

Strategic Goal Four

Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.

Objective 4.1 -- Improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans as well as support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.



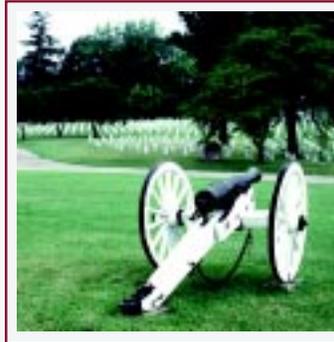
Objective 4.2 -- Advance VA medical research and development programs that address veterans' needs, with an emphasis on service-connected injuries and illnesses, and contribute to the Nation's knowledge of disease and disability.



Objective 4.3 -- Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality educational experiences for health care trainees.



Objective 4.4 -- Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veteran's benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.



Objective 4.5 -- Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

VA will support the public health of the Nation as a whole through medical research, medical education and training, and serving as a resource in the event of a national emergency or natural disaster. VA will support the socioeconomic well-being of the Nation through the provision of education, vocational rehabilitation, and home loan programs. VA will also preserve the memory and sense of patriotism of the Nation by maintaining our national cemeteries as national shrines and hosting patriotic and commemorative ceremonies and events.

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Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.

Objective 4.1

Improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to veterans as well as support to national, state, and local emergency management and homeland security efforts.

Purpose and Outcomes:

The purpose of this objective is to ensure that, in times of war or national emergency, VA continues to operate and provide services to veterans and also contributes to the national response capability. VA's efforts will be coordinated with the Department of Homeland Security, DoD, HHS, and other government agencies. The program outcome is to train VA Central Office, field-based officials, emergency planners, and key personnel on VA's Continuity of Operations plan.

Strategies and Processes:

VA will improve plans, training, and other advanced approaches to prepare for any potential contingencies. VA will develop and maintain appropriate emergency operations capability to ensure focused, coordinated emergency response and to integrate VA emergency operations with the Department of Homeland Security and other government agencies, and will ensure that information technology is available to support this effort. VA will continue to maintain readiness as required by Public Law 97-174, and implement the Memorandum of Understanding between VA and DoD which requires joint plans and procedures for using the VA medical system as the primary backup to DoD during war and other national emergencies. VA will continue to

support the VA/DoD Contingency Plan and the National Response Plan, to include the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS). This collaboration includes coordinating individual agency response plans and supporting local, state, regional, and national incident management systems. VA and DoD will also collaborate in the training and education of health care responders and identify opportunities to provide medical readiness training and platforms for first responders and military medical personnel.

VA will carry out its Comprehensive Emergency Management Program (CEM) to include continuity of operations that will require: (1) annual testing, training, and exercises, (2) preparing alternate operating capability, (3) identifying designated emergency planners within VA, (4) tracking emergency pharmaceutical caches, and (5) tracking decontamination equipment and personal protective equipment.

The CEM will be designed to enable VA to respond to a wide range of potential emergencies including:

- an attack on the United States;
- natural, environmental, and technological disasters;
- civil disorders; and
- terrorism.

VA will be prepared to respond to disasters and national emergencies. VA will partner with other Federal, state, and community agencies to develop a national emergency preparedness plan that clearly articulates VA's role and capabilities to respond to emergencies. VA will conduct training and emergency preparedness drills using standardized scenarios consistent with VA's Emergency Management Program Guidebook.

External Factors:

The necessity for VA to achieve this objective was made clear with the events of September 11, 2001. External factors that will affect VA's achievement of this objective will include the level of funding and support of Congress and the development of new technology, equipment, and medical interventions.



Performance Measures

Objective 4.1	Outcome Measures	Performance Targets	
		FY 2004	FY 2008
Emergency Management	<i>VA's Readiness Operations Center (ROC) (Sites A& B) will be fully capable of 24/7 coverage and capable of fully functioning as the VA's primary ROC. Site B will be capable of taking over Site A within 6 hours</i>	90%	95%
	<i>Percent of group / emergency preparedness officials (VA Crisis Response Team (CRT) members, Advanced COOP, and COOP Planners) who receive focused training or participate in exercises relevant to VA's COOP plan</i>	95%	100%

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Objective 4.2

Advance VA medical research and development programs that address veterans' needs, with an emphasis on service-connected injuries and illnesses, and contribute to the Nation's knowledge of disease and disability.

Purpose and Outcomes:

The purpose of this objective is to advance medical research and development programs in ways that support veterans' needs and contribute to the Nation's medical and scientific knowledge base as a public good. VA will pursue medical research areas that most directly address the diseases and conditions that affect veterans. VA research will also serve as a public good by providing benefits to the Nation as a whole in improving medical knowledge of disease and disability.

Strategies and Processes:

VA will increase provider and veterans' knowledge of the impact of military service on health care. VA will intensify efforts to implement the Veterans' Health Initiative (VHI). Veterans' military history and potential consequences of service will be fully incorporated into the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS). VA will develop, distribute, and promote orientation videos for incoming medical staff and other health care trainees.

VA will conduct medical research that leads to demonstrable improvements in veterans' health. Full research compliance and standardized protection of human subjects will be maintained. VA will increase the proportion of research



funding directed to projects addressing veteran-related issues, cooperative studies, and translational research. Support for "translational research" such as Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) will be strengthened.

Crosscutting Activities

All research conducted in VA facilities is subject to the regulations of other Federal agencies as well as to VA's own regulations. VA will work closely with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and HHS on joint studies funded by NIH. Similarly, VA will work closely with the Food and Drug Administration on human studies funded by pharmaceutical companies in support of new pharmaceutical or device applications. Sharing research and development will be aggressively supported and encouraged between VA and DoD. VA and DoD will explore military and veteran-related health research to include deployment health issues. In addition, VA and DoD will establish a forum for the sharing of best practices in health research and develop a mechanism to ensure that research outcomes are shared throughout the Departments.

External Factors:

Among the external influences that may affect the future direction of the Research and Development Program are the Congress and advisory committees. In recent years, Congress has consistently demonstrated its support for adequate VA research funding and has taken specific actions to substantially augment VA's appropriations for research. We expect Congress to maintain a high degree of interest in VA research by devoting more oversight on VA's spending of research dollars.

Performance Measures

Objective 4.2	Outcome Measures	Performance Targets	
		FY 2004	FY 2008
Research	<i>Maintain the percent of research projects devoted to Designated Research Areas</i>	99%	99%

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Objective 4.3

Sustain partnerships with the academic community that enhance the quality of care to veterans and provide high quality educational experiences for health care trainees.

Purpose and Outcomes:

VA will form partnerships with the Nation's academic community to provide training and education to medical residents and other health care trainees. The quality of health care provided to veterans is enhanced as a result of these partnerships. VA has affiliations with 107 medical schools and over 1,200 educational institutions. In FY 2002, clinical training at VA facilities was provided to over 81,000 residents, fellows and students including approximately 28,000 physician residents and fellows; 17,000 medical students; 16,000 nursing students; and 18,000 allied health residents and students.

Strategies and Processes:

VA will promote excellence and innovation in the education of future health care professionals. VA will work with the academic community to improve the training and awareness in military health related issues. We will provide appropriate support for training, education, and resident supervision.

External Factors:

Changes in VA's academic training programs may be affected by VA's ability to remain a desirable academic training partner. The future of medicine in VA is shaped by scientific, social, and economic trends that occur in society, often out of the control of the VA health care system.

Performance Measures

Objective 4.3	Outcome Measures	Performance Targets	
		FY 2004	FY 2008
Medical Training	<i>Increase medical residents' and other trainees' scores on a VA survey assessing the value of their clinical training experience</i>	82	85

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Objective 4.4

Enhance the socioeconomic well-being of veterans, and thereby the Nation and local communities, through veteran's benefits; assistance programs for small, disadvantaged, and veteran-owned businesses; and other community initiatives.

Purpose and Outcomes:

The purpose of this objective is to fully utilize veterans' benefits and other business assistance programs to enhance the socioeconomic well-being of the Nation and its veterans.

The array of benefits and services provided by VA has a direct impact on the lives of veterans and beneficiaries. Each benefit program has specific outcomes used to assess program results. However, VA benefit programs also contribute to the socioeconomic well being of the Nation. For example, a disabled veteran completing the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program or a veteran who uses Montgomery GI education benefits can be expected to achieve a higher lifetime income than those who do not participate in the program. Moreover, it is imperative that veterans with disabilities who can work are supported in maximizing their full employment potential. The Veterans Employment Initiative focuses on educating selecting officials on hiring flexibilities that can be used to hire veterans with disabilities. It also assists veterans, including veterans with disabilities, in using veteran preference status when applying for jobs. VA has also linked its job website to military transition centers around the country to assist veterans in obtaining employment.

The Loan Guaranty Program enables veterans to purchase housing that has a positive impact on the national economy. The delivery of health care benefits and services has a positive effect on the overall well-being of the Nation and can facilitate longer, more productive lives for veterans.

Strategies and Processes:

The strategies identified in the objectives under Strategic Goals 1 through 3 also support this objective of contributing to the socioeconomic well-being of the Nation through contributions to Gross Domestic Product, social and economic status of veterans and their families, and health care of veterans and the Nation.

VA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) will ensure compliance with the Small Business Act, as amended, requiring each Department to establish with the Small Business Administration (SBA) annual procurement goals for prime contract and subcontract awards to small businesses, small disadvantaged businesses, small women-owned businesses, 8(a) concerns, HUBZone concerns, and especially service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses. Goals will be established in a timely manner at a level that meets or exceeds statutory minimums.

Public Laws 105-135 and 106-50 require VA to cooperate and support SBA and Department of Labor efforts to develop programs to assist veterans, with a focus on service-disabled veterans, to establish and maintain small businesses. VA's Center for Veterans Enterprise (CVE) and OSDBU will serve as liaison with SBA and DOL to implement these laws. VA plans to develop an expanded business assistance program for veteran-owned small businesses.

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VA will also continue to provide accurate and timely information to the small businesses community on how, what, when, and where VA purchases goods and services. This will be done through print and electronic formats. VA will also participate in procurement conferences and sessions to train small businesses on VA's acquisition process and systems. VA will continue to make VA personnel aware of the Department's responsibilities to support small business through VA's acquisition program.

External Factors:

VA's small business goals are affected by government-wide acquisition reform efforts and are dependent upon effective interagency communication and collaboration.

Performance Measures

Objective 4.4		Outcome Measures		Performance Targets	
				FY 2004	FY 2008
Small Business Procurement Goals	<i>Percent of procurement achieved for each small business category:</i>				
	<i>Small Business</i>		*	35%	
	<i>8(a) Small Disadvantaged Business</i>		*	5%	
	<i>Women-owned Business</i>		*	6%	
	<i>HUBZone Concerns</i>		*	3%	
	<i>Service Disabled Veterans</i>		*	3%	
	<i>Veteran-Owned Small Business</i>		*	7%	
<p><i>*Denotes that the baseline is currently being developed, and the FY2008 performance target may be modified based on the determination of the baseline data.</i></p>					

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Objective 4.5

Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

Purpose and Outcomes:

The purpose of this objective is to preserve our Nation's history, nurture patriotism, and honor the service and sacrifice of our Nation's veterans by maintaining our national cemeteries as national shrines. Each national cemetery exists as a national shrine and as such, serves as an expression of the appreciation and respect of a grateful Nation for the service and sacrifice of veterans. Each national shrine provides an enduring memorial to this service, as well as a dignified and respectful setting for a final resting place.

National cemeteries also carry expectations of appearance that set them apart from private cemeteries. Our Nation is committed to create and maintain these sites as national shrines, transcending the provision of benefits to an individual. As national shrines, VA's cemeteries serve a purpose that continues long after burials have ceased and visits of families and loved ones have ended.

A national shrine is a place of honor and memory that declares to the visitor or family member who views it that within its majestic setting each and every veteran may find a sense of serenity, of historic sacrifice, and nobility of purpose. Each visitor should depart feeling that the grounds, the gravesites, and the environs of the national

cemetery are a beautiful and awe-inspiring tribute to those who gave much to preserve our Nation's freedom and way of life.

Strategies and Processes:

To achieve this objective, VA must maintain occupied graves and developed grounds in a manner befitting national shrines. Improvements in the appearance of burial grounds and historic structures are also required for VA to fulfill its national shrine commitment. Extensive renovation of grounds, gravesites, and grave markers will be undertaken at cemeteries where long-standing deferred maintenance needs exist.

The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, Public Law 106-117, directed VA to contract for an independent study to review various issues related to the National Shrine Commitment and its focus on cemetery appearance. Volume 3 of the study, *Cemetery Standards of Appearance*, was published in March 2002. Using the recommendations in the Volume 3 report and building on previous efforts, VA has established standards and measures by which the National Cemetery Administration can determine the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations. These standards and measures identify performance expectations in key operational processes such as interments, grounds maintenance, and headstones and markers.

Volume 2, *National Shrine Commitment*, which was published in August 2002, identified the one-time repairs needed to ensure a dignified and respectful setting appropriate for each national cemetery as well as recommendations to address deferred maintenance issues or preventive steps to minimize future maintenance costs. VA will use the information

Objective 4.5

in this report for addressing repair and maintenance needs at its national cemeteries.

VA will continue its partnerships with various civic organizations that allow volunteers to participate in maintaining the appearance of national cemeteries.

Under a joint venture with VA health care facilities, national cemeteries will continue to provide therapeutic work opportunities to veterans receiving treatment in the Compensated Work Therapy/Veterans Industries (CWT/VI) program.

VA will continue to obtain feedback to ascertain how our customers and stakeholders perceive the appearance of national cemeteries. Since 2001, the annual nationwide mail survey *Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries*, has been VA's primary source of customer satisfaction data regarding national cemeteries. The survey collects data annually from family members and funeral directors who have recently received services from a national cemetery. The information gathered is used in the strategic planning process to develop additional strategies for improvement. VA will continue to conduct focus groups to collect data on stakeholder expectations and their level of satisfaction with the appearance of national cemeteries.

All national cemeteries are important sites for patriotic and commemorative events. VA will continue to host ceremonies and memorial

services at national cemeteries to honor those who made the supreme sacrifice. To preserve our Nation's history, VA will continue to conduct educational tours and programs for schools and civic groups. VA will develop videos and other outreach products that will be used as educational tools at national cemeteries. These outreach products, which will be available for viewing by the general public, will provide a history of the National Cemetery Administration and of VA cemeteries from their inception during the Civil War to the present.

VA will also enhance its partnerships with various civic organizations to promote patriotism and broaden public understanding and appreciation for the contributions of veterans in our Nation's history. New opportunities will be identified to educate the general public on veterans' history and the role of national cemeteries.

Since national cemeteries were established in 1862, they have become the sites of memorials erected to recall distinctive heroics, group burials, and related commemorations. These memorials range from modest blocks of stone, sundials, and tablets affixed to boulders to more sophisticated obelisks and single soldiers on granite pedestals. In 2002, VA initiated its first comprehensive inventory of memorials located in more than 100 national cemetery properties across the country. To complete this inventory, VA is partnering with Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), a non-profit organization with more than 10 years of experience using volunteers to survey public outdoor sculpture nationwide. In addition to gathering historical information about memorials, volunteers will document materials, dimensions, appearance, evidence of damage, and setting. The inventory will help VA prioritize conservation needs as well as develop a maintenance plan for all its memorials. When the project is complete, the inventory data will reside at VA as well as being publicly accessible online through another SOS! partner, the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



External Factors:

Maintaining the grounds, graves, and grave markers of national cemeteries as national shrines is influenced by many different factors. As time goes by, cemeteries experience a variety of environmental changes that may require extensive maintenance. Extremes in weather, such as excessive groundwater, rain, or drought, can result in or exacerbate sunken graves, sunken markers, soiled markers, inferior turf cover, and weathering of columbaria.

Performance Measures

Objective 4.5		Performance Targets	
		FY 2004	FY 2008
Outcome Measures			
National Shrine Commitment	<i>Percent of respondents who rate national cemetery appearance as excellent</i>	98%	100%
Service Delivery Measures			
National Shrine Commitment	<i>Percent of headstones and/or markers in national cemeteries that are the proper height and alignment</i>	*	90%
	<i>Percent of headstones, markers and niche covers that are clean and free of debris or objectionable accumulations</i>	*	90%
<p><i>* Denotes that the baseline is currently being developed, and the FY2008 performance target may be modified based on the determination of the baseline data.</i></p>			