

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

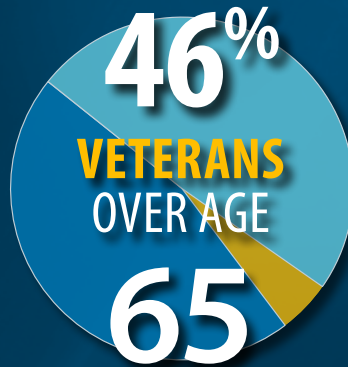


# 2016 BIENNIAL REPORT TO CONGRESS VETERAN OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

# VA BY THE NUMBERS

369,181

NUMBER OF **EMPLOYEES**



**33%**  
VA **EMPLOYEES** WHO ARE VETERANS

25%

OF VETERANS ARE  
**MINORITIES**



9%

OF VETERANS ARE  
**WOMEN**



1.02 MILLION  
VA **EDUCATION** BENEFICIARIES



2.56 MILLION

ACTIVE VA **HOME LOAN** PARTICIPANTS

1,234

HEALTH CARE FACILITIES



12,000

NUMBER OF  
VA **SOCIAL**  
**WORKERS**  
SERVING  
VETERANS  
IN FY15



135

VA NATIONAL **CEMETERIES**

35,000



NUMBER OF  
**BURIALS/**  
**CEREMONIES**  
PERFORMED IN FY15



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# LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY



**“VA’s expansive mission to care for those who have borne the battle is the highest priority of our dedicated employees who focus on fulfilling the promise to improve access to outstanding care and service for our Veterans, their families and their survivors.”**

This report specifically describes and illustrates the outreach programs conducted by all VA administrations and special staff during the past two years to increase awareness and access to VA benefits and services.

Our vision is a Veterans Affairs that is the No. 1 customer-service agency in the Federal government. That vision is guiding all our efforts. It is simple. It is achievable. And we are getting there.

The Department of Veterans Affairs FY 2014-2020 Strategic Plan describes our three Strategic Goals to achieve our mission: empower Veterans to improve their well-being, enhance and develop trusted partnerships and manage and improve VA operations to deliver seamless and integrated support.

In October 2015, we updated our Agency Priority Goals to better address the challenges Veterans were experiencing, while keeping faith with the FY 2014-2020 Strategic Plan. Our four 2016-2017 Agency Priority Goals are to: Improve Veterans Experience with VA, Improve VA Employee Experience, Improve Access to Health Care as Experienced by the Veteran and Improve Dependency Claims Processing.

VA is reorganizing for success. Our MyVA Transformation is perhaps the largest restructuring in the history of the department. It is called MyVA because we want Veterans to view us as an organization that belongs to them, providing quality care in the ways they need and want to be served.

Our five MyVA strategies are about rebuilding trust with Veterans, their families and survivors and the American people. They are a concerted approach leveraging VA’s immense scope and scale so we can give every Veteran an exceptional experience that is easy, consistent and memorable.



To accomplish all that, we're focused on:

- Improving the Veteran experience.
- Improving the employee experience.
- Achieving support services excellence.
- Establishing a culture of continuous performance improvement.
- Enhancing strategic partnerships.

We are laser-focused on improving the Veteran experience. Veterans are noticing. Our experience metrics show that nearly 60 percent of Veterans surveyed in June 2016 “trust VA to fulfill our country’s commitment to Veterans.” That is up from 47 percent less than six months earlier in December 2015. And now, 74 percent of Veterans report they get the services they need, up from 65 percent a year ago.

True transformation is a marathon. It is not a sprint. It takes several years to turn any large organization around, and we are going to continue working hard. We are accelerating change, and it will take all hands. It will take the continued strong support of Veterans Service Organizations, stakeholders and local communities. It will take the President’s continued devotion. And it will take the cooperation and support of Congress. That is an absolute certainty.

My greatest concern right now is to see Veterans’ MyVA Transformation continue to completion.

VA’s most essential partner is Congress. Congress legislates benefits we provide Veterans. It is Congress that has to fund those benefits. Congress holds the keys to many of the priorities Veterans have identified as most important to them, and accomplishing those priorities is critical to our transformation. These priorities are most important to providing Veterans and their families the benefits and services they earned, in the way they deserve.

As committed as we are to doing all we can for Veterans with everything we are given, there are

simply some things we cannot do without the help of Congress.

In late September of 2016, Congress enacted several prominent VA priorities, including VA’s full FY 2017 appropriation, necessary extensions of authority, some but not all major medical construction authorizations, and enabling legislation for significant homelessness efforts on VA’s West LA hospital campus. However, many critical legislative priorities remain. So Veterans are counting on Congress.

More than 100 legislative proposals exist for Veterans in the President’s 2017 Budget—many vital to maintaining our ability to purchase non-VA care.

Only Congress can modernize and clarify our purchased care authorities to streamline access to community care programs in years ahead. We submitted our plan last October, but we need congressional action to execute it.

Only Congress can enact legislation so we can better compete with the private sector and get the best medical professionals to choose to serve at VA.

Perhaps most importantly, only Congress can modernize the archaic appeals process. Last year, the Board of Veterans Appeals adjudicated an appeal that originated 25 years ago. Under current law, with no significant change in resources, the number of Veterans awaiting a decision will soar by 179 percent by 2027—from 500,000 to nearly 1.3 million.

VA exists to serve Veterans. We spent the last two years working together to find new and better ways to provide high quality care and administer benefits effectively and efficiently through responsible use of taxpayer dollars. Thank you for your continued, steadfast support of Veterans.

Sincerely,



Robert A. McDonald

# OVERVIEW



**Chapter 63 of Title 38, U.S.C., defines the outreach mission for VA as to provide information and awareness to Veterans and family members so they have the proper tools to access VA benefits and services.**

VA, as an institution, is an integral part of the country's broader Veteran community. The breadth and depth of VA's benefits and services are unmatched, anywhere. Millions of Veterans rely on the direct resources and services that the Department provides. Still, many Veterans are unaware of the vast array of benefits. The last two years have been extremely important for both VA and Veterans as the agency worked to transform its relationship with Veterans, Servicemembers and their family members including how VA performed outreach and engagement.

Increasing Veterans' awareness of their benefits means finding Veterans where they are and responding to their information needs in every way. Understanding how and where Veterans access information—through smart phones, newscasts, friends and colleagues, radio and the Internet—is part of the task. A first step is acknowledging and understanding that "Veterans" are not a monolithic group, but rather a highly diverse population of more than 22 million people. They include all ethnicities, genders and sexual identities; span ages 18 to 100; represent every religion and no religion and live in rural and





urban areas. One trait unifies this very American population—proud service to their country.

Recognizing the diversity of the Veteran population, VA has strengthened its outreach to specific populations such as women Veterans, Native American Veterans and other minorities. Additionally, embracing new ways Veterans are receiving information has led VA to use new technologies for outreach, such as virtual town halls, Webinars and real time digital Q&As.

This, combined with using research and data-driven decision-making, has helped program offices improve targeted communications through hyper-localized digital advertising, community events and working with the local media to share a wide variety of stories and information.

Traditional types of outreach remain essential tools. Advertising and public service announcements continue to be successful, especially for suicide

prevention information and to reach homeless Veterans. VA's Web site continuously evolves with new, relevant content, including videos, testimonials and easy-to-understand information that targets all Veteran populations.

This report reflects the many outreach activities and efforts implemented by VA that engage, educate and inform Veterans about the benefits and services available to them. Some highlights are:

- **The Veterans Experience Office (VEO)** is a standalone office that evolved from the MyVA transformation efforts. VEO is designed to understand, measure and optimize the Veterans experience across the enterprise and in local communities. The office leverages industry best practices and methodologies to develop agile and executable solutions based on direct feedback from Veterans and their families.

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One component of VEO is community engagement, which consists of field teams across the nation. In addition to other initiatives, these teams conduct outreach and work with Community Veteran Engagement Boards (CVEB) to maximize the collective impact of local services, stakeholders and federal/state agencies working together to improve Veteran outcomes. The VEO team is helping to ensure that VA leaders have begun participating more actively in community-based efforts. The full list of CVEBs can be found at: <http://www.va.gov/nace/myVA/state.asp?STATE=All>

On September 9, 2016, VA hosted an e-Summit open to all CVEBs, community stakeholders and interested members of the community. The e-Summit is the first step in building an integrated network of communities and a chance to share best practices and lessons learned.

- **Strategic Partnerships** Forming new partnerships has been a major priority of the past two years, and we have made significant progress, including standing up the Strategic Partnerships office to develop these relationships. The mission of the office is to develop strategic partnerships that leverage resources external to VA on an effective and consistent basis to improve the Veterans' experience while enhancing productivity and efficiency across VA. The effort in the past two years has been to develop objectives and processes to ensure partnerships and collaborations are underscored by mutual trust, transparency and measurable impact and outcomes. Successful programs are ones that are sustainable and err on the side of action while ensuring the combined capabilities are more

**VA digital outreach and social media efforts continued to reach a large portion of the Veteran population, almost doubling the number reached in 2014 to now more than 9 million unique visitors.**

effective and efficient in serving Veterans. One example is the **Brain Trust** summit, below.

- **Brain Trust** Building on the extraordinary leadership and trailblazing efforts of a number of distinguished VA brain researchers, VA, through the Strategic Partnerships office, convened many of the most influential voices in the field of brain health - to include the Department of Defense, the sports industry, private sector, Federal government, Veterans and community partners - to identify and advance solutions for mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Issues related to brain health and head trauma transcend the Veteran and military community, impacting all Americans. By highlighting the themes of collaborative research, medical technology and sports innovation for player safety, Brain Trust participants discussed the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of Veterans, athletes and Americans in general - suffering from head trauma related injuries. The event served as a showcase for many of the advancements that VA is pioneering to improve brain health for Veterans, the military and for the American public at large.

The following organizations teamed with VA as event partners: Amazon, Booz Allen Hamilton, Comcast, GE Healthcare, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Optum Health and Philips.

- **The Summer of Service** During the summer of 2015, VA facilities participated in a national initiative called the Summer of Service. Between the program's launch in May and Veterans Day, VA put out the call to partners and the community to increase volunteer involvement. The program was a huge success, exceeding all goals for mobilizing community volunteers to serve Veterans and their families. Community by community, state by state, VA and the country came together to serve those who have served this nation. Approximately 300,000 citizens across the country joined to honor the nation's sacred commitment to caring for Veterans, nearly tripling the number of volunteers seen in facilities in the past.



- 50th Anniversary of Vietnam War Commemoration** On March 29, 2016, VA began its commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War by acknowledging the service and sacrifice of Vietnam War Veterans and their families. The day featured a wreath-laying ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial by VA Secretary Bob McDonald and Defense Secretary Ash Carter. VA planned and coordinated more than 400 outreach events across the country and gave more than 180,000 commemorative lapel pins to Veterans or their family members.
  - Reduced Veteran Homelessness** VA, working with collaborators, has reduced Veteran homelessness by 47 percent since 2010. VA housed over 360,000 Veterans and family members and rehoused or prevented others from becoming homeless. Nearly 350 Veteran Stand Down events across the United States provided help to homeless Veterans ensuring they had access to VA benefits and services to exit homelessness. Additionally, VA conducted a large-scale digital and print advertising campaign to drive Veterans to much needed resources, which resulted in a 50 percent increase in call volume to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans.
  - National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs** Secretary Bob McDonald again signed the historic memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA). With this MOU, VA renewed commitments to recognize state-implemented best practices that other states could replicate. By continuing to strengthen its relationships with individual state Veterans Affairs offices, VA will be able leverage states' detailed knowledge of their Veteran population.
  - Minority Outreach** The Center for Women Veterans and The Center for Minority Veterans spearheaded over 11,000 events, including digital and traditional outreach events reaching nearly a million stakeholders each year.
  - Digital and Social Media** VA digital outreach and social media efforts continued to reach a large portion of the Veteran population, almost doubling the number reached in 2014. Currently, VA's Facebook pages total 1,130,000 followers, and its Twitter feeds have 316,995 followers. *Vantage Point*, VA's blog, averages 321,000 visitors each month.
  - Explore VA** Since 2013, VA has pursued a comprehensive digital national outreach program called Explore VA that informs and educates Veterans about VA benefits and services and encourages them to apply. The program's centerpiece is its Web site [www.explore.va.gov](http://www.explore.va.gov). The site satisfies a need for a simpler, more intuitive way for users to navigate VA benefits information and uses plain, clear, easy-to-understand language. The Web site has had more than 6.7 million visits since the Explore campaign was launched.
- The above activities are only some of the efforts VA implemented in the last two fiscal years to reach Veterans, family members and others about the resources and benefits of VA. We know more work needs to be done. Outreach is an ongoing process that requires constant review, updates and new ideas. We will continue to work together and with Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other Federal agencies and state organizations to reach Veterans with information about the benefits they have earned.



# STAFF OFFICES

## OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 3,915,070 visits to the Explore Web site
- 996,849 application starts from Explore Web site
- 61 percent increase in users of VA social media platforms Twitter, YouTube and Facebook
- 386,000 average monthly page views of the *VAntage Point* blog

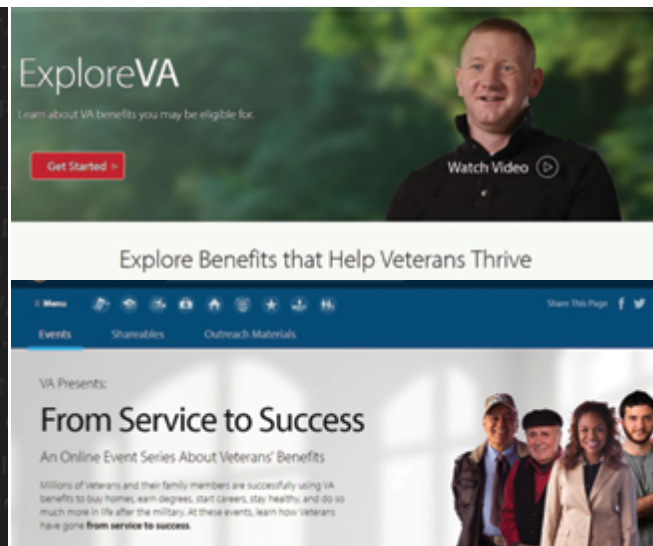
The National Veterans Outreach Office (NVO) at VA's Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is responsible for coordinating outreach activities across VA's Administrations and offices and ensuring resources are deployed properly, so that all outreach activities, events and opportunities are considered and addressed. The team also works closely with communications staff from VSOs and NGOs, meeting monthly to plan for outreach events and

the distribution of educational materials about VA benefits and services.

Part of the office's responsibility is coordinating and executing the National Veterans Day Observance at Arlington Cemetery. In the last several years, this has included planning and oversight of the National Veterans Day Committee, comprising more than 65 VSO and Military Service Organization (MSO) representatives.

To help promote Veterans Day and surrounding events, NVO hosted the annual competition for Veterans and others to submit artwork for Veterans Day posters and other promotional material. NVO oversaw the winning selection and then managed the creation and distribution of the artwork across the country for display at VA facilities, online and other locations.

Since 2013, NVO has overseen Explore VA, a digital outreach program designed to inform and educate Veterans about VA benefits and services, and encourage them to apply. The Web site [www.explore.va.gov](http://www.explore.va.gov) is the program's centerpiece.





The site provides users with clearly written information on nine main benefits categories and clear instructions on how to apply for each benefit. It also guides Veterans to more detailed information on the [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov) and [www.vets.gov](http://www.vets.gov) pages. This site has become a go-to resource for Veterans separating from service by providing the basic information they need to successfully navigate VA.

Since the Explore campaign was launched, there have been more than 6.7 million visits to the Explore Web site. Of those, more than 1.3 million visitors moved on to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) online application portals to start the process of applying for VA benefits.

OPA continued to grow its subscriber-based email program in the last two fiscal years. The program was developed to communicate directly with users who signed up to receive information. Emails are deployed to the subscriber base on a regular basis, sharing information about outreach efforts, benefits and services, events and more.

Finally, engagement across VA's numerous digital media channels—including Facebook, Twitter, the *VAntage Point* blog and Instagram—have continued to grow at a steady rate since the Office of Digital Media Engagement was stood up. The team continued to seek out new ways to share content and information with Veterans and others, including videos and Vines, online town hall platforms, photographs available through Instagram and Flickr and more.

## SPOTLIGHT ON: EXPLORE VA COLLABORATIONS

In October 2014, NVO began reaching out to VSOs, NGOs and the private sector to collaborate with them in interactive online events designed to educate Veterans and their family members on VA benefits and services. To date, NVO has held 17 social media events on collaborators' social media sites. These are virtual office hours during which VA experts from different offices and Administrations and VSO staff collaborate, working to answer any questions Veterans might have about VA benefits, including questions on eligibility and how to apply.

Before each event, VA posts information on the Explore VA Web site and, along with its collaborators and other stakeholders, promotes these outreach events on social media channels, via email and through other platforms. According to data analysis, these events reach hundreds of thousands of Veterans each year.

An event in August 2016 highlighting the Vet Center program used a collaborating VSO's Facebook page to conduct a live video tour of a local Vet Center. During this one-hour event, Veterans could enter their zip codes into Facebook and were connected with local staff at nearby Vet Centers.

The screenshot shows a Facebook event page for 'From Service to Success', an online event series about Veterans' benefits. The event is scheduled for September 17, 7-8 p.m. Eastern time. The page features a group photo of five people, a 'Register for event reminders' button, and a video player showing a woman named Natasha speaking. Text on the page describes the event's purpose: to help Veterans learn how to use VA benefits for things like buying homes, earning degrees, and starting careers. It also includes a quote from Natasha: 'The mental health care, based on my experience, has been really helpful and beneficial to me. There are so many different options available.'

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## CENTER FOR FAITH-BASED AND NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIPS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 150 outreach events attended
- 2,345 individuals and organizations reached

VA's Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP) has engaged in diverse outreach efforts to support a VA priority goal: eliminating homelessness among Veterans. Outreach events provided resources for Veterans exiting homelessness and families, connecting them with housing programs and increasing knowledge about VA's services and programs.

The CFBNP shared information with organizations about VA's many programs and services for Veterans, their families, survivors, caregivers and other beneficiaries. Through these efforts, Veterans have benefited from organizations committed to serving and supporting them.

In the last two years, an important area of outreach was connecting Veterans with food through food

pantries in local churches and VA resources via faith-based and non-profit organizations. This was made possible by the Center's relationships with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University.

Together with the VA National Chaplain Center, churches, ministerial associations and the VA Center for Minority Veterans, numerous clergy training events were held to assist clergy, lay leaders and community members in recognizing signs and symptoms of spiritual, emotional and mental trauma. Clergy trainings provided community partners with resources to assist Veterans who suffered trauma and are working to reintegrate back into the community.

Online outreach on VA's Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus pages helped to promote various CFBNP events. Outreach efforts increased the number of stakeholders interested in hosting clergy trainings and inquiries on how to start a Veteran ministry.

With these outreach events, CFBNP reached clergy of various religions and denominations, community-based organizations, college and university students, state and local government staff and other Federal agencies, all who were interested in Veterans' issues and wanted to learn more about how they could play a role in helping Veterans in their local communities.



## CENTER FOR MINORITY VETERANS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 11,000 outreach activities conducted annually
- 850,000 stakeholders reached annually
- 43 percent of Veterans reached at events were minority Veterans
- 9 lunch & learn sessions at other Federal agencies
- 5 virtual town hall meetings

In FY 2015 and FY 2016, the Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) employed a multi-pronged approach to improve outreach to minority Veterans:

- Maintaining and strengthening existing relationships with minority community stakeholders
- Establishing new relationships with approximately 16 stakeholders in minority communities
- Conducting targeted outreach activities at events sponsored by faith-based, military and state agencies as well as VSOs
- Working closely with Minority Veterans Program Coordinators (MVPCs) from the three VA Administrations to conduct targeted outreach to minority Veterans
- Hosting virtual town hall meetings
- Conducting lunch and learn workshops at other Federal agencies
- Participating in the Million Veteran Program outreach and recruitment

CMV, together with other VA offices, conducted virtual town halls to reach Veterans and stakeholders

in a cost efficient and convenient way. Some of the stakeholders CMV staff reached during the town halls included the National Association for the Advancement of Color People (NAACP), Women's Veteran Interactive, American GI Forum, and Texas County Veterans service officers.

As CMV performed outreach, staff collaborated with and shared relevant issues and/or concerns with VA Administrations. For example, when CMV learned about the lack of awareness surrounding burial benefits of Veteran spouses and certain dependent children, worked with the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), who consequently modified its Web site to highlight eligibility for burial benefits.



## CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 216 collaborative meetings
- 49 outreach events
- 64,352 hits to the Web site
- 3 Webinars held addressing resources specific to women Veterans

During the reporting period, the Center for Women Veterans (CWV) spearheaded a National Women Veterans Campaign to improve outreach to women



Veterans. Part of the effort included encouraging VA facilities across the country to hold celebrations in honor of women's military contributions and resiliency. This campaign included holding forums, sessions and workshop events in five VA districts across the country from June through September 2015, reaching more than 1,400 women Veterans.

On March 3, 2016, during Women's History Month, CWV held a Twitter Town Hall that focused on women Veterans in rural locations using the #womenvets hashtag, generating more than 500 posts and more than 41,000 impressions.

In addition to Twitter, CWV leveraged VA's Facebook presence to participate in the **Explore VA: From Service to Success** digital event series that included a Facebook Chat titled VA Serves Women Veterans, held with support from Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). The chat had 2,384 subscribers, with a total reach of 94,495 people.

To help promote the event, CWV secured interviews with staff and airtime in a number of high profile and Veteran-heavy markets, including San Diego and Pittsburgh.

Finally, the CWV staff penned a number of blogs posted to *VAntage Point* to reach women Veterans. Topics included:

- American Corporate Program Mentorship Program
- Collaboration with LeanIn.Org
- Meeting the needs for growing number of women Veterans
- eMentoring for Women Veterans with Academy Women
- Women's History Month's Salute to Vietnam-Era Women Veterans



## HOMELESS VETERANS OUTREACH AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 50 percent increase in year-over-year calls to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (NCCHV)
- 16 percent increase in views of pages on [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless) between FY 2015 and FY 2016
- 12 homeless Veteran issue blogs published that informed readers how they can help prevent and end Veteran homelessness
- 4,000 views of Pathways from Homelessness video

VA's Homeless Veterans Outreach and Strategic Communications Office (HVOSCO) performs outreach activities to expand awareness of VA resources for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The office also collaborates with organizations across the country to fill gaps in the areas of employment, affordable housing and move-in essentials for Veterans exiting homelessness.



In FY 2015 and FY 2016, the office distributed outreach materials about VA homeless programs at conferences in the Washington area, including the 2015 and 2016 National Conference on Ending Homelessness and the 2015 and 2016 National Coalition for Homeless Veterans' conferences. In addition, there were nearly 21,000 visits to the VA Web page in FY 2016, where outreach materials are available for download.

HVOSCO staff contacted more than 260 public, private and non-profit organizations to explore opportunities for collaboration to improve access to VA services among homeless and at-risk Veterans. During FY 2015 and FY 2016, VA developed relationships with 33 organizations that agreed to (1) consider job-ready Veterans exiting homelessness for vacancies, (2) provide move-in essentials for newly housed Veterans, (3) amplify key messages about the need for more affordable housing for Veterans who lack stable housing or (4) expand awareness of VA resources among Veterans.

HVOSCO used a variety of outreach tactics and activities to expand awareness about VA resources for homeless and at-risk Veterans. Staff created a series of videos available online to highlight stories of Veterans who exited homelessness. HVOSCO developed videos to encourage reluctant Veterans to contact VA for help. All videos feature formerly

homeless Veterans who overcame significant obstacles and became stably housed with help from VA staff and partners. The videos are available on VA's YouTube channel and the office's Web site. In addition, more than a dozen success stories about homeless Veteran programs are available on [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless).

HVOSCO executed an earned and paid media campaign to make homeless and at-risk Veterans aware of their VA benefits. This campaign ran from September 2015 until May 2016, and encouraged Veterans to either visit their nearest VA Medical Center or contact NCCHV at (877) 4AID-VET if they were homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. The campaign resulted in a 50 percent increase in calls to NCCHV compared to the previous 12 months. It included advertisements on digital media, billboards, buses and outdoor phone kiosks.

As part of the campaign, outreach materials were developed and disseminated to reach key audiences who were likely to interact with homeless and at-risk Veterans, including first responders, local civil servants, relatives of Veterans, homeless shelter and soup kitchen personnel and others. The office rolled out the campaign in major cities around the country that accounted for approximately 30 percent of all homeless Veterans in the U.S., including Washington, Los Angeles, New York and other cities with large homeless Veteran populations.

HVOSCO used both traditional and non-traditional engagement tactics to provide information about VA homeless Veteran resources to the public, including editorial roundtables with the press. During the roundtables, VA subject matter experts provided details about specific homeless programs and answered questions from reporters. Staff also helped facilitate the publication of more than 12 homeless issue-blogs by Secretary Bob McDonald and other internal and external thought leaders and subject matter experts.

## NATIONAL VETERANS SPORTS PROGRAMS & SPECIAL EVENTS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 5,257 Veterans were provided rehabilitative sport and art therapy opportunities through six national events
- \$8 million in grants were awarded to 86 adaptive sport entities to fund programs in 2015 and 2016

The Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events (NVSP&SE) provides opportunities for Veterans to improve their independence, well-being and quality of life through adaptive sport, recreation and art therapy programs. In 2016, NVSP&SE hosted six national rehabilitation special events for Veterans served by VA medical facilities nationwide. These events included:

- National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic
- National Veterans Wheelchair Games
- National Veterans Golden Age Games
- National Veterans TEE Tournament
- National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic
- National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

To promote these events, NVSP&SE's public affairs team collaborated with media outlets in the local and regional markets for story placement. In addition, staff produced a newsletter for distribution at the events and posting on the NVSP&SE Web site [www.va.gov/adaptivesports](http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports). Staff also contributed blogs to *Vantage Point*.

NVSP&SE also managed an adaptive sports grant program in order to promote the lifelong health of disabled Veterans and members of the Armed

Forces. The program encourages individuals to participate regularly in physical activity and sports. The office estimates that more than 10,000 Veterans with disabilities will participate in these programs.

Staff collaborated with the U.S. Olympic Committee and 41 National Governing Bodies for Paralympic sports in the United States and its Commonwealths and Territories to secure funding assistance for those Veterans training for a Paralympic slot on the U.S. Paralympic Team.

Veteran athletes receiving allowances contributed to outreach through broadcast events such as the Invictus Games and 2016 Rio Paralympic Games. They also participated in VA outreach programs featuring the accomplishments of disabled Veteran athletes.

Finally, NVSP&SE worked with the Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Warrior Care Policy and the military services' wounded warrior programs to better impact the lives of both disabled Veterans and transitioning Servicemembers by providing them with adaptive sports information and aiding their direct participation in adaptive sport activities such as Adaptive Sports Grant events.





## OFFICE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 4 Tribal Consultations conducted by the Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR) in FY 2016 with tribal leaders, tribal organizations and tribal governments
- \$45 million reimbursed to 94 tribal health programs in accordance with signed reimbursement agreements

The Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) serves as the Department's liaison in all intergovernmental affairs matters and is the primary point of contact with Federal, state, local and American Indian and Native Alaskan Tribal Governments.

IGA's mission is to coordinate VA's participation in intergovernmental affairs initiatives, including White House-sponsored activities, and to assess the issues and concerns of state, local and tribal governments and the impact of VA's action on their areas of jurisdiction. The office also facilitates continuous and bilateral communications between state and tribal governments and VA to gain early knowledge of their actions, concerns, issues and supporting programs.

In addition to coordinating intergovernmental affairs, IGA coordinates with other Federal

agencies in developing programs and subject matter exchanges for representatives of foreign governments on Veteran issues. IGA also collaborates with foreign governments on international commemorative events such as the anniversary of foreign wars and battles and official recognition by foreign governments of our Veterans.

The OTGR team works to strengthen and build closer relations between VA, tribal governments and other key Federal, state, private and non-profit organizations in an effort to effectively serve Veterans across Indian country.

OTGR efforts focus on three important goals:

- Facilitating VA's Tribal Consultation Policy
- Facilitating increased access to health care and promoting economic sustainability
- Highlighting opportunities for Veterans to access fiscal, educational, housing and other special programs and benefits through VA

As a result of these efforts, OTGR facilitated four Tribal Consultations in FY 2016 with tribal leaders, tribal organizations and tribal governments. In addition, as of 2016, there are 94 signed reimbursement agreements with tribal health programs for approximately \$45 million in reimbursements. IGA also signed a MOU with the NASDVA that increases the level of commitment and more accurately reflects the MyVA transformation.



# OFFICE OF SMALL AND DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS UTILIZATION

## AT A GLANCE:

- Participated in more than 200 outreach events

The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) provides outreach and liaison support in regards to small business acquisitions to Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs), Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSBs), Small Disadvantaged Businesses, HUBZone Businesses, Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSBs) and others.

To ensure small businesses were aware of the opportunities available at VA, OSDBU staff presented at an annual outreach event at Syracuse University, where they discussed the Veteran Entrepreneurial Programs for start-up Veteran programs, Small Business Development Centers and the International Franchise Association.

The office launched the Framework for Success Webinar series to teach small businesses procurement processes, readiness and how to do business with VA. This overview provided businesses with the ability to make informed decisions to succeed in their business ventures.

In addition, during the reporting period, OSDBU launched the Center for Verification and Evaluation Facebook page, Twitter handle and LinkedIn account to better reach Veteran business owners and other stakeholders.

OSDBU participated in a number of conferences each year, including the annual National Veterans Small Business Engagement conference, a forum dedicated to helping Veteran-owned businesses develop opportunities in the Federal and commercial marketplaces. Each year, more than 3,000 people attend this conference. OSDBU staff also spoke at the Government Procurement Conference, a national

conference geared towards fostering business relationships between the Federal government, prime contractors and small, minority, SDVOSB, VOSBs, WOSBs and HUBZone I Businesses. Staff spoke with over 80 business owners on how to do business with the VA and become procurement ready.

Finally, OSDBU developed relationships with a variety of organizations to help reach target audiences, including: Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), National Veteran Owned Business Association (NVOBA), National Veterans Small Business Coalition (NVSBC) and the National Chamber of Commerce.



## OFFICE OF SURVIVORS ASSISTANCE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 4,000 requests for assistance answered
- 1,200 survivors received introductory letters from office
- 10,000 information pamphlets distributed
- More than 100 survivor-focused events were participated in during the reporting period

The Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) honors the commitment made to Veterans and Servicemembers by serving as a resource for survivor's benefits and services provided by VA.

During the last two years, OSA strengthened working relationships with VSOs that focus primarily on surviving family members of Servicemembers and Veterans. OSA participated in national, regional and local conferences hosted by TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors), Gold Star Wives, Gold Star Families, the Society of Military Widows and Snowball Express.

OSA created new working relationships with other VSOs and MSOs with a goal of providing important information directly to Servicemembers and Veterans before their family members become their survivors. The staff enhanced relationships with The Military Coalition (TMC), National Military Family Association (NMFA), the Navy and Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS) and the Secretary of the Navy's Retiree Council to expand outreach and share information on an unprecedented level. In addition, the office continued to build relationships with a number of VSOs, including the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), VFW, Iraqi and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and Army Emergency Relief (AER) to promote awareness of the role of OSA and its benefits to survivors.



Upon official notification of an active duty Servicemember's death, OSA sends introductory correspondence to the family, which provides information about the office and offers assistance in obtaining benefits and services. During the reporting period, the office sent approximately 1,200 letters.

OSA worked collaboratively with VHA, VBA and NCA to ensure that it addressed survivors' issues quickly and completely. OSA also collaborated with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), specifically the Casualty, Mortuary Affairs and Military Funeral Honors Office, to facilitate a seamless transition from DoD to VA in regard to survivors' issues.

In the past year, OSA established working relationships with other Federal agencies that work with Veterans and their survivors such as the Department of Labor Veteran's Employment and Training Service and the Department of Education Military Education Exchange Consortium.



## VETERAN EMPLOYMENT SERVICES OFFICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 852,691 users of VA for Vets Web site
- 218,021 LinkedIn followers
- 5,958 “likes” on Facebook
- 210,000 email subscribers

The role of the Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO) is to provide employment and career management resources to attract and retain Veteran employees at VA and across the Federal government.

A primary outreach tool for VESO is the VA for Vets Web site ([www.vaforvets.va.gov](http://www.vaforvets.va.gov)), where the office posts job openings as well as employment-related resources and events targeting Veterans and transitioning Servicemembers. The Web site is the hub of most of VESO’s outreach activities.

In addition, VESO proactively reached out to more than 210,000 subscribers through weekly emails, updating them on new openings, resources and more.



## SPOTLIGHT ON: HIRING OUR HEROES TRANSITION SUMMITS

VESO staff collaborated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in developing and sponsoring hiring events across the globe for transitioning Servicemembers.

Two noteworthy events were the European Hiring Our Heroes Transition Summits in Germany and Italy. The overarching goal was to provide much needed guidance and assistance to overseas transitioning military members who often miss much of the transitioning support stateside Servicemembers receive along with several U.S. employers and business leaders. During the summits, VESO participated in employment panels reaching senior military leadership, transitioning military members, family members and spouses. Panel participants provided timely information on best practices for how to prepare as well as answered questions.

VESO staff taught resume classes and participated in networking sessions to stimulate small group engagement. These events reached close to 2,500 Servicemembers from the primary bases and members from military communities surrounding the bases.

Future events stateside with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are planned.



VESO continued to leverage social media by sharing daily and weekly job announcements as well as employment-related resources and events targeting Veterans and transitioning Servicemembers on its organizational Facebook page and a reinvigorated VA LinkedIn page. On Facebook, VESO changed its brand name to VA for Vets, ensuring brand synchronization with its Web site and community presence. In another effort to increase user engagement, VESO created more visually interesting graphics to announce its weekly job postings, resulting in an increase in “clicks.” Both sites provided additional platforms to share resources, job opportunities and more with a broader audience, while increasing VESO’s two-way communications capabilities with Veterans.

In December 2015, VESO created Google Plus and YouTube accounts so the office could conduct Webinars and virtual job fairs for Veterans seeking employment.

The staff collaborated with several internal and external stakeholders and leveraged VA communication channels to amplify its message to a broader audience. VESO collaborated on an Explore VA’s employment services Twitter chat in December 2015, which reached more than **1.21 million users**. Staff also developed content for the *VAntage Point* blog during Public



Service Recognition Week in May 2016 and the annual culinary competition for military chefs in September 2015.

VESO embarked on a small, but highly targeted online campaign at the end of FY 2015. Ads targeting all transitioning Servicemembers and Veterans, regardless of age, race, ethnicity and gender were designed to provide awareness about the services and resources available. The ad campaign increased the number of inquiries into the call center by 46.5 percent.

The staff also leveraged the enthusiasm and commitment of VA’s 120,000 plus Veteran employees when rolling out the Veterans Affinity Group, VESO’s Veteran retention effort that focuses on employee engagement for Veteran employees. More than 400 employees attended the kick-off meeting, some virtually, held at VACO, and more than 350 joined the group.

## VETERANS EXPERIENCE OFFICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- More than 35 outreach events
- 90 CVEBs established to date

To help improve the access that Veterans have to all benefits and services, not just from VA but all community organizations, the Veterans Experience (VE) team engaged local VA leadership and community leaders to build Community Veteran Engagement Boards (CVEBs). Where community boards already existed, the team helped local VA leadership engage and meet the needs and expectations of Veterans. Where community boards do not yet exist, the team helped to convene VA and non-VA groups to participate, identify co-chairs from the community and support the “startup” operations of the board.

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On September 9, 2016, VE hosted the first ever Communities E-Summit. VE organized this virtual event to bring together the CVEBS to hear about best practices and lessons learned, network with other CVEBS and hear how VA is working with local communities to improve Veterans' experiences. Along with a special keynote address from Secretary Bob McDonald, there were five panel discussions with board members of local CVEBs from San Diego, New Orleans, Orlando, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Hartford, Connecticut. The panelists shared their stories of community collaboration and how local communities and VA are working together to make a lasting difference in the lives of Veterans.



VE had active participation from the community boards, Veteran stakeholders and VA leaders who were able to join in the event, with a total of 1,026 registered attendees and over 100 questions/comments received and addressed. This was the first summit of many to help jump-start networking across all CVEBs throughout the nation.

The VE team also spent time in the last several months participating in events to reach Veterans and family members. These events offered maximum interaction and conversation with Veterans, VSOs and other organizations that work with Veterans. In the last 12 months, VE staff participated in numerous events. These included:

- The VE Team co-hosted the State Housing Counsel Summit with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to build a coalition of housing counseling agencies and community organizations in Alabama and promote awareness of foreclosure prevention and assistance to homeless Veterans and those Veterans in danger of becoming homeless. VA provided awareness on the services available to Veterans. The summit also presented an opportunity for VA to learn of community challenges and gaps and to speak with central office homelessness staff on how to address the issues.
- Midwest VE staff attended the Hidden Wounds of War Conference and spoke to many Veteran advocates throughout Michigan about VE's new role, with the goal of developing relationships throughout the region that will help improve the Veteran experience.
- In May 2016, VE staff participated in the Women Veterans Summit in Raleigh, North Carolina. After delivering a presentation, VE representatives took questions and comments from the audience, seeking to gain an understanding around the perception of VA benefits and health care delivery to women Veterans. This staff gained insight into women Veterans' specific issues that they were able to share with VA Administrations and staff offices in an effort to improve accessibility and delivery of services to women Veterans.

These events and activities allowed VE staff to share information about VA benefits and services and hear about personal experiences from Veterans. The Veterans' stories helped VA identify and resolve larger issues that may present challenges to accessing benefits and services.



# NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors Veterans and their families with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our Nation.

**AT A GLANCE:**

- 4,926 events attended
- 1,153,832 Veterans and families engaged
- 17 percent increase in Twitter messaging
- Nearly doubled Facebook “likes”
- 15,099 increase in email subscribers



NCA performs outreach and engagement at both the national and the local levels. NCA outreach engages Veterans and their families, VSOs, Federal and state officials, end-of-life care providers, funeral industry professionals and the public.

During FY 2015-2016, NCA opened three new national cemeteries in Florida and Nebraska: Tallahassee National Cemetery, Cape Canaveral National Cemetery and Omaha National Cemetery. These new cemeteries will serve over 240,000 Veterans and their families as well as provide public venues for Veterans and military services and special events. To educate and inform the public of the new sites, NCA staff reached out to local media and held events in the areas surrounding the new cemeteries.

Additionally, the national outreach team managed numerous events around the country in Washington, small towns and major metropolitan areas. NCA staff participated at every VSO national convention as

well as in funeral and mortuary industry shows. The staff also provided training sessions for hospice care-related CEU credit.

The NCA Mobile Outreach Vehicle (MOV) marked its second year collaborating with Major League Baseball (MLB) during the Grapefruit League’s Spring Training in Florida. The Pittsburgh Pirates, New York Yankees and Washington Nationals welcomed the NCA MOV display where one-on-one discussions about NCA-administered memorial benefits took place before, during and after the games. As an additional gesture of goodwill, MLB asked NCA if the MOV could remain in the fan area between games. This gave NCA additional exposure and visibility to the public. After receiving an invitation to return, NCA MOV was present throughout the summer-long minor league games.

Just before opening day, the Washington National’s Spring Training Magazine featured NCA, which proved to be a force multiplier as NCA was able to find new audiences.

- OVERVIEW
- STAFF OFFICES
- NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION
- VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION
- VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
- CONCLUSION

As a result of the collaboration between NCA and MLB, NCA was able to target Florida's large Veteran population (both year-round and seasonal) to increase awareness, improve benefit utilization and create positive opinions of VA memorial benefits among customers and the communities that are served by nine Florida national cemeteries.

In addition to live events, NCA continued to focus on increasing its digital presence during this period, hosting a live Twitter Town Hall and a live Facebook Town Hall with TAPS on Facebook. NCA used these communication tools, along with its overall agency strategic communications plan, to ensure important messages are getting to stakeholders regarding burial and memorial benefits, events, historical information, and strategic initiatives.

NCA improved its communication through email outreach. Email subscriptions increased by 15,099 contacts over the past two years, and now include nearly 50,000 subscribers in several different categories.

Not only were staff able to improve the frequency of communications via email, but they also improved the quality of communications through segmentation of geography and affiliation. NCA targeted communication towards funeral directors, medical examiners, Veterans and family members and educators. This permitted them to send timely and accurate information that was pertinent to the particular group of stakeholders.

## SPOTLIGHT ON: VETERAN'S LEGACY PROGRAM

The Veteran's Legacy Program, launched during the 2016 Memorial Day Celebration, memorializes Veteran service and sacrifice. Using educational programming and tools to help share the rich historical resources found throughout VA's 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. The program tells Veterans' individual stories, exploring how their service and sacrifice have contributed to the origins and sustainment of American democracy.

To help promote the program in the months leading up to and following Memorial Day, NCA implemented the "Whose Legacy Are You Honoring?" social media campaign via Facebook and Twitter. NCA staff asked followers whose legacy they are honoring on this Memorial Day. NCA staff posted photos of themselves holding photos of their Veteran loved ones who had passed and asked others to comment and memorialize the Veteran in their life. As a result, NCA increased its Facebook reach by 534 percent from May 17 through June 13 and 1,027 percent increase in post engagement. Analytics show the campaign reached 95,345 people, with nearly one-third of those actively engaging with the posts by sharing, liking or commenting.

Through this campaign, Twitter engagements increased by 227 percent compared to the previous month.



Cemetery directors continued to work with the local media on stories of general interest, such as burials of unclaimed Veterans' remains, Veteran and military holidays and commemorations, notable burials and access to services. From a national perspective, NCA promoted the opening of new cemeteries, including Tallahassee National Cemetery and Cape Canaveral National Cemetery. As a result of positive news coverage and community engagement, families sought the internment of more than 300 loved ones at the Cape Canaveral National Cemetery before it opened. Outreach also spurred positive community involvement through the Volunteer Support Committee and events, and it generated editorials in the *Florida Sun Times*.

Staff created an internal blog for employee communication and continued to post blogs surrounding Memorial Day services for external audiences on *VAntage Point*. The Administration saw a consistent increase in participation in both FY 2015 and FY 2016 around Veterans Day, Memorial Day and Wreaths Across America (December).

A major outreach product used by all 135 national cemeteries is the ever-popular, localized cemetery brochure. At every outreach event, from local

church groups to major air shows or state fairs, each cemetery provides targeted information about operations, guidelines and questions and answers that explain Veterans' memorial benefits in clear language.

The Sacred Trust Video, available in English and Spanish, also remains a popular outreach tool with funeral homes, military honor guards, local Veterans and retirement communities looking to showcase their neighboring national cemetery.

NCA collaborated with the National Park Service's commemorative **POW/MIA Day Funeral for 13,000**. This event, held in conjunction with National POW/MIA Recognition Day, commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. Multiple events took place at the Andersonville National Historic Site in Georgia and the surrounding facilities, such as Georgia Southwestern State University and South Georgia Technical College.

NCA also collaborated with the Vietnam War Commemoration Committee to honor the 50th anniversary. All national cemeteries participated in events where thousands of Vietnam Veterans across the country received their commemorative lapel pin.

**"I was so impressed with everyone I dealt with in arranging memorial services for my dad and my mom. Everyone was kind respectful and helpful. I am so grateful for the service I received."**

*~ (Next of Kin)*





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# VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

## BENEFITS ASSISTANCE SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 55,000 events with more than 100,000 hours of outreach in FY 2015
- 1,119,000 Servicemembers and 1,317,000 Veterans reached at events
- Over 69,000 events with more than 132,000 hours of outreach in FY 2016
- 51 percent growth in subscribers of VBA's Facebook page
- 77 percent growth of followers on VBA's Twitter feed

Established in 2010 under the Office of Disability Assistance, the Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) provides a consistent message and oversight throughout all of the customer entry points into VA, including face-to-face outreach, the National Call Center and Web and social media. BAS also facilitates the cooperative outreach effort among all regional offices and VBA business lines, making it easier for Veterans to access the benefits they have earned.

In recent years, BAS has focused on online and digital outreach, updating more than 1,600 Web pages that provide an array of benefit and other information on critical services.

In addition to Web updates and social media activity, VBA composed, edited and published content for the *VAn tage Point* blog, posting 42 blog entries during the reporting period. Blog topics included insurance benefits, home loan benefits and education

benefits. In addition, VBA published a five-part series on disability compensation appeals, a "Claims Corner" series that offered advice on filing disability compensation claims, milestones about the disability claims backlog and other notable topics.

Printed materials also play an integral role in the outreach conducted by VBA. In FY 2015 – 2016, VBA sent 982,478,000 outreach letters to active duty Servicemembers and Veterans as part of the Veterans Assistance Discharge System (VADS) and VA/DoD Identity Repository (VADIR).

Along with concentrated outreach campaigns, VBA continued to work with DoD and other stakeholders in promoting eBenefits, a one-stop online experience for self-service functions and information related to VA and DoD benefits and services. eBenefits has over 55 self-service functions, including the ability to allow Servicemembers and Veterans to check the status of compensation and pension claims and appeals, apply for disability compensation, review payment history, obtain home loan certificates of eligibility, transfer educational entitlement, generate on-demand



service and benefit verification letters and request state benefit information.

As of April 2016, over 5.6 million registered users were able to access secure online account and use self-service functions. From October 1, 2014, to April 30, 2016, there were 492,805,170 page views and 374,449,896 unique page visits to the eBenefits Web site.

In FY 2015, VBA produced a television and radio public service announcement (PSA) for the eClaims/ Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Campaign to educate Servicemembers and Veterans on the benefits of submitting fully developed electronic claims. The PSA reached Servicemembers, Veterans, their family members and Veteran advocates.

Relationship building is a cornerstone of VBA. One of the most critical collaborations was with NASCAR. VBA expanded a relationship with NASCAR to bring VA benefits and services directly into the community where Veterans and their families live. During the 2015 race season, VBA participated in 11 race events, reaching more than 5,500 Veterans, Servicemembers and their families. VA staff were on site with the Mobile Vet Center (MVC) to bring benefits and services directly to Veterans.

Additionally, for the 2015 race season, VA received invitations to participate in three NASCAR *Troops*

*to the Track* events. NASCAR *Troops to the Track* is a year-round recreational group therapy program that honors Servicemembers, Veterans and military families at races throughout the country.

In September 2016, VA coordinated with the Dover speedway and NASCAR driver, Kurt Busch, for a meet-and-greet with Veterans and conducted social media outreach promoting access to VA benefits and services.

VBA also developed a relationship with the Virginia Library Association and in February 2016, held a series of six Webinars for librarians and library support staff throughout the state. Topics included eBenefits, fully developed claims and resources to continue ending homelessness among Veterans.

In addition to new relationships, VBA continued to train and educate Goodwill staff to work with Veterans on eBenefits, including online claims filing, Veteran preference letters and home loan benefits. In June 2015, VBA held a refresher benefits training Webinar for Goodwill staff.

As of May 2015, over 2,600 Veterans received information regarding eBenefits through Goodwill and over 2,500 Veterans completed eBenefits registration.



Finally, in addition to the above activities and events, VBA conducted outreach at the following events:

- National Veterans Service Officers Conferences
- Claims Clinics
- National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS)
- Association of the United States Army (AUSA)
- National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
- National Conference for the Amputee Coalition
- DoD Warrior Games
- Women Veterans Interactive Veterans Day Salute
- Women Veterans Rock Policy Day on Capitol Hill
- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors Program (TAPS)
- Navy League Sea-Air-Space
- US Chamber of Commerce, Hiring Our Heroes Job Fairs
- Military and Veterans Affairs Commission of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.
- National Veterans Small Business Engagement
- Balloon Fest
- Arlington National Cemetery Veterans Day Ceremony

## SPOTLIGHT ON: RUN FOR THE WALL

In FY 2015 and FY 2016, VBA participated in the Rolling Thunder Run for the Wall. Run for the Wall recognizes the sacrifices and contributions made by Veterans. The Run is the annual motorcycle ride and gathering that first began in 1988. Riders from around the country rally at the Pentagon parking lots and begin the run through the streets of Washington. With more than 1 million riders and spectators, Rolling Thunder has evolved into an emotional display of patriotism and respect for all who defend our country.

VA's three Administrations collaborated on the outreach conducted at the Pentagon parking lot and the Mobile Vet Center (MVC), located at a midway point of the Run. During the event, VBA provided Veterans with assistance on submitting electronic claims, obtaining eBenefits accounts and other benefit-related issues.

In the last two years, engagements and personal interactions at Run for the Wall totaled more than 5,300.





## COMPENSATION SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- In FY 2016, VA paid a monthly average of \$5,600,000,000 in compensation benefits to 4,300,000 Veterans
- 17,300,000 Compensation Service Web page views, of which 4,200,000 were new visits

The Office of Compensation works to ensure Veterans receive the appropriate compensation and are aware of various Veteran benefits. The staff undertook a number of outreach activities and efforts to reach Veterans and increase awareness of resources.

As part of the Secretary's initiative to improve outreach to men and women Veterans who are suffering from PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma (MST), the Office of Compensation presented a workshop during the Annual Women Veterans Conference held at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta. Compensation Service's representative served on a disability claims panel and navigated the group through MST claims and secondary conditions.

During the workshop, Compensation Service employees helped Veterans with their claims. Employees continued working with Veterans after the conference to provide claims assistance, including helping them collect information and ensuring they had the necessary documents to complete their claims.

Additionally, Compensation Service provided Veterans with information to increase their awareness about filing claims for VA benefits and seeking VA treatment for service-related mental health issues and to educate them about other VA services, such as VA health care and treatment.

Staff created and distributed multiple pieces of informational materials to Veterans scheduled for

examinations at two pilot locations as part of an effort to educate Veterans on the Compensation & Pension exam process. The end goal was to expand the outreach nationally after completing the pilots.

Compensation Service continues to assess the impact of this effort, and preliminary feedback from surveys shows Veterans' satisfaction has improved with access to these materials.

## EDUCATION SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 20,000 people reached through 72 outreach events
- 14,000 new subscribers to the GI Bill Facebook page
- 4.8 million page views of GI Bill Web site ([www.benefits.va.gov/gibill](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill)) in FY 2015
- 4,000 attendees for four Webinars

During the reporting period, Education Service staff used many approaches to reach Veterans, Servicemembers and families, such as digital engagement, event participation, traditional media and relationship building.



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The team held “office hours” on Facebook during the fall and spring school terms. A specific time was set aside for Q&A sessions, with an average of 150 questions/comments. In addition, Education Service and the Departments of the Army and Education jointly held office hours on the VBA Twitter account.

The team also produced quarterly Webinars and delivered them to higher education personnel associated with the administration of VA’s GI Bill program, including VetSuccess on Campus Counselors, School Certifying Officials and State Approving Agency employees.

The Education Service staff collaborated with the American Council on Education to host a joint Webinar in June 2015 on the subject of GI Bill outcome measures, with over 400 individuals from educational institutions in attendance.

Additionally, the staff successfully executed a communications plan promoting Sections 701 and 702 of the Veterans Access Choice and Accountability Act, which refer to the in-state tuition provision and expanded Fry scholarship. Promotions included a new Web page, new FAQs, a factsheet, Facebook content, *VAntage Point* blog post and a satellite radio media tour with the Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity.

Staff leveraged traditional media by reaching out to specific outlets with information on Education Service and to setting up interviews with staff members. These external media outreach efforts reached users and potential users of the GI Bill. The media tour for the Choice Act included 13 TV

**VA Education Service programs include the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill and other educational and training programs.**

interviews and 1,024 radio stations, reaching over 4 million people; an advertising equivalent of \$155,000.

Relationships were also a vital component of the VBA Education Service’s success in FY 2015 and FY 2016. The team worked with multiple government agencies to monitor educational institutions for increased regulatory or legal scrutiny. VA, the Departments of Defense and Education, the Federal Trade Commission and Consumer Finance Protection Bureau shared findings to inform the public of potential issues affecting school enrollment, and through the GI Bill Comparison Tool, provided potential students with information that may affect their potential satisfaction with an institution.

## LOAN GUARANTY SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- More than 631,000 loans were guaranteed in FY 2015, a record number
- More than 14,000 viewers of online videos for Loan Guaranty Service

VA’s Loan Guaranty Service (LGY) staff perform outreach to Veterans and Servicemembers on a variety of issues related to home ownership, the home loan guaranty benefit, loans with reportable defaults, Specially Adapted Housing assistance and Native American Direct Loans.

During FY 2015, LGY actively engaged the lending and Veteran communities to generate more awareness about VA Home Loan Program and benefits.

VA provides direct loans to certain Native American Veterans to purchase, construct or improve a home on Federal Trust Land. Before VA may make one of these loans, VA and the respective tribal government must enter into an

MOU. Eight tribal governments signed a MOU with VA: Makah, Mescalero, Mississippi Choctaw, Northern Cheyenne, Northern Ute, Prairie Band of Potawatomi, Pueblo of Taos and Suquamish.

Native American outreach in FY 2015 resulted in the origination of 18 loans. Additionally, LGY conducted 44 outreach events to 80 different tribes throughout the U.S. and its territories. This outreach is in addition to 1,100 individual phone or email communications with various Tribal governments.

LGY enhanced its digital presence by creating benefit-specific videos to inform Veterans how and when they can use their home loan benefits. These newly created videos cover Specially Adapted Housing, the Native American Direct Loan and the true costs of homeownership. Additionally, LGY participated in a CrowdHall event, an online audience-moderated town hall, where Veterans and program stakeholders received answers to nearly 150 questions.

Online outreach continued to allow LGY to reach more Veterans, Servicemembers and their families domestically and abroad. The online video library reached more than 14,000 viewers and provided another opportunity for VA to connect with program stakeholders and benefit recipients.

In FY 2015, through collaborations, LGY guaranteed a record number of over 631,000 loans. VA has worked with private-sector loan servicers to help over 500,000 Veterans and their families retain their homes or avoid foreclosure since 2009. This effort equates to potential claim savings (savings from foreclosure avoidance) of over \$16.3 billion.

Last fiscal year, a record 90,000-plus Veterans avoided foreclosure, a \$2.8 billion savings in potential claims. Private-sector relationships resulted in more than 1,800 approved Specially Adapted Housing grants, totaling \$90 million, or a 44 percent increase over FY 2014 and 65 percent increase over FY 2013.



## OFFICE OF TRANSITION, EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

### AT A GLANCE:

- 1,343 CAPSTONE events supported in past 18 months
- 24,143 Military Life Cycle (MLC) events supported
- 196,093 transitioning Servicemembers reached
- More than 140 events, job fairs and transition summits supported

The Office of Transition, Employment and Economic Impact (OTEEI) is responsible for overseeing VA's portion of the Transition Assistance Program (VA TAP). Through VA TAP, OTEEI administers various classes at military installations throughout the United States and abroad. The purpose of VA TAP classes is to ensure that transitioning Servicemembers know and understand VA Benefits and Career Technical Training options.

From September 2014 through March 2016, OTEEI held 8,185 VA TAP classes across the globe, reaching nearly 200,000 transitioning Servicemembers and their families.



OTEEI Community Engagement supported MLC and CAPSTONE events that DoD created. These events serve as a standardized and comprehensive end-of-career experience and validate, verify and bolster the transition training and other services that prepare Servicemembers for civilian careers.

OTEEI also supported a wide variety of Transition Summits, job fairs, networking events for military spouses and other events.

The Transition Summits provided VSOs and employers of all sizes with direct access to Veterans, transitioning Servicemembers and military spouses. Senior leaders and commanders from all branches of the military; members of Congress; Federal, state and local government, the national media and members of the press, representatives from educational institutions and non-profit organizations also attended these events.

During the Transition Summits, VA Benefits advisors led workshops to educate Veterans, Servicemembers and their families on the use of the Veterans Employment Center™ (VEC) platform, and staff from VA's Veterans Employment Office served as instructors for workshops on resume writing and Federal careers.

In May 2015, VA launched the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI), designed to support the economic success of Veterans and their families by bringing together community organizations to coordinate and integrate services at the local level.



OTEEI worked with Economic Liaisons in 28 communities to conduct and participate in over 20,000 job fairs, conferences, meetings, community events and more.

Since the campaign launched, OTEEI has engaged more than 1,800 employers across the country with overviews and demonstrations of the VEC and reached out to approximately 130,000 stakeholders, including 54,000 Veterans, 15,000 spouses and 14,000 transitioning Servicemembers through community engagement activities.

In 2016, OTEEI saw great successes with online outreach and engagement. The OTEEI Pre-Discharge Team staff joined subject matter experts from other business line areas within VBA to answer questions relating to transition and benefits in a joint Facebook Town Hall event with Army Social Media and Army Soldier for Life. Approximately 900 Facebook users “liked” the Facebook Town Hall event.

## VA INSURANCE CENTER

### AT A GLANCE:

- 23,033 disabled Veterans contacted in FY 2015
- 160,889 pieces of material mailed for SGLI-DE and VGLI
- 33,000 views of four new videos
- 74,550 views of new infographics
- 253,872 Veterans reached via email
- 25 percent increase in Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance online applications

VA Insurance Center (VAIC) conducted multifaceted outreach to the various VSOs and Veterans to educate and build awareness about a variety of insurance coverage options. Outreach included

presentations, trainings, online activities and direct marketing to Servicemembers and Veterans.

Through this outreach, VAIC staff spoke with and educated Veterans about the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Disability Extension (SGLI-DE), Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI), Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI) and Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI).

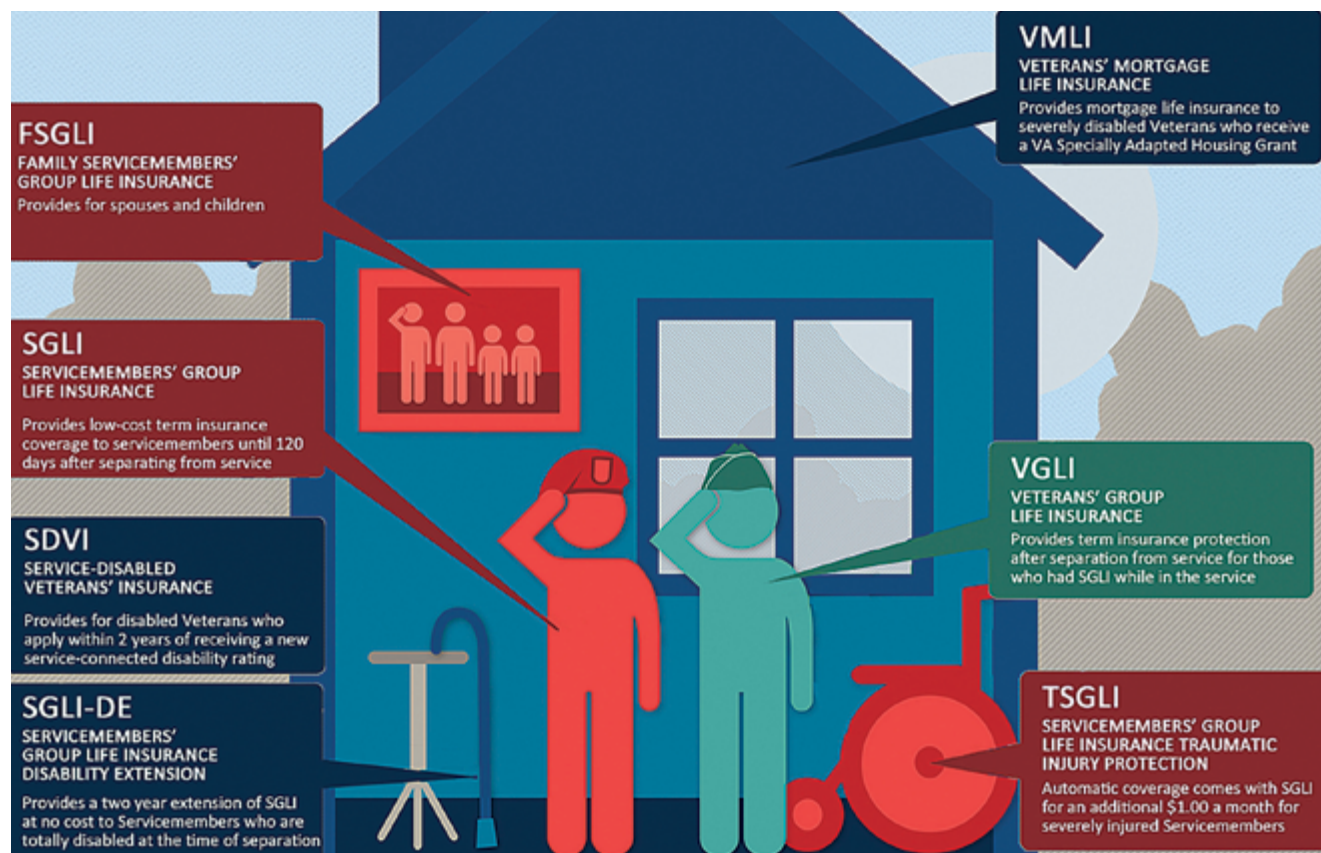
Staff developed a suite of information and brochures to distribute and send to Veterans to support outreach and to educate Veterans on life insurance coverage and the range of insurance benefits, such as the SGLI Disability Extension and Veterans Group Life Insurance.

VAIC conducted presentations and training to the New Jersey National Guard Veteran Service Office liaisons, Air Force Reserve Recovery Coordinators, the DAV Department of Florida Chapter Service Officer, the Defense Finance Accounting Service and Air Force Wounded Warrior liaisons.

Presentations and trainings focused on educating them on a wide range of VA insurance benefits, eligibility criteria, the coverage application process, maintaining of policies and claims filing.

Other outreach included presentations about VA insurance and compensation benefits at the U.S. Pentagon Financial Readiness Fair, where staff educated active duty Servicemembers, Veterans and civilians on financial matters, reaching nearly 1,000 Servicemembers and Veterans from ages 18 through 70.

The team continues to enhance the use of VA Insurance Early Communications, which uses information generated from VA/DoD Identity Repository and distributed through eBenefits. Insurance Early Communications allows VA to send messages to members regarding their insurance based on information updated in military databases, such as changes in coverage or marital status.



In addition, VA leveraged many online platforms to provide insurance information using multiple Facebook Chat events and Twitter Town Halls in collaboration with Yellow Ribbon, the different branches of service and others.

Lastly, VAIC developed a full suite of infographics to provide a visual way to help streamline the process of determining eligibility and timeframes for applying for every available VA life insurance benefit. This new resource made it easier for Servicemembers and Veterans to determine which insurance programs were best for them. By clicking on each program, the user could quickly access clear and concise information about the programs.



## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 2,168 views of Five Tracks to Employment video

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service helps Veterans with job training, employment accommodations, resume development and job seeking skills through event coordination, online outreach and relationship development.

A large part of outreach efforts for VR&E includes event participation. During the last two fiscal years, VR&E attended the following events:

- Women Veteran Forum at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. Michelle Obama and Secretary Bob McDonald both spoke at the event. Approximately 500 women Veterans attended the event, with many receiving information about employment and networking opportunities.
- Winterhaven Homeless Veterans Stand Down in January 2016. The event had more than 70 agencies and vendors participating. The theme of this event was “Ending Homelessness, One Veteran at a Time.” During the event, VR&E provided 286 Quick Books, 50 Chapter 31 VR&E applications for the benefit and 4 Chapter 36 Educational and Career Counseling applications. VR&E also provided an orientation briefing on the VR&E program to 447 Veterans.
- Student Veterans of America (SVA) 8th Annual National Conference in January 2016. This represents the largest conference for America’s student Veterans, with more than 2,000 attendees. VR&E presented and spoke on a panel.

In addition to attending events, VR&E hosted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Employer Symposium at VA Central Office to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the ADA, the nation’s first comprehensive civil rights law to address the needs of people with disabilities. The symposium offered employers and others the opportunity to learn about disability issues, workplace accommodations and technical assistance and obtain information on programs and resources to help facilitate employment of Veterans with disabilities. The ADA Employer Symposium was successful in not only increasing employer engagement, but also increasing VA employee engagement.



In addition to in-person outreach, VR&E engaged in strategic digital outreach. In August 2015, VR&E hosted a Twitter Town Hall with the BAS social media team. The Twitter Town Hall provided the opportunity to discuss the benefits and services of the VR&E program, including service delivery, employment services for Veterans in the program and independent living services. Notable participants included Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)/Operation Paving Access for Veterans Employment (PAVE), IAVA, US Army Warrior Transition Command (WTC), Ohio Department of Veterans Services, Defense Logistics Agency and Minority Women Veterans.

VR&E Outreach Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) participated in a Virtual Education Fair hosted by DoD in November 2015. The Virtual Education Fair provided hundreds of transitioning Servicemembers the opportunity to ask education and benefit questions of participating institutions of higher learning VA offices, such as Education Service and VR&E Service. The Virtual Education Fair was hosted in an online chat room forum for an entire day to ensure that Servicemembers and Veterans could participate on their own schedules from anywhere in the country. Approximately 1,000 transitioning Servicemembers and Veterans attended.



In December 2015, VR&E staff, together with Blue Star Families and Hiring Our Heroes, participated in VA's "#ExploreVA: From Service to Success" digital event series with the execution of the Employment Services Twitter chat. The chat had a potential reach of more than 377,500 users.

In March 2016, the staff participated in the United States Army/Soldier for Life/VA Facebook Town Hall event. Approximately 1,000 transitioning Servicemembers and Veterans attended the Facebook Town Hall event.

Beyond hosting and collaborating on online events, VR&E incorporated digital media through YouTube. In January 2015, the team produced a short, animated, motion graphic video to inform Servicemembers, Veterans, dependents and the public about the five tracks to employment available to Veterans with service-connected disabilities under the VR&E program. VR&E Service encouraged VRCs and Employment Coordinators (ECs) across the nation to use this video for outreach events and other marketing initiatives. As of April 26, 2016, there were 2,168 views of the YouTube video.

Finally, relationship building played a pivotal role in the success of all other outreach. During the fall of 2015, staff coordinated 10 VetSuccess on Campus Back-to-School open houses. VR&E preselected 10 locations to host these open houses. The 10 open houses had approximately 1,300 attendees, raising awareness of the VetSuccess on Campus program.

**"My sincerest thanks and compliments to everyone I dealt with at the VA."**  
*~ (Veteran's son)*

# VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

## CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

### AT A GLANCE:

- 57,000 calls to the national support line
- 1,000 Caregivers participated annually in monthly telephone education groups
- 1,300 visitors per day on average to Web site
- 60,000 subscribers to listserv
- 731 organized activities held across the country by VA sites of care
- More than 50 events participated in with VSOs

VHA provides a vast array of Caregiver support services nationwide to ensure that Veterans have emotional and physical support, access to health care and the opportunity to remain in their homes when they can no longer care for themselves. Outreach activities focus on the Caregiver Support and the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) Support Programs.

The Caregiver Support Program supports the National Caregiver Support Line, which received over 57,000 calls and responded to more than 1,400 email inquiries in FY 2015. The Caregiver Support Line also facilitates monthly telephone education groups dedicated for family Caregivers of Veterans. There is a different topic presented each month to the groups' participants, who average over 100 people. The support line provides information, education and support to callers on VA services and programs.

Digital outreach during FY 2015 – 2016 included the Caregiver Support Program Web site, [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov), and the listserv with more than 60,000 subscribers as a means to engage the broader Caregiver community on various topics and information surrounding Veterans and Caregivers.

The Caregiver Support Program posted a Web banner on VA's internal site and the public-facing VA Medical Center (VAMC) Web sites to promote National Family Caregiver Month in November 2015. Also in FY 2015, the program drafted an article and posted it on VHA's main site.

In addition, staff distributed various outreach items including environmentally friendly grocery bags, ink pens and note pads for the field to use during their local outreach events. The goal was to reach Caregivers and continue to promote various services within the program.

To expand outreach efforts, staff participated in meetings and in-person events to engage VSOs including the Wounded Warrior Project, VFW and DAV. Staff also worked with other organizations including the Military Child Education Coalition, Hope for the Warriors, Quality of Life Foundation, Elizabeth Dole Foundation, National Caregiver Alliance, Caregiver Action Network and Easter Seals.



In early FY 2016, the Caregiver Support Program participated in a Virtual Family Caregiving Fair hosted by AARP. Over 1,000 people attended and many agencies participated, including the U.S. Administration on Aging and Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services, among others. The Caregiver Support Program, in collaboration with VBA, staffed a virtual booth to educate and provide resources and chatted live with virtual visitors. This provided another communications channel for reaching Caregivers and educating stakeholders about the program's many offerings and services.

## HOMELESS PROGRAMS

### HEALTH CARE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

#### AT A GLANCE:

- 157,258 Veterans received outreach services in FY 2015
- 9,910 Veterans were enrolled in HCHV Case Management Services
- 16,723 Veterans were enrolled in HCHV Contract Services

Staff from the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program collaborated with local soup kitchens, shelters and governmental organizations to identify Veterans who were homeless and in need of assistance from VA.



HCHV outreach workers canvassed areas frequented by homeless persons in their local catchment areas regularly to attempt to identify homeless Veterans. These areas included soup kitchens, under bridges, public libraries, etc. HCHV outreach workers also participated in Veteran Stand Downs, local community meetings and other outreach and civic engagement events.

### VETERANS JUSTICE PROGRAM OFFICE

#### AT A GLANCE:

- 62,000 justice-involved Veterans served in FY 2015

The VHA Veterans Justice Program (VJP) reaches out to Veterans in prisons and jails who are nearing release and/or re-entry to inform them about VA health care and other services. During the reporting period, VJP Specialists provided training to a wide variety of law enforcement groups, which included guidance on the appropriate processes for them to refer Veterans who are nearing release to VA for services.

VJP collaborated with the American Jail Association (AJA), the Department of Justice's National Institute of Corrections (NIC), the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP), NCHV and USICH to educate justice system leaders and professionals on the identification and referral of Veterans who are preparing for re-entry to VA for services and benefits.

VJP staff made direct contact with justice-involved Veterans who are nearing release dates in justice system settings including state and Federal prisons, city and county jails and courts. Indirectly, they received ad hoc referrals from justice system partners, e.g. correctional officers, judges, district attorneys, public defenders, attorneys, law enforcement officers and family members. They also participated in Stand Downs, local community meetings, and other outreach and civic engagement events.



Staff worked to promote criminal justice agencies' use of the Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS), a Web-based system that allows prison, jail and court staff to quickly and accurately identify Veterans among their inmate or defendant populations. VRSS also prompts VJP field staff to conduct outreach to the identified Veterans.

In addition, VJP field staff worked with local and national media to shine a light on the area of justice-involved Veterans; media outlets included NPR, Yahoo! News, The Crime Report and local media.

## MEMBER SERVICES

### AT A GLANCE:

- 10,000 Veterans and beneficiaries received letters and forms
- 446,000 newly enrolled Veterans were welcomed via Welcome to MyVA program

The VHA Member Services team used a combination of communications activities to reach Veterans and their families and continued to expand collaborations with VSOs to enhance outreach efforts. The team also focused on education efforts surrounding its new Welcome to MyVA program and the Veteran Transportation Program (VTP).

Designed to introduce newly enrolled Veterans to VA health care benefits, Welcome to MyVA helps Veterans smoothly transition into the VA health care

system and enhances their access to health care. The outreach efforts also assist Veterans with scheduling their initial appointment by connecting them with their preferred VA health care facility. As of September 2016, Welcome to MyVA had personally welcomed more than 446,000 newly enrolled Veterans.

Member Services staff continued to update the VA Affordable Care Act (ACA) Web site ([www.va.gov/aca](http://www.va.gov/aca)) content and resource documents to inform Veterans and other beneficiaries of their health care benefit options. Staff also distributed thousands of printed materials to medical facilities and other organizations to enhance efforts to build awareness of health care benefits.

The Member Services team conducted social media campaigns; posted videos; hosted Google Hangouts and expanded digital resources on a variety of topics, including the VTP, and the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014.

Member Services staff developed informative materials for distribution at events and through online forums. They also conducted a direct mail campaign to ensure Veterans received important information about health care benefits and programs.

Finally, Member Services staff actively case managed pending health care enrollment applications by placing outbound calls to Veterans and advising them of the additional information they needed to submit to complete their enrollment. As of September 2016, the Case Management Pending Program attempted to contact about 8,800 Veterans with about 1,900 successful contact attempts.

**Member Services staff developed informative materials for distribution at events and through online forums.**



## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

### COACHING INTO CARE

#### AT A GLANCE:

- 31,350 Facebook followers
- 6,000 first-time callers to Coaching into Caring call center
- 7,715 subscribers to CIC e-newsletter
- Over 40 organizations met and collaborated with

Coaching into Care (CIC) provides a “coaching” service for family and friends of Veterans who believe their Veteran needs help. Coaching involves helping the user learn how to motivate their Veteran to seek services. The service is provided by licensed clinical social workers and psychologists. The goal of the service is to help Veterans and family members find the appropriate services in their community. As a direct resource to Veterans and their loved ones, CIC’s outreach efforts are an integral part of its service.

Due to various activities, relationships, strategies and CIC’s Web site ([www.va.gov/coachingintocare](http://www.va.gov/coachingintocare)), CIC maintained a steady level of inbound calls to the call center (1-888-823- 7458), increasing the number of first-time callers by more than 6,000.

In-person outreach and collaborations with organizations across the nation proved to be effective in educating and building awareness about CIC’s



services. CIC staff participated in direct outreach presentations—via conference call presentations and in-person meetings—to over 40 agencies and organizations nationwide.

Also, CIC provided trainings to call centers, both in and outside of VA to educate para-professionals about VA and CIC services in general as well as to help responders at sites choose between referral sources.

CIC’s collaboration with VSOs, Federal agencies and organizations increased its Web site page views and reliably increased Veteran family callers to the CIC call center. Over 30 percent of referrals were from agencies that CIC collaborated with for outreach. CIC developed Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with several VSOs, DoD agencies and other organizations, including Give An Hour, DVBIC, IAVA, Army OneSource, Roslyn Carter Institute Caregiver Programs, Vets-4-Warriors and others.

To enhance outreach, CIC staff members continued to release the quarterly e-newsletter, *CIC eNews*, for the Veteran community as a whole and VA and non-VA staffs. This newsletter describes the Coaching into Care call center services, current topics and services relevant to VA care, a description of a caller and how CIC helped (names and details are changed) and mental health tips. Subscribers increased to 7,715, with an estimated 80 percent of these affiliated with state, local or Federal government agencies and 20 percent comprising other Veteran stakeholders from non-profits or VSOs.

Many online outreach activities helped to expand outreach efforts by using CIC’s Facebook page and Twitter account. Additional online efforts included over 100 CIC online banners on Web sites outside VA – mostly on VSO, state Departments of Veterans Affairs and other targeted Web sites.

CIC also used online ads, including Google and Facebook ads, to drive traffic to its Web site and build awareness among friends and family of Veterans. CIC created a series of videos for YouTube in order to increase the visibility of the outreach call center and increase Web site page views.

## MAKE THE CONNECTION

### AT A GLANCE:

- 4 billion impressions through online outreach efforts
- 4.2 million visits to Web site
- 8 million views of videos
- 145,000 uses of the resource locator
- More than 800 stakeholders engaged
- 2.8 million “likes” on Facebook
- 17,800 YouTube subscribers

Make the Connection (MTC) is a VA public awareness campaign that provides personal testimonials and resources to help Veterans discover ways to improve their lives. The campaign encourages Veterans and their families to “make the connection” with information and resources.

The MTC team engaged with organizations to share campaign content and collaborate on digital engagement events through MTC social media platforms, specifically Facebook and YouTube. Beginning in FY 2015, the team engaged more than 800 stakeholder organizations nationwide, fostering relationships and providing resources to Veterans, their family members and friends and other targeted audiences through MTC’s established communications channels related to Veteran mental health. Efforts included a Twitter Q&A on the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) account to spread the word about Veteran mental health resources to an audience on a new platform. For Mental Health Awareness Month 2015 and 2016, the team shared a Thunderclap message to reach Veterans and their family members across the country; a satellite media tour and other social media events, such as a Facebook Chat, Instagram takeover and Twitter Town Hall with Mental Health America.

Using online channels, the team reached Veterans of all demographics; their family members; community members and support networks, including employers, VA and non-VA health care providers, faith-based organizations, volunteer groups, etc.

MTC engaged over 100 organizations to spread the word about the campaign, sharing outreach content and materials that included a blog, newsletter, social media and Web site content.

The MTC team attended 27 outreach events and speaking engagements nationally to provide information, distribute promotional and collateral materials and support a MTC presence at conferences and events including DAV National Convention, National Association of State Workforce Agencies Veteran Services Conference, NASPA Symposium on Military-Connected Students and NAMI National Convention, where the team reached thousands of Veterans. The team also secured materials placements at 35 events.

Supplementing all outreach, the MTC team distributed materials at events for mental health professionals and shipped materials to VA Local Recovery Coordinators (LRCs) and partner organizations.

In addition, the MTC team executed an online advertising campaign employing keyword, display banner, social media and video advertisements. Advertising was highly targeted focusing on users’ military careers, interest in mental health, history of social media and Web site engagement and relationships with Veterans and Veteran-related groups. Moreover, MTC distributed five PSAs for TV and radio broadcast nationwide beginning in FY 2015 including “Veteran Strength and Connection,” “Ready for the Challenge” and “Vietnam Veterans: Welcome Home.”





## NATIONAL CENTER FOR PTSD

### AT A GLANCE:

- 13,246 individuals contacted via direct mail
- 1,669,129 total impressions to target audiences via search and display ads
- 12,355 hits to the landing page during the reporting period
- 809,722 total page views for PTSD videos on YouTube
- 125,000 Facebook “likes”
- 125,000 subscribers to monthly email
- Over 6.9 million visitors per year to [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

The national VA PTSD Consultation Program works with VA and non-VA providers, including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, primary care providers, case managers and others with questions about assessment and treatment services for Veterans with PTSD.

In FY 2016, the National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD) created a comprehensive marketing campaign with several new outreach components, including trade show exhibits, direct mail and partner engagement. Additionally, NCPTSD researchers, providers and educators conducted professional presentations at conferences across the country and trained VA staff as a part of VA PTSD Mentoring Program and VA PTSD Consultation Program.

## SPOTLIGHT ON: PTSD AWARENESS VIDEOS

PTSD is a common issue among men and women Veterans and has lasting effects on Veterans and those close to them. NCPTSD created several PTSD whiteboard videos aimed at addressing some of the bigger questions:

- What is PTSD?
- What is prolonged exposure?
- What is cognitive processing therapy?
- What is evidence-based treatment?
- What are effective treatments for PTSD for the public and for professionals?

The videos are short and shareable and provide a different and effective resource and channel of communication to enhance the understanding of PTSD.

NCPTSD leveraged various social media channels to post the videos, and the videos have reached millions of people. “What is PTSD,” posted on June 1, 2016, has a reach of over 1.4 million people to date. In the end, the series of videos enhanced awareness of PTSD and built a strong understanding among Veterans, Caregivers, family members and the public.



To provide multiple channels for Veterans to receive information and answers on questions related to trauma and PTSD, the Center used a special email inbox and phone line. Between 15-30 emails and calls came in per day, and over 3,000 emails were received in FY 2016. The team worked closely with the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) to ensure that those who contacted the Center received the care they needed.

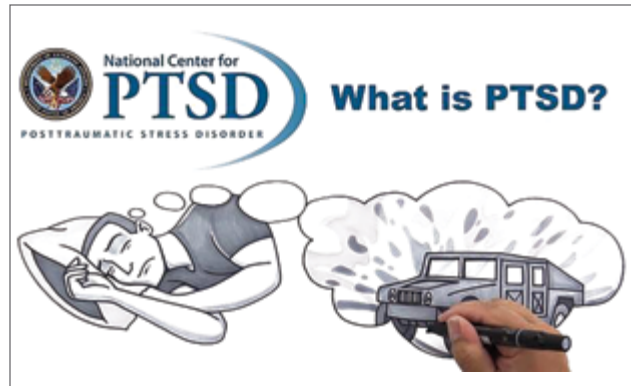
Additionally, NCPTSD developed a PTSD Consultation Lecture Series, a topic-focused online monthly lecture series for PTSD providers (non-VA and VA) that averaged 800 attendees per month.

The NCPTSD Web site, which provides resources for Veterans, the general public and professionals, received over 6.9 million visitors per year. Veterans can access all of the PTSD materials, products, apps and courses produced by the Center at [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov).

In addition to social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, NCPTSD leveraged social media ads and targeted marketing to reach Veterans online, including search engine optimization and display ad marketing through LinkedIn for the PTSD Consultation Program.

A monthly PTSD update email bulletin sent to over 125,000 subscribers each month provided continual awareness of new and existing information and critical resources. Each month, the content focused on a specific topic related to trauma and PTSD.

Through media outreach, NCPTSD Executive Division subject matter experts informed tens of millions of readers and viewers about PTSD. This helped lead to significantly increased usage of the Center's Web site and reinforced VA's position as the "go to" source for information on PTSD. In FY 2016 international, national, regional and local media outlets published over 38 stories quoting Executive Division subject matter experts.



## ONLINE TRAINING COURSES – PARENTING, MOVING FORWARD, ANGER AND IRRITABILITY MANAGEMENT

### AT A GLANCE:

- 670 percent increase of visitors to Mental Health Services online training Web sites
- More than 70 online listening session with Veterans and Servicemembers
- 30,000 subscribers to quarterly newsletter
- 6,000 clicks to online courses generated by digital advertising campaign

Mental Health Services (MHS) provides a series of online courses to help Veterans tackle everyday issues, such as problem solving, parenting and anger management. As part of this effort, MHS Web Services conducted multiple outreach activities through various channels to reach Veterans and Servicemembers. Outreach included a variety of digital, social media, stakeholder outreach, paid advertising efforts as well as a dedicated research component that looked at how Veterans may interact with self-guided online mental health resources.

As part of the research effort, MHS conducted more than 70 online focus groups with Veterans and Servicemembers nationwide to understand their knowledge of a variety of challenges facing Veterans. The listening sessions covered topics

## SPOTLIGHT ON: *THE POWER OF 1* CAMPAIGN

During Suicide Prevention Month (SPM) in 2015, VCL created a campaign to focus on the importance of connection, interpersonal relationships, community and outreach to Veterans—and how all these elements can come together to support Veterans and Servicemembers who may be in crisis. *The Power of 1* campaign encouraged those within Veterans' support networks—and Veterans themselves—to reach out and take small actions to make a difference and connect a Veteran who may be in crisis with support through VCL.

The campaign used an integrated outreach approach across multiple platforms. Key components of the campaign included online and social media tools for individuals, organizations and VA channels; email outreach and a new graphics generator for Web site visitors to create and share a graphic to share with their social media networks. Additionally, a video PSA developed for launch during September 2015 focused on the idea that small actions have the power to make a difference in the life of a Veteran or a Servicemember.

The campaign raised awareness nationwide of VA suicide prevention programs during September and resulted in 179,958 visits to VeteransCrisisLine.net during Suicide Prevention Month. Additionally, Thunderclap reached 1.6 million people. Engagement with Dr. Caitlin Thompson, an expert in suicide prevention, reached 21,291 users through Facebook, while TV and radio interviews with Dr. Thompson reached 15.6 million people. Furthermore, cinema ad placements around the country, billboards, bus ads and print ads generated 112.6 million impressions.

Audiences engaged with VA's suicide prevention content online, taking the initiative to share social media posts, written content, toolkit materials and collateral items with their networks to help spread the word about the resources available.

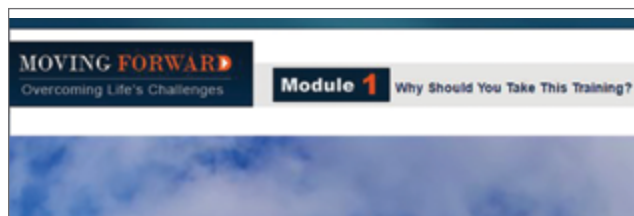




such as sleep disorders and sleep-related issues, anger management, as well as their perceptions of online self-help tools and other types of feedback in relation to the digital tools provided by MHS. The standing evaluation panels of Veterans and Servicemembers provided ongoing, substantive feedback regarding new Web-based self-help products developed by MHS and other organizations. The feedback allowed MHS to develop new products and improve existing ones to meet the needs of Veterans and Servicemembers.

To reach Veterans, Servicemembers and their spouses, MHS focused heavily on earned media by placing stories and content in a variety of traditional and online publications. Articles were placed in military base publications such as *Ft. Knox Gold Standard*, *Ft. Meade Sound-off*, *Military Press*, *Skywrighter* and *Thunderbolt* and on online blogs such as [military.com](http://military.com), [spousebuzz.com](http://spousebuzz.com). Additionally, outreach included traditional publications such as *Parents Magazine*, which has a readership of more than 13 million people, and through e-newsletters such as the American Counseling Association, American Military Retirees and Military Chaplains Association, which reached more than 60,000 readers collectively.

Extensive stakeholder research helped to identify VSOs, community-based organizations, mental health associations and others with missions aligned with MHS. Since September 2015, the team has reached out to over 80 individual organizations and media outlets and developed and maintained relationships with national and regional VSOs and pertinent health care organizations, including the VFW, IAVA, Yellow Ribbon Foundation, Vietnam Veterans of America, Jewish War Veterans, American Association for Marriage and Family and others. The campaign reached more than 5.6 million people thanks to the relationships developed during the stakeholder outreach phase.



Starting in April 2016, MHS conducted a digital outreach paid media campaign using Google and Bing advertisements. The campaign first launched in Colorado and then nationally. Month-by-month, key words were developed and constantly refreshed to ensure the best methods for reaching target audiences were used.

The team also developed a quarterly newsletter for readers to opt-in to that provided content and information about relevant mental health topics. A suite of materials was also developed to help promote each of the courses included blog posts, social media posts, fact sheets, presentations, talking points and newsletter articles tailored to each of the three products and various target audiences.

## SUICIDE PREVENTION/VETERANS CRISIS LINE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 907,200 total visits to [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net)
- 150 collaborations with organizations and well-known individuals, including Uber, the NFL Players Association, Military.com and singer John Mayer
- 41 million pieces of VCL-branded promotional items distributed from March 2011 to March 2016
- 7.1 million people reached at outreach events around the country

The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is a free, confidential resource that Veterans and their families and friends can access any day, any time. Trained professionals—some who are Veterans themselves—are available to listen, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

During the reporting period, the VCL team coordinated more than 700 outreach events nationally to provide training, distribute promotional and collateral materials and support a VCL presence at conferences and events. In addition, local Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPCs) organized their own local outreach activities

as part of a program mandate to perform at least five outreach events a month. Over the course of the reporting period, VCL representatives reached more than 7.1 million people at conferences and events for VSOs, educational institutions, media outlets, sports leagues and teams, community and faith-based organizations, NGOs and corporations. Materials made their way into the hands of Veterans, Servicemembers, health care/mental health workers, families and community members at a local and national level.

The VCL outreach team worked with more than 150 supporting organizations nationwide, developing and providing collateral and online toolkits for these organizations to help carry messages to Veterans' families and friends.

In addition, the VCL outreach team used online engagement, including social media, which contributed to more than 907,200 total visits during the reporting period to [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net), a 10 percent increase from the previous year. Efforts included disseminating PSAs and outreach videos through YouTube and online channels, sending quarterly outreach emails to VSOs and coordinating Webinars for other organizations to provide information about the VCL.

The VCL outreach team also executed an online advertising campaign, employing keywords, displaying banners and posting Facebook ads. Online advertising targeted seekers of suicide information or online resources. PSAs reached Veterans, their loved ones and community members nationwide in a wide variety of markets.

During FY 2015, the outreach team coordinated with [Upworthy.com](http://Upworthy.com), a Web site that curates emotional, positive stories and videos about real-life situations, to create a post that reached a mass audience through social networks. Upworthy promoted VA's "Behind the Scenes" outreach video, which looks into the VCL call center. The Upworthy post earned more than 34.2 million social media impressions; 179,914 page views and 266,903 "likes," comments and shares.

## TOBACCO & HEALTH

### AT A GLANCE:

- 25,000 visits to Web site [www.smokefree.gov/veterans](http://www.smokefree.gov/veterans) since launch
- Over 4,000 events logged in the Build Your Quit Plan tool

The VHA Tobacco and Health program educates Veterans on the impact of tobacco smoking and provides resources to help them quit. The program office joined with the National Cancer Institute to provide information about smoking cessation for Veterans and VA tools and resources for quitting through the National Cancer Institute's [Smokefree.gov](http://Smokefree.gov) initiative that delivers evidence-based smoking cessation resources to the public via the Web. A Veteran subsite, [www.smokefree.gov/veterans](http://www.smokefree.gov/veterans), addresses Veteran-specific issues and concerns about quitting smoking and provides information about what VA has to offer.

The site also contains the interactive Build Your Quit Plan tool to help users create an actionable plan to quit smoking and direct users to VA's resources. With the launch of a Veteran support community for quitting smoking on Facebook in April 2015, Veterans have an online forum where they can share stories, offer tips and encouragement, find resources to help them during their quitting process and learn about the benefits of living a tobacco-free life.

Additionally, Veterans shared stories and provided positive feedback on how the Facebook page helped them.



## OFFICE OF COMMUNITY CARE

### AT A GLANCE:

- More than 900 CHAMPVA beneficiaries and family members spoken to
- Hundreds of Native American Veterans and families reached from three large tribal entities in the Northwest U.S.
- More than 60 disabled Veterans were extended job offers by VHA Office of Community Care (OCC)

The Communications Department of the VHA Office of Community Care (OCC), the former Chief Business Office, conducted nine beneficiary briefings and town halls for the Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA). In addition, OCC participated in other non-program specific outreach events, such as the Confluent Ministries Veteran Expo, and gave a presentation on CHAMPVA to the national meeting of National Guard and Reserve Transition Assistance Officers as well as the Colorado National Guard. OCC provided CHAMPVA training to the Association of State and County Veteran Service Officers' state convention held in Pennsylvania.

OCC staff spoke directly to more than 900 CHAMPVA beneficiaries and family members. The audience for these briefings ranged in age from 20 to late 80s, with a mixture of sponsoring Veterans, CHAMPVA beneficiaries and family members (spouses, children, Caregivers, etc.).

## SPOTLIGHT ON: VETERAN DIRECT HIRING EVENT

OCC conducted direct hiring event in collaboration with the Colorado and Wyoming Transition Assistance Offices, VA Regional Veteran Employment Service and VBA. This event focused on the recruitment of disabled Veterans with a 30 percent or greater compensable, service connected disability rating that would allow OCC to hire those Veterans noncompetitively. This resulted in over 120 interviews and more than 50 job offers extended.



**“My wife is US Army retired. It was suggested that she come to the VA hospital for hearing and handicap access accessories...We cannot thank the VA enough for what has been done to support her.”**

*~ (Veteran's spouse)*



Presentations and direct outreach helped to reduce erroneous submissions and instances of non-reimbursable episodes of care, lowered the improper payment rate and provided a more rewarding and fulfilling experience with programs.

Staff distributed thousands of informational materials annually to a wide variety of interested parties. Materials included brochures on how to read a CHAMPVA explanation of benefits; how to apply for CHAMPVA; how to file a claim with CHAMPVA; the Meds by Mail program; the Foreign Medical Program and various specialty editions of the CHAMPVA Guide to include Braille, audio and five foreign languages (Italian, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese and Spanish). In total, the office printed over 1.5 million materials for distribution as part of outreach efforts.

Several online efforts helped to reach Veterans including staff participation in two streaming broadcasts with Hadit.com. These broadcasts included program information about CHAMPVA, the Foreign Medical Program, and the Retail Immunization Program, a collaboration between Walgreens and VA to provide no cost influenza vaccinations. Veterans connected directly with OCC as a result of the broadcasts, which also opened up email and phone communications between the participants and the office.

Finally, OCC published two editions of the *Your Health* magazine, a semi-annual publication sent to all CHAMPVA beneficiaries, featuring a mixture of program news about CHAMPVA and preventative health articles.



## OFFICE OF CONNECTED CARE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 320,000 subscribers to biweekly My HealtheVet newsletter including Veterans and Servicemembers
- 5 national outreach events attended with My HealtheVet exhibits
- 14,000 recipients of VA Mobile quarterly newsletter
- More than 1,000 people reached through monthly VA Mobile Discussion Series

The new Office of Connected Care, created in FY 2016, is the result of the merger of VA Telehealth Services with Connected Health, which consists of My HealtheVet (VA's personal health record), VA Mobile and the VHA Innovation Program. By bringing the offices together, the Office of Connected Care further enables VA to deliver on its promise to provide personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care. Specifically, the Office of Connected Care focuses on:

- Increasing access to continuous, coordinated VA health care services
- Enhancing the workflow, impact and efficiency through technology for VA staff
- Supporting Veterans' participation in their health care

The Office of Connected Care participates in a variety of Veteran outreach activities including disseminating e-newsletters for Veterans, clinicians and other stakeholders; securing media opportunities; working closely with VSOs; participating in events; and providing extensive support to My HealtheVet and Telehealth Coordinators who work with Veteran Patients across VA Medical centers.

During the reporting period, staff successfully placed articles in a number of media outlets including Military.com, Office of Rural Health online newsletter, Weekly Educator, Connected Care Messenger and Connected Care Weekly Update.

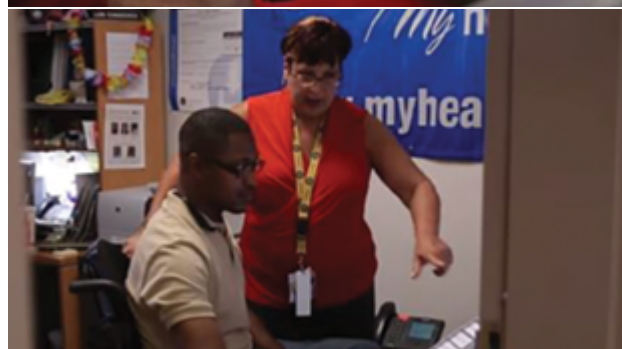
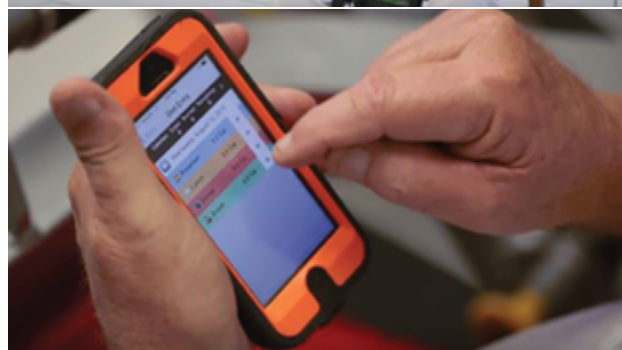
Connected Care staff members participated in a variety of outreach events at the local and national levels. These events provided My HealtheVet and Telehealth Coordinators with the opportunity to educate Veterans, Servicemembers and their family members about Connected Care programs. The events also provided a forum to encourage Veterans, Servicemembers and their family members to sign-up for My HealtheVet. Events included:

- National Association of County Veterans Service Officers Annual Training Conference
- National Veterans Wheelchair Games
- National Veterans Golden Age Games Expo
- Vietnam Veterans of America Leadership Conference
- VFW Annual Convention

Connected Care staff members provide training and education to a broad range of VA staff about available programs, services and benefits. This enabled VA staff to, in turn, inform and educate Veterans, dependents, Caregivers and families about My HealtheVet, VA Mobile and Telehealth.

In FY 2016, My HealtheVet launched a new biweekly newsletter that features articles about My HealtheVet and related topics. The Veterans and Servicemembers who receive the newsletter represent a variety of ages, demographics, conflicts and branches. Additionally, VA Mobile launched an e-newsletter, which reaches 14,000 recipients quarterly.

In FY 2015 – 2016, VA Mobile held a monthly discussion series about VA Web and mobile applications. The forum provided an opportunity for VA staff members, clinicians, app developers and other VA stakeholders



to learn about new VA-developed apps, VA app development and VA Mobile's plans to enhance Veterans' experiences. The one-hour monthly webinars covered a range of topics and demonstrations and always included an interactive Q&A session.

As additional apps entered field testing and neared national release, VA Mobile developed a series of print and online promotional materials designed to generate greater awareness. These were used for distribution at VSO conferences, VA medical centers, health IT meetings, etc.



## OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY

### AT A GLANCE:

- More than 4,260 page views since November 2015 to Health Equity Web site
- 11,580 subscribers to listserv as of September 2016
- 746 people attended Webinars held by office since November 2015 and more than 700 people accessed the archives of the sessions

The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the advancement of health equity and reduction of health disparities among Veterans. Its mission is to address health disparities through education, training, communications, programs, projects and initiatives that bring synergy and encourage collaboration within the organization.

As part of its outreach efforts, OHE launched an external Web site for Veterans and created a listserv as a communication tool to disseminate health equity-related information to Veterans and stakeholders. The Web site launched November 2015 and included health equity research, data, tools and news and events of interest to Veterans and stakeholders. The listserv, created in February 2016, helps drive Veterans and stakeholders to the new Web site and share new resources.

In addition to the launch of the Web site and listserv, OHE developed a robust fact sheet examining the Hepatitis C Virus, advanced liver disease and health disparities among vulnerable Veteran populations in October 2015. The fact sheet presented results from OHE's analysis of this health issue among vulnerable Veteran populations and educated vulnerable Veterans about the increased risk for advanced liver disease resulting from the Hepatitis C virus infection. As a result of increased interest in the fact sheet, OHE developed a dashboard as part of its efforts to target and accelerate the care of Veterans with this serious disease. The new resource promoted equitable diagnosis and treatment of underserved Veterans with the Hepatitis C virus and advanced liver disease nationally. OHE reached out to several organizations that work with vulnerable Veteran populations in order to increase awareness of the issue and the benefits of the dashboard.

OHE continued to leverage online outreach by working with VA Health Services Research and Development to launch a series of Webinars for Veterans, VHA leadership, clinicians and non-clinicians, stakeholders and researchers focused on health equity and action. The monthly Webinars launched in November 2015 and highlighted activities that promote the implementation of the VHA Health Equity Action Plan and health concerns important to Veterans. In total, 746 attendees participated in the seminars. Additionally, the OHE Web site archives the seminars, and as of September 2016 they were accessed and downloaded over 705 times.



## OFFICE OF INTERAGENCY HEALTH AFFAIRS; VA/DOD LIAISON OFFICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 600,000 National Guard and Reserve components reached through multiple outreach activities

The VA/DoD Liaison Office conducted multiple efforts to re-establish connections via telephone and email with nearly a dozen military and Veteran organizations. These included Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Navy Reserve, Army National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs and National Guard Public Affairs Office. The liaison office met with the Army National Guard Surgeons (Medical) Cell as well as the Army and Marine Corps Reserve offices.

In April 2016, VA/DoD Liaison Office participated in the Air Force Reserve Combined Training Activity (CTA) at the Pentagon. In addition to providing the VHA overview briefing, the office coordinated other briefings with BAS and the Alexandria Vet Center. This annual event attracts general officers and senior-level officers/enlisted Servicemembers.

To support distributing VA materials to Servicemembers, Veterans and their families, VA/DoD Liaison Office provided Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) posters to National Guard Transitional Assistant Advisors (TAAs). The office also provided VA health care benefits and Vet Center brochures at the CTA. The continued distribution of VA materials at these events will help disseminate information on VHA programs to National Guard and Reserve component members and their families.

VA/DoD Liaison Office continued to tailor monthly messages to several hundred thousand active duty Servicemembers and Veterans via the internet. These messages have addressed Burn Pit Registry, Women's Health and Mental Health/PTSD.



## OFFICE OF OUTREACH COLLABORATION LIAISON OFFICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- More than 11 outreach events attended
- More than 1,800 Servicemembers, Veterans and others reached through these events

VHA's Office of Outreach Collaboration Liaison Office coordinates resource exhibits at active duty bases and other locations to inform, educate and empower Veterans and Servicemembers to apply for VA health care, benefits and services they may be entitled to now or in the future.

To inform Servicemembers and Veterans, the office coordinates with other VA offices, including Rehabilitation Counseling Services, VBA, NCA, VESO, Office of Survivors Assistance, as well as the DOL's Office of Strategic Outreach, Veterans Employment and Training Service.



During the reporting period, the office coordinated presentations and exhibits at the following active duty bases and conferences:

- The Pentagon
- The Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA), Annual Meeting & Exposition
- National Guard Bureau's Annual Military Appreciation Exposition
- National Museum of the Marine Corps
- Walter Reed National Military Medical Center
- Fort Belvoir
- Fort Meade

Overall, the Liaison Office coordinated more than a dozen events and directly reached more than 1,800 Servicemembers, Veterans and others. As a result, more Servicemembers preparing for separation from the military are aware of the benefits they qualify for through VA before they separate and know what steps are necessary to take to access those benefits.

These events also served to strengthen the important ties between VA and DoD as each agency works to ensure Servicemembers and Veterans have the information they need about benefits, health care, and other services available upon separation.

The office also coordinated similar quarterly resource exhibits at VA Central Office's canteen area to provide information on VA benefits and services to Veterans, their families and friends as well as interested employees.

Each of the quarterly events at both the Pentagon and VA Central Office saw approximately 80 to 100 attendees. The office shared benefits booklets and other materials in addition to providing face-to-face information and guidance.

## OFFICE OF PATIENT CARE SERVICES

### POST-DEPLOYMENT HEALTH

#### AT A GLANCE:

- 89,104 participants in the Burn Pit Registry as of September 25, 2016
- 21,855 total page views to the Gulf War Newsletter page and individual articles
- 55,678 email subscriptions with a 21 percent open rate
- 4,668 social media click-throughs for the Gulf War Newsletter

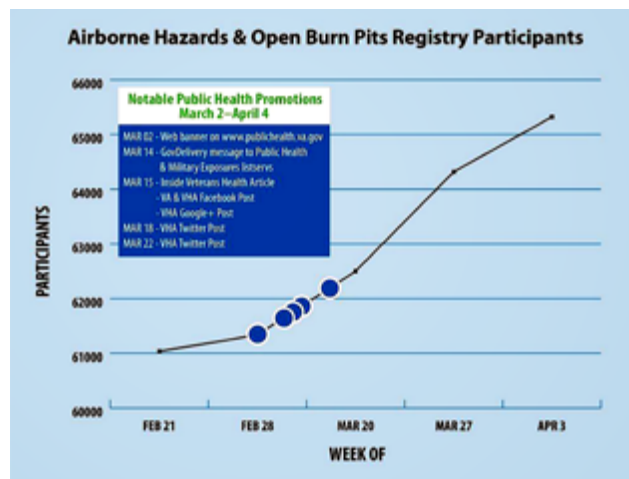
As part of VA's Office of Patient Care Services, Post-Deployment Health administers various programs and conducts educational outreach related to Veterans' exposure to environmental and occupational hazards during military service, including Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF), Gulf War, Vietnam, World War II and atomic Veterans activities.

In March 2016, the office promoted the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry to eligible Veterans and Servicemembers through social media, email and other digital channels. The promotions targeted Veterans and Servicemembers following VA's social media channels at the national and local levels, email subscribers and visitors to the office Web sites.

During the month, the registry increased by approximately 8,000 participants due to increased outreach, including a series of social media posts which generated over 2,000 impressions on Twitter and reached close to 550,000 people on Facebook.

Additionally, in February 2016, Post-Deployment Health released the online version of the Gulf War Newsletter. The newsletter contained information

about how to file a disability claim, diseases presumptively connected to military service, soon-to-be-released health and wellness apps for Veterans and a research study evaluating the use of light therapy to heal the brain. The office mailed the newsletter to approximately 650,000 Veterans, VSOs and other interested parties.



## OFFICE OF PROCUREMENT AND LOGISTICS

### AT A GLANCE:

- 61 outreach events participated in during the reporting period
- 2,500 Veterans who own small businesses attended annual conferences hosted by office

To accomplish outreach goals, staff participated in events sponsored by local, regional and national organizations, including the Small Business Administration, Chambers of Commerce, VSOs and others. At these events, staff operated booths, hosted workshops, participated in roundtable sessions or panel discussions or presented at organizations’ meetings or gatherings. In addition, staff created and conducted monthly vendor training sessions, annual vendor fairs and conferences.

OSDBU advertised most of these activities, as well as through email, phone and social media invitations and announcements, via local contacts and procurement community networks. At most events, staff handed out a “Doing Business with the Department of Veterans Affairs” trifold brochure, OSDBU’s Direct Connect trifold and, when applicable, PowerPoint slides from presentations. Some regions were able to customize these materials to meet the needs of their specific Veteran population.

## Additionally, thousands of Veteran business owners attended two Small Business Utilization Conferences, one for both FY 2015 and FY 2016.

With these outreach activities, VHA was able to increase procurement participation activities by current and future SDVOSBs, VOSBs and Small Disadvantaged Businesses (including 8(a), Woman-Owned Small Businesses and Historically Underutilized Businesses). The outreach activities encouraged greater competition by educating vendors on the processes they need to follow to bring their offerings to market. The businesses engaged provide VHA with a larger market base with the best possible goods and services at fair and reasonable cost.

Additionally, thousands of Veteran business owners attended two Small Business Utilization Conferences, one each for FY 2015 and FY 2016. The conferences gave Veteran business owners the opportunity to interact directly with VHA leadership, explore the possibility of doing business with other large businesses and learn how to navigate the process of doing business with VHA.



## OFFICE OF READJUSTMENT COUNSELING SERVICE (VET CENTERS)

### AT A GLANCE:

- 34,569 distinct outreach events hosted or participated in in FY 2015, a 24 percent increase from previous year
- 5,500 Veterans, Servicemembers and their families reached via 11 multiple day NASCAR Race Events at eight different racetracks

The Office of Readjustment Counseling Services' (RCS) Vet Centers focus on guiding Veterans and their families through major adjustments in lifestyle that are a result of a Veteran returning from combat. Services offered throughout the country include individual and group counseling, alcohol and drug assessment and suicide prevention referrals.

In-person events are a significant part of RCS outreach. Some of the most successful outreach events included 11 multiple day NASCAR Race Events at eight different racetracks. These events involved coordination with other VA program offices across all VA Administrations, specifically VBA, to ensure a single VA footprint. VA participants at these events connected with over 5,500 Veterans, Servicemembers and their families.

Also in FY 2015, the Vet Center Call Center **(1-800-WAR-VETS)** processed 113,022 telephone calls. This represented a 175 percent increase over FY 2014. The Call Center, which opened in 2009, is the product of VA leveraging technology to condense a fragmented system of Vet Center toll-free numbers into a single, modern center located in Denver, Colo. RCS completed the process of routing all Vet Centers' after-hours telephone calls to the Call Center, where they are answered by a live Vet Center staff member. This project accounts for the large increase in calls processed.

In addition to outreach through in-person events and the phone, RCS began to shift its focus towards social media in 2015. RCS coordinated with VA OPIA in October 2015 to determine the most effective way of bringing social media into RCS.

As a result, RCS staff broadcasted from a Vet Center during a January OPIA 2016 event focused solely on RCS Vet Center services. Registered participants—Veterans, Servicemembers and their families—submitted questions and received answers during this live feed. RCS responded to questions that were unanswered during the livestream portion in Facebook comments. Participants also received local Vet Center contact information. In addition, all 300 Vet Centers had counselors available to receive phone calls from event participants and provide immediate access to services.

RCS also leveraged top-tier media opportunities in order to drive attention to the services offered by Vet Centers nationwide, including:

- *"The Night Shift"*: An NBC prime time medical drama that follows medical staff (who are also recently returning combat Veterans) and their readjustment to life after combat. RCS worked on an episode that featured both Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden briefly discussing Vet Centers and presenting a PSA that dealt with the stigma Veterans associate with seeking counseling. An estimated 5.5 million viewers, ages 18-49, watched this episode.
- *"Late Night with David Letterman"*: During an episode of this popular late night talk show, Michelle Obama and David Letterman had a conversation about services available through VA's Vet Centers. An estimated 3.2 million viewers, ages 18-49, watched this program each night of that particular week. Actual viewership was expected to be higher that evening due to the high-profile guest.

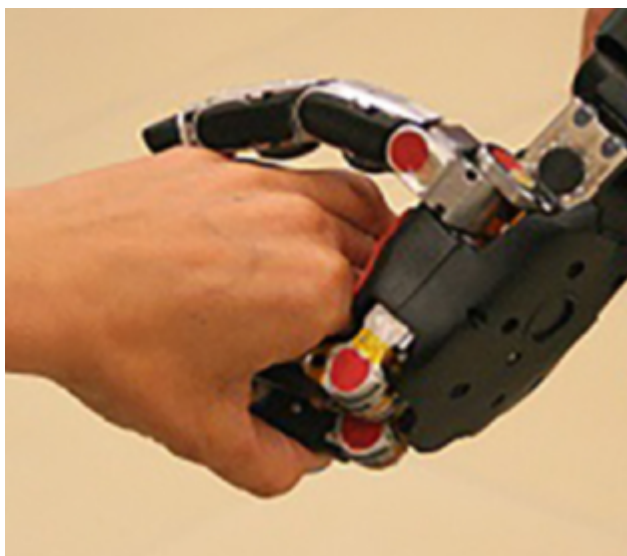
## OFFICE OF REHABILITATION AND PROSTHETIC SERVICES

### AT A GLANCE:

- 151 Veterans reached with assistive technology at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, for a total of 287 encounters including 61 initial evaluations in a one-day access clinic

The Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services is responsible for the national policies and programs for medical rehabilitation, prosthetic and sensory aids services that promote the health, independence and quality of life for Veterans with disabilities.

The Office focuses on in-person outreach through events. For instance, it represented VA during Congressional Brain Injury Awareness Day on Capitol Hill in March 2015 and 2016. The office answered questions from individuals and small groups of people, provided hardcopy informational material and demonstrated the Concussion Coach mobile application developed by Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services Polytrauma staff. As a result of this event, Polytrauma staff members were able to answer in-depth questions from all interested participants while also establishing points of contact for possible future relationships.



Staff leveraged the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic to offer assistive technology, reaching 151 unique Veterans for 287 encounters, which included 61 initial evaluations in a one-day access clinic. In addition to event coordination and in-person outreach, staff managed relationship development, online outreach and material updates and distribution.

Finally, staff authored more than 10 *VAntage Point* blog posts during the reporting period.

## OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH

### AT A GLANCE:

- 87 community members attended the training workshop
- 500 women Veterans reached

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) implements enterprise-wide initiatives that help improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans by increasing their access to care and services. These national programs stem from the Office's model to study, innovate, and spread new innovations to support the 3 million rural Veterans who are enrolled in and rely on VA health care.

Together with American Samoa's (AS) Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) and the Pacific Islands Health Care System (PIHCS), the staff developed an outreach toolkit and helped to plan and execute a training workshop to teach community members about benefits and services available to Veterans and their families. They also held an outreach event titled "Veterans Gathering" to inform Veterans of all ages, demographics, conflicts and branches as well as their families of resources and services available to them through community organizations and VA.

The Veterans Rural Health Resource Center worked to foster relationships with rural CBOCs in order to recruit and refer homeless Veterans in need of services. The staff traveled to local CBOCs to speak

with clinic managers and social workers who may encounter homeless Veterans in need of primary and specialty care, including mental health care, substance use treatment and other services. In addition, the Veterans Rural Health Resource Center conducted a number of outreach activities targeting Native American Veterans.

The office also hosted a table at the Iowa City Go Red for Women event in Virginia, distributing printed materials to increase awareness about heart disease and positive health behavior change in female Veterans.

The staff participated in a number of online activities in support of reaching out to Veterans. The office developed a Webinar with the Office of Women's Health to raise awareness regarding female Veterans' potential for postpartum depression and available Web-based services.

In FY 2015, the office spearheaded a program to assess the potential for a relationship with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) for outreach activities or expanded services for rural American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Veterans. This was an exploratory project in which the center worked with one or two TCUs, the local VA and tribal AIAN Veteran programs to identify opportunities for collaboration that may help to facilitate AIAN Veteran participation in educational opportunities, VA health care or other Veteran benefits earned while in service. The assessment is ongoing, and as of yet, there is no hard data.



## OFFICE OF VIRTUAL LIFETIME ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD

### AT A GLANCE:

- 200,000 Servicemembers, Veterans and Caregivers reached
- 112,989 new Veteran authorizations/consents obtained
- 98,000 community care providers viewed Veteran data through VLER
- 1.7 million eBenefit email subscribers

The Office of Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record Health (VLER) Program is a Veteran-focused program that gives VA and participating community care partners secure access to certain parts of a Veteran's electronic health record for coordinating care across the continuum.

To reach the maximum number of Veterans, VLER Health performed in-person outreach at numerous Veteran exhibits and community events such as VA exhibits at the Pentagon and VAMC Health Fairs. VLER Health attends these events to educate and obtain Veteran consent to exchange their health information with participating community care partners.

The education outreach of the VLER Program involved developing print, Web and social media materials for distribution and presentation highlighting the services it offers. VLER Program maintains numerous online communication channels to educate Veterans, caregivers and VA staff on the benefits of sharing health information data with community care partners.

Veterans and caregivers, in a variety of ways, feel the impact of VLER Health, which helps to inform clinicians' decisions, reduce the need for patients to carry paper records between health care providers, provide immediate access to additional health care



information during an emergency and support care management and population health analysis and better access to care.

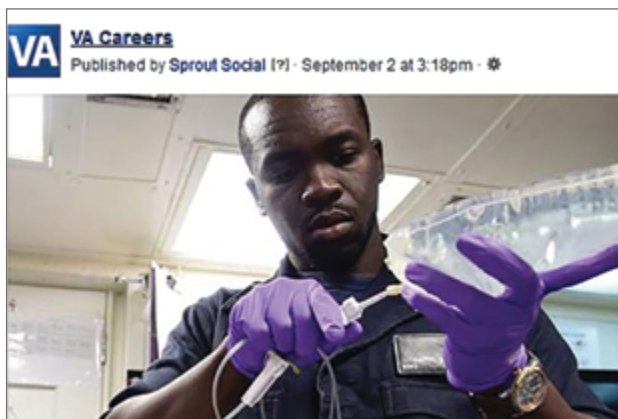
## OFFICE OF WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT AND CONSULTING – NATIONAL HEALTHCARE RECRUITMENT SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 998,721 impressions for three ad campaigns about employment opportunities
- 4,786,749 impressions from campaign ads on [www.Careerbuilder.com](http://www.Careerbuilder.com)
- 103 Veterans recruited for hard-to-fill clinical positions
- 124,171 impressions on TAOnline
- 75,000 opt-in email subscribers from TAOnline email campaign
- More than 361 calls received regarding Veteran’s Employment Assistance
- 11,150 leads through VACareer site

National Healthcare Recruitment Service (NHRS) recruiters attended numerous clinical health care conferences where Veterans in clinical careers were present. The events specific to Veterans included the Joint Federal Pharmacy Seminar and The Society for Federal Health Professionals local Veterans Business Initiative (VBI) sessions, local/regional military Transition Assistance Program (TAP) transition seminars and “Hiring Heroes” and “Recruit Military” job fairs. Recruiters discussed VHA employment opportunities and Veteran-specific hiring needs and resources. Recruiters worked directly with candidates interested in clinical VHA employment to match them to current VA opportunities and referred non-clinical

Veterans to the VESO for coordination. Through this outreach, the office was able to reach Veterans and Caregivers from the Korean conflict forward who remain in the workforce and are eligible for and/ or interested in VHA employment.



In addition to in-person employment recruitment, the office conducted several efforts to reach Veterans through social media platforms, digital ads and a targeted PSA.

Several Web sites provided platforms for online banner ads to promote VA employment opportunities to Veterans, including [www.Military.com](http://www.Military.com), CareerBuilder (targeted to health care Veterans) and TAOonline. Additionally, frequent Twitter chats took place with Veteran candidates interested in VA employment through @vacareers.

Additional social media helped to promote recruitment efforts including VACareers-branded accounts at Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook.

The ad campaigns continued to drive interested Veteran candidates for VHA's clinical positions to VACareers Web site where they were able to view current openings as well as comprehensive benefits and employment information for a wide variety of career fields. The Veterans section of VACareers Web site received significant traffic with over 634,000 page views and 99,120 unique visitors from January through September 2016.

An ongoing collaboration with DoD, the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Prisons connected candidates for employment across Federal agencies. Ongoing efforts to collaborate with DoD have led to direct candidate outreach to senior DoD health care leadership about VHA career opportunities following their military retirements.

## SPOTLIGHT ON: VACAREER WEB SITE CAMPAIGN

In FY 2015 - 2016, the NHRS staff developed an ad campaign and PSA to help drive traffic to VACareer Web site where Veterans can learn more about potential employment with VHA as well as connect to information about their benefits and other VA services through links. Online banner advertising on [www.Military.com](http://www.Military.com) resulted in 998,721 impressions for Veteran employment opportunities at VHA.

Nationwide, 8,450 radio and TV stations received the PSA. In addition, the ad campaign included coverage at national television advertising on top morning news programming, large-scale sporting events – including Veteran specific tie-in with Armed Forces Salute Week, West Point and Naval Academy games.



**“My VA physical therapist made me feel appreciated as a Veteran every time I saw him in the therapy room. He, remembering my name and recognizing the sacrifices I’ve made, was a huge booster for morale.”**

*~ (Veteran)*

## VETERANS CANTEEN SERVICE

### AT A GLANCE:

- 22,164 followers on Facebook page

The Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) works to ensure that Veterans, their families, volunteers and those serving Veterans have access to reasonably priced merchandise and services that are essential to their comfort and well-being.

While also furthering this statutory purpose, in FY 2014-2015, VCS sponsored Veterans Day celebrations that included refreshments, educational and memorial materials created in honor of Veterans, and opening remarks by VAMC Directors.

VCS is active on social media, with an emphasis on Facebook. Posted stories or events relate to the VCS “give back” initiative. Goodwill stories also include stories about VCS employees.

In addition to social media postings, VCS produced a print brochure with information about its services and benefits for Veterans that VA’s National Veterans Sports Programs handed out to participants. In addition, Veterans given a new bed donated by the VCS for VA’s Homeless Veterans program received a brochure to inform them of VCS’s available services.



## WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES

### AT A GLANCE:

- More than 287,000 people reached via Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) and over 33,000 women Veterans placed calls
- Reached 2,384 people through digital event

Women's Health Services (WHS) works to ensure that the fastest growing segment of the Veteran population has the resources it needs to address women's overall health care needs.

An integral component of WHS is the Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC), which conducts outreach to women Veterans across the nation. In addition to making outreach calls, the WVCC receives inbound calls from women Veterans who have questions and/or concerns related to VA care and benefits.

Together with VFW, WHS spearheaded an online Facebook Chat to inform women Veterans about the different benefits and services available at VA. The primary goal of this digital event was to address the main concerns of women Veterans. To help promote the event, VFW published an informational article in their e-newsletter, reaching 128,094 people and with an open rate of 32 percent.

WHS also leveraged mobile outreach. In March 2016, WHS established a relationship with ZERO TO THREE, a non-profit organization, to provide pregnant women Veterans access to Text4baby, which is a mobile information service designed to promote maternal and child health through text messages. Text4Baby is currently the largest mobile health initiative in the country, with over 1 million subscribers. Between 2013 and 2015, Text4baby reported that 6,590 participants labeled themselves as receiving health care through a military or Veteran health care system.



In March 2016, WHS, in collaboration with VBA, NCA and VA's Center for Women Veterans celebrated *Women Veterans Make History*. The 2016 theme focused on honoring women in public service and government. Throughout the month of March, VA hosted events to celebrate the successes of women Veterans in communities across the country. These women Veterans dedicated time and effort towards providing information on services available to their peers and elevating awareness of women Veterans' roles in society.

In preparation for and in honor of *Women Veterans Make History*, WHS developed materials and hosted events in collaboration with VBA, NCA and VA's Center for Women Veterans. These materials and events included:

- A field toolkit for Women Veterans Program Managers and women Veterans that included posters, fact sheets, helpful Web sites and FAQs.
- An Office of Public Affairs field toolkit for local and regional Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) that included customizable press releases, fact sheets and approved remarks for the field to use for Women's History Month.
- A Twitter Town Hall, hosted by VBA, engaged in discussion with female Veterans.
- A VHA diorama on Women's History, first displayed in the VACO lobby, traveled to VHA facilities throughout the country.
- A 60-minute internal event hosted by the Center for Women Veterans and the Women Veterans Program celebrated the experiences of women Veterans who served in Vietnam.

As in previous years, WHS worked with the American Heart Association Heart Month and Go Red initiatives. Teams developed a project that kicked off during the month of February to increase awareness and address cardiovascular disease and risk factors in women Veterans.

WHS also developed monthly outreach resources as a part of the Women Veterans Health Outreach campaign. These resources feature either a health theme or a culture change theme that staff can use to conduct outreach locally to women Veterans and distribute to external and internal stakeholders. The campaign heavily utilizes social media to reach women Veterans. The development of these resources has resulted in a cultural change in facilities that historically cared for male Veterans and did not put an emphasis on women Veterans.



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# CONCLUSION

**Our MyVA strategies lay the foundation to transform all of VA by combining functions, simplifying operations and providing Veterans care and services so they see VA as MyVA—a world-class, customer-focused, Veteran-centric service organization.**

The last two years have been a period of change and improvement at VA. We continue to discover new and innovative ways to reach out to Veterans, while also using tried-and-true methods to ensure they have information about their benefits and understand how to access them.

In order to do this, we need to continue changing VA by recognizing what is going well. This includes ensuring employees understand how their daily work supports our mission, values and strategy and changing when necessary. It's about training leaders to lead and employees to exceed expectations every day. VA's transformation includes strengthening the organization from within by ensuring we only have the best staff and leadership.

We are evaluating processes to provide the best Veteran experience possible. The VE Office and

other teams are leading the effort on this, and as we complete the staffing of these critical offices and roles, they will lead the way on working with Veterans at the community and regional level to ensure VA delivers to Veterans the benefits and services they have earned.

In changing VA for the future, we also need to look outside the agency. In the last two years, we have worked to develop collaborations and relationships with global and regional organizations that can help us conduct more effective outreach and deliver benefits and services more efficiently.

As a result, we have improved access to health care, with more Veterans coming to VA for care and waiting less time to get the services they need. In 2015, Veterans had nearly 4 million more appointments than the previous year—almost 57 million were in







VA facilities, and over 16.8 million received VA care in communities. This past July, VA completed 96 percent of Veterans' appointments within 30 days of Veterans' preferred date, 85 percent within seven days and 22 percent the same day.

We have also improved wait times—now the average wait time is approximately five days for primary care, six days for specialty care and two days for mental health care.

But, we know that isn't good enough. By December 2016, Veterans can expect same-day access for both care and mental health care.

The number of Veterans receiving mental health care from VA has increased by 80 percent since 2005, to over 1.6 million Veterans. As part of our commitment to helping Veterans in need, VCL has

been an important and effective tool. As part of that ongoing effort, VA will open a second VCL call center in Atlanta, expected to be live by the end of 2016. This means that Veterans in need will have 200 more responders ready to talk, chat and text 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

These are just a few of the plans we have for continuing to serve Veterans now and in the future. We will continue to improve on what we know works and eliminate what does not. VA is a living organization and must continue to grow, evolve and change to serve our constantly changing population of Veterans. Outreach will always be an integral part of VA's transformation as we work to reach Veterans, their families and survivors.









**2016 BIENNIAL REPORT TO CONGRESS**  
**VETERAN OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs