

A MESSAGE FROM VA'S SECRETARY



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

November 26, 2018



To the President of the United States, President of the Senate, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives:

This report highlights the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) accomplishments and challenges in providing health care and benefits delivery to our Veterans according to our duty to care for Veterans and their families. To accomplish this sacred mission, we provide timely access to health care and benefits for millions of Veterans. It is a responsibility that we do not take lightly.

During this last fiscal year, VA has made groundbreaking progress particularly in the areas of accountability, transparency, and efficiency across the Department while enjoying an unprecedented series of legislative successes. As part of this effort, the Department is tackling head-on issues that have lingered for years, including the following:

- Giving Veterans more choice in their health care decisions;
- Increasing accountability and protecting whistleblowers;
- Improving transparency by becoming the first hospital in the Nation to post online wait times, opioid prescription rates, accountability and settlement information, and chief executive travel;
- Adopting the same electronic health record as the Department of Defense (DoD), permitting seamless transfer of medical information for Veterans leaving the Armed Services;
- Establishing the first ever 24/7 White House VA Hotline that helps Veterans cut through red tape by giving them a direct, dedicated line to highly-trained, live agents, regardless of their needs and concerns; and
- Increasing suicide prevention and mental health care efforts working with DoD and other departments to develop a plan to ensure all new Veterans receive mental health care for at least 1 year following their separation from the service.

As VA Secretary, I will be focusing on the following priorities: customer service, electronic health record modernization, the Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act, and business transformation.

VA will focus on improving customer service not only to our external customers but to our employees. Customer service must start with VA employees talking with each other across all Staff Offices and Administrations. We will listen to each other so that we are better able to listen to our Veterans and their families so that we can provide the world-class customer service they deserve.

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VA will modernize our electronic health record system to create a continuum of care among VA, the DoD, and private doctors. The new system will organize VA health care around our Veterans' needs while keeping VA at the center of their health care as well as make our delivery of services more efficient and timely.

Through this landmark legislation, the MISSION Act, VA will consolidate our community care efforts into a single program that is much easier to navigate for Veterans, families, VA employees, and community providers. The MISSION Act will ensure our Veterans receive the best health care possible, whether delivered in VA facilities or in the community. It will also improve Veterans benefits and services.

If VA is to move past compartmentalization of the past and empower our employees serving Veterans in the field to provide world-class customer service, business transformation is essential. This means reforming administrative systems to give those professionals more leeway to manage budgets; improve logistics and purchasing; and recruit, retain, and relocate the staff needed to serve Veterans. It also signifies entering into more robust partnerships with state and local communities to address Veteran homelessness.

CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA), an independent public accounting firm, reviewed our financial statements and provided an unmodified opinion for the 20th consecutive year, demonstrating VA's successful efforts to ensure that taxpayer resources are used effectively and efficiently in support of Veterans and their families. Although VA received an unmodified audit opinion, we must continue to improve our financial management in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, as CLA identified a number of areas that require improvement within the Department.

Based on internal evaluations, I can provide reasonable assurance that the financial and performance information contained in this report is complete, reliable, and accurately describes VA's results for FY 2018. The Agency Performance Plan and Report, due in February 2019, will contain more detail on VA's performance measures. Caring for our Nation's Veterans is the highest honor and privilege for the men and women who serve VA. I thank you for consideration of our annual report and appreciate your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Wilkie