

**Written Testimony of  
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**Hearing on  
“VA MISSION Act: Progress Implementing Title I”**

**October 21, 2020**

**Introduction**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Tester, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today to discuss our work to implement the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community Care Network (CCN) in Regions 1, 2 and 3.

On behalf of the more than 325,000 women and men of UnitedHealth Group who work every day to help people live healthier lives and to make the health system work better for everyone, thank you for the opportunity to update you on our partnership with VA, Veterans and their families, providers, Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) and Members of Congress to ensure that our Nation’s Veterans have timely access to the best care available, whether inside the VA health care system or in their local communities. Together, we are committed to serve those who have served this great Nation.

After 33 years of uniformed service to our nation, for me, and for each of OptumServe’s employees, delivering high-quality care to our Nation’s heroes is personal. We are Veterans. In fact, my leadership team has a combined total of more than 350 years of service to our Nation. Many of us – or family members – are patients who obtain care from the VA health system. We view our work as the continuation of our service, and we continue to embody the warrior ethos of leaving no woman or man behind. We are privileged to serve our fellow Veterans as they seek care in the community.

Since I last appeared before the Committee in February 2020, OptumServe has completed our phased implementation across all three Regions and we are continuing our efforts to ensure Veterans have access to timely and high-quality care, while adapting to significant issues facing the entire U.S. health system as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has challenged all Americans, including Veterans and providers, and UnitedHealth Group is continuing to respond to support the health system during this unprecedented time. Early on, we waived cost-sharing for COVID-19 testing and treatment for our commercial plans, expanded access to telehealth and mental health services, and accelerated nearly \$2 billion in direct payments to providers to support practices so that they could meet the health needs of all Americans. Through our deep technical expertise, at the direction of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, our enterprise was enlisted to assist in processing and distributing more than \$100 billion in CARES Act support to providers, helping to provide critical stability for providers – large and small – during the pandemic.

Our response to COVID-19 also includes pioneering non-invasive, self-administered COVID-19 testing protocols that streamline testing, reduce PPE usage, increase safety of health care workers and enable the use of alternative testing swabs and viral transport media to broaden access to COVID-19 testing, providing more than \$100 million in support of individuals particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 such as health care workers, those living in hot spots, and

seniors. We also donated over 6 million pounds of meals for communities suffering from food insecurity, homelessness and health disparities.

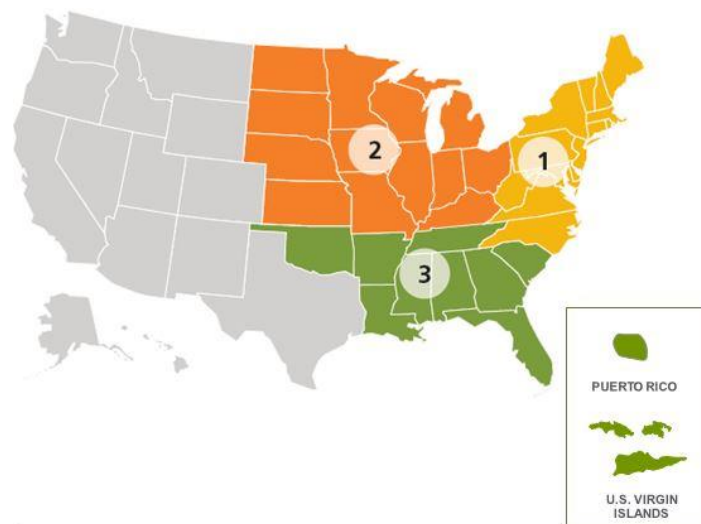
These, and many other efforts, have offered much-needed stability for providers who were able to keep their doors open and continue seeing patients, including VA Community Care Network providers. And this is just a sampling of our efforts to support members, providers, and all Americans as our nation, and the world, continues battling COVID-19. A more comprehensive summary is available on our website.<sup>1</sup>

Despite challenges of COVID-19, across Regions 1, 2 and 3:

- Veterans have received more than 1.6 million authorizations for care and are actively utilizing our high-quality and broad Community Care Network, which has grown by more than 495,000 unique care providers across more than one million sites of care since February;
- Providers are getting paid promptly – in 11.9 days on average – for care they deliver to Veterans; and
- We are continuously deepening the provider network by bringing on academic provider groups and institutions important to Veterans and VA with 92% of priority providers identified by local VA Medical Centers (VAMC) and 93% of academic institutions joining Optum’s Community Care Network to date.

### **Optum’s Role in the VA Community Care Network**

As you know, OptumServe is privileged to serve as the third-party administrator (TPA) for the VA Community Care Network in Regions 1, 2 and 3, which includes 36 States, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. OptumServe is now also responsible for managing the urgent care network for the same three Regions. The addition of our urgent care network was fully implemented as of September 1, 2020.



**VA Community Care Network Regions Where OptumServe is the TPA**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/newsroom/addressing-covid.html>

Under these contracts, OptumServe is responsible for:

- **Community care network of providers.** OptumServe leveraged its broad network and relationships across UnitedHealth Group, and beyond, to provide a robust provider network representing the full breadth of health and wellness services for the VA. We continue to build upon this foundation by contracting with preferred providers requested by our partners within the VA as well as qualified providers who directly inform us of their desire to serve Veterans.
  - **Across all three Regions to support each of the 109 VAMCs and their affiliated hospitals and clinics, OptumServe is managing a network of more than 830,000 providers across more than 1.6 million sites of care.**
- **Claims processing.** OptumServe is responsible for promptly processing claims from providers who care for Veterans as part of the VA Community Care Network. This function is critical to ensuring we sustain the established high-quality provider network.
  - **Through October 16, 2020, OptumServe has adjudicated more than 4.6 million claims in 11.9 days on average.**
- **Call center for VA staff and providers.** VA staff and providers can contact the OptumServe call center to get questions answered about authorizations, claims, and other issues.
  - **Through October 16, 2020, we answered 355,735 calls within our call center with an average speed to answer of 22 seconds.**
- **Online portal for providers, VA staff and Veterans.** OptumServe operates an online portal where providers, VA staff and Veterans can find additional resources including information about claims, explanation of benefits (EOBs), and referral information. Individuals can access the portal at [www.vacommunitycare.com](http://www.vacommunitycare.com). As outlined in the table below, our portal is uniquely built to meet our users' needs:

Portal Features	Veterans	Providers	VA Staff
View Eligibility/Enrollment	✓	✓	✓
View Referrals	✓	✓	✓
View EOBs	✓		
List of in-network pharmacies	✓	✓	✓
Access provider training/resource guides, deployment schedules		✓	
Access claim information	✓	✓	✓
Submit claims		✓	
Ability to Assist Veterans			✓

- **Community Care Experience Teams.** OptumServe's Community Care Experience teams provide on-the-ground support and resources to VAMCs and staff. One team is

aligned to each region, and each team has a team leader, a nurse, a business analyst, and one Veteran Experience Officer (VEO) assigned to each Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN) within the region. These teams allow Optum to remain well connected with local VISN and VAMC leadership, and each of the VAMC community care offices in order to better meet the needs of the VA at the local level and by extension, the Veterans they serve.

- **Managing the Urgent Care Network.** On September 1, 2020, Optum completed the implementation to provide urgent care and retail clinic options for Veterans across Regions 1, 2 and 3. To be eligible for urgent care, Veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system and have received care through a VA provider or an in-network community provider within the past 24 months.
  - **98% percent of Veterans have access to an in-network urgent care in Region 1 within a 30-minute drive (91% for Region 2 and 95% in Region 3), exceeding the 90% target set by VA.**

### **Meeting and Exceeding Our Commitments: On-Time Rollout and Continuous Optimization of Operations**

On June 19, 2020, OptumServe successfully completed the on-time roll-out as the TPA for Regions 1, 2 and 3. Today, we are delivering the Community Care Network – including the claims management process and prompt payments to providers for care authorizations – across all three Regions. In addition, as of September 1, 2020, OptumServe expanded this network to include an urgent care network in all three Regions. While our transition is complete and all three Regions are fully operational ensuring Veterans can access care in the community, our work does not stop.

We are a restless organization and our efforts on behalf of our Nation’s Veterans are dynamic. We are continuing to adjust and strengthen our operations and refine the network by adding providers in partnership with local VA staff and providers. I would highlight progress made to date in key areas of interest to the Committee and other stakeholders:

#### **■ *Building a High-Quality Provider Network***

Central to the Community Care Network is the establishment and operation of a robust network of quality, credentialed health care providers from which VA medical staff and Veterans can choose. Health care is local, and we continue to tailor the network to serve the Veterans and VAMCs that support them in their communities.

Our approach to building the Community Care Network is twofold: We began by leveraging the 1.3 million providers in the national UnitedHealthcare and Optum networks. And, we continue to target qualified community providers and health systems that have a history of working closely with VAMCs and Veterans, so these providers have an opportunity to continue to care for Veterans in their communities.

Our provider on-boarding process helps to ensure that VA CCN providers are both competent and qualified to provide the services within their practice specialty, which is a new requirement under the Community Care Network. For the first time, all providers in the community are now confirmed as credentialed in accordance with nationally recognized standards set forth by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), or the appropriate accrediting body, or credentialed consistent with Federal or State regulations. We also confirm through primary-

source verification the provider’s education, board certification, license, professional background, malpractice history, and other pertinent data. As a result, the quality of care our Veterans receive in the community has never been higher.

**Across all three Regions, OptumServe is managing a network of more than 830,000 providers in more than 1.6 million sites of care.**

We are not only meeting our contractual requirements on network adequacy, but we are exceeding them in most areas as our network continues to mature and expand. While there are many ways to evaluate network adequacy, one way is prospectively examining drive times for all eligible Veterans for health services in their area, regardless of whether all eligible Veterans will seek each type of care.

For example, 98% percent of Veterans have access to an in-network urgent care facility in Region 1 within a 30-minute drive from their home (91% for Region 2 and 95% for Region 3), exceeding the 90% target set by VA. The table below provides an overview of average drive times for health services by Region:

<b>Average Drive Times in Minutes (September 2020)</b>				
	<i>Primary Care</i>	<i>Specialty Medical</i>	<i>Dental</i>	<i>Specialty Dental</i>
<b>Region 1</b>	2.5	11.3	12.0	22.9
<b>Region 2</b>	3.0	15.6	19.7	34.8
<b>Region 3</b>	3.4	20.3	16.6	30.7

An additional measure of quality within our network is the designation of top-quality providers as high performing. Once enough data are captured to measure a provider’s or institution’s performance against VA-designated quality metrics, and their performance meets or exceeds the performance threshold as determined by VA, they will be identified as a “high-performing provider” (HPP) or “center of excellence” (COE). Using benchmarks to independently measure performance ensures Optum is providing Veterans with a high-quality network of providers and institutions available to provide care.

The target for HPP and COE has been set by VA as 15%. I am proud to share that as of today, 54% of Optum’s providers in the Community Care Network in Regions 1, 2 and 3 that have been assessed by VA meet or exceed the VA’s quality and performance metrics and bear the HPP designation.

We recognize that network management is a dynamic process that evolves over time. We are committed to working with the provider community, Veterans, Congress and the VA to continuously refine the network to better meet the needs of the VA and Veterans, by leveraging utilization data, analytics, and the interest of qualified providers who have historically been involved in Veteran care.

**Of note, in the last few months, new major health systems have joined the network including Emory Healthcare (Georgia), Piedmont Healthcare (North Carolina), Baptist Health (Arkansas), LCMC Health (Louisiana), LSU Healthcare Network (Louisiana), Methodist Le Boheur Healthcare (Tennessee) and Owensboro Health (Kansas), among many others.**

■ **Ensuring Prompt Payments for Providers**

In order to maintain the high-quality provider network OptumServe has built, we must continue to ensure providers receive accurate, prompt payments for the health services they deliver. This is critical to the success of our network and vital to building trust between providers and our organization.

Simply put, after a provider cares for a Veteran, the provider bills OptumServe, and OptumServe pays the bill quickly and accurately.

**Through October 16, 2020, OptumServe has adjudicated more than 4.6 million claims in 11.9 days on average.**

As a restless organization, we continuously evaluate how we do business. We seek and receive feedback from all our stakeholders and strive to optimize our processes and communications by acting upon that feedback. And when questions do arise, as they do with any new program, we work closely with providers to quickly resolve them.

■ ***Providing Timely Customer Service to Community Providers and VA Staff***

A knowledgeable and responsive customer service operation is essential when VA staff or providers have questions about the Community Care Network. Our dedicated team is available to answer questions about authorizations, claims and other topics.

**Through October 16, 2020 we answered 355,735 calls within our call center with an average speed to answer of 22 seconds.**

We continue to focus on providing quality customer service and first call resolution – and learn from our providers experiences to optimize our operations – for providers and VA staff who may need assistance.

**Adapting Veteran Care During COVID-19**

While the COVID-19 pandemic upended the entire health system, OptumServe has continued to serve Veterans and adapt to the changing environment. Many provider offices were forced to temporarily suspend in-person appointments for routine care, but Veterans’ health needs did not stop. In fact, OptumServe continued to receive thousands of referrals for care every day during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic when the entire country was adjusting to the new normal.

To respond to the pandemic and the needs of Veterans, we worked with our providers to implement best practices for care consistent with VA guidance. We encouraged telehealth for care when clinically possible and ensured our providers were following the latest guidance on protecting patients and their colleagues. And when appointments were not possible, the referral eligibility period was extended by VA so Veterans could see providers as their local communities began to reopen or when the Veteran themselves felt it was safe.

Telehealth utilization also increased significantly from just 31 telehealth-associated claims received in February to nearly 12,000 claims received

JAN 2020	16
FEB 2020	31
MAR 2020	327
APR 2020	5,303
MAY 2020	8,956
JUN 2020	11,369
JULY 2020	11,925
AUG 2020	7,944
SEP 2020	10,398

in July, of which 31% were for behavioral health services. We continue to see high levels of telehealth utilization and encourage it when clinically appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

Today, we are receiving approximately 72,000 referrals per week across all Regions. We are actively monitoring referral data to adapt our networks as necessary, to ensure the VA and Veterans have a robust network of high-quality community providers available to them to meet their care needs as health systems reopen.

COVID-19 also has implications for the upcoming flu season. Ensuring Veterans can easily access a flu vaccine is a high priority, especially as this benefit is a new responsibility of the VA CCN TPAs. Working with the VA and our network partners, we are managing the increased demand brought about by this change and during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we went from receiving a total of 11 claims for flu vaccinations last year to more than 48,375 claims since September 1, 2020 so far.

### **Commitment to Continued Input, Feedback and Sharing with Key Stakeholders**

Operational excellence has been foundational to our approach to the implementation of VA Community Care. Also foundational are open lines of communication with key stakeholders of Veterans' care.

To ensure the continued success of this program, we are actively engaging a diverse group of stakeholders. Our efforts include:

- Quarterly engagements with Veterans and Military Service Organizations to ensure the voice of the customer is heard and acted upon;
- Holding a quarterly provider advisory board that is used to solicit feedback to drive actionable results;
- Continuing regular touchpoints with Members of Congress and Committees, and creating a Veteran Advocate Portal so Members of Congress and staff can receive up to date information; and
- Engaging hospital associations at the state and local levels.

These touchpoints are more than an item on a checklist. Rather, they are positively impacting Veterans and those we serve in real ways. **For instance, we quickly engaged with the Louisiana Hospital Association after Hurricane Laura so that local VAMCs had up to date information on which hospitals still had power and water so that Veterans could access the care they needed during the disaster.**

### **Conclusion**

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to provide an update on how OptumServe is assisting the VA with its mission to provide world-class health care to our Nation's Veterans. We understand that health care is local, and we continue to work closely with the VA, VAMCs, Veterans, VSOs and the provider community to tailor our provider network to meet the unique needs of Veterans in their communities.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2020 telehealth claims listed are based on the date the claim was received. Please note claims received will lag the date the care was delivered by up to 180 days, which is the allowable amount of time for providers to submit claims.

We remain committed to the success of the VA Community Care Network and OptumServe's role to deliver access to high-quality health care and a broad network of providers for our nation's Veterans. We are fully invested in this mission and have built a highly reliable organization to ensure its success. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Committee as you ensure our Nation's heroes receive the health care they have earned and richly deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to your questions.

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