

VFW Applauds Choice Program Extension

Ensuring veterans have timely access to high quality care is key focus

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is applauding Congress for passing legislation this week that extends and improves the Veterans Choice Program. The bill now heads to the White House for the president's signature.

The Choice Program was created by the VFW-supported *Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014*, in response to the nationwide access to care crisis that embroiled the Department of Veterans Affairs. It provided the VA an additional \$10 billion in emergency funding to expand veterans' access to care in the community. The legislation came with a three-year sunset clause, however, which meant the VA had to either use or lose the funds by this August.

With about \$1 billion estimated to remain unobligated, the VFW is pleased the money will continue to help wounded, ill and injured veterans receive the quality care they earned and deserve. The legislation passed this week also addresses two issues that the VFW had identified and had asked Congress to fix. The first issue is to eliminate the confusing secondary payer requirement, clarifying that VA is the payer of care, not veterans. The second issue the legislation addresses will make it easier for VA to share medical documentation with Choice providers, so veterans don't have to face unnecessary delays when scheduling Choice Program appointments.

"While this bill is an important step, Congress still has a long way to go," said VFW National Commander Brian Duffy. "Congress must still act on a permanent replacement for the Choice Program, one that consolidates VA's community care authorities, as well as integrates the best aspects of the VA system with available health care capabilities in the

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community, both public and private. Congress must also act on legislation to improve VA's ability to construct and lease facilities; hire, retain and discipline employees; and improve its health processes and systems to ensure veterans have timely access to high quality care," he explained.

"The VFW fully expects this Congress to properly resource the VA while diligently exercising its oversight responsibility," said Duffy. "Proper leadership, management and accountability is what the VFW demands from the VA — and from Congress, too."

Learn more about the concerns the VFW has conveyed to Congress about the Choice Program and other VA community care programs at www.vfw.org/VAWatch.