



March 19, 2020

Dear President Trump, Secretary Wilkie and Members of Congress,

Our country is experiencing an unprecedented health and economic crisis. We recognize the unique role the VA plays in caring for veterans and its “fourth mission” to deliver care to the civilian population during emergencies, such as the one we are currently experiencing.<sup>1</sup>

As you consider legislation and executive actions to address the ongoing outbreak of coronavirus, Concerned Veterans for America offers the following recommendations to ensure veterans continue to receive access to care and the VA is fully utilizing its resources to meet the dynamic needs of our country.

### Recommendations

- 1) **Expedite Payments** – Take executive action to expedite payments to all vendors, suppliers and community health care providers to assist their cash flow to ensure they can continue to keep their doors open and support the VA.
- 2) **Approve Pending Authorizations** – Approve all pending community care authorizations immediately to eliminate the 27 day wait time for approval that is creating a backlog.<sup>2</sup> This will allow veterans to access care in their community, particularly in health care professions not impacted by the coronavirus and that have been in high demand for community care, such as physical therapy, optometry, and home health assistance.
- 3) **Full Choice** – Temporarily allow full and unrestricted choice in the community care network using the “best interest of the veteran” provision in the VA MISSION Act to mirror access currently granted under the urgent care benefit. This will ensure veterans can immediately opt to access care in the community if it meets their needs.
- 4) **Approve Pending Community Care Claims** – Eliminate the 2.5 million backlog of pending community care claims by immediately paying providers for care already delivered to veterans.<sup>3</sup> Many of these providers are already seeing adverse impacts on their businesses and immediate payments will help them stay in business and not lay off staff.
- 5) **Procurement Regulatory Relief** – Take executive action to provide regulatory relief from government purchasing regulations that hinder the hiring of vendors and procurement of the supply chain necessary for VHA to stock and resupply medical facilities.
- 6) **Identify Community Health Care Provider Capacity** – In light of the health crisis, the VA is cancelling elective surgeries and nonurgent procedures at VA medical facilities. The VA should partner with TRIWEST and Optum to compile a list of health care services the VA is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/38/17.86>

<sup>2</sup> According to data provided to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee in December, per Sen. Sinema in 2/5/20 committee hearing.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings/va-mission-act-update-on-the-implementation-of-the-community-care-network>

not delivering during the emergency and identify community care network providers who are still open and accepting veteran patients. With the VA's suspension of some health care services, additional communication is necessary to ensure continued care coordination between the VA and third party administrators. Specifically, this list of care capacity in the community could include services performed by health care providers who likely are not assisting with the coronavirus response. For example, this may include prioritizing the delivery of physical therapy, optometry, home health assistance, chiropractic care, mental health services in the community.

- 7) **Prescription Flexibility** – As the VA seeks to limit unnecessary visits to facilities, action should be taken to remove the current 14-day limitation on prescriptions from urgent care providers. This will reduce unnecessary visits to the VA and allow veterans to stay home and limit potential exposure to the coronavirus.
- 8) **Open Repossessed VA Housing to Increase Capacity** – Open repossessed VA loan homes to provide additional capacity to safely shelter coronavirus patients needing to be quarantined, including homeless veterans. This was done during Hurricane Katrina to provide additional housing options for evacuees.
- 9) **Outreach Regarding VA Burial Assistance** – Provide quick processing and proactive outreach to the families of veterans. Often individuals are unaware of the services offered by the VA to assist with burial of a veteran at a VA cemetery or a headstone.
- 10) **Protect Community Care Funding** – As Congress considers the supplemental funding request made by the White House, efforts should be made to ensure the VA has the adequate resources to protect health care providers and can safely deliver care to our veterans. Additionally, Congress should ensure funding provided for community care is protected from being used or transferred for other purposes. For many veterans needing coronavirus related care, they will be utilizing urgent care facilities as part of community care and it is critical that it is adequately funded. If the VA needs additional funding as the situation develops, it should come as a new funding request to Congress.
- 11) **Evaluate Effectiveness** – Finally, without fully knowing the full impact of the current crisis, the VA should reevaluate the effectiveness of these recommended actions after 6 months.

We recognize the VA has been given the significant responsibility of ensuring veterans continue to receive services while also preparing for a potential influx of patients. Action must be taken now to provide financial relief to providers, regulatory relief to suppliers and vendors, and ensure veterans have maximum flexibility to access care close to home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "N Anderson".

Nate Anderson  
Executive Director  
Concerned Veterans for America