

## **Improving Veterans Care in the Community Act of 2016 (S. 3401)**

The Improving Veterans Care in the Community Act of 2016, S. 3401, seeks to improve the Veterans Health Administration's ability to provide veterans access to health care in their communities. There are several programs that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) may use to send veterans in to the community for care. S. 3401 consolidates all of these programs into one program while expanding eligibility for veterans who need access to services that are not available at their local VA facilities. The consolidated program will be called the "Care in the Community Program."

### **Old non-VA Care Programs**

Veterans' Choice Program  
Traditional VA Care in the Community  
Patient Centered Community Care  
Project Access Received Closer to Home  
Indian Health Service/Tribal Health Program  
Sharing of VA and DOD Health Care Resources  
Emergency Care for Veterans with Service Connected Disabilities  
Emergency Care for Nonservice- connected conditions



**Care in the  
Community  
Program**

### **Clarification/Expansion under S. 3401**

A veteran requires services that are not available at a VA facility within 40-miles driving distance.  
The veteran's provider at the VA believes it is in the medical interest of the veteran to send him/her into the Community for Care.

Ultimately, S 3401 will make the Care in the Community Program easier for the veteran to use and for the VA to administer. The measure includes provisions to ensure that providers participating in the program are able to interact with staff at the local VA Medical Centers to ensure that local providers are able to question local staff about the program and provider reimbursement. Additionally, the measure ensures records are shared back with the veterans' provider within the VA.

S. 3401 requires the VA to educate veterans on how the Care in the Community Program works, the circumstances in which they are eligible to use it and when the VA will act as the primary payer for the Care in the Community. The measure also requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine the performance of the third party administrators, which have been responsible for the administration of the Veterans Choice Program.

The Improving Veterans Care in the Community Act also includes the following requirements:

- The VA must create an interdisciplinary panel to develop a clinical appeals process to resolve disputes regarding VA health care;
- The GAO is required to report on how to improve the clinical operations of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and ensure that clinical staff perform at the top of their licenses;
- A GAO report is directed on the travel benefit program, how it can be improved to be more timely and if Congress should revise the program's eligibility requirements;
- A GAO report on the structure and management of the VA's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs is required;
- The GAO is also required to report on payment responsibility for the Care in the Community Program; and
- The legislation calls for the creation of a VHA Payment and Access Commission, similar to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission that exists for Medicare.