

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 9, 2019

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office initiate a review of the quality rating system for community living centers (CLCs) operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

There have been several reports indicating poor quality ratings as well as disturbing anecdotal stories of substandard treatment and conditions at some CLCs across the country. These accounts are blights on a system designed and expected to offer high-quality, dignified care for our veterans. While the majority of personnel at CLCs are committed professionals dedicated to providing excellent and comprehensive care to their residents, any evidence of inadequate care to even a single veteran is unacceptable.

Although the VA first released overall CLC star ratings in 2018,¹ detailed and specific information about the agency's methodology for developing the star ratings is not easily accessible to the public. Unfortunately, reporting based on internal VA documents conveyed that CLCs rated more poorly in comparison to private nursing homes on quality measures such as pain and pressure ulcers.² The VA has released some of the CLC Health Surveys, capturing findings from surprise inspections in 2018. These surveys provide some context to the poor quality ratings received by some CLCs, and offer specific examples of incidents in which better staff training could have remediated, or prevented, adverse outcomes.

We appreciate that many CLCs care for a disproportionately complex resident population with multiple chronic and difficult conditions. But public concerns and reporting underscore the need to ensure CLCs have the tools, resources, and properly trained staff necessary to provide the quality nursing home care our veterans need and deserve.

Given that many of our country's veterans are aging and seeking nursing home care in a VA CLC, we would like GAO to review the rating system for these entities. Specifically, we request that GAO address the following questions:

¹ Press Release, VA Extends Record of Transparency with First-Ever Posting of Annual Nursing Home Ratings (June 12, 2018), <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=4072>.

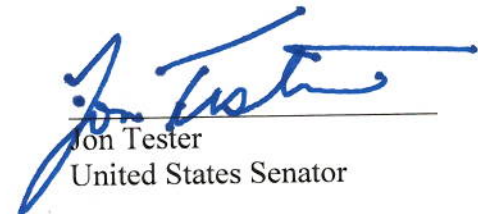
² Andrea Estes and Donovan Slack, *Secret VA nursing-home ratings hid poor quality care from public*, Boston Globe and USA Today (June 17, 2018), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2018/06/17/secret-nursing-home-ratings-hid-poor-quality-care-from-public/w07FGInmFuAR10z2PrDxII/story.html>.

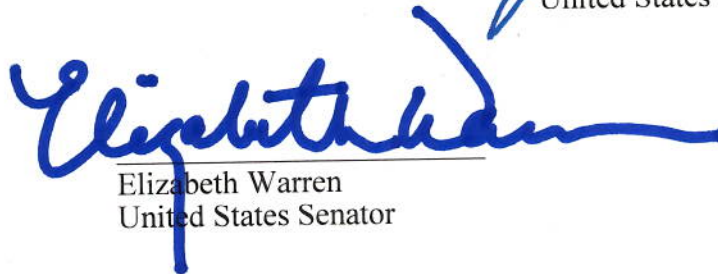
1. How does VA develop its CLC quality ratings, including ratings for inspections, quality measures, and staffing? What are the specific inputs used to develop these ratings and how do inspection results inform them? How does VA ensure that the inputs on which the ratings are based are accurate?
2. What do the CLC quality rating data reveal about trends in quality across CLCs nationally? For example, what deficiencies are commonly cited on inspections, what quality measures are particularly problematic, and what do the staffing levels and training reveal?
3. How does VA use the rating data in its oversight? For example, what actions does VA take to address concerns identified in the CLC quality rating data, and for poorly performing CLCs in particular? Would more training be helpful to help address key concerns? Are there best practices from top performing CLCs that those facilities could share with other CLCs?

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Nikki Hurt of Senator Markey's staff at 202-224-2742 or Dahlia Melendrez of the Veterans committee staff at 202-224-2074. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


John Tester
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator