

United States Senate

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

I write to formally request information on several recent developments within the Veteran Healthcare Administration impacting veterans across Montana. Specifically, I am concerned with the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) recent findings of 1,600 ineligible providers within the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) network, the closing of the VA's Office of Community Care (OCC), and rumors of VA facility closures nationwide. I am disappointed by the lack of transparency and stakeholder input on these and other matters, reminiscent of the conditions during the 2014 scandals that prompted Congress to intervene.

As you know, the GAO recently flagged some 1,600 health care providers as potentially ineligible to participate in the VCCP, including many who were deceased, had violent criminal records, and had revoked or suspended medical licenses. Our veterans and taxpayers deserve better. I would like to know how many of these providers were operating in Montana, and what actions will be taken to hold them accountable and to rectify any harm they may have caused.

Further, I am concerned that an oversight of this magnitude may reflect a broader shift in the Department's priorities away from Community Care, reversing efforts by Congress and the Trump Administration to expand veterans' timely access to quality care. Last fall, reports surfaced that the VA was quietly consolidating its Offices of Community Care (OCC) and Veterans Access to Care (OVAC), without input from Congress, health care providers, or any of our nation's leading Veterans Service Organizations. Given the history of community care programs, which were created in response to deadly scandals within the VA health care system, it is unacceptable that the VA would make such changes with less than full transparency.

Equally concerning are rumors of pending VA health care facility closures that serve less than 3,000 patients. If true, this indiscriminate approach would shut down five of Montana's ten outpatient clinics, requiring many Montana veterans to travel hundreds of miles to receive VA health care and rendering it impracticable for others. Even rumors of such closures significantly complicates your own ability to recruit and retain quality providers.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns, and I ask for a detailed and prompt response.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator