



## The Protecting Veteran Community Care Act

Senator Steve Daines

**Background:** The 2018 VA MISSION Act was landmark piece of legislation that overhauled the VA Choice Program to provide veterans with easier, quicker, and better access to healthcare. This was a major win for rural veterans who might live hundreds of miles away from the nearest VA facility. Unfortunately, the VA has failed to live up to its obligation to provide timely care through the community. Veterans are still facing unacceptably long waiting periods and frequently rescheduled appointments. With these issues only being exacerbated by increased VA eligibilities, created by the PACT Act, the VA continues to fall short on the complete and proper implementation of the MISSION Act. This has resulted in the need for Congress to strengthen existing authorities to ensure that the VA isn't restricting care in the community for veterans who need it most.

**Summary:** This legislation strengthens the existing community care program, limits the VA's ability to restrict access to care in the community, and requires the VA to track relevant community care data and provide those statistics to Congress.

Specifically, this legislation would

- Amend the MISSION Act to specifically include inpatient mental health standards
  - Does not allow the VA to prioritize referrals to alternate Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs (MH RRTP) over qualifying community care facilities for veterans who meet criteria for priority admission and cannot be accommodated by a MH RRTP.
- Established minimum standards for community residential programs.
- Addresses the VA's subversion of Community Care access standards
- Requires the VA to track and present to Congress data on how many community care eligibility decisions have been made, including:
  - How many instances of community care requests have been
    - Approved
    - Declined
    - Appealed, including appeal decision
  - Mental health specific community care requests
  - Emergency room authorizations
- Require a passage of a Joint Resolution in both chambers of Congress agreeing to any modifications to community care eligibility.