

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 1, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

As you develop your Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request, we respectfully ask that your budget include a request to replace the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) Medical Center located in Reno, Nevada with a new medical center in a different location. As members representing a state that is home to nearly 250,000 veterans, ensuring that veterans have access to the best care we can provide is a top priority.

An estimated 75 percent of northern Nevadans reside in a Health Professional Shortage Area, making access to quality and reliable care a critical issue. This shortage especially impacts the nearly 100,000 veterans who depend on the services administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities in northern Nevada. Built in 1939, the VASNHCS Medical Center currently provides inpatient and outpatient care to veterans living in 12 Nevada counties, in addition to several counties in northeastern California, covering an expansive geographical area of 110,000 square miles. In 2021, the medical center completed 535,684 outpatient appointments and provided services for 30,846 individual veteran patients.

In 2012, the VA submitted a request to renovate the Reno medical center in order to address seismic line safety and infrastructure deficiencies, as well as to expand it to include a clinical and research wing. Since the original project submission, it has been determined that the existing medical center has additional deficiencies. Specifically, four buildings, equating 75 percent of the total campus footage, are classified by the VA as High Risk or Exceptionally High-Risk for sustaining damage during a major seismic event. This is particularly concerning, as Nevada is the third most seismically active state in the U.S., and the existing medical center is located in the part of the state most at risk for seismic hazards. In total, it was estimated that it would cost approximately \$900 million to mitigate all seismic deficiencies to complete the project requested in 2012.

However, the 2012 renovation and expansion proposal is no longer practicable or cost-effective, and instead a brand-new facility is needed. Due to significant residential growth in the area surrounding the current medical center since the time of its construction, there has been increased vehicular and foot traffic, loss of residential street parking spots, and a rise in overall disruption. This has reduced the quality of life for the neighborhood's residents, and cast serious doubt that the initial request for expansion of the existing facility is feasible. As a result, the VASNHCS, in collaboration with the VA Office of Construction and Facilities Management, conducted a feasibility study determining that building a new facility, rather than renovating and expanding the current one, would be a more cost effective and long-term solution to serve Nevada's veterans for generations to come.

The feasibility study makes clear that the best solution for veterans is to construct a new state-of-the-art clinical space in Reno to improve patient access to modernized and expanded services and programs. This project would address existing deficiencies and space concerns, while alleviating the burden of renovating a facility actively treating patients. Constructing a new facility also would address challenges posed by increased vehicle and pedestrian traffic near the current facility, creating a safer residential environment. Additionally, the proposal to replace the existing medical center has a shorter estimated timeline for full project delivery than renovation does. The time to complete construction on renovating and expanding the existing medical center would be 15 to 20 years, versus the 8 years estimated to complete construction on a new facility for Nevada's veterans.

A 21st century facility is critical to best serving Nevada's veterans with lifesaving medical services that are continually in high demand. Reno veterans have been waiting for an updated medical facility since 2012, and it is for the reasons laid out in this letter that we urge that your Fiscal Year 2024 budget include a request to construct a new VA medical center to replace the existing VASNHCS medical center in Reno, Nevada.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator