

VA's Fourth Mission

Frequently Asked Questions

What is VA's Fourth Mission?

[VA's "Fourth Mission"](#) is to improve the Nation's preparedness for response to war, terrorism, national emergencies, and natural disasters by developing plans and taking actions to ensure continued service to Veterans, as well as to support national, state, and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security efforts.

Why is VA's Fourth Mission important?

VA is the primary medical back-up system to the Department of Defense and serves as an asset to the nation during disasters and emergencies. As a foundational part of federal emergency management efforts through the [National Response Framework](#), VA will lead the effort for meeting Veterans' needs and fill gaps in community services for Veterans, service members or civilians if needed. Additionally, VA will support and partner with other government agencies working with Veterans at the federal, state, local, tribal and territorial levels in times of crisis.

How does VA fulfill the Fourth Mission?

The Fourth Mission is not a mechanism that is activated or button that is pushed, but it is a statutory requirement and commitment that is sustained daily. The Veterans Health Administration Office of Emergency Management (OEM) supports VA's Fourth Mission by developing and implementing policies, processes, programs, and systems to provide mission assurance of services and force protection of people and assets while building a culture of preparedness and resilience. Through a combined, proactive approach, OEM ensures the VA is the most prepared and responsive integrated healthcare system in the nation. To learn more, visit www.va.gov/VHAEMERGENCYMANAGEMENT.

Does VA execute the Fourth Mission every day?

VA's Fourth Mission is managed and maintained every day. As part of daily operations and responsibilities, OEM coordinates emergency management preparedness logistics, training, exercises and assessments, manages emergency plans, processes and procedures, and develops emergency management policies and directives in an effort to sustain VA's emergency and disaster preparedness and optimize the continuity of care for Veterans. OEM operates more than 50 [Federal Coordinating Centers](#) and has Area Emergency Managers (AEMs) strategically located around the country who work with local VA medical facilities and communities on a daily basis to assist with mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

Does VA only respond to national emergencies?

No. OEM prepares for and responds to any natural disaster and emergency that may negatively impact Veteran access to benefits, services and the continuity of VA healthcare. OEM has a long history of preparation, coordination, and response activities during hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, floods, water main breaks, power outages and the like. In addition, VA may provide support and resources during large special events such as, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, Presidential Inauguration, and the National 4th of July Celebration in Washington, DC.

How does VA know when VA facilities or local communities may need assistance?

OEM manages the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Watch officers. The VHA Watch continually monitors weather and any significant event that may negatively impact VA facilities, staff, and operations in service to Veterans. They maintain situational awareness for VA 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. Constant surveillance and proactive notification processes and procedures help to ensure VA is informed and ready to manage and respond to any emergency that threatens Veteran access to benefits, services and health care.

What does VA do when an emergency or disaster strikes?

In times of crisis, OEM activates the Emergency Management Coordination Cell (EMCC); a VHA-level incident coordination capability that leverages resources from across the VHA enterprise, in order to ensure any impacted VHA facilities have the appropriate resources to sustain the continuity of care for our Veterans. In addition, the EMCC provides VHA incident action planning, operational reporting, and the coordination of VHA logistical, administrative, and financial support as needed during incidents and events. The EMCC also serves as the focal point of emergency management, public health, medical, information related to the emergency, disaster, or contingency on behalf of the VHA. The EMCC manages FEMA requests for VA assistance.

Can local communities just ask VA for assistance during a disaster?

When the resources needed to respond to a disaster exceeds local and state governments capabilities, Federal resources may be needed. State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) agencies may request Federal assistance through the Federal Disaster Declaration process. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the Federal agency responsible for coordinating Federal resources in support of SLTT needs. SLTT's may request Federal resources through the Regional FEMA office. FEMA reviews the request and if it is determined VA resources are needed, FEMA issues a Mission Assignment to VA to provide the resources.

Where can I get more information about VA's Fourth Mission?

Learn more about VA's Fourth Mission and VA COVID-19 response efforts at www.va.gov/health/coronavirus/statesupport.asp.