



## Doing Right By Our Veterans: Expanding Health Care Access & Options

A note from Andy —

A Beshear/Coleman administration will always put our veterans first. Doing right by those who have served our country starts with increasing opportunities for good-paying jobs, no matter where you live in Kentucky. That's why last week we unveiled our plan to increase skills training and create more jobs that pay good wages for our veterans.<sup>1</sup>

Our commitment to veterans also requires that we fight for access to affordable health care. My comprehensive health care plan, that we released in March, will lower costs, strengthen Medicaid, and codify protections for people with pre-existing conditions into state law.<sup>2</sup> That will lift up all working families. But our veterans face unique challenges and they deserve a governor who will deliver them specific solutions to expand access and increase options.

When veterans come home, we owe them our gratitude—and I'll be a governor who focuses on getting results that honor their service.

Thanks,

Andy

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<sup>1</sup> [“Creating More Good-Paying Jobs for Those Who Served,”](#) Beshear/Coleman, 7/2/2019.

<sup>2</sup> [“Andy Beshear’s Health Care Plan,”](#) Beshear/Coleman, 3/26/2019.



**Here's how the Beshear/Coleman vision to do right by our veterans will focus on expanding health care access and options to those who served:**

**Expand Access to Mental Health Services:** Veterans are often forced to travel or move many miles away from their friends, family, and support network to get the care they need. Or even worse, they might go without receiving vital treatment altogether. This is especially troubling when roughly 20 veterans commit suicide every day.<sup>3</sup> To help get ahead of these severe challenges, we will build on past successes and work with state and federal leaders to promote and expand telehealth services throughout rural Kentucky, starting with community mental health clinics. Telehealth services are an effective way to enable our veterans to receive vital mental health services in the comfort of their homes.<sup>4</sup>

**Increase Flexibility for Veterans:** Too many veterans must travel far distances to get to the nearest health care center, which can make scheduling appointments difficult to balance with the responsibilities of working during the day. Veterans should be allowed to take time off from work — unpaid and with advance notice to their employers — to access VA health care services. No veterans should have to worry about getting the care they need just because they're also working to support themselves and their family.

**Peer-to-Peer Outreach to Handle Substance Use:** Sadly, many veterans are suffering from substance use disorder. In fact, about 1 in 10 veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan seen in the VA have a problem with alcohol or other drugs, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>5</sup> The VA also reports that “studies show PTSD and substance use problems are strongly related in people who served in the military.”<sup>6</sup> Studies have also shown that peer-to-peer outreach between veterans has proven to be an effective way to combat some of these devastating health problems.<sup>7</sup> A Beshear/Coleman administration will focus on promoting and expanding opportunities to connect veterans in Kentucky with other veterans to increase peer-to-peer outreach that can help tackle substance use disorders. One of the first steps will be partnering with veterans service organizations, along with public universities to strengthen resources for students who are veterans and may be struggling with addiction or substance use.

**Create New Veterans-Specific Medical Training:** Veterans continue to face new and developing health challenges. The Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure should add a veteran-specific component to their Continuing Medical Education training. By also partnering with local medical and advocacy groups, this will help ensure medical professionals are staying up to speed with

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<sup>3</sup> [“VA Releases Veteran Suicide Statistics by State,”](#) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 9/15/2017.

<sup>4</sup> [“Telehealth Services,”](#) AARP.

<sup>5</sup> [“PTSD and Substance Abuse in Veterans,”](#) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

<sup>6</sup> [“PTSD and Substance Abuse in Veterans,”](#) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

<sup>7</sup> [“Vets Helping Vets. A Promising Strategy for PTSD,”](#) University of Albany.



the latest medical challenges for veterans — and safeguard Kentucky from being caught off guard if new challenges are around the corner.<sup>8</sup> We will also work to expand licensing and training opportunities for EMTs<sup>9</sup> so there are additional veterans-specific training components available to help with life-saving emergency services.

**Secure Funding for Kentucky VA Facilities:** It's simply too hard for too many veterans to get the care they need, whether it's due to long distances or lengthy waitlists. We will work with anyone across party lines and with our congressional delegation to focus on securing funding for VA facilities in Kentucky and to increase access, address understaffing, improve the quality of care and shorten waitlists.

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<sup>8</sup> ["Continuing Medical Education,"](#) Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure.

<sup>9</sup> [Kentucky Board of Emergency Medical Services.](#)