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VA health care options under MISSION Act

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its new and improved Veterans Community Care Program on June 6, 2019, implementing portions of [the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act](#) of 2018 (MISSION Act), which both ends the Veterans Choice Program and establishes a new Veterans Community Care Program.

The MISSION Act will strengthen the nationwide VA Health Care System by empowering Veterans with more health care options.

“The changes not only improve our ability to provide the health care Veterans need, but also when and where they need it,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It will also put Veterans at the center of their care and offer options, including expanded telehealth and urgent care, so they can find the balance in the system that is right for them.”

Under the new Veterans Community Care Program, Veterans can work with their VA health care provider or other VA staff to see if they are eligible to receive community care based on new criteria. Eligibility for community care does not require a Veteran to receive that care in the community; Veterans can still choose to have VA provide their care. Veterans may elect to receive care in the community if they meet any of the following six eligibility criteria:

1. A Veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
2. A Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
3. A Veteran qualifies under the [“grandfather” provision](#) related to distance eligibility under the Veterans Choice Program.

4. VA cannot furnish care within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below:

- **Drive time to a specific VA medical facility**
- Thirty-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutional extended care services.
- Sixty-minute average drive time for specialty care.

Note: Drive times are calculated using geomapping software.

- **Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility**
 - Twenty days from the date of request for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutional extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
 - Twenty-eight days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
5. The Veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.
6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA's standards for quality based on specific conditions.

In preparation for this landmark initiative, senior VA leaders will visit more than 30 VA hospitals across the country to provide in-person support for the rollout. The VA MISSION Act:

- Strengthens VA's ability to recruit and retain clinicians.
- Authorizes "[Anywhere to Anywhere](#)" telehealth across state lines.
- Empowers Veterans with increased access to community care.
- Establishes a new urgent care benefit that eligible Veterans can access through VA's network of urgent care providers in the community.

VA serves approximately 9 million enrolled Veterans at 1,255 health care facilities around the country every year.

For more information, visit www.missionact.va.gov.

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News Release

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VA publishes proposed regulations to improve the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

WASHINGTON –The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will publish a [proposed rule](#) in the Federal Register March 6 that would improve and standardize [VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers \(PCAFC\)](#) and ensure the program regulations reflect changes required by the [VA MISSION Act of 2018](#).

A component of the [Caregiver Support Program](#), the PCAFC was established in 2011 to provide additional benefits including a monthly stipend for qualifying family caregivers of eligible Veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

In the proposed rule, VA seeks to standardize eligibility by expanding the definition of serious injury to include any service-connected disability — regardless of whether it resulted from an injury, illness or disease — defining what it means to be in need of personal care services, and ensuring that the eligibility criteria capture the personal care service needs of Veterans and Servicemembers with cognitive or neurological impairment or mental health conditions, among other things.

Additionally, VA is proposing changes to the stipend payment methodology, definitions for financial planning and legal services and procedures for revocation and discharge, to include advance notice requirements aimed at improving communication between VA and PCAFC participants.

“We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to caregivers who work tirelessly to provide critical support for our nation’s Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This proposed regulation would improve the assistance we provide to help ensure our most vulnerable Veterans can stay in their homes with their loved ones for as long as possible.”

VA’s Caregiver Support Program is the first of its kind and addresses the complexity and expense of keeping loved ones out of institutions and at home with their families who provide personalized care. The program offers unparalleled support services including training, peer mentoring, respite care, a telephone support line and self-care courses for caregivers of all Veterans enrolled in VA health care who need personal care services.

The regulations are part of a broad effort to [strengthen PCAFC](#) in advance of a planned expansion under the MISSION Act which expanded eligibility for PCAFC to eligible Veterans from all eras, beginning with those who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975. Two years after the first phase of program expansion, PCAFC will include eligible Veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty between May 7, 1975 and Sept. 11, 2001. Prior to expanding, VA must fully implement an information technology (IT) system required by the MISSION Act.

In October 2019 VA launched a commercial off-the-shelf IT system and expects to complete deployment in late summer or early fall of 2020. The department also standardized operating procedures for the Caregiver Support Program, provided new training for staff and caregivers and is boosting operational capacity through hiring of additional staff. These changes are necessary as VA prepares to expand PCAFC.

Learn more about support services available for [caregivers of Veterans](#) or call the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274.

The proposed rule will be open for public comment in the Federal Register for 60 days.

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