

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5624

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish an integrated project team to improve the process for scheduling appointments for health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 19 (legislative day, DECEMBER 16), 2024

Ms. HASSAN (for herself and Mr. BOOZMAN) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish an integrated project team to improve the process for scheduling appointments for health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improving Veteran Ac-
5 cess to Care Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF INTEGRATED PROJECT TEAM**
2 **OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO**
3 **IMPROVE HEALTH CARE APPOINTMENT**
4 **SCHEDULING.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
6 fairs, through the Veterans Health Administration and the
7 Office of Information and Technology of the Department
8 of Veterans Affairs, or any successor offices or administra-
9 tions of similar function, shall establish an integrated
10 project team to improve the process for scheduling ap-
11 pointments for health care from the Department of Vet-
12 erans Affairs.

13 (b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to en-
14 sure the Department of Veterans Affairs delivers to pa-
15 tients and employees of the Department in a timely man-
16 ner the scheduling capabilities developed by the integrated
17 project team established under subsection (a) to imme-
18 diately improve delivery of care, access to care, customer
19 experience and service, and efficiency with respect to the
20 delivery of care.

21 (c) OBJECTIVES.—The objectives of the integrated
22 project team established under subsection (a) are the fol-
23 lowing:

24 (1) To develop or continue the development of
25 a scheduling system that enables both personnel and
26 patients of the Department of Veterans Affairs to

1 view available appointments for all care furnished by
2 the Department, including—

3 (A) available appointments for all pro-
4 viders of the Department;

5 (B) available appointments at all clinics,
6 hospitals, and other health care facilities of the
7 Department; and

8 (C) available appointments at all offices
9 providing patient care within the health care
10 system of the Department, including primary
11 care and all forms of specialty care.

12 (2) To develop or continue the development of
13 a self-service scheduling platform, available for use
14 by all patients of the Department, which shall—

15 (A) enable such patients to view available
16 appointments and fully schedule appointments
17 for all care furnished by the Department, in-
18 cluding—

19 (i) appointments for all providers of
20 the Department;

21 (ii) appointments at all clinics, hos-
22 pitals, and other health care facilities of
23 the Department; and

24 (iii) appointments at all offices pro-
25 viding patient care within the health care

1 system of the Department, including pri-
2 mary care and all forms of specialty care;

3 (B) if a referral is required for an appoint-
4 ment, provide a method for the patient to re-
5 quest a referral and subsequently book an ap-
6 pointment if the referral is approved; and

7 (C) provide such patients with the ability
8 to cancel or reschedule appointments.

9 (3) To create a process through which all pa-
10 tients of the Department can telephonically speak
11 with a scheduler who can assist the patient to deter-
12 mine appointment availability and can fully schedule
13 appointments on behalf of the patient for all care
14 furnished by the Department, including—

15 (A) appointments for all providers of the
16 Department;

17 (B) appointments at all clinics, hospitals,
18 and other health care facilities of the Depart-
19 ment; and

20 (C) appointments at all offices providing
21 patient care within the health care system of
22 the Department, including primary care and all
23 forms of specialty care.

24 (4) To carry out such other functions, over-
25 sight, metric development and tracking, change man-

1 agement, cross-Department coordination, and other
2 related matters as the Secretary determines appro-
3 priate as it relates to scheduling tools, functions,
4 and operations with respect to health care appoint-
5 ments furnished by the Department.

6 (d) COORDINATION WITH ELECTRONIC HEALTH
7 RECORD MODERNIZATION PROGRAM.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The integrated project team
9 established under subsection (a) shall carry out the
10 objectives under subsection (c) in consultation and
11 coordination with the deployment schedule and capa-
12 bilities of the Electronic Health Record Moderniza-
13 tion Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs
14 to ensure a smooth transition to using the tools and
15 features, where relevant and appropriate, that may
16 be created pursuant to this section, along with the
17 features in the Electronic Health Record Moderniza-
18 tion Program.

19 (2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this
20 subsection shall be construed to require the inte-
21 grated project team established under subsection (a),
22 the Veterans Health Administration, or the Office of
23 Information and Technology of the Department to
24 defer or delay the deployment of scheduling capabili-
25 ties required by this section because of future poten-

1 tial planned capabilities of the Electronic Health
2 Record Modernization Program.

3 (e) DEADLINES.—

4 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days
5 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
6 retary of Veterans Affairs, through the Veterans
7 Health Administration and the Office of Information
8 and Technology of the Department of Veterans Af-
9 fairs, or any successor office, shall fully establish the
10 integrated project team under subsection (a).

11 (2) COMPLETION OF OBJECTIVES.—Not later
12 than one year after the date of the enactment of this
13 Act, the integrated project team established under
14 subsection (a) shall complete the objectives under
15 subsection (c).

16 (f) REPORT ON OBJECTIVES.—If the Secretary of
17 Veterans Affairs determines that an objective under sub-
18 section (c), or any feature or service in connection with
19 that objective, cannot be implemented or otherwise incor-
20 porated into a final product, the Secretary shall, within
21 45 days of that determination, submit to the appropriate
22 committees of Congress a report—

23 (1) detailing that objective, feature, or service
24 and providing an explanation as to why that objec-

1 tive, feature, or service cannot be implemented or in-
2 corporated, as the case may be; and

3 (2) setting forth a plan for implementing this
4 section without that objective, feature, or service.

5 (g) IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS.—Not later than
6 each of one year and two years after the date of the enact-
7 ment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall
8 submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report
9 on the progress of the Secretary in fulfilling the require-
10 ments of this section, including—

11 (1) costs incurred to implement such require-
12 ments as of the date of the report;

13 (2) the expected costs to complete implementa-
14 tion of such requirements (including costs for man-
15 agement and technology);

16 (3) the schedule for deployment of any capabili-
17 ties developed by the integrated project team estab-
18 lished under subsection (a); and

19 (4) goals and metrics achieved, challenges, and
20 lessons learned.

21 (h) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-
22 tion shall be construed to preclude or impede the ability
23 of a veteran to contact or schedule an appointment directly
24 with a facility or provider through a non-online scheduling
25 process, should the veteran choose to do so.

1 (i) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

2 (1) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CON-
3 GRESS.—The term “appropriate committees of Con-
4 gress” means the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of
5 the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
6 of the House of Representatives.

7 (2) FULLY SCHEDULE.—The term “fully sched-
8 ule”, with respect to booking an appointment, means
9 that the appointment booking is completed, rather
10 than simply requested.

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