



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2014

Mr. Thomas H. Miller
Chairman
Advisory Committee on Prosthetics
and Special-Disabilities Programs
4000 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Apt. 1238
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Mr. Miller:

This is in response to the report you submitted following the December 3-4, 2013, meeting of the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs. I appreciate the Committee's thorough deliberation and input on the issues presented in the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee is a valuable resource that continues to make significant contributions to ensure that Veterans with special disabilities receive the best available care. The enclosed action plan addresses the recommendations in your report.

I look forward to the Committee's continued partnership with VA as we work together to serve our Nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Eric K. Shinseki", is positioned above the printed name.

Eric K. Shinseki

Enclosure



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WASHINGTON

April 4, 2014

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs recommendations and VA's responses. The recommendations are the result of the Committee's meeting held December 3-4, 2013.

A similar letter has been sent to other leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs. Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

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Eric K. Shinseki

Enclosure



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April 4, 2014

The Honorable Richard M. Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Burr:

I am pleased to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs recommendations and VA's responses. The recommendations are the result of the Committee's meeting held December 3-4, 2013.

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April 4, 2014

The Honorable Michael H. Michaud
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Michaud:

I am pleased to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs recommendations and VA's responses. The recommendations are the result of the Committee's meeting held December 3-4, 2013.

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Eric K. Shinseki

Enclosure



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2014

The Honorable Jeff Miller
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs recommendations and VA's responses. The recommendations are the result of the Committee's meeting held December 3-4, 2013.

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**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Responses to the Advisory Committee on Prosthetics
and Special-Disabilities Programs Recommendations
December 3-4, 2013**

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends the Veterans Benefits Administration establish an integrated workgroup to review and resolve issues which impact Veterans' eligibility for clothing allowance. The Committee is concerned about the process for reimbursements and Veterans' complaints in regards to delays in receiving payments. Workgroup should include a disabled Veteran who receives a clothing allowance.

VA Response: The clothing allowance program is a jointly administered program between the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA). VBA determines eligibility and notifies eligible Veterans to apply for the benefit. VHA determines entitlement based on the clothing allowance eligibility requirements.

Veterans can receive one or more clothing allowance payment if it is determined that he or she uses one or more prosthetic or orthopedic appliances because of a service-connected disability or disabilities that tends to wear or tear one or more outer garments. Veterans may receive one or more clothing allowance payments if skin medication is taken because of one or more service-connected skin conditions that causes irreparable staining to one or more outer garments.

If a Veteran is found entitled to the clothing allowance benefit, a VHA Prosthetic Representative will generate and authorize a clothing allowance payment. If the Veteran applies before August 1 of each benefit year, the Veteran will receive a payment via paper check or electronic fund transfer (EFT). If the Prosthetic Representative processes the clothing allowance application before August 1, the Veteran will receive his/her payment September 1 - October 31. Often payments are returned to VA for multiple reasons (e.g., incorrect address, incorrect EFT information, death). VBA is responsible for reissuing payments once notified that funds have been returned.

VA Action Plan – Recommendation 1					
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status
VHA and VBA will establish an integrated workgroup to review and resolve issues which impact Veterans'	VHA's Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service	VBA's Office of Business Process Integration; Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity,	Integrated workgroup will review current procedures to clarify and standardize eligibility requirements.	07/07/2014	

eligibility and cause payment delays.		Compensation Service, and Office of Resource Management	Also review and identify issues which may delay a Veteran's payment.		
Consult with Veterans Service Organizations to identify a disabled Veteran in receipt of the clothing allowance benefit.	VHA's Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service		Veteran representative will provide input on the workgroup's recommendations for eligibility and payment issues.	07/07/2014	

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that VA Office of Human Resource Management provides appropriate training to Human Resource personnel responsible for hiring rehabilitation research and development personnel.

VA Response: The VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) and Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) have an existing Service Line Agreement (SLA) for a targeted delegated examining unit (DEU) specifically for research hiring. Under the SLA, human resources personnel staffing the DEU engage with research subject matter experts (SME) to ensure that applicants for research positions are appropriately qualified and classified as best qualified, well-qualified, or qualified.

In general, this arrangement has worked well. ORD will continue engagement with WMC to ensure that the DEU has been provided with the appropriate SMEs and points of contacts specific to rehabilitation research and development hiring actions.

VA Action Plan – Recommendation 2					
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status
Ongoing engagement with WMC	ORD	WMC	ORD to organize a meeting between WMC, ORD Central Office Staff, and Rehabilitation Research and Development Staff to discuss hiring issues and ensure that	6/30/2014	

			the DEU has all necessary information to operate under the SLA.		
Revisit the SLA	ORD	WMC	Annually, ORD and WMC will confirm that the requirements and expectations detailed in the SLA are sufficient and will revise if necessary.	10/1/2014	

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that VA fully staff the Vision Center of Excellence. There are concerns in regards to the length of time it is taking to fill vacant VA positions.

VA Response: As of February 21, 2014, there are three full-time equivalent employees (FTEE) (Vision Center of Excellence (VCE) Deputy Director (Ophthalmologist), Optometrist, and Management Analyst) and one part-time (0.6 FTEE) VA Research Health Biologist employed at VCE. In addition, a Biostatistician accepted an offer and started work on March 9, 2014, and a Management Assistant has accepted an offer with an expected start date of April 21, 2014. VA is currently recruiting for a Blind Rehabilitation Specialist and a Blind Rehabilitation Services employee has been detailed to the VCE for several weeks in the interim. VA expects all hiring actions to be completed in spring of 2014.

VA Action Plan – Recommendation 3					
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status
Hire Biostatistician to support the VCE.	Specialty Care Services	VCE	Fill vacant VA Biostatistician position.	Completed	Biostatistician entered on duty on March 9, 2014.
Hire Management Assistant to support the VCE.	Specialty Care Services	VCE	Fill vacant VA Management Assistant position.	4/21/2014	Candidate has accepted an offer with a expected entrance on duty date of April 21, 2014.
Hire Blind Rehabilitation Specialist to support the VCE.	Specialty Care Services	VCE	Fill vacant VA Blind Rehabilitation Specialist position.	6/11/2014	Job announcement closed on February 9, 2014. Qualifying applicants were referred to selecting officials week of February 24, 2014.