

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS



Biennial Report 2024

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Letter from the Advisory Committee Chair

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
Department of Veteran Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

I am appreciative and grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Chairperson of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV).

Gathering for the first time in person since COVID-19, the Advisory Committee eagerly started to garner data and current Veteran information from the upcoming meetings. The Executive Director and staff of the Center for Minority Veterans provided excellent leadership and positive guidance along with enormous efforts to support our commitment to our Veterans. Their efforts guided the Advisory Council with multiple meetings including an in-person meeting in Washington, DC, focusing on Veterans' issues with the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) and the National Association Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that would help increase the ACMV's outreach efforts. We wanted to share some ideas for the NAACP-NASDVA-ACMV meeting. (See attached for our suggestion document).

The ACMV is very thankful for your leadership and guidance. We are encouraged by the positive direction and ongoing progress to enhance access to VA services for all Veterans.

On behalf of the ACMV, please allow me to express my sincere appreciation for allowing me and my cohorts to serve VA and our minority Veterans. Our research, our dedication, and our collective abilities will help all Veterans.

Sincerely,

/s/

Robert V. "Bobby" McDonald
Chair, Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans

Part I. Executive Summary

The 2024 Biennial Report of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (Committee) provides the Committee's observations, recommendations, and rationales that address the effectiveness of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) delivery of benefits and services to minority Veterans.

The Committee fulfilled its requirement to conduct a minimum of two meetings during fiscal year (FY) 2023 in accordance with P.L. 103-446, and the VA Committee charter on February 21, 2024. The Committee will fulfill its requirement to conduct a minimum of two meetings during FY 2024. Specifically in FY 2023, the Committee met virtually on July 12, 2023, and September 28, 2023, at VA Central Office (VACO) in Washington, District of Columbia. In FY 2024, the Committee met in person on February 20-22, 2024, at VACO in Washington, District of Columbia.

The meetings at VACO, included briefings from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), select VA Staff Offices, the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Part II. Summary of 2024 Recommendations

The Committee reviewed information received during meetings with VA officials through document reviews and from direct communications with minority Veterans. The Committee strongly believes that if implemented, the nine 2024 recommendations will significantly enhance the VA's ability to strategically address the needs of minority Veterans as the Veteran population becomes more diverse. These recommendations and rationales address the following issues:

- The Department of Veterans Affairs should review the demographics of minority Veterans compared to non-minority Veterans who utilize Patient Advocate's assistance in health care or mental health VA facilities to determine if there are any variations among the Veteran population to include minority Veterans are utilizing this assistance by 1st Quarter Fiscal Year 26.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs should conduct a comprehensive review of the best practices in use across state-level Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) with a focus on services provided to minority, women, and rural Veterans. This review should aim to understand how effectively these best practices facilitate access to healthcare and mental health services within the VA system. The effort should be directly linked to the Department's mission to improve Veterans' health outcomes and align with strategic plans and the Committee charter, specifically targeting the enhancement of service delivery to minority Veterans by 1st Quarter Fiscal Year 26.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should create a funded pilot program for callback agent service for funeral homes that need direct services when trying to assist minority, rural Native American Veterans, and their families in their time of need by 2nd Quarter Fiscal Year 26.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should include minority status in its data collection efforts to better help determine whether there is a different issue related to the underutilization of memorial benefits for minorities versus overall Veteran underutilization by 1st Quarter Fiscal Year 26.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should implement an awareness campaign of existing memorial benefits like the recent campaign to expand awareness in the women Veterans' community by the 4th Quarter of Fiscal Year 26.
- The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV) recommends that the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation conduct an inquiry to explore and assess the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran Benefits Administration's (VBA) efforts to address multiple, well-documented and acknowledged disparities affecting minority Veterans, specifically but not limited to decades-old grant rate disparities that have disproportionately disadvantage Black Veterans, Veterans in outlying areas and territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa). Additionally, it is recommended that the Subcommittee examine, investigate, and evaluate progress to date on the

Department's efforts to address, execute, and implement the recommendation of the Congressionally mandated, Government Accounting Office report, Actions Needed to Further Examine Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Compensation (GAO-23-106097).

- The ACMV recommends that the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation require the VA, writ large, and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) specifically to disclose and make publicly available unredacted research, reports, studies, and or related material, especially by any/all federally funded research and development centers (FFRDC) reports, research, findings, and proposed recommendations and courses of actions related to disparities impacting minority Veterans. In disclosing these materials, the VA must ensure the safety of Veterans' personally identifiable information.
- Congress House Committee on Veterans' Affairs should seek and obtain a Congressional appropriation budget, an independent direct budget line item, of no less than \$9.7 million to the Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) to support the work of the ACMV and the CMV. Those resources are needed to; a) expand outreach and engagement efforts by CMV and ACMV, b) support the continued development, implementation, and management of a Minority Veteran Customer Relationship Management Tool (CRM), c) support the continued development of Development, Implementation, and Management of a Minority Veteran Customer Disparity/Equity Dashboard (CMV Tool), d) conduct an Advisory Committee/Minority Veteran Regional Event in FY 25, e) add an additional full-time employee (FTE) to support the above and assist in developing a cohesive, enterprise wide engagement plan for Minority and Underserved Veterans.
- Congress should move to enact the VA-approved, and ACMV-supported legislative Bill, H.R.4325 - Historically Underserved Veterans Inclusion Act of 2023, 118th Congress (2023-2024). The CMV and ACMV work to address disparities in the use of VA benefits and services by the five racial/ethnic groups defined in section 544(d) of P.L. 103-446, Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994. The 30-year-old legislation does not currently reflect the varied Veteran population of 2024. This Bill aligns with VA priorities, Strategic Objective 2.1, Underserved, Marginalized and At-Risk Veterans—Reaching All Veterans—CMV has developed a legislative proposal to update the focus of ACMV and CMV to include underserved, vulnerable, and marginalized Veterans identified in the legislative proposal.

Part III ACMV 2022 Recommendations, Rationales, and VA Responses

Recommendation 1: The Department of Veterans Affairs should review the demographics of minority Veterans compared to non-minority Veterans who utilize Patient Advocate’s assistance in health care or mental health VA facilities to determine if there are any variations among the Veteran population to include minority Veterans that are utilizing this assistance by 1st Quarter FY 26.

Rationale: Enhancing the overall care provided by the VA to minority Veterans is crucial to the mission of the VA, especially as women and minority Veterans continue to be some of the fastest-growing Veteran populations. Patient Advocates may be the last option for many Veterans frustrated with obtaining health care and mental health support. Being proactive, the VA can ensure that they get in front of specific issues negatively impacting their care and support, taking a more proactive stance. In some regions, there may be variations in accessing Patient Advocates as a means of understanding the scope of essential services available to Veterans. In some areas, Veterans may not be aware of the Patient Advocate role and how they can assist.

VA Response: Concur

VHA affirms demographics of minority Veteran utilization of patient advocacy services compared to non-minority Veterans is not an indicator of Veteran ability to access patient advocates. By the directive of the VHA Governance Board, every VA medical facility is required to have at least two Patient Advocates on staff. Most VA medical facilities have more than the minimum based on a variety of factors such as complexity level, Veteran uniqueness, workload, etc. Veterans can access Patient Advocates by walking into a local office, phone calls, complaint letters to the VA medical facility, and the 24/7 Ask VA online service.

Further, VHA agrees there is potential benefit in understanding the unique healthcare needs and associated challenges of minority Veterans compared to their non-minority counterparts based on complaint issue codes. Patient Advocates assign each Veteran complaint an issue code to categorize complaints into digestible themes. This could be useful to Minority Veteran Program Coordinators and Health Equity professionals at the facility, VISN, and national levels seeking to identify opportunities for outreach, awareness, and improvement.

VHA Action Plan:

Recommendation 1: The Department of Veterans Affairs should review the demographics of minority Veterans compared to non-minority Veterans who utilize Patient Advocate’s assistance in health care or mental health VA facilities to determine if there are any variations among the Veteran population to include minority Veterans that are utilizing this assistance by 1st Quarter FY 26.

Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status	Contact Person
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					as of June 2024	
Develop new requirement	Office of Patient Advocacy (OPA)	VHA Support Service Center (VSSC)	Develop new requirements for the VSSC team to produce reporting that allows the drill down of complaint issues codes by race at the facility, VISN, and national levels	6/30/24	Not Started	Ron Hamner
Develop enhancements based on the requirement.	OPA	VSSC	Collaboration between OPA and VSSC to connect the Patient Advocate Tracking System – Replacement (PATs-R) to the VHA data warehouse and begin development of reporting	6/30/25	Not Started	Ron Hamner
Test development and data accuracy	OPA	VSSC	Collaboration to test and review developed reports to clear tools for internal VA use	8/31/25	Not Started	Ron Hamner
Release capability	OPA	VSSC	Release report for VA internal use and communicate the availability to VA users	9/30/25	Not Started	Ron Hamner

Recommendation 2: The Department of Veterans Affairs should conduct a comprehensive review of the best practices in use across state-level Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) with a focus on services provided to minority, women, and rural Veterans. This review should aim to understand how effectively these best practices facilitate access to healthcare and mental health services within the VA system. The effort should be directly linked to the Department's mission to improve Veterans' health outcomes and align with strategic plans and the Committee charter, specifically targeting the enhancement of service delivery to minority Veterans by 1st Quarter FY 26.

Rationale: Enhancing the efficacy and engagement of VSOs in serving minority, women, or rural Veterans is critical to ensuring equitable access to healthcare and mental health services. VSOs play a vital role in bridging the gap between Veterans and VA, particularly for those in minority, women, and rural categories who may face additional barriers to accessing care. By understanding and standardizing best practices, the VA can improve service delivery and outcomes for these Veterans.

VA Response: Concur

Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) will work jointly with VHA/VSO's/and State level directors to support the development of a comprehensive review of the best practices to facilitate access to healthcare and mental health services within the VA system to underserved Veteran populations.

VHA Action Plan:

Recommendation 2: The Department of Veterans Affairs should conduct a comprehensive review of the best practices in use across state-level VSOs with a focus on services provided to minority, women, and rural Veterans. This review should aim to understand how effectively these best practices facilitate access to healthcare and mental health services within the VA system. The effort should be directly linked to the Department's mission to improve Veterans' health outcomes and align with strategic plans and the Committee charter, specifically targeting the enhancement of service delivery to minority Veterans. 1st Quarter FY 26.

Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status as of June 2024	Contact Person
Deferred to VHA Action Plan						

Recommendation 3: The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should create a funded pilot program for callback agent service for funeral homes that need direct services when trying to assist minority, rural Native American Veterans, and their families in their time of need by 2nd Quarter FY 26.

Rationale: Providing a one-stop call line for funeral homes would expand and increase minority Veteran utilization rates of memorial benefits by providing real-time assistance to problems that often must be resolved in a very short period. While funeral homes often know a great deal about memorial benefits, if a Veteran has not planned, or is in sudden need of the benefits, family members are often unfamiliar with the available benefits. Funeral homes can be a logical conduit to help family members receive the benefits, but even well-informed homes will often have specific questions regarding the process, location, and availability of services in a relatively short period. The process should also be widely distributed through funeral home associations for maximum exposure.

VA Reponses: Concur in principle

NCA understands that Veteran families must often make decisions regarding interment and memorialization in a short period at a difficult time. NCA also understands that funeral homes in rural areas likely have less experience with national cemeteries than funeral homes in more populous areas that may have well-established relationships and more constant contact with their nearest national cemeteries. NCA's National Cemetery Scheduling Office provides phone lines to assist all funeral homes and survivors by providing information about interment in any VA national cemetery in the country, determining eligibility for interment in a national cemetery, and scheduling the interment on a date and time convenient for the family in any open VA national cemetery. All of this is usually accomplished with just one phone call to 800-535-1117. For any Veteran family who does not wish to inter their loved one in a national cemetery, NCA's Applicant Assistance Office provides information regarding VA memorial products including government-furnished headstones, markers, and medallions to mark the graves of Veterans in private cemeteries, memorial headstones and markers for eligible individuals whose remains are not available for interment, and Presidential Memorial Certificates to commemorate the service of Veterans. The Applicant Assistance Office is available to assist funeral homes and survivors with obtaining memorial products at 800-697-6947. Both phone lines are staffed by experts in their respective areas, and most funeral homes throughout the country are aware of these services and these phone numbers. VA does not believe that Veteran families would be better served by the VA attempting to combine these services into a "one-stop" call line.

NCA regularly performs outreach to funeral homes through the National Funeral Directors Association and other funeral industry professional organizations. NCA will examine potential methods of increasing awareness of funeral homes that may serve greater numbers of minority, rural Native American Veterans and their families to ensure those funeral homes can access these services for Veteran families in their times of need. Additionally, NCA is seeking contractor support for strategic communications, which would include the development and sharing of communication products to funeral home staff and other stakeholders that more readily address VA burial and memorial benefits, while providing these stakeholders material that they can leverage in working with Veterans and families.

NCA Action Plan:						
Recommendation 3: The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should create a funded pilot program for callback agent service for funeral homes that need direct services when trying to assist minority, rural Native American Veterans, and their families in their time of need by 2 nd Quarter FY 26.						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status as	Contact Person

					of July 2022	
Concur in principle						

Recommendation 4: The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should include minority status in its data collection efforts to better help determine whether there is a different issue related to the underutilization of memorial benefits for minorities versus overall Veteran underutilization by 1st Quarter FY 26.

Rationale: Currently, this information is not fully tracked, and it is therefore difficult to create or design a separate process to improve minority underutilization.

VA Response: Concur

In April 2022, the Department established the Demographics Data Working Group (DDWG), under the direction of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive Number 15 standards, to deliver an enterprise plan for standardization of Veteran Demographics, contact information, and communications preferences data for operational use. As an active participant in this working group, NCA will comply with OMB’s requirements and implementation timelines. Moreover, NCA is partnering with the Center of Minority Veterans (CMV) to develop a collaborative tool/app that provides evidence-based data to assist with determining the demographic makeup (such, as race, ethnicity, age, and gender) of the deceased Veterans served and not served by NCA within 75 miles of a National, state, or tribal cemetery over the last five years. Development of a full demographic profile of Veterans in a service area will then allow a more detailed assessment by demographic characteristics of those who chose interments in VA cemeteries, and thence allow identification and targeting of underserved groups. This project is currently being Vetted through the VA’s Data Governance and development will resume once the authority to operate is complete.

NCA Action Plan:						
Recommendation 4: The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should include minority status in its data collection efforts to better help determine whether there is a different issue related to the underutilization of memorial benefits for minorities versus overall Veteran underutilization by 1 st Quarter FY 26.						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status as of July 2024	Contact Person

Implement revision of OMB's Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnicity Data Standards.	DDWG	NCA	Task 1: OMB publishes revised SPD-15 standards for Race and Ethnicity Task 2: The Agency submits an action plan on Race and Ethnicity Data to OMB Task 3: VA information collections comply with OMB revised standards.	March 28, 2024 March 28, 2025 March 28, 2029	Completed March 29, 2024	Jacqueline Hillian-Craig
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Recommendation 5: The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should implement an awareness campaign of existing memorial benefits like the recent campaign to expand awareness in the women Veterans' community by the 4th Quarter FY 26.

Rationale: The purpose of the campaign is to increase the overall utilization of memorial benefits by Veterans, as well as create stronger partnerships with local Veterans organizations that often participate in and support memorial services for Veterans.

VA Response: Concur

NCA concurs that greater outreach to Veterans, their families, and stakeholders is necessary and will continue to implement and execute activities that support greater awareness and utilization of VA burial benefits. NCA is currently seeking contractor support for strategic communications with the capability to execute multiple comprehensive communication campaigns which would include Public Service Announcements. This support would also develop and execute directed messaging to Veterans, industry partners like funeral homes, and end-of-life involved groups.

NCA regularly performs outreach to funeral homes through the National Funeral Directors Association and other funeral industry professional organizations. NCA will examine potential methods of increasing awareness of funeral homes that may serve greater numbers of minority, rural Native American Veterans and their families to ensure those funeral homes are able to access these services for Veteran families in their times of need. Additionally, NCA is seeking contractor support for strategic communications, which would include the development and sharing of communication products to funeral home staff and other stakeholders that more readily addresses VA burial and memorial

benefits, while providing these stakeholders material that they can leverage in working with Veterans and families.

NCA partnered with VHA and VBA to develop integrated communications around the part of a Veteran's journey at the end of their life. Talking about end-of-life planning is never easy, but it's essential. VA provides a variety of benefits and services to help Veterans and their loved ones prepare. From life insurance to burial costs, we want to be sure that Veterans and their families learn how they can plan with VA benefits. Thanks to our partnership, we were able to develop an End-of-Life public service announcement (PSA), create a new landing page website that links to all of our related benefits, and create an integrated overview briefing for stakeholders.

In FY 2023, NCA participated in over 50 national-level events designed to reach Veterans, their families, and stakeholders, as well as other outreach events conducted by national cemeteries throughout the nation. NCA appears in person at VSO conventions, job fairs, military-specific events (i.e., Association of the United States Army, etc.) and conducts digital outreach, as well. Additionally, extensive and robust publications and media outreach reached over 1,000,000 Veterans.

NCA also leveraged the celebration of its 50th anniversary in 2023, to host several events at cemeteries nationwide to garner additional interest and awareness of VA national cemeteries and memorial benefits. Events at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, the National Memorial Cemetery at Quantico, and NCA's participation at the GI Film Festival provided opportunities for Veterans, their families, and the public to learn more about NCA and its benefits.

The Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) saw the largest expansion in the site's history with the inclusion of Veterans in private cemeteries. The new Veterans and service members added to VLM are those who were interred in private and other non-VA cemeteries and received an NCA headstone, marker, or medallion since 1996. In support of this expansion, NCA executed a robust communications campaign that included social media posts, a media round table, a video, and media coverage in various publications, including CNN.

NCA's social media presence is growing due to a focused effort in establishing national cemetery pages, which resulted in nine cemeteries joining Facebook in 2023. In total, NCA has 39 national cemeteries with Facebook pages and has seen year-over-year growth in followers (+2.5%) on its main page due to a more consistent and directed posting schedule.

Partnerships with Carry the Load to support their annual national relay in May and the Travis Manion Foundation's #TheHonorProject are particularly meaningful as these groups conduct events within national cemeteries that bring Veterans, their families, and the community together. These events and the communications support provided by both organizations amplify NCA messaging and showcases national cemeteries to both Veterans and the public, who may not be familiar with them.

In the spirit of its mission and values, NCA has actively conducted outreach to private cemeteries serving underrepresented Veterans to ensure that they are aware of headstone and marker benefits available to them, supported their efforts in rehabilitating and cleaning these cemeteries through technical advice, and amplified their presence and needs within the community through visits by senior VA leadership which led to positive media coverage. These activities allow NCA to connect with Veterans within their communities and reflect to them that NCA honors all Veterans and their legacies.

NCA Action Plan:

Recommendation 5: The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), should implement an awareness campaign of existing memorial benefits like the recent campaign to expand awareness in the women Veterans’ community by the 4th Quarter FY 26.

Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status as of July 2024	Contact Person
Award Strategic Communications Contract	Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation		-Open solicitation Evaluate offerors Award contract	August 2024	Started	Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation
Develop Communications Plan	Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation		-Research/ analyze applicable data -Develop comprehensive communications products	January 2025	Pending	Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation
Implement Communications Plan	Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation		-Release communications products	April 2025	Pending	Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation

Recommendations to Congress:

Recommendation 6: The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV) recommends that the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation conduct an inquiry to explore and assess the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran Benefits Administration's efforts to address multiple, well documented and acknowledged disparities affecting Minority Veterans, specifically but not limited to decades-old grant rate disparities that have disproportionately

disadvantage Black Veterans, Veterans in outlying areas and territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa). Additionally, it is recommended that the Subcommittee examine, investigate, and evaluate progress to date on the department's efforts to address, execute, and implement the recommendation of the Congressionally mandated, Government Accounting Office report, Actions Needed to Further Examine Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Compensation (GAO-23-106097).

Rationale: This Advisory Committee has, more than eleven times, in the past twenty years requested that the VA investigate, address, and take corrective action related to grant rate disparities that have disproportionately disadvantaged various groups of minority Veterans but most specifically Black Veterans. Routinely, the Veteran Benefits Administration has offered a myriad of opaque root causes ranging from “selection effect” to “access to representation”. Yet, as the GAO report and several other public research initiatives signal, disparities persist and continue to disadvantage the most underserved Veteran communities.

Recommendation 7: The ACMV recommends that the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation require the VA, writ large, and VBA specifically to disclose and make publicly available unredacted research, reports, studies, and or related material, especially by any/all federally funded research and development centers (FFRDC) reports, research, findings, and proposed recommendations and courses of actions related to disparities impacting minority Veterans. In disclosing these materials, the VA must ensure the safety of Veterans' personally identifiable information.

Rationale: On multiple occasions over the last three decades, the Advisory Committee has been briefed on a variety of studies, reports, and research conducted by the VA to explore disparities impacting minority Veterans. Seldom, if ever, is this unredacted research shared with the ACMV or disclosed publicly. Instead, the VA offers sanitized presentations or topline findings without a) sharing the underlying data, b) offering corrective action to address the underlying inequities, and c) tackling related personnel accountability matters related to the disparities. As a FACA committee, composed mostly of academic researchers, and educated and engaged Veterans advocates, the lack of transparency brings into question the integrity of the VA's internal/external investigations. A more transparent engagement by the VA with the ACMV would permit the committee to execute its functions more thoroughly.

Recommendation 8: Congress's House Committee on Veterans' Affairs should seek and obtain a Congressional appropriation budget, an independent direct budget line item, of no less than \$9.7 million to the Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) to support the work of the ACMV and the CMV. Those resources are needed to; a) expand outreach and engagement efforts by CMV and ACMV, b) support the continued development, implementation, and management of a Minority Veteran Customer Relationship Management Tool (CRM), c) support the continued development of Development, Implementation, and Management of a Minority Veteran Customer

Disparity/Equity Dashboard (CMV Tool), d) conduct an Advisory Committee/Minority Veteran Regional Event in FY 25, e) add an additional full-time employee (FTE) to support the above and assist in developing a cohesive, enterprise wide engagement plan for Minority and Underserved Veterans.

Rationale: Historically the ACMV has been hamstrung in its ability to conduct its statutory obligation for outreach and engagement to Minority and Underserved Veterans due, in part, to limited budgets. Routinely, the VA has limited CMV/ACMV's ability to travel and conduct site visits. The ACMV has been informed that limited resources for the Office of the Secretary are the driving factor. An independent appropriation in the form of a direct budget line item in the VA's budget for the CMV/ACMV would safeguard the continued ACMV/CMV engagement plan for Minority and Underserved Veterans.

Recommendation 9: Congress should move to enact the VA-approved, and ACMV-supported legislative Bill, H.R.4325 - Historically Underserved Veterans Inclusion Act of 2023, 118th Congress (2023-2024). The Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) and the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV) work to address disparities in the use of VA benefits and services by the five racial/ethnic groups defined in section 544(d) of P.L. 103-446, Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994. The 30-year-old legislation does not currently reflect the varied Veteran population of 2024. This Bill aligns with VA priorities, Strategic Objective 2.1, Underserved, Marginalized and At-Risk Veterans—Reaching All Veterans—CMV has developed a legislative proposal to update the focus of ACMV and CMV to include underserved, vulnerable, and marginalized Veterans identified in the legislative proposal.

Rationale: The current thirty-year-old legislation does not reflect the needs of today's minority and underserved Veterans and needs to be updated. The current authorizing language (38 USC 544(c)) is narrowly focused on the five racial/ethnic minorities that Congress identified in 1994 and provides limited policy guidance or direction to the ACMV members. Additionally, the current language does not include other underserved populations as identified by Secretary Department of Veterans Affairs (SECVA). HR 4325: CMV's legislative proposal:

- renames the ACMV as “Advisory Committee on Minority and Historically Underserved Veterans” and CMV as “Center for Minority and Historically Underserved Veterans,
- Adds Veterans who identify with more than one race/ethnicity and Veterans of Middle Eastern and North African descent to the racial/ethnic groups served by ACMV and CMV,
- Expands the missions of CMV and ACMV to serve minority Veterans and “historically underserved” Veterans, including Veterans who are LGBTQ+, are whose gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual characteristic, tenets of religion, sincerely held beliefs or no religion at all, has been determined to be underserved members of a minority faith, have language barriers or are without citizenship status,

Part IV. Agenda: 2023 Virtual Washington, District of Columbia, Departmental Briefings

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS (ACMV)
July 12, 2023
MS TEAMS – Virtual Meeting
AGENDA**

Wednesday, July 12, 2023

11:00 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.	Opening Remarks/Review Agenda	James Albino, DFO Robert McDonald, Chairman
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11:05 a.m. – 11:25 a.m.	VA Advisory Committee Update	Jeffrey Moragne Advisory Committee Management Office
11:55 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.	Center for Minority Veterans Update	Debra Walker Deputy Director
12:05 p.m. – 1:05 p.m.	Courtesy Visit Planning	ALCON

Topics:

- Re-Upping CMV – SecVA letters forthcoming
- Courtesy Visit Discussion
- Courtesy Visit Logistics
- Courtesy Visit Pairings
- Courtesy Visit Support
- Courtesy Visit Survey Template
- Courtesy Visit Follow up, Review and Analysis (planning for September Meeting)
- In-Person Meeting in 2024 (Proposed January - February during NASDVA/VSO Legislative Visits)

1:05 p.m – 2:15 p.m.	Veterans Health Administration	Dr. Chad Kessler Director, Emergency Medicine, VHA
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Topics:

- Support The Resiliency of Our Nation's Great Veterans Act (Strong Act)
- Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act)
- COVID-19 research across the VA system.
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys – minority Veterans.

2:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Public Comments	Open to the public
2:30 p.m.	Wrap-up/Adjourn	Robert McDonald Chairman

Part V. Agenda: 2023 Virtual Washington, District of Columbia, Departmental Briefings

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY VETERANS (ACMV)
September 28, 2023
MS TEAMS – Virtual Meeting
AGENDA**

Thursday, September 28, 2023

11:00 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.	Opening Remarks/Review Agenda	James Albino, DFO Robert McDonald, Chairman
11:05 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	Welcoming Remarks	Maureen Elias, Deputy Chief of Staff
11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Center for Minority Veterans Update	James Albino, Director
11:30 p.m. – 1:05 p.m.	Courtesy Visit Update	ALCON

Topics:

- Courtesy Visit Discussion
- Courtesy Visit Logistics
- Courtesy Visit Pairings
- Courtesy Visit Support
- Courtesy Visit Survey Template

1:05 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	National Cemetery Administration	Jacqueline A. Hillian-Craig, Executive Director, Strategy and Analysis, NCA
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Topics:

- Update on high-level initiatives.
- Update on Outreach Activities.
- Update on Veterans Legacy Memorial project
- Update on NCA' Equity Office

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Veterans Benefits Administration	Laurine Carson, Deputy Executive Director, Policy and Procedures, VBA
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Topics:

- Update on VBA Equity Office.

2:00 p.m. – 2:25 p.m.	Minority Veterans Programs Coordinator (MVPC 101)	Carmen Drummond, Senior Program Manager, CMV
2:25 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Public Comments	Open to the public
2:30 p.m.	Wrap-up/Adjourn	Robert McDonald Chairman

Part VI. Agenda: 2024 VACO, Washington, District of Columbia, Department Briefings
Department of Veterans Affairs
Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV)
VA Central Office Admin Meeting Room 230
AGENDA

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

8:00 a.m. – 8:05 a.m.	Opening Remarks	James Albino, DFO
8:05 a.m. – 8:15 a.m.	Chairman’s Welcome/Committee Member Roll Call/Acknowledgments	Robert McDonald Chairman
8:15 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.	Veterans Health Administration	Ernest Moy, M.D., Executive Director, Office of Health Equity
9:15 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Veterans Experience Office	John Boerstler, Chief Experience Officer
10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Break	
10:15 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	National Cemetery Administration	Jacqueline Hillian-Craig, Executive Director, Strategy and Analysis, NCA
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Veterans Benefits Administration	Joshua Jacobs, Under Secretary for Benefits
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch	
1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Center for Women Veterans	Lourdes Tiglao, Executive Director
1:30 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.	Office of Equity Assurance	Cheryl Rawls, Executive Director
2:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Closeout/Updates/ Administrative Paperwork	Debra Walker, ADFO Dwayne Campbell
2:30 p.m.	Wrap-up/Adjourn	Robert McDonald Chairman

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV)
VA Central Office Admin Meeting Room 530/Arlington, VA
AGENDA**

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Subcommittee Breakouts	Subcommittee Chairs
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Department of Justice	Nicole Siegel, Director Servicemembers & Veterans Initiative, Civil Rights Division
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Lunch	
12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Travel to National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) – 300 Army Navy Drive, Arlington, Virginia	
12:30 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.	NASDVA Briefing	Allen P. Whitney, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs
3:15 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	Wrap-up/Adjourn	Robert McDonald Chairman
3:30 p.m.	Travel to 810 Vermont Avenue	

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans (ACMV)
VA Central Office Admin Meeting Room C-7
AGENDA**

Thursday, February 22, 2024

8:45 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.	Chairman's Remarks	Robert McDonald Chairman
9:15 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.		

	Black Veterans Research Project	David Camporeale, Director, of Vets, Office of Research & Policy, Department of Labor
10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Break	
10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	Office of Public & Intergovernmental Affairs	Zaneta Adams, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs
11:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	Committee Open Discussion	Robert McDonald Chairman
11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Public Comments Closeout/Updates/Reminders	James Albino, DFO Debra Walker, ADFO Dwayne Campbell
12:15 p.m.	Wrap-up/Adjourn	Robert McDonald Chairman

APPENDIX A: Action Plan Follow Up

Roll Up of Open ACMV Reports Action Plans 2022 Update Spreadsheets

Recommendation 1: That VA capture race/ethnicity and service branch metrics in all MST tracking, specifically in annual MST reports and include MST questions in all mental health intakes for all genders by the 2nd Quarter FY 2025.

VA Response: Concur-in-Principle

VHA Action Plan:						
Recommendation 1: That VA capture race/ethnicity and service branch metrics in all MST tracking, specifically in annual MST reports and include MST questions in all mental health intakes for all genders by the 2nd Quarter FY 2025.						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status as of June 2024	Contact Person
Convene internal discussions to determine pros/cons and feasibility.	11 Office of Mental Health (MH)	11MH will consult with VHA Office of Health Equity and others, as appropriate	Convene biweekly meetings of internal committee Generate proposed plan Seek consultation on proposed plan from OMH Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Consultation Program	End of 1st Quarter FY 2025	Complete	Amy Street, National Director MST, 11MH
Identify and implement appropriate action steps	MH		Implement proposed analytic plan to examine MST-related data by race/ethnicity	End of 1st Quarter FY 2025	Ongoing	Amy Street, National Director MST, 11MH

			Implement proposed plan to incorporate MST status data into the OMH Population Analysis of Needs and Differential Access Dashboard			
Convene internal discussions to determine pros/cons and feasibility of include MST questions in all mental health intakes for all genders metrics in all MST tracking	11 Office of Mental Health (MH)		Convene internal meetings of subject matter experts within the MST section Continue current policy of universal MST screening of all Veterans and recommended best practice of inclusion of MST questions in all mental health intakes	End of 1st Quarter FY 2025	Complete	Amy Street, National Director MST, 11MH

VHA Action Plan:

Recommendation 2: That VA improve diversity within the Department’s workforce. Specifically, the diversity reflected within the GS 13,14, 15 and SES positions by the 2nd Quarter FY 2025.

VA Response: Concur

<p>VHA Action Plan:</p> <p>Recommendation 2: That VA improve diversity within the Department’s workforce. Specifically, the diversity reflected within the GS 13,14, 15 and SES positions by the 2nd Quarter FY 2025.</p>

Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status as of June 2024	Contact Person
Online Experience-Based Resource System	Institute for Learning Education and Development (ILEAD)	Workforce Management and Consulting Office (WMC) VISNs	Maintain and market site to VHA groups to submit experience-based detail opportunities	FY 2024 - 2025	Launched October 2023 with ongoing notices to local HR and senior leader groups	Luci Papanastassiou
Career Pathing	(ILEAD)	Human Resources; Workforce Management and Consulting Office (WMC)	Design Road Maps for Career Growth Market Road Maps for Transparent and Broad Access	FY 2024 - 2025	In Progress	Luci Papanastassiou
Supervisor Development Coordinator Pilot	(ILEAD)		Pilot program in Nine Facilities and VACO	FY 2023 - 2024	Launched in October 2023; ends in Sept 2024.	Rhonda Carter
Universal Application	(ILEAD)		Two updated versions to align with program requirements	FY 2024	Used for two Leadership Programs and External Leadership Program Selections	Kelley Carameli
Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Mentorship Program	(ILEAD)	National Improvement Office	Facilitate mentoring matches for ELT to improve outcomes at facilities	FY 2024	In progress	Rhonda Carter

Career Aspiration Survey	(ILEAD)		Explore expansion and access to survey at all VHA levels	FY 2023 - 2024	Ongoing; reassessing processes for survey marketing	Kelley Carameli
Leadership Potential Assessment Tool	(ILEAD)	National Center for Organization Development	Deliver a VHA-developed leadership tool for all VHA staff	FY 2024	Launched January 2024	Kelley Carameli
Leadership Attribute Checklist	(ILEAD)	WMC VISNs	Identify leadership traits sought by VHA Hiring Officials	FY 2023 - 2024	Ongoing; refining traits using Talent Review Processes	Kelley Carameli

Recommendation 3: That VA expand the VLM to include Veterans of COFA Nations, Palau, the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia and U.S. Territories American Samoa and U.S. Virgin Islands as they are without a U.S. National Cemetery by the 2nd Quarter FY 2025.

VA Response: Concur

NCA Action Plan:						
Recommendation 3: That VA expand the VLM to include Veterans of Compacts of Free Association Nations, Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia and U.S. Territories of American Samoa and U.S. Virgin Islands as they are without a U.S. National Cemetery by the 2nd Quarter FY 2025.						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Task	Due Date	Current Status as of July 2024	Contact Person
	NCA (OEMI)	OIT Benefits Appeals and Memorials	IT development work to add interment records to VLM	September 30, 2026	Complete NCA	James LaPaglia William Rodgers

APPENDIX B: Advisory Committee Biographies

Charles Allen, MD, CFI, Major, USAF (Retired) African American

Charles E. Allen, MD is a retired Air Force Officer, (Major, KC 135 Tanker Pilot, 23 combat flights during the Gulf War), a retired family practice physician and former project director for University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) Veterans Upward Bound (VUB). He currently is an associate lecturer of chemistry-biochemistry at UWM and national director of education, training, and mental health for the National Association for Black Veterans.

Dr. Allen earned his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry/Biochemistry from Rocky Mountain College, Billings, MT; his Master of Science in Health Services administration from Central Michigan University and his MD from Maria Dehostos, School of Medicine, Dominican Republic. Charles Allen resides in Wisconsin.

Salvador J. Castillo, USAF Hispanic

Salvador J. Castillo is an U.S. Air Force Veteran. He was assigned to the 43 SFS Squadron in Pope Airfield, Ft. Bragg, NC in support of the 82nd Airborne Division from 1998-2002 as Security Forces Member. In July of 2006-2008, he joined the 36 Infantry Division unit as an Intel Analyst. Mr. Castillo has been involved in various intergovernmental projects such as the development of the Cameron County Veteran's Court and have been the President of the South Texas Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans Association.

Mr. Castillo earned his master's in public administration from the University of Texas Pan-American.

Salvador J. Castillo resides in Texas.

Irma Hagans Cooper, Colonel, USA (Retired) African American

Colonel Irma Hagans Cooper is a thirty-year Veteran of the United States Army. She has held three (3) Commands ranging from Company to a Medical Group including one command in Iraq. Colonel Cooper has distinguished herself by exceptional meritorious conduct in a myriad of assignments with the Army Nurse Corps. In all her positions, she has demonstrated inspiring leadership, tireless energy and total dedication to the spirit and mission of the Army Nurse Corps and the United States Army Reserves. She is a graduate of the Army War College with a Master of Science in Strategic Studies.

Irma Hagan Cooper resides in California.

**Georgina Dodge, U.S. Navy (Veteran)
Asian American**

Since 2017, Georgina Dodge has served as Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Provost for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Bucknell University, and has held similar roles as Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Vice President; Title IX Coordinator at the University of Iowa and Assistant Vice Provost of Office of Minority Affairs at The Ohio State University where she convened and directed the university's Bias Assessment and Response Team, produced the university's annual diversity report and helped develop metrics for diversity performance evaluations.

As a first-generation college student, Dodge brings a unique perspective to Maryland as an individual who took an unconventional path to educational and professional success. Prior to her career in academics, she served in the U.S. Navy as an electronics technician. Upon completion of her six-year enlistment term, Dodge began her pursuit of an A.A. from Golden West Community College in Huntington Beach, California. After graduating with honors, Dodge continued to build on her education with a B.A. in English from the University of California Irvine, graduating summa cum laude. The scholar went on to earn both her MA and PhD in English from University of California, Los Angeles.

Along with her various memberships to professional organizations like the Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA) and Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), she organized the Women of Color Caucus within the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States and has served in several other change-making positions throughout her 23-year career. Dodge was recently featured on the September 2018 cover of *Diverse: Issues of Education*. Georgina Dodge resides in Maryland.

**Lisa Carrington Firmin, Colonel, USAF (Retired)
Hispanic**

Colonel Lisa Carrington Firmin is the Military Liaison and Associate Vice President for Veteran and Military Affairs at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). As the founding leader for Veteran and Military Affairs, she oversaw the consolidation and realignment of all Veteran support services on campus and the creation of the Center for Military Affiliated Students to better support and serve Veterans and military affiliated students.

During her military service, Colonel Carrington Firmin held a multitude of leadership roles and received numerous awards including, but not limited to, the Legion of Merit Medal with oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal, and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal.

Lisa Carrington Firmin resides in Texas.

**Ronald Garcia, USN
Hispanic**

Mr. Garcia is a Veteran of the United States Navy, where he completed two tours of duty in Vietnam. He is retired from Fannie Mae where he held the position of Senior Deputy Director. Mr. Garcia is a past member of the Orange County Division, League of California Cities Advocacy Committee and has previously held positions which include serving as Chair & Vice Chair of the Brea Planning Commission, and Chair of the Brea Investment Advisory Committee, and Board of Directors for the Neighborhood Housing Services of Orange County.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, with a minor in Finance, from the University of Redlands.

Ronald Garcia resides in California.

**Warren A. Jones, MD, FAAFP, Captain, USN (Retired)
African American**

Warren Jones MD, FAAFP retired as a Captain in the US Navy after serving twenty-two years of service. Dr. Jones also has over thirty years' experience in health care. Notably, he founded and established the Mississippi Institute for Improvement of Geographic Minority Health and Health Disparities (MIGMH) at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMC). Over the course of his tenure there, Dr. Jones secured approximately \$38 million for MIGMH and its constituent programs. Dr. Jones' other professional experience includes directing the State of Mississippi's Medicaid Program. He was recognized as Outstanding Minority Educator in the State of Mississippi and was elected the first and only African American President of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Dr. Jones is a 1978 graduate of the Louisiana State University School of Medicine in New Orleans.

Warren Jones resides in Mississippi.

**Robert V. "Bobby" McDonald, USN
African American**

Mr. McDonald serves as President and Executive Director of the Black Chamber of Commerce of Orange County (OC). Under his leadership, the Black Chamber has consistently partnered with minority business associations, local chambers and legislators to provide support and advocate for the county's many small-business owners. Mr. McDonald developed the chamber's educational outreach programs and has established the chamber's Veteran's business network programs. He has served as member of PBS Southern California board of Trustees, California Cultural Historical Endowment Board and the 17-member State Board of Governors of the California

Community College System. He is a member of the 9th and 10th (Horse) Calvary Association-Buffalo Soldiers.

He earned his degrees from Los Angeles Harbor College and California State University, Fullerton.

Robert V. McDonald resides in California.

Major General Linda L. Singh, US Army Reserve National Guard African American

Major General Linda Lee Singh was Maryland's first African American and first woman Adjutant General. She is a senior advisor to the governor. She was responsible for the readiness, administration, and training of more than 6,700 members of the military department with an annual budget of more than \$314 million. As the adjutant general, she served as the official channel of communication between the governor and the National Guard Bureau and serves as a governor's cabinet member, according to her biography in the Maryland Archives.

Major General Singh is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College, where she received a master's degree in strategic studies. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Columbia Union College, a master's degree in business administration, military management from Touro International University.

Linda L. Singh resides in Maryland.

Nathan A. Tilton, Sergeant First Class, USA (Retired) Pacific Islander

Mr. Tilton, a disabled Veteran, serves as an independent researcher. He was responsible for collecting, organizing, and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data to explore current issues, predict trends, and develop solutions. These projects draw on different disciplines such as sociology, medicine, psychology, and other fields. In addition to his work as an independent researcher, Nathan works with the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, by advocating for people with disabilities to receive disability benefits while acting as a part of congressional briefing team. He addressed systemic barriers facing people with disabilities by building and implementing innovative and high-impact advocacy plans.

His education includes a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, and he is working to complete his Master of Arts in Medical Anthropology in 2022.

Nathan A. Tilton resides in California.

**Beth A. Townsend, Lieutenant Colonel, USAFR (Retired)
Native American**

Lieutenant Colonel Beth Townsend was appointed by Governor Terry Branstad and confirmed by Iowa Senate unanimously as director of Iowa Workforce Development in 2015. She has general supervision over the various services IWD provides to Iowans. Lieutenant Colonel. Townsend also serves as the chair of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies Veterans Affairs Committee. She previously served as the Director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.

She is a graduate of Kearney State College, Kearney, Nebraska, and the University of Nebraska Law School. She is a member of the Nebraska and Iowa state bar.

Beth Townsend resides in Iowa.

**Michael J. Yaguchi, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF (Retired)
Asian American**

Lieutenant Colonel Yaguchi is an Air Force Veteran; the former Director of VA Programs for CSRA International, Inc., and Managing Director of Yaguchi & Associates, LLC. He retired from the USAF in 2006. In 2009, he assumed duties as the Director, Nuclear Policy in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. In 2018, he started Yaguchi & Associates, LLC and launched his inaugural project in late 2018. He also served on the Board of Directors for many non-profit organizations, including, but not limited to, The Alzheimer Association (Northeast NE); the Go For Broke National Education Center; and serves on the advisory board with the National Veterans Network.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from the University of Washington, and a Master of Arts in Air and Space Operations, Air Command and Staff College.

Michael J. Yaguchi resides in Washington.