



Legislative Alert #113-44: SUPPORT S. 2450, Veterans Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014
VETERANS

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Issue Background: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released an interim report regarding issues of patient wait times, scheduling practices, and alleged patient deaths at the VA Health Care System (HCS) in Phoenix, Arizona in which they reviewed the crisis resulting in the delay of care for Veterans. In the review it was revealed that many Veterans are currently at risk for being forgotten or lost within the complicated scheduling process. The average wait time for the Phoenix VA HCS was an average of 115 days for the first primary care appointment and 57,000 Veteran patients have been waiting at least 90 days for appointments with an additional 64,000 Veterans being denied appointments after requesting them. Recently, reports have found that at least 23 Veteran deaths have been linked to delayed VA medical care with another 35 Veteran deaths linked to care delays in the Phoenix area alone. It is imperative to fix the VA HCS and give veterans the treatment they deserve.

Action Required: Contact your Representatives and Senators and urge them to support and cosponsor S. 2450, introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Senator John McCain (R-AZ), the Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014, which would improve Veterans' access to health care and address serious problems facing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Details (To Be Put Into Letter):

Recent reports, most notably an interim report by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of the Inspector General (OIG), have revealed that issues of patient wait times, scheduling practices, and alleged patient deaths have led to a remarkable crisis within the VA Health Care System (HCS) in Phoenix, Arizona and other facilities around the nation. Many Veterans are at risk for being forgotten or lost within the complicated scheduling process, and approximately 57,000 Veteran patients have been waiting at least 90 days for primary care appointments with an additional 64,000 veterans being denied appointments upon requesting them. These reports have also linked as many as 23 Veteran deaths to delayed VA medical care with another 35 Veteran deaths linked to care delays in the Phoenix, Arizona area. Improved access to health care for Veterans as well as improved efficiencies within the VA HCS as a whole are necessary in order to provide adequate, quality and timely care for our nation's Veterans who deserve no less.

S. 2450 would work to solve deficiencies within the VA HCS and would require the VA to enter into contract with a third party for assessment of scheduling, staffing, financial, and other processes at each facility. The Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 requires the VA to review the needs of the scheduling system and software and make necessary changes. The VA Inspector General (IG) would also be responsible for identifying staffing shortages and allowing the Department to utilize direct hire authority to fill needed positions. This legislation also improves access to healthcare for Veterans and allows them to seek care from outside healthcare providers if enrolled in the VA's patient enrollment system and have been unable to receive an appointment with the VA within wait-time goals or if they reside more than 40 miles from the nearest VA medical facility. Additionally, this legislation also requires the VA to improve access to healthcare services and establishes a Commission on Access to Care to examine the access of veterans to health care. Finally, the Secretary of the VA would be required to ensure that scheduling and wait-time metrics are not factors to determine pay performances awarded to employees and would be responsible for publishing wait-time goals for VA facilities publicly.

Take Action: Click the "[Take Action](#)" link at the top of the Alert to immediately email and/or write to your Senators and Representatives. This is the quickest and most effective method of expressing your views to Congress. You can also write and/or e-mail the 'Details' section or edit as you desire for a more personalized communication . Also, contact friends and family and urge them to use the Contact Congress feature on AUSN's website as well. Please direct any questions concerning this issue to our Director of Legislation, Anthony Wallis, at 703-548-5800 or at Anthony.Wallis@ausn.org.