

D. STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS HAS BEEN CONDUCTED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PROGRAM AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED DURING DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPTIONS

Since the inception of the program VA has been working to keep internal and external stakeholders informed on the CARES program. VA has shared study information to date, including the CARES process, the evaluation criteria, the progress of the Phase 1 pilot project and the data on veteran population and facilities. During Phase 1 VA has encouraged interested stakeholders to provide comments and questions. Many comments have been received, either sent to VA or made during the numerous meetings and briefings that have taken place. These comments have been shared with the National CARES Project Team (NCPT) and with BA&H.

This appendix reviews the level and nature of stakeholder interest to date, including the comments received through the HQ and VISN communications channels, as well as other communications activities in which BA&H has been involved during this stage of the CARES process. It is expected that interest will rise once the service delivery option report is released. VA will continue to review and consider these comments. No decision on the VISN 12 options will be made until there has been an opportunity for all interested persons and groups to provide input.

THE OVERALL RESPONSE FROM STAKEHOLDER GROUPS INDICATES THAT THERE IS STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM AS IT EXISTS NOW AND CONCERN ABOUT MAKING ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO THE SYSTEM

While it is difficult to categorize the comments received in many forms from diverse groups and individuals, the most common theme is support for the VA's health care system. Many persons and groups point to what VA does right. There is a deep sense of satisfaction with the system, while stakeholders still recognize that improvements can be made. The concern expressed is that the CARES process would cause an adverse impact on a facility or program that an individual or group strongly supports.

The other theme that has resonated throughout veterans and stakeholder groups is interest in having a voice in the process. Requests have ranged from serving on decision-making or advisory bodies, to seeing the options in the draft stages in order to influence the options presented. Stakeholder have also asked for an adequate comment period that would allow for review and comment before a decision is made.

Comments concerning specific facilities make up the bulk of the written comments received by the VISN, as well as the input received by BA&H during site visits. In particular, considerable concern

has been expressed by both Congressional representatives and veterans about the future of the North Chicago Medical Center. Many recognize that a partnership with Great Lakes Naval Station may be a sensible direction for the future.

There has also been an organized movement to provide testimonials concerning the fine work done at the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center. Apparently concern had been raised in the community that the center could be closed down. Support has been expressed for the construction of a new blind rehabilitation center at Hines, one that is not coupled with any other rehabilitation programs.

Other concerns and interests will be reviewed later in this section.

VA HEADQUARTERS HAS KEPT NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS INFORMED DURING PHASE 1 OF THE STUDY, WHILE VISN 12 HAS PROVIDED INFORMATION TO LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

VA Headquarters has provided opportunities for national stakeholder groups to keep informed on the Phase 1 study through written materials, as well as through regular and special briefings. National stakeholder groups meet regularly with VA senior executives and the CARES process is generally discussed at these meetings. Additionally, there have been special briefings at the request of the national Veteran Service Organizations to go over, in detail, the veteran demand projections and the facility assessments. Briefings have been conducted both with a large group of VSOs, as well as with individual organizations. VA has also held three briefings with Congressional staff who represent the area included in VISN 12, as well as the staff from House and Senate committees involved with veterans affairs. During these briefings the general study process and progress has been discussed, as well as the data on veteran demand projections and facility assessments.

VISN 12 has taken the lead in keeping local stakeholders up to date on the progress of the CARES process. They issue a weekly information bulletin that is widely distributed to internal and external stakeholders and that is also posted on the web site maintained by VA Headquarters.

Local congressional and other government officials, local VSO representatives, and Medical School Deans have been kept informed on the CARES process through discussions at regular meetings the VISN holds. Additionally the VISN Director has provided available information to the Medical Center leadership, who in turn communicate with their employees and affiliates.

Attached is a list of the government officials and veterans groups that have been involved in the communications and provided input.

VA HAS RECEIVED MORE THAN 550 WRITTEN COMMENTS ON PHASE 1 FROM LOCAL INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS FOCUSING PRIMARILY ON SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC FACILITIES

BA&H served as the repository for public comments regarding the CARES process. Comments received by BA&H came through several different channels. The primary channel was VISN 12 who issued a comment form with the weekly bulletins and posted it on the web site. Other

comments were mailed directly to members of the NCPT, Secretary Principi, and BA&H. A package of 402 letters was sent by way of Congressman Mark Kirk's office

Once received, BA&H recorded the comments on a matrix, summarizing the contents of the communications and classifying comments into nine categories: access to care, methodology, education, VA workforce, suggested alternative options, quality of care, physical plant, support for a VA facility, and other. Some comments spanned more than one category. This matrix was regularly shared with the NCPT and BA&H project team. Members of the BA&H project team could and did read the comments in their entirety dealing with their area of interest. The chart below summarizes the comment matrix.

**SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED
as of May 15, 2001**

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Total Comments | 572¹ |
| Support of N. Chicago | 402 |
| Quality of care | 88 |
| Hines – Blind Rehab Center | 54 |
| General | 16 |
| N. Chicago | 8 |
| Chicago Area | 7 |
| Marion | 1 |
| Milwaukee | 1 |
| St. Louis | 1 |
| Access | 53 |
| N. Chicago | 20 |
| General | 19 |
| Hines | 6 |
| West Side | 3 |
| Crowne Point | 1 |
| Iron MT. | 1 |
| Milwaukee | 1 |
| Tomah | 1 |
| Wichita | 1 |
| Suggested alternative options | 16 |
| Methodology – General | 13 |
| Education | 8 |
| VA workforce | 5 |
| Other (Miscellaneous) | 4 |
| Physical Plant | 2 |

¹ Some comments had more than one issue identified, therefore category totals may exceed the total number of comments received.

The largest number of public comments was relayed through Congressman Kirk's office. Second to this groups of letters about the North Chicago facility were the over 50 individual letters were received supporting the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center.

Not included in the matrix summary are form letters and petitions, as they were not individual comments. A form letter requesting veteran representation on the CARES study team was sent in by 37 individuals in the Chicago area. VA also received a petition with over 800 signatures asking that the inpatient services at West Side remain open.

COMMENTS FROM NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS HAVE FOCUSED MORE ON THE CARES PROCESS

There has been considerable interest in the CARES process in Phase 1. The Attachment lists the groups and Congressional offices that have participated in briefings on the CARES process and whose input is reflected in the comments below. The following are the general areas on which concerns and questions were raised by these groups:

- Benchmarking assumptions
- Comment period
- Communications
- Great Lakes Naval Station
- Construction moratorium
- Cost savings
- Funding for implementation
- Lessons learned
- Medical school affiliation
- Original service delivery study options
- Qualifications of the contractor
- Secretary role
- Sensitivity analysis
- Spinal Cord Injury bed levels
- Timeframe for the CARES study
- Unmet demand projections
- Workload information

VA WILL HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD ON THE PROPOSED SERVICE DELIVERY POTIONS AND CONSIDER ALL INPUT BEFORE MAKING A DECISION

VA is committed to giving stakeholders the opportunity to provide input to the process. Meetings with stakeholder groups, informational bulletins and other communications activities will continue throughout Phase 1. Importantly, there will also be a public comment period on the options.

ATTACHMENT
STAKEHOLDER GROUPS PROVIDING INPUT ON THE CARES
PROCESS

As of May 22, 2001

**Congressional
Offices**

Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill)
 Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI)
 Senator Peter Fitzgerald (R-IL)
 Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA)
 Senator Herbert Kohl (D-WI)
 Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)
 Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN)

Congressman Tammy Baldwin (D) Wisconsin-12
 Congressman Jody Bigert (R) Illinois-13
 Congressman Rod Blagojevich (D) Illinois 5
 Congressman Danny Davis (D) Illinois-7
 Congressman Lane Evans (D) Illinois-17
 Congressman Mark Green (R) Wisconsin-8
 Congressman Luis Gutierrez (D) Illinois-4
 Congressman Henry Hyde (R) Illinois-6
 Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr (D) Illinois-2
 Congressman Mark Kirk (R) Illinois-10
 Congressman Jerry Klecska (D) Wisconsin-14
 Congressman Donald Manzullo (R) Illinois-16
 Congressman Thomas Petri (R) Wisconsin-6
 Congressman David Phelps (D) Illinois-19
 Congressman David Obey (D) Wisconsin-17
 Congressman Paul Ryan (R) Wisconsin-1
 Congressman Janice Schakowsky (D) Illinois-9
 Congressman James Sensenbrenner (R) Wisconsin-9
 Congressman J.C. Watts (R) Oklahoma-4

House Veterans Affairs Committee
 Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
 House Appropriations Committee

**Local Government
Officials**

Office of the Mayor of the City of Chicago
 City of Chicago, Commission on Human Rights
 Lake County Board Office
 City of Iron Mountain
 Dickinson County, Michigan
 Menominee County, Michigan

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| Veteran Service Organizations | Oneida County, Wisconsin |
| | Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs |
| | Lincoln County, Wisconsin |
| | Washington County, Wisconsin |
| | Waupaca County, Wisconsin |
| | Veterans of Foreign Wars |
| | Paralyzed Veterans of America |
| | Disabled American Veterans |
| | American Legion |
| | Order of the Purple Heart |
| | AmVets |
| | Blinded Veterans Association |
| | Polish Legion of American Veterans |
| | Vietnam Veterans of America |
| | National Gulf War Resource Center |
| | Veterans Strike Force |
| Milwaukee County Allies Veterans Association | |
| UPP Veterans Organization | |
| Local Colleges & Universities | University of Illinois |
| | Loyola University Health System |
| | Medical College of Wisconsin |
| Unions, Employees, & Individuals | AFGE Local 1732 AFL/CIO |
| | AFGE Local 2280 |
| | VAMC employees |
| | VARO employees |
| | Retired employees |
| | Volunteers |
| | Patient Advocates |
| | Veterans/Patients |
| Family members of Veterans/Patients | |
