

VA applies bipartisan provision to enhance VA medical care

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New policy will improve staffing at Veterans Administration health clinics

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) welcomed the news that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will implement one of the key proposals from the bipartisan *Veterans Health Care Staffing Improvement Act*, helping to ensure veterans can get the care they need from Advance Practice Registered Nurses.

The VA will now allow Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) to practice to the full extent of their education, training, and certification. This will help enable the VA to find enough medical professionals to fill the need for health care services for veterans. This is particularly important for primary care services in rural areas, where veterans struggle to find access to medical care.

“Allowing these highly-qualified registered nurses to put their training to practice will help address delays at VA hospitals and clinics across the country,” said Senator Durbin. “I commend Secretary McDonald and Under Secretary Shulkin for taking steps to remove barriers to health care access by increasing the number of qualified medical professionals providing primary care to our nation’s veterans, and hope the VA can extend full practice authority to CRNAs in the future as well.”

“After a lifetime of service to our nation, veterans deserve nothing but the best medical support. But unfortunately, all too many of our wounded warriors face significant hurdles to accessing the health care they need to thrive upon their return to civilian life,” said Senator Merkley. “In order to support our veterans to the best of their ability, our medical professionals must be able to practice to the full extent of their education, training, and certification. When it comes to our veterans, there should be no holding back. I’m thrilled that the VA heeded our call to improve VA health care staffing today and will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to fight for our veterans who have fought for us.”

“It’s maddening that our nation’s veterans are forced to wait for care due to a shortage of medical personnel when trained APRNs are standing by, ready to help but blocked by needless bureaucracy,” said Rep. Peter DeFazio. “Thankfully, the VA has recognized the exceptional training and ability APRNs possess, and I urge them to quickly approve the ability of Nurse Anesthesiologists to practice at the same level as other APRNs. I’m proud to have sponsored the House version of the Veterans Health Care Staffing Improvement Act and look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate next Congress to continue to push the VA to address unnecessary personnel shortages that are hurting our veterans.”

The Members of Congress praised the step forward, but expressed disappointment that the VA had excluded Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) from their final rule.

“While this is a major step forward in supporting our veterans, I would have liked to see the VA grant nurse anesthetists full authority to practice as well. I’ll keep working with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to ensure that CRNAs gain full practice authority so that they can provide our wounded warriors with care to the full extent of their abilities,” said Merkley.

