

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 14, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

The Honorable Louis DeJoy
Postmaster General
U.S. Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza West, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20260

Dear Secretary Wilkie and Postmaster General DeJoy,

We write with grave concern surrounding mounting reports of long wait times for veterans to receive critical prescription medications.

As you know, approximately 80 percent of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) prescriptions are fulfilled by the mail. In Fiscal Year 2019 alone, VA's mail order pharmacy processed 125.2 million outpatient prescriptions. You are both well aware of the volume of prescriptions processed daily through the VA's mail-order pharmacy system, the Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP).

VA and the United States Postal Service (USPS) typically provide speedy service, with prescriptions arriving within three to five days of being ordered, on average. However, we are concerned by reports from veterans and VA staff indicating that wait times have doubled, or even tripled in some cases, without explanation.¹ In fact, reports indicate that medications have been allegedly sitting at post office locations for nearly two weeks without movement.

We are particularly alarmed that these reports come in the wake of the implementation of USPS's new operational standards. The reports offer evidence that the requirements have rendered postal workers unable to deliver mail in a timely manner.² This is in addition to the overhaul of senior leadership at USPS, which has displaced dozens of senior executives charged with running the day to day operations of the agency.³ The culmination of these major changes, pursued in the heat of a brutal pandemic and economic crisis, is now impacting our veterans'

¹ <https://connectingvets.radio.com/articles/veterans-affairs-mail-order-prescription-usps-delays>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/05/senate-democrat-launches-inquiry-into-postal-service-delays/>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/08/07/postal-service-investigation-dejoy/>

access to prescriptions. This is completely unacceptable.

Veterans need their medication to arrive without delay. Many depend on them for treating pain, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental and physical health issues. With local VA healthcare systems around the country experiencing medication shortages and switching to 30-day refills, which could cause additional delays and disruptions given the reliance on USPS, these delays are a real threat to our veterans, and your agencies must do everything possible to rectify the situation.

In addition to this, we request that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. Has VA experienced an influx of new mail-order prescription requests due to the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, by what percentage has the workload increased for each of VA's seven CMOPs, for the months of February, March, April, May, June, and July 2020?
2. For each of VA's seven CMOPs, how many days, on average, has it taken for veterans' prescriptions to be delivered by USPS (as measured from the date the CMOP sent the prescription until the date of delivery), for the months of February, March, April, May, June, and July 2020?
3. For each of VA's seven CMOPs, what percentage and how many prescription orders did not meet VA's 10-day delivery timeliness goal (as measured from the date the veteran requested the prescription until the date of receipt), for the months of February, March, April, May, June, and July 2020?
4. What steps have your agencies taken to enhance coordination to ensure prompt delivery of veterans' prescription drugs during the COVID-19 crisis?
5. How will you ensure that prescription drugs for veterans, and other high-priority parcels, are quickly processed, delivered, and not subject to further delay?

We appreciate your prompt attention and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress