

Prioritizing the Health of Virginia's Veterans Accelerating Veterans' Access to Care

Importance to Virginians

Since 2001, about 2.5 million U.S. troops have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. More than 6,000 men and women have given their lives and more than 48,000 have been injured. Virginia has the honor of having the largest increase in its veteran population of any state since 2000. Much of this trend is driven by younger veterans of recent conflicts.

One in 10 Virginians is a veteran. The Commonwealth should help ensure a smooth transition when these men and women are ready to return to civilian life. This is even more important now as the numbers of veterans continue to grow in Virginia and drawdowns of troops from Afghanistan continue. Virginia must begin by meeting their most basic need—the need for timely, quality health care.

Unfortunately, over the last few months, reports have surfaced about weaknesses in the Veterans Affairs health care system—veterans waiting for appointments much longer than they should be and facing difficulty in accessing important services. A recent report showed that Virginia is last in the nation when it comes to the ratio of VA health facilities to veterans, at only 0.3 facilities per 10,000 veterans. Some veterans in Virginia are still waiting more than 60 days to get a primary care appointment at the VA. However, Virginia is not interested in casting blame on the VA. The responsibility of caring for veterans' health needs should not be the VA's to carry alone. Instead, Virginia is committed to working together as partners with the VA to find solutions.

Goal

All of Virginia's veterans should have access to timely, quality health care. Over the next 12 months, Virginia will aim to increase access to care for veterans across the Commonwealth by promoting partnerships with the VA and private health providers.

Issue Background

On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law a measure that will provide \$16.4 billion in new funding to the VA system. The legislation directs \$10 billion in emergency spending over three years to the VA to pay private providers to care for veterans who have been unable to schedule timely appointments at the VA or live too far away from a VA hospital or clinic.

A Healthy Virginia

Strategies for Success

In the next 60 days, Virginia will host leaders from the Veterans Health Administration in Virginia and hospital/health system leaders to explore ways they can work together to improve timely access to quality care for veterans. There will be a special focus on meeting specific needs for services that veterans have difficulty accessing. In areas where the VA system has robust resources, strategies will be examined for increasing veteran referrals and encouraging regular visits with medical providers. Also, Virginia will explore ways to improve health information technology connectivity between the VA system and private systems so that care can be better coordinated and enhanced.

Timeline

The summit will lead to a clear action plan for how Virginia's hospitals and provider community can work together with the VA system to improve care for veterans.

Measures of Achievement

The ultimate goal is to decrease veteran waiting times for appointments at the VA and identify access to alternative providers of care, when needed and appropriate. We are committed to ensuring that veterans across the Commonwealth have access to high-quality, long-term care and will continue to support construction of veteran care centers in Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia. The number of new partnerships facilitated between community providers and the VA will be an interim measure of success in achieving these goals.