



**MYVA EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**STATEMENT ON THE PROGRESS OF ONGOING VA TRANSFORMATION**

JULY 5, 2016

In March of 2015, both President Obama and Secretary McDonald traveled to Phoenix, Arizona to participate in a roundtable discussion focused on improving the ability of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to serve the nation's Veterans. The backdrop for that discussion had been a profound and public breach of VA's commitment to "those who have borne the battle," in the form of unacceptable patient wait-times and a leadership culture lacking transparency and accountability at the Phoenix VA. Following the roundtable, as a step toward informing the course for long-term reform and excellence across the VA, Secretary McDonald announced the formation of the MyVA Advisory Committee (MVAC).

The MyVA Advisory Committee is independent of VA, and is composed of leaders and subject matter experts from the Veterans community, business, higher education, and the public and private sectors. The Committee is chartered to advise VA on how best to create a high-performing and customer-focused culture across the Department, and also to assess and evaluate VA's progress toward improving access to benefits and delivering quality care to the nation's Veterans.

Over the past year, the Committee has traveled across the United States to engage VA leadership, VA employees, individual Veterans, Veteran-serving organizations, private sector experts, and many other key stakeholders in an effort to inform, calibrate, and evaluate VA's ongoing efforts to better serve the nation's Veterans.

In the fall of 2016, the committee will release a full report detailing a summary assessment of those efforts, to include recommendations for sustained focus and additional improvement. However, in advance of that report – and in the context of the public discourse related to change and transformation across the Department – the members of the Committee believe that it is both important and appropriate to provide public insight as to our current assessment of VA's transformation initiatives.

The MVAC membership agrees that there is significant work ahead for the Department in order to appropriately set the course for long-term excellence and reform. However, it is also important to note that members of the MyVA Advisory Committee unanimously agree that the change we have witnessed over the past 15-months – at all levels of the Department – is unprecedented. Most importantly, the change we've witnessed has been authentically focused on the relentless pursuit of improving access to benefits and providing quality care for the nation's veterans.

To that end, we'd like to highlight several examples that we believe are indicative of the ongoing and positive transformation required to realize long-term reform and excellence across the Department.

**IMPROVING THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE:**

**The Committee has witnessed real and meaningful progress toward enhancing the Veterans' experience with VA services and VA people.** This progress has been informed by exhaustive

benchmarking against the best customer service firms and organizations in the world, and enabled by tremendous improvements in workforce training, data systems, and data transparency.

Since the access crisis in Phoenix, VA has completed millions more appointments, both within VA and within the community, as compared to the year prior – 97% of those appointments were completed inside 30 days of the clinically indicated or ‘veteran preferred’ date of request. This improvement was made possible, in part, because today’s VA leaders in the field have been empowered by performance dashboards and data-driven metrics in a way that wasn’t even contemplated just two years ago. Importantly, VA employees across the organization have been given the freedom to leverage this data to enhance process and practice at the local level.

In a similar way, the Committee identified that confusing and complicated communications with Veterans – particularly related to eligibility, access, and benefits determination inquiries – have historically compromised timely and quality service delivery. In response, VA has launched an effort to fundamentally transform how it communicates with Veterans via the web, call centers, mobile apps, text, letters, and by taking action to consolidate more than 100 webpages into a single entry portal. Additionally, Secretary McDonald and his team have committed to re-writing all standard communications with Veterans in clear, concise, and straight-forward language.

#### **ENGAGING AND DEVELOPING VA EMPLOYEES:**

The Committee believes that VA’s employees represent the organization’s most valuable asset, and thus investing in the development of the workforce represents a necessary condition for long-term excellence. We’ve been encouraged to learn that VA leadership shares our assessment – and more importantly we’ve been encouraged by the fact that **VA leadership is taking unprecedented steps to engage VA employees in the transformation process.**

For example, VA has leveraged local and national “stand-down” events to not only streamline access to care for Veterans, but also as a means to conduct employee training positioned to enhance service and clinical outcomes. The substance of these stand-downs has been informed by quarterly surveys of the VA workforce (new), and unprecedented participation by the union leadership.

Even more transformational has been the development and introduction of VA’s new Leaders-Developing-Leaders (LDL) program, a peer-to-peer initiative designed to disseminate best practices across VA. More than 13,300 senior- to mid-level leaders have already participated in the LDL program, with over 22,000 total participants. These types of enterprise-wide initiatives are consistent with best-in-class human capital development programs in private industry, and serve to ensure that the veteran will receive a consistent and high-quality experience wherever and whenever they engage VA people and services.

#### **CREATING A CULTURE OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:**

**Over the past year, VA has gone to extraordinary lengths to cultivate a culture of transparency and accountability across all levels of the organization.** Most notable is the shift from a rule-based to a principles-based approach to decision-making at all levels. This cultural shift has empowered employees to focus on the Veteran experience in a way where performance expectations are clear, continuous improvement is the norm, and accountability is to the Veteran.

Importantly, significant improvements related to enterprise technology systems have also fueled enhanced transparency and accountability, leveraging systems that are dynamic and responsive to the needs of Veterans and those who serve Veterans across the organization. Enhancement in technology

systems has also allowed for unprecedented visibility into health outcomes, and collaboration between providers inside and outside the VHA.

Finally, where leadership was not accountable to the Veteran, we've witnessed leadership change. In fact, since the MyVA Committee was created, twelve of the top-17 leaders at VA have been replaced.

**LEVERAGING INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP:**

At the outset of the Committee's engagement with VA, one of our most troubling findings focused on just how much VA's approach and "thinking" related to innovation and partnership was inwardly focused and consistent with a "not invented here" mentality. Today however, the change we've witnessed at VA in this regard has been profound.

**With purpose and ambition, VA has dramatically expanded its portfolio of external partnerships as a means to introduce new resources and expertise as fuel for innovation.** Examples include partnerships with world-class service firms like Wegmans, Starbucks, and USAA, to drive innovation related to the Veteran experience; partnerships with world-class technology firms like IBM, Google, Coursera and Amazon to drive innovation related to data, measurement, and human-centered design; and partnerships with Veteran-serving non-profits and other NGO's, to better situate VA people and services within the broader ecosystem of organizations and institutions addressing the social, economic, and wellness needs of Veterans.

In a similar way, VA has also created Community Veteran Engagement Boards (CVEB's) in communities across the U.S., as a means to leverage community-connected resources to improve Veteran outcomes more holistically. Fifty-five CVEBs have been launched to date, and VA is working to have 100 CVEBs online by year's end. The CVEB's will serve not only to bring new resources and partners to the table in service to the needs of today's Veterans, but equally important is the fact that the local and regional engagement cultivated by the CVEB's will seed long-term, community-connected partnerships positioned to serve many future generations of Veterans.

**SUMMARY**

Over the past year, the work of the MyVA Advisory Committee has driven home to the membership – many of whom have extensive experience and praiseworthy accomplishments related to transforming and modernizing large and complex organizations – that the challenges ahead for VA remain significant. The committee continues to emphasize the need for an enhanced focus on accountability throughout the organization, and a purposeful strategy to engage 'the whole of VA' in the transformation effort; in both these areas, progress must be accelerated. We are convinced that the transformation currently underway at VA is right, appropriate, and does set a course for long-term reform and excellence across the Department.

Accordingly, the membership of the MyVA Advisory Committee strongly urges those who would propose or act to politicize the ongoing reform at VA to consider first and foremost the debt of honor that's been earned by America's Veterans, and how a grateful nation best pays on that debt. It is the well-considered opinion of the Committee that the leadership and countless dedicated employees of the Department are committed to change and excellence at all levels, and that significant progress has been made toward transforming the Department into a 'Veteran-first,' learning organization capable of providing class-leading and resource efficient services and care to this and future generations of America's Veterans. It is therefore critically important that the organizational momentum supporting

the MyVA transformation process – both inside and outside of VA – be sustained and supported during this period of political change.

### **MyVA Advisory Committee Membership:**

#### **MG Josue “Joe” Robles Jr; Chairman, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Major General Josue (Joe) Robles, Jr., USA (Ret.) retired from USAA in 2015 after serving seven years as president and chief executive officer. During MG. Robles’s tenure as CEO, USAA grew customers 63 percent, revenue 67 percent, net worth 87 percent, assets owned and managed 70 percent, and more than doubled employee engagement. Robles joined the U.S. Army in 1966, and for the next 28 years, served in a variety of command and staff positions, including director of the Army budget and as commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division (the Big Red One).

#### **Michael Haynie, PhD; Vice Chairman, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Dr. Michael Haynie is Vice Chancellor at Syracuse University, and also holds positions as the Executive Director of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), and as the Barnes Professor of Entrepreneurship at Syracuse University’s Whitman School of Management. A veteran of the U.S. Air Force, Haynie’s academic expertise is focused on innovation, entrepreneurship, and competitive strategy. For the past three years, Haynie has also served as the chairman of the U.S. Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Committee on Veterans’ Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach.

#### **Herman Bulls; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Herman Bulls is Vice Chairman, Americas, as well as an International Director and the founder of JLL’s highly acclaimed Public Institutions Business Unit, which specializes in delivering comprehensive real estate solutions to federal, state and local governments, economic development & nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions. He is an Army veteran, a West Point graduate and serves as a director of the West Point Association of Graduates and the Military Bowl, an NCAA sanctioned post season football game.

#### **Teresa Carlson; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Teresa Carlson serves as the vice president of the world wide public sector at Amazon Web Services where she is responsible for operations, strategy, sales and business development. The more than 20-year industry veteran is also the head public policy advisor for the global public sector at AWS and oversees revenue and partnership strategy. She previously served as vice president of federal government business at Microsoft. Carlson also has 15 years of experience in the health care field and was recently named to Washingtonian Magazine’s “100 Most Powerful Women.”

#### **Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H, FACS; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Dr. Richard H. Carmona served as the 17th Surgeon General of the United States (2002-2006). Carmona is a combat decorated and disabled Army Special Forces veteran of the Vietnam War. Carmona is currently a Distinguished Professor at the University of Arizona, and holds numerous public and private leadership positions and has extensive experience in public health, clinical sciences, health care management, and national preparedness.

#### **Laura Herrera, MD, MPH; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Dr. Laura Herrera is medical director for population health and community health programs at Johns Hopkins HealthCare, responsible for providing physician leadership in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the population health care management programs. Previously Dr. Herrera was deputy secretary of public health services for Maryland’s Department of Health and Mental

Hygiene. She served as a medical officer in the Army Reserve, as National Director of Women's Health, and the Acting Deputy Chief Officer of Patient Care Services in VA's Veterans Health Administration.

**Chris Howard, DPhil; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Chris Howard is currently the 8<sup>th</sup> President of Robert Morris University in suburban Pittsburgh, and was formerly the President of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. Howard is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel and an Air Force Academy graduate. A Rhodes scholar, he earned his doctorate in politics at the University of Oxford and an M.B.A. with distinction from the Harvard Business School. Howard previously served on the National Security Education Program Board and previously served on the American Council on Education's board of directors.

**Nancy Killefer; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Nancy Killefer, vice chair of the Defense Business Board. Killefer was senior director in the Washington office of McKinsey & Company, an international management consulting firm. She founded and led McKinsey's global public sector practice. She is also a former chief financial officer, chief operating officer and assistant secretary for management for the Treasury Department, and previously chaired the IRS oversight board.

**Eleanor "Connie" Mariano, M.D.; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Dr. Eleanor "Connie" Mariano is Former Physician to the President of the United States and Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (ret). Dr. Mariano was the first female director of the White House Medical Unit and the first military woman to become a White House Physician to the President. After serving in the White House she joined Mayo Clinic's Executive Health Program. She is also the founder of the Center for Executive Medicine (CEM), is a unique medical practice designed for executives and their families who seek the highest standard of personalized and responsive medical care.

**Jean Reaves; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Jean Reaves is a Vietnam era veteran, the wife and mother of veterans, and has acted as a veterans' advocate for over 20 years. Reaves is a member of AMVETS and several other veteran service organizations. She is currently president of North Carolina AMVETS Service Foundation, and previously served as veteran liaison for former Sen. Kay Hagan, D-North Carolina

**Maria "Lourdes" Tiglao; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Maria "Lourdes" Tiglao is the Regional Communications Manager for Team Rubicon Region III. She is a US Air Force veteran who served in the medical field as part of the 3-person USAF Critical Care Air Transport Team and helped co-found and launch the first USAF Critical Care Medical Attendant Team in the Pacific. Lourdes also served as a member of the International Health Specialist Team for the US Air Force, an organization that used medicine as an approach to crossing cultural barriers.

**Robert E. Wallace; Member, MyVA Advisory Committee**

Robert E. Wallace serves as the Assistant Adjutant General and Executive Director of Veterans of Foreign Wars. Wallace is a Vietnam veteran. He is responsible for the day-to-day operations of VFW activities in Washington, DC. He previously had a career in banking and also held positions in New Jersey state government in its Veterans Affairs and Employment and Training Commission.