



# Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act Update Veterans Choice Program

# General Information (background)

- ❑ Veterans Access Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) went into effect November 5, 2014
- ❑ VA has contracted with a Third Party Administrator (TPA) to manage overall operations of the program: Includes mailing of cards, authorization for care and claims processing.
- ❑ The Contractor for New England States is Health Net Federal Services

# General Information (Choice Card)

- In order to be eligible to receive a Choice Card the Veteran must:
  - Have been enrolled by August 1, 2014, **or**
  - Returned Combat Veteran
  
- Veterans covered by other health insurance (OHI) must provide that information to the Contractor upon request to be eligible for care under the Choice Program.
- Veterans are responsible for any copayments, deductibles or cost shares as required by their Other Health Insurance (OHI)
- Veterans can still choose to receive their care from the VA

# General Information (Choice Card)

## Definition of Veteran for VA Purposes

- Veteran is a person who: (38 USC 101(2))
  - Served in the active military, naval or air service
  - Discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable
- Former or current Reservists if they served for the full period for which they were called (excludes training purposes)
- Former or current National Guard members if activated/mobilized by a Federal order

# General Information (Choice Card)

- ❑ Receiving a Veterans Choice Card **is not** authorization to use the Veterans Choice Card
- ❑ Only the Contractor can authorize use of the Choice Program – use must be “pre-authorized” by contractor
- ❑ Choice program covers hospital care and medical services under the Medical Benefits Package, which includes pharmacy and beneficiary travel.
- ❑ Choice **does not** cover Nursing Home Care or emergency non-VA Care

# General Information continued...

- ❑ To be eligible for the Choice Program, a Veteran must be enrolled in VA health care
  
- ❑ Prescriptions and prosthetic items will continue to be filled by the VA
  - Provisions have been made to fill emergent prescriptions in the community
  
- ❑ Emergency Care, Long Term Acute Care and Nursing Home Care **are not** covered under Choice Program
  - Current non-VA care rules apply for emergency care

# Use of Veterans Choice Card (eligibility requirements)

- ❑ Based on Wait Time
  - Has a scheduled appointment, with a VA healthcare provider and is unable to receive an appointment within 30 days of the date that an appointment is deemed clinically appropriate by a VA health care provider, or if no such clinical determination has been made, the date a Veteran prefers to be seen.
- ❑ Based on Geographic Distance
  - Reside more than 40 miles from the closest VA facility or
  - Reside less than 40 miles from a VA medical facility, but must travel by air, boat, or ferry to reach a facility,
  - Reside less than 40 miles from a VA medical facility, but face an unusual or excessive burden in accessing such a facility due to geographic challenges. NOTE: Geographic challenges is a naturally occurring permanent or semi-permanent condition. If the veterans travel to the nearest VA medical facility is impeded by the presence of a body of water (including moving and still water) or a geologic formation that cannot be crossed by road, the Veteran is eligible for non-VA care under the Choice Program.
  - **Reside in a State without a full-service VA medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care and reside, MORE than 20 miles from such a facility. NOTE: This criterion only applies to Veterans residing in three states: Alaska, Hawaii, and New Hampshire. Please note that those Veterans in New Hampshire who reside within 20 miles of a full service VA Medical Facility such as White River Junction in a bordering state are not eligible.**

# Use of Veterans Choice Card (based on Residence)

- ❑ Choice Card program allows Veteran to receive care based on residence or when wait times for VA health care exceed the standards established in law.
- ❑ For purposes of this program, a “residence” is defined as legal residence or personal domicile. A residence cannot be a post office box or non-residential point of delivery.
- ❑ Veterans with a PO Box or non-residential address who wish to have their eligibility for the Choice Program based on distance should call VA at 1-877-222-VETS (8387). They will be asked to provide the address of their residence. The Veteran will be informed of their eligibility and, if eligible advised of next steps, including contacting the TPA to obtain approval to use the Choice Program. You must have a Choice Card when you call to request care.
- ❑ If not eligible for Veterans Choice Program based on Choice, the Veteran will be provided their appeal rights.

# Use of Veterans Choice Card

## Use of the card *must be* preauthorized

- ❑ Authorization is provided by Health Net Federal Services by calling 1-866-606-8198
- ❑ VA Medical Centers **are not** involved in the choice card authorization or approval process
- ❑ Care must be clinically necessary
- ❑ Eligible Veterans are authorized for a course of treatment, which must be considered medically necessary, for up to 60 days. The treatment will include any follow-up appointments, as well as any ancillary and specialty services.
- ❑ Exception to TPA Authorizations: VA Medical Centers continue to authorize Non-VA Care Dental Care, Dialysis and Prosthetics.
  - ❑ Veterans requesting Dental Care should contact local VAMC

# Use of Card based on Geographic Residence

- ❑ Veterans eligible based on geographic residence **are not** required to be seen by a VA Provider (including Primary Care or Mental Health)
- ❑ Distance criteria Veterans are not required to come to the VA for care or to have been previously seen by the VA
- ❑ A referral (Consult) from VAMC is not required for Veterans who are using Choice Program based on residence eligibility
- ❑ Health Net Federal Services will determine clinical necessity

# Use of Card Based on 30 Day Wait Criteria or Choice First

- ❑ Veterans are eligible to use the Veterans Choice Card if their appointment can not be scheduled within 30 days of the clinically appropriate date or if services are not available at VAMC to begin with in which case may be referred to community for care.
- ❑ VA Provider determines the clinically appropriate date
- ❑ At the time the VAMC schedules an appointment more than 30 days from the clinically appropriate date, the MSA/clerk will:
  - inform the Veteran to contact Health Net 1-866-606-8198, if they want to try and schedule an appointment in community
  - Provide an additional FACT sheet with instructions to the Veteran on how to contact the Health Net Federal Services

# Use of Card Based on 30 Day Wait Criteria (continued)

- ❑ If a Veteran accepts an appointment in the community using their Veterans Choice Card, Health Net Federal Services will notify the VA Medical Center
- ❑ The VA Medical Center will cancel the Veteran's VA appointment after appointment has been scheduled in the community.
- ❑ Contractor is responsible for providing "consult" information necessary to coordinate appointment to non-VA provider

# Veteran Choice Card and non-VA Providers

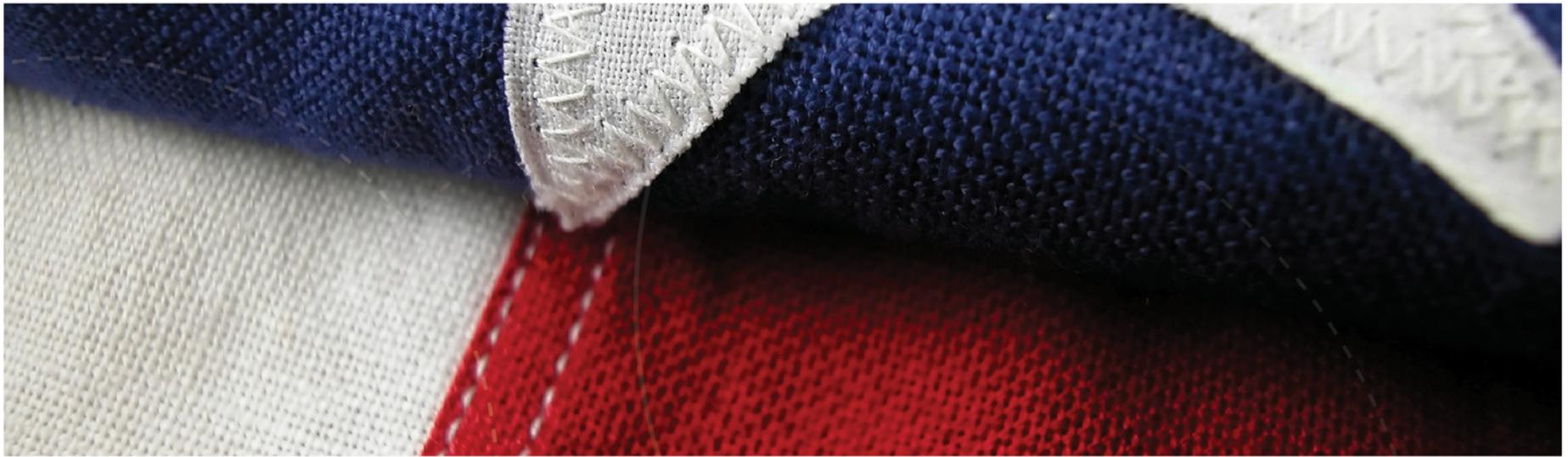
- ❑ Veterans must use either a provider under contract to VA or a provider who is out of network but meets requirements of the Choice Act. **Veteran may choose their Provider.**
- ❑ Health Net has ability to negotiate individual Provider Choice agreements with non-VA providers who do not want to enter into a contract
- ❑ To ensure quality care for our Veteran's, Provider Choice agreements must meet requirements in the Choice Act
  - accept Medicare rates
  - included in Medicare Directory
  - have same or similar credentials as VA providers and share that information with the Contractor

# Recent Changes

- On May 22, 2015, Public Law 114-19 (HR 2496), the Construction Authorization and Choice Improvement Act, was signed into law
- Implementing the first three provisions (sections “aa through cc”) of the enhanced eligibility (dd is still under review)
  - (aa) Geographical challenges
  - (bb) Environmental factors such as:
    - Roads that are not accessible to the general public, such as a road through a military base or restricted area
    - Traffic, or
    - Hazardous weather conditions
  - (cc) A medical condition that impacts the ability to travel by the route(s) that are 40 miles or less (e.g. Veteran cannot travel over “rough roads.”)
    - Determination of medical condition requires clinical provider determination/documentation
  - (dd) Remaining provision requires additional discussion and will be implemented at a later time

# Recent Changes (Con't)

- On July 31, 2015 Public Law 114-XX (HR 3236), Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015, was signed into law
- Changes will require system changes, contract modifications and regulatory guidance prior to implementation – **post 1 Oct**
- Includes five provisions to enhance the Veterans Choice Program:
  - Removes 60 day limit on episode of care
  - Removes requirement for enrollment prior to 8/1/2014; Veteran must be enrolled in the system of patient enrollment
  - Expand provider base by allowing Secretary VA to establish criteria
    - Most likely requires regulations to implement
  - Adds when care cannot be provided in VA by clinically indicated date that is shorter than wait time (currently 30 days)
  - Changes requirement for distance from CBOCs related to full time physician availability
    - Most likely requires regulations to implement
    - In review by OGC to determine exact interpretation



Questions?