



EMERGENCY CARE OUTSIDE THE VA: WHAT EVERY **VETERAN** NEEDS TO KNOW

The 72-Hour Rule · Urgent Care · Community Care Reporting Guide

Call within 72 hours

Notify the VA within 72 hours of the START of your emergency care at a non-VA facility

HOW TO NOTIFY THE VA

CALL (RECOMMENDED — WORKS EVERY TIME)

844-724-7842

VA Centralized Notification Center (844-72-HRVHA)

OR TRY REPORTING ONLINE

**emergencycarereporting.
communitycare.va.gov/request**

VA's ECR portal — this site is sometimes slow or down. If it won't load, just call.

The hospital or ER staff can make this call for you — ask them to, if possible. But if they don't, **you or a family member/representative can and should make the call yourselves**. Don't assume the hospital handled it.

WHAT TO DO, STEP BY STEP

- 1 Get emergency care immediately. **Never delay treatment** to call the VA first — the VA wants you to seek care right away in a true emergency.
- 2 As soon as it's reasonably possible — ideally within the first day — call **844-724-7842** or have someone call on your behalf. (The online portal exists too, but the phone line is the more reliable option.)
- 3 Give them your name, the facility name, and the date/time care started.
- 4 Ask directly: **"Were any follow-up referrals or services ordered from this visit?"** If yes, those need separate prior authorization — see below.
- 5 Keep a note of who you spoke with, the date, and any reference number they give you.

THE PART MOST VETERANS MISS: REFERRALS NEED SEPARATE AUTHORIZATION

Calling within 72 hours gets your emergency visit itself reviewed for coverage. It does **not** automatically cover everything that comes after it. If the ER refers you to a specialist, orders follow-up imaging, or schedules a follow-up procedure with a community provider, **that referral needs its own prior authorization from VA Community Care before you receive it** — even though it came out of an authorized ER visit. Call your local VA Community Care office to get any referral authorized before you show up to that follow-up appointment.

USING URGENT CARE INSTEAD OF THE ER

Urgent care works **differently** from the emergency room rule above. It's not governed by the 72-hour ECR process — it runs through VA's community care urgent care benefit, and using it correctly starts before you ever walk in the door.

How to Find an In-Network Urgent Care

- You must be enrolled in VA health care and have received VA care within the past 24 months to use this benefit.
- Use the VA's facility locator at **va.gov/find-locations** and filter for "Urgent care" to find VA-approved in-network clinics near you.
- Call **VA's urgent care line or your local VA Community Care office** if you're unsure whether a clinic is in-network before you go.
- In-network urgent care visits generally do **not** require prior authorization for the visit itself — that's the main advantage over a specialist referral.
- If no in-network urgent care is reasonably available, treat the visit like emergency care and follow the 72-hour reporting steps above.

The Process Once You're There

- Tell the front desk you're a veteran using the VA community care urgent care benefit — this helps them bill correctly from the start.
- Bring your **Veteran ID card** or be ready to provide your VA enrollment information.
- Ask directly: **"Are any follow-up services, imaging, or referrals being ordered from this visit?"**
- Just like with the ER, any follow-up referral out of urgent care **needs its own prior authorization** from VA Community Care before that follow-up appointment.
- Keep your visit summary, the date, and the clinic name — you'll want this if any billing questions come up later.

COMMON MYTHS VS. FACTS

MYTH

"If I miss the 72-hour window, VA automatically denies the claim."

FACT

Missing the window does not mean automatic denial. Your claim gets reviewed under a different, stricter set of rules — so it's still worth calling, even late.

MYTH

"The hospital always calls the VA for me automatically."

FACT

VA prefers the facility to notify them, but it doesn't always happen. Confirm it was done, or make the call yourself.

MYTH

"Since my ER visit was covered, any follow-up care from that visit is automatically covered too."

FACT

Follow-up referrals need their own prior authorization. This is the single most common reason veterans get surprise bills.

MYTH

"Urgent care and the ER follow the same 72-hour rule."

FACT

Urgent care runs on a separate community care benefit, not the 72-hour ECR process — but it only works cleanly at an in-network clinic.

THE VETERAN ROADMAP

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COMMUNITY CARE PHARMACY & URGENT CARE COPAYS

Pharmacy Billing Card · CCN Region Contacts · Copay Rate Reference

COMMUNITY CARE PHARMACY BILLING CARD

If you fill a prescription through VA Community Care, keep these tips in mind so you don't get billed incorrectly:

- 1 Use the **VA Facility Locator** (va.gov/find-locations) to confirm your urgent care provider or pharmacy is in the VA network before you go.
- 2 Bring your **Veteran ID**, a photo ID, and any secondary insurance information with you to the visit.
- 3 **Don't pay any copays at the time of your visit.** VA will send you a bill afterward if one is required.

Questions or concerns? Call **VA Community Care at 877-881-7618**, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET.

FIND YOUR CCN REGION & CONTACT

VA's community care network is split into 5 regions, each managed by either Optum or TriWest. If a provider or pharmacy has billing questions, they (or you) can call the number for your region:

Regions 1-3 — Optum

Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast states (includes Georgia)

(888) 901-6609

Provider eligibility confirmation line

Regions 4-5 — TriWest

Western states, Alaska, Hawaii, and U.S. territories

(833) 483-8669

Provider eligibility confirmation line

Pharmacy Billing Info (Regions 1-3 — Optum)

Payer ID: VACCN

BIN: 004336

PCN: ADV

Rx Group — Referred Care: Rx3839

Rx Group — Urgent Care/VA Provider: Rx4136

Rx Group — Flu or COVID-19 Vaccine: Rx3841

Veteran ID: 10-digit Veteran ID or SSN

Veteran DOB format: YYMMDD

24/7 Pharmacy Help Desk: 800-364-6331

Give this billing information to the pharmacy if they have trouble processing your prescription through VA Community Care. If your region is 4-5 (TriWest), ask the pharmacy to call TriWest directly — billing details vary by region.

URGENT CARE COPAY RATES

PRIORITY GROUP	COPAY — FIRST 3 VISITS PER CALENDAR YEAR	COPAY — EACH ADDITIONAL VISIT
1-5	\$0 (no copay)	\$30
6	If related to a condition covered by special authority: \$0 (no copay). If not related to special authority: \$30 each visit	\$30
7-8	\$30	\$30

Note: Special authorities include conditions related to combat service and exposures (Agent Orange, active duty at Camp Lejeune, ionizing radiation, Project SHAD/Project 112, Southwest Asia Conditions), as well as military sexual trauma and presumptions applicable to certain veterans with psychosis and other mental illness. If you're only getting a flu shot at your visit, you won't have to pay any copay, no matter your priority group.

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Pharmacy billing details, CCN region contacts, and copay rates shown here are drawn from VA and Community Care network materials current as of publication. Copay amounts, regions, and contact numbers can change — always confirm current rates and billing details with VA Community Care or your regional network (Optum or TriWest) directly. This guide is independently published and is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or produced by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

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WHEN YOU DON'T QUALIFY YET: IMMEDIATE, COVERED CARE OPTIONS

Same-Day Primary Care · 24/7 Clinical Triage · Emergency Fallback

If you're newly enrolled in VA health care and haven't yet reached the 24-month recent-care mark required for the Community Care urgent care benefit, you still have same-day, no-cost options for non-emergency needs. You do not have to wait for your first scheduled appointment to get care.

YOUR IMMEDIATE OPTIONS

1

VA Same-Day Primary Care

All VA medical centers offer same-day primary care and mental health services. You do not need to wait for a scheduled appointment — walk in or call your local VA facility to be seen today.

2

24/7 Clinical Triage Line

Call 800-698-2411 (or your local VA facility's main line) to speak with a VA nurse right now. They can assess your symptoms, provide medical guidance, and connect you with a VA Tele-Emergency provider if needed.

Remember:

If your condition is severe or life-threatening, none of the above applies — go to the nearest emergency room or call 911 immediately, then report it to the VA within 72 hours as described earlier in this guide. These same-day options are for non-emergency needs only.

WHICH PATH FITS YOUR SITUATION?

YOUR SITUATION	RECOMMENDED PATH
Life-threatening emergency	Nearest ER or call 911 — then report within 72 hrs
Urgent, non-emergency, haven't hit 24-month mark	Same-day primary care or 24/7 Triage Line
Urgent, non-emergency, past 24-month mark	In-network Community Care urgent care clinic
Unsure how serious it is	Call the 24/7 Clinical Triage Line first: 800-698-2411

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