



Office of U.S. Senator Mark Begich

Alaska :: April 2011

Official website :: <http://begich.senate.gov>

# Rural Veterans: Should Not Be Disadvantaged in Their Ability to Receive Access to Care

## S.3325 VETERANS TELEHEALTH AND OTHER CARE IMPROVEMENTS ACT OF 2010

- *Purpose*- Senator Begich introduced this bill in May 2010 with the intent to improve telehealth for rural Alaska veterans.
- *Problem*- Many rural Alaska veterans may face unnecessary copay requirements for telehealth and telemedicine visits. Additionally, many Alaska Native communities face severe limitations in access to VA healthcare.
- *Specifics of Bill*- This bill authorizes the VA Secretary, Secretary Shinseki, to waive the imposition or collection of copayments for telehealth and telemedicine visits of veterans. It also directs the VA Secretary to establish an outreach program to veterans that ensures awareness and eligibility for programs providing compensation and other benefits.
- *Link to Thomas.gov for [full details of bill](#).*

## Congressional Testimony Supporting S.3325

- *Committee hearing on rural health, Testimony of Dan Winkelman, Vice President for Administration and General Counsel of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, June 16, 2010*- Mr. Winkelman described remote western Alaska as a region faced with an unemployment rate of over 20 percent, an average per capita income of \$15,000, and where over 6,000 homes do not have access to safe drinking water. He stated:

This is the environment where many Alaska Native veterans were born and raised and then return to after serving our great Country. For Alaska Native/American Indian veterans, who serve at the highest per capita rate of any U.S. race, to lack access upon their return from duty to culturally appropriate and quality health care services by the Veterans Administration (VA) is a shame. In Alaska, highly rural



YouTube

[youtube.com/USSenatorMarkBegich](http://youtube.com/USSenatorMarkBegich)



Facebook

[facebook.com/begich](http://facebook.com/begich)



Twitter

[twitter.com/senatorbegich](http://twitter.com/senatorbegich)

veterans must break through several barriers in order to receive care. There are almost no VA facilities in rural Alaska.

- Senator Begich understands these issues and will continue to fight on behalf of these Alaska Native veterans and other rural Alaska veterans.

### **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between VA and Indian Health Services**

- *Purpose:* to establish coordination, collaboration, and resource-sharing between the VA and Indian Health Service (HIS) to improve the health status of Alaska Native veterans.
- *5 Goals:*
  1. Increase access to and improve quality of health care and services to the mutual benefit of both agencies.
  2. Promote patient-centered collaboration and facilitate communication among VA, HIS, Alaska Native veterans, Tribal facilities, and Urban Indian Clinics.
  3. In consultation with tribes at the regional and local levels, establish effective partnerships and sharing agreements among VA headquarters and facilities, HIS Headquarters and HIS, Tribal, and Urban Indian health programs in support of Alaska Native veterans.
  4. Ensure that appropriate resources are identified and available to support programs for Alaska Native Veterans.
  5. Improve health-promotion and disease-prevention services to Alaska Natives to address community-based wellness.
- View the full [VA-HIS MOU here](#).



**YouTube**

[youtube.com/USSenatorMarkBegich](https://youtube.com/USSenatorMarkBegich)



**Facebook**

[facebook.com/begich](https://facebook.com/begich)



**Twitter**

[twitter.com/senatorbegich](https://twitter.com/senatorbegich)