



## **Tribal Health Programs – Collaborating Today for a Better Tomorrow Fact Sheet August 2016**

Since 2012, VA has worked closely with the Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal Health Programs (THPs) to ensure that American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans can receive care paid for by the VA in a culturally sensitive environment. VA values these collaborations and looks forward to working with IHS and THPs as VA moves towards implementing a consolidated community care program that is easy to understand, simple to administer, and meets the needs of Veterans, community providers, and VA staff. VA proposes to extend existing reimbursement agreements with IHS and THPs through December 2018 and ensure any new reimbursement agreements between VA and THP extend through December 2018 so that we may conduct tribal consultation and work together to ensure VA's consolidated community care program builds on VA's existing relationships with IHS and THP.

### **Future Vision for VA Community Care**

- Today, VA uses multiple programs to provide thousands of Veterans access to community care. Having multiple programs, each governed by its own set of requirements, with different payment schedules results in a complex and complicated landscape that Veterans and their caregivers must navigate. It causes confusion for Veterans, community providers, and VA staff.
- VA submitted the *Plan to Consolidate Programs of Department of Veterans Affairs to Improve Access to Care* to Congress in October 2015. That plan outlines our vision to move towards an integrated health care network that delivers the best health care available through VA and community providers.
- VA collected feedback from Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), tribes, Federal partners, Health Care Industry Leaders, Congress, and VA Staff, and sought industry best practices to develop the *Plan*. Some key themes from this feedback included recommendations for:
  - Clarifying processes for accessing community care, as current processes are confusing today; and
  - VA to play an active role in care coordination for Veterans.
- Based on this feedback, the *Plan* proposes to simplify and consolidate all existing VA Community Care programs by rolling them into one program with a single set of eligibility requirements, streamlined clinical and business processes, and the establishment of a high-performing network of community providers and facilities.
- To successfully achieve the goal outlined in the *Plan*, VA is taking both a short-term and long-term approach to implement immediate fixes where we can today, while driving towards a better future state for community care.

- In creating our two-pronged approach, we looked at the Veteran’s community care journey to identify five major touch points that would have the most impact on improving each Veteran’s health care experience. Encompassing all of these touch points is a focus on Customer Service that aims to provide quick resolution of questions and issues.
  1. *Eligibility:* We want to provide easy-to-understand eligibility information to Veterans, community providers, and staff.
  2. *Referral and Authorizations:* We want to streamline referrals and authorizations, providing Veterans timely access to a community provider of their choice.
  3. *Care Coordination:* We want to solidify care coordination through seamless health information exchanges.
  4. *Community Care Network:* We plan to implement a Community Care Network that provides access to high-quality care inside and outside of VA.
  5. *Provider Payment (Claims):* We want to become better partners to our community providers by paying them promptly and correctly.

### **VA’s Community Care Network**

- As part of VA’s *Plan*, VA is working to build a high-performing, integrated health care network to improve Veterans’ access to high-quality care both in VA and in the community.
- Reimbursement agreements with IHS and THPs are one of the many ways in which VA purchases care for Veterans. VA wants to continue our collaborations with IHS and THPs and work together to determine the path forward towards an integrated health care network.
- Participation in the Community Care Network could allow THPs to provide care to and receive reimbursement for all Veterans enrolled in VA health care and served by THPs, regardless of whether they are eligible for IHS-funded health care or not.
- VA is incorporating lessons-learned from existing community care programs and industry best practices into the Community Care Network draft request for proposal (RFP), which is scheduled to be out for bid in 2016. Many of these features will benefit tribal health programs, including:
  - Ensuring Veteran choice in provider selection.
  - Establishing direct communication channels between VA and community providers.
  - Standardizing and simplifying processes for sharing information between VA and community providers.

### **Next Steps**

- Conduct Tribal Consultation regarding the tribal health programs participation in the core provider network, and potentially transitioning from the current reimbursement agreement structure to a model under which tribal health programs deliver care to all eligible, VA enrolled Veterans using a standard reimbursement rate.

- Continue to serve Veterans under the existing reimbursement agreements while VA engages in consultation and future planning with THPs.
- Continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that the future Community Care Network provides Veterans with a provider network that best meets their needs.

