

Testimony of
Sharon Vitti, President of CVS MinuteClinic
before the
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Health
“MISSION Critical: Care in the Community Update”
September 25, 2019

Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Dunn, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and to share CVS Health's role and experience in expanding access to care for our nation's veterans.

My name is Sharon Vitti, and I serve as President of CVS MinuteClinic and as Senior Vice President at CVS Health. In this role, I lead all aspects of MinuteClinic care delivery, business operations, and strategic development.

CVS Health is the nation's premier health innovation company helping people on their path to better health. Whether in one of our pharmacies or through our health services and plans, CVS Health is pioneering a bold new approach to total health by making quality care more affordable, accessible, simple and seamless. CVS Health is community-based and locally focused, engaging consumers with the care they need when and where they need it. Our innovative health care model increases access to quality care, delivers better health outcomes, and lowers overall health care costs.

Our support of the MISSION Act is one example of the many ways we stand with veterans, active military and their families. We have several Workforce Initiatives programs dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining veterans to build a pipeline of workforce talent. Since 2015, CVS Health has hired almost 15,000 people with military experience and more than 5,000 military spouses.

In addition, we provide charitable support to military and veteran-focused organizations, including the National Guard, Operation Reinvent, and the USO. And,

colleagues can connect through the CVS Health Colleague Resource Group BRAVE, which is comprised of nearly 1,400 members with a passion to serve those who have served our country.

We were recently recognized for our efforts to support veterans and military members. In May, *Military Times* named CVS Health to its 2019 list of best companies for veterans seeking a civilian job.

With that as background, I am pleased to be here today to provide an overview of MinuteClinic's partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Support for our country's veterans and members of the military is central to the work we do at CVS Health, whether through our workforce programs or our efforts to connect this population with easily accessible, high-quality care.

Shared Vision for Expanding Access

Addressing the growing need to provide veterans with convenient access to quality urgent care in their communities is a shared vision for the VA and CVS Health. The program in place today originated in 2016 with a pilot funded by the VA Health System in Palo Alto, California. Palo Alto utilized discretionary funds for a one-year program that leveraged 14 local MinuteClinic sites to provide access to treatment for minor illnesses, minor injuries, and skin conditions. The initial months of the pilot were devoted to the development of criteria, information sharing protocols, and training materials, including defining the list of eligible services and creating educational materials to assist VA nurses with triage.

A critical first step was to ensure the capability was in place to quickly convey information about the veterans' visit to the VA electronically so we could maintain continuity of care for the veterans we provided care for and keep VA providers informed of the veterans' health status. As a result of our work together with the VA in Palo Alto, we established the connectivity that today makes it possible for us to provide information about a veteran's visit directly to the VA through the e-Health Exchange.

In addition to establishing standards and protocols, we focused on ensuring a positive experience for the veterans we serve by working closely with both the VA and our own CVS Health colleagues with prior military service to create a welcoming environment and to ensure our services are viewed as an extension of their coordinated care with the VA.

We began to see veterans in our clinics during the second half of the pilot. Veterans were screened for eligibility when they called the VA triage line and, if their condition met the criteria, the veteran was offered the opportunity to be treated at a MinuteClinic. Over 550 visits were conducted during this roughly six-month operational phase with an average in-clinic wait time of less than 20 minutes.

Under the pilot, veterans who desired to do so could also fill prescriptions from their MinuteClinic visit at the co-located CVS Pharmacy. The pharmacy followed the VA formulary and applied standard VA co-pays.

Expansion under the Choice Program

The Palo Alto pilot generated considerable interest from other VA service areas, including the VA Health System in Phoenix, Arizona. In April 2017, we partnered with the VA's Office of Community Care, the Phoenix VA, and TriWest, the third-party CHOICE administrator for the region, to enable veterans to receive care at 24 MinuteClinics in the Phoenix area.

Operating under the CHOICE Program helped us identify and create new protocols for billing and pharmacy access, which were crucial to future program expansion. As an example, pharmacy services were not included in the CHOICE program. To maintain the same seamless veteran experience as created in the Palo Alto pilot, the VA's emergency prescription fill authority was approved to allow veterans to receive their initial first-fill of prescriptions written in conjunction with their MinuteClinic visit at the pharmacy of their choice.

Our partnership with the Phoenix VA further demonstrated that MinuteClinic filled a need for veterans and offered another convenient access point for care within the

broader community care network. Once proven in Phoenix, the program resumed operation in Palo Alto and expanded to additional regions, including Santa Clarita, California and Corpus Christi, Texas.

Enactment of the VA MISSION Act

The *John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018, or VA MISSION Act, (P.L. 115-182)* provided the framework needed for the national expansion of urgent care access for veterans. Under the *MISSION Act*, veterans can now access urgent care and walk-in medical services under their VA benefits without pre-authorization. Veterans who meet certain eligibility criteria can receive care at any MinuteClinic location. Following the visit, MinuteClinic is able to make the full record of medical services provided available to the VA with the patient's consent.

We provided comments to the VA throughout the regulatory process and worked closely with the VA to provide location data and technical assistance to ensure a successful launch on June 6, 2019. Since the “go-live” date, we have provided care for more than 5,600 veterans in all 33 states and the District of Columbia in which we operate MinuteClinics. Combined with the veterans we cared for during the pilot and under CHOICE, we have provided care for more than 9,500 veterans since our partnership with the VA began three years ago.

Our experience suggests there is a high level of knowledge among veterans about MinuteClinics and the types of conditions we treat. We typically treat for acute conditions where prompt treatment can avoid more serious health issues and additional costs. The top conditions for which veterans visit a MinuteClinic are cough, sore throat, sinus infection, rash, and ear ache. Veterans also have demonstrated a good understanding of the structure of the new benefit as well as the intent that urgent care augments, not replaces, their relationship with VA providers.

Conclusion

CVS Health deeply values its partnership with the VA and the opportunity to provide care for those who have served. Starting with a shared vision, we are proud of the program we have created and appreciate the opportunities we have had to work with the VA Office of Community Care, the Palo Alto and Phoenix VA Health Systems, TriWest and now Optum to meet the needs of veterans.

We also appreciate Congress and this Committee for recognizing this program and the benefits it offers veterans when drafting the *VA MISSION Act*. Our participation in the *MISSION Act* provides deserving veterans across the country greater access to quality health care when and where they need it, while ensuring they are still linked with their VA care providers. We are proud to be able to support Congress and the VA in bringing this meaningful and impactful program forward to help improve the health of our nation's veterans.