

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 10419

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program to improve access to and awareness of community-based dental services for veterans residing in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Mr. BERGMAN (for himself, Mr. DAVIS of North Carolina, Mr. VAN DREW, Mr. GOLDEN of Maine, Ms. KING-HINDS, and Mr. MURPHY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program to improve access to and awareness of community-based dental services for veterans residing in rural areas, 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 “Supporting Mobile and
5 Integrated Local Examinations for Veterans Act” or the
6 “SMILE for Veterans Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. RURAL VETERANS DENTAL ACCESS PILOT PRO-**
2 **GRAM.**

3 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
5 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
6 retary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a pilot pro-
7 gram to improve access to dental services for eligible
8 veterans residing in rural areas by—

9 (A) furnishing basic, preventive, restora-
10 tive, and urgent dental services through reim-
11 bursements, contracts, or other agreements
12 with community-based providers that offer den-
13 tal services, including mobile dental services
14 and no-cost dentistry day; and

15 (B) conducting outreach to inform such
16 veterans of the availability of such services.

17 (2) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall carry out
18 the pilot program in not fewer than ten locations in
19 rural areas located in not fewer than five States.

20 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of the pilot
22 program, an eligible veteran is a veteran who is en-
23 rolled in the patient enrollment system of the De-
24 partment of Veterans Affairs under section 1705 of
25 title 38, United States Code, resides in a rural area,
26 and—

1 (A) is not otherwise eligible for dental care
2 and services furnished by the Department
3 under section 1712 of such title; or

4 (B) is eligible for dental care under section
5 1712 of such title, but is unable to access such
6 care through the Department or the Commu-
7 nity Care Network within the access standards
8 established under section 1703(d) of such title.

9 (2) HOMELESS VETERANS.—In the case of a
10 veteran who is homeless, as defined in section 2002
11 of such title, the Secretary—

12 (A) may waive the requirement under this
13 paragraph that the veteran be enrolled in the
14 patient enrollment system under section 1705
15 of such title;

16 (B) may deem such veteran to satisfy the
17 residency requirement under this paragraph if
18 the veteran is receiving services in, or was last
19 known to reside in, a rural area; and

20 (C) shall establish procedures to permit eli-
21 gibility for services under the pilot program
22 based on alternative forms of verification, in-
23 cluding documentation of participation in a pro-
24 gram administered by the Department, another

1 Federal agency, a State or local agency, or
2 community partner serving homeless veterans.

3 (c) COMMUNITY-BASED DENTAL PROVIDERS.—In
4 carrying out the pilot program established under sub-
5 section (a), the Secretary shall identify community-based
6 entities described in paragraph (1) that provide dental
7 services in rural areas and that are willing to provide such
8 services, subject to reimbursements, contracts, or other
9 agreements with the Department, to veterans residing in
10 such areas, and participate in outreach efforts to inform
11 such veterans of the availability of such services.

12 (1) ENTITIES INCLUDED.—Community-based
13 entities described in this paragraph include—

14 (A) nonprofit organizations that provide
15 dental services;

16 (B) Federally Qualified Health Centers, in-
17 cluding Community Health Centers;

18 (C) Rural Health Clinics;

19 (D) Critical Access Hospitals;

20 (E) dental schools or institutions of higher
21 education with dental education programs;

22 (F) mobile dental clinics or mobile health
23 programs that include dental services;

24 (G) private dental practices; and

1 (H) other community-based organizations
2 that provide dental services to underserved pop-
3 ulations.

4 (2) PRIORITY.—In selecting among community-
5 based entities described in paragraph (1), the Sec-
6 retary shall, to the extent practicable, prioritize part-
7 nerships with entities that have demonstrated capac-
8 ity to provide dental services in rural areas, includ-
9 ing—

10 (A) mobile dental clinics and other mobile
11 health programs that include dental services in
12 areas where permanent dental infrastructure is
13 limited; and

14 (B) providers with demonstrated commu-
15 nity reach or the ability to deliver portable,
16 community-based dental services in rural set-
17 tings, including through care delivery models
18 that do not require a permanent dental facility.

19 (3) PARTICIPATION CRITERIA.—The Secretary
20 shall establish participation criteria for providers
21 under the pilot program, including criteria relating
22 to licensure, demonstrated capacity to serve rural
23 areas, data reporting, and quality assurance.

24 (4) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this
25 section may be construed to—

1 (A) require an entity participating in the
2 pilot program to participate in the Veterans
3 Community Care Program established under
4 section 1703 of title 38, United States Code; or

5 (B) prohibit an entity that participates in
6 such program from also participating in the
7 pilot program or from continuing to furnish
8 care to veterans otherwise eligible for health
9 care furnished under the Veterans Community
10 Care Program through existing pathways while
11 serving eligible veterans under this pilot pro-
12 gram.

13 (d) PROVIDER DIRECTORY.—The Secretary shall
14 maintain and update, not less than annually, a publicly
15 available directory of community-based dental providers
16 identified under this section that are willing to provide
17 dental services to veterans and participate in outreach ef-
18 forts under the pilot program.

19 (e) COVERED SERVICES AND REIMBURSEMENT.—

20 (1) COVERED SERVICES.—The pilot program
21 established under subsection (a) shall include out-
22 patient dental services furnished to an eligible vet-
23 eran that are necessary to evaluate, diagnose, pre-
24 vent, or treat dental disease, infection, or pain, in-
25 cluding—

- 1 (A) oral examinations and evaluations;
- 2 (B) diagnostic imaging, including X-rays;
- 3 (C) teeth cleanings and other preventive
- 4 dental services;
- 5 (D) dental fillings;
- 6 (E) urgent dental services to relieve pain,
- 7 treat infection, or stabilize an oral condition;
- 8 (F) basic extractions;
- 9 (G) complete and partial dentures required
- 10 following extractions covered under the pilot
- 11 program, and preparatory services furnished to
- 12 abutment teeth in support of denture place-
- 13 ment, including—
 - 14 (i) scaling and root planing;
 - 15 (ii) endodontic treatment; and
 - 16 (iii) dental crowns;
- 17 (H) nonsurgical periodontal services; and
- 18 (I) other outpatient dental services as the
- 19 Secretary determines appropriate to include as
- 20 covered services under the pilot program.

21 (2) NON-COVERED SERVICES.—An entity par-

22 ticipating in the pilot program may furnish to an eli-

23 gible veteran additional medically necessary out-

24 patient dental services that are not designated as

25 covered services under paragraph (1), provided that

1 the entity complies with the billing requirements
2 under paragraph (3)(C)(ii). Services furnished under
3 this paragraph may not include cosmetic or other
4 elective dental procedures.

5 (3) REIMBURSEMENT.—The Secretary shall es-
6 tablish reimbursement rates for covered dental serv-
7 ices under paragraph (1) furnished by community-
8 based dental providers to eligible veterans under the
9 pilot program.

10 (A) RATE METHODOLOGY.—In establishing
11 reimbursement rates, the Secretary shall, to the
12 extent practicable, ensure that such rates do
13 not exceed the rates paid for comparable serv-
14 ices under dental plans offered through the
15 Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insur-
16 ance Program under chapter 89A of title 5,
17 United States Code.

18 (B) TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—The Sec-
19 retary shall establish terms and conditions for
20 such reimbursements, contracts, or other agree-
21 ments, including—

- 22 (i) quality standards;
- 23 (ii) reporting requirements; and
- 24 (iii) procedures for the suspension,
25 modification, or termination of participa-

tion for failure to meet program requirements.

(C) BILLING.—As a condition of participation in the pilot program, an entity shall—

(i) agree to accept, as payment in full for covered dental services furnished under the pilot program, the reimbursement rate established by the Secretary and not to bill or otherwise seek payment from a veteran for any amount in excess of such rate, except as authorized by the Secretary; and

(ii) in the case of dental services not covered under the pilot program, may charge a veteran for such services only if—

(I) the veteran elects to receive such services; and

(II) the entity provides the veteran, in advance of furnishing such services, with a clear and understandable disclosure of the cost of such services and obtains the veteran's consent to receive and pay for such services.

(D) PROCESSING.—The Secretary shall process clean claims submitted by participating

1 providers not later than 30 days after the date
2 of submission.

3 (f) OUTREACH AND COORDINATION.—The Secretary
4 shall use communication and outreach mechanisms of the
5 Department to inform veterans residing in rural areas
6 about dental services available through providers partici-
7 pating in the pilot program and to facilitate access for vet-
8 erans to such services.

9 (1) OUTREACH ACTIVITIES.—Outreach and co-
10 ordination activities under this subsection may in-
11 clude—

12 (A) dissemination of information through
13 Department medical centers and community-
14 based outpatient clinics;

15 (B) communication through the Depart-
16 ment’s websites and digital platforms;

17 (C) coordination with state and county vet-
18 erans service officers;

19 (D) coordination with participating pro-
20 viders to inform veterans of available services
21 and to assist veterans in locating and accessing
22 such providers; and

23 (E) other outreach mechanisms as deemed
24 appropriate by the Secretary.

1 (2) CONNECTION.—The Secretary shall estab-
2 lish mechanisms to facilitate veterans’ access to par-
3 ticipating community dental providers and to sup-
4 port care coordination, which may include—

5 (A) enabling Department clinicians and
6 care coordinators to connect veterans with par-
7 ticipating community dental providers; and

8 (B) designating, at each location in which
9 the pilot program is carried out, an employee of
10 the Department, as determined by the director
11 of the medical center or community-based out-
12 patient clinic of the Department with responsi-
13 bility for such location, to serve as the point of
14 contact for the pilot program, responsible for—

15 (i) coordinating eligibility determina-
16 tions under the pilot program, including
17 eligibility determinations for homeless vet-
18 erans under subsection (b)(2);

19 (ii) coordinating with participating
20 community-based dental providers; and

21 (iii) assisting eligible veterans in ac-
22 cessing services under the pilot program.

23 (3) VETERANS OTHERWISE ELIGIBLE FOR DE-
24 PARTMENT DENTAL CARE.—In carrying out activi-
25 ties under this subsection, the Secretary shall ensure

1 that outreach activities include information for vet-
2 erans already eligible for dental care and services
3 furnished by the Department under section 1712 of
4 title 38, United States Code, regarding how to ac-
5 cess such care, including through the Community
6 Care Network or other Department programs.

7 (g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

8 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—There are authorized to
9 be appropriated to the Secretary \$5,000,000 for fis-
10 cal year 2027 to stand up the pilot program under
11 this section.

12 (2) EXECUTION.—There are authorized to be
13 appropriated to the Secretary \$20,000,000 for each
14 of the fiscal years 2028 through 2030 to carry out
15 the pilot program under this section.

16 (h) DURATION; ANNUAL REVIEW.—The authority of
17 the Secretary to carry out the pilot program under this
18 section shall terminate at the end of the 3-year period fol-
19 lowing the date on which the program is established. Dur-
20 ing such period, the Secretary shall, on an annual basis,
21 review the effectiveness of such pilot program to determine
22 the potential of such pilot program for continuation or ex-
23 pansion.

1 **SEC. 3. WORKING GROUP ON RURAL VETERAN DENTAL AC-**
2 **CESS.**

3 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall establish
4 an internal working group within the Department to
5 evaluate dental care access challenges faced by veterans
6 residing in rural areas.

7 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—The working group shall include
8 representatives from—

9 (1) the Veterans Health Administration;

10 (2) the Office of Rural Health of the Depart-
11 ment of Veterans Affairs;

12 (3) other relevant offices of the Department, as
13 determined by the Secretary; and

14 (4) representatives of community-based dental
15 providers, nonprofit organizations, and other entities
16 with experience providing mobile or community-
17 based dental services, as appropriate.

18 (c) DUTIES.—The working group shall—

19 (1) assess the availability of dental services for
20 veterans residing in rural areas;

21 (2) identify existing mobile or community-based
22 dental programs serving such areas;

23 (3) evaluate barriers that veterans face in ac-
24 cessing dental services through community providers;

1 (4) identify opportunities for improved coordi-
2 nation between the Department and community den-
3 tal providers;

4 (5) identify best practices for outreach, provider
5 coordination, mobile service delivery, and the use of
6 reimbursements, contracts, or other agreements
7 under the pilot program established under section 2;
8 and

9 (6) assess barriers to accessing dental benefits
10 faced by veterans residing in rural areas who are
11 otherwise eligible for dental care and services fur-
12 nished by the Department under section 1712 of
13 title 38, United States Code.

14 (d) RECOMMENDATIONS.—Not later than 18 months
15 after the date on which the working group is established,
16 the working group shall submit to the Secretary a sum-
17 mary of its findings under subsection (c). The Secretary
18 shall consider such findings in carrying out the pilot pro-
19 gram under section 2 and shall address in the report re-
20 quired under section 4 any actions taken in response to
21 such findings.

22 **SEC. 4. REPORT TO CONGRESS.**

23 (a) REPORT.—Not later than three years after the
24 establishment of the pilot program under section 2, the
25 Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Af-

1 fairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a
2 report on the pilot that includes—

3 (1) a description of the community-based pro-
4 viders identified under such section;

5 (2) an assessment of the effectiveness of out-
6 reach efforts conducted under such section;

7 (3) recommendations for improving coordina-
8 tion between the Department and community-based
9 dental providers;

10 (4) an assessment of the extent to which reim-
11 bursements, contracts, or other agreements entered
12 into under section 2(d) expanded access to dental
13 services under the pilot program, including—

14 (A) the number of veterans who received
15 dental services under such reimbursements,
16 contracts, or other agreements;

17 (B) the types of dental services furnished
18 pursuant to such reimbursements, contracts, or
19 other agreements;

20 (C) the geographic areas in which dental
21 services were furnished pursuant to such reim-
22 bursements, contracts, or other agreements;
23 and

24 (D) the total costs of carrying out such re-
25 imbursements, contracts, or other agreements,

1 including related outreach and information dis-
2 semination activities;

3 (5) an assessment of dental access challenges
4 faced by veterans in the pilot areas who are eligible
5 for dental benefits under section 1712 of title 38,
6 United States Code, including the extent to which
7 such veterans face barriers to accessing those bene-
8 fits, and any recommendations to address such chal-
9 lenges; and

10 (6) a description of the findings and rec-
11 ommendations submitted by the working group
12 under section 3 and any actions taken by the Sec-
13 retary in response to such findings to modify or im-
14 prove the pilot program.

15 **SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.**

16 In this Act:

17 (1) The term “no-cost dentistry day” means a
18 scheduled event at which one or more community-
19 based dental providers furnish dental services to vet-
20 erans at no charge to such veterans.

21 (2) The term “rural area” means a census tract
22 that has not been assigned a Rural-Urban Com-
23 muting Area code of 1.0, 1.1, 2.0, 2.1, or 3.0 as de-
24 termined under the coding system maintained by the
25 Economic Research Service of the Department of

1 Agriculture and the Health Resources and Services
2 Administration of the Department of Health and
3 Human Services.

4 (3) The term “State” has the meaning given
5 that term in section 101(20) of title 38, United
6 States Code.

○