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**VA, DoD Secretaries Meet at Pentagon**

WASHINGTON -- Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta welcomed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki today to the Pentagon for the latest in a series of regular meetings the two Secretaries have held on issues of common interest to both Departments.

Today's session included discussions with disabled Veterans, two of whom are now athletes with the United States Paralympic team, about their experiences as they left active service and transitioned to Veterans’ status. The Paralympic athletes told the two Cabinet members how DoD and VA adaptive sports programs helped them in their recovery from their injuries and gave them new purpose in their lives after the military.

"It is clear that there is a lot of good work being done to help our Service members have the smoothest transition possible to Veteran status and civilian life," said Secretary Panetta. "But there are still too many stories of programs that are poorly connected between our Departments and that are time-consuming and plain confusing for our Service members and Veterans."

"The vision Secretary Panetta and I share is to provide an integrated, seamless experience to our people across their lifetimes -- from when they raise their hands to take the oath, to when they leave active service and join the Veteran ranks, to when they are laid to rest with final honors," said Secretary Shinseki. "Over the past three years, VA and DoD have made significant progress, but more work remains."

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At today's meeting, Panetta and Shinseki focused on five areas where the two Departments have joined efforts on behalf of the nation's Service Members and Veterans: the Disability Evaluation System, Electronic Health Records, Transition programs, joint Pharmacy initiatives, and Recovery Coordination for the wounded, ill, and injured.

The two Secretaries were pleased with the status of the development of plans to implement the President's directive to develop a new model for the Transition Assistance Program to ensure that all Service members are "career-ready" when they depart the military. They also discussed the improvements to the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) as a result of the $400 million recently added to the Defense Department budget over the next five years and VA’s commitment to increase the number of personnel in support of administering the system. With more than 24,300 Service members currently being evaluated for disability ratings through IDES, the Secretaries stressed the importance they are attaching to additional personnel helping to shorten the time Service members spend waiting for their ratings before they can complete their transition from active duty to Veterans’ status.

Panetta and Shinseki also discussed steps forward on electronic health records, noting that the Interagency Program Office established by the two Departments to provide leadership in building the joint integrated electronic health records system now has new leadership.

The Secretaries were also updated on development of the Graphical User Interface program, reporting that doctors at the James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center at North Chicago can now view both VA and DoD patient records simultaneously on a single monitor. The Lovell Center is a first-of-its-kind partnership between VA and DoD to provide integrated care to Service members and Veterans in the same facility and has been a testing ground for the Departments' efforts to deliver a fully integrated electronic health record for all Service members and Veterans. Panetta and Shinseki are expected to meet again this May in Chicago to visit the Lovell Center and to review progress on deliverables the two Departments have committed to achieve by the end of the year, including: a detailed implementation plan for the revised transition assistance program; spurring development

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of electronic transfer of patient files, to reduce both the processing and mailing costs incurred by paper transfer and disability evaluation processing times; and finalizing a contract for joint pharmacy capability at the Lovell Center.

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