

VFW Releases Survey Results on TRICARE Program Changes

DOD failing to adequately communicate to millions of beneficiaries

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is releasing the results of a TRICARE survey that focused on the changes to the military health care program as mandated by the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. The 33-question survey also focused on the awareness and perceptions around the controversial cost-sharing changes in the Defense Department’s Interim Final Rule, which was publically released Sept. 28.

“The VFW survey confirmed suspicions that the Defense Department is failing to adequately communicate to perhaps millions of TRICARE beneficiaries that changes are about to occur in their health care program,” said VFW National Commander Keith Harman. “I can only hope DOD ups their game to fill in the notification gaps before the Jan. 1 implementation date.”

The survey was conducted between Oct. 26 and Nov. 8, with more than 11,800 responses tallied. Only 48 percent of respondents were aware of any TRICARE program changes, which take effect in the new year. Thirty percent of respondents identified themselves as TRICARE Prime users, but only 12 percent reported being aware that Prime co-payments for military retirees were increasing. [TRICARE reports](#) 4.6 million beneficiaries in its Prime category, and 1.94 million using either TRICARE Standard or Extra.

Also beginning Jan. 1, TRICARE Select will replace TRICARE Standard and Extra. A third of respondents stated they preferred the current cost-sharing payment method over the new flat-rate system, while 12 percent preferred the new flat-rate system, citing predictability and a perceived lowering of costs as factors. When asked to rank order considerations when evaluating costs associated with health care, 52 percent listed overall costs as the primary consideration, while only 6 percent listed predictability as their primary consideration.

When asked about pharmacy usage for maintenance medications, 47 percent reported using Mail Order as their primary method. Respondents listed cost (37 percent) and convenience (33 percent) as the top two reasons for this choice. Only 32 percent

reported being informed of the recent change in policy, which now requires Mail Order users to annually opt-in to automatically refill each medication.

For demographic purposes, 86 percent of respondents identified themselves as TRICARE-eligible, and 79 percent of those reported using TRICARE as either their primary or secondary health care benefit. Regarding current status, 77 percent identified as military retirees or their dependents, 5 percent were service members or their dependents, and 3 percent were surviving spouses. Regarding wars or conflicts served, the largest cohort were Vietnam veterans at 49 percent, followed by 41 percent (Desert Shield/Storm) and 37 percent (Post-9/11). The gender split was 81 percent male, 19 percent female.

Click here to [read DOD's Interim Final Rule and public comments](#).