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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 6, 2016

Statement by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald on the Commission on Care Report

WASHINGTON – Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald released the following statement on the Commission on Care final report.

The report is available here.

"On behalf of the Nation's 22 million Veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs, I thank the members of the Commission on Care for their hard work over the past year. The Commission has produced a wide-ranging set of recommendations on reforming the Veterans Health Administration, and VA looks forward to reviewing and considering these recommendations as we ensure that we remain true to our mission to serve and honor the men and women who are America's Veterans.

"While we will examine the report closely over the coming weeks and respond in a more detailed fashion, I am pleased to see that many of their recommendations are in line with our MyVA efforts to transform the VA into a Veteran-centric organization. Necessary transformational progress has been under way for the past two years, increasing access to health care and improving the Veteran experience of VA. This past March, VA set a new record for completed appointments: 5.3 million inside VA, 730,000 more than in March 2014. We also issued twice as many authorizations for care in the community than in March 2014. Clinical workload is up 11 percent in the past two years. Nearly 97 percent of appointments are now completed within 30 days of the Veteran's preferred date; 22 percent are same-day appointments; average wait times are five days for primary care, six days for specialty care, and two days for mental health care. Nearly 90 percent of Veterans surveyed say they are "satisfied or completely satisfied" with the timeliness of their appointments.

"However, until all Veterans say they are satisfied, I won't be satisfied. Nobody at VA will be satisfied. But our progress so far proves that VA's current leadership, direction, and momentum can produce the necessary transformation, as VA has already demonstrated in reducing the backlog of disability compensation claims by 90 percent since 2013.

"We know we can't complete the job without help from our partners. For that reason, I look forward to continuing to work with Congress, Veteran advocates, and Veterans themselves to identify further ways to improve VA.

"There are some things that can be done right now to help us continue our progress. Congress must act on our proposals to consolidate our Community Care programs, modernize and reform the claims appeals process, and pass the bi-partisan Veterans First Act. The window of opportunity is closing fast, but if Congress acts before leaving town this month, 2016 will be the year the nation turned the corner for Veterans.

"In the meantime, as we review the recommendations of the Commission, we will continue to look for other ways to build on the progress we've made to date and ensure we are doing everything possible to faithfully serve those who have served this country."

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