

PLAIN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE.** To establish the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Plain Language policy.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES.** This directive sets forth policies, roles, and responsibilities for managing the Plain Language Program within the Department.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** Office of the Executive Secretariat (001B), Office of the Secretary (00).
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOK.** None.
- 5. RESCISSION.** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/

Stephen W. Warren
Executive in Charge and Chief
Information Officer
Office of Information and Technology

/s/

Jose D. Riojas
Chief of Staff

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PLAIN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

1. **PURPOSE.** This directive establishes Department-wide policy for the VA Plain Language Program. This directive also assigns responsibilities and provides procedures for VA's Plain Language Program in accordance with Public Law 111-274, also known as the "Plain Writing Act of 2010," and also referred to as the "Plain Writing Act." It promotes VA use of clear, concise, and well-organized language in documents to effectively communicate with intended audiences. This is in accordance with the guidance in Presidential Memorandum, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-11-15.
2. **POLICY.** The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires the Federal Government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner. VA fully supports this Act.
3. **RESPONSIBILITIES.**
 - a. **Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials.** Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials will:
 - (1) Ensure that Administrations and Staff Offices use plain language concepts in new or substantially revised public-facing documents after the date of this directive. Documents requiring technical or specialized language should be as clear and concise as possible and offer explanations when necessary.
 - (2) Require employees who regularly write or edit public-facing documents to take the plain language training offered by the Department through the VA Learning University. All other VA personnel are encouraged to take plain language training to improve their writing skills.
 - b. **Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary to the Department.** The Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary to the Department serve as the Senior Officials for Plain Language and oversee VA's implementation of the Plain Writing Act. The Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary are responsible for:
 - (1) Managing the Plain Language Program;
 - (2) Chairing the VA Plain Language Working Group;
 - (3) Communicating Plain Writing Act requirements to VA and encouraging plain language training;
 - (4) Publishing and maintaining VA's Plain Language Web site;

(5) Compiling implementation data for VA's Annual Plain Language Compliance Report; and

(6) Reviewing and updating this directive, as necessary.

4. REFERENCES.

- a. **Plain Writing Act of 2010.** This Act was signed by President Barack Obama on October 13, 2010. Federal agencies are required to use "clear Government communication that the public can understand and use."
- b. **Executive Order, E.O. 13563 – Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review.** This E.O. was signed on January 18, 2011. It states that "[our regulatory system] must ensure that regulations are accessible, consistent, written in plain language, and easy to understand."
- c. **Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-11-15: Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010, signed April 13, 2011.** This memo contains OMB issued plain language guidance.

The references can be found at: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>.