



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# News Release

Office of Public Affairs  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 22, 2022

## VA Secretary Denis McDonough statement on confirmation of Under Secretary for Health and other personnel updates

**WASHINGTON** — The Department of Veterans Affairs welcomed the news of the confirmation of Shereef Elnahal, M.D. as Under Secretary for Health.

“Dr. Shereef Elnahal’s confirmation as VA’s Under Secretary for Health is great news for Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors and our workforce,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Dr. Elnahal is an exceptional leader and clinician, and he will play a critical role in VA’s mission to provide timely access to world-class health care to the more than 9 million Veterans we serve, and the millions more we will serve in the future.”

“I also want to thank Steve Lieberman, M.D. acting Under Secretary for Health since July 2021,” the Secretary continued. “Throughout the pandemic, Steve has been a steady hand helping to deliver care to more Veterans than ever before. With Steve at the helm, VHA’s trust scores improved to 90%, weekly home and telehealth visits increased by 1,590%, and more than 4 million Veterans received the COVID-19 vaccination. We are a much better VA because of Steve’s unwavering commitment and leadership.”

VA has also made more key appointments in recent months.

**Kishla Askins, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Enterprise Integration:** Prior to her appointment to VA, Kishla Askins, U.S. Navy retired Veteran, served as the CEO for Global Bridge Health Strategies focused on breaking down stove pipes and building resilient bridges for a more stable world. Before starting her own consulting business, she spent 30 years serving in the United States Navy in various leadership and staff positions in combat, clinical, operational, academic, policy, political and senior executive environments. Askins is an active volunteer with the Travis Manion Foundation, Girl Scouts and the City of Alexandria. Service is a family business as her wife is an active-duty United States Marine Colonel. Askins’s late father and father-in-law are Vietnam Veterans, grandfathers are World War II Veterans, and her wife’s paternal grandmother and grandfather are both Veterans having served in the European Theatre of World War II.

**Melissa Bryant, Senior Advisor, Strategic Engagement, Office of the Secretary (effective 31 July):** Prior to her time at VA, Melissa Bryant, a third generation U.S. Army combat Veteran, served as a senior intelligence officer in uniform and civil service in key leadership positions with the Department of Defense and intelligence community. She transitioned to advocacy and public affairs as the national legislative director for The American Legion and as chief policy officer for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Bryant is widely recognized for championing causes impacting women and minority service members and Veterans. She is transitioning into this role from her previous appointments as the Deputy Assistant Secretary and Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs.

**Maureen Elias, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary:** Prior to her appointment to VA, Maureen Elias, U.S. Army Veteran, served as a Professional Staff Member for the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. Before coming to the Hill, Maureen served in various roles in two of the traditional “Big Six” Veterans Service Organizations including Paralyzed Veterans of America and Vietnam Veterans of America, advocating for improvements to Veteran healthcare and benefits. Elias is an active volunteer and advocate in the Veteran community including teaching storytelling with the Armed Services Arts Partnership, serving as an ambassador for the Travis Manion Foundation and an active alumnus of Student Veterans of America.

**Jennifer Esparza, White House Liaison, Office of the Secretary:** Prior to her appointment, Jennifer Esparza, a Tillman Scholar, served as a law fellow and legal affairs director at Veterans Education Success, advocating for Veterans utilizing VA education benefits. In addition to protecting Veteran benefits, she has spent considerable time addressing sexual violence issues in the military. Before joining the advocacy space, Esparza spent 11 years enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. After her service in uniform, she received a B.A. from the University of Oregon in International Studies and Arabic and graduated in 2020 from Georgetown University Law Center.

**Adam Farina, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Public Affairs (effective 31 July):** Before his time at VA, Adam Farina served as associate communications director and speechwriter at Everytown for Gun Safety, where he helped lead the organization’s federal and opposition communications and told the stories of survivors of gun violence. Prior to that, he served as deputy communications director and speechwriter for Congressman Seth Moulton (MA-06). He has also written surrogate speeches for the Biden-Harris campaign. Farina is transitioning into this role from his previous position as Chief Speechwriter.

**Sue Fulton, Assistant Secretary, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs:** Prior to her appointment, Sue Fulton served as Chair and Chief Administrator of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission under Governor Phil Murphy. A 1980 West Point graduate and Army Veteran, Fulton had a 25-year career in brand management at Fortune 100 companies, gaining experience and expertise in leadership and strategic communications. Fulton has long advocated for military service members through nonprofit organizations such as Knights Out, OutServe and SPARTA, and has served as an appointed member of both the West Point Board of Visitors and the Board of Visitors of the National Defense University.

**Kimberly M. Mitchell, Senior Advisor, Veterans Service Organizations Liaison, Office of the Secretary:** Prior to her appointment to the VA, Kim Mitchell held several key positions in non-profit organizations with a focus on Veterans and military families. Most recently, she was the Senior Vice President at National University. Prior to that she served as the President and CEO of Veterans Village of San Diego and President and Co-Founder of Dixon Center. A strong advocate for our Veterans and their families, Mitchell has worked with hundreds of communities across the nation and is a nationally recognized speaker on Veteran transition and reintegration.

**Michael Waldman, Special Counsel, Office of General Counsel:** Prior to his appointment, Michael Waldman handled criminal, civil and

enforcement matters, including False Claims Act and qui tam lawsuits, debarment proceedings, bid protests, congressional investigations and complex commercial cases. His clients included government contractors of all types, including hospitals, health care providers, defense contractors and electronics companies. Waldman represented companies and individuals in a wide variety of federal white-collar criminal and civil investigations, including the Department of Justice, U.S. attorneys' offices, federal agencies, and Congress. He also conducted sensitive internal investigations and advised on compliance matters. Waldman has represented clients in appeals in numerous U.S. courts of appeals and has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. He previously worked as a litigation partner at the Robbins Russell law firm in Washington, D.C.

As these new leaders join and transition through the department, there are four individuals who have departed.

"We want to express our sincere appreciation for Chris Diaz, Deputy Chief of Staff and White House Liaison; Ray Kelley who served as Liaison, Veteran Service Organizations; Richard Sauber, General Counsel of the Office of General Counsel; and Kayla Williams, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs," said McDonough. "Their great work provided valuable service to Veterans. We wish them well in their future endeavors."

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