

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1954

To improve the provision of health care furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans diagnosed with diabetes and heart disease, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 13, 2023

Mr. SANDERS (for himself, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. WELCH, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. FETTERMAN, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. DURBIN, Ms. STABENOW, and Ms. HIRONO) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To improve the provision of health care furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans diagnosed with diabetes and heart disease, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improving Whole
5 Health for Veterans with Chronic Conditions Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

7 It is the sense of Congress that—

1 (1) the Department of Veterans Affairs has pio-
2 neered a whole health approach to health care that
3 provides access to alternative medicines, delivers a
4 holistic approach to health and well-being, and re-
5 peatedly demonstrates better health outcomes than
6 the private sector at a low cost to taxpayers in the
7 United States;

8 (2) the effects of poor dental care are shown to
9 worsen the symptoms of diabetes and heart disease;

10 (3) diabetes and heart disease are shown to in-
11 crease risk of periodontal disease;

12 (4) the combination of diabetes, heart disease,
13 and periodontal disease can be fatal; and

14 (5) to best achieve a whole health model for the
15 provision of health care to veterans with diabetes
16 and heart disease and reduce long-term costs, the
17 Department must furnish preventative and com-
18 prehensive dental care to veterans diagnosed with di-
19 abetes and heart disease.

20 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

21 In this Act:

22 (1) COVERED CARE.—The term “covered care”
23 means dental care that is comprehensive in nature
24 and consistent with the dental services and treat-
25 ment furnished by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

1 to veterans pursuant to section 1712(a)(1)(G) of
2 title 38, United States Code.

3 (2) COVERED VETERAN.—The term “covered
4 veteran” means a veteran who—

5 (A) is enrolled in the system of annual pa-
6 tient enrollment of the Department of Veterans
7 Affairs established and operated under sub-
8 section (a) of section 1705 of title 38, United
9 States Code, pursuant to paragraph (1) or (2)
10 of such subsection or is not enrolled in such
11 system but is otherwise entitled to hospital care
12 and medical services under subsection (c)(2) of
13 such section;

14 (B) is not eligible for dental services and
15 treatment and related dental appliances under
16 the laws administered by the Secretary of Vet-
17 erans Affairs as of the date of the enactment of
18 this Act; and

19 (C) has a diagnosis of—

20 (i) type 1 or type 2 diabetes; or

21 (ii) ischemic heart disease.

1 **SEC. 4. PILOT PROGRAM TO FURNISH DENTAL CARE FROM**
2 **THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
3 **TO CERTAIN VETERANS DIAGNOSED WITH DI-**
4 **ABETES OR ISCHEMIC HEART DISEASE.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than one
6 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
7 retary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program
8 (in this section referred to as the “pilot program”) under
9 which the Secretary shall furnish covered care to covered
10 veterans for the duration of the pilot program.

11 (b) DURATION.—The pilot program shall be carried
12 out during the four-year period beginning on the date of
13 the commencement of the pilot program.

14 (c) LOCATIONS.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry
16 out the pilot program at the following locations:

17 (A) Each medical center of the Depart-
18 ment with an established dental clinic.

19 (B) Each community-based outpatient clin-
20 ic with an established dental clinic.

21 (2) MOBILE DENTAL CLINICS.—In carrying out
22 the pilot program, the Secretary shall test the effi-
23 cacy of mobile dental clinics to service rural areas
24 that do not have a population base to warrant a full-
25 time clinic but where there are covered veterans in
26 need of dental care.

1 (3) HOME-BASED DENTAL CARE.—In carrying
2 out the pilot program, the Secretary shall test the
3 efficacy of portable dental care units to service rural
4 veteran in their homes, as the Secretary considers
5 medically appropriate.

6 (d) DENTAL THERAPISTS AND TELE-DENTISTRY.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot
8 program, The Secretary shall test the efficacy of the
9 use of dental therapists and tele-dentistry to service
10 the dental care needs of covered veterans.

11 (2) USE OF TELE-DENTISTRY.—When providing
12 tele-dentistry under paragraph (1), the Secretary
13 shall use Federal employees to the maximum extent
14 possible.

15 (e) ADMINISTRATION.—

16 (1) NOTICE TO COVERED VETERANS.—In car-
17 rying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall in-
18 form all covered veterans of the covered care avail-
19 able under the pilot program.

20 (2) COPAYMENTS.—The Secretary may collect
21 copayments for covered care furnished under the
22 pilot program in accordance with authorities on the
23 collection of copayments for medical care of veterans
24 under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code.

25 (f) REPORTS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days be-
2 fore the completion of the pilot program, and not
3 later than 180 days after the completion of the pilot
4 program, the Secretary shall submit to the Com-
5 mittee on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on
6 Armed Services of the Senate and the Committee on
7 Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on Armed
8 Services of the House of Representatives a report on
9 the pilot program.

10 (2) CONTENTS.—Each report under paragraph
11 (1) shall include the following:

12 (A) A description of the implementation
13 and operation of the provision of covered care
14 under the pilot program.

15 (B) The number of covered veterans re-
16 ceiving covered care under the pilot program
17 and a description of the covered care furnished
18 to such veterans.

19 (C) An analysis of the costs and benefits
20 of covered care provided under the pilot pro-
21 gram, including a comparison of costs and ben-
22 efits by location type.

23 (D) An assessment of the impact of the
24 pilot program on appointments for care, pre-
25 scriptions, hospitalizations, emergency room vis-

1 its, wellness, employability, satisfaction, and
2 perceived quality of life of covered veterans re-
3 lated to their diagnosis of diabetes or ischemic
4 heart disease.

5 (E) An analysis and assessment of the effi-
6 cacy of mobile clinics and portable dental care
7 units, to the extent such modalities are used, to
8 service the needs of covered veterans under the
9 pilot program.

10 (F) An analysis and assessment of the effi-
11 cacy of dental therapists and tele-dentistry to
12 service the needs of covered veterans under the
13 pilot program, to include a cost benefit analysis
14 of such services.

15 (G) The findings and conclusions of the
16 Secretary with respect to the pilot program.

17 (H) Such recommendations as the Sec-
18 retary considers appropriate for the expansion
19 of dental care to all veterans eligible for health
20 care from the Department.

21 (g) IMPACT ON COMMUNITY CARE.—Nothing in this
22 section limits a covered veteran from accessing care or
23 services pursuant to section 1703 of title 38, United
24 States Code.

1 **SEC. 5. STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM TO**
2 **INCENTIVIZE DENTAL TRAINING AND EN-**
3 **SURE THE DENTAL WORKFORCE OF THE DE-**
4 **PARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

5 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
6 erans Affairs, to ensure that the Department of Veterans
7 Affairs has sufficient staff to provide covered care to cov-
8 ered veterans, shall implement a loan reimbursement pro-
9 gram for qualified dentists, dental hygienists, and oral
10 surgeons who agree—

11 (1) to be appointed by the Secretary as a den-
12 tist, dental hygienist, or oral surgeon, as the case
13 may be, under section 7401 of title 38, United
14 States Code; and

15 (2) to serve as a dentist, dental hygienist, or
16 oral surgeon, as the case may be, of the Department
17 pursuant to such appointment at a dental clinic of
18 the Department selected under subsection (c) for a
19 period that is not less than the duration of the pilot
20 program under section 4.

21 (b) MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—

22 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
23 graph (2), the Secretary may reimburse not more
24 than—

25 (A) \$100,000 for each dentist participating
26 in the program under subsection (a);

1 (B) \$25,000 for each dental hygienist par-
2 ticipating in such program; and

3 (C) \$40,000 for each credentialed doctor of
4 medicine in dentistry serving as an oral surgeon
5 and participating in such program.

6 (2) DUAL ELIGIBILITY.—The Secretary may re-
7 imburse an individual serving in multiple positions
8 described in subparagraphs (A) through (C) of para-
9 graph (1) not more than \$140,000.

10 (c) SELECTION OF LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall
11 monitor demand among covered veterans for covered care
12 and require participants in the program under subsection
13 (a) to choose from dental clinics of the Department with
14 the greatest need for dentists, dental hygienists, or oral
15 surgeons, as the case may be, according to facility enroll-
16 ment and patient demand.

17 **SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be appro-
19 priated for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal
20 year 2024 such sums as may be necessary to carry out
21 this Act.

22 (b) AVAILABILITY.—The amount authorized to be ap-
23 propriated under subsection (a) shall be available for obli-

1 gation for the eight-year period beginning on the date that
2 is one year after the date of the enactment of this Act.

○