

President Trump signs bill extending private health care program for veterans

Extension of Veterans Choice Act

What is the Veterans Choice program?

- The Veterans Choice Act was signed in 2014, following a scandal in which as many as 40 veterans died while waiting months to get medical appointments at the Phoenix VA medical center
- The bill gave the VA about \$15 billion to hire new personnel and help fund veterans to get treatment from non-VA providers if they face wait times of more than 30 days or if they have to drive more than 40 miles to a facility
- Veterans were issued a “Choice Card” to facilitate their appointments with outside health providers. To use the card, veterans must typically arrange care through a VA coordinator



VA Secretary
David Shulkin

*The program was
set to expire on:*



Details of the Veterans Choice Act extension

- The extension that President Trump signed gives VA Secretary Shulkin time to develop a comprehensive plan to allow veterans to more easily obtain health care outside of the VA
- The extension allows the VA to continue operating the Choice Program until its funding runs out, which is expected to occur in early 2018.
- Prior to the extension, the program was scheduled to expire on Aug. 7, 2017 with nearly \$1 billion left over
- The legislation calls for changes to help speed up VA payments and promote sharing of medical records
- More significant changes in the program are likely to come in fall 2017, when Secy. Shulkin is expected to unveil a “Choice 2.0” plan

Sources: Ben Kesling, “Trump signs legislation extending private-care program for veterans,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2017; Darlene Superville, “Trump extends private-sector health care program for vets,” *Associated Press*, April 19, 2017; Leo Shane III, “Trump extends vets’ access to privatized health care,” *Military Times*, April 19, 2017.