

VA Makes Changes to Veterans Choice Program

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Changes Remove Barriers and Expands Access to Care

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced a number of changes to make participation in the Veterans Choice Program easier and more convenient for Veterans who need to use it. The move, which streamlines eligibility requirements, follows feedback from Veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

“As we implement the Veterans Choice Program, we are learning from our stakeholders what works and what needs to be refined,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “It is our goal to do all that we can to remove barriers that separate Veterans from the care they deserve.” To date, more than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014.

Under the old policy, a Veteran was eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she met the following criteria:

- Enrolled in VA health care by 8/1/14 or able to enroll as a combat Veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program;
- Experienced unusual or excessive burden eligibility determined by geographical challenges, environmental factors or a medical condition impacting the Veteran’s ability to travel;
- Determined eligible based on the Veteran’s current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.

Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran’s physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician;
- Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician;
- Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home;
- Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran’s local

VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons; or

- Lives in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes New Hampshire Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the United States Territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).

Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA's progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.