

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Draft National Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Plan

AGENCY: Department of Veterans Affairs.
ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This document concerns VA's health care planning process known as CARES, or Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services. The CARES process was designed to enable the veterans health care system to more effectively use its resources to deliver more care, to more veterans, in places where veterans need it most. We are providing interested persons the opportunity to review and submit written comments to the independent CARES Commission concerning the draft National CARES Plan of the Under Secretary for Health.

DATES: Comments must be submitted by October 20, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Written comments can be mailed to Richard E. Larson, Executive Director, CARES Commission, 00CARES, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20480; or faxed to (202) 501-2196; or e-mail to www.carescommission.va.gov. Comments should indicate that they are submitted in response to the "Notice; Draft National Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Plan."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Janice R. Sloan, CARES Commission, at (202) 501-2000.

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.

This notice includes 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. The full plan, all appendices, and related information can be viewed at www.va.gov/CARES.

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 5, 2003.

Tim S. McClain,
General Counsel.

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- Appendices C through S can be viewed @ <http://www.va.gov/CARES/>

References

- Access Calculation Technical Summary
- CACI/Milliman Enrollment/Demand Model
- Congressional Contacts
- Congressional Letter
- DoD Primary Receiving Centers
- GAO Report (GAO/HEHS-99-145) titled "VHA Health Care Improvements Needed in Capital Asset Planning and Budgeting"
- GAO Testimony (GAO/HEHS-99-173) titled "VHA Health Care Challenges Facing VA in Developing an Asset Realignment Process"
- Handbook for Market Plan Development
- IBM Market Planning Template Technical Summary
- Planning Initiative Selection Criteria
- Space and Functional Surveys

Introduction

Environment of Change Surrounds VA Mission

The mission so nobly described by Abraham Lincoln as "Caring for those who shall have borne the battle" represents a single constant, surrounded by constant change.

The one, unchanging feature attending Mr. Lincoln's charge to provide health care for America's veterans is that the nation regards it as a duty of the highest priority. But how that job is done—at what kind of facilities, where they are located, and which types of procedures are used—has been subject to dynamic change, as a function of medical advances, modern health care trends, regional migration and other factors.

This document embodies the plan for managing a vital element of that change: the capacity and placement of facilities, their accessibility and the acute care infrastructure necessary to meet the current and future needs of veterans. The underlying planning process is entitled "Capital Asset Realignment for