

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-643](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In June 2019, VA implemented its new community care program, the VCCP, as required by the VA MISSION Act of 2018. Under the VCCP, VAMC staff are responsible for community care appointment scheduling; their ability to execute this new responsibility has implications for veterans receiving community care in a timely manner.

GAO was asked to review VCCP appointment scheduling. This report examines, among other issues, the VCCP appointment scheduling process VA established and VA's monitoring of that process.

GAO reviewed documentation, such as scheduling policies, and referral data related to the VCCP and assessed VA's relevant processes. GAO conducted site visits to five VAMCs in the first region to transition to VA's new provider network, and interviewed VAMC staff and a non-generalizable sample of community providers receiving referrals from those VAMCs. GAO also interviewed VA and contractor officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Congress consider requiring VA to establish an overall wait-time measure for the VCCP. GAO is also making three recommendations to VA, including that it align its monitoring metrics with the VCCP appointment scheduling process. VA did not concur with one of GAO's recommendations related to aligning monitoring metrics to VCCP scheduling policy time frames. GAO continues to believe this recommendation is valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-20-643](#). For more information, contact Sharon M. Silas at (202) 512-7114 or silass@gao.gov.

September 2020

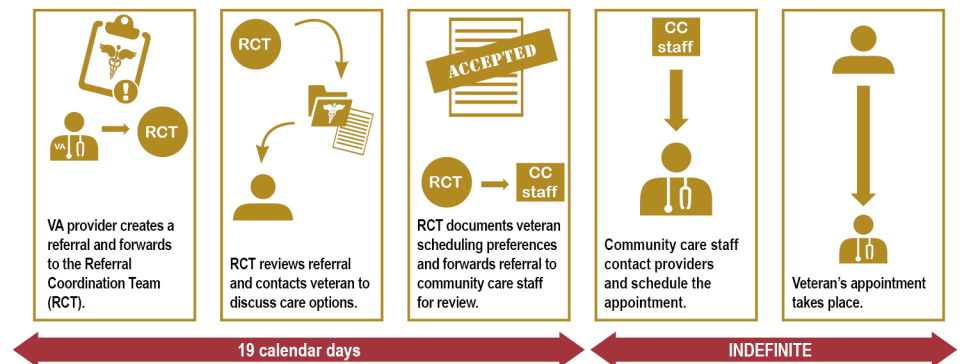
VETERANS COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM

Improvements Needed to Help Ensure Timely Access to Care

What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) established an appointment scheduling process for the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) that allows up to 19 days to complete several steps from VA providers creating a referral to community care staff reviewing that referral. However, as the figure shows, VA has not specified the maximum amount of time veterans should have to wait to receive care through the program. GAO previously recommended in 2013 the need for an overall wait-time measure for veterans to receive care under a prior VA community care program. Subsequent to VA not implementing this recommendation, GAO again recommended in 2018 that VA establish an achievable wait-time goal as part of its new community care program (the VCCP).

Potential Allowable Wait Time to Obtain Care through the Veterans Community Care Program



Source: GAO illustration based on analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) documentation. | GAO-20-643

Note: This figure illustrates potential allowable wait times in calendar days for eligible veterans who are referred to the VCCP through routine referrals (non-emergent), and have VA medical center staff—Referral Coordination Team (RCT) and community care staff (CC staff)—schedule the appointments on their behalf.

VA has not yet implemented GAO's 2018 recommendation that VA establish an achievable wait-time goal. Under the VA MISSION Act, VA is assigned responsibility for ensuring that veterans' appointments are scheduled in a timely manner—an essential component of quality health care. Given VA's lack of action over the prior 7 years implementing wait-time goals for various community care programs, congressional action is warranted to help achieve timely health care for veterans.

Regarding monitoring of the initial steps of the scheduling process, GAO found that VA is using metrics that are remnants from the previous community care program, which are inconsistent with the time frames established in the VCCP scheduling process. This limits VA's ability to determine the effectiveness of the VCCP and to identify areas for improvement.