Strategic Goal #1: Restoration and Improved Quality of Life for Disabled Veterans

Disability Compensation Program
(Reviewed in CY 2002 and Received a Rating of "**Results Not Demonstrated**")

Improvement Initiative: Develop capability to begin reporting on five new performance measures.

FY 2007 Actions:

Five new long-term (outcome) measures were added to the 2005 budget submission, and a new cost-efficiency measure were added to the 2007 budget submission.

Results are being reported for two of the outcome measures (Percent of compensation recipients who were kept informed of the full range of available benefits and Percent of DIC recipients above the poverty level).

Results are also being reported for the cost efficiency measure (Productivity Index).

Reporting capability for the three remaining outcome measures (Percent of veterans in receipt of compensation whose total income exceeds that of like circumstanced veterans; Percent of compensation recipients who perceive that VA compensation redresses the effect of service-connected disability in diminishing the quality of life; and Percent of DIC recipients who are satisfied that VA recognized their sacrifice) is dependent upon a program outcome study that will be scheduled after the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission issues its report in October 2007.

Improvement Initiative: Develop analyses of how results information from new measures is used and how this information impacts program performance.

FY 2007 Actions:

Results for the two outcome measures indicated that VA has improved its customer service and service delivery as follows:

1) The percent of compensation recipients who were kept informed of the full range of available benefits increased from 43 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2005. No customer satisfaction survey was conducted for 2006.

2) Additionally, all DIC recipients are above the U.S. poverty threshold levels.

The cost efficiency measure (Productivity Index) has been in place for only one year. 2006 baseline results show a productivity index of 90 percent; results data need to be gathered for an additional year to accurately determine performance in this area.

Improvement Initiative: Evaluate recommendations from the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission.

FY 2007 Actions:

The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission began work in May 2005 and issued its report in October 2007. VA will study the Commission's recommendations and begin taking appropriate actions in 2008.

Improvement Initiative: Improve management of total disability benefit based on individual unemployability.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA has reinstated annual certification of employment and other evidence controls (VA Forms 21-4140, 21-8940, and 21-4192) used in determining individual unemployability (IU).

VA is advising all new IU beneficiaries of potential eligibility to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services through separate mailings from both the Vocational Rehabilitation program and the Compensation and Pension program.

VA is reviewing the potential benefits of using a New Hires database maintained by HHS to verify employment status.

Improvement Initiative: Develop a measure related to rating consistency.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA developed and validated a methodology to measure rating consistency, increased the Quality Review Staff workforce devoted to measure consistency, and began collecting consistency data in June 2007 through comparative statistical analysis of grant rates and evaluations across all regional offices.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program
(Reviewed in CY 2006 and Received a Rating of "**Adequate**")

Improvement Initiative: Collect data on both established and newly developed measures to evaluate performance and use these results to improve program performance.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA is continuing to collect data on established measures and is working with the Department of Labor to develop a method of collecting/verifying income from one national source rather than from each state.

Improvement Initiative: Work with the Department of Labor and Department of Defense to assess results of collaboration and use these results to enhance future efforts to coordinate services for veterans with disabilities.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA is working with the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to provide rehabilitation planning and employment services to veterans with disabilities. Three joint work groups are working to improve the quality of employment services and suitable job placements for veterans with disabilities. The work groups are as follows: Performance Measures for Assessment of Partnership Program results; Curriculum Design; and Joint Data Collection, Analysis, and Reports.

Improvement Initiative: Cooperate with GAO on an evaluation of the program to assess the effectiveness of recent program changes, including the implementation of the Five Tracks to Employment model.

FY 2007 Actions:

GAO is currently conducting and VA is participating in an evaluation of the VR&E program, which will include an evaluation of the implementation of the Five Tracks to Employment model.

Strategic Goal #2: Smooth Transition to Civilian Life

Education Program
(Reviewed in CY 2003 and Received a Rating of "**Results Not Demonstrated**")

Improvement Initiative: Determine the optimum level of monthly benefits required to accomplish the military recruitment and retention goals.

FY 2007 Actions:

DoD surveys indicate education benefits are a valuable tool in meeting recruitment and retention goals. DoD recruitment levels were met in FY 2006, and DoD is on track to meet FY 2007 goals. VA received DoD annual survey data in August 2007, affirming that education benefits still rank high as a reason individuals enlist.

VA requested that DoD provide its annual survey data from research companies so that VA can determine if the current monthly benefits aid in military recruitment and retention goals.

Improvement Initiative: Create an outcome measure on veterans' readjustment to civilian life due to the benefit received in this program.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA plans to award a contract for a customer satisfaction survey to determine customers' perception of how the GI bill assisted their readjustment in 2008.

VA plans to award a contract to determine the percentage of servicemembers and veterans who were enrolled in school and obtained a degree or certificate. The contract will be issued in 2009 with results available in the same year.

Improvement Initiative: Reinstate a cost-effectiveness measure such as the 'Administrative Cost per Trainee' measure.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA has designed a model to assess the cost effectiveness of the program. Although preliminary tests lead us to believe this could be a useful tool to measure efficiency based on the cost per trainee measure, we currently are unable to determine if the model will generate data that could predict changes in performance due to resource adjustments. We require two years of actual data to establish targets and are concluding year one of the data gathering.

Strategic Goal #3: Honoring, Serving, and Memorializing Veterans
Housing Program
(Reviewed in CY 2004 and Received a Rating of "Results Not Demonstrated")

Improvement Initiative: Develop analyses of how results information from new measures is used and how this information impacts program performance.

FY 2007 Actions:

Analysis of these new measures is underway to determine if/how they will impact program performance.

Improvement Initiative: Develop the capability to begin reporting on the new long-term performance measures focused on outcomes that meaningfully reflect the purpose of the program.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA has begun work on a customer satisfaction survey project, which will yield data for the new Specially Adapted Housing measure and the lender and veteran satisfaction measures.

VA has settled on the data source (Census Current Population Survey) to be used in calculating the program's new Veteran Homeownership measure. VA is currently compiling data to use in establishing a reporting baseline.

Improvement Initiative: Develop the capability to report on mortgage delinquencies at a point earlier than the current requirement of '105 days delinquent.

FY 2007 Actions:

In order to intervene at an earlier point in the delinquency cycle and consequently have the ability to assist veterans in avoiding foreclosure, VA undertook a business process review.

The redesigned VA business environment will be a Web-based, rules-driven application that electronically connects servicers and VA. This application will expedite VA's ability to intervene on veterans' behalf when necessary, and will allow VA to monitor and ensure appropriate servicers' performance as they service VA loans.

Medical Care Program
(Reviewed in CY 2003 and Received a Rating of "**Adequate**")

Improvement Initiative: Accelerate the collaborative activities with DoD and other Federal agencies, e.g., interoperable computerized patient health data, improved data on insurance coverage, and enrollment and eligibility information.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA and DoD now are able to support one and two-way exchanges of electronic health data for legacy systems.

Since January 2006, DoD has been providing "combat pay" data for OIF/OEF and other veterans. These data are being shared via a Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) interface. In the near future, DMDC plans to provide data for reserves via this interface.

Improvement Initiative: Develop performance based budgets and clearer resource requests.

FY 2007 Actions:

As a Performance Improvement Initiative PMA scorecard deliverable, VA will demonstrate, using a subset of measures in three programs, the ability to estimate the cost of achieving different levels of performance. This is an important step towards aligning budget requests with performance.

Improvement Initiative: Continue the enrollment policy for non-enrolled priority level 8 veterans (higher income, non-disabled), and implement additional programmatic and cost-sharing policies aimed at focusing resources on core veteran populations.

FY 2007 Actions:

Enrollment policy continues while VA focuses resources on the core veteran population. The 2008 budget proposed a tiered enrollment fee based on income and increasing prescription co-pay ($8 to $15 for P7 & P8s). The 2008 budget also proposed to eliminate the 3rd-party offset to 1st-party debt. OIF/OEF veterans have P6 status for 2 years after discharge from active duty.

Veterans with service-connected disabilities continue to have priority when seeking medical care for a service-connected disability, as prescribed in VA policy manuals.

Insurance Program
(Reviewed in CY 2005 and Received a Rating of "**Moderately Effective**")

Improvement Initiative: Develop first steps in aligning budget requests to performance.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA is developing methodologies for estimating the marginal costs of changing performance targets for measures in other VA programs. VA plans to expand this effort to other programs including the Insurance program.

Improvement Initiative: Conduct an independent evaluation of the conversion privilege from SGLI to VGLI.

FY 2007 Actions

The ability to convert from SGLI to VGLI is a very important feature of the SGLI program, especially for the disabled servicemembers leaving service who may have difficulty obtaining life insurance from the private sector because of their service-connected disabilities.

An independent evaluation, scheduled to begin in FY 2008, will help VA do the following: Identify the proper strategic target for this measure, assess outreach material sent to servicemembers at discharge, and assess the special outreach efforts undertaken to inform servicemembers of this benefit.

Improvement Initiative: Validate the results from our customer satisfaction survey using the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

FY 2007 Actions:

VA will use the ACSI to validate overall customer satisfaction and provide recommendations for improvement. Work is scheduled to begin in FY 2009.

Pension Program
(Reviewed in CY 2005 and Received a Rating of "**Adequate**")

Improvement Initiative: The program will collect and use data to implement three new performance measures regarding access, income, and dignity.

FY 2007 Actions:

Two new performance measures (Percent of VA beneficiaries receiving financial assistance for medical expenses and Percent of pension recipients who believe that the processing of their claim reflects the courtesy, compassion, and respect due to a veteran) were added to the 2007 budget submission for the purposes of measuring income and dignity, joining the access-related measure (Percent of pension recipients who were informed of the full range of available benefits), which has been in place for a number of years. Dignity and access are measured by responses to the customer satisfaction survey regarding processing of the claim.

In response to GAO Report 05-47 and feedback received during the Pension PART process, VA developed a Productivity Index measure. Results for this measure were included in the FY 2008 budget submission.

Improvement Initiative: The program will provide initial steps in linking performance to budget.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA is developing methodologies for estimating the marginal costs of changing performance targets for measures in other VA programs. VA plans to expand this effort to other programs including the Pension program.

Improvement Initiative: The program will use information derived from new performance measures to identify and make program improvements.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA will use this information to identify and make necessary program improvements.

Improvement Initiative: The program will continue to develop more ambitious strategic targets.

FY 2007 Actions:

Ambitious strategic targets are included in VA's Strategic Plan, which was published in October 2006.

VA's Pension program is taking the following steps to achieve these ambitious targets: Increasing staffing levels at the Pension Maintenance Centers (PMCs) to begin moving original pension claims to the PMCs. Adding a timeliness measure to the Director's performance standards. Continuing the emphasis on results and performance through the Veterans Benefits Administration's Office of Field Operations.

Strategic Goal #4: Contributing to the Nation's Well-Being

Burial Program
(Reviewed in CY 2002 and Received a Rating of "**Moderately Effective**")

Improvement Initiative: Continuing to strengthen methods to link performance, budget, and accountability.

FY 2007 Actions:

As a Performance Improvement initiative PMA scorecard deliverable, VA will demonstrate, using a subset of measures in three programs, its ability to estimate the cost of achieving different levels of performance. This is an important step towards aligning budget requests with performance.

Improvement Initiative: Use performance data to increase managers' performance.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA established an Organizational Assessment and Improvement (OAI) program. OAI enhances program accountability through a one-NCA scorecard, provided to management at all levels, that combines cemetery self-assessments with independent validation of performance results reporting.

Through FY 2007, NCA has completed 35 site visits assessing 59 cemeteries as part of this initiative. NCA schedules 12 visits per year as part of this continuous improvement program.

Improvement Initiative: Use data results from three new performance measures to drive improvements in program operations (National Shrine Commitment).

FY 2007 Actions:

VA collected baseline data during 2004 for the three new National Shrine Commitment measures. As a result, the gap between current performance and strategic goals has been identified.

These data are now regularly collected and reported and are helping to drive performance improvements.

A new performance measure related to the condition of national cemetery facilities is being added to the FY 2009 budget submission to further drive improvements in maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines.

Medical Research and Development Program
(Reviewed in CY 2005 and Received a Rating "Moderately Effective")

Improvement Initiative: Continue to refine meaningful and useful performance measures to assist VA in management.

FY 2007 Actions:

VA developed performance measures and assessment tools for Biomedical and Clinical Research Centers, Research Enhancement award programs, and the Research Career Scientist program.

Performance measures and assessment tools need to be developed for the Merit Review program. This will be facilitated by the transition to an electronic project management system in about a year.

Improvement Initiative: Assess the physical condition of VA medical research infrastructure to determine its adequacy to support high-quality veteran-centric research.

FY 2007 Actions:

A contractor has been selected to perform the site visits, and the task order is being finalized.

Seventy-five sites will be surveyed within the next 3 years representing all sites with substantial research programs.

Improvement Initiative: Increase the number of research projects related to OIF/OEF veterans.

FY 2007 Actions:

Using October 1, 2006, as a baseline, VA plans to increase the number of OIF/OEF-related research projects funded in FY 2008 by 5 percent.

Enabling Goal: Applying Sound Business Principles

General Administration Program
(Reviewed in CY 2004 and Received a Rating of "Moderately Effective")

Improvement Initiative: Develop performance based budgets and clearer resource requests.

FY 2007 Actions:

As a Performance Improvement Initiative PMA scorecard deliverable, VA will demonstrate, using a subset of measures in three programs, its ability to estimate the cost of achieving different levels of performance. This is an important step towards aligning budget requests with performance.

Develop performance-based budgets and clearer resource requests. Conducted a measure validity assessment for all staff offices whereby measures not thought to be critical or robust were dropped.

Retained measures are focused on core and/or critical staff office functions. Number of measures reduced from 93 to 58.

This is an important step towards providing Congress with clearer budget requests that align more directly with critical staff office functions and related performance indices.