

## IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

**JUNE 6, 2018:** President Trump signs the *VA MISSION Act* into law. Jon immediately begins engaging the VA on how it will implement the bill. Three weeks after the bill is signed into law, Jon questions VA Secretary nominee Robert Wilkie about the VA's progress on establishing new community care networks.

**OCTOBER 2018:** The VA must report to Congress outlining its progress in developing regulations for the new Veterans Community Care Program.

**MARCH 2019:** The VA must submit a report to Congress on access and quality standards.

**JUNE 2019:** The Veterans Community Care Program and walk-in care regulations must be published, after a public comment period.



## THE VA'S TO DO LIST:

- From now until the Veterans Community Care Program goes "live" (June 2019), the VA must award contracts to Community Care Network Administrators. These are government contractors that will build networks of providers to see veterans in their communities.
- The VA will be responsible for educating veterans about the new community care program.
- The VA will be responsible for training employees and contractors on how to administer the community care program.
- The VA must establish a continuing education program for non-VA medical professionals to assist in identifying and treating common mental and physical conditions of veterans.

## JON'S MAJOR VETERANS BILLS SIGNED INTO LAW

***VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act*** allows the VA to quickly fire bad employees without sacrificing the due process rights of good ones. It also provides incentives for managers to address poor performance and misconduct, strengthens protections for whistleblowers, and provides VA leadership with additional training.

***Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act*** streamlines the current disability benefits appeals process so veterans can choose the path that is best for them. It also establishes deadline goals for how quickly the VA can issue a final decision on an appeal so veterans aren't forced to wait for D.C. bureaucrats to decide what benefits they can and can't receive.

***Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act*** removes the arbitrary 15-year time limit on G.I. Bill benefits for Montana veterans and their families and brings Guardsmen and Reservists benefits more in line with their active duty counterparts.

***Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act*** addresses many of the Choice Program's issues while reducing out-of-pocket costs for veterans and ensuring providers get paid in a timely manner.

***VA Choice and Quality Employment Act*** streamlines the hiring process for hard-to-fill positions and helps address VA workforce shortages by increasing recruitment efforts. It also creates a VA-wide database for vacant and hard-to-fill positions, and expands a private-public sector partnership to foster innovation and better practices at the VA.

***VA Expiring Authorities Act*** funds 20 VA programs that help rural, disabled and homeless veterans access mental health care, make it to their doctor appointments on time and get back on their feet. The bill includes provisions from Jon's *Deborah Sampson Act*, which provides more opportunities for women veterans to seek readjustment counseling at the VA.

***Veterans' Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act*** increases disability and survivor benefits for veterans and their families to help them keep up with the rising cost of housing, utilities and food.

***VA Clinics Act*** recognizes the service and sacrifice of three distinguished Montana veterans by naming VA facilities in Missoula and Billings in their honor.



## SENATOR JON TESTER'S *VA MISSION ACT*

IMPLEMENTING BIPARTISAN REFORM  
FOR MONTANA VETERANS

***“Our VA MISSION Act delivers Montana veterans a health care system worthy of their service.”***

**- Senator Jon Tester**

## THE GOAL OF THE VA MISSION ACT

In Montana, we know that you can't have a VA clinic in every community. But we also know that veterans can't always drive two hours to the nearest clinic. And they certainly can't afford to wait months for an appointment. Veterans rely on local doctors to fill in the gaps when the VA can't.

The Choice Program was created with an important mission: to make it easier and faster for veterans to get health care. But it hasn't worked like that for many veterans. So as Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I wrote the *VA MISSION Act* with Republican Chairman Johnny Isakson from Georgia to put veterans in the driver's seat about where to get their health care services and cut government red tape that has caused so many difficulties for Montana veterans.

Over the course of a year we worked with veterans, advocates and the VA to craft a bold, bipartisan compromise that scraps the Choice Program, streamlines community care, and puts medical decisions in the hands of doctors and veterans – where they should be. And on June 6, 2018, our bill was signed into law, calling it a “historic moment.”

I'll be holding the VA accountable to use the tools we've given them to get the job done right.



## JON'S VA MISSION ACT STRENGTHENS:

### VA HEALTH CARE

- Removes barriers for veterans to access mental telehealth care.
- Incentivizes medical residents and providers to work in rural, tribal and underserved VA facilities.
- Provides greater recruitment, retention and relocation incentives so that the VA can attract and maintain high-quality providers.
- Increases the amount the VA will reimburse medical professionals for education debt reduction.
- Develops criteria to identify underserved medical facilities and incentivize medical professionals to complete their residencies in rural areas.
- Establishes mobile deployment teams to provide additional care at the highest-need VA facilities.
- Recruits medical scribes to assist physicians so that doctors can focus on serving veterans, and not filling out paperwork.

### COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE

- Scraps the Choice Program as we know it.
- Establishes one community care program that allows veterans and their doctors to choose where that veteran's health care needs are best served.
- Streamlines the process for veterans to access community providers.
- Creates new standards for faster reimbursements to private providers who care for veterans.
- Requires stronger accountability and transparency to ensure contractors who administer the VA's community care program are meeting the terms of their contracts.
- Strengthens safety measures and guidelines for private providers to prescribe opioids to veterans.

### CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES

- Expands eligibility for VA caregiver support services to veterans of all eras.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

### How can community providers partner with the VA to serve veterans under the Veterans Community Care Program?

After the VA's contract with Health Net expires September 30, 2018, the VA will work directly with community providers to establish new care authorizations and a system for scheduling, coordination and payments, including new standards for prompt payment for services. The VA will be responsible for creating a seamless transition plan.

### Can a veteran continue to see a mental health care counselor under the new system?

If the veteran and their VA provider believe it's in the best interest of the veteran to continue seeing the same community provider, then yes.

### When will the new community care system be operational?

Approximately June 6, 2019, one year after the bill was signed into law, the VA will roll out the new, streamlined Veterans Community Care Program. Until that time, the *VA MISSION Act* ensures veterans can continue to access care using the Choice Program.

### If a veteran lives in Havre and needs an x-ray, will they have to travel to Great Falls or Fort Harrison or will they get the service at the local hospital? And will they receive mileage?

Veterans and their providers will make decisions on where that veteran receives health care based on a variety of factors, including distance. The *VA Mission Act* does not make changes to the VA's beneficiary travel rules.

### Will veterans' co-pays for prescriptions or services change?

Copays for walk-in care, a new benefit created by the *VA Mission Act*, may be modified under the new law but co-pays for prescriptions or services remain unchanged.

### What is walk-in care?

Walk-in care is non-emergency, convenient community care that veterans can access with out prior authorization from the VA at local clinics or pharmacies. Veterans will pay their normal copays for their first two visits. Additional visits might cost more.