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Improving the Veteran's Experience through MyVA Communities

MyVA Communities is Part of Larger Ecosystem Where Communities Rally Around Their Veterans

WASHINGTON – As part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) MyVA initiative, the largest transformation in the history of VA, VA is reporting the progress and growth of the locally led, community-driven initiative, *MyVA Communities*.

Modeled after San Diego's successful One VA Community Advocacy Board, more than 50 communities have joined the *MyVA Communities* movement. What these communities have in common is that they have local Veteran engagement boards which are led by the community, provide a feedback and input mechanism for local Veterans, are accessible, and are designed to bring together all available local resources and capabilities to better support our Veterans. They are also flexible enough to meet the unique needs of each community and facilitate the development of local solutions.

"VA is undergoing its largest ever transformation, MyVA, based around the central premise that we must look at all of the decisions we make through the lens of the Veteran, that is how we provide a better experience," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. "A vital part of that transformation is better working with strategic partners and that's exactly what *MyVA Communities* help us do, bring together local community leaders that want to help VA improve and provide services to Veterans."

Connecticut established the first Veterans community board in the country using the new *MyVA Communities* model and was followed by several other start-ups including MyVA Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In other areas, VA was able to join well-established existing engagements including the Alaska Forget Me Not Coalition and the Region 9 Veterans Community Action Team in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The community Veterans engagement boards, which go by different names in each community, are co-chaired and driven by local community leaders and include representatives from all three VA Administrations on the board membership (Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration and the National Cemetery Administration). To support further integration of VA service offerings in communities, VA is incorporating the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI) into the MyVA Veterans Experience portfolio of service offerings. VECI, which was announced by the Secretary in 2015, has improved education and employment opportunities for Veterans in over 25 communities around the country. This is one example of a resource VA can offer to current and future MyVA Communities across the country.

VA expects to see 100 *MyVA Communities* throughout the country by the end of this year as a result of ongoing engagements with community leaders and existing groups with similar missions. The goal is to seek integration with existing community collaborative groups, and encourage local community leaders to adopt the *MyVA Communities* model where gaps may exist.

For more information on the *MyVA Communities* effort, visit: http://www.va.gov/nace/myVA/index.asp. More information about MyVA may be found at http://www.va.gov/opa/myva/docs/myva_integrated_plan.pdf.

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