

# Balanced Community Care

## BACKGROUND

Access to community care is essential for veterans, particularly those living in rural areas and those with unique needs. An estimated 4.6 million veterans reside in rural communities, with 58% enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), compared to 38% for urban veterans, underscoring the need for accessible healthcare options.

While The American Legion believes VA should remain the cornerstone of veterans healthcare, integration of community care to supplement the VA direct-care system has been an important relief valve to ensure veterans get the care they need, when they need it.

Over \$150 billion has been spent on community care since 2015. Costs for community care have grown approximately 20% annually since 2019, while internal VA costs have remained stable. The increase is primarily due to expanded eligibility.

Rural veterans face unique challenges obtaining VA care. For instance, lack of internet connectivity makes it difficult for rural veterans to attend telehealth visits. Rural broadband access must be expanded and transportation programs improved.

## KEY POINTS

- Community care should receive the same coordination and oversight as VHA-provided care.
- Community care costs have ballooned due to expanded use and require additional oversight.
- VA providers should be able to fully treat veterans outside of the state in which they are licensed to operate.
- Transportation programs for veterans to and from appointments both at VA and in the community must be improved, including emergency flights.

## WHAT CONGRESS CAN DO

- **Pass S. 275/H.R. 740 – Veterans ACCESS Act**
- **Pass H.R. 1107 – Protecting Veteran Access to Telemedicine Services Act**
- Ensure veterans receive any bills for copays quickly and do not receive surprise bills months after treatment.
- Pass legislation codifying rules VA is currently using to allow doctors to treat and prescribe remotely for patients outside the state the provider is licensed in.



## THE AMERICAN LEGION'S LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Scan the QR code to read the full list of legislative priorities of The American Legion.

