

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

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Debunking the VA Privatization Myth

There is no effort underway to privatize VA, and to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate on the real issues surrounding Veterans' health care.

Facts Debunk the Privatization Myth: A Two-Decade Comparison

In 1998, VA's budget was \$42.38 billion.

- VA's 2018 enacted budget is more than four times that figure at \$188.65 billion.

In 1998, VA had 240,846 employees.

- As of March 29, 2018, VA had 385,233 employees, a nearly 60 percent increase in 20 years.
- VA has increased its end strength by nearly 15,000 since the beginning of the Trump administration, from roughly 370,000 to 385,233 as of March 29, 2018.

In 2000 VA had 1,110 medical facilities.

- Today, VA has 130 more medical facilities, for a total of 1,240.

VA Community Care Has Existed for More Than 70 Years, and Has Nothing to Do with Privatization

VA has been offering community care since the World War II era, starting with the then-Veterans Administration's Hometown Program that began in 1945.

As former Secretary Shulkin [said](#), "No health care provider delivers every treatment under the sun. Referral programs for patients to get care through outside providers (known as Choice or Community Care at the VA) are as essential to the medical profession as stethoscopes and tongue depressors."

Currently, VA operates seven distinct community care programs. VA is working with Congress to merge all of VA's community care efforts into a single, streamlined program that's easy for Veterans and VA employees to use so the department can work with Veterans to coordinate their care with private providers when VA can't provide the care in a timely way or when it's in Veterans' best medical interest.

The fact is that demand for Veterans' health care is outpacing VA's ability to supply it wholly in-house. And with America facing a looming doctor shortage, VA has to be able to share health care resources with the private sector through an effective community care program. There is just no other option and, once again, VA has offered this solution since the World War II era.

The Bottom Line on the Privatization Myth

"If we're trying to privatize, we're not doing a very good job,"... "We've gone from 250,000 employees in the VA in 2009 to 370,000 employees, and we've gone from a \$93.5 billion budget to what the president's asked this year is \$198 billion. It sounds like we've been an utter failure if we're trying to privatize." [— House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Phil Roe](#)