Project HERO Overview

Supplementing VA care with quality medical and dental providers

JULY 2012

VA HEALTH CARE Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

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Project HERO Overview

- Project HERO is a pilot program that helps Veterans get the care they need when it is not readily available at their local Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers
- While Veterans can still find and visit non-VA doctors with a Non-VA care authorization, Project HERO provides Veterans with pre-screened networks of health and dental service providers who meet VA standards for quality care
- These providers are available through contracts with Humana Veterans Healthcare Services (HVHS) and Delta Dental Federal Government Programs (Delta Dental)

Congressional Authority

- Developed by VA in response to House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Conference Report 109-305
- Congressional report called for VA to:
  - Implement care management strategies proven valuable in public and private sectors
  - Ensure care purchased for enrollees from community providers is cost-effective and complementary to the larger Veterans Health Administration (VHA) system of care
  - Preserve and sustain partnerships with Academic Affiliates
  - Establish at least three care management demonstration programs through competitive award
  - Collaborate with industry, academic and other organizations to incorporate a variety of public-private partnerships

Source: 109th Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, H. Rep. 109-305, Committee of Conference Report H.R. 2528, Nov. 18, 2005, associated with Public Law 109-114 (enacted Nov 30, 2005). Available at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-109hrpt305/pdf/CRPT-109hrpt305.pdf, pp. 43-44

Vision and Objectives

Vision

- Pilot program to better manage contracted care
- Potential to reduce VA purchased care operating costs while improving access, accountability, care coordination, patient satisfaction and clinical quality
- Ultimate goal is to help ensure all care delivered by VA – whether through VA or community providers – is of comparable quality and consistency for Veterans

Objectives

- Provide as much care for Veterans within the VHA as practical
- When necessary, efficiently refer Veterans to high-quality community-based care
- Improve exchange of medical information between VA and non-VA providers
- Foster high-quality care and patient safety
- Control operating costs
- Increase Veteran satisfaction
- Secure accountable evaluation of pilot (demonstration) results
- Sustain partnerships with Academic Affiliates

Contract Awards

- Specialty care provider services are contracted for and provided when VA cannot readily provide the service internally

HVHS

- Medical/surgical
- Diagnostics
- Mental health
- Dialysis services
- Start of health care delivery – Jan. 1, 2008

Delta Dental

- Dental care
- Start of dental care delivery – Jan. 14, 2008

Services and Benefits

HVHS and Delta Dental offer:

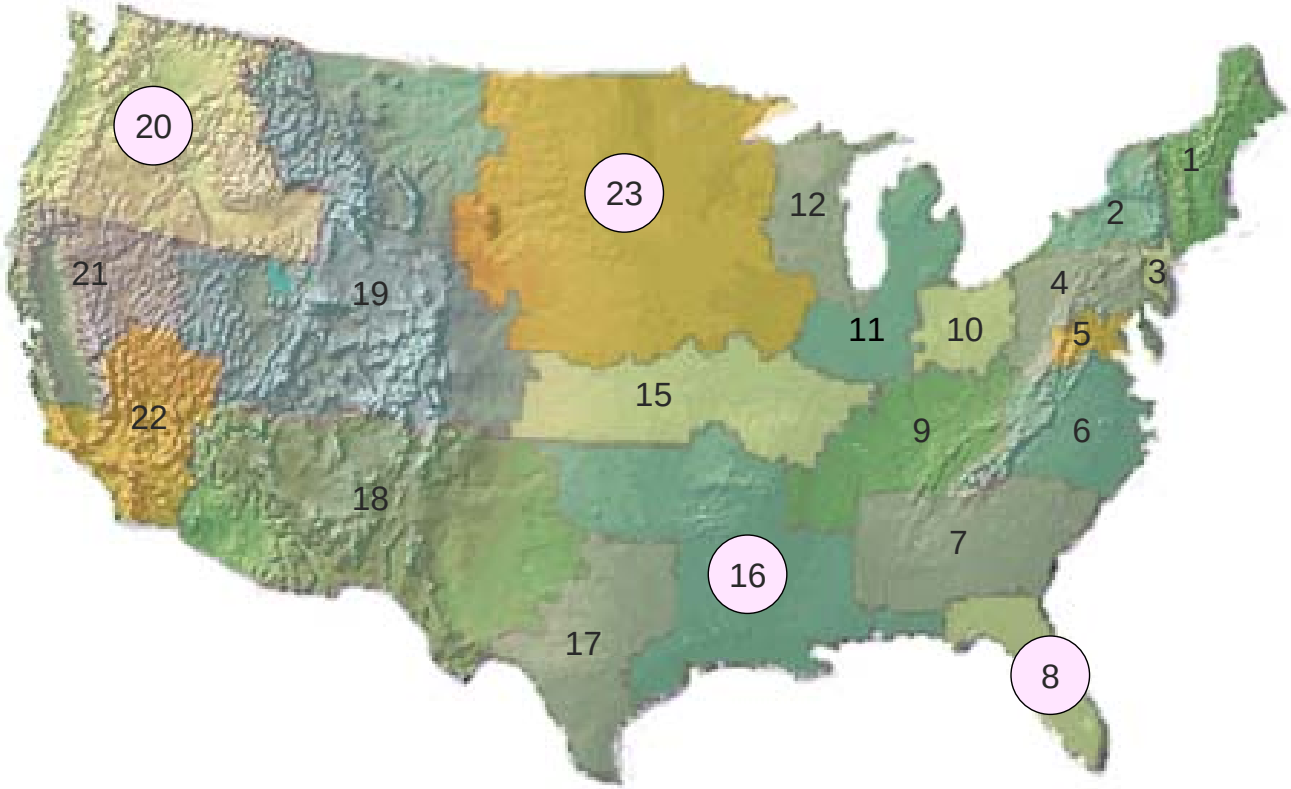
- Credentialed, quality providers
- The return medical documentation to VA
- Monitoring and reporting of access to care, appointment timeliness, and patient safety and satisfaction
- Appointment-setting services
- Additional patient advocate services
- Timely payment of claims to providers

Benefits

- Facilities and providers meet VHA-specified quality standards
- Primary care providers can make the most informed decisions for their patients
- Improved access to specialty care services
- Cost savings with pricing comparable to or less than Medicare and NDAS rates
- Centralized VA vendor coordinated referral and appointment process
- Timely payments to providers

Project HERO Availability: VISNs 8, 16, 20 and 23

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) divides the country into geographic Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs).
- Project HERO is offered in four VISNs: 8*, 16, 20* and 23



Alaska, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are excluded from Project HERO

Services Available by VISN and Station

VISN 8	VISN 20
• Bay Pines • Miami • North Florida/South Georgia (NFL/SGA) • Orlando • Tampa • West Palm Beach • *Excluded: Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands*	• Boise • Portland • Puget Sound • Roseburg • Spokane • Walla Walla • White City • *Excluded: Alaska*
VISN 16	**VISN 23**
• Alexandria • Fayetteville (AR) • Gulf Coast (Biloxi) • Houston • Jackson • Little Rock • Muskogee • New Orleans (NOLA) • Oklahoma City • Shreveport	• Black Hills • Central Iowa • Fargo • Iowa City • Minneapolis • Nebraska/Western Iowa (NWI) • Omaha • Sioux Falls • St. Cloud

Contracted Services Available Based on VISN Need

- Allergy medicine
- Audiology
- Cardiology evaluation
- Cardiovascular surgery
- Chiropractic care
- Dental
- Dermatology
- Diagnostic imaging
- Dialysis
- Endocrinology
- ENT
- Gastroenterology
- General surgery
- Gynecology
- Hematology
- Hyperbaric medicine
- Immunology
- Infectious disease
- Internal medicine

- Medical oncology care
- Mental health
- Nephrology
- Neurology
- Neurology (other)
- Neurosurgery
- Obstetrics
- Occupational therapy
- Oncology
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopedic surgery
- Physical therapy
- Plastic surgery
- Podiatry
- Pulmonary
- Radiation therapy
- Rehabilitation medicine
- Rheumatology
- Speech pathology
- Urology

- Support services to outpatient care including lab pathology and anesthesia
- Inpatient professional fees include internal medicine, general surgery, OB/GYN, cardio/thoracic, cardiologist/interventional, cardiologist (non-interventional), neurologist, medical oncologist, orthopedic surgeon, gastroenterologist, ophthalmologist, radiation therapist, pathologist, radiologist, anesthesiologist, pulmonologist, dermatologist, neurosurgeon

How Veterans Participate in Project HERO

1 Eligible Veteran visits VA primary care provider and requires specialty care

Care is not readily available through VA

2 Veteran authorized for care through Project HERO

VA determines specialty care is available through Project HERO

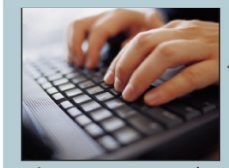
3 Veteran contacted by HVHS or Delta Dental

HVHS or Delta Dental sets up appointment and VA sends medical records to non-VA provider

4 Veteran sees Project HERO provider

Providers and facilities must meet VA quality standards

5 Veteran's records are returned to VA within 30 days



Accurate, secure records improve the Veteran's continuity of care and ensure privacy

6 Veteran is surveyed about the experience

Patient feedback helps improve Project HERO

Program Oversight

- **VHA Chief Business Office leadership provides oversight**
  - Oversees purchased care programs, including Project HERO
  - Meets with and incorporates internal and external stakeholders
  - Regularly monitors and evaluates program metrics
- **Project HERO Governing Board** oversees Project HERO activities and reports status to VISN teams
  - Approves change in terms, quantities or conditions of Project HERO contracts
  - Is comprised of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health Operations and Management, the VHA Chief Business Officer, and network directors from the four participating VISNs
- **Contract Administration Board** provides contract guidance as needed
  - Reviews major modifications that impact contract scope
  - Is comprised of the Project HERO Contracting Officer, Contracting Officer Technical Representative, Program Manager, Office of Acquisitions and Logistics members, and the Office of General Counsel
- **Project HERO PMO** oversees the Project HERO contracts to help ensure quality care, timely access to care, timely return of clinical information to VA for informed continuity of care, patient safety and satisfaction
  - Collaborates with VA, Veterans Service Organizations, Academic Affiliates, industry, and other federal agencies and stakeholders
  - Includes contract administration, project management, quality oversight, data analysis and reporting, communication and training

Quality Oversight

Multiple clinical quality management programs provide oversight for Veteran care

- VA requires providers to be credentialed and facilities to be accredited
  - PMO audits credentialing quarterly, audits accreditation annually and reviews status changes
- The Joint Commission requires that accredited facilities continuously meet quality standards and perform unannounced reviews to VA and private sector facilities alike
- HVHS and Delta Dental have comprehensive quality management plans in place and require contracted providers and facilities to meet their quality standards
  - HVHS and Delta Dental track and trend potential and substantiated quality and safety events and complaints, and screen claims data based on the Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) patient safety indicators
  - Clinical staff review and investigate identified complaints, grievances and potential patient safety events and forward cases to the HVHS Patient Safety and Peer Review Committee
  - Peer Review Committee is comprised of VHA and HVHS members; only physicians make up the voting membership
  - Summary results are reported to governance for resolution

Project HERO Quality Measures

What does Project HERO measure?	*How is it measured?*
Access and timeliness of care provision	• Time taken to be seen by provider within number of minutes of scheduled appointment (by exception) • Patient's ability to schedule an appointment or diagnostic service with a specialist in a timely manner
Provider credentialing	• All providers are credentialed to ensure board certification, licensing, privileging, education, experience, status and malpractice history
Facility accreditation	• Accreditation requirements include standards for continued quality improvement and organizational structure, and processes that promote quality and ensure patient safety for facilities under contract • The PMO monitors the accreditation status of inpatient facilities where Project HERO Veterans receive care
Clinical Information sharing	• Percent of clinical information (medical documentation) returned to VA in the contractually required timeframe
Patient safety and satisfaction	• Number and severity of patient safety events within contracted hospitals • Number and type of patient complaints/issues with contracted network providers and facilities • HVHS provider trending database utilizes Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality inpatient safety indicators, and inpatient and outpatient complaints and grievances
Quality measurement	• The PMO obtains and reports annually on the quality measurement data available from secondary sources for Project HERO facilities and providers including The Joint Commission and the National Committee for Quality Assurance • A peer review committee oversees an established quality assurance process

Objectives Progress and Measures

Objective	Background	Measures
Provide as much care for Veterans within the VHA as practical	Veterans only receive care through Project HERO when the care they need is not readily available at their local VAMC	• For FY11, HVHS unique outpatients accounted for 0.69% of all unique patients cared for by VA and through Non-VA care, while other Non-VA care and VA cared for 6.09% and 93.23%, respectively • For FY11, Delta Dental unique patients accounted for 3.14% of all unique patients cared for by VA and through Non-VA care, while Non-VA care and VA cared for 4.09% and 92.77%, respectively
When necessary, efficiently refer Veterans to high-quality community-based care	Leveraged existing Non-VA care processes and systems for efficiency. Contracts require HVHS and Delta Dental provider networks to meet VA-specified quality standards	• The PMO monitors quality by access to care, provider credentialing, facility accreditation, clinical information sharing, patient safety and satisfaction
Improve exchange of medical documentation between VA and non-VA providers	Contracts require non-VA providers to return medical documentation to VA within 30 days. Electronic clinical information sharing is also available at all Project HERO sites	• HVHS and Delta Dental are required to submit medical documentation to VA, with specific measures for routine care and diagnostic testing, radiology reports electronically signed and initial dental treatment plan submitted to VA
Foster high-quality care and patient safety	Contracts require HVHS and Delta Dental provider networks to meet VA-specified quality standards. The PMO monitors and participates in VA, HVHS, Delta Dental, Joint Commission and other quality management programs	• The PMO compares HVHS quality measures to the Joint Commission, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, National Committee for Quality Assurance, and other health care quality standards

Source: Visits: VSSC Non-VA Care and Outpatient data cubes, 1/1/2008-6/30/2010

Objectives Progress and Measures (cont.)

Objective	Background	Measures
Control operating costs	Services are negotiated for savings at a percentage of Medicare rates for medical/surgical services, and a percentage of National Dentistry Advisory Service (NDAS) rates for dental services	• VA pays negotiated rates, which are generally less than Medicare rates for medical services and less than 80% of the NDAS Comprehensive Fee Report for dental services
Increase Veteran satisfaction	The PMO surveys Project HERO patients to monitor and measure patient satisfaction	• Project HERO patient satisfaction is comparable to VA • For FY11, overall satisfaction with Project HERO care through HVHS is 71% and 76% for Delta Dental
Secure accountable evaluation of pilot (demonstration) results	Contracts require regular reporting of program measures. The PMO monitors and reports program results monthly	• The PMO monitors and reports detailed metrics, trends and analysis monthly • The PMO also captures contract lessons learned to leverage them across contracts
Sustain partnerships with Academic Affiliates	The PMO analyzes program metrics to determine potential impacts and communicates with the VA Office of Academic Affiliates to sustain VA partnerships	• Analysis indicates that Project HERO has not impacted the volume of care purchased from VA's Academic Affiliates

Source for patient satisfaction data: Project HERO patient satisfaction survey results FY09 Q1-Q4 as of 12/07/2009

Overall Impact on VA Non-VA Care

Key features of the Project HERO business model

	Before Project HERO		With Project HERO
Quality	VA has variability in how quality is monitored from community providers	vs.	Network providers are held to VA quality standards including accreditation, credentialing, and peer review
Clinical information	VA could not require or measure the return of patient health records to VA	vs.	HVHS and Delta Dental providers are required to return patient records to VA within 30 days
Clinical coordination	Patients must identify their own Non-VA care providers and schedule their own appointments	vs.	HVHS and Delta Dental coordinate appointments between patients and health care providers in pre-qualified networks
Timeliness of care	VA cannot measure speed of appointment or wait times	vs.	HVHS and Delta Dental providers are committed to contacting Veterans for appointments within five days, arranging for Veterans to see specialists within 30 days, and helping ensure that Veterans wait less than 20 minutes to see the doctor or dentist once they've checked in
Cost	With the exception of physician services, VA does not have authority to pay at Medicare rates for Non-VA care services	vs.	VA pays negotiated rates, which are generally less than Medicare rates for medical services and less than 80% of NDAS Comprehensive Fee Report for dental services

Top Five Benefits

1. **Veterans get the care they need -** When Veterans need care that is not readily available at the VAMC, they do not have to search for local doctors and dentists. Project HERO supplements VA care with credentialed quality medical and dental providers to meet their needs
2. **It is easy -** VA sends a copy of the Project HERO authorization to HVHS and Delta Dental. HVHS and Delta Dental schedule appointments with a pre-screened medical or dental provider for Veterans
3. **It is fast -** HVHS and Delta Dental ensure Veterans see specialists within 30 days of receipt of an authorization, and Veterans wait less than 20 minutes to see the doctor or dentist once they have checked in for their appointments.
4. **Records returned to VA -** Veterans have peace of mind knowing their medical and dental records are returned to VA so their doctors and dentists can provide more informed, continuous care over time
5. **Negotiated rates -** Veterans can trust VA is using resources wisely while maintaining high quality care. HVHS and Delta Dental are contracted to meet VA quality standards at negotiated rates, and they send invoices directly to VA for payment

What Veterans Have to Say

- *"From the time I saw my VA medical team, it was very soon that I received a call from Delta Dental. Since that time it has been smooth sailing. I am so appreciative of Project HERO"*

- *"Care was prompt, courteous, considerate, thorough, efficient, and complete"*

- *"When VA sent me to Humana, they got me in ASAP and took care of the exam in good time"*

- *"Glad to see VA is working in a partnership role with non-VA specialist to help Veterans"*

Contact

For additional information, e-mail vhacoprojecthero@va.gov,
or contact any of the Project HERO team members listed below

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