

PROJECT HERO

Project HERO is a pilot program that helps veterans access the health care they need when specific medical expertise or technology isn't available inside the VA health care system. While veterans can still research and see out-of-network providers with a Fee care authorization, Project HERO removes the guesswork by contracting with Humana Veterans Healthcare Services (HVHS) and Delta Dental Federal Services (Delta Dental) to provide veterans with pre-screened networks of health and dental providers who meet VA standards for quality care.

Through Project HERO, Humana Veterans Healthcare Services and Delta Dental Federal provide:

- One-stop appointment-setting services with local medical and dental providers
- Patient advocate services
- Credentialed, quality providers
- Return of clinical information to the VA for centralized patient record keeping, and continuity of care
- Timely provider claims processing and sending claims to the VA for reimbursement
- Monitoring and reporting of access to care, appointment timeliness, patient safety and satisfaction

AVAILABILITY

Project HERO is currently available in four Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs).

- **VISN 8: VA Sunshine Health Care Network**
Southern Georgia and most of Florida. Does not include Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- **VISN 16: South Central VA Health Care Network**
Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and portions of the states of Texas, Missouri, Alabama, and Florida.
- **VISN 20: Northwest Network**
Washington State, Oregon, most of the state of Idaho, and one county each in Montana and California. Does not include Alaska.
- **VISN 23: VA Midwest Health Care Network**
Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and portions of northern Kansas, Missouri, western Illinois, western Wisconsin, and eastern Wyoming.

These VISNs have the highest expenditures for community-based care, particularly relative to the number of patient enrollees in the VISN. These VISNs represent approximately 25% of total enrollment and 30% of annual out-of-network expenditures. Over time, positive outcomes may result in the expansion of Project HERO to additional regions.

OBJECTIVES

The ultimate goal of Project HERO is to ensure that all health care delivered by VA, either through VA providers or community partners, is the same quality and consistency for veterans.

Project HERO objectives:

- Provide as much care for veterans within the VA as possible
- Efficiently refer veterans to high-quality community-based care as needed
- Improve the exchange of information between VA and community providers
- Increase veteran health care satisfaction
- Foster high quality health care and patient safety
- Sustain partnerships with university affiliates
- Secure accountable evaluation of results

OVERSIGHT AND PARTICIPATION

The Project HERO Governing Board, comprised of leaders from VA, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and participating VISNs, ensures that veterans continue to receive high-quality health care. The Board reports on Project HERO activities, reviews and approves changes in terms, quantities, or conditions of the Project HERO contracts.

The Project HERO Program Management Office regularly tracks and monitors quality, safety, vendor performance, cost and other data to ensure that Project HERO is meeting its objectives. This information is gathered, analyzed and reported on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. The Program Management Office shares its findings with internal and external stakeholders including the Project HERO Governing Board, directors of participating Project HERO VISNs, senior VA and VHA leadership, veteran services organizations, Academic Affiliates and labor unions.

VA continues to meet with veteran services organizations, academic affiliates, industry, and other federal agencies in the course of implementing Project HERO. These partnerships bring fresh ideas and leading-edge strategies, tools, and capabilities to help VA meet Project HERO's objectives. Together, VA and its partners collaborate to provide better care for all veterans.

PROJECT HERO HISTORY

In November 2005, VA developed Project HERO in response to House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Conference Report 109-305, which directed VA to focus on cost-effective purchasing of care and to develop a competitive award with at least three objectives-oriented demonstrations (pilot programs) to encourage collaboration with industry and academia.

VA contracts with Humana Veterans Healthcare Services (HVHS) for medical/surgical, mental health, diagnostics, and dialysis and Delta Dental Federal Services (Delta Dental) for dental care provider networks were announced in January 2008. All Project HERO contracted provider networks and care facilities are required to meet accreditation standards and VA-specified quality standards.

QUICK FACTS

- As of October 24, 2008, nearly 22,000 appointments have been scheduled through Humana Veterans Healthcare Services (HVHS) and over 6,500 dental appointments scheduled through Delta Dental. VISN 16 reports 12,079 paid line items of care for August and 14,202 for September 2008, an increase of over 17%.
- Patient satisfaction continues to be high. Overall satisfaction with HVHS providers was 75% of 882 survey responses, and overall satisfaction with Delta Dental services was 87% of 402 survey responses.
- From 54 hospitals in 1930, VA's health care system now includes more than 155 medical centers, with at least one in each state, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. VA operates more than 1,400 sites of care, including 872 ambulatory care and community-based outpatient clinics, 135 nursing homes, 45 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, 209 Veterans Centers and 108 comprehensive home-care programs. VA health care facilities provide a broad spectrum of medical, surgical and rehabilitative care. Learn more in the VA Fact Sheet, Medical Care section at <http://www1.va.gov/opa/fact/vafacts.asp>

MORE INFORMATION

- VA Project HERO: <http://www.va.gov/hac/hero>, vhacoprojecthero@va.gov, 303.370.7755
- Humana Veterans Healthcare Services: <http://www.humana-veterans.com/>, 1.866.458.6630
- Delta Dental Federal Services: <http://www.projectherodental.org>, 1.866.737.6543