



JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

presents the

Joint Strategic Plan

FISCAL YEARS 2022-2027

LETTER FROM VA AND DOD

JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DoD) are obligated by law to collaborate and share resources where mutually beneficial to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness of health care, benefits(1), transition and career readiness(2) for Service members and Veterans. Congress enacted the first specific legislation in 1982, the *Veterans Administration and Department of Defense Health Resources Sharing and Emergency Operations Act (Public Law 97-174)*, followed by a number of additional Congressional mandates over subsequent years. While VA and DoD have always worked together to meet these obligations, the collaborative relationship and view of both Departments' responsibilities to our shared beneficiaries(3) has evolved significantly over the last 40 years.

Today, VA and DoD leadership, through the VA-DoD Joint Executive Committee, have moved past the historically bifurcated view that DoD's role ends and VA's role begins when the Service member separates, to embrace a new appreciation of overlapping interests and intertwined responsibilities across the Service member and Veteran life cycle(4). While no Service member or Veteran shares the same experiences, there are a broad set of stages they traverse. VA and DoD focus on those moments that matter in each stage to proactively identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration, coordination, and shared resources, to improve the experience of Service members and Veterans.

The implications of this culture shift are significant. VA and DoD thought-leadership is now more inclusive and aware of how their decisions impact one another. As such, the Joint Executive Committee uses an intentional decision-making process that is Service member-and-Veteran-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking throughout a Service member's career and transition to a Veteran, by recognizing data as a shared asset. Furthermore, VA and DoD look at long-term opportunities to effect positive outcomes for Service members, Veterans, their eligible family members, caregivers, and survivors through deliberate risk reduction.

We are excited about continuing to facilitate this evolution as we coordinate and guide the collaborative efforts of our two Departments. We would like to thank everyone involved in VA-DoD collaboration for their contributions and continued commitment to Service members, Veterans, their eligible family members, caregivers, and survivors.



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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DoD) are required to produce a joint strategic plan to shape, focus, and prioritize the coordination and sharing efforts among appropriate elements of the two Departments. The Joint Executive Committee has published ten iterations of the VA-DoD Joint Strategic Plan since the creation of the Joint Executive Committee in 2003, each documenting operational commitments, as well as a forward-looking joint strategy from one to three years. In past Joint Strategic Plans, the inclusion of operational details -- in a short timeframe -- made the document more tactical than most typical strategies.

In recent years, the collaborative relationship between VA and DoD has grown significantly to allow a broader view of the joint strategic planning cycle. As such, Joint Executive Committee leadership decided to establish a longer-term strategy to build on this momentum and improve the Joint Strategic Plan's overall flexibility, timeliness, traceability, and alignment to both VA and DoD departmental strategic plans. Also, VA-DoD strategic planning for fiscal years 2022-2027 will shift from a three-year to a six-year planning cycle to enable a more long-term and enduring strategy and will include changes to the Joint Strategic Plan and supporting documentation.

Joint Strategic Plan. Focused solely on strategy, the plan will establish a top-down VA-DoD strategic narrative for the next six-years, to be reviewed and updated every four-years for added flexibility.

Joint Executive Committee Co-Chair Annual Priority Guidance. This memorandum will continue to identify new and modified priorities at the beginning of every fiscal year. It will direct subcommittee leadership to initiate annual updates to the Joint Operating Plan by creating new or modified action plans to support joint priorities.

Joint Operating Plan. Subcommittees will develop detailed tactical action plans to support the five strategic goals in the Joint Strategic Plan. This plan will be updated and approved annually at the subcommittee leadership-level to enable detailed joint planning at a more appropriate organizational level.

Joint Executive Committee Priority Milestone Review. Distributed at each quarterly meeting, the review will continue to support the tracking of critical milestones and support committee oversight. At the start of each fiscal year, new critical milestones will be derived from the Joint Operating Plan, increasing traceability and accountability.

Senior leaders within VA and DoD have expressed their core focus areas and stressed the importance of working together for the mutual benefit of Service members and Veterans. In February 2021, VA Secretary Denis R. McDonough highlighted three core non-negotiables: providing all Veterans timely, world-class health care; ensuring [Veterans] and their families have access to the benefits earned; and honoring Veterans with a final resting place that is a lasting tribute to their service(5). In March 2021, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III identified three priorities for the Force: defending the Nation, taking care of our [DoD] people, and succeeding through teamwork. Additionally, he reaffirmed DoD's commitment to maintaining interagency collaboration in order to support Veterans and their families long after they had served(6).

To continue building on this momentum, the Joint Executive Committee is proud to present the Fiscal Year 2022-2027 Joint Strategic Plan to shape, focus, and prioritize coordination and sharing efforts between VA and DoD moving forward.



MISSION

The mission of the VA-DoD Joint Executive Committee is to enhance the overall social, physical, emotional, mental health and well-being of Service members, Veterans, and their eligible beneficiaries throughout the duration of their life cycle journey.



VISION

Provide an efficient, effective, and quality health care, transition, and benefits experience through enhanced coordination and shared resources, with a commitment to interoperability, accountability, collaborative growth, and long-term stewardship.



STRATEGIC GOALS

The VA-DoD mission and vision statements merge the values of both Departments to serve a common set of beneficiaries, while still supporting the needs of each unique organization. VA and DoD have established five strategic goals that provide a long-term strategic approach to accomplishing the Joint Executive Committee mission and vision.

Goal 1 – Health Care Collaboration – Provide a patient-centered health care system that delivers excellent quality, access, satisfaction, and value, consistently across the two Departments.

Goal 2 – Integrate Benefits and Services Delivery – Deliver comprehensive benefits and services through an integrated beneficiary-centric approach that anticipates and addresses the needs of stakeholders, provides excellent customer service, and is transparent.

Goal 3 – Enhance the Transition and Post-Separation Experience – Provide a comprehensive, holistic, timely and personalized approach to ensure transitioning Service members and Veterans have access to the highest quality care, benefits programs, job training, and post-service placement services at the right time in their transition.

Goal 4 – Modernize Shared Business Operations – Remove barriers to effective and efficient delivery of services through proactive joint planning and execution, innovative technology solutions, and a commitment to financial stewardship.

Goal 5 – Strengthen Interoperability and Partnership – Strengthen and expand cross-agency and public-private partnerships to improve data interoperability, shape policy, facilitate data-driven decisions, and enable a seamless experience for beneficiaries.

GOAL 1 - HEALTH CARE COLLABORATION

Provide a patient-centered health care system that delivers excellent quality, access, satisfaction, and value, consistently across the two Departments.

VA and DoD together manage the two largest health care systems in the nation with much of the same population, at varying points in their lives, striving to provide high-quality care for more than 18 million Service members, Veterans, and other beneficiaries(7). As such, both Departments are uniquely positioned to gain value and efficiencies from a synergistic, non-competitive relationship in order to best serve the long-term health care needs of Service members and Veterans. VA and DoD leadership fully realize the value of this partnership and are committed to expanding existing collaboration and health care resource sharing. VA and DoD will work together to execute priority initiatives that support shared principles in the area of health care, including access to care, beneficiary-focused outcomes, and building resilience and readiness.

Access to Health Care – VA and DoD will work to ensure Service members and Veterans, especially the most vulnerable who require outreach, have easier access to care. The Departments will share resources and leverage technology to increase each other’s capacity to offer more options for in-person and virtual health care services. VA and DoD are committed to providing appropriate health care for all Service members and Veterans, in addition to meeting the unique health care needs of racial and ethnic minorities; women; survivors of sexual trauma; and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) community.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Telehealth/Virtual Health use across the country increased in 2020 and 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic emergency evolved. VA and DoD shared expertise on telehealth delivery during the pandemic and collaboratively updated training and educational content to provide a mutual, common framework for competency development. VA and DoD will continue working together in this area to increase access to health care and improve Service member and Veteran outcomes.

Beneficiary-Focused Outcomes – VA and DoD will deliver evidence-based, patient-centered care focused on individualized patient needs, characteristics, and preferences to best support health, well-being, and independence. The Departments will work to provide clear, consistent and plain language(7)(8) communication with beneficiaries. Accurate research, science, data, and evidence-based policymaking are fundamental to providing quality health care, optimizing patient safety, and measuring beneficiaries’ experiences and satisfaction. VA and DoD will leverage population health information to provide insight on the overall health of the Service member and Veteran populations, improve understanding of what health services those populations need, and maximize the quality of care VA and DoD offer.

Resilience and Readiness – Both Departments are committed to building resilience and readiness in Service members and Veterans, as well as the health care professionals who care for them. VA and DoD will expand their collective impact by maximizing brain health, strengthening mental health services, suicide prevention efforts, and continuity of care for at risk Service members as they transition. The Departments will share training, education, and clinical settings in which health care professionals can build and maintain their skills to leverage and increase each other’s expertise and to ensure enhanced outcomes for all beneficiaries. In times of national crisis, VA and DoD will continue to provide services to the Nation, while keeping focus on their respective operational missions.

GOAL 2 – INTEGRATE BENEFITS AND SERVICES DELIVERY

Deliver comprehensive benefits and services through an integrated beneficiary-centric approach that anticipates and addresses the needs of stakeholders, provides excellent customer service, and is transparent.

VA and DoD will deliver benefits to Service members, Veterans, their eligible family members, caregivers, and survivors through fair, transparent, and accountable processes. The population of VA and DoD beneficiaries reflects diverse demographic characteristics eligible for a wide range of benefits through each life stage of the Service member-Veteran life cycle journey. VA and DoD recognize the complexity of this system and are committed to enhancing the process by integrating technology into joint business operations, eliminating gaps and discrepancies in benefits offered, and improving communication with beneficiaries.

Integrating Technology – Together, VA and DoD will anticipate the needs of Service members and Veterans by leveraging new tools, procedures, and innovative technology solutions to improve business operations for benefits delivery. The Departments will continue promoting agility in benefits administration focused on reducing the burden on Service members and Veterans. Processes will be automated to improve efficiency, accuracy, and ease of data sharing and record keeping between VA and DoD in a paperless environment.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

VA and DoD established the ability to leverage electronic pre-separation service treatment information as a foundation for considering Service members' applications for Benefits Delivery at Discharge. This eliminates burdensome requirements for Service members to obtain and transmit records to VA, reduces time-consuming administration at military medical treatment facilities and speeds the application process by as much as 50 percent. Work continues to make all available personnel record and clinical data available electronically for the Benefits Delivery at Discharge population to create more efficiencies.

Eliminating Gaps and Reducing Redundancies – VA and DoD will continue efforts to proactively identify differences in the benefits offered by the Departments in order to eliminate gaps and reduce redundancies wherever possible. VA and DoD will work to revise policies or seek legislative relief, where necessary, to remove unintended barriers in order to improve customer experience.

Improving Communication – The benefits process should be transparent, timely, consistent, and secure in order to build trust with VA and DoD beneficiaries. The Departments will work to provide clear, consistent and plain language communication with all beneficiaries. Service providers will communicate respectfully and with sensitivity to unique needs of racial and ethnic minorities; women; survivors of sexual trauma; and the LGBTQ+ community. VA and DoD will continue efforts to modernize the way Service members, Veterans and beneficiaries, can more easily and seamlessly access the benefits to which they are entitled.

GOAL 3 - ENHANCE THE TRANSITION AND POST-SEPARATION EXPERIENCE

Provide a comprehensive, holistic, timely and personalized approach to ensure transitioning Service members and Veterans have access to the highest quality care, benefits programs, job training, and post-service placement services at the right time in their transition.

It is estimated that 200,000 Service members transition to civilian life each year(9). The transition from military to civilian life is widely recognized as a potentially challenging and stressful process for Service members, Veterans, their eligible family members, and caregivers. In 2019, the Joint Executive Committee designated the transition period as the critical 365-day pre-separation through the 365-days post-separation from military service. Every transitioning Service member and Veteran has a unique transition journey with different needs and priorities for each individual. VA and DoD are committed to ensuring every Service member and Veteran has a personalized and seamless transition process.

Shared Responsibility – VA and DoD will continue to work closely with the Department of Labor, other federal organizations, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations to provide transition assistance planning, services, and programs at multiple stages throughout this journey.

Comprehensive Framework – With a unique focus on operations and resources that help transition Service members to civilian life, VA and DoD will continue using the Military to Civilian Readiness framework to align the myriad of independent transition activities, including the Transition Assistance Program, under one overarching umbrella during the critical 365-days pre- to 365-post separation. This framework will continue to be instrumental in establishing comprehensive, standardized, and individualized assessments across both Departments. The data generated from these assessments will be leveraged for more personalized services and targeted outcomes.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

The Joint Executive Committee approved the Military to Civilian Readiness framework in September 2019. Military to Civilian Readiness satisfies and builds upon several components of Executive Order 13822, Supporting our Veterans During Their Transition from Uniformed Service to Civilian Life, as well as the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2019, Sections 522 and 552. To meet the congressionally mandated Transition Assistance Program and other mandatory transition functions, VA, DoD, and Department of Labor, along with other interagency partners, provide a variety of courses, one-on-one engagements and learning opportunities to transitioning Service members, Veterans, family members and caregivers. These interagency partners continually work to improve transition services provided.

Personalized Approach – Newly separated at-risk Veterans and their families will receive consistent and caring support services and accurate information on benefits and resources available from VA and other partners. VA and DoD will continue to prioritize personalized contact with Veterans who had a mental health appointment in their last year of Active Duty service. The Departments will provide benefits information based on individual needs and enhance warm handover processes to support Veterans and their families, as needed, regardless of characterization of discharge.

GOAL 4 - MODERNIZE SHARED BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Remove barriers to effective and efficient delivery of services through proactive joint planning and execution, innovative technology solutions, and a commitment to financial stewardship.

VA and DoD are committed to using resources responsibly. While each Department has separate business operations to support individual missions, the shared population of beneficiaries presents opportunities where a joint approach to doing business gains efficiencies, avoids costs, and achieves better outcomes for Service members and Veterans. VA and DoD will identify and work to remove obstacles to collaboration, so that both Departments can reduce or eliminate inefficiencies and promote resource sharing, wherever mutually beneficial.

Joint Planning – The Departments will support a culture of collaboration to ensure consideration of potential impacts to VA and DoD in individual department planning efforts. VA and DoD will identify areas of business operations that would benefit from better alignment of processes, planning, policy, and execution. VA and DoD will continue to eliminate barriers to joint capital asset planning to enable joint consideration of shared market needs and identify potential shared facilities and services that would improve the efficiency, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness of health care delivery for Service members and Veterans.

Innovative Technology – Both Departments will continue to identify gaps with existing technology and seek innovative solutions for continued process improvements. VA and DoD will implement technology solutions as needed to remove barriers to effective and efficient delivery of health care, benefits, and transition support services.

Financial Stewardship – VA and DoD will promote mutually beneficial coordination, use, or exchange of use of health care resources to eliminate duplication, gain efficiencies, and realize cost avoidance. The Departments will identify and address policies and processes to effectively manage the resulting financial and medical care workload.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

VA and DoD have been sharing health care resources at the local and enterprise scale since 1982. As of September 2021, there are 147 active health care resource sharing agreements between 144 VA and DoD partners nationwide (66 VA and 78 DoD) covering a wide range of services, to include: Inpatient, Outpatient, Ancillary Services, Pharmacy, Administrative Services, Existing Capital Space, Human Capital Resources, and Dental. The Departments continue to leverage existing authorities and seek new legislative authorities where needed to optimize resource sharing.

GOAL 5 - STRENGTHEN INTEROPERABILITY AND PARTNERSHIP

Strengthen and expand cross-agency and public-private partnerships to improve data interoperability, shape policy, facilitate data-driven decisions, and enable a seamless experience for beneficiaries.

Cross-agency, as well as public-private partnerships, create opportunities to drive meaningful change from individual projects to the whole-of-government. The effectiveness of any partnership is dependent on the ability to exchange and use information. VA and DoD will strengthen and expand its network of interagency and public-private partnerships to bolster organizational agility and promote operational efficiency. The Departments are committed to improving interoperability and the exchange and use of data as a strategic asset to inform decision-making.

Partnerships – VA and DoD will partner with other Federal, State, Tribal, and private sector organizations to ensure Service members, Veterans, and other beneficiaries are aware of the benefits and services to which they are entitled and how to access these benefits, either online or in person.

Interoperability – VA and DoD will continue to modernize business operations and systems in collaboration with partners who provide data, strategy, and subject matter expertise to support and advocate for Service members, Veterans, and other eligible beneficiaries. Through interoperable systems, benefits and service providers within VA, DoD, and across the health care and benefits partner continuum are able to view, interact with and analyze health, benefits and other relevant beneficiary data to improve outcomes.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

The joint Health Information Exchange connects VA, DoD and United States Coast Guard providers with a large number of private sector partners, representing more than 2,000 hospitals, 8,800 pharmacies, 33,000 clinics, 1,100 labs, 800 Federally qualified health centers and 300 nursing homes, to help health care providers in both Departments and in the private sector make more informed treatment decisions as they care for Service members, Veterans, and DoD beneficiaries.

Data Management – As with any other strategic asset, data needs to be managed. VA and DoD will continue to jointly lead the way in establishing a federal data management standard to facilitate identification and use of authoritative data sources (i.e., “single source of truth”), with the goal of reducing duplicative collection, improving analytic processes, and providing an authoritative source of accurate information for users in both Departments.

CONCLUSION

The FY 2022-2027 Joint Strategic Plan builds on the critical collaborative growth that has taken place between VA and DoD over the last 40 years and sets a clear vision for continuing this evolution into the future. As the Departments continue to adapt and evolve, the VA-DoD Joint Executive Committee provides an essential forum for leadership from VA, DoD, the Military Services, and interagency partners to work together to drive improvements in the delivery of health care, benefits and services, and transition support. The strategic goals set forth in this plan capture shared priorities for both Departments to serve a common population: Service members, Veterans, their eligible family members, caregivers, and survivors. VA and DoD leaders, clinicians, benefit counselors, scientists, and policy makers will continue to create and support a spectrum of programs and initiatives that will produce positive outcomes felt by a range of stakeholders for years to come.

Establishing the Joint Executive Committee mission, vision, and strategic goals in this Joint Strategic Plan is only the first phase of the FY 2022-2027 joint strategic planning cycle. The Executive Committees and Independent Working Groups subordinate to the Joint Executive Committee will now take on the critical work of establishing annual joint action plans for all JEC priority objectives needed to operationalize the VA-DoD Joint Strategic Plan. Flexible and accurate joint action planning is a critical element of joint collaboration, oversight, and accountability for VA and DoD. The JEC will publish an annual Joint Operating Plan that will include current priority objectives for each year in the FY 2022-2027 joint strategic planning cycle, detailed action plans supporting these objectives, and critical milestones and performance measures that will be tracked quarterly by the Joint Executive Committee co-chairs.

VA and DoD are committed to driving the collaborative efforts needed to realize the strategic vision laid out in this plan. This shared work is vital to serving and honoring the Nation's Service members, Veterans, their eligible family members, caregivers, and survivors with the dignity, respect, and gratitude they deserve. ■

CITATIONS

- 1) 38 USC Section 8111 and 38 USC Section 320.
- 2) 38 USC Section 320(e), Job Training and Post-Service Placement Executive Committee
- 3) The term "beneficiary" means a person who is a primary beneficiary of the Department of Veterans Affairs or of the Department of Defense.
- 4) The Veterans Journey Map was developed by VA in collaboration with DoD to cover life stages from pre-Service to end of life. The Journeys of Veterans Map can be viewed in full detail at: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Veteran-Journey-Map.pdf>.
- 5) Source: February 9, 2021 Email Message to VA employees from VA Secretary McDonough.
- 6) Source: March 4, 2021 Secretary of Defense Message to the Force memorandum, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Mar/04/2002593656/-1/-1/0/SECRETARY-LLOYD-J-AUSTIN-III-MESSAGE-TO-THE-FORCE.PDF>.
- 7) Source: https://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp.
- 8) Source: <https://www.esd.whs.mil/dd/plainlanguage/>.
- 9) Source: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/transition/tap.asp>.



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