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MANAGEMENT
OFFICE OF INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**“ENSURING TIMELY ACCESS: CHALLENGES IN VA SCHEDULING”
September 26, 2024**

Good morning, Chairman Rosendale, Ranking Member Cherfilus-McCormick, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Office of Information and Technology's (OIT) and Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) efforts to modernize the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) scheduling systems. I am accompanied by my colleagues from VHA, Ms. Hillary Peabody, Acting Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Integrated Veteran Care (IVC), and Dr. Mark Hausman, Executive Director, Access Transformation, IVC.

Enterprise Scheduling Modernization: A Collaborative Effort

VHA and OIT are working together on the Enterprise Scheduling Modernization effort, which aims to streamline and enhance VA scheduling systems. The modernization of our scheduling tools is essential for ensuring Veterans receive the best and most timely care while simplifying processes for Veterans and VA staff. By consolidating and upgrading our scheduling systems, we are laying the foundation for a seamless, more efficient, and more Veteran-centered health care system.

VA's Enterprise Scheduling Modernization efforts introduce new functionalities designed to improve access to care for Veterans. These include the ability to schedule virtual and in-person appointments across VA facilities, consolidating multiple scheduling functions into a unified platform, and provider-based scheduling that integrates various appointment types into a single scheduling application. Our modernization efforts are crucial in bringing VA scheduling systems up to industry standards, enabling us to schedule any type of appointment with greater flexibility and efficiency. Our ultimate goal for these scheduling improvements is to connect Veterans with the best available resources for the most convenient and most appropriate care. To provide the best health outcomes for Veterans, VA must invest in modern scheduling tools that have near-term benefits and ultimately facilitates a long-term scheduling solution.

Key Scheduling Tools and Benefits

Integrated Scheduling Solution

The Integrated Scheduling Solution (ISS) is a staff-facing, web-based application currently used for scheduling Veteran appointments that ultimately consolidates functionalities from multiple scheduling applications into a single enterprise scheduling solution for care in VA health care facilities. ISS represents a significant leap forward from our legacy system, VistA Scheduling Enhancement Graphical User Interface (VSE GUI) by offering a more integrated, intuitive, and efficient scheduling process. We began the enterprise-wide rollout of ISS September 2024, and full implementation is expected by February 2025. Enhancements, including additional appointment types and telehealth capabilities are underway, and we anticipate retiring VSE GUI by June 2025. Ultimately, ISS will be the future single scheduling system that will house all scheduling tools and functionalities; this will allow VA staff to schedule appointments in a single platform across multiple sites of care.

Clinic Capacity Search Tool

The Clinic Capacity Search Tool (CCST) is a simplified web application providing the ability to search and view all available appointments for requested service and modality across multiple facilities. Currently, CCST enables the scheduling of telehealth appointments, providing Veterans with quicker access to care and a broader range of available options. We are enhancing CCST to include additional in-person clinical resources, and we are scheduled to begin rolling out of these new features in January 2025.

Clinic Configuration Manager

The Clinic Configuration Manager (CCM) is a web-based tool VHA administrative staff use to provide a standardized approach to managing availability with providers anywhere in VA. Fully implemented in March 2024, CCM reduces discrepancies, increases efficiency and improves scheduling.

Community Care Scheduling: External Provider Scheduling (EPS) Platform

External Provider Scheduling (EPS) is a technology platform that will be able to improve the process of scheduling Veterans with community care providers by supplying information on care availability and allowing VA staff to schedule Veterans directly into available community care provider appointment slots through a singular user interface. EPS connects VA and community care providers to streamline care navigation and coordination activities. EPS offers information on who, where, and when community care providers and services are available to support informed Veteran decision making.

Moving Forward

VA's scheduling modernization efforts aim to improve timeliness between a Veteran's request for care and the scheduling of their appointment, ensure Veterans receive the best available resources, and enhance coordination and information sharing between VA and community care providers. Our multiple scheduling efforts strengthen the collaboration between VA, Veterans, and community care providers and will ultimately unite under our ISS platform. ISS will integrate these tools and processes to create a streamlined scheduling experience across the enterprise, which will lead to faster, more flexible care for Veterans. Our efforts enable VA staff to increase efficiency, reduce administrative burdens, and improve care delivery for Veterans in a sustainable and effective manner. Veterans will experience enhanced access to the best care more quickly, whether within VA or through community providers.

Conclusion

Chairman Rosendale, Ranking Member Cherfilus-McCormick, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. VA's modernization efforts are transforming the way we deliver care to Veterans and support VA staff and providers. We are proud of the progress we have made and remain committed to continuing this journey of improvement for the benefit of our Veterans and the dedicated staff who serve them. This concludes my testimony, and I look forward to answering your questions.