

United States Senate

May 30, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

As your Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implement the Accelerating Care Initiative with the objectives of strengthening and accelerating access to health care for veterans, we want to make certain that this initiative takes into account the needs of rural veterans across the country. Rural veterans face significant challenges accessing health care through the VA system. The burdens of time and distance prevent many rural veterans from receiving basic health care benefits through a VA facility and, all too often, important preventative or follow-up care is extremely difficult to obtain. We urge your Administration to give veterans more opportunities to access the health care they deserve, and we respectfully request that any expansion of health care outside of VA facilities affords rural veterans the option for them to choose care in their own communities.

Rural Americans have always responded when our nation has gone to war and have consistently served in our military at rates higher than their proportion of the population. In fact, forty-four percent of U.S. recruits today are from rural areas and these men and women will become our nation's veterans of tomorrow. Additionally, forty-one percent of all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system reside in rural communities, creating a vital need for health care access in rural areas. This need will only grow as service members continue to return home from Iraq and Afghanistan. The disproportionate number of rural Americans serving in the military has created a disproportionate need for veterans' care in rural areas. In order to provide timely access to for rural veterans, care options must include Critical Access Hospitals, Rural Health Clinics, Sole Community Hospitals, and other rural hospitals that provide quality, community-oriented, primary, and preventative care located where rural veterans live.

Our hope is that the Accelerating Care Initiative assesses the needs of rural veterans by considering the success and precedent set by the Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH) Program. ARCH was a congressionally authorized pilot program implemented by the VA that allows veterans to access care from non-VA community providers closer to where a veteran lives. Since 2011, the ARCH pilot program has been operating in five rural sites within Kansas, Montana, Virginia, Arizona, and Maine. Analysis shows that over ninety percent of veterans who received primary care services through ARCH were "completely satisfied" with the care, and cited significantly shortened travel times to receive this care. Contract care coordination


with non-VA community providers has been tested through ARCH and the VA's Accelerating Care Initiative would benefit from extending and expanding ARCH's proven model to increase access to care for veterans across the country.

Providing health care in rural communities requires solutions that can adapt to meet a community's unique needs, and we must all be mindful of the long-term needs of our servicemen and women. We are committed to working with you to provide our veterans with the best quality care that they can access within the communities they call home.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran



Jon Lester