

## Fact Sheet: Access to Eye Care in Georgia for Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides health care to veterans at many facilities in Georgia. These sites include three medical centers, four outpatient clinics, 25 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), and seven veterans' centers<sup>1</sup>. The AOA Health Policy Institute found that veterans in Georgia have access to primary eye care at or near 97 percent of 29 outpatient sites, thanks to on-site care and a significant expansion through the Veterans Choice Program.

The Veterans Choice Program increases access to care for veterans by authorizing millions of appointments for veterans in their communities. The Choice Program began in April 2014, and was extended in April 2017<sup>2</sup>. Doctors of optometry in private practice sign up with the Choice program to see vets who have difficulty arranging an appointment with an eye doctor at a VA facility. The Choice Program and on-site eye and vision care in outpatient clinics in Georgia allow vets to receive in-person primary eye care, including comprehensive eye exams-the gold standard for vets-and treatment for most eye and vision problems.

The AOA Health Policy Institute found that doctors of optometry are available to provide primary eye care services to veterans in communities across Georgia. Four of the CBOCs in Georgia offer on-site eye care services. Of the other 21 CBOCs, 12 have Choice doctors of optometry within two miles, seven have Choice doctors of optometry within five miles, and three have Choice doctors of optometry within 10 miles. Among the other four outpatient clinics in the state, two have Choice doctors of optometry within two miles and two have Choice doctors of optometry within five miles. Overall, eye doctors are available at or within five miles of 25 (86 percent) of the 29 clinics, and within 10 miles of 28 (97 percent) of the clinics (see table, below).

<b>29 Georgia Outpatient Clinics for Veterans</b>
<b>Clinics with on-site eye care or Choice doctors of optometry within 2 miles: 20 (69%)</b>
<b>Clinics with on-site eye care or Choice doctors of optometry within 5 miles: 25 (86%)</b>
<b>Clinics with on-site eye care or Choice doctors of optometry within 10 miles: 28 (97%)</b>

The only outpatient clinic in Georgia for veterans that does not have on-site eye care or a Choice doctor of optometry within 10 miles is the CBOC in Blairsville, population 652. However, there are two doctors of optometry in that town and a Choice doctor of optometry within 15 miles. Meanwhile, the Atlanta VA Medical Center is a 2-hour drive, nearly 100 miles away.

Coincidentally, the Atlanta VA has experimented with a remote screening program at Blairsville and other sites that bypasses local in-person eye care in favor of referring patients to Atlanta for assessment

and treatment. Doctors of optometry are available locally within 15 miles—and usually much less—of all sites selected for the remote screening program.

In conclusion, the AOA Health Policy Institute found that doctors of optometry are available at or in the vicinity of nearly all outpatient clinics for veterans in the state of Georgia.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/region.asp?ID=1007>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/index.asp>