

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0520

February 3, 2021

The Honorable Dat Tran
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Norris Cochran
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Acting Secretary Tran, Acting Secretary Cochran, and Director Walensky:

I write to request the expansion of COVID-19 vaccination dose allocations to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinics and facilities outside major population centers. I commend your efforts to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to VA facilities across the United States. However, the application of the vaccine must be expanded in order to increase vaccine accessibility to rural populations, including the central coast of California.

I am concerned that veterans are unable to receive a COVID-19 vaccine due to their location and lack of access. My district is home to numerous individuals who have served our country and earned the honorable title of United States military veteran. Many of them depend on their nearest VA facility for healthcare needs, including the COVID-19 vaccine. Yet, local VA clinics have not received dose allocations and are unable to administer the vaccine.

One such clinic, the Major General William H. Gourley VA-DoD Outpatient Clinic (Gourley Clinic) located in Marina, California serves 80,000 veterans, of which well over 50% are in the at risk 75 years of age and above category, on the central coast of California. The Gourley Clinic is an ideal location for a vaccine distribution site not only for the local veterans, but also for

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veterans outside the area who are treated at the clinic due to its position between the major population hubs of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the Gourley Clinic does not have any vaccine doses to administer nor the cold storage freezers required to possess certain vaccines. In order to receive the current two dose COVID-19 vaccine, veterans who normally go to the Gourley Clinic must travel hours to alternative sites on two separate occasions.

As you work to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccine is equitably administered to all veterans, I ask that you consider and implement a better way to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to rural, non-hub VA facilities, such as the Gourley Clinic. Such a plan would allow veterans in rural areas to conveniently obtain the vaccine without the inconvenience of hours-long travel. That type of relief provided by the VA would significantly help our veterans access the vaccine that they deserve and contribute greatly to our nation's efforts to defeat COVID-19.

Please know that I am eager and willing to work with you to ensure that all of our veterans in rural areas can more easily obtain the COVID-19 vaccine. Thank you for your consideration to remedy this issue, and I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



JIMMY PANETTA
Member of Congress