

VFW Statement on Commission on Care Report

‘VA needs leadership, not management by committee’

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States agrees with most of the 18 recommendations made by the [Commission on Care in its final report](#) that was released today on how to improve the care and services the Department of Veterans Affairs provides to eligible veterans. But the nation’s largest and oldest major war veterans organization is firmly against one recommendation that would create another layer of bureaucracy to manage the day-to-day operations of the VA health care system.

“The VFW thanks the commission for their hard work,” said VFW National Commander John A. Biedrzycki Jr., “and while we agree with most of their recommendations, we cannot support all of them, most especially the proposal to establish a politically-appointed board of directors that would govern the VA health care system. The VA needs leadership, not management by committee.”

The proposed governance board would be similar to how the 15 members of the Commission on Care were selected. It would include political appointees, the majority of who would be civilian health care executives and veterans who do not use the VA health care system. “How and when veterans receive their care should not be determined by appointees who have never used the system, nor have a vested interest in improving the care and benefits veterans receive. Creating more bureaucracy is never the answer to high-turnover in leadership and a lack of proper succession planning,” said Biedrzycki.

The commission also recommends establishing high-performing, integrated community care networks that include the private sector as well as the VA, the military health system, and other federally-funded providers. This recommendation is very similar to a proposal by the VFW and its Independent Budget coauthors to develop Veteran-Centered Integrated Health Care Networks to leverage the capabilities of public and private health care systems to better meet the needs of veterans in every community. The commission’s final report also explains how unrealistic and unsustainable proposals which promise unlimited choice

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would erode the quality of care veterans receive and shift the financial cost of care onto veterans.

“The VFW agrees that VA must develop processes and systems to help veterans make more informed choices, but what we can’t support is veterans being given a list of primary care providers and told to go find someone willing to see them,” said the VFW national commander. “That’s not choice; that’s shirking an inherent responsibility to care for our nation’s wounded, ill and injured veterans. Expanded private sector options cannot limit VA’s ability to provide comprehensive veteran-specific care,” he explained. “Veterans with a private sector primary care provider must be offered VA specialty care whenever possible and especially when clinically appropriate.”

Regarding the way forward, Biedrzycki said the VFW plans to meet with the commissioners, the VA, Congress, and other stakeholders in the coming weeks to discuss “implementing those recommendations we do support, and identifying reasonable alternatives to those recommendations we do not.”