



**Department of
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News Release

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New VA Health Care Options Recommended for Chicago-area Veterans

CHICAGO – The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) top doctor today recommended a series of significant changes in the way health care is delivered to Chicago, Wisconsin and upper-Michigan veterans. The changes are part of VA's health care planning process called CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services).

Today's announcement initiates a 60-day comment period to allow veterans, employees and other stakeholders to provide input.

"These recommendations will allow VA to treat more veterans in more places at a higher level of quality than ever before," said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Thomas Garthwaite. "Additionally, VA will maintain its commitment to medical education and research in Chicago and throughout the surrounding network of VA facilities."

Last month, VA announced a field of nine options that underwent an extensive evaluation by local and national health care professionals, the National CARES Project Team and the National CARES Steering Committee. Evaluations took into account the needs of veterans, including their ages, medical conditions and other special characteristics.

The nine options were divided among three market areas. Four options were for the southern market (Chicago area), three options for the central market (Wisconsin) and two for the northern market (upper Michigan peninsula). After careful evaluation, one option was tentatively identified for each market.

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In Chicago, the option under consideration (Southern Market - Option B) will enhance services at the West Side VA Medical Center (VAMC); maintain full ambulatory care and affiliation with Northwestern University at Lakeside VAMC, but discontinue inpatient services; renovate Hines VAMC; and expand VA and Department of Defense sharing agreements at the North Chicago VAMC.

The Madison, Wis., VAMC (Central Market - Option G) would gain 75 nursing home beds. Although Milwaukee and Tomah would lose some acute-care beds, all sites would maintain outpatient care capacity and three community-based outpatient clinics would be added in the region.

The Iron Mountain VA Medical Center (Northern Market - Option I) would continue as an active facility and a telemedicine hub. A new community-based outpatient clinic would be established at Gladstone in Delta County.

"It is important to understand that this is a preliminary proposal," said Garthwaite. "Today's announcement begins the formal comment period during which we will hold town hall meetings and solicit views from anyone who has a stake in VA health care in these regions. This input will be considered in determining the final options implemented by VA."

Efficiencies from the recommended proposals, estimated at \$720 million over the next 20 years, will be directed back into care for veterans in the region, providing better access and enhanced outpatient care, inpatient care, long-term care and care for special disabilities such as blind rehabilitation and spinal cord injury.

"VA health care is changing, and for the better," said Garthwaite. "We've gone from mostly an inpatient setting where we treat illness in its latter stages to a system focused on prevention of disease, early detection, health promotion and easier access. VA's infrastructure, designed a half century or more ago, needs to be evaluated and updated to meet veterans' needs today and in the future. That's what CARES will do."

Comments on CARES should be sent to vhaocares@hq.med.va.gov. Details on the options and supporting documents are available at www.va.gov/CARES.