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Miramar Health
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Testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health

Chair Miller-Meeks, Ranking Member Brownley, and members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to testify before you today. My name is Tom Sauer, and I'm a Navy and Marine Corps Veteran, having spent the better part of my adult life wearing the cloth of our nation. I'm a former enlisted Marine infantryman, a 2006 Naval Academy graduate, and a former Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal officer. Today, however, I'm the owner and CEO of Miramar Health, a Veteran-owned and operated Community Care Provider for intensive substance use disorder (SUD) and mental health treatment, exclusively for America's Veterans.

Mental health and addiction treatment are deep passions of mine, because depression and addiction killed my dad. Five days before I graduated from high school, and three weeks before I shipped out for the Marines in 1999, a methamphetamine overdose took his life after decades of struggle, just like so many millions of Americans suffering from our country's disastrous mental health and addiction crisis.

Thanks to recent legislation, thousands of veterans have enhanced access to life-saving mental healthcare and addiction treatment within the VA's Community Care Network (CCN). We've provided intensive, custom-tailored, world-class mental health and addiction treatment for nearly 250 Veterans from a dozen VA Medical Centers across the Western United States, typically for 30, 60, and sometimes 90+ days. This treatment is for our veterans who are truly suffering, in crisis, and often near death from suicide or overdose resulting from America's disastrous mental health and addiction crisis.

In three and a half years, we've grown from one small clinic with six employees, to eight residential facilities and one large outpatient facility. These facilities are staffed by nearly 100 phenomenal physicians, nurses, psychologists, therapists, medical technicians, case managers, and support staff, many of whom are Veterans themselves. I could not be any prouder of them.

I didn't come all the way out here to tell you this just so I could pat myself on the back, but rather to simply convey the sincerity of our intentions and to lay out how important this challenge is. Miramar believes in our partnership with the VA by bridging both capability and capacity gaps within certain VAMCs and in being an advocate to Veterans in need, all while providing them with the highest quality care.

In other words, we do not consider ourselves to be just another government contractor. We are partners and teammates with the VA, and we're here asking for your help to ensure our nation's Veterans receive the lifesaving care they need and deserve by strengthening that partnership.

The overwhelming majority of front-line, boots-on-the-ground VA personnel we directly interact with are fantastic, dedicated, and lifesaving public servants. There are many who, in my mind, deserve medals and parades for saving the lives of Veterans.

I am here today to advocate for veterans in need to access care ANYWHERE, IMMEDIATELY, and we can figure out the paperwork later. The current VA policy of having 30 days to find a bed in a given region does not meet the URGENT LEVEL of this CRISIS.

Specifically, we've encountered several occasions where, despite community care being available for a Veteran in crisis, they're either put onto waiting lists for up to 30 days before receiving care, when they don't have 30 minutes without becoming a very real risk to suicide or overdose. I have first-hand knowledge of these suicides and overdose deaths since I've owned Miramar, so I understand the devastation this policy can cause.

We believe this issue could be rather easily corrected through a legislative carve-out for Community Care eligibility, as with Urgent Care, when it comes to urgent and emergency mental health and addiction treatment.

This could be done by clarifying and ensuring the COMPACT Act is being implemented as intended and that Veterans are aware of this option for receiving care.

We urge you to ensure that our veterans have access to the care they need when they need it through the Community Care Network.

We appreciate your consideration of this matter, and we are willing to work with you to address these issues and ensure that our guys and gals get the care they so desperately need.

Thank you, Chair and members of the Subcommittee. Each of you, your staffers, and the committee's staff are champions for America's Veterans, so I am exceptionally grateful to you and your commitment to serving them, and that you are holding this important hearing today.

In conclusion, thank you for addressing the issues we raised today. Veterans' lives depend on it. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear, and I look forward to answering your questions.