

January 24, 2003

10N6

Dear Stakeholder:

In 2002, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the beginning of a new initiative designed to continue to bring VA's health care system into the 21st century. The goal of VA's Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) is to realign and enhance health care to meet veterans' needs now and in the future.

We are entering Step 4 of the CARES Phase II Process, "Develop Market Plans." We will work with veterans service organizations and other stakeholders to analyze gaps identified in the VISN 6 geographic area, and develop market plans to address them. Recently, VA made an adjustment to the timeline for the CARES Process:

The deadline for VISNs to submit their Market Plans has been moved to April 15, 2003, instead of February 28, 2003. There are several benefits for extending the timeline for development of Market Plans:

- The additional time will allow the National CARES Program Office to rerun the CARES data with recently received Census 2000 information.
- VA's new policy (effective January 17, 2003) regarding enrollment for health care will be included when CARES data is updated.
- The new deadline for draft Market Plans will not affect the time allotted for review by the CARES Commission, and it will keep the October deadline for the Secretary's decision on a National CARES Plan.

I am enclosing several documents that summarize this information. I encourage you to review this material, and share it with others.

Throughout the development of CARES Market Plans, veterans and other stakeholders will be involved through briefings, mailings, and solicitation of comments. The VISN 6 Internet Web site, <http://www.va.gov/netsix-cares/>, and VA's national CARES Web site, <http://www.va.gov/CARES/>, are two places where information can be accessed and comments made via an electronic comment card. Additional information about CARES will be posted on these Web sites as it becomes available.

If you have questions or need additional information, contact your local medical center public affairs officer, or contact Pamela Howell, VISN 6 CARES Communications Coordinator, at 919.956.5541.

Sincerely,



Daniel F. Hoffmann, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 6

Enclosures (4)

1. CARES Process Outline
2. Revised CARES Timeline
3. VA News Release for Budget, Health Care Changes
4. VISN 6 Public Affairs Officers Listing