

VETERANS INCREASED CHOICE FOR TRANSPLANTED
ORGANS AND RECOVERY ACT OF 2017

NOVEMBER 7, 2017.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State
of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. ROE of Tennessee, from the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 2601]

The Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 2601) to amend the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 to improve the access of veterans to organ transplants, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

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The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Increased Choice for Transplanted Organs and Recovery Act of 2017” or the “VICTOR Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. ORGAN TRANSPLANTS UNDER THE VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM.

Section 101(b)(2) of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113–146; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note) is amended—

- (1) in subparagraph (C)(ii), by striking “or”;
- (2) in subparagraph (D)(ii)(II)(dd), by striking the period and inserting “; or”;

and

- (3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(E)(i) requires an organ or bone marrow transplant; and

“(ii)(I) has, in the opinion of the primary health care provider of the veteran, a medically compelling reason to travel outside the region of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, established under section 372 of the National Organ Transplantation Act (Public Law 98–507; 42 U.S.C. 274), in which the veteran resides to receive such transplant at a medical facility of the Department; or

“(II) faces an unusual or excessive burden in receiving such transplant at a medical facility of the Department, including—

“(aa) geographical challenges;

“(bb) environmental factors, including roads that are not accessible to the general public, traffic, or hazardous weather;

“(cc) a medical condition of the veteran that affects the ability to travel; or

“(dd) other factors the Secretary determines appropriate, including the preference of the veteran to receive such transplant at a non-Department facility.”.

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.

The amendments made by this Act shall take effect on the later of—

- (1) October 1, 2018; and
- (2) the date of the enactment of this Act.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

H.R. 2601, as amended, the “Veterans Increased Choice for Transplanted Organs and Recovery Act of 2017,” would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide for any care or services for transplantation to a veteran who requires an organ transplant at a federally approved transplant center that treats Medicare patients if there are compelling medical reasons for the veteran to go outside of his Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, or the veteran faces an unusual or excessive burden in receiving his transplantation care at a VA Transplantation Center (VATC).

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

VA has offered solid organ transplant services for eligible veteran patients since 1962 and bone marrow transplant services for eligible veteran patients since 1982.¹ Through VA’s National Transplant Program, VA provides transplants primarily through 13 VA transplant centers located in: Palo Alto, California; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Houston, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; Iowa City, Iowa; Madison, Wisconsin; Birmingham, Alabama; Nashville, Tennessee; West Roxbury, Massachusetts; Bronx, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Richmond, Virginia.²

The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113–146; 128 STAT. 1754) created the Choice program to increase access to care in the community for veteran patients unable to receive care at VA medical facilities due to long waiting

¹ VA National Transplant Program. <https://www.va.gov/health/services/transplant/> Accessed October 30, 2017

² Ibid.

times for VA appointments or lengthy travel distances to VA medical facilities. Since the implementation of the Choice program, the Committee has been hearing an increasing number of complaints about the VA transplant program from veterans who are concerned about the lengthy travel required for many veterans to reach a VA transplant center and barriers to receiving transplant care in the community. Currently, a veteran who needs an organ transplant must obtain the transplant at one of the fourteen VATCs. This means that a veteran may be required to travel hundreds, even thousands of miles across several states for a transplant, despite potentially bypassing many other transplant centers on the way. On June 29, 2016, the Journal of the American Medical Association published an article that found that greater distance from a VA Transplant Center was associated with a lower likelihood of receiving a transplant and a greater likelihood of death among certain veteran transplant patients.³ Moreover, there may be medical reasons for which a veteran would benefit from going to a particular transplant center regardless of where the veteran resides. Given that, the Committee believes that veterans residing far from VA transplant centers should be given the option of receiving their transplant from transplant centers that would most benefit the veteran. The Committee also believes that, wherever possible, VA should remove barriers to transplant care in the community for veteran patients. Consistent with those goals, section 2 of the bill would authorize VA to provide for any care or services a veteran may need, for a bone marrow or a solid organ transplant, at a federally approved transplant center if, in the opinion of the veteran's primary care physician, the veteran has a compelling reason to travel outside of the region of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network in which the veteran resides, or if the veteran faces an unusual or excessive burden at a VATC including geographical challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition of the veteran that affects the ability to travel, and other factors determined appropriate by the Secretary of VA, including the veteran's preference to receive a transplant at a non-VA facility.

HEARINGS

There were no Subcommittee hearings held on H.R. 2601.

On October 24, 2017, the full Committee conducted a legislative hearing on a number of bills including H.R. 2601.

The following witnesses testified:

The Honorable Jim Banks, U.S. House of Representatives, 3rd District, Indiana; The Honorable Mike Gallagher, U.S. House of Representatives, 8th District, Wisconsin; The Honorable John R. Carter, U.S. House of Representatives, 31st District, Texas; The Honorable Glenn Thompson, U.S. House of Representatives, 5th District, Pennsylvania; The Honorable Neal P. Dunn, U.S. House of Representatives, 2nd District, Florida; The Honorable Andy Barr, U.S. House of Representatives, 6th District, Kentucky; The Honorable David J. Shulkin, M.D., Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, who was

³Journal of the American Medical Association, "Association of Distance from a Transplant Center with Access to Waitlist Placement, Receipt of Liver Transplantation, and Survival Among U.S. Veterans, June 29, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24668105>.

accompanied by Carolyn Clancy M.D., the Executive in Charge of the Veterans Health Administration, and Laurie Zephyrin M.D., MPH, MBA, the Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Community Care for the Veterans Health Administration; Adrian M. Atizado, Deputy National Legislative Director, Disabled American Veterans; Roscoe G. Butler, Deputy Director for Health Care, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division, The American Legion; and Kayda Keleher, Associate Director, National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Statements for the record were submitted by:

American Federation of Government Employees, AFL–CIO; American Health Care Association; American Medical Association; AMVETS; Concerned Veterans of America; Fleet Reserve Association; Got Your 6; Health IT Now; Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; Military Officers Association of America; Military Order of the Purple Heart; National Alliance on Mental Illness; National Guard Association of the United States; Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs/Association of VA Psychologist Leaders/Association of VA Social Workers/Veterans Healthcare Action Campaign; Paralyzed Veterans of America; Reserve Officers Association; University of Pittsburgh; Vietnam Veterans of America; and the Wounded Warrior Project.

SUBCOMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

There was no Subcommittee consideration of H.R. 2601, as amended.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On November 2, 2017, the full Committee met in open markup session, a quorum being present, and ordered H.R. 1133, as amended, to be reported favorably to the House of Representatives by voice vote. During consideration of the bill, the following amendments were considered and agreed to by voice vote:

An Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 2601 offered by Representative Neal Dunn of Florida.

COMMITTEE VOTES

In compliance with clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, there were no recorded votes taken on amendments or in connection with ordering H.R. 1133, as amended, reported to the House. A motion by Representative Tim Walz of Minnesota, Ranking Member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to report H.R. 1133, as amended, favorably to the House of Representatives was agreed to by voice vote.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS

In compliance with clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII and clause (2)(b)(1) of rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee's oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the descriptive portions of this report.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In accordance with clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee's performance goals and objectives are to improve the provision of transplant care to veteran patients by authorizing VA to provide for any care or services a live donor may require to carry out a transplant procedure in either a VA or VA community care facility for an eligible veteran notwithstanding that the live donor may not be eligible for VA health care.

NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY, ENTITLEMENT AUTHORITY, AND TAX EXPENDITURES

With respect to the requirement with respect to clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office an estimate of new budget authority, entitlement authority, or tax expenditures or revenues.

EARMARKS AND TAX AND TARIFF BENEFITS

H.R. 2601, as amended, does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

COMMITTEE COST ESTIMATE

Clause 3(d)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires an estimate and a comparison by the Committee of the costs that would be incurred in carrying out this bill.

However, clause 3(d)(3)(B) of that Rule provides that this requirement does not apply when the Committee has included in its report a timely submitted cost estimate of the bill prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office under section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. The Committee has requested but not received a cost estimate for this bill from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office. The Committee believes, according to a preliminary score from the Congressional Budget Office, that enactment of H.R. 2601, as amended, would not increase outlays from the current amounts appropriated to the Veterans Choice Fund.

BUDGET AUTHORITY AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

With respect to the requirements of clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and with respect to requirements of clause (3)(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has requested but not received a cost estimate for this bill from the Director of Congressional Budget Office. The Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office a statement as to whether this bill contains any new budget authority, spending authority, credit authority, or an increase or decrease in revenues or tax expenditures.

FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

With respect to the requirements of Section 423 of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (as amended by Section 101(a)(2) of the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act, P.L. 104–4), the Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office a statement as to whether the provisions of the reported bill include unfunded mandates.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act would be created by H.R. 1133, as amended.

STATEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to Article I, section 8 of the United States Constitution, H.R. 2601, as amended, is authorized by Congress’ power to “provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States.”

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that H.R. 2601, as amended, does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

STATEMENT ON DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Pursuant to section 3(g) of H. Res. 5, 115th Cong. (2017), the Committee finds that no provision of H.R. 2601, as amended, establishes or reauthorizes a program of the Federal Government known to be duplicative of another Federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

DISCLOSURE OF DIRECTED RULEMAKING

Pursuant to section 3(i) of H. Res. 5, 115th Cong. (2017), the Committee estimates that H.R. 2601, as amended, contains no directed rulemaking that would require the Secretary to prescribe regulations.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATION

Section 1. Short title

Section 1 of the bill would provide the short title for H.R. 2601, as amended, as the “Veterans Increased Choice for Transplanted Organs and Recovery Act of 2017” or the “VICTOR Act of 2017”.

Section 2. Organ transplants under the Veterans Choice program

Section 2 of the bill would amend Section 101(b)(2) of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (PL 113–146) by adding, at the end, a new section (D)(ii)(II)(dd) with regards to the eligibility of a veteran seeking an organ or bone marrow trans-

plant. The new section would authorize VA, in the case in which a veteran is eligible for a transplant procedure from VA, to authorize medical care and services via the Choice program when: (1) in the opinion of the primary health care provider of the veteran, there exists a compelling reason to travel outside the region of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network in which the veteran resides to receive such a transplant at a medical facility of the Department; or (2) if the veteran faces an unusual or excessive burden in receiving a transplant at a Department medical facility. Unusual or Excessive burdens include: geographic challenges; environmental factors, including roads that are not accessible to the general public, traffic, or hazardous weather; a medical condition of the veteran that affects the ability to travel; or other factors determined appropriate by the Secretary, to include the veterans preference.

Section 3. Effective date

Section 3 of the bill would stipulate that amendments made by this Act shall take effect on October 1, 2018, or the date of enactment whichever occurs later.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italic, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

**VETERANS ACCESS, CHOICE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ACT OF 2014**

* * * * *

**TITLE I—IMPROVEMENT OF ACCESS TO
CARE FROM NON-DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS PROVIDERS**

**SEC. 101. EXPANDED AVAILABILITY OF HOSPITAL CARE AND MEDICAL
SERVICES FOR VETERANS THROUGH THE USE OF AGREE-
MENTS WITH NON-DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ENTITIES.**

(a) EXPANSION OF AVAILABLE CARE AND SERVICES.—

(1) FURNISHING OF CARE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Hospital care and medical services under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, shall be furnished to an eligible veteran described in subsection (b), at the election of such veteran, through agreements authorized under subsection (d), or any other law administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, with entities specified in subparagraph (B) for the furnishing of such care and services to veterans.

(B) ENTITIES SPECIFIED.—The entities specified in this subparagraph are the following:

(i) Any health care provider that is participating in the Medicare program under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.), including any physician furnishing services under such program.

(ii) Any Federally-qualified health center (as defined in section 1905(1)(2)(B) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396d(1)(2)(B))).

(iii) The Department of Defense.

(iv) The Indian Health Service.

(v) Subject to subsection (d)(5), a health care provider not otherwise covered under any of clauses (i) through (iv).

(2) CHOICE OF PROVIDER.—An eligible veteran who makes an election under subsection (c) to receive hospital care or medical services under this section may select a provider of such care or services from among the entities specified in paragraph (1)(B) that are accessible to the veteran.

(3) COORDINATION OF CARE AND SERVICES.—The Secretary shall coordinate, through the Non-VA Care Coordination Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the furnishing of care and services under this section to eligible veterans, including by ensuring that an eligible veteran receives an appointment for such care and services within the wait-time goals of the Veterans Health Administration for the furnishing of hospital care and medical services.

(b) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—A veteran is an eligible veteran for purposes of this section if—

(1) the veteran is enrolled in the patient enrollment system of the Department of Veterans Affairs established and operated under section 1705 of title 38, United States Code, including any such veteran who has not received hospital care or medical services from the Department and has contacted the Department seeking an initial appointment from the Department for the receipt of such care or services; and

(2) the veteran—

(A) attempts, or has attempted, to schedule an appointment for the receipt of hospital care or medical services under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, but is unable to schedule an appointment within—

(i) the wait-time goals of the Veterans Health Administration for the furnishing of such care or services; or

(ii) with respect to such care or services that are clinically necessary, the period determined necessary for such care or services if such period is shorter than such wait-time goals;

(B) resides more than 40 miles (as calculated based on distance traveled) from—

(i) with respect to a veteran who is seeking primary care, a medical facility of the Department, including a community-based outpatient clinic, that is able to provide such primary care by a full-time primary care physician; or

(ii) with respect to a veteran not covered under clause (i), the medical facility of the Department, in-

cluding a community-based outpatient clinic, that is closest to the residence of the veteran;

(C) resides—

(i) in a State without a medical facility of the Department that provides—

(I) hospital care;

(II) emergency medical services; and

(III) surgical care rated by the Secretary as having a surgical complexity of standard; and

(ii) more than 20 miles from a medical facility of the Department described in clause (i); **[or]**

(D)(i) resides in a location, other than a location in Guam, American Samoa, or the Republic of the Philippines, that is 40 miles or less from a medical facility of the Department, including a community-based outpatient clinic; and

(ii)(I) is required to travel by air, boat, or ferry to reach each medical facility described in clause (i) that is 40 miles or less from the residence of the veteran; or

(II) faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to such a medical facility of the Department based on—

(aa) geographical challenges;

(bb) environmental factors, such as roads that are not accessible to the general public, traffic, or hazardous weather;

(cc) a medical condition that impacts the ability to travel; or

(dd) other factors, as determined by the Secretary **[.];** or

(E)(i) *requires an organ or bone marrow transplant; and*

(ii)(I) *has, in the opinion of the primary health care provider of the veteran, a medically compelling reason to travel outside the region of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, established under section 372 of the National Organ Transplantation Act (Public Law 98-507; 42 U.S.C. 274), in which the veteran resides to receive such transplant at a medical facility of the Department; or*

(II) *faces an unusual or excessive burden in receiving such transplant at a medical facility of the Department, including—*

(aa) geographical challenges;

(bb) environmental factors, including roads that are not accessible to the general public, traffic, or hazardous weather;

(cc) a medical condition of the veteran that affects the ability to travel; or

(dd) other factors the Secretary determines appropriate, including the preference of the veteran to receive such transplant at a non-Department facility.

(c) ELECTION AND AUTHORIZATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In the case of an eligible veteran described in subsection (b)(2)(A), the Secretary shall, at the election of the eligible veteran—

(A) provide the veteran an appointment that exceeds the wait-time goals described in such subsection or place such eligible veteran on an electronic waiting list described in paragraph (2) for an appointment for hospital care or medical services the veteran has elected to receive under this section; or

(B)(i) authorize that such care or services be furnished to the eligible veteran under this section for a period of time specified by the Secretary; and

(ii) notify the eligible veteran by the most effective means available, including electronic communication or notification in writing, describing the care or services the eligible veteran is eligible to receive under this section.

(2) ELECTRONIC WAITING LIST.—The electronic waiting list described in this paragraph shall be maintained by the Department and allow access by each eligible veteran via www.myhealth.va.gov or any successor website (or other digital channel) for the following purposes:

(A) To determine the place of such eligible veteran on the waiting list.

(B) To determine the average length of time an individual spends on the waiting list, disaggregated by medical facility of the Department and type of care or service needed, for purposes of allowing such eligible veteran to make an informed election under paragraph (1).

(d) CARE AND SERVICES THROUGH AGREEMENTS.—

(1) AGREEMENTS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall enter into agreements for furnishing care and services to eligible veterans under this section with entities specified in subsection (a)(1)(B). An agreement entered into pursuant to this subparagraph may not be treated as a Federal contract for the acquisition of goods or services and is not subject to any provision of law governing Federal contracts for the acquisition of goods or services. Before entering into an agreement pursuant to this subparagraph, the Secretary shall, to the maximum extent practicable and consistent with the requirements of this section, furnish such care and services to such veterans under this section with such entities pursuant to sharing agreements, existing contracts entered into by the Secretary, or other processes available at medical facilities of the Department.

(B) AGREEMENT DEFINED.—In this paragraph, the term “agreement” includes contracts, intergovernmental agreements, and provider agreements, as appropriate.

(2) RATES AND REIMBURSEMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In entering into an agreement under paragraph (1) with an entity specified in subsection (a)(1)(B), the Secretary shall—

(i) negotiate rates for the furnishing of care and services under this section; and

(ii) reimburse the entity for such care and services at the rates negotiated pursuant to clause (i) as provided in such agreement.

(B) LIMIT ON RATES.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in clause (ii), rates negotiated under subparagraph (A)(i) shall not be more than the rates paid by the United States to a provider of services (as defined in section 1861(u) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395x(u))) or a supplier (as defined in section 1861(d) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 1395x(d))) under the Medicare program under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.) for the same care or services.

(ii) EXCEPTION.—

(I) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may negotiate a rate that is more than the rate paid by the United States as described in clause (i) with respect to the furnishing of care or services under this section to an eligible veteran who resides in a highly rural area.

(II) HIGHLY RURAL AREA DEFINED.—In this clause, the term “highly rural area” means an area located in a county that has fewer than seven individuals residing in that county per square mile.

(III) OTHER EXCEPTIONS.—With respect to furnishing care or services under this section in Alaska, the Alaska Fee Schedule of the Department of Veterans Affairs will be followed, except for when another payment agreement, including a contract or provider agreement, is in place. With respect to care or services furnished under this section in a State with an All-Payer Model Agreement under the Social Security Act that became effective on January 1, 2014, the Medicare payment rates under clause (i) shall be calculated based on the payment rates under such agreement.

(C) LIMIT ON COLLECTION.—For the furnishing of care or services pursuant to an agreement under paragraph (1), an entity specified in subsection (a)(1)(B) may not collect any amount that is greater than the rate negotiated pursuant to subparagraph (A)(i).

(3) CERTAIN PROCEDURES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In entering into an agreement under paragraph (1) with an entity described in subparagraph (B), the Secretary may use the procedures, including those procedures relating to reimbursement, available for entering into provider agreements under section 1866(a) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395cc(a)) and participation agreements under section 1842(h) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 1395u(h)). During the period in which such entity furnishes care or services pursuant to this section, such entity may not be treated as a Federal contractor or subcontractor by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs of the Department of Labor by virtue of furnishing such care or services.

(B) ENTITIES DESCRIBED.—The entities described in this subparagraph are the following:

(i) In the case of the Medicare program, any provider of services that has entered into a provider agreement under section 1866(a) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395cc(a)) and any physician or other supplier who has entered into a participation agreement under section 1842(h) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 1395u(h)); and

(ii) In the case of the Medicaid program, any provider participating under a State plan under title XIX of such Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.).

(4) INFORMATION ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.—The Secretary shall provide to any entity with which the Secretary has entered into an agreement under paragraph (1) the following:

(A) Information on applicable policies and procedures for submitting bills or claims for authorized care or services furnished to eligible veterans under this section.

(B) Access to a telephone hotline maintained by the Department that such entity may call for information on the following:

(i) Procedures for furnishing care and services under this section.

(ii) Procedures for submitting bills or claims for authorized care and services furnished to eligible veterans under this section and being reimbursed for furnishing such care and services.

(iii) Whether particular care or services under this section are authorized, and the procedures for authorization of such care or services.

(5) AGREEMENTS WITH OTHER PROVIDERS.—In accordance with the rates determined pursuant to paragraph (2), the Secretary may enter into agreements under paragraph (1) for furnishing care and services to eligible veterans under this section with an entity specified in subsection (a)(1)(B)(v) if the entity meets criteria established by the Secretary for purposes of this section.

(e) RESPONSIBILITY FOR COSTS OF CERTAIN CARE.—

(1) SUBMITTAL OF INFORMATION ON HEALTH-CARE PLANS.—Before receiving hospital care or medical services under this section, an eligible veteran shall provide to the Secretary information on any health-care plan described in paragraph (2) under which the eligible veteran is covered.

(2) HEALTH-CARE PLAN.—A health-care plan described in this paragraph—

(A) is an insurance policy or contract, medical or hospital service agreement, membership or subscription contract, or similar arrangement not administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, under which health services for individuals are provided or the expenses of such services are paid; and

(B) does not include any such policy, contract, agreement, or similar arrangement pursuant to title XVIII or XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.) or chapter 55 of title 10, United States Code.

(3) RECOVERY OF COSTS FOR CERTAIN CARE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—In any case in which an eligible veteran is furnished hospital care or medical services under this section for a non-service-connected disability described in subsection (a)(2) of section 1729 of title 38, United States Code, or for a condition for which recovery is authorized or with respect to which the United States is deemed to be a third party beneficiary under Public Law 87–693, commonly known as the “Federal Medical Care Recovery Act” (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.), the Secretary shall recover or collect from a third party (as defined in subsection (i) of such section 1729) reasonable charges for such care or services to the extent that the veteran (or the provider of the care or services) would be eligible to receive payment for such care or services from such third party if the care or services had not been furnished by a department or agency of the United States.

(B) USE OF AMOUNTS.—Amounts collected by the Secretary under subparagraph (A) shall be deposited in the Medical Community Care account of the Department. Amounts so deposited shall remain available until expended.

(f) VETERANS CHOICE CARD.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of receiving care and services under this section, the Secretary shall, not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, issue to each veteran described in subsection (b)(1) a card that may be presented to a health care provider to facilitate the receipt of care or services under this section.

(2) NAME OF CARD.—Each card issued under paragraph (1) shall be known as a “Veterans Choice Card”.

(3) DETAILS OF CARD.—Each Veterans Choice Card issued to a veteran under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

(A) The name of the veteran.

(B) An identification number for the veteran that is not the social security number of the veteran.

(C) The contact information of an appropriate office of the Department for health care providers to confirm that care or services under this section are authorized for the veteran.

(D) Contact information and other relevant information for the submittal of claims or bills for the furnishing of care or services under this section.

(E) The following statement: “This card is for qualifying medical care outside the Department of Veterans Affairs. Please call the Department of Veterans Affairs phone number specified on this card to ensure that treatment has been authorized.”.

(4) INFORMATION ON USE OF CARD.—Upon issuing a Veterans Choice Card to a veteran, the Secretary shall provide the veteran with information clearly stating the circumstances under which the veteran may be eligible for care or services under this section.

(g) INFORMATION ON AVAILABILITY OF CARE.—The Secretary shall provide information to a veteran about the availability of care and services under this section in the following circumstances:

(1) When the veteran enrolls in the patient enrollment system of the Department under section 1705 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) When the veteran attempts to schedule an appointment for the receipt of hospital care or medical services from the Department but is unable to schedule an appointment within the wait-time goals of the Veterans Health Administration for the furnishing of such care or services.

(3) When the veteran becomes eligible for hospital care or medical services under this section under subparagraph (B), (C), or (D) of subsection (b)(2).

(h) FOLLOW-UP CARE.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall ensure that, at the election of an eligible veteran who receives hospital care or medical services from a health care provider in an episode of care under this section, the veteran receives such hospital care and medical services from such health care provider through the completion of the episode of care, including all specialty and ancillary services deemed necessary as part of the treatment recommended in the course of such hospital care or medical services.

(i) PROVIDERS.—To be eligible to furnish care or services under this section, a health care provider must—

(1) maintain at least the same or similar credentials and licenses as those credentials and licenses that are required of health care providers of the Department, as determined by the Secretary for purposes of this section; and

(2) submit, not less frequently than once each year during the period in which the Secretary is authorized to carry out this section pursuant to subsection (p), verification of such licenses and credentials maintained by such health care provider.

(j) COST-SHARING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall require an eligible veteran to pay a copayment for the receipt of care or services under this section only if such eligible veteran would be required to pay a copayment for the receipt of such care or services at a medical facility of the Department or from a health care provider of the Department pursuant to chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) LIMITATION.—The amount of a copayment charged under paragraph (1) may not exceed the amount of the copayment that would be payable by such eligible veteran for the receipt of such care or services at a medical facility of the Department or from a health care provider of the Department pursuant to chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code.

(3) COLLECTION OF COPAYMENT.—A health care provider that furnishes care or services to an eligible veteran under this section shall collect the copayment required under paragraph (1) from such eligible veteran at the time of furnishing such care or services.

(k) CLAIMS PROCESSING SYSTEM.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide for an efficient nationwide system for processing and paying bills or claims for authorized care and services furnished to eligible veterans under this section.

(2) REGULATIONS.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall prescribe regulations for the implementation of such system.

(3) OVERSIGHT.—The Chief Business Office of the Veterans Health Administration shall oversee the implementation and maintenance of such system.

(4) ACCURACY OF PAYMENT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure that such system meets such goals for accuracy of payment as the Secretary shall specify for purposes of this section.

(B) QUARTERLY REPORT.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a quarterly report on the accuracy of such system.

(ii) ELEMENTS.—Each report required by clause (i) shall include the following:

(I) A description of the goals for accuracy for such system specified by the Secretary under subparagraph (A).

(II) An assessment of the success of the Department in meeting such goals during the quarter covered by the report.

(iii) DEADLINE.—The Secretary shall submit each report required by clause (i) not later than 20 days after the end of the quarter covered by the report.

(1) MEDICAL RECORDS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure that any health care provider that furnishes care or services under this section to an eligible veteran submits to the Department a copy of any medical record related to the care or services provided to such eligible veteran by such health care provider for inclusion in the electronic medical record of such eligible veteran maintained by the Department upon the completion of the provision of such care or services to such eligible veteran.

(2) ELECTRONIC FORMAT.—Any medical record submitted to the Department under paragraph (1) shall, to the extent possible, be in an electronic format.

(m) TRACKING OF MISSED APPOINTMENTS.—The Secretary shall implement a mechanism to track any missed appointments for care or services under this section by eligible veterans to ensure that the Department does not pay for such care or services that were not furnished to an eligible veteran.

(n) IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall prescribe interim final regulations on the implementation of this section and publish such regulations in the Federal Register.

(o) INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT.—Not later than 30 days after the date on which the Secretary determines that 75 percent of the amounts deposited in the Veterans Choice Fund established by section 802 have been exhausted, the Inspector General of the Department shall submit to the Secretary a report on the results of an audit of the care and services furnished under this section to en-

sure the accuracy and timeliness of payments by the Department for the cost of such care and services, including any findings and recommendations of the Inspector General.

(p) AUTHORITY TO FURNISH CARE AND SERVICES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may not use the authority under this section to furnish care and services after the date specified in paragraph (2).

(2) DATE SPECIFIED.—The date specified in this paragraph is the date on which the Secretary has exhausted all amounts deposited in the Veterans Choice Fund established by section 802.

(3) PUBLICATION.—The Secretary shall publish such date in the Federal Register and on an Internet website of the Department available to the public not later than 30 days before such date.

(q) REPORTS.—

(1) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days after the publication of the interim final regulations under subsection (n), the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the furnishing of care and services under this section that includes the following:

(A) The number of eligible veterans who have received care or services under this section.

(B) A description of the types of care and services furnished to eligible veterans under this section.

(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 30 days after the date on which the Secretary determines that 75 percent of the amounts deposited in the Veterans Choice Fund established by section 802 have been exhausted, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the furnishing of care and services under this section that includes the following:

(A) The total number of eligible veterans who have received care or services under this section, disaggregated by—

- (i) eligible veterans described in subsection (b)(2)(A);
- (ii) eligible veterans described in subsection (b)(2)(B);
- (iii) eligible veterans described in subsection (b)(2)(C); and
- (iv) eligible veterans described in subsection (b)(2)(D).

(B) A description of the types of care and services furnished to eligible veterans under this section.

(C) An accounting of the total cost of furnishing care and services to eligible veterans under this section.

(D) The results of a survey of eligible veterans who have received care or services under this section on the satisfaction of such eligible veterans with the care or services received by such eligible veterans under this section.

(E) An assessment of the effect of furnishing care and services under this section on wait times for appointments

for the receipt of hospital care and medical services from the Department.

(F) An assessment of the feasibility and advisability of continuing furnishing care and services under this section after the termination date specified in subsection (p).

(r) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section shall be construed to alter the process of the Department for filling and paying for prescription medications.

(s) WAIT-TIME GOALS OF THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), in this section, the term “wait-time goals of the Veterans Health Administration” means not more than 30 days from the date on which a veteran requests an appointment for hospital care or medical services from the Department.

(2) ALTERNATE GOALS.—If the Secretary submits to Congress, not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, a report stating that the actual wait-time goals of the Veterans Health Administration are different from the wait-time goals specified in paragraph (1)—

(A) for purposes of this section, the wait-time goals of the Veterans Health Administration shall be the wait-time goals submitted by the Secretary under this paragraph; and

(B) the Secretary shall publish such wait-time goals in the Federal Register and on an Internet website of the Department available to the public.

(t) WAIVER OF CERTAIN PRINTING REQUIREMENTS.—Section 501 of title 44, United States Code, shall not apply in carrying out this section.

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