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# News Release

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 7, 2014**

### **VA Black Hills Health Care System to Initiate an Environmental Impact Statement Regarding the Proposal to Enhance and Maintain High Quality, Safe, and Accessible Care**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that the VA Black Hills Health Care System (VA BHHCS) will initiate an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as part of due diligence to evaluate the impact of the proposed reconfiguration of services in the VA BHHCS. The VA BHHCS' proposal is to enhance the delivery of high quality, safe, and accessible care closer to Veterans' homes throughout the VA BHHCS service area which includes western South Dakota, northwestern Nebraska, parts of eastern Wyoming, and southwestern North Dakota.

The EIS will include an evaluation of the impact on local communities and historic properties. Following completion of VA's due diligence, the Secretary can make a final decision about the reconfiguration of VA BHHCS. NEPA, enacted in 1969, requires Federal agencies to identify and evaluate the potential impacts of a proposed action on the environment. This is accomplished by a thorough analysis of a range of potential alternatives and potentially affected resources, incorporating input from the public as well as other governmental agencies.

The EIS will begin within the next few months. This study is designed to include all interested people and organizations. Additional information regarding participation will be available at a later date. A Notice of Intent (NOI) signaling the formal start of the NEPA process will be published soon in the Federal Register.

The major components of the proposed reconfiguration plan involve: purchasing more healthcare services closer to Veterans' homes, strengthening partnerships with Indian Health Service, Tribal Health agencies, Department of Defense, and private-sector health care facilities; and supporting the development of new VA health care facilities. If the proposed reconfiguration is approved, it would include the establishment of a community-based outpatient clinic in Hot Springs. The existing residential rehabilitation treatment program in Hot Springs would relocate to Rapid City, SD and the Rapid City community-based outpatient clinic would be expanded. Veterans who previously received inpatient care at the VA Hot Springs hospital would be able to receive VA-funded care in their local communities or at the Fort Meade VA hospital. Veterans could also choose to continue to receive services at other VA hospitals. There will be no lapse in services for the Veteran community.

This proposed reconfiguration was first presented to the public in December 2011 by VA Black Hills and VISN 23 Leadership. Since that date, VA officials have been communicating the proposal throughout South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming, gathering feedback, and continuing to develop the range of alternatives for analysis.

As additional information becomes available it will be posted at [www.blackhills.va.gov](http://www.blackhills.va.gov).

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