



Sunday, September 17, 2017



# VA only filling half of its medical appointments while veterans wait for weeks

by Eric Hannel | Sep 17, 2017, 12:01 AM

Internal Department of Veterans Affairs data provided by whistleblowers reveals the agency is only filling about half of its capacity to make medical appointments, even as veterans continue to wait an average of at least 30 days before a medical appointment can be scheduled.

The VA documents show that between July and September of 2017, the agency only used 51.44 percent of the appointments available across its healthcare system.



**Randy Hetrick, Founder TRX | FounderMade**

[Watch Full Screen](#)

VA documents also show there are currently 184,520 veterans across the nation waiting longer than 30 days for an appointment and more than 45,000 new

veteran patients waiting more than 90 days. Internal VA documents also indicate 479,239 veterans nationwide are waiting for physician requested follow-up appointments over 30 days for the period July to September 2017.

The VA says its times have improved over the last few years.

"The wait time for all VA clinics from the date the veterans first requests an appointment to the date when the appointment is completed has decreased from 19 days to 17 days since 2014," according to VA spokesperson Curt Cashour.

But in clinics around the country, the VA's ability to use all of its available appointment time is still lagging.

In Iowa, the VA's clinic utilization averaged just over 41 percent while between ten to twelve thousand appointments remained unfilled each of those months. Even while thousands of appointments remained unused, there were 1,291 veterans waiting more than 30 days for an appointment and at least 82 waiting longer than 90 days.

Similarly, the Phoenix VA facility, which was the epicenter of VA's wait time scandal that became public in 2014 and where at least 293 veterans died while waiting for care, has 3,338 veterans waiting more than 30 days for an appointment, while only 55.4 percent of appointments were utilized.

The Government Accountability Office has flagged VA healthcare as an area the government needs to improve since 2015. The VA system has been flagged in part due to its inefficiency in providing timely healthcare for veterans, both within VA and through the use of the CHOICE program, a VA controlled system that sends veterans outside the department for care.

"GAO will continue to look at medical appointment scheduling and wait times in its follow-up work regarding VA," Dr. Debra Draper, director of healthcare at GAO told the *Washington Examiner*.

Appointment inefficiency has plagued VA for years as various schemes have been used to make utilization look better than it is, as noted by VA's own

documents and as captured in numerous reports by GAO, the VA Office of Inspector General and the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

*Eric Hannel, previously the staff director for the Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations at the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, is a Marine Corps combat veteran and freelance investigative writer.*