

**STATEMENT OF  
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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS FOR VETERANS  
AFFAIRS**

**February 12, 2020**

Good morning, Chairwoman Brownley, Chairman Pappas, Ranking Member Bergman, Ranking Member Dunn and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss Provider Relations During the Transition to VA's new Community Care Program. VA has continued to work with our providers to ensure Veterans receive the best care possible. Community providers are integral to VA's ability to provide Veterans with greater choice of and access to timely, high-quality health care. VA is continuously striving to enhance relationships with community providers by improving technology systems, deploying new tools to enhance efficiency with electronic file sharing and to address payment timeliness.

**Introduction**

This is a time of transformative change at VA. MISSION Act implementation is succeeding and has become part of our core business. We are now in a phase of proactive refinement and enhancement. We have moved beyond planning for individual sections and are strategically knitting together the tools you've given us into a future vision for the organization. As we have demonstrated this year, we will lead the U.S.

healthcare industry forward. You will see us focus and lead on modernizing our operations, bringing us in line with industry standards in key areas like claims processing and referrals. Alongside our Department of Defense and Department of Health and Human Services partners, we intend to lead the industry in quality, health information exchange, opioid safety, and ultimately care coordination powered by a joint electronic health record.

And importantly, you will see us lead in meeting Veterans where they are, including in rural areas. We have launched an effort to synergize and augment the range of solutions available to Veterans in these areas, including mobile care teams, telehealth, and the expanded reach of our new community care program. We are building a cohesive strategy that will deliver care for Veterans no matter where they choose to live or seek the care they need.

As your staff have seen, we now leverage VA's first-ever Joint Operations Center to operationalize this type of enterprise strategy - viewing enterprise data and monitoring risks and opportunities across the nation. Business intelligence is driving decisions like never before and, as we have demonstrated this year, business intelligence is centered on an excellent experience of care for Veterans, their families, and the important people in their lives.

## **Community Care**

On June 6, 2019, we successfully launched the new Veterans Community Care Program, a cornerstone of the MISSION Act. Expanded eligibility criteria, improvements to processes and technologies, and a growing network of community providers are just some of the ways that the MISSION Act has improved the options that Veterans have to address their health care needs. Since the launch, VA has placed more than 3.6 million referrals and authorized more than 3.85 million episodes of care. In these early referral patterns, it appears Veterans have improved access to specialty care. Eligibility criteria ensure that the clinical needs of the Veteran are accounted for and, when appropriate, that a Veteran can work closely with his or her provider to choose the best setting and clinician in his or her best medical interest.

Since implementation, VA has been developing and deploying improvements to the new Veterans Community Care Program that improve the experience of Veterans, community providers, and VA staff. VA is modernizing its information technology (IT) systems to replace a patchwork of old technology and manual processes that slowed down the administration and delivery of community care. Once fully implemented, the new IT systems will speed up all aspects of community care—eligibility, authorizations, appointments, care coordination, claims, payments—while improving overall communication between Veterans, community providers, and VA employees.

We intend to continue this trajectory and make ourselves the most accessible and convenient health care system in history. You have given us the tools to do so. The new streamlined community care program is easier for Veterans and their families

to navigate, and our network of more than 880,000 providers, which complements care delivered through VA facilities and by telehealth, provides an unprecedented range of options. VA remains committed to strengthening the VA health care system, expanding access, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible in serving our Nation's Veterans.

### **Urgent Care Benefit**

VA has also implemented a robust contracted network of urgent care providers that is a great new benefit for enrolled Veterans who need immediate care for minor injuries and illnesses. As of January 2020, more than 6,400 urgent care centers have joined VA's urgent care network, which is currently managed by TriWest. About 90 percent of the country's Veterans eligible for the urgent care benefit are now covered by a network urgent care provider, and since June of 2019, they have provided care to Veterans in more than 160,000 visits.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we knew when we began implementing the MISSION Act of 2018 that we had the potential to make an enormous positive impact for Veterans. More than six months later, we know that is the case – with the new tools you have provided us, VA is helping more Veterans access the care and services they need. We will continue to work to improve Veterans' access to timely, high-quality care in VA facilities and by

virtual means, augmenting this with excellent choices through our robust network of community partners.

I am proud of the future we are building on behalf of Veterans and their families, and this Committee's continued support is essential to ensure it is realized. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.

February 2020  
Department of Veterans Affairs