

CHOOSE ✓ A



www.veteranspolicy.org



Veterans
Healthcare
Policy
Institute

DID YOU KNOW?

The VHA Is a Model for Our Broken Healthcare System

Critics of America’s increasingly dysfunctional market-driven healthcare system often look to other countries for alternate models. Fortunately, we have a successful example of socialized medicine here in the United States. It’s the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), run by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). When it comes to quality, access, affordability, and equity, the VHA leads the way.

EQUITY

The VHA delivers high quality care to nine million patients who are disproportionately older, poorer, and sicker than those treated in other healthcare systems. Veterans served by the VHA get better care at a lower cost than even some of the wealthiest patients in the U.S.

While other healthcare systems tout their commitment to health equity, the VHA [devotes enormous](#) effort to [study](#) and remedy the impact of things like structural racism and poverty on access to and outcomes of care. The VHA [truly delivers](#) superior outcomes for people of color, as well as low-income and LGBTQ patients. Here’s two quick examples: Black veterans with kidney disease [have lower mortality rates](#) when they are treated through VHA. Patients of color also [did not have higher COVID-19 fatality rates](#) than their white counterparts, bucking national trends. (Veterans generally [fared far better](#) than the general population during the pandemic.)

QUALITY

A 2018 RAND [study](#) comparing the quality of VA care to the private sector concluded that the “VA health care system generally provides care that is higher in quality than what is offered elsewhere in communities across the nation.”

The VHA screens all patients for PTSD, military sexual trauma, and suicide, and is the only system in the nation that integrates primary and mental healthcare in its clinics. The system also provides [peer support and community](#) to patients suffering from the devastating isolation that is often a result of trauma. It is a true community of care for providers and patients alike.

While other healthcare systems claim that they are committed to the effective management of the kinds of [chronic conditions](#) from which millions of Americans suffer, the VHA actually produces superior outcomes in the management of conditions like [diabetes](#) and [cancer](#).

While the nation suffers from a serious [crisis in the delivery of emergency care](#), researchers have [documented](#) that the VHA's model of highly coordinated emergency care saves lives, when compared to the fragmented care delivered in private sector emergency rooms. One Stanford economist, David Chan, called this "[The VA Advantage](#)."

In April of 2023, scientists released a [review](#) of 53 studies published between 2015–2023 that contrasted VA to non-VA healthcare. The review concluded that, "VA-delivered care was as good as or better than Veterans received from VA-paid community care."

The VHA's coordinated system of care does far more than treat physical and mental health problems. It deals with homelessness, legal problems, unemployment, job retraining, and many other social and economic issues that impact health and well-being. The [National Academies](#) have highlighted the VA's pioneering work in Whole Health as a model for the nation.

ACCESS

While Congress and the media often complain about long wait times in the VA, they are, in fact, far lower and more transparent than in the private sector. As the RAND Corporation's Carrie Farmer has [testified](#), "no U.S. health

care system other than VA publicly reports its data on wait times." She's also found that "wait times for VA-delivered health care are often shorter than for non-VA care in the private sector."

AFFORDABILITY

The VHA treats some of the oldest, poorest, and sickest patients in the country. It provides patients with high quality care at lower cost than any other healthcare system in the nation.

In a study of VHA emergency care entitled "VA Hospital Care Improves Quality and Lowers Cost," Chan and his colleagues [point out](#) that the cost of lower quality private care is 21 percent higher than VHA care. This is, in part, because of VHA's stellar care coordination and integrated electronic medical record.

The VHA is the only system in the country that negotiates the cost of pharmaceuticals with Big Pharma. As one [GAO study](#) documented, the VA pays about as much for prescriptions as Medicare Part D.

A [2014 Congressional Budget Office Study](#) suggested that, "the health care provided by VHA generally cost less than would equivalent care provided in the private sector."

