

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 8, 2013

The Honorable Eric Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

Veterans represent approximately ten percent of New Hampshire's population, and we have worked together to ensure they have the quality health care they need and deserve. We ask that you consider co-locating a part-time access clinic with a proposed telehealth site in Colebrook, NH to better serve our North Country veterans.

There is an ongoing need for the Department to open a new Community Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC) in Colebrook—which is located in the midst of Coos County, the northern most county of our state. It is the largest geographical area within NH, and it is rural and mountainous. Much of its area is reserved as national forest, wilderness and state parks.

While Coos County is within the catchment area of the White River Junction VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Vermont, our veterans often have difficulty getting to the medical center for appointments. Our North Country veterans are frequently confronted with travel of more than 130 miles and trips of two to three hours in duration. The nearest CBOCs are in Littleton and Conway, NH, requiring a one to two and a half hour drive each way. During inclement weather and winter conditions, the driving times are much longer and travel more hazardous. Even if veterans from the North Country choose to go to the Manchester VAMC, they still face a 150-mile trip.

In your July 5, 2012 response, you indicated that the White River Junction leadership team is considering a telehealth site in the Colebrook area. We applaud this initiative, but we ask that Director Deborah Amdur also consider establishing a part-time access clinic co-located in Colebrook with any telehealth site.

We envision a clinic similar to the Fort Kent, Maine model, which is staffed one day each week from the Caribou CBOC and serves about 200 veterans. This Fort Kent veteran population is similar in numbers to the veteran population that resides in Coos County.

Given the substantial obstacles veterans in our Great North Woods face in accessing VA health care, we firmly believe that opening a combined access clinic and telehealth center in Colebrook, NH would address an unacceptable gap in VA health care service for our North Country veterans.

We urge you to give this matter your highest priority, and would encourage you to task the new Director of the White River Junction Medical Center and the Department with exploring this option as quickly as possible. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this important project.

Thank you for your long and distinguished service to our country.

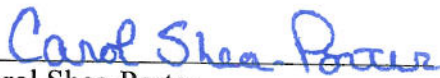
Sincerely,



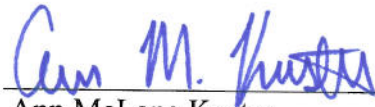
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress