

**VA**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**Fact Sheet**Office of Public Affairs  
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www.va.gov**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Accelerating Access to Care Initiative  
Fact Sheet  
May 27, 2014****Summary:**

On Wednesday, May 21, Secretary Shinseki directed the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) leadership to personally review their processes to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is doing everything possible to schedule Veterans for their appointments.

VA has redoubled its efforts to provide quality care to Veterans and has taken steps at national and local levels to ensure timely access to care. VHA has developed the Accelerating Care Initiative, a coordinated, system-wide initiative to accelerate care to Veterans, and promptly communicated this to leadership in the field on May 22, and launched implementation the morning of May 23.

**Key Facts:**

- VA health care facilities are systematically reviewing clinic capacity in an effort to maximize our ability to provide Veterans medical appointments when, and in the manner they want them.
- Activities being reviewed to maximize our abilities include:
  - Capacity and efficiency assessments
    - Ensuring Primary Care clinic panels are correctly sized and achieving the desired level of productivity
    - Extending or flexing clinic hours on nights and weekends
    - Ability for overtime for providers
    - Assessing the availability of community providers to provide the care being requested
  - Identification of resources required to provide timely care for Veterans.
- The VA health care system was established to provide the health care and benefits Veterans have earned and deserve. Veterans and Veteran Service Organizations know the importance of a VA health care system dedicated to serving Veterans, given VA's mission, expertise and focus on care specifically for Veterans. For instance, VA offers specialty services and expertise in the areas of mental health, spinal cord injury, and many other areas that are unique to VA health care delivery and hard to find outside VA.

- The purpose of the initiative is to strengthen access to care in the VA system, while also ensuring flexibility to use private sector care when needed in accordance with VA guidelines.
- Where VA cannot increase capacity, VA is increasing the use of care in the community through non-VA care.
  - Currently, approximately 9-10% of VA's budget for health care costs is for non-VA care.
  - From 2008-2013, non-VA care outpatient visits grew from 8.9 million to 15.3 million, a 72% increase.
  - In fiscal year 2013, VA provided non-VA care to over 1 million Veterans at a cost of \$4.8 billion dollars (an increase over the fiscal year 2012 total of \$4.5 billion).
  - For fiscal year 2014 year-to-date (April 2014), VA provided non-VA medical care to approximately 904,714 unique Veterans at a cost of \$3.380 billion dollars.
  - Because VA knows that capacity can be a challenge in any healthcare system across the country, VA will work with the Veteran patient to develop an agreed upon treatment plan in communities where the sufficient (non-VA care) capacity to provide timely care does not exist.
- Each of VA's facilities is reaching out to Veterans to coordinate the acceleration of their care.
  - Facilities will make at a minimum 3 attempts to contact any Veteran patient new to VA care, or new to a particular clinic in a facility, who is scheduled for any appointment more than 30 days out, or is currently on the Electronic Wait List (EWL).
  - Facilities will assess whether the Veteran wishes to be seen sooner than currently scheduled.
    - If yes, and the capacity and resources exist – (following the facility assessment), the Veteran will be scheduled into new appointment openings.
    - If yes, and the capacity and resources do not currently exist, non-VA medical care referral will begin.
  - Facilities will review their cancellations and available appointments on a daily and on-going basis and contact Veterans currently on the EWL to offer available appointments.
  - Facilities will track and report to VHA clinic capacity, clinic productivity, Non-VA Care Authorizations/Obligations and the EWL on a bi-weekly basis.

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **Q: How long does VA anticipate the Accelerating Access to Care Initiative will take to implement?**

VA initiated Accelerating Care on May 23, 2014. VA anticipates the initial reviews to be completed by Friday, May 30, 2014. Following those assessments,

VA will work with the individual Veterans to arrange their treatment in accordance with their wishes. VA will continue this effort for at least 90 days.

**Q: How was this initiative communicated to VA facilities, and who will be overseeing the initiative to ensure it is carried out at the local level?**

VA staff has developed a series of training calls that began on Friday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>. An oversight group comprised of Network Directors, Deputy Chief Business Officers, Clinic Administration and other Senior Leaders and Staff have been established to monitor the implementation of the Accelerating Care effort.

**Q: How long does VA anticipate continuing this initiative?**

Once the initial surge of Veteran's issues has been addressed, this initiative will transition to an operational component of normal VA business.

**Q: What are the goals of the Accelerating Access to Care Initiative?**

A: This initiative is designed to increase timely access to care for Veteran patients; decrease the number of Veteran patients on the EWL and waiting greater than 30 days for their care; and standardize the process and tools for on-going monitoring and access management at VA facilities.

**Q: In what circumstances can VA currently authorize non-VA care? How does this initiative change that?**

VA can utilize non-VA medical care for eligible Veterans when the VAMC cannot provide the care due to unavailability of the service due to lack of capacity and/or capability. Non-VA medical care is also used when geographical distance is a hindrance to receiving timely care.

This initiative doesn't change the use of non-VA medical care.

**Q: Who is currently eligible to receive care at a non-VA facility? How does this initiative change that?**

Eligibility for non-VA medical care is complex and varies for non-Service Connected veterans. This initiative doesn't change eligibility requirements as they are outlined in statute. Veterans can find more information on eligibility on the [National Non-VA Medical Care Program Office](#) website.