



STATEMENT OF

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FOR THE RECORD OF THE

**Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States House of Representatives**

**“RURAL ACCESS: IS VA MEETING ALL VETERANS WHERE THEY LIVE?”**

JANUARY 11, 2024

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Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for extending an invitation to QTC Health Services – a Leidos Company – to submit a statement for the Committee’s oversight hearing on rural access for Veterans. QTC Medical Services, Inc. (QTC), a wholly owned subsidiary of Leidos, was founded in 1981 by two Asian immigrants, with the goal to provide high Quality, Timely, and Customer-focused medical examination services. Our national footprint includes 90 medical clinics across the country, 19,000 network providers that cover all 50 states, 12 mobile medical clinics, and large administrative offices in Virginia, California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

As a leading provider of medical, disability, and occupational health examinations, we are pleased to share how we are supporting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide timely and quality access to disability examinations for Veterans in rural communities. Contract exam providers like QTC, create vital access points for disability exams in underserved communities where there is a shortage of providers.

## **Introduction**

Today, over 4 million, or a quarter of all Veterans, live in rural and highly rural communities. According to VA’s Office of Rural Health, the demographics of rural Veterans track closely with that of the non-veteran rural population who face challenges of higher poverty rates, advanced age, poorer health, and limited health care access compared to suburban and urban communities.<sup>1</sup> To address barriers to accessing medical services, VA challenged QTC to develop innovative ways to help better serve Veterans in rural communities. To meet this goal, QTC continues to open new brick-and-mortar clinics, build our provider network, and deploy innovative solutions to reach Veterans in underserved rural communities. A few of our trailblazing efforts are discussed in detail below and we are steadfastly working several additional innovative solutions to improve our service delivery to rural veterans.

## **Providing Disability Exams for Rural Veterans**

### **Mobile Medical Clinics**

QTC first introduced our custom-built mobile medical clinics (MMCs) to VA in 2018 and since then, our fleet has grown to 12 MMCs, all of which are manufactured in Ohio. QTC’s own and operated MMCs, primary focus is to deliver high-quality medical examination services to examinees in rural areas of the United States. Operated by a hand-picked team that includes providers whose licenses can cross state lines, the MMCs afford QTC the ability to travel long



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<sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs. Office of Rural Health. “Rural Veteran Health Care Challenges.” <<https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp>>

distances into underserved communities or wherever they are needed most. Our custom-built MMCs are ADA-compliant and can operate in a wide array of climates ranging from the Mojave Desert at 130 degrees to the winter plains of Minnesota at negative 40.

Our MMCs have had an increasingly important role in reaching rural Veterans. QTC can perform about 97 percent of all the exams the organization historically had to do for Veterans in these MMCs. QTC has served over 79,000 patients to date with mobile services. In 2021 and 2022, we reached over 24,000 and 27,000 patients with mobile services. As we prepare ourselves with robust delivery healthcare models, the MMCs help us deliver a better exam experience with examinees that usually have trouble reaching a clinic or medical facility. By bringing the clinic curbside, we provide the same set of clinic capabilities available through traditional fixed clinics for examinees in remote and underserved regions.

### **Boothless Audio Exams**

QTC's boothless audio headphones are one of the more recent innovations that are increasing access to care and services for Veterans. As of the year 2020, more than 1.3 million Veterans were receiving disability compensation for hearing loss, and more than 2.3 million received compensation for tinnitus, according to the Veterans Benefits Administration compensation report. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that Veterans are 30 percent more likely than non-veterans to have severe hearing impairment. Specifically, those who served after 9/11 are four times more likely to have hearing loss compared to their civilian counterparts.

The previous requirement for audiology exams required performing the exam inside a soundproof audio booth. The lightest soundproof audio booth that met the requirements weighed 850 pounds, making it immobile. QTC and its partners developed sophisticated headphones that met the specific VA requirements, conducted multiple clinical trials, and worked with VHA Audiologists to conclude that the efficacy of the headphones was equivalent to that of a soundproof audio exam — a significant milestone for increasing access to health care for Veterans. Within a few weeks of being approved, we were able to perform a hearing exam for a homebound, 97-year-old World War II Veteran, living in rural Illinois. We took our headphones into his home with an audiologist, and they were able to perform his hearing exam right out of his home.

### **Serving Veterans of Native American Reservations**

QTC is also proud to have partnered with Native American tribes in Washington and Montana to provide medical disability exams to tribal Veterans on reservations for the first time in history. Native Americans serve in the military at five times the national average. For over 200 years, they've fought in every major military conflict— from the Revolutionary War to ongoing operations worldwide. Nationally, they have a higher rate of disability within the overall Veteran population: 36.4 percent compared to 26.2 percent of all other demographics. as Native American Veterans are less likely to use VA benefits compared to Veterans of other races. Many live far from a VA medical facility and have difficulties completing the exams required for

disability claims, with the result that Native American Veterans are less likely to use VA benefits compared to other Veterans.

Located on the coast of Washington, the Makah Indian Reservation is a five-hour drive and ferry ride to the nearest VA medical facility. There is only one paved road that connects it with the rest of the state, and it has frequent mudslides and rainfall. Before the 1930s, the reservation was only accessible by sea. Beginning in World War I, they sent soldiers to serve in every major conflict of the twentieth century.

To better serve Veterans who belong to the Makah tribe, QTC supported a two-day event, during which our medical team stationed the MMC near their town hall and Indian Health Clinic. There are no house addresses on the reservation, so the Tribal Liaison transported some of the Veterans to their appointments. As the QTC team provided exams, the VA representative processed claims. Organizing the first-ever Tribal event in VA and QTC history remains an incredibly humbling experience for our team, and we stand ready to support additional Tribal events.

Since the first event with the Makah tribe, QTC has helped organize clinic events for various Tribes in Washington and Montana in concert with the VA Regional Office and the Medical Disability Exam office.

## **Recommendations**

### **Pass H.R. 5938, Veterans Exam Expansion Act of 2023**

QTC supports H.R. 5938 and urges swift enactment of the bill with our recommended enhancements. QTC recommends that the committee amend the legislation to provide VA with the flexibility to leverage the license portability authority for additional provider types, when needed, for providers completing disability examinations on behalf of VA. One way to do so is by granting contract medical disability examiners with the same license portability authorities that Veterans Health Administration employees already have under 38 USC 7402. This would allow the Department to be nimble and swiftly respond to the problem of providers not being available in rural communities. With the enactment of the PACT Act, Congress provided the legal authority to expand disability benefits. However, Veterans in rural areas will likely encounter extended wait times if Congress does not concurrently legislate full license portability authority to enable all types of MDE providers to deliver timely, high-quality exams.