

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: VA's

mission to provide quality health care for America's veterans has not changed since its inception. But how that care is provided—at what kind of facilities, where they are located and which types of procedures are used—has been subject to dynamic change. Medical advances, modern health care trends, and veteran migrations all have an impact on the medical care landscape. In a dynamic health care environment, VA must plan to embrace change so it can best serve veterans health care needs in the future.

The draft National CARES Plan embodies the plan for managing a vital element of that change: The Department's capital infrastructure. The plan is based on a systematic, national assessment of the future needs of veterans and the present location and condition of the physical plant that delivers their health care. The draft National CARES Plan identifies gaps where there is an imbalance between

current infrastructure and future needs. It then makes recommendations to solve these imbalances and assure that VA is best positioned to meet veterans health care needs into the future.

The draft Plan incorporates new community-based primary and specialty outpatient clinics. Additionally, four new Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders Units have been proposed, along with two new Blind Rehabilitation Centers. Other enhancements include expansion of numerous existing outpatient clinics, renovations of inpatient beds, diagnostic and ancillary services, as well as two new hospitals.

The full plan, all appendices, and related information can be viewed at <http://www.va.gov/CARES>. It also is available for inspection in the Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Ave., NW., Room 1063B, Washington, DC 20420. The draft National CARES Plan, including an appendix that summarizes individual network plans, which was prepared by VA's Under Secretary for Health after review of present and projected user data, as well as input from a wide range of sources and stakeholders and the

individual network plans will be published in another **Federal Register** notice in the near future.

The independent CARES Commission, appointed by the VA Secretary, is evaluating this draft National CARES Plan, which incorporates individual network Market Plans. Members of the Commission include individuals with special knowledge or interest relating to VA health care, as well as representatives from stakeholders' groups.

This notice provides interested persons an opportunity to submit written comments concerning the draft National CARES Plan to the CARES Commission. The Commission will consider these comments in developing its recommendations to the VA Secretary. Under the CARES process, the Secretary will either accept or reject the Commission's recommendations, without modification.

Dated: August 6, 2003.

Tim S. McClain,
General Counsel.

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