Congressional Budget Office
Cost Estimate

December 7, 2022

H.R. 6273, VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Project Act of 2021

As ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on September 21, 2022

By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2023	2023-2027	2023-2032
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	4	6
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	4	6
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	*	8	14

Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	**Yes**	**Mandate Effects**	
Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2033?	**No**	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	**No**
		Contains private-sector mandate?	**No**

* = between zero and $500,000.

H.R. 6273 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a five-year program at five of its medical centers to improve safety and suicide care for veterans. The bill would direct VA to select the sites after nine months of evaluation and to use the curriculum from the Zero Suicide Institute of the Education Development Center (the Institute). The bill would authorize VA to extend the program for another two years; CBO anticipates the department would do so.

The bill would require VA to develop the program with the Department of Health and Human Services and other relevant public and private organizations. VA would designate 5 to 10 employees at each participating medical center who would be trained by the Institute. VA would work closely with the Institute to formulate plans, collect data, and adopt approaches to caring for patients at risk of suicide.

To satisfy the bill's staffing requirements, CBO expects that VA would assign duties to some current agency employees and hire 25 new program coordinators at five participating facilities. At the average annual rate of $100,000 per new employee, salaries and benefits for those coordinators would total $18 million over the 2023-2032 period. CBO also expects that VA would pay for curriculum materials, seminars, and consulting fees from the Institute. Based on data about similar training costs, CBO estimates that program planning, development, and recurring training would cost about $280,000 a year, for a total of $2 million over the 2023-2032 period.

Finally, the bill would require VA to report to the Congress annually on the progress of the program and provide a final report upon the conclusion of the program. Based on information about similar reports, CBO estimates satisfying that requirement would cost less than $500,000 over the 2023-2032 period.

In total, CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost $20 million over the 2023-2032 period.

Some of the employees from the program would be treating veterans who have been exposed to environmental hazards. CBO expects that some of the costs of implementing the bill would be paid from the new Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF) established by Public Law 117-168, the Honoring our PACT Act. The TEF is a mandatory appropriation that VA will use to pay for health care, disability claims processing, medical research, and IT modernization that benefit veterans who were exposed to environmental hazards.

Additional spending from the TEF would occur if legislation increases the costs of similar activities that benefit veterans with such exposure. CBO estimates that 21 percent of such additional costs would be paid from the fund in 2023, growing to 42 percent in 2032 as costs for those activities increase over time. Those percentages are based on the amount of formerly discretionary appropriations that CBO estimated will be provided through the new mandatory appropriation as specified in the Honoring our PACT Act.

Given the additional spending from the TEF, CBO estimates that over the 2023-2032 period, implementing the bill would increase spending subject to appropriation by $14 million and direct spending by $6 million.

The costs of the legislation, detailed in Table 1, fall within budget function 700 (veterans benefits and services).

Table 1.
Estimated Budgetary Effects of H.R. 6273

	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars											
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2023-2027	2023-2032
Increases in Spending Subject to Appropriation												
Estimated Authorization	*	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	8	14
Estimated Outlays	*	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	8	14
Increases in Direct Spending												
Estimated Budget Authority	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	*	0	0	4	6
Estimated Outlays	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	*	0	0	4	6

* = between zero and $500,000.

The Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 establishes budget-reporting and enforcement procedures for legislation affecting direct spending or revenues. The net changes in outlays that are subject to those pay-as-you-go procedures are shown in Table 1.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Etaf Khan. The estimate was reviewed by Leo Lex, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.