VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 14, 2021

VA establishes 120-day task force on inclusion, diversity, equity and access

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough established a 120-day task force April 1 to conduct a whole-of-VA review and to design and implement a holistic and integrated VA mission on inclusion, diversity, equity and access.

VA strives to provide quality care and services to all Veterans regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity but a 2019 Government Accountability Office report reveals that Veterans from underserved communities continue to face barriers to accessing VA health services.

"Systemic barriers that underserved communities face many times negatively impact Veterans," said McDonough. "In order to overcome many of these barriers, VA must tap into its vast diversity and use it as a major source of strength. The implementation of this task force will help the department become the inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible team our Veterans, their families, survivors and caregivers deserve."

The task force is charged with providing concrete and actionable recommendations addressing inclusion, diversity, equity and access to the secretary no later than July 31, and will focus on five objectives:

1. Ensure execution of requirements outlined in Executive Order 13985 and any other subsequent and relevant Executive Orders.
2. Examine and develop VA's strategic mission, goals and objectives on inclusion, diversity, equity and access.
3. Conduct a whole-of-VA review of policies, programming, training and strategic communications for workforce and Veterans' initiatives.
4. Identify opportunities to leverage data to inform and operationalize inclusion, diversity, equity and access.
5. Develop institutional access points for underserved communities to establish strategic partnerships with VA.

Led by the Chair, Deputy Chief of Staff and White House Liaison Chris Diaz — additional members of the task force include:

- Assistant Under Secretary for Health and Clinical Services Kameron Matthews M.D.
- Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations Cheryl Rawls.
- Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer Barbara Morton.
- Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Hansel Cordeiro.
- Executive Director of the National Center for Organizational Development Maureen Marks, Ph.D.
- Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Melissa Bryant.
- Senior Advisor to the Secretary and Veteran Service Organizations Liaison Ray Kelley.
- Acting Executive Director for the Center for Minority Veterans Dennis May.
- Acting Executive Director for the Center for Women Veterans Elizabeth Estabrooks.
- Chief of Staff at the Office of Enterprise Integration Shana Love-Holmon.
- Clinical Implementation Lead for PRIDE Tiffany Lange, Psy.D.
- Executive Director for the Center for Innovation Ryan Vega, M.D.
- Executive Director for Human Capital Management Lisa Thomas, Ph.D.
- Special Counsel Tahmika Ruth Jackson, JD, LL.M.
- Director of the Office of Tribal Government Relations Stephanie Birdwell.
- Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy White House Liaison James Anderson (facilitator).
- Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Resolution Management, Diversity & Inclusion Harvey Johnson

The task force recommendations will aim to eliminate barriers so that all veterans have equal treatment and experiences when interacting with VA. More to follow at the conclusion of the 120-day period.

###