

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 2, 2019

Director Darwin Goodspeed
VA Portland Health Care System
3710 SW U.S. Veterans Hospital Road
Portland, OR 97239

Dear Director Goodspeed:

We write today regarding recent reports that the average wait time for veterans at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Salem is an average of 80 days for new primary care patients. This revelation is deeply troubling and we seek answers on what proactive measures the VA Portland Health Care System is taking to remedy this situation.

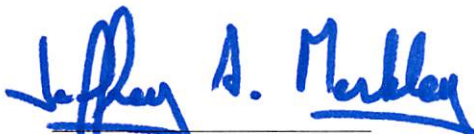
While we understand that recruiting and retaining doctors in Salem can be a challenge, that rationale is hardly an excuse for the current state of affairs. Salem is less than 50 miles from Portland, and people in other professions routinely commute to Salem from Portland. Making veterans commute for care is unacceptable, as travel for many veterans can be burdensome.

Our veterans answered the call to service and we should be doing everything we can to ensure we meet our obligations that were promised to these men and women when they signed up. To help us understand what the VA Portland Health Care System is doing to shorten the wait time and improve recruitment and retention, please provide answers to the following questions at your earliest convenience:

1. What strategies are in place to improve recruitment and retention for clinics that routinely have doctor shortages? Have these strategies worked? If not, what is being done to improve the strategies?
2. Does the VA Portland Health Care System require a doctor to reside in the community in which he or she is working? If not, what is preventing the VA Portland Health Care System from letting doctors from other cities commute to clinics that have doctor shortages? If there is such a requirement, is the VA Portland Health Care System considering allowing doctors to commute to clinics that have doctor shortages?
3. Please provide a detailed strategy for reducing wait times for veterans, particularly those transferring from other VA clinics, and what is needed to meet those goals.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter, we look forward to your responses to these questions. Our offices stand ready to work with your team to help address this situation so that our state's veterans can receive the timely care they have earned. If we or our offices can be helpful in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator