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Wilmington VA on ‘MISSION’ to roll out new health care options

WILMINGTON, Del. — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is set to launch its new and improved community care program on June 6. The roll-out implements portions of the John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson [VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks \(MISSION\) Act of 2018](#), which both ends the Veterans Choice Program and establishes the new Veterans Community Care Program.

The MISSION Act serves to strengthen the nationwide VA Health Care System by empowering Veterans to have more options in their health care decisions.

Under the new Veterans Community Care Program, Veterans can now work with their VA health care provider or other VA staff to see if they are eligible to receive community care. Eligibility for community care does not require a Veteran to receive that care in the community; Veterans can still choose to have VA provide their care. Veterans are eligible to choose to receive care in the community if they meet any of the following six eligibility criteria:

1. A Veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
2. A Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands and U.S. Virgin Islands.
3. A Veteran qualifies under the [“grandfather” provision](#) related to distance eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program.
4. VA cannot furnish care in a manner that complies within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below, however, these standards are proposed and not yet final.

- **Average drive time to a specific VA medical facility**

- Thirty-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutional extended care services.
- Sixty-minute average drive time for specialty care.

Note: Average drive times are calculated by VA using geo-mapping software.

- **Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility**

- Twenty days for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutional extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.

- Twenty-eight days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
- 5. The Veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.
- 6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA's standards for quality.

To help employees prepare for this transformation and others under the MISSION Act, the Wilmington VA Medical Center and its outpatient clinics are dedicating the month of May to readiness.

"We're focused because it's important that these new benefits and appropriate options are effectively communicated to our Veterans, staff, and community partners," said Vince Kane, the director of Wilmington VA Medical Center and its five outpatient clinics. "We've invested more in employee training, and we've increased our presence at town halls, outreach events, and community meetings."

The VA MISSION Act of 2018:

- Strengthens VA's ability to recruit and retain clinicians.
- Statutorily authorizes "[Anywhere to Anywhere](#)" telehealth provision across state lines.
- Empowers Veterans with increased access to community care.
- Establishes a new, urgent-care benefit that eligible Veterans can access in the community.

"I see this as a tremendous opportunity for us. I see it as a chance – particularly here in Delaware and South Jersey – to grow and enroll more of our Veterans in VA health care," Kane said. "We know a transformation of this size – and on such a rapid timeline – won't be without risk. We're aiming for excellence and we continue to work on improving our processes while increasing our services, our partnerships, and our communications so Vets can get the care they need at the right time, the right place, and with the right provider."

Annually, Wilmington VA Medical Center and its community-based outpatient clinics serve approximately 31,000 Veterans in Delaware and southern New Jersey.

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Some of Wilmington VA's community activities:

- Covered VA MISSION Act at U.S. Senator Tom Carper's Veterans Summit on April 29.
- VA Town Hall on MISSION Act at American Legion Post No. 2 in Dover on May 8.
- Briefed MISSION Act at meeting of service officers and congressional staffers on May 14.
- Veterans Community Forum on MISSION Act at VFW Post No. 220 in Mays Landing May 16.
- VA Town Hall on MISSION Act at Delaware Veterans Post No. 1 in Wilmington on May 21.
- Briefed MISSION Act to the Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs in Dover on May 21.
- VA outreach discussed VA MISSION Act at Veterans Stand Down in Atlantic City on May 22.
- MISSION Act outreach at Seaford Library's Antique & Custom Car Show on May 25.
- MISSION Act outreach table at town hall of U.S. Senator Chris Coons on May 28.
- VA outreach team at New Jersey Jeep Invasion at Wildwood, New Jersey, June 8 and 9.

For more information:

- VA news release – April 22, 2019: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59215/vas-improvements-veteran-community-care-mission-act-track-june-6-implementation/>
- VAntage Point Blog – April 1, 2019: [New eligibility criteria a major improvement over existing rules](#)
- VAntage Point Blog – March 19, 2019: [VA MISSION Act: What is the latest on community care? How VA is transforming Veteran community care under the VA MISSION Act of 2018 and what to expect.](#)
- VAntage Point Blog – Feb. 11, 2019: [MISSION ACT 101: How the law will improve VA's ability to deliver health care to Veterans](#)