Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 20, 2023

Dr. Shereef Elnahal
Under Secretary For Health
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Under Secretary Elnahal:

As you know, the VA MISSION Act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to create a high-performing and integrated health care network to ensure continuity and coordination of care for veterans seeking care in the community.

We have observed the efforts the VA has undertaken to carry out this directive, including the pilot programs in Orlando, Florida and Columbia, South Carolina, to improve care coordination between the Veterans Health Administration and health providers in the community.

As a delegation, we understand that care coordination and communication between the VA and providers in the community is essential to ensuring that our veterans have timely access to quality care. This is particularly the case in states with large rural areas, such as Nebraska, where veterans often live hours from the nearest VA facility, and community care options are a necessity.

We believe that creating a new program to improve care coordination between the VA and rural providers in the community is needed. Fortunately, Nebraska is in a unique position to lead this effort. Leslie Marsh, the 2023 President of the National Rural Health Association (NHRA) and the CEO of Lexington Regional Hospital in Nebraska, has worked to obtain support from the state's VA Medical Centers and Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) for a rural veteran referral program.

The rural veteran referral program will enhance access and choice for veterans who live in rural communities, and afford them more options for their health care. We are hopeful that once this program is established in Nebraska it can eventually be leveraged across the entire NRHA network of providers across rural America.

As a delegation, we stand ready to work with you and your colleagues at the VA and the NRHA to implement this critical program in Nebraska and ensure that it succeeds in improving care for our rural veterans.

Sincerely,

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

Pete Ricketts
United States Senator

Mike Flood
Member of Congress

Adrian Smith
Member of Congress

Don Bacon
Member of Congress

cc:

Dr. Ryan Vega, Chief Officer, Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning, Department of Veterans Affairs