

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 18, 2019

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

I write to express concern regarding ongoing delays in payments to health care providers who serve veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community Care Network (CCN). I understand that the VA is currently working through a backlog of provider payment claims from the previous Veteran Choice Program (VCP) managed by Health Net. I urge you to dedicate the necessary resources to reducing and eliminating that backlog of claims to ensure providers are paid in a timely manner.

My office has heard from numerous health care providers in New Hampshire who have yet to receive payment on claims in the tens of thousands of dollars. We are more than willing to assist these providers and have worked with them to identify the claims for the VA and pursue expedited payment. However, providers should not be forced to seek assistance simply to receive what is rightly owed to them for services rendered to veterans.

Delays in payment undermine provider confidence in the CCN and threaten efforts to build a strong network, which will be necessary for the community care model established in the VA MISSION Act to succeed. If providers can't trust that they will be paid in a timely manner, then ultimately it is our veterans who suffer as these providers drop out of the network and veterans receive fewer options for care. Unfortunately, I have heard from community providers who have made the difficult choice to stop seeing veterans covered by the VA because they can no longer wait to receive compensation. As you know, most of these providers appreciate the opportunity to deliver care to the veterans who have served our nation and are willing to assume responsibilities that are not inherent in the more traditional delivery of care. Many of them are also small businesses who depend on timely payments for services to keep their business running. At the very least, we must ensure that these providers are confident that when they see a veteran they will be paid.

Not only has this backlog resulted in unpaid claims, but it has created confusion among providers during a time of transition to the new CCN where clarity and consistency is critical to building a robust network. It is often unclear to providers who contact my office if claims are delayed due to administrative backlog or errors in their submissions. Providers are also struggling to discern the difference between claims still pending with the VA and claims that will be paid out by Optum under the new CCN. For these reasons, I urge you to increase provider outreach to ensure

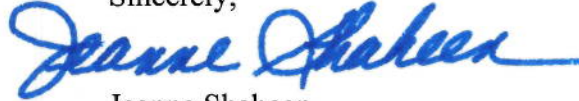
that those with unpaid claims understand the reasons for delay and are able to quickly remedy any omissions or mistakes in their claim submissions.

Given the existing backlog in provider payments and the concerns my office has heard in New Hampshire, I request a response to the following questions:

- When does the VA expect to eliminate the backlog of unpaid claims from the previous VCP network?
- How many unpaid claims does the VA currently have pending from the previous VCP network in Veterans Integrated Service Network 1?
- Does the VA immediately communicate errors in claims upon submission or do providers only receive notification when their claim is processed for payment?
- What efforts has the VA made to improve provider outreach and education regarding the claims process?

I appreciate your commitment to serve our veterans and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator