

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VA Expands Choice Program Eligibility For Veterans, Plaskett Applauds Decision

VIC News / **Published On March 28, 2015 01:25 PM /**

Cynthia Graham **March 28, 2015**



The Department of Veterans Affairs this week expanded eligibility to a program that will allow easier access to care for veterans living more than 40 miles from the nearest VA medical facility, according to information received from Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett's Washington, D.C. office.

Currently, the Veterans Choice Program allows veterans who live more than 40 miles in a straight line from a VA facility or who face delays in scheduling an appointment to receive care in their communities at non-VA medical facilities. The program has been amended to include driving distance in considering that 40-mile allowance.

"This is a step in the right direction in fixing a rule that presents a challenge for so many of our veterans, particularly those here in the Virgin Islands, from having easy access to care," Plaskett said. "Under this proposed fix, Virgin Island veterans would be able to qualify for and use their Choice Cards at local medical facilities to access services that they would otherwise have to travel to Puerto Rico to receive."

According to Plaskett's office, the proposed change is expected to almost double the number of veterans who qualify under the program, which was initially authorized by the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014.

Plaskett and congressmen Rick Nolan and Markwayne Mullin have previously co-sponsored legislation to change the VA's 40-mile eligibility criteria. H.R. 572, or the Veterans Access to Community Care Act of 2015, proposes to ensure veterans' access to private health care whether or not the nearest VA medical facility can provide services.

Veterans who wish to confirm their eligibility under the Veterans Choice Program should call 1-866-606-8198.