

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

United States Senator for Vermont



The VETERANS DENTAL CARE ELIGIBILITY EXPANSION AND ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2021

Section-by-Section Fact Sheet

Sec. 1: Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act of 2021

Sec. 2: The Sense of Congress

- (1) The Department of Veterans Affairs has pioneered a whole health approach to health care that repeatedly demonstrates better outcomes than the private sector at a lower cost to taxpayers in the United States;
- (2) the effects of poor dental care are seen in patients who develop diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, upper respiratory ailments, and even dementia;
- (3) the Department spends countless dollars on prescription drugs, community care, urgent care, and emergency room visits on preventable ailments that would be reduced or eliminated through preventative dental care; and
- (4) in order to best achieve a whole health model for the provision of health care to veterans and reduce long-term costs, the Department must furnish veterans with preventative and emergency dental care.

Sec. 3: The requirement to furnish dental care to veterans.

- (a) Strikes all language limiting the Secretary's ability to provide dental care and provides legal authority for such care.
- (b) Paragraph (1)(A) corrects for re-designating section 1712(b)
Paragraph (1)(B) corrects section 1712C of title 38 to reflect chapter 17 of title 38.
Paragraph (2) updates the heading for section 1712
Paragraph (3) updates the tables of sections for the USC for the changes for the heading to section 1712 and the complete repeal of section 2062.

Sec. 4: Expansion of dental care to all veterans

- (a) The Secretary will implement a phased approach to providing dental care to veterans, beginning with veterans in priority groups 1 and 2.
- (b) The first phase will be conducted over two years and will test the VA's capacity to implement a dental expansion at all levels.
 - The Secretary will provide dental care to veterans in this phase at all VAMC's that have operational dental clinics, along with four contracted facilities, CBOC's, FQHC's and Indian health service facility.
 - These facilities will be chosen in consideration of rural areas, areas not in close proximity to an active-duty military installation, and areas of different geographic locations.

- The Secretary shall include the use of mobile dental clinics, portable clinics and telemedicine in the implementation of its phased expansion.
 - All veterans to receive dental care are to receive the same level of care as veterans who currently receive dental and are rated at 100% service-connected.
 - Veteran participation is voluntary
 - The Secretary may collect copayments for services as necessary.
 - The Secretary shall inform all eligible veterans of their eligibility for the program.
 - The Secretary may enter a third-party contract where necessary to carry out phase one, and contractors will be held to service standards decided by the Secretary.
- (c) Expansion
- The program will be expanded every two years to include the following two priority groups.
 - The Secretary shall expand locations in each phase in proportion to the amount of newly enrolled veterans in order to ensure adequate facilities and staffing.
- (d) Reports
- The Secretary shall report on the progress of each phase to congress with a plan for implementation of the following phase.

Sec. 5: State Dental Clinics

- (a) The VA will be required to maintain at least one dental clinic in each state.
- (b) Implementation will be one year after the passage of this bill.

Sec. 6: Dental Health Education

- (a) The VA will implement an education program to promote dental health to all VHA enrolled veteran
- (b) The program will promote links between dental health and overall health, proper techniques for dental care, signs and symptoms of commonly occurring dental conditions, treatment options, options for obtaining care, available and accessible options for low or no-cost care.
- (c) Delivery of educational materials to veterans may include print materials at facilities of the Department, distribution of materials over the Internet, and group presentations.

Sec. 7: Student Loan Repayment

- (a) To ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs has sufficient staff to provide dental service to veterans, the VA shall implement a loan reimbursement program for qualified dentists that agree to serve as a dentist of the Department for not less than five years and a location deemed of high need by the Secretary.
- (b) The maximum reimbursement amount is \$100,000 per dentist, \$20,000 per oral surgeon and 10,000 per dental hygienist participating in the program.

Sec. 8: Appropriations

- (a) The funds necessary for this act will be made available for a period of eight years