



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

November 17, 2014

To the President of the United States, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and President Pro Tempore of the Senate:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is in the midst of an historic opportunity to improve the way we serve Veterans. To that end, I am pleased to submit the *Department of Veterans Affairs 2014 Performance and Accountability Report*. This point-in-time report highlights VA's accomplishments and challenges in providing health care and benefits to Veterans.

We are taking a hard look at how we do business. Overwhelmingly, our employees are deeply devoted to VA's mission—serving those who have borne the battle, as well as their families and survivors. Their day-to-day behavior and performance is driven by VA's mission-critical institutional values—Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence, or I-CARE. We judge our success in performing that mission against a single metric—Veterans' outcomes.

VA is a customer-service organization. We serve Veterans who expect and deserve to receive the highest level of care and service that VA can provide. Because VA and its stakeholders hold the Department accountable for delivering that service, VA is committed to being open and transparent. Therefore, we have initiated development of a more robust process for measuring our services according to Veteran satisfaction and outcomes. Additionally, we will expand our Veteran satisfaction survey capabilities in the coming year, thereby capturing more Veteran experience data through telephone, social media, and on-line means. We are instituting "Lean Management" organizational strategies while examining how we can reorganize VA to better serve Veterans, with integrated organizations and along common regional service boundaries. We are focused on establishing an employee-led, Veteran-centric restructure, called "MyVA." 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. This is a long-term process and we are just beginning to plan how this will unfold.

One of the ways we have become a Veteran-centric organization is by redoubling efforts to ensure timely access to quality care. Through VA's Accelerated Access to Care initiative, the Department has improved access, decreased the number of Veterans on electronic wait lists and connected them with health care appointments in VA facilities, and in their communities, across the country. VA health care facilities nationwide are standardizing access management processes, and monitoring clinic capacity to maximize appointments; where we cannot increase capacity, we are increasing non-VA medical care. We are also updating the antiquated appointment scheduling system, beginning with near-term enhancements and ending with the acquisition of a state-of-the-art, "commercial off-the-shelf" scheduling system.

And while implementing the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, the Department has set the course for longer-term improvements through the development of a guiding document for the Veterans Health Administration called the "Blueprint for Excellence", by the creation of a new Digital Services Team to better connect Veterans with caregivers, and through the launch of an aggressive recruiting effort to answer the need for more well-qualified medical professionals. VA leaders have also taken a fresh look at VA's homelessness program, VBA's Transformation Strategy, and other key areas such as human resources and financial management to identify more opportunities for greater efficiencies.

In addition, we received our 16th consecutive unqualified (clean) audit opinion on our consolidated financial statements. As stated in my "Statement of Assurance," VA has assessed the reliability and completeness of financial data and the actions the Department is taking to resolve its one material weakness.

Every VA employee is charged to be an advocate for Veterans, committed to providing Veterans and their families the very best health care and services. The Nation has depended on its Veterans, and VA's employees want Veterans to know they can depend on VA.

Sincerely,



Robert A. McDonald