



The Northern Virginia Veterans Association supports House Bill 432 - Help Bring A Veterans Care Center to Northern Virginia. Transportation to the two existing facilities is difficult to arrange and requires a long commute from the eastern corridor of Northern Virginia. Older veterans worry that the distance may also mean not seeing their families or spouse on a regular basis. The Northern Virginia Veterans Association prepared a white paper on transportation and a needs analysis.

Transportation services for veterans to their medical appointments is difficult to arrange for numerous reasons, including transportation organizations' prohibitively high costs, not accepting insurance, not serving veterans of all ages and not serving those with disabilities. In addition, most transportation programs will not provide same day or next day services, they require a one to two-week advance reservation, most have limited service hours and time restraints for each trip, and more. These limiting criteria are on-going and have been compounded during the COVID-19 pandemic as organizations change their procedures in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and state mandates.

FACTORS THAT PREVENT RELIABLE SAFE TRANSPORTATION

- ***High cost of transportation or insurance not accepted***
- ***Complicated application process***
- ***No immediate services / weekend service***
- ***Age restrictions 50 to 65 years of age and older***
- ***Limited geographic region, limited hours, limited duration***
- ***Limited number of trips in a time period***
- ***Only drop offs at transportation stations/stops***
- ***Serving only ambulatory veterans***
- ***Drivers not allowed on military installations***
- ***Lyft/Uber not experienced with veteran-specific needs***

Volunteer-staffed programs have stopped providing any services and some have closed due to lack of funding. The factors listed are only some examples of the challenges faced when scheduling transportation services for veterans. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these limitations. Due to the pandemic, programs have lost funding and transportation services have completely halted. Rides to routine medical visits were canceled because more urgent rides had been prioritized. As of September 2020, previously canceled VA appointments are being rescheduled, however VA transportation services are still not operating.

For as long as transportation services remain inaccessible to Virginia's most vulnerable veterans, their overall health, well-being, and continuity of care may continue to decline. The 2017 US Census reports out of 199,049 veterans living in our 10-county service area, 62,471 of these veterans are categorized to be within our vulnerable veteran population with 4,688 (2.4%) in poverty, 31,431 (15.8%) disabled, and 26,352 (13.2%) age 75+. These are the veterans who urgently need our support and services.



Transportation services for veterans to their medical appointment locations would decrease the number of missed appointments and may increase the veteran's willingness to schedule routine and follow-up appointments; thereby improving whole-person health and well-being. Not only would veterans experience less stress and anxiety in finding a way to get to their appointments, but a positive interaction with their driver could help improve feelings of loneliness and isolation; another component of well-being we cannot overlook. It is not uncommon for older veterans to experience barriers to access care:

Transportation Case Story – Marine Corps Veteran, Robert

Prior to a friend referring him to the Northern Virginia Veterans Association, Robert, a Prince William County resident, had signed up for other ride programs but was told there were no volunteers to take him to the VA hospital in Washington, DC. He also did not qualify for the VA hospital transportation because he lived too close to the facility.

If Robert had a checkup, bloodwork or x-ray he could drive himself to the metro station and catch a shuttle to the VA hospital. A medical procedure such as chemotherapy or one using anesthesia required a person to stay with him and drive him home. As Robert became sicker, he could not drive himself to the metro station because of the medicine he was taking. He shared that he once skipped taking his medicine, so he could drive to the hospital. He said it caused pain and made it difficult to drive. This was an awful choice for Robert to have to make.

On another occasion, after an in-patient surgical procedure and chemotherapy, Robert was discharged from the VA hospital on a Saturday. The VA shuttles did not run on the weekend, so Robert walked several blocks to a bus to take him to the metro station. He said each step he took was painful and agonizing. The doctor had told him that he was not supposed to exert himself after the procedure. The pandemic caused many volunteer transportation programs to suspend services.

Other impacted stakeholders are healthcare providers and hospitals/clinics. Healthcare providers would be able to see their patients on a regular basis to provide care continuity and preventive care, and continue building their patient/provider relationship. Veterans 55 and older have the largest number of suicides 58.1%, and that number increases with age VA National Suicide Report, 2005-2015. With a shift to value-based care, patient-centeredness and patient satisfaction are increasingly at the forefront of care. Hospitals/clinics would benefit on multiple fronts from veterans arriving and arriving on time to their medical appointments. Additionally, by removing the transportation barrier, veterans would more likely seek preventive medical attention instead of waiting until the ailment becomes an emergency resulting in ambulance transport to the hospital emergency room.

The Northern Virginia Veterans Association supports House Bill 432 - Help Bring A Veterans Care Center to Northern Virginia. Let us come together as a community and create a Veterans Care Center on the eastern side of the Northern Virginia corridor that we are proud of, to provide service to those veterans who most desperately need it.