



ISSUE BRIEF: STRENGTHENING VETERANS HEALTH CARE

The Situation

- Since the Civil War, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system has evolved into a highly integrated system specializing in the distinct health needs of wounded, ill and injured veterans and their family caregivers.
- Over the years the VA has developed centers of excellence in prosthetics, spinal cord injury and disease, blinded and low vision rehabilitation, clinically complex older veterans, environmental exposures and mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder. These needs have evolved with demographics within its veterans' patient populations.
- Over the last decade VA has become increasingly dependent upon community partners to meet the rising medical care needs of veterans because of the growing misalignment between the escalating demand for care and sluggish increase in capacity of the VA health care system.
- The MISSION Act of 2018 (PL 115-182) is being implemented that will further transformation veterans' health care delivery by expanding eligibility—and thus demand for care—through VA's Community Care Network of private providers, and assessing VA's infrastructure.

The Challenge

- Congress and VA continues to increase the Department's breadth and depth of responsibility caring for wounded, ill and injured veterans without matching resources.
- VA must continue to enhance its internal capacity and programs that are designed to meet the specialized needs of service-disabled veterans especially when patients' demand for these services is not evenly distributed across the country.
- VA must also respond to different kinds of needs such as maternity care and in-vitro fertilization for which it has very limited or no resources. It must also have gender-specific programming to meet the growing needs of women veterans.
- Veterans who have used the VA and expect improved access and equally high standards of quality in the Community Care Network may not be met.

The Solution

- VA must remain the primary provider and coordinator of care for veterans who rely upon it to efficiently and effectively support veterans care.
- As a supplementary provider network to the VA health care system, the Community Care Network must be developed to ensure it is well integrated and high-performing with the VA health care system.
- VA must create standards for its Community Care Network partners that ensure access to and quality of care, and offer training to ensure providers' familiarity with veterans' unique health risks and care needs.
- Congress must closely oversee VA to ensure the VA MISSION Act is fully and faithfully implemented as intended in an open and transparent manner that provides regular opportunities for meaningful participation from VSOs and veterans at all critical decision points.
- Congress must provide VA with sufficient and timely funding to fully implement the VA MISSION Act, and to meet the full demand for care by enrolled veterans within VA facilities and through non-VA providers in the Veterans Community Care Program.