

## **Veterans Choice Improvement Act of 2016**

In 2014, Congress took the first step to address the VA health care crisis with the passage of the Veterans Choice Act, which created the new Choice card that allows veterans who face long waits or distances to see a doctor of their choice. Since then, we have learned that systemic problems still exist and that the VA has resisted letting veterans see doctors outside the VA. This means veterans are still facing unacceptable hassles and delays.

The Veterans Choice Improvement Act seeks to improve the Veterans Choice Program and to eliminate the redundant, bureaucratic layering that is causing our veterans to experience confusion and delay. Our veterans fought to defend our country, and we promised them the best health care in the world. This legislation seeks to make good on this sacred promise by:

- ★ Consolidating the myriad of VA programs, contracts and authorities that currently allow veterans to receive care outside of the VA into the Veterans Choice Program, which will provide veterans with one easy-to-understand program that allows them to receive care outside of the VA when needed.
- ★ Making the Veterans Choice Program, which is scheduled to sunset in 2017, a permanent program so that veterans can continue to count on health care that is both timely and close to home.
- ★ Creating one funding account for all non-VA care so that VA will be able to manage resources in an efficient and transparent manner.
- ★ Streamlining funding for care and allowing the VA to manage that funding in a more efficient manner.
- ★ Enabling the VA to enter into provider agreements with local medical providers when the VA is unable to meet the demands of veterans in a local area, thereby ensuring that veterans can get the care they need in the local community without forcing them to drive long distances to VA medical centers.
- ★ Setting strict time standards for reimbursement and standardizing reimbursement rates so that outside medical providers will no longer be hesitant to work with the VA because of the agency's notoriously antiquated and inefficient claims process.
- ★ Calling on the VA create an electronic claims submission process that is modern, secure, and efficient.

## **Veterans Choice Improvement Act of 2016**

The Veterans Choice Improvement Act of 2016 seeks to address three significant problems that contribute to the VA's continued inability to provide consistent, quality health care to veterans across the United States.

### **Problem #1 – Systemic confusion with non-VA care**

The VA has the legal authority to send veterans outside of the VA to receive care, but there are multiple programs, contracts and laws that confuse everyone involved. The eligibility requirements, reimbursement rates, funding sources and regulations that govern the programs are all different, and this creates confusion that ultimately harms veterans.

#### ✓ **Solution #1 – Simplify the process**

The Veterans Choice Improvement Act simplifies the process by consolidating redundant and overlapping programs into the Veterans Choice Program and creating one funding source for all non-VA care programs. This will streamline and simplify the process for veterans who need to go outside of the VA to receive care.

### **Problem #2 – Medical providers fear working with the VA**

VA has an antiquated, slow, and inefficient claims processing system that often makes it very difficult for private medical providers to work with the VA. Reimbursement for claims is chronically slow or not forthcoming at all, which is currently causing significant financial hardship for many small medical practices and hospitals, jeopardizing veterans' access to care.

#### ✓ **Solution #2 – Create a standardized claims processing system using industry best practices**

The Veterans Choice Improvement Act requires that the VA will create a modern, secure and efficient claims submission process. It gives strict timelines for reimbursement and measures to ensure the VA meets them. It standardizes reimbursement rates and defines what information VA needs to promptly reimburse a claim. The intent is to create a system that is user friendly for medical providers so that they are eager to work with VA to provide quality care to our veterans.

### **Problem #3 – VA does not use local medical providers to help veterans.**

In rural states, it is common to hear of a veteran who has to drive 4 or more hours each way just to receive care for something as simple as getting a new pair of eyeglasses. This is ridiculous when the veteran could go to any number of local facilities to be cared for but is instead made to drive hundreds of miles. Why doesn't VA just have an agreement with local providers to help veterans?

#### ✓ **Solution # 3 – Provide VA with the ability to enter into provider agreements.**

This legislation allows the VA to enter into provider agreements with local providers when VA is unable to provide that service or it places an excess burden on the veteran to receive the care. This will help thousands of veterans in rural areas receive the care they need much more easily and conveniently.