



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

STRATEGIC PLAN
2018–2022



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General



MISSION

To serve veterans and the public by conducting effective oversight of the programs and operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) through independent audits, inspections, reviews, and investigations.

VISION

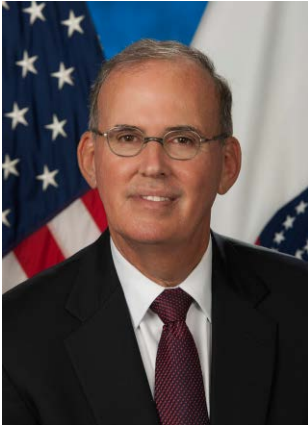
To be recognized as an independent and fair voice for veterans and their families that makes meaningful improvements to VA programs and services, while being responsive to the concerns of veterans service organizations, Congress, VA employees, and the public.

To achieve this vision, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) will

- Make meaningful recommendations that enhance VA programs and operations, as well as prevent and address fraud, waste, and abuse;
- Identify opportunities to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness throughout VA and help ensure taxpayer dollars are appropriately spent;
- Safeguard the OIG's independence, consistent with governing laws and policy;
- Identify impactful issues proactively and strategically;
- Produce reports that meet quality standards, including being accurate, timely, proportionate, objective, and thorough;
- Act with transparency by promptly releasing reports that are not otherwise prohibited from disclosure;
- Promote accountability of VA employees; and
- Treat whistleblowers and others who provide information with respect and dignity, including protecting the identities of individuals who wish to remain anonymous.

VALUES

- Meet the highest standards of professionalism, character, and integrity and accept responsibility for actions.
- Promote diversity, individual perspectives and expertise, and equal opportunity throughout the OIG.
- Maintain a collaborative and engaging work environment that attracts, develops, and retains the highest quality staff.
- Honor veterans and the individuals who serve them by continually striving for excellence.



I am pleased to present the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Strategic Plan for 2018–2022. This plan outlines our goals and objectives in promoting the efficiency, effectiveness, and integrity of VA’s programs and operations to better serve the needs of veterans and their families. It also describes the strategies that will advance our efforts to deter and address criminal activity, waste, and abuse while promoting progress and innovation throughout VA.

This strategic plan aligns with the priorities of OIG leaders at multiple levels, as well as Hotline contacts, emergent needs, and stakeholder feedback. With this plan, the OIG will focus on evolving challenges and efforts that can drive the most meaningful and expansive positive change for VA and the veterans it serves. The strategic plan builds on what we know of ongoing management challenges and high-risk areas facing the Department to better identify the underlying causes of significant problems.

The plan focuses not only on the oversight of programmatic areas, such as VA health care and benefits, but also examines key factors that cut across VA administrations and program offices driving success or perpetuating deficiencies. These include VA’s stewardship of taxpayer dollars, leadership and governance, and the future of VA and its capacity for innovation.

The OIG honors its commitment to veterans by ensuring that our oversight mission, goals, and strategies are grounded in the principles of independence, transparency, objectivity, fairness, and the drive to improve care for the men and women who have served our country. We look forward to continuing our work with VA, Congress, veterans service organizations, and others affected by this plan as we address the difficult challenges facing VA in the years ahead and share information on its progress and successes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Missal". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light gray background.

MICHAEL J. MISSAL
Inspector General

Last updated August 2018

Strategic Goals

The following five strategic goals are responsive to areas of need identified by VA, external agencies and organizations, the veteran community, other stakeholders, and OIG personnel. They reflect the OIG's unwavering commitment to veterans, their families, and the public, and to supporting the VA leaders and staff who serve them.

- 1. Healthcare Services.** Improve veterans' access to exemplary health care by identifying opportunities to improve the quality, management, efficiency, and delivery of patient-centered care in VA facilities and in the community.
- 2. Benefits for Veterans.** Help ensure that veterans and their families receive benefits in a timely manner, and superior services for which they are eligible, by making recommendations to advance expeditious and accurate VA decision-making and processes for delivering benefits.
- 3. Stewardship of Taxpayer Dollars.** Identify procedures and strategies for making the most responsible use of VA appropriated funds, including sound and closely monitored procurement practices and financial systems that reduce the risk of fraud, waste, and misuse of resources.
- 4. Leadership and Governance.** Address emergent, pervasive, and persistent problems within VA that have arisen or gone unaddressed because of failures in leadership, including lack of accountability, poor governance, staffing deficits, and misconduct by individuals in positions of trust.
- 5. Information Systems and Innovation.** Assess and recommend enhancements to VA's infrastructure systems, including information technology, data security, and financial management that support VA operations. Through findings and report recommendations, highlight practices that promote quality standards that can be implemented throughout VA, particularly those that effectively use program planning, budget forecasting, and other predictive tools.

These goals will be advanced through VA OIG audits, inspections, reviews, and investigations that have the greatest impact on veterans' lives, investments of taxpayer dollars, and the public interest.

Top Strategic Objectives

Goal 1. Healthcare Services

- Promote access to healthcare providers who are qualified to address veterans' often distinct physical and behavioral health needs in a timely manner
- Oversee the quality of care provided by VA and its community providers

Goal 2. Benefits for Veterans

- Recommend improvements in decision-making and accountability at every stage in the benefits process—from eligibility determinations through delivery and appeals
- Advance the quality and delivery of VA services such as transitional assistance, home loans, training/education, and fiduciary and caregiver support

Goal 3. Stewardship of Taxpayer Dollars

- Identify savings and monetary recoveries by scrutinizing VA's financial management and controls, high-risk programs, and process efficiencies
- Focus criminal and administrative investigations on holding employees, contractors, and others accessing VA resources accountable for illegal or unethical conduct

Goal 4. Leadership and Governance

- Establish the root causes—and who is accountable—for identified problems including leadership vacancies, failures to meet ethical standards, and lack of policies or guidance
- Examine governance structures to determine if reporting lines and information-sharing mechanisms are effective and encourage efficient VA operations and program implementation

Goal 5. Information Systems and Innovation

- Review current and proposed financial, health record, inventory, and other electronic systems for their effectiveness in achieving VA goals, controlling costs, meeting user needs, and ensuring information is used, shared, and secured in a lawful and ethical manner
- Examine VA planning efforts on high-risk initiatives and encourage the use of innovative approaches
- Recommend improvements to VA's organizational supports, policies, and guidance to advance programs and operations and remedy problems observed in multiple sites
- Promote promising practices identified through OIG work or through exchanges with VA staff and veterans' groups and recognize progress made by VA in implementing OIG recommendations

Key Strategies

In order to prioritize limited resources, the OIG must focus on work that will yield results with the greatest possible impact on the lives of veterans and their families. The OIG receives nearly 40,000 contacts each year through its Hotline alone. Requests from Congress, concerns from VA, issues raised by other oversight agencies, leads from other stakeholders, and OIG groundwork all contribute to a vast pool of potential projects. In addressing fraud, waste, abuse, inefficiencies, and lack of effectiveness, the OIG employs approaches that result in saving and recovering taxpayer dollars whenever possible, as well as recommending improvements to VA programs and operations.

The full engagement of qualified OIG staff is critical to ensuring all work is meaningful and impactful. To that end, the OIG is committed to recruiting and retaining a diverse, dedicated, and principled staff. All OIG personnel are trained to conduct their work with objectivity, high-quality standards, independence, and respect for the efforts of VA personnel on the front lines of service delivery to veterans.

The following are strategies that OIG staff should use for ensuring that oversight efforts are successful and have a significant positive effect.

Strategies for Achieving Goals and Objectives

Make recommendations to address root causes of identified problems

The OIG issues findings and recommendations that are based on available evidence, information gained from fieldwork and interviews, and an increased use of data analytics and research. OIG work that identifies areas of concern or wrongdoing also examines who is responsible, failures in oversight, and the underlying causes of new and persistent problems.

Improve collaborations that yield timely products

The OIG leverages expertise across its offices and uses newly established teams to increase specialization and collaboration. Stakeholder engagement and problem solving with VA staff are also critical to implementing OIG goals. For reports and work products to be of value to stakeholders and veterans, the OIG recognizes they must be accurate, fair, objective, current, and practical.

**Focus available
resources on high-
impact oversight work**

The OIG seeks to identify criminal activity, significant VA program and operational deficiencies, and wrongdoing through audits, inspections, reviews, and investigations. The following criteria are among those considered in determining the impact, nature, and scope of OIG work that will advance its goals and objectives:

- Risk of harm to veterans and their families (both well-being and financial)
- Number of veterans affected by a particular system, process, or program change or failure
- Record of performance by VA programs or operations, including whether they are new or required to be implemented quickly
- Amount of VA funding invested in specific systems, operations, programs, or topic areas
- Substantial changes in policy, structure, or direction by VA that has the potential for eroding controls, efficiency, or effectiveness
- Areas considered high risk by OIG staff through fieldwork or trends detected by Hotline, data analytics, investigations, or other internal groups
- High-risk areas reported by GAO or other oversight groups (internal and external to VA), as well as areas of interest identified by Congress or the veteran community
- VA contracts and third-party agreements that may require additional oversight
- The public interest

The resulting audits, reviews, inspections, and investigations generally yield reports (or summaries of successful criminal investigations) to inform the veteran community, public, Congress, VA, and others about OIG findings and recommendations. To ensure transparency, the OIG publishes all reports, unless prohibited by law or privacy provisions. These published reports are extensively disseminated and posted on the OIG website. When appropriate, OIG staff also provide outreach through news releases, social media, congressional testimony, and briefings. Reports and outreach often prompt increases in calls to the OIG Hotline and provide opportunities to meet with stakeholders to exchange additional information that informs future OIG strategic work plans.

Outcome Measures

In assessing the successful implementation of the OIG's strategic goals and objectives, the following are among the quantitative measures that will be used that are consistent with previously reported performance measures:

- Percentage of reports (audits, inspections, reviews, and other published products) issued that identify opportunities for improvement and provide recommendations for corrective action
- Percentage of recommendations implemented within one year. The OIG also provides as a resource on its public website, a dashboard with report recommendations and their status as implemented/not implemented and additional information in its *Semiannual Reports to Congress*
- Monetary benefits (dollars in millions) from audits, investigations, contract reviews, inspections, and other reviews
- Return on investment (monetary benefits divided by cost of operations in dollars)
- Percentage of recoveries achieved resulting from postaward contract reviews
- Percentage of investigative cases that result in criminal, civil, or administrative actions
- Number of arrests, indictments, convictions, criminal complaints, pretrial diversions, and administrative sanctions

The OIG also will consider and highlight such qualitative measures as success in identifying responsible parties for recognized problems and feedback from veterans, VA staff, whistleblowers, and other stakeholders on the quality and usefulness of OIG products. In addition, congressional interest in OIG work, hearing testimony, and other engagement that informs policymaking will be noted, as well as changes in VA systems, policies, or practices resulting in part from OIG recommendations.

All measures will help inform ongoing changes to the strategic plan, which will be continually reviewed and adjusted to meet evolving needs.

Challenges and Risks to OIG's Strategic Plan

Consistent with the provisions of the *Government Performance and Results Act of 1993*, the OIG has identified several potential internal complications and challenges “external to the agency and beyond its control” that may impact its ability to fully realize its strategic goals. These risks include such internal issues as the ability to quickly recruit, hire, and retain qualified staff with expertise in particular subject areas, and the rate at which newly created specialized teams can become operational.

External challenges include the unpredictability of future funding levels and federal shutdowns or hiring freezes that can interrupt the progression of project staffing and implementation. Similarly, failures of critical infrastructure within VA that the OIG needs to access vital information can be a significant impediment. Examples include VA deficiencies in implementing new or existing inventory, records, or financial management systems needed to conduct audits or other oversight work. The OIG also remains limited by its lack of subpoena power to compel former VA employees' testimony. Changes in VA's technology, policies, staffing, and guidance can affect the direction of OIG efforts—particularly those that lead to VA restructuring that can effectively obfuscate problems. The level of engagement and receptiveness of VA leaders, and vacancies in key positions, will also shape OIG efforts.

The OIG must be flexible in order to remain responsive to veterans and their caregivers, Congress, VA leaders, OIG staff working in the field, and others who can identify exigent or emerging issues. Both external and internal challenges may require the OIG to prioritize specific projects and reallocate resources to projects that present the greatest risks to VA or harm to veterans.

OIG History and Statutory Authority

In October 1978, Public Law 95-452, *Inspector General Act of 1978*, was enacted, establishing a statutory Inspector General for VA. The Inspector General has authority to inquire into all VA programs and activities as well as the related activities of persons or parties performing under grants, contracts, or other agreements. Under the law, as amended, the Inspector General is responsible for

- conducting and supervising audits and investigations;
- exercising full law enforcement authority;
- recommending policies designed to promote economy and efficiency in the administration of—and to prevent and detect criminal activity, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in—VA programs and operations; and
- keeping the Secretary and Congress fully and currently informed about problems and deficiencies in VA programs and operations and the need for corrective action.

In addition, Public Law 100-322, *Veterans' Benefits and Services Act of 1988*, charged the OIG with oversight of the quality of VA health care.

Organizational Overview

The OIG is headquartered in Washington, DC, and has more than 40 field offices located throughout the country. In addition to the Immediate Office of Inspector General, the OIG is organized into the following offices:

- Audits and Evaluations
- Counselor to the Inspector General
- Contract Review
- Healthcare Inspections
- Investigations
- Management and Administration
- Special Reviews

The Immediate Office of Inspector General

The Inspector General and Deputy Inspector General provide leadership and set strategic direction for a nationwide staff of auditors, investigators, inspectors, attorneys, healthcare professionals, and support personnel who conduct independent oversight of the second largest agency in the federal government. The office includes congressional and media affairs staff who ensure that information is accurately and promptly released and that requests from reporters and legislators are appropriately addressed.

The Office of Audits and Evaluations

This office provides independent oversight of VA's activities to improve the integrity of its programs and operations. Staff are involved in evaluating such diverse areas as healthcare inventory and financial systems, administration of benefits, resource utilization, acquisitions, construction, and information security. This work addresses VA program results; economy and efficiency; controls; fraud indicators; and compliance with legal mandates, policies, and other guidance. Staff also identify opportunities to enhance VA operations and veteran care and support.

The Office of Counselor to the Inspector General

The Counselor's office provides independent legal advice to OIG leaders and is involved in all aspects of office operations. OIG attorneys provide legal support for investigations, audits, and inspections; work with OIG investigators in developing *qui tam* and *False Claims Act* matters; represent OIG in employment litigation and personnel matters; and inform legislative proposals and congressional briefings. The Counselor's office also oversees the work of the Release of Information Office and the Office of Contract Review.

The Office of Contract Review

Under the supervision of the Counselor, the office provides preaward, postaward, and other pricing reviews of Federal Supply Schedule, construction, and healthcare provider contracts. Preaward reviews provide VA contracting officers with assistance and information needed to negotiate fair and reasonable prices, and to protect the interests of veterans and taxpayers. Postaward reviews assess compliance with contract terms and conditions and help recover identified overcharges.

The Office of Healthcare Inspections

Healthcare Inspections assesses VA's efforts to maintain a fully functional healthcare program that promotes high-quality patient care and safety and prevents adverse events. Staff conduct inspections prompted by OIG Hotline complaints, congressional requests, and other leads. The office conducts inspections of individual medical facilities and systems. Field staff participate in Comprehensive Healthcare Inspection Program (CHIP) site visits focusing on leadership, quality management, and adherence to requirements and standards for patient care provision and documentation. Facility results are aggregated into summary reports that identify national trends. This office also conducts statistically supported national reviews of topical issues and provides consultations to criminal investigators and audit staff as needed.

The Office of Investigations

This office investigates crimes involving VA programs and operations by employees and nonemployees. Criminal investigations focus on such issues as benefits and procurement fraud (including Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business fraud); embezzlement, extortion, and bribery; drug theft and diversion; theft of VA resources and data; identity theft; homicide, manslaughter, sexual assault, and rape; and threats against VA employees, patients, facilities, and computer systems. Staff also investigate allegations of serious violations of policies and procedures by high-ranking VA leaders such as misuse of government resources and official time, preferential treatment, abuse of authority, nepotism, and travel irregularities.

The Office of Management and Administration

Staff provide comprehensive support services to the OIG. This office promotes organizational effectiveness and efficiency by providing reliable and timely financial, personnel, budgetary, and information technology services to the organization. The office also oversees the OIG Hotline, which receives, screens, and refers all allegations and complaints for additional action. Cases are accepted on a select basis including those having the most potential risk to veterans, VA programs and operations, or for which the OIG may be the only avenue of redress. In addition, through report follow-up, the office helps to ensure that corrective actions in response to OIG recommendations are effectively monitored and resolved.

The Office of Special Reviews

The Office of Special Reviews was created in January 2018 to increase the OIG's flexibility and capacity to quickly conduct reviews of significant events and emergent issues not squarely within the focus of a single existing OIG directorate or office. It is led by an executive director and a deputy director, who are staffing the office with professionals with a broad array of expertise. This office undertakes projects assigned to it by the Inspector General and works collaboratively with the other directorates to review topics and issues of interest that span multiple offices, such as community care for veterans.

For more information, please visit the OIG home page at www.va.gov/oig.

For more information about the OIG, visit the website:

www.va.gov/oig

Follow the OIG on Twitter:

@VetAffairsOIG

**To report suspected criminal activity, waste, abuse, mismanagement,
and safety issues to the OIG, contact the Hotline:**

Online: www.va.gov/oig/hotline

Mail: VA Inspector General Hotline (53E)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Telephone: (800) 488-8244

Fax: (202) 495-5861

