



TULARE COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

Cheryl L. Duerksen, Ph.D. • Agency Director

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VETERANS CORNER

I would like to update you on an earlier column and some changes that have occurred recently with the Veterans Choice Card. You may have received a white card, called the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA) or Choice Card in the mail from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). If you are currently enrolled in VA healthcare, the card was sent to you automatically. Many questions have arisen, and continue to arise, over when and how to use the card. Recently the VA has changed the rules regarding who can use the cards.

First, here's a little background regarding the card's introduction to the veterans community: The card is a result of scheduling problems that some VA medical facilities experienced. The card program temporarily provides veterans the ability to receive medical care in the community; to be eligible, a veteran must be enrolled in VA health care and meet at least one of the following:

- The local VA medical facility must have told the veteran that the wait for an appointment will be greater than 30 days from the clinically determined date (i.e., the date that the veteran and the provider agreed upon as the next date to be seen for care); if no date is provided, it will be the veteran's preferred date.
- The veteran currently resides more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA health care facility.
- The veteran is located somewhere other than Guam, American Samoa, or the Republic of the Philippines and needs to travel by air, boat, or ferry to the nearest VA facility.
- The veteran faces unusual or excessive burdens in traveling to the medical facility through geographical challenges, environmental factors, or a medical condition. The staff at the local VA facility will work with veterans to see if they meet these conditions.
- The veteran resides in any of the following locations: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or the U.S. Virgin Islands. Some veterans that reside in New Hampshire and are within 20 miles of White River Junction VAMC will not be eligible for the Choice program.

The program is scheduled to end when the allocated funds (\$10 billion) are used or August 7, 2017, whichever occurs first.

Ken Cruickshank, the Veterans Services Officer for Tulare County, is a retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer. The Veterans Services Office is located at 205 North L Street in Tulare.



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The cards do not give veterans permission to go wherever and whenever they want for health care, and it is not designed to be a fee based card for emergency treatment. Before using the Choice Card, call the VA at 1-866-606-8198 to get permission to use the card. If you fail to get permission to use the card, you may be held responsible for the charges incurred for treatment.

If you are not currently enrolled in the VA healthcare system, and would like to enroll, we can help you complete the application in the office. After you have completed the application, you can go to the VAMC Fresno or the VA South Valley Clinic to see if you can enroll. If you need assistance completing your claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs, we can assist with that as well.

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