THE MESOCRATIC PARTY | POLICY WHITE PAPER

The Service Standard

7-Day Access, Digital Modernization, and a Veterans System Built on Outcomes

You served us. Now we serve you.

Published by the Mesocratic National Committee February 2026

Paid for by the Mesocratic National Committee. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.

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Executive Summary

The United States has approximately 18 million living veterans. An estimated 17+ veterans die by suicide every day. Approximately 35,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. VA wait times, while improved in recent years, remain unacceptable at many facilities. The claims backlog persists. And transition planning — preparing service members for civilian life — begins far too late and covers far too little.

The VA has improved. That is not the standard. The standard is outcomes: Is every veteran who needs care getting it quickly? Is every veteran in crisis getting immediate help? Is every veteran transitioning out of service prepared for what comes next?

By that standard, the system is failing.

The Mesocratic Party proposes:

- **7-day primary care / 14-day specialty care access standard.** If the VA cannot see you within that window, you automatically receive community care at VA expense. No bureaucratic approval process. No waiting for authorization. The clock starts when you call.
- **Mental health surge.** Hire thousands of additional mental health providers. Same-day crisis access at every VA facility. Veterans Crisis Line improvements.
- **Full digital modernization.** Single portal for all veteran records, benefits, appointments, and claims. One login. One system. One place.
- **Housing First for homeless veterans.** The evidence is overwhelming: permanent housing first, then wraparound services. It works. It saves money.
- **GI Bill protection and expansion.** Crack down on predatory for-profit colleges. Expand GI Bill to cover vocational training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship programs.
- **12-month transition planning.** Transition support begins 12 months before separation — not 90 days. Covers employment, education, healthcare enrollment, benefits, housing, and financial planning.

The cost of these reforms is real. The cost of not implementing them — in lives lost, crises managed, and promises broken — is far higher.

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1. The Problem: The Gap Between Promise and Delivery

1.1 The Scale

The United States has approximately 18 million living veterans, including roughly 7 million enrolled in VA healthcare. The VA operates the largest integrated healthcare system in the country — over 1,300 facilities including 171 medical centers and more than 1,100 outpatient sites.

The VA also administers disability compensation, education benefits (GI Bill), home loan guarantees, life insurance, and burial benefits. It is, by any measure, one of the most important institutions in the federal government.

1.2 Wait Times

VA wait times have improved since the 2014 scandal that exposed falsified records at the Phoenix VA. But improvement is uneven. Many facilities meet access standards; many do not. Veterans in rural areas face particular challenges — the nearest VA facility may be hours away, and specialty care may require significant travel.

The MISSION Act (2018) established community care options for veterans who face long wait times or excessive drive times. But the referral process can be slow and bureaucratic, and many veterans report difficulty navigating the system.

1.3 The Suicide Crisis

An estimated 17+ veterans die by suicide every day. Veteran suicide is a national emergency. While the VA has invested significantly in mental health programs and the Veterans Crisis Line, the numbers remain devastating.

Key factors: difficulty accessing timely mental health care, stigma around seeking help, the transition from military to civilian life, traumatic brain injury, PTSD, substance use disorders, social isolation, and access to firearms (firearms are the method in approximately 70% of veteran suicides).

1.4 Homelessness

Approximately 35,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. The number has declined significantly from its peak — the result of targeted programs like HUD-VASH (Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing) and the Housing First approach.

But 35,000 is 35,000 too many. These are men and women who served their country and are sleeping on streets.

1.5 The Claims Backlog

VA disability claims processing has faced chronic backlogs. While the VA has made progress, many veterans still wait months for initial claims decisions and longer for appeals. Delays in claims processing mean delays in compensation — which for disabled veterans can mean the difference between financial stability and crisis.

1.6 The 90-Day Problem

The military's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) typically begins 90 days before separation. For a service member leaving a structured environment they may have been in for years — with housing, healthcare, income, and community all provided — 90 days is woefully insufficient.

The result: many veterans leave service without a clear employment plan, without healthcare enrolled, without benefits activated, and without the civilian support network they need. The most vulnerable period for veteran suicide, homelessness, and crisis is the first year after separation.

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2. The Data: What Good Looks Like

2.1 Facilities That Work

Some VA facilities consistently meet or exceed access standards. These facilities share common characteristics: adequate staffing, effective scheduling systems, engaged leadership, and proactive outreach to enrolled veterans. The model works — it just doesn't work everywhere.

2.2 Community Care Under MISSION Act

The MISSION Act expanded community care options, allowing veterans to seek care from private providers when VA wait times or drive times exceed established standards. Early evidence suggests community care has improved access for many veterans, particularly in rural areas.

The challenge: community care is more expensive than VA-provided care for most services. A sustainable model uses community care as a backstop — not a replacement — for the VA system.

2.3 Telehealth

VA telehealth expanded dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic and has remained a significant access tool. Telehealth is particularly valuable for mental health services, chronic disease management, and veterans in rural areas.

2.4 Mental Health Programs

Evidence-based mental health treatments — cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, and medication management for PTSD and depression — are effective when veterans can access them. The VA has trained thousands of providers in these modalities.

The bottleneck is access: not enough providers, not enough appointments, and too many veterans who never connect with care in the first place.

3. The Proposal

3.1 7-Day Access Standard

- **Primary care:** 7-day access standard from the date of the appointment request.
- **Specialty care:** 14-day access standard.
- **Automatic community care trigger:** If the VA cannot meet the standard, the veteran is automatically authorized for community care at VA expense. No additional paperwork. No prior authorization required.
- **Measurement:** Real-time public reporting of access times by facility, updated monthly.

This is not privatization. The VA remains the default provider. Community care is the backstop that ensures no veteran falls through the cracks. The goal is to make the VA so good that community care is rarely needed — but available when it is.

3.2 Mental Health Surge

- **Hire 10,000 additional mental health providers** over 4 years (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors).
- **Same-day crisis access** at every VA medical center and large community-based outpatient clinic.
- **Walk-in mental health clinics** — no appointment needed for crisis or urgent mental health care.
- **Veterans Crisis Line improvements:** Reduce wait times, increase staffing, expand text and chat capabilities.
- **Lethal means counseling:** Voluntary, respectful conversations about firearm safety for veterans at elevated suicide risk. Not confiscation — counseling about temporary storage options during crisis periods.

3.3 Full Digital Modernization

- **Single veteran portal:** One login for all VA services — healthcare, benefits, claims, appointments, records, prescriptions, and communications.
- **Unified health record:** Complete interoperability between DoD and VA health records. When a service member separates, their records transfer seamlessly. No gaps.
- **Mobile-first design:** Full functionality on smartphones and tablets.
- **Claims tracking:** Real-time status updates on all pending claims and appeals.

The VA's IT modernization efforts have been troubled. The electronic health record migration (Oracle Cerner) has faced delays and problems. The Mesocratic position: the goal is right, the execution must improve, and the funding must be sustained.

3.4 Housing First for Homeless Veterans

The Housing First model — providing permanent housing immediately, then connecting residents with wraparound services (mental health, substance abuse treatment, employment assistance) — is the most effective approach to chronic homelessness. The evidence is robust: Housing First programs achieve housing retention rates of 80-90%.

- **Expand HUD-VASH vouchers** to eliminate the waitlist.
- **Rapid rehousing** for veterans who are newly homeless or at imminent risk.
- **Prevention funding** to help veterans at risk of homelessness before they lose housing.
- **Goal: functional zero veteran homelessness** — meaning every veteran who becomes homeless is identified and housed quickly.

3.5 GI Bill Protection and Expansion

- **Predatory school crackdown:** Strengthen the 90/10 rule and other protections that prevent for-profit colleges from targeting veterans for GI Bill revenue while providing low-quality education.
- **Expand covered programs:** GI Bill benefits should fully cover vocational training, apprenticeships, coding bootcamps, and entrepreneurship programs — not just traditional degree programs.
- **Housing allowance adequacy:** Ensure GI Bill housing allowances reflect actual local housing costs.

3.6 12-Month Transition Planning

- **Begin 12 months before separation** — not 90 days.
- **Individualized transition plan** covering employment, education, healthcare enrollment, benefits activation, housing, financial planning, and community connection.
- **Warm handoff to VA:** Service member meets their VA primary care provider before separation.
- **Employment pipeline:** Partnerships with employers who commit to veteran hiring. Skills translation — converting military experience into civilian credentials and certifications.
- **Follow-up:** VA contacts every separated veteran at 30, 90, 180, and 365 days after separation.

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4. The Math

Component	Estimated Annual Cost
Staffing for 7-day standard (additional providers)	$3-5 billion
Community care trigger (estimated additional referrals)	$2-4 billion
Mental health surge (10,000 providers over 4 years)	$2-3 billion
Digital modernization (amortized over 5 years)	$2-3 billion

Component	Estimated Annual Cost
HUD-VASH expansion + Housing First	$1-2 billion
12-month transition program	$500 million - $1 billion
Total annual investment	**$10.5-18 billion**

Offsets and savings:

Source	Estimated Annual Value
Reduced ER visits from better primary care access	$1-2 billion
Reduced homelessness costs (shelters, ER, criminal justice)	$1-3 billion
Reduced claims backlog processing costs	$500 million - $1 billion
Reduced crisis interventions from earlier transition planning	$500 million - $1 billion
Total estimated savings	**$3-7 billion**

Net annual cost: approximately $5-13 billion. This is a fraction of the VA's total budget (approximately $300+ billion) and a fraction of what the nation spends on defense. The cost of not investing — in lives lost, crises managed, and promises broken — is immeasurably higher.

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5. Who Benefits

- **All 18 million veterans** — particularly those currently underserved by wait times, geographic barriers, and system complexity.
- **Veterans in crisis** — same-day mental health access and improved Crisis Line could save hundreds of lives per year.
- **Homeless veterans** — Housing First with expanded vouchers can realistically achieve functional zero homelessness.
- **Transitioning service members** — 12-month planning dramatically reduces the risk of post-separation crisis.
- **Active-duty members** — knowing that the system works after service affects retention and morale.
- **Military families** — every improvement to veteran care reduces the burden on spouses, children, and caregivers.
- **Taxpayers** — a system that prevents crises is cheaper than one that responds to them.

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6. Implementation

Year 1: Mental health hiring surge begins. 12-month transition pilot at 10 major installations. Digital modernization roadmap finalized. HUD-VASH voucher expansion appropriated.

Year 2: 7-day access standard enacted with automatic community care trigger. Digital portal MVP launched. Transition program expands to all installations.

Year 3-4: Mental health surge reaches full staffing. Housing First programs achieve measurable homeless veteran reductions. Digital system fully operational.

Year 5: Full system operational. Performance metrics published. Continuous improvement based on outcomes data.

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7. How the Parties Compare on Veterans

	Republican	Mesocratic	Democrat
VA model	Privatize/expand choice	Fund VA + choice as backstop	Fund VA, limit privatization
Access standard	Choice-based	7-day standard + auto-trigger	Staffing-based
Mental health	Some support	Major surge	Strong support
Homelessness	Market-based	Housing First + HUD-VASH expansion	Housing First
Transition	90-day TAP	12-month individualized planning	Some expansion
GI Bill	Protect	Protect + expand + crack down	Protect + expand
Digital modernization	Support	Mandate with accountability	Support

The Mesocratic position is that the VA should be the best healthcare system in the country — and that when it falls short, veterans get care immediately from the community. This is neither privatization nor the status quo. It is an access guarantee.

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8. Conclusion

The United States asks its military to do extraordinary things — deploy to combat zones, endure hardship, risk their lives, and spend years away from families. In return, the nation promises to take care of them when they come home.

The system built to keep that promise is better than it was a decade ago. It is not good enough.

Seventeen veterans die by suicide every day. Thirty-five thousand are homeless tonight. Veterans in rural areas wait weeks or months for appointments. Service members leave the military with 90 days of transition planning for a life change that can take years to navigate.

The reforms proposed here cost money. Every line item is a real expenditure. But the cost of these reforms is a fraction of the cost of failing the people who served — in emergency room visits, in crisis interventions, in homelessness services, in disability backlogs, and in lives lost.

You served us. Now we serve you. Not with speeches and flag pins — with 7-day access standards, same-day crisis care, a roof over every veteran's head, and a system that works as well as the people it serves.

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