these critical services. Locally available resources seem to drive availability of VA's home and community-based services (HCBS) more than clinical need. Lack of a national standard for determining the need for these critical services also hampers the effectiveness of planning, programs, initiatives, and services.

The Solution

- In accordance with DAV Resolution No. 016, VA should make a sustained commitment to requesting and allocating sufficient resources for effective LTSS and adopting appropriate incentives to create the right mix of VA LTSS across the system for those it serves, particularly service-disabled veterans. To understand and adequately plan for meeting veterans' needs, VA must adopt an evidence-based needs assessment instrument to determine the sufficient level of HCBS services needed for veterans and their caregivers to remain safe and active participants in their communities.
- Congress should authorize VA to reimburse medical foster home care on behalf of all eligible veterans who prefer care in this home-like setting.
- Congress should conduct rigorous oversight of VA LTSS in meeting the needs of veterans with a goal of reducing service gaps in all VA HCBS programming, expanding the veterans directed care program and creating system-wide access to other home and community-based services.