



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# News Release

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## **VA Implements Second Phase of Choice Card Program**

*Cards sent to Veterans waiting more than 30 days for care*

Washington, DC – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that it began mailing Veterans Choice Cards on November 17 to Veterans currently waiting more than 30-days from their preferred date or the date that is medically determined by their physician for an appointment at a VA facility.

“VA continues to focus on implementation of this new temporary benefit so that Veterans receive the timely quality care they need in a way that reduces confusion and inefficiencies,” said Secretary Robert A. McDonald, who penned an [open letter](#) to Veterans announcing the implementation of the Choice Card program.

The Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit that allows some Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. The first round of cards along with a letter explaining the program was issued on November 5 to Veterans who are eligible based on their place of residence. VA is now engaging in the next phase of its rollout –eligibility explanation letters are being sent to Veterans waiting more than 30 days from their preferred date to be seen or considered medically necessary by their physician.

To improve service delivery, VA has prioritized efforts to accelerate Veterans off of wait lists and into clinics through the Accelerated Care Initiative begun over the summer. Through this initiative, VA medical centers have increased access to care inside and outside of VA, added more clinic hours and work days, deployed mobile medical units and shared their best practices from VA’s high-performing facilities throughout the organization.

### **Significant improvements have resulted nationally:**

- Scheduling more than 1.2 million more appointments in the past four months than in the same period last year. In total, VA medical centers have scheduled over 19 million Veteran appointments from June to October 1, 2014;
- Reducing the national new patient Primary Care wait time by 18 percent;
- Completing 98 percent of appointments within 30 days of the Veterans’ preferred date, or the date determined to be medically necessary by a physician;
- Authorizing 1.1 million non-VA care authorizations, a 47-percent increase over the same period last year; and
- Increasing the amount of time providers could deliver care to Veterans by increasing the amount of clinic hours in primary and specialty care and through adding weekend and evening clinics at our medical centers.

VA is America’s largest integrated health care system with over 1,700 sites of care, serving approximately 9 million Veterans enrolled in health care services. The Choice Program is part of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA), enacted nearly three months ago, to enable VA to meet the demand for Veterans’ health care in the short-term.

For more information about the Choice Program, call 1-866- 606-8198 or visit <http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/>.

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