



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Fact Sheet

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March 24, 2015

VA Works to Expand Choice Program Eligibility

Background

On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146) (“VACAA”). Technical revisions to the Choice Act were made on September 26, 2014, when the President signed into law the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-175).

In March 2015, VA announced the expected expansion for eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program by changing the calculation used to determine the distance between a Veteran’s residence and the nearest VA medical facility from a straight line distance to driving distance.

Summary

One of the current eligibility criteria for the Veterans Choice Program is based on the distance calculation using the *straight line* distance from a Veteran’s home to the nearest VA medical facility. Under VA’s plan for expansion, this criterion will change to the *driving distance* calculation between the Veteran’s home and the nearest VA medical facility.

For example: Under the new distance calculation, a Veteran who lives less than 40 miles, straight line distance, from the nearest VA medical facility, but who needs to physically drive more than 40 miles to get there would be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program. Under the previous straight line distance calculation, this Veteran would not be eligible for the Program unless they were waiting for an appointment longer than 30-days from their preferred date or the date determined to be medically necessary by their physician.

VA is expanding the eligibility determination in order to increase Veterans access to high quality, timely healthcare. VA looks forward to continued collaboration with Veterans and our partners to ensure the success of the Veterans Choice Program.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Why is VA changing this criterion now?

A: The interim final regulation was based on the discussion in the House Conference Report that accompanied the Act. After further review of other information contained in the report, VA believes that revising the calculation will still be in the spirit of the law and allow improved access for Veterans.

Q: What mapping tool is used to calculate the 40 miles?

A: The tool used will be a commercial product that is consistent with VA's long-established beneficiary travel program. As every commercial product uses priority programming, the results may vary among products.

Q: Is it still 40 miles from any VA medical facility or is it 40 miles from a VA medical facility that actually provides the care needed?

A: This is currently defined as any VA medical facility. Absent a statutory change, VA does not believe that it has the flexibility to adopt an alternative approach.

Q: How does VA plan to notify newly eligible Veterans?

A: Because all potentially eligible Veterans already received their Choice card, VA will send letters notifying Veterans who will soon be eligible under the revised mileage calculation.

Q: When will this expansion go into effect?

A: VA must publish an interim final rulemaking and this change will be effective upon publication of this rulemaking in the Federal Register.

Q: Where can I get more information about the program?

A: Please review the VA Choice website at <http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/>