

WAITING TIMES AND DELAYS FOR VETERANS CARE

NO ACCURATE NUMBERS TO MEASURE DELAYS IN URGENT HEALTH CARE

The VA has no idea how long most patients wait to receive care, said Debra Draper, health care director at the Government Accountability Office (GAO). “It is unclear how long veterans are waiting to receive care in VA’s medical facilities because the reported data are unreliable” because VA hospitals have tried to cover up wait times, fudge numbers and backdate delayed appointments in an effort to make things appear better than they are.¹

GAO analysts found more than half of the VA’s 50,000 schedulers did not know how to accurately report the information needed to determine wait times, which includes logging the date a veteran wants to be seen as well as the actual date of the appointment. Others admitted to changing the desired date so the time aligned with VA’s established goal of 14 days.²

MORE THAN 80 VETERANS’ DEATHS CAUSED, OR BEING CAUSED, BY DELAYS IN CARE

82 vets who have died or are dying or have suffered serious injuries as a result of delayed diagnosis or treatment for colonoscopies or endoscopies.³

More than 20 veterans are dead or dying of cancer “because they had to wait too long for diagnosis or treatment” at a VA facility in South Carolina.⁴

The deaths of three veterans at a VA facility in Georgia were caused by delays in care.⁵ In total, 5,100 veterans in need of gastrointestinal procedures went without consultations between 2011 and 2012 in Georgia.⁶ These included a delay in 2,860 screenings, 1,300 surveillance and 340 diagnostic endoscopies.⁷ (As of January 2014, the facility has no pending GI consults).⁸

¹ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black and Drew Griffin, “Hospital delays are killing America's war veterans,” CNN, November 20, 2013; <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/19/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/>.

² Patricia Kime, “VA wait times mean some die before getting care,” Army Times, March 15, 2013; <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130315/BENEFITS04/303150016/VA-wait-times-mean-some-die-before-getting-care>.

³ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black, and Drew Griffin, “Veterans dying because of health care delays,” CNN, January 30, 2014; http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/30/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html?hpt=hp_t2.

⁴ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black and Drew Griffin, “Hospital delays are killing America's war veterans,” CNN, November 20, 2013; <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/19/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/>.

⁵ Nelli Black and Scott Bronstein, “VA hospital in Georgia apologizes for deaths after delayed care,” CNN, November 22, 2013; <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/22/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/>.

⁶ Wesley Brown, “Gastrointestinal backlog reported at second east Georgia VA hospital; Legion's town hall meeting on quality of care today,” January 28, 2014; <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/metro/2014-01-28/gastrointestinal-backlog-reported-second-east-georgia-va-hospital?v=1390934934>.

⁷ Wesley Brown, “Gastrointestinal backlog reported at second east Georgia VA hospital; Legion's town hall meeting on quality of care today,” January 28, 2014; <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/metro/2014-01-28/gastrointestinal-backlog-reported-second-east-georgia-va-hospital?v=1390934934>.

In the Florida region, five veterans are dead, and 14 vets or their families were sent disclosures that they suffered "adverse events" because of delayed or denied care or diagnosis.

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In the Rocky Mountain region, two veterans died, and four families were sent the disclosures or notified.¹⁰

In the Texas region, seven vets or their families were sent disclosures about adverse events and serious injuries suffered because of delayed care.¹¹

DISABILITY BENEFIT CLAIMS TAKE MORE THAN A YEAR TO PROCESS

It takes an average of 376 days for the VA to process veterans' disability benefit claims.¹²

In Cleveland, Ohio, it takes an average of 464 days for the VA to process veterans' disability benefit claims.¹³

About 400,000 veterans are waiting more than 125 days for a decision on requests for disability compensation.¹⁴

There are approximately 34,000 veterans who have been waiting for a year or longer on requests for disability compensation.¹⁵

Veterans in Nevada wait longer than those in any other state to have disability benefits claims completed. As of December, 4,000 Nevada veterans had been waiting more than 125 days for completion of their claims.¹⁶

⁸ Wesley Brown, "Gastrointestinal backlog reported at second east Georgia VA hospital; Legion's town hall meeting on quality of care today," January 28, 2014; <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/metro/2014-01-28/gastrointestinal-backlog-reported-second-east-georgia-va-hospital?v=1390934934> .

⁹ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black, and Drew Griffin, "Veterans dying because of health care delays," CNN, January 30, 2014; http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/30/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html?hpt=hp_t2 .

¹⁰ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black, and Drew Griffin, "Veterans dying because of health care delays," CNN, January 30, 2014; http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/30/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html?hpt=hp_t2 .

¹¹ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black, and Drew Griffin, "Veterans dying because of health care delays," CNN, January 30, 2014; http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/30/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html?hpt=hp_t2 .

¹² Sarah Buduson, "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Cleveland office one of slowest for processing disability claims," newsnet5.com, October 2, 2013; <http://www.newsnet5.com/news/local-news/investigations/us-department-of-veterans-affairs-cleveland-office-one-of-slowest-for-processing-disability-claims> .

¹³ Sarah Buduson, "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Cleveland office one of slowest for processing disability claims," newsnet5.com, October 2, 2013; <http://www.newsnet5.com/news/local-news/investigations/us-department-of-veterans-affairs-cleveland-office-one-of-slowest-for-processing-disability-claims> .

¹⁴ Kevin Freking, "Vets groups oppose proposal to alter disability filing rules," Associated Press, January 12, 2014; http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/national_world/2014/01/12/vets-groups-oppose-proposal-to-alter-disability-filing-rules.html .

¹⁵ Aaron Glantz, "Overtime, new computer system put sizable dent in VA benefits backlog," The Center for Investigative Reporting, November 11, 2013; <http://cironline.org/reports/overtime-new-computer-system-put-sizable-dent-va-benefits-backlog-5514> .

VETS WAIT MORE THAN TWO WEEKS FOR MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY

The VA failed to meet its 14-day goal in 34 percent of new mental health appointments in treatment categories including psychiatry, psychology, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse in 2013.¹⁷

In nearly half of 47,700 first-time psychiatric therapy appointments in 2013, veterans waited longer than two weeks.¹⁸

The average time it took to start any type of behavioral health therapy was 15 days.

In Houston, Texas, veterans needing new appointments waited an average of 28 days to receive services.¹⁹

Approximately 22 veterans commit suicide every day.²⁰

ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS VA NOT MEETING TARGETS FOR PRIMARY AND SPECIALTY CARE FOR 3 OUT OF 4 VETERANS

Based on GAO recommendations to improve reliability of reported wait times for new medical appointments, in 2013 the VA changed the way it tracks and calculates its performance.

Using the new tracking method in 2013, the VA reported only 41 percent of veterans were scheduled for new a primary care appointment and only 40 percent of veterans were scheduled for new specialty care appointments within the 14 day standard.²¹

In contrast, in 2012 the VA reported that 90 percent of new primary care appointments and 95 percent of new specialty care appointments had met the 14 day standard.²²

¹⁶ Keith Rogers, "Heller: Nevada veterans have longest wait for VA benefits," Las Vegas Review-Journal, December 11, 2013; <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/heller-nevada-veterans-have-longest-wait-va-benefits> .

¹⁷ Gregg Zoroya and Meghan Hoyer, "Many veterans still wait weeks for mental health care, USA Today, November 4, 2013; <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/04/veterans-mental-health-treatment/3169763/> .

¹⁸ Gregg Zoroya and Meghan Hoyer, "Many veterans still wait weeks for mental health care, USA Today, November 4, 2013; <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/04/veterans-mental-health-treatment/3169763/> .

¹⁹ Gregg Zoroya and Meghan Hoyer, "Many veterans still wait weeks for mental health care, USA Today, November 4, 2013; <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/04/veterans-mental-health-treatment/3169763/> .

²⁰ Gregg Zoroya and Meghan Hoyer, "Many veterans still wait weeks for mental health care, USA Today, November 4, 2013; <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/04/veterans-mental-health-treatment/3169763/> .

²¹ http://www.va.gov/budget/docs/report/2013-VAPAR_Part_II.pdf

²² <http://www.va.gov/budget/report/>