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# News Release

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## Secretary Wilkie: Revolutionizing VA Health Care

WASHINGTON – Today Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie released the following statement:

### Revolutionizing VA Health Care

By Secretary Robert Wilkie

The past two years have been an exciting time for Veterans and for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Under President Trump's leadership, VA has enacted more reforms across the organization than at any other time since the 1990s, with key advances in the areas of transparency, accountability and customer service.

VA will soon build on this progress by rolling out a plan that will revolutionize VA health care as we know it.

This week, as part of VA's implementation of the [MISSION Act](#), the department will introduce long-awaited access standards on community care and urgent care that will take effect in June and guide when Veterans can seek care to meet their needs – be it with VA or with community providers.

VA's current patchwork of seven separate community care programs is a bureaucratic maze that's hard to navigate for Veterans, their families and VA employees.

Our new access standards will form the basis of a federal regulation that will consolidate VA's community care efforts into a single, simple-to-use program that puts Veterans at the center of their VA health care decisions. Strict and confusing qualification criteria like driving distances and proximity to VA facilities that don't offer needed services will be replaced by eligibility guidelines based on what matters most: the convenience of our Veteran customers.

Although these new standards represent an important win for America's Veterans, they will not be without controversy. Some will claim falsely and predictably that they represent a first step toward privatizing the department.

Here are the facts: under President Trump, VA is giving Veterans the power to choose the care they trust, and more Veterans are choosing VA for their health care than ever before.

Since 2014, the number of annual appointments for VA care is up by 3.4 million, with over 58 million appointments in fiscal year 2018. Simply put, more Veterans are choosing to receive their health care at VA. Patients' trust in VA care has skyrocketed – currently at 87.7 percent – and [VA wait times are shorter](#) than those in the private sector in primary care and two of three specialty care areas.

In other words, VA is seeing more patients than ever before, more quickly than ever before, and Veterans are more satisfied with their care than they have been previously.

And why should we be surprised?

[A 2018 Rand study](#) found that the VA health care system “generally delivers higher-quality care than other health providers.”

[A 2018 Dartmouth study](#) found that “Veterans Health Administration hospitals outperform non-Veterans Health Administration hospitals in most health care markets.”

[A 2019 study](#) in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows that VA wait times are shorter than those in the private sector in primary care and two of three specialty care areas.

These studies provide verification of the fact that VA has made great strides since 2014, and now compares favorably to the private sector for access and quality of care – and in many cases exceeds it.

And VA employees are noticing improvements as well. [VA ranked sixth out of 17](#) federal government agencies in the Partnership for Public Service's annual “Best Places to Work” tabulation, up from 17<sup>th</sup> last year.

We know that to keep the trust of our Veterans we must continue to deliver. Our medical services must meet our Veterans' needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA. We will constantly innovate, upgrade, and pursue ways to serve our nation's heroes as best we can.

Our new access standards are a vital part of this effort.

Most Americans can already choose the health care providers that they trust, and President Trump promised that Veterans would be able to do the same.

With VA's new access standards, the future of the VA health care system will lie in the hands of Veterans – exactly where it should be.

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