



**MyVA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES FOR APRIL 14-15, 2015**

The MyVA Advisory Committee (MVAC) convened its meeting on April 14-15, 2015, at the Board of Veteran's Appeal, in Washington, DC.

**Committee member(s) present:**

Josue Robles – Chairman  
Michael Haynie – Vice Chairman  
Herman Bulls  
Richard Carmona (**absent day 1**)  
Delos Cosgrove  
Laura Herrerra Scott  
Christopher Howard  
Nancy Killefer  
Fred Lee  
Eleanor Mariano  
Regina Reaves  
Maria Tiglao  
Robert Wallace

**Committee member(s) absent:**

Teresa Carlson

**Agency representative(s) participating:**

Robert McDonald – Secretary  
Sloan Gibson – Deputy Secretary  
Jose Riojas – Chief of Staff  
Robert Snyder – Executive Director, MyVA  
Scott Blackburn – Director, MyVA  
Sharon Gilles – Designated Federal Officer  
Robert Sanders – Alternate Designated Federal Officer

**Presenter(s) and other participant(s):**

Jeffery Moragne – Director, Advisory Committee Management Office  
Purnima Boominathan – Office of General Counsel  
Allison Hickey – Under Secretary for Benefits  
Carolyn Clancy – Interim UnderSecretary for Health  
Ronald Walters – Interim UnderSecretary for Memorial Affairs  
Tom Allin – MyVA Chief Veterans Experience Officer  
Matt Collier – MyVA Strategic Partnerships Lead  
Tom Muir – MyVA Support Services Excellence Lead  
Greg Giddens – MyVA Performance Improvement Lead  
Gina Farrisee – Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/MyVA People and Culture



**Day 1 of the MVAC meeting opened at 8:30 a.m.**

**Welcome:**

Chairman Josue Robles opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, and Committee members gave brief self-introductions.

**Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Leadership Remarks:**

Mr. Snyder gave an overview of the role of the Advisory Committee and explained how the day would proceed. Mr. Snyder's ask the Committee to provide feedback on whether MyVA has identified the correct priorities and, if not, to provide practical recommendations for moving forward. He then introduced Secretary McDonald for welcoming remarks to the Committee Members and an overview of why the Committee is needed.

Secretary McDonald spoke about the ICARE values. He explained that ICARE stands for Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence and that all employees were asked to pledge to the values. Secretary McDonald expressed his desire that the Committee would help VA put the Veteran at the center of the Department's efforts, transforming the culture and moving VA to be more outward focused.

Secretary McDonald discussed the demand placed on VA due to the increasing number of Veterans receiving benefits. This has resulted in unprecedented growth in the support VA provides, with a rise in compensation, complexity of medical issues claimed by Veterans, and an increase in disability compensation paid. These growth factors have placed stress on an aging system, and VA needs to rethink its processes and systems around access to care. The Secretary discussed how 60 percent of VA Hospitals are more than 50 years old; however, it has been difficult to close outdated facilities. He discussed Veterans Health Administration (VHA) hiring and loss of employees: VA is working to hire an additional 10,000 medical personnel, and that the attrition rate is favorable when compared to the medical profession as a whole. Secretary McDonald went on to say that VA has revised salary bands for medical personnel and is working to revise pay bands for the remainder of staff.

In closing, the Secretary discussed VA's mission, vision, and guiding principles and that VA must get employees involved in change and transformation to improve the services and care we provide to Veterans, their families, and survivors. As the nature of VA's work is changing, the Department must look at different models and structures. Secretary McDonald would like to see an increased emphasis on Strategic Partnerships and other models of care to serve Veterans who are beyond VA's reach today.

**Presenter on Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA):**

Mr. Moragne spoke to the Committee and informed them that FACA is a Federal statute that governs the establishment, termination and management of Federal Advisory Committees (FAC). He informed them that FACA was enacted to promote openness and transparency and to regulate the number and duration of FACs. He explained to the committee the requirements of the FAC, the role of the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and rules governing FAC meetings and Congressional testimony.



**Presenter on Ethics:**

Ms. Boominathan informed the Committee that they are considered Special Government Employees. She explained the maximum number of days they can work and that they cannot be paid for their service. However, they can receive payment for transportation to and from meeting locations and per diem for meals based on the government rate if they are on travel status.

Ms. Boominathan explained the ethical rules that govern VA and the Committee members and stressed to them that they should contact her office if they have any questions. She also discussed conflicts of interest and explained that they should contact her office should any potential conflict arise.

**Presenter on Veterans Benefits Administration:**

Ms. Hickey spoke to the committee concerning the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). She explained the mission and services offered by VBA and how the demand for services has increased over the last 10 years, and how VBA is transforming itself to deal with the increase.

Ms. Hickey discussed the VBA transformation plan, and its activities organized across people, process, and technology. She explained how Phase One of the plan is complete and has helped to reduce the claims inventory by nearly 50 percent and the backlog by nearly 70 percent. IT systems have been a large factor in the VBA transformation. VBA personnel now work 95% of claims digitally from 4 billion records that have been scanned, reducing claims processing costs to 8 cents on the dollar. VBA built new rules for its Education System, allowing 85% of claims to be automatically processed, and VBA's Life Insurance claims are now paid within 3 days with 99% accuracy. Ms. Hickey also discussed how VBA's transformation aligns with the MyVA goals.

**Presenter on Veterans Health Administration:**

Dr. Clancy briefed the Committee on the accomplishment of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). She discussed the number of employees and how they are Veteran focused. She explained how VA is the largest provider of health professional training in the United States: 70% of US physicians have had some part of their training in VA. VHA hospitals, medical centers and clinics are organized into 21 Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). In the past, VHA has been a closed system, but is now moving from a provider model to a provider-coordinator (provider-payer) model.

Dr. Clancy explained that VHA's Blueprint for Excellence has 10 strategies under four themes which align with the VA Strategic Plan and supports MyVA. The themes are Improve Performance, Promote a Positive Culture of Service, Advance Health Care Innovation for Veterans and the Country, and Increase Operational Effectiveness and Accountability. VHA and the VISNs are taking steps to implement Veteran-facing changes. In addition, 73% of VHA facilities have made improvements over the last several months. The VHA Blueprint for Excellence principles have been incorporated into individual performance plans. VHA is moving to a more virtual system of care as the norm. The Department is very interested in the adoption of electronic health records by private providers. The Choice Act provides VA with an additional 1500 residency slots, the first 300 will start this July. Dr. Clancy added that VA is not able to



hire as fast as it would like. She expected that, as part of the Blueprint for Excellence, VA will be more integrated into local communities, State Board exchanges, and other groups that would provide healthcare.

**Presenter on National Cemetery Administration:**

Mr. Walters briefed the Committee on National Cemetery Administration (NCA), providing a brief history and the vision and mission statement. He stated that NCA plans to open 18 new cemeteries by 2017, which would be the largest expansion since the Civil War. This would give 96% of Veterans access to an open national or state Veterans cemetery within 75 miles of their home. Utilization of this benefit remains low at about 12-15%. Recently NCA started a Homeless Veterans apprenticeship program: NCA trains Veterans and then employs. Two classes have graduated; 32 graduates are now employed and many have been promoted.

Mr. Walters noted that NCA has won many awards for customer service, which is a tribute to employees in the field. NCA has shared operational measures and standards with VHA and VBA in this area, but that it is important to recognize differences in the sizes and missions of the respective administrations when looking to leverage changes to other organizations. The Secretary noted there was no integration among Administrations and Staff Offices at VA below the Office of the Secretary, and that the MyVA initiative was formed to address how VA can start integrating at lower levels.

**Presenter(s) on MyVA:**

Mr. Snyder and Mr. Blackburn briefed the Committee on MyVA and the vision and mission. The MyVA concept was developed to implement the VA Strategic Plan and its primary focus areas based on the results of listening to VA employees, Veterans and other stakeholders. VA has heard that currently Veterans must integrate services on their own, resulting in poor customer service and frustrated Veterans and beneficiaries. Similar themes have been heard from employees: VA has employees that care deeply about customer service, but they feel they do not have the resources, knowledge of VA, and proper training to deliver quality customer service. They explained that MyVA is focusing on five primary areas/work streams:

- 1. Improving the Veterans experience** by examining our Veteran-facing processes and organizations from the Veteran's perspective to enable every Veteran to have a seamless, integrated, and responsive VA customer service experience every time.
- 2. Achieving support services excellence** by identifying common services that are performed in support of VA mission components, and seeking to optimize these services to increase efficiency and eliminate duplication. These services include: Human Resources, Legal Services, Information Technology, Acquisitions & Logistics, Real Property Facilities Management, Public Affairs, Congressional Affairs, Financial Management, and Security & Preparedness.
- 3. Establishing a culture of continuous performance improvement**, so conditions are set at the local level for issues to be raised, addressed, and solutions replicated across as many facilities as needed to achieve enterprise level results.
- 4. Enhancing strategic partnerships** by making better "matches" and formal partnerships between community, nonprofit, and other organizations and the work being done for Veterans at VA facilities across the country.



**5. Improving the employee experience by focusing on our people and culture so employees and leaders are empowered to better serve Veterans.**

MyVA is about much more than these five themes. It's a mindset and a cultural shift that places the Veteran at the center of everything we do.

**MyVA Gallery Walk:**

Stations were set up in the room to enable the Committee members to meet in small groups and receive briefings from the MyVA Leadership Team Members on each of the 5 work streams. Simultaneously, the slides being discussed were displayed for the audience via television monitors. The public and other attendees had the ability to see the station displays on breaks and before and following the meeting.

**Discussion on Gallery Walk:**

Following the Gallery walk, the Committee members reconvened to discuss what they learned. They provided the following feedback on these questions.

- What did you find most surprising?
  - They were impressed by amount of work done in short period of time.
  - It is exciting to see passion and energy reflected in the work.
  - They appreciated the focus on what is possible as opposed to mitigating threats.
  - They were surprised by the level of involvement at all levels of the organization and the participation in all ranks.
  - They were surprised that town hall meetings were being conducted. (they discussed how to provide feedback on issues raised at town hall meetings).
  - They were impressed by the enthusiasm of the presenters.
  
- What are you most excited about?
  - They liked that MyVA was developing strategic partnerships and engaging in bi-lateral communications.
  - They liked the emphasis on MyCareer at VA in the Employee Engagement presentation.
  - They liked that VA was changing the view of its role from provider of services to facilitator as it relates to healthcare.
  - They thought the timing of the MyVA Initiative is good as America want to help the Veterans and providing more opportunities for strategic partnerships.
  
- Is anything big missing?
  - The Committee stated we should say what ideal service delivery look like across the 5 work streams/ what great look like.
  - Veteran Experience should be standardized across the Department.
  - The Committee thinks VA should identify what are the characteristics of the organization.
  - VA 101- employees need to understand the connection between what they do and how it fits into the Department's Mission/have a sense of identity.



- VA needs to do a better job of telling its positive story (i.e., what VA has done/accomplished/good news stories).
- VA should have more transparency (i.e., rank doctors by names and metrics) internally and externally.
- VA need to identify time lines for the changes it plans to implement.
- The Committee suggested that VA establish a feedback loop to provide Veterans and employees feedback on suggestions made.
- The Committee recommended that VA come up with a plan B in case the work stream approach does not work.
- The Committee suggested that VA work to integrate the work streams activities as one Program Plan.
  
- What should be MyVA's 1-2 highest priorities to deliver?
  - Develop a consistent customer interface and integrate call centers to ensure a unified customer experience.
  - Emphasize the Employee Experience and develop the employees "north star".
  - Improve the VA 101 training making it more intensive. The Committee recommended that VA 101 be at least 3-days (ideally, no-one should ever say 'I don't know').
  - Communicating better and more often to both employees and customers. VA needs to think broadly about all the stakeholders in this area. There are many stakeholders who could benefit from understanding VA benefits and services.
  
- Any concerns or words of caution?
  - The Committee members spoke about the pros and cons of benchmarking. They cautioned that metrics ought to be used to show trends and as indications for internal management purposes.

**Closing remarks were provided by Mr. Robles and Secretary McDonald and the meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.**

**Day 2 of the MVAC meeting opened at 8:30 a.m.**

**Welcome:**

Chairman Josue Robles opened the meeting with welcoming remarks and appreciation of the Committee members for the work put in on day one. He also thanked VA for providing the Committee with such a great overview of activities. He highlighted it is now a handoff from VA's provision of context to the Committee deciding how they should proceed.

**Presenter Recap of Day One:**

Mr. Blackburn recapped day one and addressed key themes that emerged:

- Improving the Veteran Experience (front-line training, Community Veteran Engagement Boards, improving call center operations)
- Engaging Strategic Partners as a "force multiplier"



- Improving the Employee Experience (communications, “north star”, feedback loop, career path) and developing new skills in our leaders
- VA101 – developing staff baseline knowledge of the VA (including our history)
- For healthcare - moving from a provider, to a provider and facilitator
- Establishing and maintaining high quality standards (internal and partnerships)

**Discussion on MyVA Support:**

Mr. Haynie led the discussions on how the Committee could best add value to the MyVA efforts, emphasizing the common understanding of the MVAC focus and the need to address unique challenges of a public sector organization. In addition, the Committee needs to ensure that its recommendations stay within boundaries of the charter and are actionable by the Secretary. Mr. Snyder asked the Committee for help in balancing between what is most impactful and what is feasible. VA is not unique, however, and the Department would seek help in finding those people and organizations that have done this before so that VA can learn from them.

Discussion on the mission and scope of the Committee highlighted and identified a purpose statement of “Serving those who have served” with the aim of having VA employees act as though “every day is Veteran’s Day.” The Committee also clarified their role as having VA report out to the Committee on how it is making progress in five work streams as it relates to timing/phasing/resourcing.

The Committee requested the following for future meetings:

- VA to create dashboards of work stream progress – identifying sequencing of activities and identifying who is responsible for what.
- Develop a Program Plan that integrates the work streams / how MyVA will execute
- Replicate the gallery walk
- Drill down on specific areas at the Committee’s request

The Committee will then provide advice/feedback on the progress (i.e., be a barometer check on the work being conducted). This includes assisting with identifying best practices. The Committee does not view its role as providing reports to VA.

Discussion on what is considered the most impactful areas for VA to consider resulted in the following:

- Employee and Veteran Customer services
- How to get local participation/create their own wins (decentralization)
  - Local ownership
  - Providing tools – creating participative approach to change.
  - Teaching people continuous improvement
- How to think about change management process



**Exercise on Top Priorities:**

Mr. Blackburn led the Committee in an exercise to determine priorities for the MyVA team. The members were each asked to identify their top six priorities based on all the topics/issues that were discussed on day 1. The following six priorities were identified:

1. Employee engagement (e.g., "north star" for employees, address morale, create feedback loop, internal communications) (14 votes)
2. Front-line customer service training (12 votes)
3. Communicating our values: mission identity (12 votes)
4. Web/phone veteran experience (unified digital experience, one website, one 1-800 number bundled together) (9 votes)
5. Training our leaders on new skills (e.g., "workout", leading town halls, developing/coaching other leaders) (9 votes)

Identify and spread internal best practices and using that to determine what great looks like (9 votes)

**MyVA Model Based on Top Priorities**

Ms. Tiglao led a conversation about how MyVA can conceptualize its strategic, operational and tactical approach to be successful as follows:



**Closing remark/comments was provided by Committee members and VA leadership.**

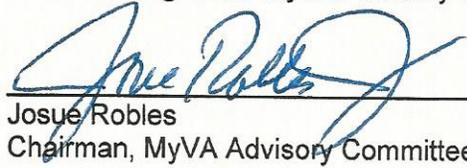
**Meeting was adjourned by DFO at 12:40 p.m.**



Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Gilles  
Designated Federal Officer, MyVA Advisory Committee

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes from the April 14-15, 2015 meeting of the MyVA Advisory Committee are true and correct.



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Josue Robles  
Chairman, MyVA Advisory Committee