

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

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End of Year Message to VA's Supporters from Secretary David Shulkin

Today Secretary Shulkin provided a year-end statement focused on VA accomplishments for 2017.

The text is below and there is a link here to see his accompanying video message: https://youtu.be/1I8d_nMFUI4

Happy Holidays!

2017 has been a year of accomplishments for the Department of Veterans Affairs and this is a perfect time to reflect on, acknowledge, and thank all of those who have enabled our many accomplishments for Veterans during this past year. We owe so much to our Nation's leaders and others in and outside of government for supporting and enabling improvements to the ways in which we serve Veterans:

- First and foremost, let me express my gratitude to President Trump. His leadership and vision have driven and inspired VA to better care for Veterans and their families. Among his many supportive acts and leadership initiatives, he has signed 9 bills to improve our ability to serve Veterans, as well as one Executive Order and three Presidential Proclamations; he has personally participated in and led six events honoring Veterans, and he has kept their interests foremost in the minds of all Americans by mentioning their service and sacrifices in 25 of his public speeches. He was the driving force behind the White House Hotline for Veterans, which opened for 24-7 service in October and has served more than 16,000 callers.
- Vice President Pence has also been critical to every initiative involving Veterans. He personally led our Veterans Day ceremony at Arlington and demonstrated his concern for Veterans by supporting and attending Honor Flight ceremonies and events such as the Wounded Warrior bicycle ride.
- Thanks to all the Members of Congress for making 2017 a legislative success for Veterans. With the unwavering support and leadership of our VA committees, Congress supported and passed groundbreaking legislation on VA Accountability, Appeals Reform, the Forever GI Bill, Veterans Choice Improvements, and Personnel Improvements and Extension of Choice funding.
- Thanks also to my fellow Cabinet Secretaries and leaders of Administrations for their departments and agencies support:
 - Department of Defense: We are partnering on a new Electronic Medical Record and shared purchasing to better serve both Veterans and Service Members and best use taxpayer resources.
 - Housing and Urban Development: Together, VA and HUD helped house over 61,000 homeless Veterans last year alone.
 - Department of Energy: With DoE assistance, we've launched an important Veterans Brain Health Initiative and Big Data Super Computing to expand dramatically our research into Veterans' health.
 - Department of Labor: Working together, the unemployment rate for Veterans has dropped to 2.6%, the lowest in 17 years.
 - Department of Education: With DoE's support, VA helped enable more than 1 million Veterans to use the GI Bill in 2017.
 - Health and Human Services: Our collaborations have led 620,000 Veterans to participate in precision medicine initiatives, achieve a reduction of 36% in the use of opioids, and produce over 10,000 research papers that will help us better serve Veterans and all Americans.
 - Department of State: Thanks to DoS for coordinating the visits of dignitaries from 16 countries to the Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - The Department of Justice has assisted with revising and coordinating new Telehealth regulations and regulations for prescriptions to improve Veterans' access to care and medications.
 - The Department of Interior helped provide employment opportunities for Veterans through the Park Ranger Internship Program.
 - The Small Business Administration almost doubled the goal of 10 percent of federal contracts with Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business by achieving 19 percent.
 - And thanks to our partners in the private sector for helping provide Veterans' care. In 2017, VA authorized 6.1 million community care appointments, a 42 percent increase over 2016.

These and other collaborations have helped VA make significant progress in serving Veterans and their families. We have become more transparent by posting wait times for Veterans' appointments, Veterans' satisfaction with VA care and services, facility quality scores and accountability actions.

We've reduced dropped calls to our Veterans Crisis Line from 35% percent to less than 1 percent, ensured Veterans have same-day access to primary and mental health care at all our care facilities, identified 430 unused and under-utilized facilities for disposal, and improved claims processing times by 18 percent in 2017.

All of these accomplishments have resulted in raising Veteran "Trust" Scores from a low of 46% in 2014 to 70% today.

But we still have much work to do, and we at VA look forward to the continued support and leadership of President Trump, Members of Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and all Americans as we fulfill Lincoln's famous words "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

As the year comes to a close, may God bless each and every one of you, and may God continue to bless this wonderful country of ours.