



ISSUE BRIEF

Congress, Administration Should Enact Further Steps to Eliminate Disparities in Veterans' Access to Chiropractic Care

BACKGROUND:

Following decades of inaction and neglect on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the process of integrating chiropractic care into the VA health care delivery system was initiated during the past decade, but only after Congress enacted a series of statutes (Including PL 107-135 and PL 108-170) that included specific directives instructing the VA to hire doctors of chiropractic (DCs) and place them at VA health care facilities. Prior to the intervention of Congress, no doctors of chiropractic served on the staff of any VA treatment facility and the availability of the services delivered by doctors of chiropractic for eligible veterans was limited to VA "referrals" to those doctors serving in private practice outside of the VA system. Such referrals were so rarely provided, that as a practical matter, it would be fair to say that access to the services provided by doctors of chiropractic within the VA system was virtually non-existent until Congress took action to address that glaring deficiency. As a result of the previous referenced congressional directives, including recommendations issued by a congressionally-mandated advisory committee, the VA (as of early 2017) currently provides access to a Doctor of Chiropractic at over 60 major VA treatment facilities within the U.S.

THE ISSUE:

Despite the above progress, the overwhelming majority of America's eligible veterans continue to be denied access to chiropractic care, because access to the services provided by doctors of chiropractic is often times non-existent at nearly 100 additional major VA treatment facilities that comprise the major sites where VA care is offered. The VA has no doctors of chiropractic on staff at these locations and referrals to DCs outside of VA's system through the Choice Program are sporadic, at best. Virtually all major VA service organizations have formally testified in support of enacting new legislation to correct this deficiency.

Shockingly, the above disparity has been allowed to continue, despite important data demonstrating a critical need within the VA for the specific type of health care doctors of chiropractic specialize in providing. Past Department of Veterans Affairs data (Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veterans) cite "diseases of Musculoskeletal System/Connective System," such as back pain, as the number one ailment of Iraq/Afghanistan veterans accessing VA treatment.

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Recently, the Joint Commission an independent non-profit organization that certifies more than 20,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including every major hospital, revised its pain management standard to include chiropractic services. Clinical experts in pain management who provide input to the Commission's standards affirmed that treatment strategies may consider both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic approaches. Services provided by doctors of chiropractic (who were recognized in 2009 as "physicians" by the Commission are now included in the standard of care for pain management, effective January 2015.

The Joint Commission standard advises facilities, when considering the use of medications to treat pain, to weigh both the benefits to the patient, as well as the potential risks of dependency, addiction, and abuse of opioids. The treatment plan offered by DCs is a non-pharmacologic approach to pain management.

ACTION NEEDED:

- **In the House of Representatives**, Rep. Julia Brownley (D-Calif.), ranking member of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, subcommittee on Health, has introduced a bill, **HR 103, the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act**, which phases-in the services of doctors of chiropractic at more VA major medical facilities over several years and codifies chiropractic as a standard benefit for veterans accessing VA care. Co-sponsorship of HR 103 is requested.
 - **Members of the House of Representatives are urged to show support for greater access to chiropractic services in the VA by cosponsoring HR 103 and working for its passage in the 115th Congress.**
- **In the Senate**, Senators Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) and Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) have introduced **S. 609** the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act. Co-sponsorship of S. 609 is requested.
 - **Senators are urged to show support for greater access to chiropractic services in the VA by cosponsoring the Senate version of the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act and working for its passage in the 115th Congress.**

For Additional Information Please Contact:

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