



## VA Portland Health Care System Press Release



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[VA Portland Health Care System](#)

3710 SW U.S. Veterans Hospital Road  
Portland, Oregon 97239

### **VA Office of Inspector General Releases Administrative Summary of Investigation Regarding Wait Time at VA Portland Health Care System**

During the first week of March 2016, VA's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began releasing several administrative report summaries related to a subset of 77 already completed and publicly known investigations into wait times at specified VA facilities to include VA Portland Health Care System.

Although the OIG report summaries do present new information to many Veterans and stakeholders, these investigations that have looked into potential scheduling irregularities only examined a point in time going back to when the Department requested that OIG review the Access Audit findings from early 2014, almost two years ago.

The VA Portland Health Care System has aggressively trained and retrained all of our personnel who schedule patients to ensure that there is no confusion in scheduling procedures. Regular scheduling audits are conducted and staff are able to clearly articulate scheduling procedures. In addition, VA Portland Health Care System has opened weekend clinics, instituted walk-in clinics, and greatly increased the use of telemedicine. We recently expanded our Salem and Fairview outpatient clinics, doubling their Primary Care Space and adding Specialty Care Services to include Eye, Dermatology, and Audiology as well as integrated Mental Health Services. These actions will significantly improve our access to healthcare and improve care coordination across Primary and Specialty Care.

As part of "MyVA" transformation, VA has worked to improve our employee experience by working to modernize and enhance our scheduling processes in Vista, and leveraging industry to explore other potential commercial solutions. We have also strengthened leader and management training through a focused "Leaders Developing Leaders" program, and adopted "Lean" as the centerpiece methodology for our process improvement effort. We have also ensured that all employees involved in scheduling are retrained, while improving our processes as we update scheduling software.

#### **INCREASING ACCESS TO CARE**

We are making lasting improvements in access to VA care by expanding capacity, focusing on staffing, space, productivity and VA Community Care.

The VA Portland Health Care System has hired 131 additional clinical staff with VA Choice Act dollars to assist in meeting Veteran Care. We have doubled our space in both the Salem and East/Fairview outpatient clinics to include specialty care services and robust integrated Mental Health. A project to add an additional 21 exam rooms and additional 15,000 square feet to our Vancouver campus is also underway. These expansions will greatly improve access to care in these areas.

Additionally, we have doubled our delivery of care by telephone, secure messaging and telehealth to better improve access and meet Veteran care needs without their traveling for a schedule appointment. We also implemented a new, non-procedure, colorectal screening option for Veterans in lieu of colonoscopy which has almost eliminated Veterans waiting for screening colonoscopies. The VA Portland Health Care System has weekend clinics in order to bring Veterans in for care in some of our high-demand clinics like Ophthalmology, Audiology and Compensation and Pension.

As we continue to sustain access to care, more and more Veterans are choosing VA care — for the quality, for the convenience, or for the cost-savings so even though we're completing millions more appointments, we continue to have more work to do.

The VA Portland Health Care System has increased authorizations for care in the community by over 30 percent in the past two years and this trend continues to rise. Over 14,500 VA Portland Health Care System Veterans have elected to seek care in the community through the Choice Program since it was enacted in the fall of 2014.

On February 27, VA facilities across the nation completed a second Access Stand Down to connect with Veterans that have urgent health care needs, address their needs and reduce the number of Veterans waiting greater than 30-days for urgent care. This event also aimed to improve our employee experience by streamlining access to care processes.

The VA Portland Health Care System appreciates the work of the independent OIG to provide VA with necessary feedback to help us improve. OIG's investigations give us the opportunity to make necessary changes and better serve Veterans.

Link to VA OIG Summary: <http://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/ims/wait-times-14-02890-167.pdf>

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*The VA Portland Health Care System (VAPORHCS) serves more than 96,000 Veterans in Oregon and Southwest Washington. VAPORHCS consists of the main tertiary care medical center located near downtown Portland, Ore., the Vancouver Campus located near downtown Vancouver, Wash., a Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) in downtown Portland, as well as nine community outpatient clinics across Oregon that support our Veterans. These clinics are located in Bend, Fairview, Hillsboro, Warrenton, Newport, Salem, The Dalles, West Linn, and Lincoln City Oregon.*



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