



2003 Enrollment Restriction

Background:

By law, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is required to review, on an annual basis, the patient enrollment system. The purpose of this review is to ensure that adequate resources are available to provide quality and timely health care to all enrolled veterans. When the demand for services exceeds VA's ability to provide such care, the Secretary is required to make enrollment adjustments.

2003 Demand:

In the past few years, the demand for VA health care enrollment has seen a dramatic increase—from 3.8 million enrollees in 1996 to 6.8 million in 2002. In 2002, we treated 1.4 million more veterans than in 1996—with 20,000 fewer health care employees. Because of this growth in demand, we have been unable to provide all enrollees timely access to quality health care. As of January 2003, approximately 236,000 veterans were on waiting lists for a medical appointment.

Decision:

Effective January 17, 2003, VA suspended NEW enrollment of veterans assigned to Priority Group 8 (VA's lowest priority group consisting of higher income veterans). Veterans enrolled in Priority Group 8 on or before January 16, 2003, remain enrolled and continue to be eligible for the full-range of VA health care services. Enrollment of veterans into Priority Groups 1 through 7 is NOT impacted by this suspension and continues without restriction.

Impact:

The decision to suspend new enrollment of veterans in VA's lowest priority group helps to ensure that quality and timely care will be available to veterans with service-connected conditions, veterans with special authority based on military service, lower-income veterans, and those with special health care needs.