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**Heller on GAO Report: VA Must Prioritize Retaining Doctors to Fully Support Nevada Veterans**

*GAO Report Follows Heller Request to Examine Doctor Shortages*

**Washington, D.C.** – Following today’s release of a [Government Accountability Office (GAO) report](http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-124), U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) called on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) take immediate steps to improve its ability to recruit and retain top-level physicians in order to fully support our nation’s veterans.

The newly-released GAO report is the result of [a request from Heller and Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=F65727FA-396E-45FE-8368-736A23289DCA) to Comptroller General Gene Dodaro in 2016. Heller specifically [asked for recommendations](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/569fcb7a-2034-45bb-b0d9-c89c2d66889e/gao%202.pdf) on how to address shortages of critical positions such as intake workers, doctors, nurses, and assistants so that veterans can receive timely and quality health care. ‎

Among some of the concerns identified in the report, the GAO found that the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has failed to evaluate the effectiveness of its physician recruitment and retention strategies, and that facilities still experienced difficulties.

Additionally, although VHA measures productivity, the mental health departments are given two sets of differing metrics to follow, which creates confusion in measuring productivity.

“The GAO’s report underscores the critical need for the VA to take immediate steps to ensure the department is retaining and recruiting the best doctors to treat our nation’s veterans. I’m pleased the GAO looked into this issue following my request, and urge the VA to take into consideration its recommendations,” **Heller said.** “The federal government should be doing all it can when it comes to providing world-class medical care to America’s warriors, and key in that effort are the VA’s doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals. Make no mistake, the VA’s shortage of medical staff has a direct impact on the care veterans receive, and that’s why more data collection and evaluation is important. As a member of the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I will continue to work to ensure that the department is properly equipped to support Nevada’s veterans, particularly those living in rural areas who are most affected by doctor shortages.”

Heller, a senior member of the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, has also championed bipartisan legislation to fix the nationwide gap between the supply of and demand for physicians. This summer, Heller and Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) introduced the [bipartisan Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=87919CA1-6D52-458F-9332-A6A11C0ADEA1), a bill designed to address the growing physician shortage and its strain on the health care system and patients’ access to quality care.

In August, [Heller hosted VA Secretary David Shulkin in Reno, Nevada](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=E5B0E4D8-6124-47F1-AC54-DD1D0DF301B5), where they discussed this issue and toured the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System. Heller signed a declaration reaffirming his commitment to preventing suicide among Nevada veterans.

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