

Veterans' Health Care

The VFW's Concerns:

VFW members report noticing improvements at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, and report preferring VA care over other options. They prefer VA because they like the quality of care they receive, VA knows how to care for veterans, and because it is an earned benefit. Still, veterans want VA to improve customer service, hire more doctors to improve access, and fix its aging infrastructure. The VFW-supported *VA MISSION Act of 2018* addresses these concerns and makes other improvements to the VA health care system. The VFW has noticed two major concerns with implementation of the *VA MISSION Act of 2018* that must be addressed. VA has decided to waive the \$30 copayment for the first three urgent care appointments for certain veterans. This copayment structure is counter to VA's other copayment structures, which acknowledge that veterans should never pay a copayment for care related to a service-connected disability. Veterans who receive non-service-connected care are typically charged a copayment for such care at VA medical facilities, so it is fitting for VA to charge a copayment for non-service-connected care through community care programs. Veterans have also experienced long delays for access to community care. A recent VA Inspector General report found that some community care appointments took an average of 66 days to complete, with 34 of those days spent waiting for VA staff.

VA suicide data finds that veterans total 18 percent of adult suicides in the United States, with an average of 20 veterans and service members who die by suicide every day. Of those veterans, only six are actively enrolled in VA. Reports have also consistently found veterans ages 18-34 to be most likely to die by suicide.

Women veterans make up about 10 percent of the veteran population and are the fastest growing cohort within the veteran community. VA has made progress in gender-specific health care for women, but more is needed. VA must ensure it addresses privacy concerns, expands the amount of time new mothers are given to find health care coverage for their newborns, and makes other improvements to women veterans health care.

The VFW urges Congress to:

- Require VA to waive urgent care copayments for service-connected care and expedite the community care referral process.
- Pass S. 785, *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019*, which would provide VA the authorities it needs to expand suicide prevention efforts.
- Pass S. 514/H.R. 3224, *Deborah Sampson Act* and S. 319, *Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2019*.