

## Strategic Goal Three

*Honoring, Serving, and Memorializing Veterans*

### Strategic Objective 3.1

*Delivering Health Care*

Provide high-quality, reliable, accessible, timely, and efficient health care that maximizes the health and functional status for all enrolled veterans, with special focus on veterans with service-connected conditions, those unable to defray the cost, and those statutorily eligible for care.

#### Making a Difference for the Veteran



*A VA health care provider meeting with a patient*

#### VA Health Care – “A Bright Star”

The prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) labels VA “a bright star” of health care safety. The glowing comments came in the May 18, 2005, edition of the Journal, which examined the progress – or, too often, lack of progress – among private-sector health care systems during the last 5 years on issues affecting patient safety. VA’s health care system “quickly emerged as a bright star in the constellation of safety practice, with system-wide implementation of safe practices, training programs and the establishment of four patient-safety research centers,” according to the Journal’s editorial. The statement has much to back it. In December 2004, the Annals of Internal Medicine examined seven specific measurements of quality care for diabetes, and found VA ahead of its private-sector counterparts in all seven categories. That same month, the independent National Committee for Quality Assurance, which ranks health care plans according to 17 performance criteria, found VA out-performing America’s best private sector hospitals in all 17.

## Performance Trends and Impact of FY 2005 Results

Performance Trend	FY 2005 Impact																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> <b>Clinical Practice Guidelines Index</b></p> <table border="1"> <caption>Clinical Practice Guidelines Index Performance</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>70%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>77%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>87%*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>77%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>77%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>80%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Actual data through June 2005. Final data are not yet available.</p>	Year/Target	Percentage	2003	70%	2004	77%	2005 Result	87%*	2005 Plan	77%	2006 Plan	77%	Strategic Target	80%	<p>The 2005 score of 87 percent significantly exceeded the target of 77 percent. The Clinical Practice Guidelines Index demonstrates the degree to which VHA provides evidence-based clinical interventions to veterans seeking care in VA. The measure covers elements of care that are known to have a positive impact on the health of our patients who suffer from commonly occurring acute and chronic illnesses. Providing these interventions has improved the overall health of these veterans.</p>				
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2005 Result	87%*																		
2005 Plan	77%																		
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Strategic Target	80%																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> <b>Prevention Index II</b></p> <table border="1"> <caption>Prevention Index II Performance</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>80%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>82%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>83%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>90%*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Actual data through June 2005. Final data are not yet available.</p>	Year/Target	Percentage	2001	80%	2002	82%	2003	83%	2004	88%	2005 Result	90%*	2005 Plan	88%	2006 Plan	88%	Strategic Target	88%	<p>The 2005 score of 90 percent exceeded the target of 88 percent. The Prevention Index II demonstrates the degree to which VHA provides evidence-based clinical interventions to veterans seeking preventive care in VA. The measure targets elements of preventive care that are known to have a positive impact on the health and well-being of our patients. Providing these interventions has improved the overall health of veterans by preventing conditions from developing.</p>
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## Performance Trends and Impact of FY 2005 Results

Performance Trend	FY 2005 Impact																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> Percent of Specialty Care Appointments Scheduled within 30 Days of Desired Date</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>84%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>86%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>89%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>93%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>95%*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>93%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>93%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>93%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p style="font-size: small;">* Actual data through June 2005. Final data are not yet available.</p>	Year/Category	Percentage	2001	84%	2002	86%	2003	89%	2004	93%	2005 Result	95%*	2005 Plan	93%	2006 Plan	93%	Strategic Target	93%	<p>The 2005 attainment of 95 percent exceeded the target of 93 percent. This measure was designed to assess the degree to which specialty care appointments are scheduled in a timely manner. It takes into account the timeline that the patient has identified as meeting his or her need. It serves as a measure of timeliness as well as responsiveness to the patient's stated needs. Providing timely care has improved the overall health of veterans by quickly treating existing conditions and preventing conditions from developing.</p>
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## Related Information

### Major Management Challenges

The following major management challenges have been identified for this strategic objective:

#### OIG

- Part-Time Physician Time and Attendance (see page 206 for more details)
- Staffing Guidelines (see page 206 for more details)
- Quality Management (see page 207 for more details)
- Long-Term Health Care (see page 207 for more details)
- Security and Safety (see page 208 for more details)

## GAO

- Access to Acute Care, Long-term Care, and Specialized Health Care Services (see page 218 for more details)
- Patient Safety Financial Management Control (see page 219 for more details)
- Resources and Workload Management Financial Management Control (see page 222 for more details)

## Program Evaluations

An independent evaluation of VA's cardiac care program was completed in 2003. The study found that heart patients treated at VA hospitals have consistently higher mortality rates than patients of similar age and in roughly similar health who are treated at non-VA institutions. A larger proportion of the veterans die in the first month after suffering a heart attack, and a larger proportion of the survivors die over the next 3 years. The program evaluation also found that VA patients undergo cardiac catheterization—a key step in assessing the seriousness of a person's heart disease—less often than patients treated in non-VA hospitals. In addition, they have only about one-half the likelihood of undergoing angioplasty or bypass surgery, two procedures that can often extend life.

A blue ribbon panel of national experts was commissioned to oversee the quality improvements for VA's cardiac care program. Changes that have been implemented include stricter adherence to national clinical guidelines, hiring more cardiologists, upgrading catheterization lab equipment, reconfiguring access to cardiac care (including expansion of community services), providing reimbursements for emergency care provided in non-VA settings, and conducting additional clinical research to discover the causal effects of VA's higher mortality statistics. All VA hospitals with cardiac care programs have provided detailed plans on how they intend to improve the quality of care at their facilities. VA's Strategic Management Council is monitoring compliance with the national action plan.

In January 2005 VA initiated an independent evaluation of its oncology program. The program evaluation focuses on lung, colorectal, prostate, hematologic, and breast cancers. The results of the program evaluation will help VA determine how well it is meeting the oncology program goals and objectives and will provide a comparison of how VA is performing compared to the private sector.

## Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Medical Care Program during 2003, which resulted in a rating of "Adequate." Please see Summary Table 3 on page 57 for more information.

## New Policies and Procedures

A new directive was issued for *Documentation of Kinesiotherapy Services in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Nursing Home Care Units* that does the following:

- Establishes policy for the documentation of Kinesiotherapy services including applicable treatment time and procedures within VA nursing home care units.
- Defines the interdisciplinary care process in short-term, goal-oriented rehabilitative care programs, formal restorative nursing programs, nursing home care units, and other long-term maintenance programs.

## Other Important Results

- The 2005 attainment of 85 percent met the target for outpatient encounters that have electronic progress notes signed within 2 days.
- The 2005 achievement of 73 percent exceeded the target of 67 percent for patients who report being seen within 20 minutes of scheduled appointments at VA health care facilities.

## Strategic Objective 3.2

### *Decisions on Pension Claims*

Process pension claims in a timely and accurate manner to provide eligible veterans and their survivors a level of income that raises their standard of living and sense of dignity

### Making a Difference for the Veteran

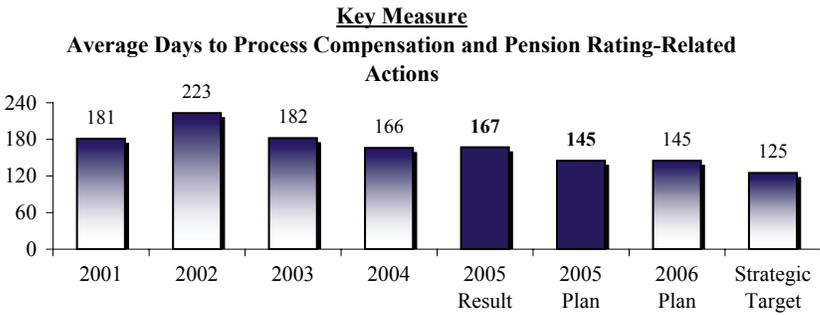
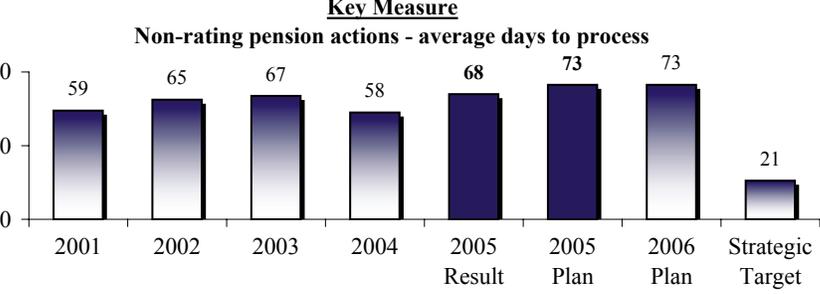
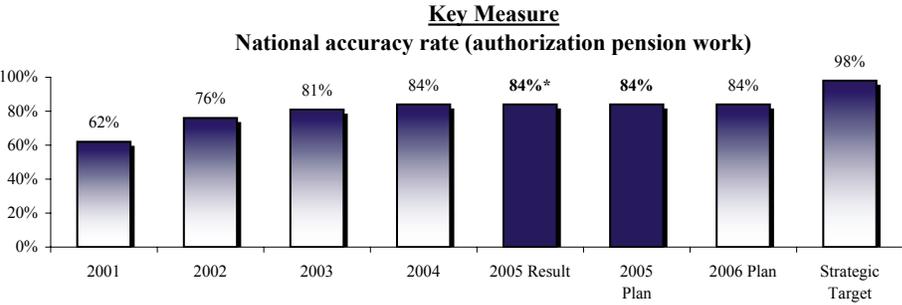


*VA honors veterans*

### Getting the Correct Benefit to a Deserving Beneficiary

With a little investigative work, employees at the Huntington, West Virginia, Regional Office helped the widow of a former prisoner of war (POW) who was about to lose her VA pension. Veterans Service Representative Suzanne Heckenbach was discussing a former POW veteran's claim with Paul Lowe, a senior rating specialist. As they talked, she mentioned the widow of another former POW, who was about to lose her nonservice-connected death pension because her Social Security benefits pushed her slightly over the VA income limit. They looked into her case and Lowe determined that, due to legislation passed after the veteran's death, his death could be considered service-connected. The widow was awarded Dependency and Indemnity Compensation nearly double that of her old pension rate.

## Performance Trends and Impact of FY 2005 Results

Performance Trend	FY 2005 Impact																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> Average Days to Process Compensation and Pension Rating-Related Actions</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="256 436 1076 751"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Average Days</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>181</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>223</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>182</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>166</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>167</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>145</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>145</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>125</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Average Days	2001	181	2002	223	2003	182	2004	166	2005 Result	167	2005 Plan	145	2006 Plan	145	Strategic Target	125	<p>On average, the veteran had to wait an additional day for a rating decision when compared to last year (167 vs. 166 days). While negligible, this processing time is too long, does not meet the needs of the veteran, and is significantly higher than the 145-day target. The continuing increase in the number of claims received did appreciably affect VA's ability to meet its 2005 target.</p>
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2001	181																		
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2004	166																		
2005 Result	167																		
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> Non-rating pension actions - average days to process</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="256 961 1076 1255"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Average Days</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>59</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>65</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>67</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>58</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>68</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>73</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>73</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>21</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Average Days	2001	59	2002	65	2003	67	2004	58	2005 Result	68	2005 Plan	73	2006 Plan	73	Strategic Target	21	<p>In 2005 VA met its target by 5 days, thus providing more timely responses to those veterans who are either waiting for decisions on claims or are waiting for VA to make adjustments to their awards.</p>
Year	Average Days																		
2001	59																		
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2005 Result	68																		
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Strategic Target	21																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> National accuracy rate (authorization pension work)</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="207 1360 1109 1665"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Accuracy Rate</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>62%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>76%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>81%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>84%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>84%*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>84%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>84%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>98%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Actual data through June 2005. Final data will be available in January 2006.</p>	Year	Accuracy Rate	2001	62%	2002	76%	2003	81%	2004	84%	2005 Result	84%*	2005 Plan	84%	2006 Plan	84%	Strategic Target	98%	<p>The veteran is entitled to an accurate decision on his or her pension claim. VA continues to strive to improve in this important area by providing enhanced training to help employees properly make increasingly complex pension-related decisions.</p>
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2004	84%																		
2005 Result	84%*																		
2005 Plan	84%																		
2006 Plan	84%																		
Strategic Target	98%																		

## Related Information

### Major Management Challenges

The following major management challenges have been identified for this strategic objective:

#### OIG

- State Variances in VA Disability Compensation Payments (see page 202 for more details)
- Compensation and Pension Timeliness (see page 203 for more details)
- Compensation and Pension Program's Internal Controls (see page 204 for more details)
- Fugitive Felon Program (see page 205 for more details)

#### GAO

- Timeliness and Accuracy (see page 220 for more details)
- Consistency of Claims Decisions (see page 221 for more details)
- Staffing Level Justification (see page 221 for more details)
- Program Transformation and Modernization (see page 221 for more details)

### Program Evaluations

An evaluation of the Pension program was completed by ORC Macro; Economic Systems, Incorporated; and the Hay Group in 2004. They recommended that the pension benefit payable to veterans' survivors be more consistent with the benefit provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food assistance programs. VA is reviewing the proposal.

### Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Pension program during 2005. The rating has not yet been issued.

### New Policies and Procedures

The Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000 has significantly increased both the length and complexity of claims development. VA's notification and development duties increased, adding more steps to the claims process and lengthening the time it takes to develop and decide a claim.

We expect increased workload due to pending requirements to expand outreach efforts. These requirements would involve additional efforts to identify and inform veterans who are not enrolled or registered with VA about their potential eligibility for benefits or services, including eligibility for medical and nursing care.

### Other Important Results

Despite the increased workload, the overall customer satisfaction rate for pension has increased from 63 percent in 2001 to 66 percent in 2004.

## Strategic Objective 3.3

### *Providing Insurance Service*

Maintain a high level of service to insurance policyholders and their beneficiaries to enhance the financial security for veterans' families

## Making a Difference for the Veteran



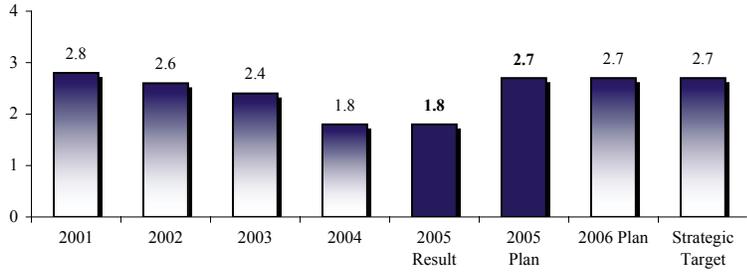
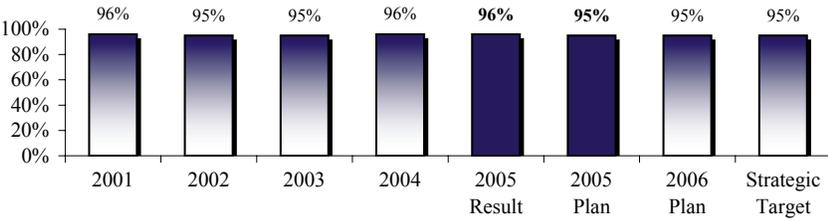
*VA employees using the latest technologies to serve veterans*

### Insurance Services – Tops in Government

The VA Insurance Center, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, administers six nationwide life insurance programs that provide \$18.7 billion in insurance protection to 1.4 million veterans. The center annually processes 141,000 death awards, 36,000 loans and cash surrenders, 21,000 new life insurance applications, and 2 million premium collections, and handles more than 730,000 telephone calls. The center also supervises the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and Veterans' Group Life Insurance programs that provide over \$1 trillion in coverage to 2.9 million servicemembers and veterans and 3 million spouses and children.

The Insurance Center received top honors for overall excellence in customer support from a group representing help desks, call centers, and other customer service operations in the government. The award came in 2004 from the Government Contract Center Community of Practice, which examined 32 entrants from federal, state, and local consumer assistance centers and Web portals in four categories. Winners were selected for their excellence in internal and external customer support. The operation requires 80 toll-free lines and about 100 employees. The center's "signature service" program means that insurance specialists are responsible for all aspects of the calls they receive including any issues that arise by letter.

## Performance Trends and Impact of FY 2005 Results

Performance Trend	FY 2005 Impact																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> <b>Average Days to Process Insurance Disbursements</b></p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="191 468 938 741"> <caption>Average Days to Process Insurance Disbursements</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Average Days</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>2.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>2.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>2.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>1.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>1.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>2.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>2.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>2.7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year/Target	Average Days	2001	2.8	2002	2.6	2003	2.4	2004	1.8	2005 Result	1.8	2005 Plan	2.7	2006 Plan	2.7	Strategic Target	2.7	<p>By processing these disbursements in 1.8 days on average, VA ensures that death claim benefits, policy loans, or cash surrenders are paid in a timely manner so that veterans and their families receive cash proceeds when needed either at the time of the veteran's death or as a quick influx of cash in the form of a policy loan or cash surrender to the policyholder.</p>
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2006 Plan	2.7																		
Strategic Target	2.7																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Supporting Measure</b> <b>High customer satisfaction ratings % (Insurance)</b></p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="167 961 995 1182"> <caption>High customer satisfaction ratings % (Insurance)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Satisfaction Rating %</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>96%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>96%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>96%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year/Target	Satisfaction Rating %	2001	96%	2002	95%	2003	95%	2004	96%	2005 Result	96%	2005 Plan	95%	2006 Plan	95%	Strategic Target	95%	<p>Maintenance of high customer satisfaction levels with VA-provided life insurance services is an indicator that VA's efforts to honor and serve America's veterans and their beneficiaries are successful and that veterans and their families believe that VA is providing them with a high level of service.</p>
Year/Target	Satisfaction Rating %																		
2001	96%																		
2002	95%																		
2003	95%																		
2004	96%																		
2005 Result	96%																		
2005 Plan	95%																		
2006 Plan	95%																		
Strategic Target	95%																		

## Related Information

### Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of the Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to this objective.

### Program Evaluations

A program evaluation of the Insurance program was completed by ORC Macro; Economic Systems, Incorporated; the Hay Group; and Systems Flow, Incorporated in May 2001. While the evaluation concluded the program was effective in meeting its Congressional intent, there were several recommendations for improvements that have been implemented including the following:

- Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) dependent coverage is now available.
- Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) premium rates have been reduced, making them more comparable to commercial quotes.
- The "terminating age of 70" has been removed from the Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) program.
- Measures have been taken to better publicize the SGLI conversion feature.

A number of recommendations have not yet been implemented. VA will continue to address the recommendations of the program evaluation. The program evaluation recommendations that were implemented have enhanced the financial security of veterans' families.

### Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Insurance program during 2005. The rating has not yet been issued.

### New Policies and Procedures

VA's Paperless Processing initiative will allow VA to image the Loan and Surrender applications as soon as they are received and immediately create a loan or surrender workflow task for employees of the Policyholders Services. Additionally there will be new internal controls reports and tools for monitoring Loan and Surrender disbursements and accounting actions. These improvements will decrease the processing time of disbursements.

The Insurance Service's major training initiative, "Skills, Knowledge and Insurance Practices and Procedures Embedded in Systems," successfully implemented four new job aids that capture "best practices" for processing various work items. These improvements will result in more accurate processing with improved service to veterans and beneficiaries.

The Insurance Web site has several new enhancements including the VMLI premium calculator, frequently asked questions and facts, a bulletin board, and the VA life insurance handbook. All of these features provide visitors up-to-date information and improve veterans' access to insurance information.

## Strategic Objective 3.4

### *Meeting Burial Needs*

Ensure that the burial needs of veterans and eligible family members are met.

### Making a Difference for the Veteran



*Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery*

VA maintains 121 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico, as well as 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict, from the Revolutionary War to the current war in Iraq, are buried in VA's national cemeteries.

VA also administers the State Cemetery Grants program, which provides aid to states to establish, expand, or improve state veterans cemeteries. The grants have helped establish, expand, or improve 61 state veterans cemeteries that performed more than 20,000 burials of veterans and eligible family members in 2005.

With the opening of the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in 2005, there is now an operational national or state veterans cemetery in every state of the union as well as Puerto Rico and Guam.

## Performance Trends and Impact of FY 2005 Results

Performance Trend	FY 2005 Impact																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> <b>Percent of Veterans Served by a Burial Option within a Reasonable Distance (75 miles) of their Residence</b></p> <table border="1"> <caption>Percent of Veterans Served by a Burial Option within a Reasonable Distance (75 miles) of their Residence</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>72.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>73.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>75.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>75.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>77.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>78.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>82.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>90.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year/Target	Percentage	2001	72.6%	2002	73.9%	2003	75.2%	2004	75.3%	2005 Result	77.1%	2005 Plan	78.3%	2006 Plan	82.2%	Strategic Target	90.0%	<p>By the end of 2005, more than 18 million veterans and their families had reasonable access to a burial option. One of the primary objectives of VA is to ensure that the burial needs of veterans and eligible family members are met. Having reasonable access is integral to realizing this objective.</p>
Year/Target	Percentage																		
2001	72.6%																		
2002	73.9%																		
2003	75.2%																		
2004	75.3%																		
2005 Result	77.1%																		
2005 Plan	78.3%																		
2006 Plan	82.2%																		
Strategic Target	90.0%																		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> <b>Percent of Respondents Who Rate the Quality of Service Provided by National Cemeteries as Excellent</b></p> <table border="1"> <caption>Percent of Respondents Who Rate the Quality of Service Provided by National Cemeteries as Excellent</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2001</td> <td>92%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>91%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>94%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>94%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>94%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>96%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year/Target	Percentage	2001	92%	2002	91%	2003	94%	2004	94%	2005 Result	94%	2005 Plan	95%	2006 Plan	96%	Strategic Target	100%	<p>Cemetery service goals are set high consistent with the expectations of the families of individuals who are interred as well as other visitors. High-quality, courteous, and responsive service to veterans and their families is reflected in VA's 2005 satisfaction rating.</p>
Year/Target	Percentage																		
2001	92%																		
2002	91%																		
2003	94%																		
2004	94%																		
2005 Result	94%																		
2005 Plan	95%																		
2006 Plan	96%																		
Strategic Target	100%																		

## Related Information

### Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of the Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to this objective.

### Program Evaluations

The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, Public Law 106-117, directed VA to contract for an independent demographic study to identify those areas of

the country where veterans will not have reasonable access to a burial option in a national or state veterans cemetery, and the number of additional cemeteries required through 2020. *Volume 1: Future Burial Needs*, published in May 2002, identified those areas having the greatest need for burial space for veterans. VA continues to use this report as a valuable tool for planning new national cemeteries.

In 2005 NCA initiated a joint effort with VBA and VA's Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness to begin a comprehensive program evaluation of the full array of burial benefits and services that VA provides to veterans and their

families. The program evaluation will assess, develop, and update program outcomes, goals, and objectives and compare actual program results with established goals.

## Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Burial program during 2002, which resulted in a rating of "Moderately Effective." Please see Summary Table 3 on page 57 for more information.

## New Policies and Procedures

From 2005 through 2009, NCA will establish 11 new national cemeteries. The development of these cemeteries is consistent with current policy to locate national cemeteries in areas with the largest concentration of veterans. Each location will provide a burial option to at least 170,000 veterans not currently served.

In 2005 the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies began interment operations, providing service to veterans in the area of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 2006 new national cemeteries will begin providing service to veterans in the areas of Detroit, Michigan; Atlanta, Georgia; and South Florida. A new national cemetery to provide service to veterans in the area of Sacramento, California, will begin interment operations in 2007. These five new cemeteries will provide reasonable access to a burial option to 2 million veterans.

As directed by the National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003, Public Law 108-109, action is underway to establish six new national cemeteries to serve veterans in the areas of Bakersfield, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Columbia/Greenville, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; Sarasota, Florida; and Southeastern Pennsylvania. These cemeteries are expected to begin operations in 2009 and will provide service to about 1 million veterans.

## Other Important Results

In 2005 VA continued to take actions necessary to establish new national cemeteries to provide service to veterans in

the areas of greatest need. VA also completed construction projects to extend burial operations at four national cemeteries. Appropriate land acquisition is a key component to providing continued accessibility to burial options. For example, Fort Sam Houston Army Post transferred to VA approximately 170 acres of land contiguous to VA's Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. This additional acreage will allow the cemetery to continue to provide reasonable access to a burial option to about 273,000 veterans and their families in the San Antonio, Texas, area.

In addition to building, operating, and maintaining national cemeteries, VA also administers the State Cemetery Grants program, which provides grants to states for up to 100 percent of the cost of establishing, expanding, or improving state veterans cemeteries. Increasing the availability of state veterans cemeteries is a means to provide a burial option to those veterans who may not have reasonable access to a national cemetery. In 2005, 61 operating state veterans cemeteries performed more than 20,000 interments of veterans and eligible family members, and grants were obligated to establish, expand, or improve state veterans cemeteries in 12 states.

In a report released in 2005, VA's national cemeteries received the highest rating ever achieved by a public or private organization in a nationwide customer satisfaction survey. The survey was the 2004 American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). VA scored a rating of 95 out of a possible 100 points. This is two points higher than the last survey in 2001, when VA's national cemeteries also ranked number one in customer satisfaction. In addition on ACSI's index for "user trust," VA achieved a rating of 97 out of a possible 100 points. This indicates that respondents are exceptionally willing to say positive things about VA's national cemeteries.

## Strategic Objective 3.5

### *Symbolic Expressions of Remembrance*

Provide veterans and their families with timely and accurate symbolic expressions of remembrance.

## Making a Difference for the Veteran



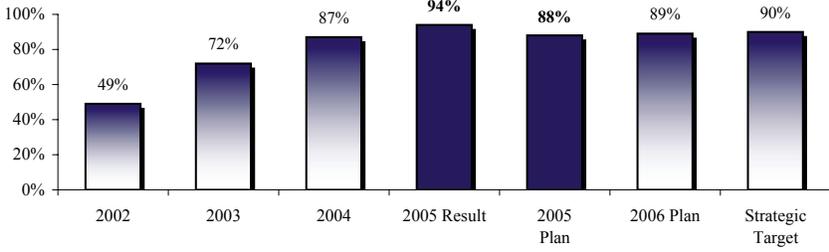
*Presidential Memorial Certificate*

### Presidential Memorial Certificate

A Presidential Memorial Certificate is an engraved paper certificate, bearing the signature of the current President, to honor the memory of honorably discharged deceased veterans. Family members and loved ones may request a certificate, and more than one may be provided. Only proof of eligible service is required.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy began the practice of issuing Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs) as a way for the President of the United States, on behalf of all Americans, to express appreciation for the service and sacrifice of honorably discharged deceased veterans. All subsequent Presidents have continued the program. Five million PMCs have been issued since the National Cemetery Administration became responsible for administration of the program in 1987.

## Performance Trends and Impact of FY 2005 Results

Performance Trend	FY 2005 Impact																
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Measure</b> <b>Percent of Graves in National Cemeteries Marked Within 60 Days of Interment</b></p>  <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <caption>Data for Key Measure Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year/Target</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2002</td> <td>49%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003</td> <td>72%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004</td> <td>87%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Result</td> <td>94%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005 Plan</td> <td>88%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006 Plan</td> <td>89%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strategic Target</td> <td>90%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year/Target	Percentage	2002	49%	2003	72%	2004	87%	2005 Result	94%	2005 Plan	88%	2006 Plan	89%	Strategic Target	90%	<p>The amount of time it takes to mark the grave after an interment is extremely important to veterans and their families. The headstone or marker is a lasting memorial that serves as a focal point not only for present-day survivors, but also for future generations. In addition, it may bring a sense of closure to the grieving process to see the grave marked. The 2005 achievement not only represents continued improvement, but also indicates that VA is serving veterans and their families well in this area.</p>
Year/Target	Percentage																
2002	49%																
2003	72%																
2004	87%																
2005 Result	94%																
2005 Plan	88%																
2006 Plan	89%																
Strategic Target	90%																

## Related Information

### Major Management Challenges

Neither VA's Office of Inspector General nor the Government Accountability Office identified any major management challenges related to this objective.

### Program Evaluations

In 2005 NCA initiated a joint effort with VBA and VA's Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness to begin a comprehensive program evaluation of the full array of burial benefits and services that VA provides to veterans and their families. The program evaluation will assess, develop, and update program outcomes, goals, and objectives and compare actual program results with established goals.

### Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Evaluation

In relation to this strategic objective, the Administration conducted a PART evaluation of VA's Burial program during 2002, which resulted in a rating of "Moderately Effective." Please see Summary Table 3 on page 57 for more information.

### New Policies and Procedures

VA has developed a new performance measure that will help ensure timely and accurate symbolic expressions of remembrance are provided for veterans who are not

buried in national cemeteries. NCA receives and processes applications to order headstones and markers for graves of such veterans. In 2005 (the baseline year), VA processed 13 percent of these applications within 20 days of receipt. VA's long-range performance goal is to process 90 percent of the applications within 20 days of receipt.

## Other Important Results

VA furnishes headstones and markers for the graves of eligible persons in national, state, other public, and private cemeteries. VA also furnishes memorial headstones and markers bearing the inscription "In Memory of" to memorialize eligible veterans whose remains were not recovered or identified, were buried at sea, donated to science, or cremated and scattered. VA furnishes headstones and markers for national cemeteries administered by the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior, as well as for state veterans cemeteries, and contracts for all columbaria niche inscriptions at Arlington National Cemetery. In 2005 VA processed more than 363,000 applications for headstones and markers for placement in national, state, other public, or private cemeteries. Since 1973 VA has furnished nearly 9 million headstones and markers for the graves of veterans and other eligible persons.

Headstones and markers must be replaced when either the government or the contractor makes errors in the inscription, or if the headstone or marker is damaged during installation. When headstones and markers must be replaced, it further delays the final portion of the interment process, the placing of the headstone or marker at the gravesite. NCA will continue to improve accuracy and operational processes in order to reduce the number of inaccurate or damaged headstones and markers delivered to the gravesite. In 2005, 96 percent of headstones and markers were delivered undamaged and correctly inscribed. In 2005 inscription data for 99 percent of headstones and markers ordered by national cemeteries were accurate and complete. VA will continue to focus on business process reengineering, including improving accuracy and operational processes, in order to reduce delays in marking graves caused by inaccurate or damaged headstones and markers.

In 2005 VA issued nearly 488,000 Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs), bearing the President's signature, to convey to the family of the veteran the gratitude of the Nation for the veteran's service. To convey this gratitude, it is essential that the certificate be accurately inscribed. The accuracy rate for PMCs provided by VA is consistently 98 percent or better.