

New VA Mission Act Signed Into Law

By Blake Hyfied

The VA Mission Act of 2018, signed into law June 6, 2018, is designed to greatly improve veteran access to VA healthcare. What does it mean for veterans? The VA Mission Act addresses in-network and non-VA healthcare issues, veterans' homes, access to walk-in VA care, prescription drug procedures, and much more. Here are some highlights of the Act:

Eliminating Funding Gaps, Consolidating Programs, And Modernization

The VA Mission Act does some important things in the short term as well as introducing long-care fixes. The short term improvements are crucial for some veterans; the Act eliminates a gap in care due to funding issues associated with the VA Choice program.

Veteran Care Program

A significant improvement under the VA Mission Act is that the Department of Veterans Affairs is now required to provide access to community care if VA does not offer the care or services the veteran requires, and when the veteran meets certain requirements.

Authorization For Veteran Care Contracts

To implement the Veteran Care Program, the VA is authorized to enter into contracts-Veterans Care Agreements-with community healthcare providers with rates comparable to the VA Veterans Community Care Program.

Veteran Care Homes

The VA is now authorized to enter Veteran Care Agreements with State Veterans Homes with the purpose of eliminating competitive contracting. Under the VA Mission Act these homes are required to follow federal Fraud, Waste, And Abuse requirements.

Veteran Access To Walk-In Services

Veterans have walk-in care access under the VA Mission Act, but this portion of the law includes certain conditions including a requirement that vets must have used VA healthcare services within a 24-month period prior to requesting walk-in services. Walk-in care is available from community healthcare providers who have a contract or other agreement with the VA to provide the services.

Expanding The VA Veteran Caregiver Program

Important changes to the VA Comprehensive Assistance For Family Caregivers includes expanded eligibility for veterans with service-connected medical issues. In the past access to this program was more limited and emphasized post-9/11 military service.

“Safe Opioid” Procedures For VA Prescriptions

The VA is now required to ensure its care providers-including contractors-are using “evidence-based guidelines” for prescribing opioid-based painkillers or pain management approaches. These guidelines are found in the Opioid Safety Initiative which must be adhered to as a condition of providing community care.