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VA's proposed rules for Veteran community care now open for public comment

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the publication beginning tomorrow of a proposed regulation in the [Federal Register](#) for the new [Veterans community care program, including access standards](#).

The proposed regulation would establish new rules for the Veterans community care program required by section 101 of the [VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks \(MISSION Act\)](#) of 2018.

Last month, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie announced its proposed **access standards for community care** and **urgent care** provisions that will take effect in June and guide when Veterans can seek care to meet their needs under the MISSION Act – be it with VA or with community providers.

Under the MISSION Act, signed by President Trump in June 2018, there are six different eligibility criteria for community care:

- Services unavailable
- Residence in a State without a full-service VA medical facility
- 40-mile legacy/grandfathered from the Choice program
- Access standards
- Best medical interest
- Needing care from a VA medical service line that VA determines is not providing care that complies with VA's standards for quality

ACCESS STANDARDS

VA is proposing new access standards, effective when the final regulations publish (expected in June 2019), to ensure Veterans have greater choice in receiving care.

Eligibility criteria and final standards as follows were based on VA's analysis of all of the best practices both in government and in the private sector and tailored to the needs of our Veteran patients:

- Access standards will be based on **average drive time** and **appointment wait times**.
- For primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services, VA is proposing a **30-minute average drive time standard**.
- For specialty care, VA is proposing a **60-minute average drive time standard**.
- VA is proposing appointment wait-time standards of **20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services**, and **28 days for specialty care from the date of request with certain exceptions**.

Eligible Veterans who cannot access care within those standards would be able to choose between eligible community providers and care at a VA medical facility.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said, "Our medical services must meet our Veterans' needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA. 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."

Secretary Wilkie's full statement from Jan. 28 [is available here](#).

The proposed regulation (RIN 2900-AQ46) is currently available online at <https://federalregister.gov/d/2019-03030>.

The proposed regulation is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register tomorrow, Feb. 22, and VA encourages the public to provide input on the proposed regulation by March 25, 2019, during the public comment period. For instructions on how to submit a comment, visit the Federal Register website at www.regulations.gov and search for RIN 2900-AQ46.

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