



Congress Needs to Enact Legislation to Eliminate Disparities in Veterans' Access to Chiropractic Care

STATUS OF CHIROPRACTIC CARE IN THE DVA:

Following decades of inaction and neglect on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs (*DVA*), the process of integrating chiropractic care into the DVA health care delivery system was initiated during the past decade, but only after **Congress enacted a series of statutes (*Including PL 107-135 and PL 108-170*) that included specific directives instructing the DVA to hire doctors of chiropractic and place them at DVA health care facilities.** Prior to the intervention of Congress, no doctors of chiropractic served on the staff of any DVA treatment facility and the availability of chiropractic care for eligible veterans was limited to DVA "referrals" to doctors of chiropractic serving in private practice outside of the DVA system. Such referrals were so rarely provided, that as a practical matter, it would be fair to say that access to chiropractic care within the DVA system was virtually non-existent until Congress took action to address that glaring deficiency. As a result of the previous referenced congressional directives, including recommendations issued by a congressionally-mandated advisory committee, **the DVA (as of February 2010) currently provides chiropractic care at 36 major DVA treatment facilities within the U.S.**

A MAJOR DISPARITY CONTINUES TO EXIST:

Despite the above progress, **the overwhelming majority of America's eligible veterans continue to be denied access to chiropractic care,** because the DVA has failed to take any significant action to provide chiropractic care at nearly 120 additional major DVA treatment facilities that comprise the major sites where DVA care is offered. The DVA has no doctors of chiropractic on staff at these locations and referrals for chiropractic care outside of DVA's system are rarely provided at these and other locations.

IMPORTANT GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM DATA:

Shockingly, the above disparity has been allowed to continue, despite important data demonstrating a critical need within the DVA for the specific type of health care doctors of chiropractic specialize in providing. Recent Department of Veterans Affairs data (*Analysis of VA Health Care Utilization Among Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veterans, October 2009*) cite "**diseases of Musculoskeletal System/Connective System,**" such as **back pain, as the number one ailment of Iraq/Afghanistan veterans accessing DVA treatment.**

CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVES:

House VA Committee Chairman Bob Filner (*D-CA*) has introduced HR 1017, the "Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act," which would phase-in the placement of doctors of chiropractic at all major DVA medical centers. Similar legislation authored by Chairman Filner overwhelmingly passed the U.S. House in the 110th Congress, **and it is fully anticipated that the House of Representatives will overwhelmingly approve HR1017 at some point during the 111th Congress.**

In the Senate, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (*D-WA*), Member of the Senate VA Committee has introduced similar legislation (*S1204*) which would expand access to chiropractic care within the DVA system.

ACTION NEEDED IN THE 111TH CONGRESS:

Both HR1017 and S1204 enjoy bi-partisan support and the support of America's leading veterans' service organizations. Members of the House so should be encouraged to co-sponsor HR1017 and work for its adoption by the House. Likewise, Members of the Senate should be encouraged to co-sponsor S1204. At some point during the 111th Congress (*preferably sooner rather than later*) provisions based on HR1017 and S1204 are expected to be incorporated into a broader based veterans health bill that will address a variety of issues relating to the DVA health delivery system. Members of Congress are urged to work for the swift enactment of legislation based on these two bills.

TALKING POINTS:

- **For too long, veterans have been denied access through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to the chiropractic care they want, need and deserve.**
- Following enactment of specific legislative directives by Congress in 2002 and 2003 (*Public Laws 107-135 and 108-170*), the DVA is beginning to make chiropractic care available at selected DVA facilities around the country.
- Where implemented, the integration of chiropractic care into the DVA has proved highly successful.
- Still, the chiropractic benefit is virtually non-existent at over 80% of DVA major medical facilities.
- *Every* eligible veteran should have unimpeded access through the DVA to chiropractic care.
- Although this is a step forward to improve the care available to America's veterans, many are unable to access chiropractic care at a DVA facility unless the program is expanded.
- Musculoskeletal ailments (*principally joint and back disorders*) were the top health problem of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, according to a recent DVA report (*Jan. 2009*).
- More needs to be done to overcome barriers to chiropractic care and ensure that doctors of chiropractic are integrated fully in federal health programs - like the DVA health system - without any further delay.
- **Members of the House of Representatives should contact Rep. Filner's office and cosponsor HR1017.**
- **Members of the Senate should contact Sen. Murray's office and cosponsor S1204.**

KEY MEMBERS:

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

House Veterans Affairs Committee

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