

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
Special Medical Advisory Group (SMAG)
Responses to Recommendations from the
October 9, 2019, SMAG Report**

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends the use of a draft assessment tool derived primarily from the Functional Assessment Standardized Items A143 (FASI) and the Minnesota MnCHOICES functional assessment.

VA Response: Concur-in-principle. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Caregiver Support Program Office agrees in principle with the standardized use of an assessment tool based on industry standards but recognizes that any such tool must be utilized only in accordance with the governing statute and regulations. Therefore, VHA will need to complete further development, testing, and analysis of the recommended draft assessment tool before opining on whether it is appropriate for use in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). The Caregiver Support Program Office is testing potential uses of the assessment tool and considering how it may be utilized for purposes of informing PCAFC eligibility determinations. Use of a standardized assessment tool, like the one recommended by the Committee, will be considered among other initiatives VA is undertaking to improve PCAFC and expand the program as required by the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act of 2018.

Status: In progress

Target Completion Date: June 2020

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends VA develop a comprehensive implementation plan for the recommended draft Veteran functional assessment. The Committee stated that a standardized approach to conducting the functional assessment requires a strategic and methodical process for implementation. The Committee listed three core elements for implementation: assessor qualifications, assessment protocols, and assessment testing.

VA Response: Concur-in-principle. The Caregiver Support Program Office recognizes the importance of developing a comprehensive implementation plan for any functional assessment tool, including addressing assessor qualifications, assessment protocols, and assessment testing. Once VA completes further development, testing, and analysis of the draft assessment tool, we will consider options for implementation, if appropriate. Results of the testing and analysis will help inform decisions on assessor qualifications and assessment protocols, including locations, assessor consultations, and re-assessment triggers, as appropriate.

Status: In progress

Target Completion Date: TBD

Recommendation 3: The Committee listed 10 additional areas of consideration regarding successful implementation of the tool and program.

1. Include all appropriate professions as possible assessors (i.e., Occupational Therapist).
2. Testing the assessment should be a part of the implementation plan.
3. Include measures of success in the implementation plan. The subcommittee was not tasked with this requirement, but VA should determine by what means they will validate the tool is working properly.
4. Be mindful that a person's ability to cope with their current health condition does not correlate with their service-connected disability rating. When completing the assessment, be sure to consider the Veteran's coping capacity.
5. Mental Health should be clearly identified as a factor in the functional assessment process.
6. A systematic assessment of the home environment is important.
7. The assessor should have access to consultation of specialty expertise when completing the assessment.
8. Ensure the VA Medical Centers have staffing and resources to adequately complete the in-home assessments.
9. Consider inter-rater reliability measurement for the assessment tool particularly amongst different professionals who may be completing assessment.
10. Assessments should be ongoing and are not a one-time event.

VA Response: Concur-in-principle. The Caregiver Support Program Office recognizes and appreciates the input from the SMAG. These areas will be considered during VA's development, testing, and analysis of the draft assessment tool, and as VA works to improve PCAFC and expand the program as required by the VA MISSION Act of 2018.

Status: In progress

Target Completion Date: TBD

Actions to implement include the following:

VA Action Plan-Name of Recommendation					
Steps to Implement Recommendation	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status
<p>Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends the use of an assessment tool derived primarily from the Functional Assessment Standardized Items A143 (FASI) and the Minnesota MnCHOICES function assessment. Further pilot testing is recommended before implementing.</p>	<p>Office of Care Management & Social Work (10P4C)</p>		<p>VHA will further develop, test, and analyze the draft assessment tool</p>	<p>June 2020</p>	<p>In process</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: The Committee notes that a comprehensive implementation plan for the recommended draft Veteran functional assessment is essential to its success. A standardized approach to conducting the functional assessment requires a strategic and methodical process for implementation. The plan should include three core elements: assessor qualifications; assessment protocols; and assessment testing.</p>	<p>Office of Care Management & Social Work (10P4C)</p>	<p>Employee Education Service</p>	<p>If appropriate following testing, VHA will develop a comprehensive implementation plan, including assessor qualifications, assessment protocols, and assessment testing.</p>	<p>TBD</p>	<p>TBD</p>

<p>Recommendation 3: The Committee added 10 additional areas of consideration listed in the report.</p>	<p>Office of Care Management & Social Work (10P4C)</p>		<p>VHA will consider the 10 listed areas.</p>	<p>TBD</p>	<p>In process</p>
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Department of Veterans Affairs
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