

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 17, 2024

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We write to highlight unacceptable delays faced by our veterans seeking health care via the VA's community care program. We receive frequent communications from our veteran constituents regarding lengthy wait times in both scheduling and receiving health care through community care providers. Eligible veterans have earned timely, quality health care; These delays must be urgently addressed.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has reported several times on these challenges, making several recommendations to improve the community care program and VA scheduling process since at least 2018. Despite this, on November 10, 2023, GAO Health Care Director Sharon Silas reported that, "Most VAMCs did not meet the timeliness standard for scheduling community care appointments, and VHA's analysis used to create this standard was limited."¹ Further, Ms. Silas reported that, "VHA has recently established a timeliness standard for VHA facility appointments, but not for community care,"² and that "fully implementing our recommendations related to gaps in the appointment scheduling process—particularly establishing a standard for when community care appointments should occur—is important to ensuring that veterans have timely access to care."³

The GAO's findings are consistent with what we have heard from our veteran constituents. Every month, our veterans contact us for assistance with scheduling appointments, with some waiting months for certain types of community care appointments. Veterans have also reported significant administrative delays that occur between referral to the community care program and the scheduling of an appointment.

Ongoing failure to make consistent improvements to community care wait times is unacceptable, and we are concerned that the lack of care time standards for community care only exacerbates the problem. Accordingly, we ask that you promptly respond to the following questions:

1. Why do veterans continue to experience lengthy wait times to both schedule and receive care through the community care program?
2. Why have the GAO's recommendations regarding community care appointment scheduling and time standards not been fully implemented?

3. What accountability measures are in place when consistent delays in veteran care occur?
4. What actions is the Department of Veterans Affairs taking to improve community care wait times?
5. What additional resources or authorities are needed (if any) from Congress to improve veteran community care wait times?
6. Will you commit to establishing a meaningful target in the next 30 days for improving community care wait times between referral/file entry date and the scheduling of an appointment?
7. Will you commit to establishing within the next 90 days an acceptable wait time standard for the interval between making an appointment and attending that appointment?

Providing timely, quality care for our veterans is paramount. No veteran should have to wait weeks or months for medical care. We thank you for your attention to this issue and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



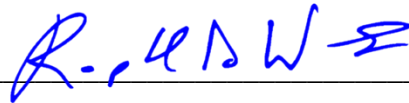
Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Reverend Raphael G. Warnock
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Ted Budd
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator