



The VA Crisis

Budget Shortfalls & Staff Shortages

VA operates the largest health care system in the country, providing care to about five million veterans at more than 1,300 health care facilities. But budget shortfalls over the years threaten to undermine the whole system. In fiscal 2006, for example, facilities in half of 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks reported budget shortfalls, some as high as \$30-40 million.

At VHA, budget shortfalls mean fewer VA healthcare workers to care for veterans, longer working hours for employees, longer waiting time for veterans to receive services, delayed facility construction and repairs, and closing of facilities. A VA hospital in Alaska, for example, had to turn away more than 600 veterans last year. Veterans are not the only ones who suffer. VA workers are pressured to work prolonged overtime, causing stress and burnout. The VA hospital in Seattle, for example, saw 93 nurses leave the agency last year due to chronic short staffing and pressure to discharge patients sooner.

The situation isn't any better at VBA. Due to chronic staffing shortages, the backlog of claims has gone up over the years, greatly delaying benefits our country's veterans are entitled to. The claims backlog is predicted to reach 396,834

at the end of fiscal 2007, far exceeding the 250,000 pending claims VA considers to be a normal pending workload. Inadequate training has also been an issue at VBA. Employees often times have been assigned to work with little training. As a result, employees are subject to unrealistic productivity pressures and are unfairly blamed for the quality and timeliness of responses veterans receive.

It shouldn't be this way.

The Bush administration continues to play politics with the health care and benefits of the men and women who sacrifice so much for our country. Last year, the White House tried again to charge veterans user fees and larger drug co-pays and proposed cruel cuts such as medical prostheses research and construction. Last year VA admitted to a billion dollar shortfall half way through the year. Yet supplemental fiscal 2006 funding was not passed even though we still face severe staffing shortages and long wait lists. VA funding needs to be based on need, not politics. We need to heed the call of veterans groups in calling for assured funding that ensures that veterans get the health care they need based on real demand and real costs.

You Have the Power to End the Crisis.

Get the facts. Get involved.

