

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

The potential shortage of health care providers in coming years is significant and stands to impact the delivery of timely and quality care for America's patients and veterans. As these challenges increase, we must ensure that federal health care workforce programs are producing the maximum return on taxpayer investment. All federally financed health care training programs should be closely scrutinized to determine whether they are operating efficiently, aligning with specific national needs, and achieving their strategic objectives. Preparing a health system that can both meet today's demands and respond to changing dynamics in the future will not happen without rigorous and consistent oversight.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a unique role in providing medical care to millions of veterans while also developing over 100,000 health professionals every year. The VA's mission statement for medical training—"to educate for VA and for the nation"—captures this effort well. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has identified 12 health care workforce training programs at the VA, which together had obligations of \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2012. These programs provide valuable education and training in veterans' care. They also are able to respond to projected shortfalls and needs throughout the VA and the nation, both in specific professions and in certain geographic areas. Yet, every federal dollar spent on a misaligned program or lost due to mismanagement does not achieve the goal of training the next generation of health care professionals.

We respectfully request that you assist us in our review and oversight of federal health care workforce programs by providing the following information:

1. Please provide a comprehensive list of statutory and/or departmental strategic plans and goals for each health care workforce program at the VA.
2. Please provide a comprehensive list of all metrics used to monitor the progress, outcomes, and recipients of each program, including metrics to assess whether programs are achieving their statutory objectives.

3. Please provide the funding levels for and number of professionals supported or served by each program each year for the last five years.
4. For programs in which the department has discretion to target specific health care professions or areas of need, please describe the data and methodology used to make such determinations.
5. Please describe the department's strategy and schedule for evaluating each program to determine how closely each program is targeted to match identified health care workforce needs both for the VA and the nation, in specific health care fields and regions. Please include any metrics that are used to measure success in implementing this strategy.
6. Please describe the department's procedure for coordinating programs intra-departmentally and with other federal agencies to ensure health care workforce programs are addressing unmet needs and avoiding unnecessary duplication.
7. Please describe if the department has developed and implemented a strategy for consolidating and streamlining VA-funded health care workforce programs to enable them to operate more effectively and flexibly in response to workforce projections and shortfalls while avoiding unnecessary duplication. If not, please explain why not, and please provide a timetable for development and implementation of a strategy.

We look forward to working with you to improve the efficiency and accountability of health care workforce training programs to ensure a sound investment aligned with both the needs of the VA and our nation. Thank you in advance for providing a written response within 30 days.

Sincerely,



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Michael B. Enzi
U.S. Senator



Richard Burr
U.S. Senator