

Veterans and seniors both deserve access to best health care

By Arlene Kessler

As a retiree and veteran, I am thankful to live in a county that looks out for veterans' health after they have served their country. Lawmakers should continue to advocate for the programs that help veterans succeed long after we've finished our military duties. While there already is an increased need for quality health care as you age, veterans deserve access to the very best care because of the mental and physical health challenges associated with service.

When I retired, I found that Medicare Advantage can supplement my VA plan nicely. These two programs work in tandem with one another and deliver me the comprehensive — yet affordable — coverage I need to stay healthy.

Specifically, I love the flexibility of my Medicare Advantage plan. While the closest VA medical center is over 30 miles from where I live, there is a very robust Medicare Advantage network in my area. I use the at-home doctor and nurse visits offered through my plan, which is both convenient and easy. Medicare Advantage also gives me the option to quickly see a doctor close to my apartment or I can even use telehealth to virtually meet with my doctor. And that's why I never have to ignore symptoms or illnesses, seeing a specialist or doctor is never a burden!

For those who need specialized care, I could not recommend the Medicare Advantage program enough. These plans help reduce gaps in health care coverage and give you the ability to get in front of your health challenges.

For those veterans that need it, Medicare Advantage also has robust benefits offered that help people stay on top of their mental health needs. For instance, MA can give you access to a range of mental health specialists, wellness programs, and comprehensive prescription medication coverage that allows people to find the mental health treatment that works best for them.

Medicare Advantage covers a high population of enrollees from rural and underserved areas. With 40% of the program's enrollees earning less than \$25,000 a year, the program is an essential avenue to health care for many low-income individuals and those like me that have a fixed income. Potential cuts to this program would negatively impact over 30 million Americans across the country that rely on the program for high-quality, affordable care.

Caring for both veterans and seniors has been a bipartisan issue in the past, and I anticipate it will continue to be a bipartisan issue in the future. Nearly 4 in 5 senior voters want their federal government to protect funding for Medicare Advantage. Lawmakers shouldn't strip the most vulnerable Americans of their health coverage because of political disagreements. The evidence that Medicare Advantage works for both seniors and individuals with disabilities enrolled in the program is clear as day, so it should be a no-brainer for our Wisconsin representatives to support it at the federal level.

(Arlene Kessler is a retiree and U.S. Army veteran who resides in Oconomowoc.)