

# Durbin Discusses Covid-19 Response With Illinois VA Medical Facility Leaders

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today discussed the response to the COVID-19 pandemic with directors of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers in Illinois. Durbin, on a call with the directors, spoke about the provisions in the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* that could support VA Medical Centers in Illinois that are dealing with outbreaks of COVID-19. As of April 1, the VA has 1,602 positive veteran cases of COVID-19 nationwide, including 51 at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, seven at Hines VA Medical Center, and 20 at Lovell VA Medical Center. There has been one COVID-19 fatality at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center.

**“Many of the nearly 600,000 veterans throughout Illinois are over the age of 65, and some have underlying health conditions. Because we know they can be more susceptible to severe illnesses such as COVID-19, we have to make sure our Illinois VA Medical Centers have resources – like test kits, personal protective equipment, and access to broadband for telehealth – that help keep patients and staff safe. I will continue to push the VA to act immediately to address any possible shortages of resources,”** Durbin said.

The *CARES Act* included \$19.57 billion in funding for the VA to ensure that the Department has the equipment, tests, telehealth capabilities, and support services necessary to support veterans and the health care workforce at facilities nationwide. This includes \$15.85 billion in direct medical care, including coverage of treatment of veterans, overtime for clinical staff, the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE), and the purchase of other supplies and equipment. The bill also provided \$3.1 billion for facilities and IT support for telemedicine and \$590 million for vulnerable veterans, including to support homeless veterans' programs and State Veterans Homes.

Last week, Durbin and Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) sent a [letter](#) to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie urging the agency to ensure that all VA medical facilities in Illinois are well equipped to promptly respond to the coronavirus pandemic and provide for the wellbeing of Veterans as well as VA employees. Durbin and Duckworth requested that the VA provide information about whether the agency is prepared to fulfill its "fourth mission" to support civilian health care systems if needed. The Senators requested as part of this assessment the number of acute-care and ICU beds currently available within VA medical facilities in the State of Illinois.