

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



2023 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report

I. Introduction

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2023 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report demonstrates VA's continued commitment to the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The report provides examples of VA's accomplishments and best practices as well as VA's communication and training efforts to promote plain language writing. The report includes VA's ongoing efforts to identify plain writing and web optimization principles to reduce barriers to evaluate Veteran and customer satisfaction for continued improvement.

VA is the largest integrated healthcare system in the United States with more than nine million enrolled Veterans and over six million Veterans receiving healthcare each year. VA employs nearly 380,000 individuals including more than 350,000 professionals within Veterans Health Administration. VA remains committed to delivering world-class care and benefits to all those we serve.

The Department's Fiscal Year 2022-2028 Strategic Plan describes the major efforts the Department will undertake through the next 5 to 7 years to deliver tailored and desired outcomes for Veterans. VA's Fiscal Year 2022–2028 Strategic Plan outlines four fundamental principles—access, advocacy, outcomes and excellence.

- The Plan reinforces VA's communications from the Administrations and Staff Offices to deliver clear and consistent messages that demonstrate our commitment to improving Veterans' health, well-being and economic security. VA delivers information to Veterans the way they want to receive it, so that Veterans understand their eligibility for benefits, care, memorialization and services and how to access benefits they earned. This Plan enables VA to connect with Service members early in their military careers to establish long-term relationships with them. VA also collaborates with partners to understand and share communication preferences of Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors and tailor outreach to meet their needs and preferences.
- VA also customizes all forms of communications for groups and individuals whose primary language is not English and for individuals with hearing, vision and/or speech impairments.

- VA educates employees on communication approaches to deliver accurate and consistent information, benefits, care and services to Veterans, Service members and their families, caregivers and survivors.

VA has once again been named as one of the top five Best Places to Work in the Federal Government by the Partnership for Public Service. The rankings measure employee engagement and satisfaction, providing leaders with a roadmap to better manage our most important asset—our employees. The morale of VA’s workforce has a direct impact on Veteran care. Investing in VA’s employees results in improved care and outcomes for the Veterans we serve.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, VA has been in the front lines and working tirelessly to care, inform and protect Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. VA published a series of reports on its COVID-19 response as continuation of its pledge to share best practices and lessons learned with other Government agencies and the private health care system. As COVID levels change, VA develops various materials and uses targeted social media messaging in support of COVID-19/flu prevention and vaccine uptake; COVID-19 vaccine guidance and options; and Community Providers guidance. VA also provides this information in Spanish and Tagalog. VA strives to improve care by examining its activities on an ongoing basis.

VA’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA)

VA is taking action to become a Federal model for I-DEA in its cultural transformation action plan. VA’s goal is to create a high-performing diverse workforce that is fully engaged and empowered to deliver outstanding services to the diverse communities we serve and cultivate equitable access to care, benefits and services for all. VA cares for the most diverse group of Veterans in history.

VA adopted a new mission statement “To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise to care for those who have served in our nation’s military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors.” The mission statement is inclusive of all those who have served in our nation’s military, to include female Veterans as well as Veterans families, caregivers and survivors.

II. Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing

- Teri McClelland, Acting Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary
- Prevolia Harper, Deputy Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary
- Vivian Drake, Staff Assistant, Plain Language Coordinator, Office of the Executive Secretary

VA Administrations and Staff Offices also provide continued support to the Plain Language efforts of VA.

III. Ongoing Plain Writing Actions

For the second year in a row, VA received a top grade in 2022 from the Center for Plain Language in their annual Federal Report Card with an A+ for organizational compliance for staffing, communication and training as required by the 2010 Plain Writing Act as well as communicating information clearly to Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. VA also received a B+ in Writing Quality from the Center's second review of VA's Freedom of Information Act webpage and first review on VA's Contact Us webpage on the ease for the public to find, understand and use the information it needs. VA's Administrations and Staff Offices also received several recognitions and awards for its clear communications.

VA style guides use best practices and VA documentation requirements to ensure all communications have concise, consistent and easy-to-understand language, tone and graphics to provide the highest quality customer experience in the delivery of care, benefits and memorial services to Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors as well as to VA employees and the public. Guides include:

- VA Executive Secretariat style guide
- [VA's Public Affairs Guidelines.](#)
- [Associated Press Stylebook.](#)
- [VA.gov content style guide – VA.gov Design System.](#)
- [Digital.va.gov/accessibility.](#)
- [Office of Information and Technology Documentation Style Guide.](#)

VA uses multiple channels and methods to ensure Veterans and the public are clearly informed and understand their benefits, care and service options and how to access directly in VA's network and in the community. VA's social media pages are:

- <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>.
- <https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs>.
- <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>.
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/VeteransAffairs/>.
- <https://www.youtube.com/user/DeptVetAffairs>.
- <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs>.

VA uses several communication toolkits to help standardize communication approaches for staff in creating and delivering useful information that is easy to understand and consider. Examples are:

- [Veteran Community Partnerships Toolkits.](#)
- [Forever GI Bill Communications Toolkit.](#)
- [How to use the PACT Act Communications Toolkit.](#)
- [Veterans Employment Toolkit.](#)
- [Monthly Enrollment Verification School Communication Toolkit.](#)
- [VA Suicide Prevention Toolkit.](#)

Following are some great examples and accomplishments of written public communications and efforts from VA Administrations and Staff Offices.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)

VHA is fully committed to Plain Language principles in communicating with our Veterans and VA colleagues. In the past year, VHA worked to improve our communications products and materials according to these standards to include careful audience analysis and writing for the reader; active voice with a clear call to action; ensuring materials are 508 compliant and accessible; presenting information in a logical order; and providing examples when appropriate.

Use of style guides consistently helps ensure plain language writing when communicating care and benefits information to Veterans and the public. Standard operating procedures explain the writing, editing and approval process; associated timelines; and requestor's responsibilities. Also, peer review takes place between the subject matter expert review and routing materials for leadership approval. Sharing links to materials uploaded into Microsoft Teams channels allows multiple reviewers to simultaneously view documents while ensuring version control. A single working document enables the content creator to address comments and edits using plain language. The following examples align with best use of plain language writing.

Readjustment and Counseling Service (RCS)

- **Weekly Employee Newsletter:** RCS published 52 weekly e-newsletters to Vet Center teams and administrative support staff throughout the fiscal year. The RCS Communications team scrutinized each edition, ensuring active voice, speaking in first or second person in the Chief Officer's message, avoiding the use of acronyms when possible and routinely utilizing headers, sub headers, bulleted lists or tables that were easy for internal stakeholders to understand. In addition, each article included hyperlinks to the [RCS Intranet](#) page where team members could click for more information on a particular topic. These messages are well received, and employees often comment on or submit additional content for other editions.
- **Vet Center Messaging and Graphics Standard Guide:** RCS developed and published an internal training guide, [Vet Center Messaging and Graphics Standard Guide](#), to train employees on how to simplify language when writing or speaking to external stakeholders about Vet Center services. RCS initially printed and mailed copies of this guide to all Vet Centers and Vet Center Outstations, and then updated and sent the updated guide when Vet Center eligibility changed. RCS Communications included Training on Vet Center plain language, and the contents within the guide, during the annual face-to-face training for Vet Center Outreach Specialists throughout all five districts to include North Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, Continental, and Pacific.
- **Vet Center Websites:** RCS worked alongside VA's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) to develop minimum viable product websites for each Vet Center to edit and maintain to bring useful information on Vet Center services in a digital capacity to Veterans, Service members and their families. RCS Communications worked with web editors to ensure the website templated language was accurate, relevant and easy to understand. The Communications team and support staff from the Office of the CTO hosted trainings, offered office

hours for support and developed toolkits to help staff in creating useful information that was easy to understand and considered the diverse population Vet Centers serve. The website language developed for all 300 sites was a continuation of the Vet Center messaging best practices and considered language that could be confusing, triggering or off putting to the target audience. The Communications Officer personally reviewed and edited all draft sites before publication to ensure quality control. (See, for example, [Lowell Vet Center | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](http://www.va.gov)) The websites also feature up to three spotlights where Vet Center teams may highlight their groups or upcoming outreach events. The featured content is timely, actionable and the limited word count makes the spotlights easy to read and understand.

- **Mobile Vet Center Vehicle Wraps:** In accordance with the organization's rebrand, RCS designed [Mobile Vet Center vehicle wraps](#) using design elements and simple words to communicate the purpose of the vehicle, the services it can provide and to whom. The simple terminology, map of the United States and demographics of those eligible for services helps VA and RCS communicate the mission and ultimately can lead to increased use by the target audience.
- **Vet Center Call Center Scripts and Templates:** The confidential, 24/7 Vet Center Call Center streamlined operations and improved communications through the development of a call script, including a disruptive caller standard operating procedure that Call Center technicians use for redirecting callers. The Call Center implemented a time-limited group to develop templates for technicians to request support, and also to refer Veterans, Service members and their families to their local Vet Center. This group of templates included a separate template for bereavement cases, ensuring team members are only sending information needed about the case rather than providing too much personal health information. This process improved the efficiency in which referrals can be directed and improved the level of detail and information Vet Centers receive, which in turn supports the Veteran, Service member or family more effectively.
- **Support the Resiliency of our Nation's Great (STRONG) Veterans Act, Vet Center Eligibility Roll Out:** RCS took from lessons learned on previous eligibility implementation plans and streamlined the process for explaining the change in who is eligible for Vet Center services. RCS program offices worked together to develop appropriate products, [frequently asked questions](#) (FAQs) and guides to support implementation by Districts and Vet Centers. The use of FAQs, updated policy and associated trainings and office hours improved the efficiency of the roll-out to support all those who are eligible for services.
- **Vet Center Spanish Brochure and Referral Card:** RCS translated into Spanish its standardized Vet Center brochure that uses design and language best practices to effectively communicate to potential clients. The team shared it with native Spanish-speaking team members to review before finalizing. Leaders from one or more Vet Centers in Puerto Rico expressed concern in certain translations. After discussion, RCS remediated the concerns to ensure the brochure contained appropriate dialect and plain language for current and potential Spanish-speaking clients. RCS also translated into Spanish a referral

card intended for current clients and community partners to use when talking to friends or family about the Vet Center.

Office of Connected Care (OCC)

Plain Writing accomplishments include:

- Ongoing recognition of Innovative, Leading and Best Practices in Virtual Care for quarterly submissions from the field via a certificate and a badge for use with electronic signatures.
- Implemented use of VA Pulse Analytics with OCC for Virtual Care web analytics monitoring.
- The VA News blogs feature stories of how telehealth is being used successfully, thus highlighting the services and their value that are available to Veterans. The stories also demonstrate how health care providers are using telehealth to provide effective care.
 - <https://news.va.gov/106796/telehealth-helps-veteran-care-for-son/>
- OCC collaborates with VHA communications to use plain language in social media posts, thus ensuring effective sharing of resources.
 - <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransHealth>
- My HealthVet, VA's patient portal, shares newsletter and spotlight articles to provide Veterans with information for managing their health. The articles are written in plain language and often include a questionnaire at the end to gather feedback and specific information to improve future articles. Here is an example of a My HealthVet spotlight article: [Track Your Blood Pressure Online - My HealthVet - My HealthVet \(va.gov\)](#).
- Implementation of an electronic tool for monitoring Accessibility (Section 508 Compliance) of resources and trainings within the Connected Care Academy allowed improvement in the flow and aesthetics of presenting the information needed for Virtual Care.
- The concept of Patient-Generated Health Data is a new development that requires guidance on sharing information and ensuring its security.
 - https://connectedcare.va.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/PGHD-Veteran-Trifold_0.pdf
- As VA continues to modernize va.gov as a digital gateway for Veterans, it is important to consider how this affects their interaction with the long-standing program My HealthVet. It is crucial to share information to ensure awareness and a smooth transition for Veterans.
 - <https://connectedcare.va.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/mvh-va-sign-in-one-pager-508-1.7.pdf>
- The VA App Store is a reliable source of information for Veterans and health care providers looking for innovative apps.
 - My VA Images: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/my-va-images>
 - VA Video Connect: <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect>
- VA created internal office job aides and videos (over 100 resources) for staff to standardize and improved and modified resources and training materials.
- OCC continuously reviews feedback from Veterans, conducts gap analyses and explores new technologies and resources to identify ways to improve VA tools

and services. Our goal is to find innovative solutions and provide better care to those we serve. Following are a variety of programs developed in that spirit:

- ATLAS Toolkit: [ATLAS Promotional Toolkit \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- VA Health Chat toolkit: [VA Health Chat \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- Virtual Health Resource Center Toolkit: [Virtual Health Resource Centers \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

OCC Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

With the implementation of the new tools for accessibility and translation, OCC is expanding inclusion, diversity, equity and access by eliminating the barriers so that individuals may use the resources and trainings provided. Additional functionalities for translation of resources and trainings into audio only format, into electronic braille and into 50 different languages are further removing accessibility issues for individuals needing these formats. Individual users control the ability to use these alternative formats as needed.

OCC ensures accessibility of communications products for Veterans and VA staff with hearing impairments or disabilities by including closed and open captions on video products, such as promotional and demo videos; durable trainings; and recorded webinars (508 compliance). Following are some examples:

- Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLnLtWMa25c&feature=youtu.be>
- Webinar: <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHACC/SitePages/Connected-Care-Discussion-Series-2023-05-11.aspx>
- Training:
<https://hcm03.ns2cloud.com/sf/learning?destUrl=https%3a%2f%2fva%2dhcm03%2ens2cloud%2ecom%2flearning%2fuser%2fdeeplink%5fredirect%2ejsp%3flinkId%3dONLINE%5fCONTENT%5fSTRUCTURE%26componentID%3d4629571%26componentTypeID%3dVA%26revisionDate%3d1658498280000%26fromSF%3dY&company=VAHCM03>

Veterans can access resources that help them bridge the digital divide and gain access to the necessary tools and technologies for telehealth usage. This information is designed to inform providers and Veterans about available resources with efforts to consolidate the information in one place instead of scattered pieces.

- <https://connectedcare.va.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/telehealth-digital-divide-fact-sheet.pdf>
- <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHACC/SitePages/Bridging-the-Digital-Divide.aspx#bridging-the-digital-divide-toolkit>
- https://vaots.blackboard.com/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?content_id=154501_1&course_id=2690_1&mode=reset
- https://vaots.blackboard.com/webapps/login/?action=guest_login&new_loc=%2Fwebapps%2Fblackboard%2Fexecute%2Flauncher%3Ftype%3DCourse%26id%3D2690_1
- <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHACC/SitePages/Bridging-the-Digital-Divide.aspx>

Office of Primary Care (OPC)

OPC's accomplishments include OPC newsletter, a Clinical Resource Hub news release, an announcement for the "Let's Talk Virtual Care" VLOG series and the following links in support of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act information on the Toxic Exposure Screening SharePoint.

- [Toxic Exposure Screening Toolkit \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- [PACTAct-603-FacilityScriptCard.docx](#)
- [Exposure Locations Posters](#)
- [Environmental Health Registry Evaluations for Veterans](#)

Care Management and Social Work (CMSW)

CMSW produced several writings in Plain Language compliance documents that include sexual assault brochures developed to support VA's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access principles for underrepresented groups. CMSW supports the best practice of information exchange and transparency.

- [CCICM SharePoint](#)
- [CCICM Interactive Guide](#)
- [Contacts in the Field](#)
- [Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management \(CCICM\) - Points of Contact](#)
- CCICM Dashboard Suite: [CCICM Dashboard \(National\) - Power BI \(powerbigov.us\)](#)

Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP)

IPVAP produced a two-part sexual assault podcast to educate the community regarding what sexual assault is, who is affected and how VHA can help.

- IPVAP developed an Intimate Partner Violence and Dementia Supplemental Campaign for use on Facebook and Twitter that provides information regarding how dementia impacts relationship health and safety. This best practice reaches out to the social media platforms to allow Veterans, caregivers and the community know that VHA is here to help and support the Nation's Veterans and their families.
- The IPVAP National Leadership Council Committee developed a Self-Nomination Member Application for its Committee so that each person who meets that eligibility has an opportunity to apply.

Care Coordination and Integrated Case Management (CCICM)

- In the News: [New VA practice simplifies care for Veterans - VA News](#) article highlights the amazing work being done by the Martinsburg VA Medical Center in West Virginia using the CCICM practice framework.
- Post-9/11 Transition and Case Management external website: [Post-9/11 Transition and Case Management Home \(va.gov\)](#).
- The National Social Work PACT Staffing Program created and disseminated a fiscal year (FY) 2023 Office of Rural Health Talking points with FY 2024 budget projects that highlighted accomplishments, strategies for innovation, sustainment

planning, what research has been done and the data received and action plans for the future.

- The National Social Work Leadership Council Strategic Communications Committee published a Branding and Style Toolkit that will assist all VHA social workers improve their knowledge and skill with VHA compliance standards.

Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (PCCCT)

PCCCT prioritizes plain writing in all Whole Health communications for Veterans, family members, caregivers and the public. Whole Health is VA's approach to healthcare that supports Veterans' health and well-being to live their life to the fullest. Whole Health focuses on what matters to Veterans, not what is the matter with them. PCCCT organizes examples of plain language efforts and documents used to communicate with the specific audience so the content can be found easily. Information is conversational and uses bullets, headings and familiar words minimizing the use of acronyms.

- The Whole Health website (www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH) is continuously updated with Veteran-facing content. In FY 2022, there were 589,953 pageviews, a 35% increase over FY 2021.
- VA and VHA leaders have used Veteran stories highlighting success using a Whole Health approach. These stories are available on the Veteran-facing website on a [Features](#) page. Specific examples include:
 - [Veteran Regains Confidence Through Whole Health](#)
 - [Sharing Whole Health: Peer-to-Peer](#)
- The Whole Health GovDelivery platform has 146,403 subscribers. Veteran-facing Whole Health content is provided twice monthly and includes links to resources.
- Contacts at each VA medical center receive a monthly Whole Health Communications Plan that includes Veteran-facing newsletter content, videos, employee resources and VHA-approved social media content that is locally customizable. The Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs distributes social media content to Veteran Service Organizations and other organizations that have expressed interest in receiving content.
- The [#LiveWholeHealth](#) self-care series for Veterans launched in FY 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued due to the overwhelming positive response. In FY 2022, there were 3,742,758 people reached by this series, including social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube) impressions and VA News views. This VA News series is a collaboration with Office of Public Affairs and Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. Self-care experiential videos including meditation, yoga, breathwork, movement, healthy cooking and more are posted weekly to VA social media platforms that Veterans, family, caregivers and staff can enjoy on demand. There are 175 experiential videos posted. Examples of posts that received a high level of engagement include:
 - [#LiveWholeHealth #151: Tai Chi Moving Meditation](#)
 - [#LiveWholeHealth #158: Scale back the back pain with self-care acupressure](#)
 - [#LiveWholeHealth #169: Relax, refresh, recharge](#)

- PCCCT publishes Veteran Whole Health stories and share these on multiple platforms to create awareness and desire for VA Whole Health. Additional examples include:
 - [Finding Her Way with Whole Health](#)
 - [Small Steps Lead to Big Changes for Senior Veteran](#)
 - [Living His Best Life with VA Whole Health](#)
 - [Veteran finds support in Whole Health](#)
- A focus group that included Veterans, Whole Health peers, Veterans Service Organizations representation and VA clinicians and other staff created “Discover what Matters. Live Whole Health” and “Whole Health: What Matters to You?.” Initial videos created to promote this tag line have remained valuable resources that demonstrate the use of plain language:
 - [Discover What Matters. Live Whole Health](#) (home page of website)
 - [Whole Health: What Matters to You?](#)
- Each VA medical center received two “Pull-up Banners” that can be used to promote Whole Health. Each facility could select from six options to target individual needs.
- PCCCT provided monthly Whole Health videos, tools and resources to VA offices to incorporate in staff meetings, newsletters and other venues to promote Whole Health for Veterans and employees. Examples include Primary Care, Mental Health, MyHealtheVet, C-20 and Patient Care Services.
- A Whole Health Speakers Bureau shares consistent Whole Health messages within and outside VA. All speakers are vetted, and slide decks are standardized.
- PCCCT sponsored an “Anti-Acronym” campaign to raise awareness and minimize the use of acronyms in written communications and presentations.
- The VA Cincinnati Public Affairs Officer provided “Spit Shine Your Presentation Techniques” training on simple communication tips and techniques to improve staff presentation skills.
- Each program office work unit received annual reminders to use plain language, current branded templates and to follow VA style guidelines for communications.
- PCCCT analyzed monthly web and social media data and quarterly #LiveWholeHealth data to understand Veteran use patterns and to target future content.
- PCCCT reviewed and edited written communications to share information that is conversational and uses bullets, headings and familiar words.
- All print products, posters, templates and Veteran Feature stories consider the diversity of the Veteran population. Examples are included in each of the Veteran Whole Health Stories and links included in this document. All resources created are 508 compliant.
- Key Whole Health resources have been translated to Spanish and Tagalog. These include Posters, Taking Charge of My Life and Health participant workbook, the [Personal Health Inventory](#) and [Veteran Education Whole Health Education Handouts](#) that were translated in collaboration with VA Caribbean Health Care System.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) Health Program

The sign-up for the LGBTQ+ Health Program gov delivery newsletter appears at the top of each sub-page of the LGBTQ+ Health Program web site (under Patient Care Services) as well as with on dedicated page: [VHA LGBTQ+ Health Program - Patient Care Services \(va.gov\)](#). The overall gov delivery site is widely promoted and when signing up for one communication type, people are given the option to sign up for other newsletters.

Coordination between Patient Care Communications and Veterans Health Administration Digital Media allowed for a sign-up option for LGBTQ+ Health Program's Newsletter "LGBT Veterans (USVHA 1176)". Sign-up for "LGBT Veterans" was added to the gov delivery sign up page under "Health and Wellness" section. Within 6 weeks, there was a 12-fold increase in subscriptions with no other major advertising. This outcome indicates that using Plan Writing requirements to improve VA web sites, specifically gov delivery subscriptions, showed a very large impact allowing those with an interest getting access to LGBTQ+ Veteran information.

- An option to sign up for "LGBT Veterans" on public gov delivery sign-up main page resulted in 1228% increase in subscriptions from about 2,100 to almost 29,000.
- The LGBTQ+ Health Program Pride campaign included the main graphic in English and Spanish. The Spanish graphic was included in social media and local visibility by the VA Puerto Rico Public Affairs Office. The English and Spanish posters are available to VA staff and to the public here at [LGBTQ+ Health Program Pride Month & Special Observances](#).

National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP)

NCP developed COVID-19 prevention and vaccine acceptance materials, which included web and SharePoint sites, Frequently Asked Questions, press releases, satellite media tours and interviews by NCP leadership, posters, banners, graphics and "COVID in 20" (C20) interview segments. Following are examples:

- Organized the [COVID-19 vaccine SharePoint site](#) in a logical and orderly fashion to help VA staff easily find relevant materials. Materials included advice on running an effective COVID-19 vaccine program in a VA medical center; staff training in COVID-19 vaccine handling, storage and administration; materials to support COVID-19 vaccine acceptance and clear information; and instructions to provide to COVID-19 vaccine recipients.
- Maintained and updated a [flu communications toolkit](#) for Veterans and VA staff. The toolkit contained social media materials, Facebook content, tweets, posters, banners and fact sheets to promote flu prevention messages.
- Increased circulation of a print version of the [Manage Stress Workbook](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the needs of Veterans and VA staff requesting stress management resources to use during challenging times.
- Created a [Healthy Living During Stressful Times infographic](#) to help Veterans maintain or adopt healthy living behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Promoted a [monthly topic campaign](#) throughout VA to support Healthy Living and Disease Prevention. Materials were developed for Veterans and VA staff using Plain Language, health literacy and accessibility principles.
- Ensured all 8,000+ health education materials located in the [Veterans Health Library](#) were developed in compliance with Plain Language, health literacy and accessibility standards. This library included all health information webpages and other interactive tools such as videos and workbooks, with many of these materials also available in Spanish.
- Created decision aid tools for the Veterans Health Library to help Veterans understand options for COVID-19 prevention, flu prevention, diabetes management and colorectal cancer screening. These decision aid tools went through additional end user testing and development to confirm they were easy to navigate and understand for Veterans.

Best Practices

Following are examples of NCP best practices:

- Quickly addressed and corrected website issues that were flagged by Site Improve to maintain 508 compliance and accessibility standards.
- Analyzed Google Analytics for external websites to measure Veteran use, time on pages and how viewers accessed content. Used this data to identify opportunities to improve outreach and engagement with external websites.
- Used Subject Matter Expert internal reviews to ensure materials were Plain Language compliant and easy to use.
- Collected, wrote and promoted MOVE! Weight Management Program [Veterans Success Stories](#).
- Maintained [MOVE!11 Questionnaire](#) to help Veterans identify factors that may influence their weight status and associated need for self-management education.

Innovations

Following are examples of NCP innovations:

- Led implementation of VA's new Patient Centered Learning (PCL) Program to support a consistent and comprehensive approach to patient education across VA. PCL will accelerate VA's adoption of Plain Language and health literacy strategies to improve health outcomes by ensuring the highest levels of Veteran understanding, engagement and participation in their health care and self-care.
- To date, PCL has begun drafting structured public-facing health content to use on VA National Program Office websites that aligns with Plain Language, health literacy and accessibility standards. PCL has developed other resources to support a Plain Language approach throughout VA, including provisioning a SharePoint site and additional communication materials, guidance on using representative imagery in educational materials, core standards for VA staff in delivering effective patient education and scalable patient education content that can be used to educate Veterans on important health topics.
- Conducted six TEACH and Motivational Interviewing Train-the-Trainer Facilitator Trainings to train VA staff to deliver these trainings locally. TEACH and

Motivational Interviewing Trainings are designed for primary care clinicians to enhance clinician communication skills (including the use of Plain Language principles) and deliver patient-centered care.

- Updated Healthy Living and Veteran educational handouts to make them more visually engaging. Added QR codes to these handouts for easy access of additional resources on mobile devices.
- Used targeted social media messaging in support of COVID-19/Flu prevention and vaccine uptake.

Continuous Improvement

Following are FCP continuous improvement examples:

- Translated the [MOVE! Weight Management Program for Veterans Workbook into Spanish language](#).
- Improved website navigation, webpage speed and accessibility for the [Veterans Health Library](#) so users could more easily find the health information they were looking for on the website.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (I-DEA)

I-DEA ensured 508 compliance in all materials, particularly those within the [Veterans Health Library](#) and enhanced materials in the Library to make them more easily accessible for all Veterans. This process included making educational materials available in English and Spanish, providing educational materials in multiple modalities based on learner preferences and making the website easier to navigate and search.

Health Outcomes Military Exposures

This newsletter is available online as a web page and in PDF format and is mailed to Veterans: [Agent Orange Newsletter - 2022 - Public Health \(va.gov\)](#).

Office of Integrated Veteran Care (IVC)

Focused communications about the Veterans Comprehensive Prevention, Access to Care, and Treatment Act (COMPACT Act) and new benefits for Veterans that cover emergency suicide care include:

- [VA Provider Advisor \(April 2023\) Issue](#), a monthly publication, directed to VA community providers, provides the latest news and available education and training resources for this audience. This issue focused on two major VA initiatives that expand care to Veterans—COMPACT Act and PACT Act.
- [COMPACT Press Release](#) announced the new availability of emergency suicide care under the COMPACT Act, explaining who is eligible and what is covered.
- [COMPACT VA News Story](#) – This VA News story, by IVC’s Chris Cox, reiterated the availability of emergency suicide care under the COMPACT Act and explained eligibility and coverage.

Quality and Patient Safety (QPS)

Following are examples of QPS Plain Language initiatives:

- QPS Annual Report: [Quality and Patient Safety Annual Report FY22 \(va.gov\)](#)
- QPS Quarterly Newsletter (latest): <https://vaww.qps.med.va.gov/filedownload.ashx?fid=67346>

- Access to Care (ATC) website [Health Care Access & Quality Information | Veterans Affairs \(azurewebsites.us\)](https://www.healthcareaccessandquality.va.gov/)
 - new ATC homepage completed along with a new video providing an overview of the site and explaining its purpose. This new page clarifies the role and value of the site upfront for users and enables them to rapidly understand what information is available on the site as well as what services are not accessible on ATC.
 - Based on the internal review of all quality metrics on ATC including patient safety, quality of care and outcome measures, the updated quality metrics will be consolidated for simplified display in three key areas: (1) Facility-centric display; (2) Nursing Home display; and (3) VA quality metrics on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Care Compare site. This will markedly enhance the user experience.
 - Quality measures shared on the Facility Performance page will be further grouped by domain area (e.g., Safe, Effective, Veteran-centered). The elements displayed for each metric are simplified based on detailed user feedback and expert design support. Plain language definitions will be provided for each measure. Filters are being added to allow the user to select specific areas of most interest to their circumstances (e.g., Women’s Health, Diabetes Care, MISSION Quality, etc.). Users will be able to compare quality data for up to three VA medical centers. This change will support better readability and comprehension of the data and use for informed health care decision-making. The Nursing Home quality data are being updated based on internal priorities and user feedback. A new page is being created on ATC to explain to the user why VA shares many quality measures on the CMS Care Compare site and the reasons for Veterans and caregivers to take a closer look at these data sources. The ATC Home page also was refreshed with menu options that were adjusted and renamed to reflect new pages that were added as follows: About, Recent updates, More data and Access to Care videos.

- Evidence Based Practice Program published:
 - Five evidence-based clinical practice guidelines are available for the following practice areas. All evidence-based clinical practice guidelines jointly developed by the VA/DoD can be found at <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/>.
 - Schizophrenia
 - Bipolar
 - Diabetes
 - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and
 - Pregnancy
 - Evidence Based Practice Program published three synopses in peer reviewed journals. These include:
 - [The Management of Major Depressive Disorder: Synopsis of the 2022 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Department of](#)

[Defense Clinical Practice Guideline | Annals of Internal Medicine \(acpjournals.org\)](#)

- [The Use of Opioids in the Management of Chronic Pain: Synopsis of the 2022 Updated U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Department of Defense Clinical Practice Guideline | Annals of Internal Medicine \(acpjournals.org\)](#)
- [healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/Rehab/ULA/Management_of_Upper_Limb_Amputation10Artical.pdf](#)
- Fielded two educational webinars each offering 1 hour of continuing education credit. The webinar offerings were on Schizophrenia and Diabetes.

VHA High Reliability Organization (VHA HRO)

In accordance with VA Directive 0001 (and pursuant to Public Law 111-274(b) (Plain Writing Act of 2010)), the VHA HRO Support Team strives to use Plain Language for all written communications and products. We employ the following Plain Language best practices: active voice; basic vocabulary (high school level, no legalese); simple, clear language (no wordiness); short sentences (fewer than 20 words); short paragraphs (2-3 sentences); simple design (use of headings, lists and tables to organize information). The team refers to a VHA HRO Style Guide, aligned with VHA communications and tailored for use in conveying HRO information in a consistent manner for every communication and employs comprehensive Quality Control (QC) processes, including a robust document check by a dedicated QC team, accessibility checking through Microsoft Word tools, an HRO QC Huddle Board (Visual Management System) to communicate editing/writing strong practices (helping ensure Continuous Process Improvement), regular QC trainings and more. Products include:

- HRO Theme of the Month Newsletter [Posted on HRO SharePoint site](#)
- VHA HRO SharePoint site [VHA Journey to High Reliability - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- Bi-weekly HRO Activities At a Glance Fact Sheet [Posted on HRO SharePoint site](#)
- HRO Style Guide (which includes a section on Plain Language) (Internal Use HRO Support Team Document)

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICE OFFICER (CSO)

Following are examples of Plain Language initiatives:

- CSO Newsletter June 2023 version
- CSO SharePoint homepage: [Office of Policy Analysis \(OPA\) - Chief Strategy Office \(va.gov\)](#)
- CSO Staff Spotlight: [Our Team \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- Fiscal Year 2023-2025 VHA Operational Planning Guidance
- Strategic Directions Committee Meeting RECAP: [Strategic Planning \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- Milestones, Resources and Survey: [The North Star: An Electronic Newsletter from the Chief Strategy Office - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- CSO VA LGBTQ + Resources: [VA LGBTQ+ Resources - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS (OAA)

VA operates the largest education and training platform for health professionals in the Nation and the second largest funder of graduate medical education in the United States. Over 60 clinical disciplines are represented in VA's health professions education (HPE) programs. More than 118,000 health professions trainees (HPTs) participated in over 7,700 training programs offered through partnerships between 150 VA medical facilities and over 1,400 academic institutions. Over 34,000 trainees in VA come from Minority Serving Institutions, such as Hispanic Serving Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Ninety six percent of the Nation's medical schools including 151 of 157 Liaison Committee on Medical Education accredited allopathic schools and 35 of 37 Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation-accredited osteopathic medical schools are affiliated with VA. Visit www.va.gov/oaa/.

VA's HPT workforce is critical to maintaining timely Veteran access to care. VA HPE programs also play a leading role in creating the health care workforce for VA and the Nation. An estimated 70% of VA podiatrists and psychologists, 82% of VA optometrists and 64% of VA physicians participated in VA HPE programs prior to recruitment into staff positions.

The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 provided VA with the ability to increase the number of graduate medical education physician residency positions by 1,500 over a 10-year period. All of the positions have been awarded; 66% were awarded in primary care (internal medicine, family medicine and geriatrics) and mental health (psychiatry and sub-specialties).

Ninety-one percent of HPTs were satisfied or very satisfied with their VA training experience. Before their VA training experience, 50% of HPTs indicated they were interested in working for VA; after their VA training experience, 69% indicated they were interested in working for VA. To learn more about OAA, visit www.va.gov/oaa/.

Highlights of Academic Year 2021-2022

- VA established eight new Geriatric and Extended Care Nurse Practitioner Residency programs to help address the nursing shortage and meet the demands of the aging Veteran population. VA has 116 nurse residency programs, including 48 post-baccalaureate Registered Nurse Residency programs and 68 Nurse Practitioner Residency programs (34 Primary Care, 26 Mental Health and 8 Geriatric and Extended Care) with over 600 nursing HPT positions.
- Since 2013, VA's Mental Health Education Expansion initiative added more than 780 funded training slots across 10 disciplines, including Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Mental Health Counseling, Nursing and Psychiatry.
- VA has expanded affiliations to Minority Serving Institutions with HPE programs, including 62% of Asian American, Native American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, 57% of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 34% of Hispanic Serving Institutions and 20% of Predominantly Black Institutions.

- 72% of VA physicians, 30% of nursing staff, 41% of other clinical staff and 18% of VHA administrative staff teach or supervise HPTs at VA.
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases provided more than 27,000 doses of the antiviral drug remdesivir to VA after a collaboration study on treatments for COVID-19, which will be used to treat Veterans with COVID-19.
- [VA launches largest ever liver cancer screening study.](#)
- [New VA study to develop artificial intelligence that can predict aggressive prostate cancer.](#)

Best Practices

Following are examples of products following Plain Language Act:

- [OAA HPEW Media Toolkit.](#)
- [Partnership advancing health professions education – Vantage Point.](#)
- For almost 10 years, VHA [National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships](#) has facilitated the annual VHA [National Community Partnership Challenge](#) (CPC) to recognize partnerships that improve the health and well-being of Veterans and their communities. The 2023 CPC theme is “Accelerating VHA’s Journey to High Reliability Through Partnerships,” which aligns with VHA’s priority initiative to become a High Reliability Organization that:
 - Prioritizes patient safety.
 - Creates a culture of continuous improvement.
 - Uses proactive strategies to prevent errors and adverse events.

Three winning partnerships received the coveted Crystal Award who are partnerships that affirm VA’s commitment to Veterans of all races, ethnicities, sexual identities, languages, cultures and spiritual preferences. Winners also will demonstrate a high impact on the well-being of Veterans and their communities, and their potential for scalability and sustainability.

More than 550 partnerships have been recognized through CPC. Recently, some notable partnerships included:

- The [Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center’s](#) Heroic Gardens partnership project. Veterans participate in virtual gardening workshops, community-based nature walking meditation groups and opportunities to understand plant-based healing.
- The VA Boston Healthcare System collaborated with [Veterans Voice Radio Network](#). Veterans tune in to listen to critical care information, including suicide prevention resources.
- [Robert Dole VA Medical Center’s partnership with the Wichita Animal Action League and Safe Paws Alliance](#). Veterans received pet care support during inpatient care, thus reducing their distress as they underwent treatment.
- [The Ralph H. Johnson VA Health Care System](#). Through a collaboration with six community hospitals, Veterans experienced improved coordinated care and reduced risk of suicidal behaviors and deaths by suicide.

For more information about the challenge, visit

<https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/CPC.asp> or contact

VHA_Partnerships@va.gov. For more information about HAP, visit <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/index.asp>.

Best Practices Current Articles

- [Traumatic brain injury carries risk for cardiovascular disease in post-9/11 Veterans.](#)
- [New VA study to determine best drug for Veterans with treatment resistant depression.](#)
- [Blood pressure drug could prevent posttraumatic headaches.](#)

Best Practices Social Media

- #VAResearchNewsBrief. A [VA Boston Healthcare System](#) study found that medical scribes have the potential to lower patient wait times in VA.
- [#VAResearchNewsBrief](#). Dr. Chetan Jinadatha of the Central Texas VA Health Care System invented a device to track the disinfection of portable medical equipment, which will help reduce the spread of infections in hospitals.
- This [message](#) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs encourages Veterans to join the Million Veteran Program, which is VA's national voluntary research program to understand how genes affect health.

Innovations

- [Geo-mapping tool builds a path for new partnerships – VAntage Point.](#)
- [Veteran: “Adaptive scuba is the closest thing to flying.” – VAntage Point.](#)
- [Rural Interprofessional Faculty Development Initiative \(RIFDI\) – Cohort 4.](#)
- [Geomapping and Affiliations with Minority Serving Institutions \(MSI\).](#)
- [Virtual reality technology helps Veterans in pain.](#)
- [Five ways the Million Veteran Program is transforming our understanding of Veteran health.](#)

Continuous Improvement

- [Chiropractic and chiropractic residencies enhance rural Veteran care – VAntage Point.](#)
- [Designated Education Officer F2F National Conference.](#)
- [2023 VA Research Week Kickoff Event \(Video\).](#)
- [Improving Early Detection of Kidney Disease.](#)

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA)

- [First generation VA pharmacist devoted to serving Veterans – VAntage Point.](#)
- Rural Interprofessional Faculty Development Initiative (RIFDI) Program; Webinars–Cultural Competency: Issues of Diversity in Supervision.
- [Improving Care for Veterans Through Health Equity Research](#) (Print-digital journal).
- [2023 DEI Research Supplement Awardees](#) (Research funding awards).

OFFICE OF WOMEN’S HEALTH Accomplishments

- [Maternity Care Brochure.](#)
- [Fertility Services Brochure.](#)
- [Breast Cancer Screening flyer.](#)
- [Outreach materials: 12 health posters and six cultural campaign posters.](#)
- [New web page: 100 Years of Health Care for Women Veterans.](#)
- 2023 Gold Hermes Creative Award for “Caring for Women Veterans in the Community” social media campaign.
- 2022 Platinum Hermes Creative Award for “Valiant Women Veterans” social media campaign.
- 2022 Gold Hermes Creative Award for an animated video promoting the [Women Veterans Call Center.](#)

Best Practices

To enhance plain language in all our materials, we:

- Write copy using common words, short sentences, and short paragraphs.
- Evaluate copy using the Flesh-Kincaid readability scale and adjust copy as needed.
- Write using the Federal plain language [guidelines.](#)

Innovations

- Select words that translate easier for non-native English speakers.
- Add visuals to help with clarity.

Continuous Improvement

- Use design and graphics to highlight important concepts and make materials appealing to readers.
- Concentrate on Veteran-first language.

Promoting Equity in Policies, Programs, Training, and Activities

In addition to ease of understanding, one of our main goals is that our materials be accessible to people of all genders, races/ethnicities and abilities. To reinforce this, we:

- Use gender-neutral language.
- Ensure our visuals represent cis and transwomen as well as women of various races/ethnicities.
- Consider the needs of all abilities when creating our materials.
- Follow plain language guidelines.

OFFICE OF VA/DOD HEALTH AFFAIRS (OHA)

OHA continues to use best practices to ensure all communications are concise, consistent and in easy-to-understand language. Our correspondence representatives use the VA Executive Secretariat Style Guide as well as the Public Affairs Guidelines as needed.

- OHA continues to improve our social media presence via our internet page: [VA/DoD Health Affairs Home](#).
- OHA's site is 508 compliant and produced in plain language for internal and external stakeholders.
- OHA also encourages our Executive Correspondents to continuously learn plain language writing through the Office of the Executive Secretariat's Action Officer training.

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA)

VBA ensures it follows communication and style guidelines as outlined by VA's Executive Secretariat and VA's Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. VA primarily uses the Associated Press stylebook rules. In addition, VBA uses an established concurrence process to ensure products and communications developed by VBA's Strategic Engagement staff are reviewed for writing style and content and given final approval by senior leadership. Examples that promote use of plain language, include:

- GI Bill Comparison Tool: Your Future Starts Here at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_E_a1_b5kk.
- Digital GI Bill Introduction at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhOiYjXMGP0>.

Following are examples of significant VBA accomplishments related to written public communications:

- VALife insurance program coming in January 2023 for Veterans with established service-connection at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/103790/valife-insurance-program-coming-january-2023-veterans-with-service-connection/>.
- Nine new cancers added to the presumed service-connected list related to particulate matter at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/102843/nine-new-cancers-added-to-the-presumed-service-connected-list-related-to-particulate-matter/>.
- Disability compensation and benefits available to Vietnam War Veterans at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/101624/disability-compensation-and-benefits-available-to-vietnam-war-veterans/>.
- VA proposes updates to disability rating schedules for respiratory, auditory and mental disorders body systems at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/100285/va-proposes-updates-to-disability-rating-schedules-for-respiratory-auditory-and-mental-disorders-body-systems/>.
- Veterans Benefits Guide now available in both print and digital formats at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/95660/veterans-benefits-guide-now-available/>.
- VA plans expansion of benefits for disability claims for conditions related to certain toxic exposures at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/89496/breaking-news-va-plans-expansion-benefits-disability-claims-conditions-related-certain-toxic-exposures/>.
- ChooseVA Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) Campaign served 15.2M impressions to the Veteran audience, garnering over 145K clicks to garner maximum awareness about the VRRAP program in a clear and concise manner. [Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program \(VRRAP\) | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#).

VBA Awards

VBA received several recognitions/awards for its clear communications as follows:

- Honorable Mention in the 2022 Hermes Creative Awards competition–Veteran Readiness and Employment:
 - Link to video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-k57qaZYhs>.
- 2021 MarCom Awards:
 - Platinum Winners:
 - Best Video: Animation–[Home Loans Public Service Announcement](#).
 - Best Video: PowerPoint Presentation–Buy a Feature.
 - Best Print Media: Magazine Special Edition–[Stars and Stripes Veterans Benefits Guide](#).
 - Best Strategic Communications: Study–Human Centered Design Questionnaire.
 - Gold Winners:
 - Best Digital Media: E-newsletter–[Veterans Benefits Newsletter](#).
 - Best Print Media: Magazine Writing–[Stars and Stripes Special Publication](#).
 - Best Print Media: External Newsletter–[Veterans Benefits Newsletter](#).
 - Best Video: PSA–[Protect Those Who Matter Most with VA Life Insurance](#).
 - Best Video: Radio PSA–Insurance PSA
 - Best Video: Motion Graphic–[Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program](#).
 - Honorable Mention:
 - Print Media: Direct Mail, Postcard–Pension Poaching postcard
 - Print Media: Writing, Speech–[GI Bill 77th Anniversary Video Remarks](#).
 - Digital Media: Social Media–[VBA Facebook Site](#).
 - Digital Media: Social Media–[VBA Twitter Site](#).
 - Digital Media: Social Media–[VBA Instagram Site](#).
 - Digital Media: Writing (Web), Blog (Single Post)–[Military children qualify for a variety of VA benefits](#).
 - Video/Audio: Video/Film, Government–[VA Benefits News \(Mr. Burke episode\)](#).

VBA Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

Following are examples of improved communications/documents to promote equity in policies, programs and activities:

- [VA makes it easier to buy a home on tribal land–VAntage Point](#).
- [Protect your benefits: Beat pension poachers to the punch–VAntage Point](#).

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION (NCA)

NCA incorporates plain language in all its communication products, including news releases, fact webpages, blogs, public-facing websites and social media. In

collaboration with the Veterans Experience Office, NCA significantly revised and redesigned two of its most popular outreach brochures (On Behalf of a Grateful Nation Burial and Memorial Information and Honoring Service and Sacrifice A Reference for End-Of-Life Professionals Who Support Veterans and Their Families) so that layout, imagery and content were more accessible and emphasized the most important and relevant benefit information.

NCA Infographic for Funeral Home Staff

NCA responded to feedback from end-of-life professionals by creating a streamlined reference infographic for funeral home staff who provide service to Veterans and their families. The infographic is in plain language and summarizes the most important components of how a funeral director can assist a family with NCA benefits. The infographic offers top-line messaging for funeral home staff to share with Veteran families on what NCA benefits are available.

NCA's History Program Website

Owing to the interest and importance that Veterans, the public and NCA place in history as well as telling the stories about national cemeteries and those interred in them, NCA's History Program website was redesigned to help readers find material and better promote significant publications and products. [NCA History Program - National Cemetery Administration \(va.gov\)](https://www.nca.gov/history-program).

NCA's 50th Anniversary

To support outreach and promote this year's anniversary, a dedicated website was launched featuring photos, events and other pertinent information that was more readily available for the public: [NCA marks 50 years \(1973-2023\) - National Cemetery Administration \(va.gov\)](https://www.nca.gov/50th-anniversary).

NCA Web Services

NCA Incorporated the use of Google Analytics to direct resources and prioritize improvement on websites and material most frequently viewed by the public and that requires updates. The NCA History Program website redesign update also leverages tools related to 508 compliance to ensure all posted documents and PDFs are accessible. NCA Internet web content employs best practices by using consistent and easy-to-understand language, tone and graphics. The team uses the Associated Press Stylebook, VA Public Affairs guidelines and the VA.gov web style guide to ensure consistency in written communications.

NCA Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

NCA values and supports inclusion, diversity, equity and access. It publishes social media posts and blogs to honor the achievements and contributions of Veterans in special emphasis months, such as Hispanic Heritage Month, American Indian and Alaskan Native Heritage Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Pride Month and others. Following are a few examples of these communications.

- Historic Black Cemeteries:

- [\(2\) Facebook.](#)
- Native American Heritage Month:
 - <https://www.facebook.com/NationalCemeteries/posts/pfbid0vP4mS6vKDDxnvDSfU1twPoF9qb578dTPwWPh4KZEzXjA8uEqZ8i3LFtRSHA6YTUcl>.
- Pride Month:
 - [\(2\) Facebook.](#)
 - <https://www.facebook.com/NationalCemeteries/posts/pfbid033SpYp49TBVEyDGgUDdaKE7Nsg4Tyu9yHWwo7aJJKo3Tp7cEacEb1zQ6NPKdCM8Ybl>.
- Underserved Communities Plain Language Social Media Posts.
- African American Women, Vantage Point Blog:
 - <https://news.va.gov/102004/six-triple-eight-women-to-receive-congressional-gold-medal/>.
- Veterans Legacy Program (VLP) publishes several Facebook posts about Veterans from diverse backgrounds and unique groups throughout the year and during specialized months. Please visit the VLP Facebook page at [Veterans Legacy](#).

BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS (BVA)

BVA used Vantage Point news site to clearly explain a new technology (Virtual Telehearings) available to Veterans to allow them to have their appeal heard at the location of their choosing. The Vantage Point article explained how to get a virtual telehearing and outlined needed requirements and technology. This example can be found as the first item on the Board webpage in the rotating banner www.BVA@va.gov or at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85732/howto-get-a-virtual-hearing-at-the-bva/>. The Board has updated its webpage to include the use of Web banners and a total redesign of www.BVA.va.gov to ensure Veterans are able to find and understand useful information related to appeals.

VETERANS EXPERIENCE OFFICE (VEO)

Based on reputation for communications expertise, VEO actively contributed to the VA Web Governance Board 6102 Working Group. The group meets biweekly to update Internet and Intranet guidelines, which underscore plain language use, accessibility and 508 compliance. VEO accomplished the following:

- Integrated content editing and review functions into the graphic design process to address consistent use of plain language in all designed materials.
- Applied accessibility tools in published works to help ensure materials meet 508 compliance requirements and follow logical reading order.

VEO's plain language best examples include:

- VEO website at <https://department.va.gov/veterans-experience/>. Redesigned website emphasizes plain language use, 508 compliance and intuitive navigation.
- Serving America's Veterans: VA Fiscal Year 2023 Quarter 2 Report at <https://department.va.gov/veterans-experience/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/05/VA-FY2023-Q2-Trust-Report-V5.15.23.pdf>.

- VEO 2022 Improving Customer Experiences Report at <https://department.va.gov/veterans-experience/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/04/VEO-FY2022-Report-V4.24.2023-0830hrs.pdf>.
- VA's PACT Act campaign: Crafted a blog, "Spread the word about PACT Act eligibility," at <https://news.va.gov/109115/spread-word-pact-act-health-care-eligibility/> that explained the new law and acted as a central hub for numerous graphics that transformed legal speak into easily digestible, visually stunning, plain language products for use on a wide variety of platforms. Example visual materials include:
 - Toxic Exposures Map at <https://www.va.gov/files/2023-06/PACT%20Act%20Exposure%20Map%20V6.21.2023%201030hrs.pdf>.
 - Overview Presentation at https://www.va.gov/files/2023-05/PACT%20Act%20Overview%20101%20Rev%204.11.2023_0.pdf.
 - PACT Act and Cold War, Vietnam Era Veterans at <https://www.va.gov/files/2022-11/PACT%20Act%20Cold%20War%2C%20Vietnam%20Veterans%20V9.27.22%201600hrs.pdf>.
 - PACT Act and Gulf War, Post-9/11 Era Veterans at https://www.va.gov/files/2022-11/PACT%20Act_Gulf%20War%2C%20Post-911%20Veterans%20V9.26.22%200900hrs.pdf.
 - Connect with VA at <https://www.va.gov/files/2022-11/Connect%20with%20VA%20Flyer%20V11.1.22%200930hrs.pdf>.
- PACT Act Performance Dashboard Issue 8 at https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/pdf/VA_PACTActDashboard_Issue8_060923.pdf.
- VA Workforce Dashboard Issue 2 at https://news.va.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/06/VA-Workforce-Dashboard_20230623_Issue2_508_FOR_RELEASE.pdf.
- Memorial Day Events campaign: Leveraged graphic design and blog expertise to share numerous Memorial Day events occurring across the United States. The blog, "More than 200 free Memorial Day observances and events across the country," is available at <https://news.va.gov/120170/more-than-200-free-memorial-day-observances-and-events-across-the-country/>. Example of social media coverage that included the graphic and link to blog is available at <https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs/status/1660805256429568001?cxt=HHwWgoCw6ZrlrowuAAAA>.
- Blog "Recognize a VA employee with an I CARE Award" at <https://news.va.gov/120359/recognize-va-employee-i-care-award/>. This blog was highlighted in a VetResources June 2023 edition (available at <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVA/bulletins/35d7629>), a subscription-based weekly newsletter distributed to nearly 13 million email subscribers. VEO received 300+ engagements in less than a week following the article's publication and newsletter dissemination.

Continuous Improvements

VEO followed plain language guidance on the following:

- VetResources is a weekly newsletter delivered to nearly 13 million email subscribers. Surveys at <https://survey.voice.va.gov/?1S5ziY-VetResources> aim to use customer feedback to improve what resources are highlighted and how they are shared through the newsletter platform.
- Translated 13 PACT Act-related products, including one-pagers, infographics, presentations and a comprehensive guide, into Arabic, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese languages available at <https://news.va.gov/109115/spread-word-pact-act-health-care-eligibility/>.
- Updated the graphic design work request form to include options specifically to address content development and 508 compliance.
- Collaborated with external offices based on user feedback to improve product effectiveness and accessibility.
- Delivered a variety of templates in numerous formats (InDesign, Word and PowerPoint) on VEO's intranet site to assist internal users in developing high-quality documents. Templates include one-pagers, multi-page reports and presentations. VEO products, crafted with an emphasis on 508 compliance and a plain language approach, are widely available on VEO's intranet and internet sites.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA)

VEO followed plain language guidance on the following:

- Regularly updated the VEO Style Guide to include additional icons that foster diversity in all published works. These icons are available for download across the organization via VEO's intranet site.
- Refined VA and VEO reports to support diverse audience representation and promote accessibility.

OFFICE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION (OAWP)

OAWP promotes and improves accountability within VA:

- OAWP added a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) to its website at <https://www.va.gov/accountability/whistleblower/faqs>, which uses concise language to clearly communicate important information to VA employees and applicants. The FAQ addresses common questions about investigations, disclosures and whistleblower protections using plain language.
- OAWP reorganized the layout of its Complainant Portal at <https://oawp.va.gov/intake/> to make the website easier for all users to navigate. The new layout provides essential links at the top of the page so that users can easily access their VA account, create an account or create an anonymous account. The website follows plain language best practices to clearly communicate which matters OAWP may investigate, thus empowering complainants to make informed decisions about reporting.
- OAWP continues to communicate important announcements to its employees through an internal Intranet SharePoint in brief, clear language. OAWP's SharePoint announcements follow a uniform format and use plain language for easy readability.

OFFICE OF ACQUISITION, LOGISTICS AND CONSTRUCTION (OALC)

OALC followed plain language guidance on the following:

- OALC's Office of Procurement, Acquisition and Logistics' (OPAL) flyer provides an organizational overview for public-facing engagements, such as vendor/industry, customer service and job recruitment events.
- OPAL's fiscal year 2023 acquisition cut-off dates internet site at <https://www.va.gov/opal/fo/cutoffDates.asp> advises OPAL's VA customers the deadlines and general details to submit acquisition requirements packages to encourage customers to submit requirements early.

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS (OPIA)

Digital Media Enterprise (DME) publishes several stories daily on VA News at <https://news.va.gov>, which is more than 150 stories each month. These stories reach VA's vast community of 2 million Veterans, dependents, survivors, caregivers, service members and followers on social media.

While topics may vary, the content must always be relevant to the community, and it must be timely, actionable and easy to understand. The writing is direct, declarative, in an active voice, simple in construction and successful in explaining health and benefits information. Following are examples of this content philosophy:

Plain Language Activities/Accomplishments:

- <https://news.va.gov/117663/expanded-presumptive-disability-vietnam/>.
- <https://news.va.gov/121361/veterans-cost-of-living-increase-benefits/>.
- <https://news.va.gov/116652/va-releases-dashboard-measure-pact-act/>.
- <https://news.va.gov/120769/appealing-your-health-care-decisions/>.
- <https://news.va.gov/117508/prescription-refill-now-available-mobile-app/>.

In addition to VA News, DME, in conjunction with Office of Information and Technology, created [Department.VA.Gov](https://www.va.gov) to better communicate VA's corporate information to the non-Veteran community of journalists, academics and Congressional stakeholders. The website explains the organization and provides information about VA that is not directly tied to benefits or services.

VA also uses multiple social media channels and methods to ensure Veterans and the public are clearly informed and understand their benefits, care and service options. In addition, they understand how to access directly in VA's network and in the community.

VA's social media pages are:

- <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>.
- <https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs>.
- <http://www.news.va.gov>.
- <https://www.flickr.com/photos/VeteransAffairs/>.
- <https://www.youtube.com/user/DeptVetAffairs>.
- <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs>.

VA's Media Relations pages are:

- <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/100331/veteran-wins-super-bowl-tickets-thanks-to-vet-tix/>.
- <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/62324/als-veteran-lives-life-on-his-terms/>.
- <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/78131/titan-from-helpless-helping-hundreds/>.
- <https://news.va.gov/102446/we-believe-you-and-we-believe-in-you-resources-for-homeless-veterans/>.
- <https://news.va.gov/87792/teen-awarded-20000-scholarship-volunteer-work/>.

OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT (OM)

OM followed plain language guidance on the following:

- VA received its fourth consecutive Association of Government Accountants Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting (CEAR). The CEAR award is the highest form of recognition in Federal Government management reporting.
- VA received its second consecutive Best-in-Class Award for the Fiscal Year 2022 Agency Financial Report. This report provides financial and performance information demonstrating our commitment to fiscal transparency and responsibility to providing Veterans with world-class health care, ensuring access to benefits, and honoring them with a lasting tribute for their service.

OFFICE OF ENTERPRISE INTEGRATION (OEI)

OEI developed a cross-Administration management construct to define requirements, align responsibility and ensure integration of strategic objectives that enabled VA to successfully implement the PACT Act. The PACT Act is the most significant expansion of benefits and services for toxic exposed Veterans in more than 30 years.

- OEI provided data and performance management expertise to enable development of the PACT Act Performance Dashboard at https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/pdf/VA_PACTActDashboard_Issue8_060923.pdf.
- OEI published the VA Strategic Plan <https://department.va.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/va-strategic-plan-2022-2028.pdf>.
- OEI launched an interactive summary of major facts about the Veteran population including gender, age, projections and VA expenditures in each state: <https://www.data.va.gov/stories/s/bn2v-jbm5>.
- OEI published the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Performance Plan and Fiscal Year 2021 Report: <https://department.va.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/va-annual-performance-plan-and-report-2021-2023.pdf>.
- OEI published the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan: <https://department.va.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/va-annual-evaluation-plan-2023.pdf>.
- Continued to strengthen VA enterprise governance to improve transparency, accountability and decision making.
- OEI assumed responsibility for VA's Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) and began addressing PRA requirements. OEI has steadily reduced the number of PRA violations and currently, VA has no PRA violations for the current fiscal year.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA)

The Acting Assistant Secretary, OEI, is developing an enterprise approach to implementing executive orders and policies to increase I-DEA

OFFICE OF INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY (OIT)

OIT continuously works with our partners across VA to launch accessible, inclusive, plain language content and tools for Veterans. Here are a few of our more recent highlights that had a large impact on the public:

- Launched the [VA.gov/PACT webpage](https://www.va.gov/PACT) within an hour of the Senate's passage of this law to help Veterans and their family members understand what the historic PACT Act law means for them on expanded VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic substances. Also offer a toggle to Spanish and Tagalog versions of the content. This webpage has over 14 million pageviews since its launch and has maintained an exceptionally high experience rating (90% or above). Here are some quotes from Veteran feedback:
 - “Thank you for providing this simple and easy to understand information to help me navigate what the new bill means to me and my family.”
 - “This information explained in detail the Pact Act, new presumption conditions and how to address them! Very down to earth explanations! Thank you.”
 - “Easy to navigate, easy to understand and got answers I was looking for! Other government sites take note! VA does it right!!!”
 - “The professionalism of the efforts put forth to make all these changes in useable format for Veterans to pursue these benefits and find the needed help to qualify for these monumental VA changes to benefit claims and healthcare participation. Keep up the good work.”
- In partnership with VHA, OIT continued keeping Veterans informed about the latest [COVID-19 vaccine](#) guidance and options. OIT also continues providing this information in Spanish and Tagalog.
- Launched updated content and an accessible, easy-to-understand digital form for Veterans to submit Supplemental Claims for previously denied disability compensation claims. This [Supplemental Claims information](#) and [Supplemental Claims digital form](#) are critical to helping Veterans who are now eligible for compensation under the PACT Act to get the benefits they've earned and deserve.
- Launched a newly [combined debt management portal](#) where Veterans can review both their benefit overpayment and health care copay debt in one place. OIT ensured accessible, plain language content throughout the experience.
- Launched a [new education benefit rates section](#) on VA.gov. Provide separate rate pages for each program, including Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill and Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance, and an explanation of how we determine how much each person can receive in our modernized, fully accessible VA.gov environment.

- Rates information is consistent among the most accessed VA.gov content. Previously, education rates information was housed in a legacy content management system with accessibility issues.
- These accessible, plain language webpages provide Veterans, their dependents and their survivors with current payment rates based on type of school or training program, eligibility according to length of service, and other factors.
- The webpages also provide up-to-date payment amounts for monthly housing allowance and books and supplies.
- OIT updates pages annually as soon as new rates take effect. Additional pages cover past and future rates to support Veteran needs beyond current rates.
- Launched new community care content to help Veterans understand how they can access care outside VA. This accessible, search engine-optimized, plain language content helps increase Veteran access to care.
 - [Eligibility for community care outside VA.](#)
 - [How to get community care referrals and schedule appointments.](#)
 - [About our VA community care network and covered services.](#)
 - [Does VA cover Indian Health Service or Tribal Health Programs care?.](#)
 - [Getting emergency care at non-VA facilities.](#)
 - [Getting urgent care at VA or in-network community providers.](#)
 - [Reimbursement of non-VA prescriptions or medical expenses.](#)
 - [Choosing between urgent and emergency care.](#)
- Ensured plain language content in new and expanded digital products, such as the [VA: Health and Benefits mobile app](#).
- Launched a new webpage about [how to report the death of a Veteran to VA](#) in response to VBA's Office of Finance and Management request to make information easier for family members to find on this topic. The goal is to help address the debt that can arise for family members when VA continues to send benefit payments to a Veteran who has died.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (I-DEA)

OIT works with partners across VA to help promote equity-focused policy changes and information and to lead efforts to continue to provide more accessible digital content and multilingual content for Veterans and family members with limited English proficiency.

Examples include:

- OIT continues to expand translated content for Veterans. For example, OIT translated high-priority pages such as [VA.gov/PACT](#) into Spanish and Tagalog. OIT also now provide Spanish language versions of core benefit eligibility and how to apply pages for [disability compensation](#) and [health care](#). OIT continues to translate more digital content.
- In partnership with VA's 508 office, OIT launched a new, fully accessible, plain language [webpage to help Veterans report digital accessibility issues](#) and find information about their overall accessibility and civil rights. Here's a quote about the page from a blind Veteran:

- "...team has done a beautiful job, wonderful template, make sure they're producing websites that are useful and fully accessible. New VA accessibility page is absolutely beautiful."
- Policy updates, including:
 - In partnership with the Veterans Health Administration, OIT launched an accessible, plain language [webpage about the recent change to provide copay exemptions for eligible American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans](#).
 - In partnership with the Veterans Health Administration, we communicated in plain language about the [new policy to provide free emergency care to Veterans in suicidal crisis](#).

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS MODERNIZATION INTEGRATION OFFICE (EHRM IO)

EHRM-IO employs best practices throughout the program to ensure all materials have consistent and easy-to-understand language, tone and graphics. The team promotes the use of the Associated Press Stylebook, VA public affairs guidelines and the VA.gov web style guide to ensure consistency in written communications.

- The internal EHRM style guide fosters uniform language, terms and messaging about the program. The May 2023 update to the style guide included changes to guidance and information regarding EHRM deployment sites in the wake of the EHRM program reset, updates to reflect changes in program leadership and several additions to style and terminology guidance.
- The internal website features an EHRM dictionary, program templates, graphics, guides and a robust searchable question and answer database that provide simplistic wording about various aspects of the VA EHRM program that employees can use to communicate externally.
- Internal stakeholders are educated on key news, events and program capabilities through recurring meetings, emails, articles and blogs.
- All EHRM graphical products incorporate accessibility design principles and Section 508 compliance to ensure readability for people with disabilities. The EHRM-IO team developed a 508 compliance checklist that serves as a work aid in addition to the existing World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standards. It contains four subsections addressing files in PDF, Word and PowerPoint formats, as well as web content. The 508 compliance checklist ensures consistency in approach to Section 508 across all the documents, captures 508 best practices as well as adheres to WCAG 2.0 AA standards. EHRM-IO has reviewed and improved its templates to further enhance the 508 compliance across its products and remains diligent in looking for any further improvements.
- The team uses various trackers and internal concurrence processes to ensure accuracy and consistency; though some communications can be technical in nature, this system of checks and balances ensures the content is written in plain language that anyone can understand.

- An internal resource that provides guidance regarding communications processes, events and activities related to EHRM for VA medical center Public Affairs Officers (PAO) and designated local VA communicators. It also outlines key actions to prepare for deployment of the new electronic health record (EHR), or “go-live,” at VA health care facilities. The PAO Hub features a timeline, resources section, and quick links to other EHRM pages PAOs might find useful. The related PAO Playbook is a standalone document that provides many of the same resources as the PAO Hub. Templated communications are provided as often as possible to ensure clear and concise writing.
- Insights gained from a monthly analysis of internal and external website metrics provides guidance on language, areas and resources that require additional clarification or detail.
- Various communications received MarCom awards from the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals: the internal site earned a Platinum MarCom Award, an infographic was selected for a Gold MarCom Award, and an honorable mention was given to a blog post and special edition newsletter. EHRM-IO received two Gold Awards from the Hermes Creative Awards for blogs regarding VA’s transition to the Federal EHR and its metrics portal. VA employees were also recognized for their achievements on the EHRM program by health IT industry organizations, which was further amplified across internal and external VA channels. Following are examples:
 - Frequently Asked Questions: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/resources/frequently-asked-question/>.
 - Download a Fact Sheet: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/resources/fact-sheets/>.
 - Employee recognition: Intranet article recognizing the EHRM-IO program executive director and the deputy chief information officer for their selection as 2023 FedHealthIT100 award recipients.
- The EHRM IO website houses up-to-date information for the public to learn about the program, how it will affect Veterans, the deployment schedule of the new electronic health record (EHR) and frequently asked questions. Basic information and benefits are compiled into fact sheets, which can be viewed as content directly on web pages for easy readability and search optimization. In addition, the fact sheets can be viewed and downloaded as PDFs if the reader prefers. The website is also fully Section 508 compliant and designed for a simple and straightforward user experience. To remain 508 compliant, EHRM-IO continually works with subject matter experts to ensure that it is up to date with industry best practices. EHRM IO is committed to making solutions accessible to all users through conformance to accessibility standards and incorporating accessibility design principles. As VA implements its new electronic health record system, the program office will collaboratively test and validate system accessibility. Following are Examples:
 - External site homepage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/>.
 - External site deployment schedule page: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/resources/ehr-deployment-schedule/>.

- Fact sheet: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/resources/fact-sheets/benefits-of-vas-new-electronic-health-record/>.
 - Fact sheet: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/resources/fact-sheets/what-veterans-need-to-know-about-how-vas-health-record-system-is-changing/>.
 - Infographic: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/resources/fact-sheets/how-vas-electronic-health-record-modernization-effort-will-benefit-veterans/>.
 - Blog: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/news-stories/new-electronic-health-record-system-saves-hours-a-day-for-va-lab-staff-in-walla-walla-washington/>.
 - News release: External site webpage: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/news-releases/va-extends-delay-of-upcoming-electronic-health-record-deployments-to-june-2023-to-address-technical-and-other-system-performance-issues/>.
- EHRM-IO uses various platforms and channels to improve communications and plain language. Engagement with VEO and VHA's Office of Connected Care's telehealth teams has strengthened communication to Veterans, while posting almost daily on Facebook and Twitter has enabled the team to share updates and educational content to the public in an easily digestible format. In October 2022, the EHRM external website was re-launched in the WordPress platform, giving the Communications team editing capabilities to enable greater flexibility and nimbleness in communicating to the public. As part of this change, the website address and naming convention throughout were updated from EHRM to EHR Modernization to minimize the use of lesser known acronyms. Banners and red buttons on website homepages help identify links to hot-button resources, while improved organizational components (such as icons and blocks of content) aid readers in finding pertinent information. Using virtual meeting technologies, various internal and external town halls have allowed employees, Veterans and other stakeholders to hear directly from VA leaders in a remote and geographically dispersed environment. Following are Examples:
 - EHRM Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/EHRMVA>.
 - EHRM Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/EHRMVA>.
 - EHRM external website: <https://digital.va.gov/ehr-modernization/>.
 - EHRM-IO strives to improve and solicit feedback on the clarity of our communication channels. User surveys are frequently conducted during meetings, and the team has held multiple usability sessions to observe and improve the ease of the EHRM internal website navigation. There is also an option for internal website visitors to provide feedback on every page, including if they found the page helpful/informative/interesting, and why or why not. The visitor may also provide a comment and their email address so the team can respond. This feedback is also taken into consideration to improve the website, artifact or way in which information is conveyed. This guidance is then applied to

the external website and other communication channels. In addition, the external website solicits feedback on the Contact Us page, encouraging visitors to share their thoughts in an effort to improve the website and tailor it to their information needs. VA's EHRM program is among multiple program offices poised to comply with the new law requiring federal government agencies to translate web pages into multiple languages. Example: Contact Us: External webpage: <https://www.ehrm.va.gov/about/contact-us>.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

In line with VA's broader efforts, EHRM-IO values and supports inclusion, diversity, equity and access. It publishes articles and blogs to honor the achievements and contributions of Veterans and employees during special emphasis months, such as Hispanic Heritage Month, American Indian and Alaskan Native Heritage Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and others. The all-staff weekly communication wrap-up email featured a message from the EHRM-IO chief of staff recognizing Juneteenth and Pride Month. EHRM-IO has regular engagement with and outreach to VA's Office of Tribal Government Relations, the Center for Women's Veterans and the Center for Minority Veterans to ensure two-way information sharing and perspectives, concerns and needs from each group are incorporated into the program. The EHRM-IO team also assisted in creating videos in support of the Office of the Deputy Chief Information Officer (ODCIO) and its Diversity Equity Inclusion Access Program. Those videos underscored the meaning and importance of dignity and respect, as told by leadership within ODCIO. For example, see the external site blog at <https://www.ehrm.va.gov/news/article/read/womens-history-month-recognizing-front-line-workers>.

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION (HRA)

VA's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) communicates with leadership and employees throughout the enterprise to keep all apprised of ongoing and upcoming challenges. OCHCO uses numerous communications channels, to include:

- Agency-wide Bulletins – Flash updates on policy issues. Recent examples include:
 - [Hawaii Fire Hiring](#).
 - [Parental Bereavement Leave](#).
- **Fact Sheets**—Brief issue papers addressing topics of concern to employees. Recent examples include:
 - [Paid Parental Leave](#).
 - [OPM HR Information](#)—To ensure employees can see alignment with VA OCHCO with Governmentwide personnel policies.
- The OCHCO SharePoint site, an internal-VA repository for information that all employees need, including topics on:
 - VA Future of Work.
 - Employee and Labor Relations.
 - Career Development.

The purpose of using all these communication channels is to reach employees wherever they are and deliver information as they prefer to receive it. Our goal is to have a well-informed and more productive workforce.

OFFICE OF SMALL AND DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS UTILIZATION (OSDBU)

OSDBU provides plain language information through a series of factsheets and reference guides to assist the Veteran and small business community with navigating verification, procurement training and contracting.

- Library of Fact Sheets: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/library/factsheets.asp>.
- Reporting Fraud: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/docs/factsheetReportingFraud.pdf>.
- Reference Guides: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/media/reference-guides.asp>.

OSDBU uses a plain language approach to provide training, education and outreach to the small business community.

- Education and Training Calendar: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/calendar.asp>.
- Outreach Events: <https://www.vetbiz.va.gov/events/>.

OSDBU's social media platforms are critical when connecting with the Veteran and small business community. The platforms are easily accessible, Section 508 compliant and produced in plain language.

- YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEZt3MxLqXC16PmyxoyOZ-g>.
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/vaosdbu>.
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/VAVetBiz>.

OSDBU uses a plain language approach to inform all stakeholders regarding VA small business goals, access opportunities, training programs and resources.

- Media Library: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/media/index.asp>.
- Publications: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/media/publications.asp>.
- Small Business Liaisons: <https://www.va.gov/osdbu/about/contacts.asp#sbl>.
- VA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities: <https://www.vendorportal.ecms.va.gov/eVP/fco/FCO.aspx>.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

OSDBU assists VA's implementation of the President's Executive Order 13985 on Equity. The VA Equity Action Plan and strategies to advance equality for small and underserved individuals are available at <https://www.va.gov/OSDBU/WVOSBI.asp>.

CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS (CWV)

CWV participates in continuous education and training on plain language and adopting best practices from other organizations. CWV is always looking for ways to improve CWV's communication with women Veterans as well as ways to be innovative and look for new ideas.

CWV reviews web content quarterly and updates the website as required or needed. Documents are updated in plain language and made 508 compliant prior to upload on

CMV's website, social media and blogs. CWV also uses plain language in briefings and speeches. Examples include:

- CWV Website updated to include website banner at www.va.gov/womenvet.
- Fact Sheets.
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter).

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

- CWV ensures that briefing materials, posters and social media include the full diversity of the Nation.
- CWV's survey outreach documents are diverse and are used to ensure that women Veterans see women Veterans that look like them and their communities.
- CWV actively shares information for all communities but in this case particularly to underserved communities such as:
 - Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native, and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and North African persons.
 - Individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming and non-binary (LGBTQ+) persons); persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy related conditions; parents; and caregivers.
 - Individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; Veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality.
 - Individuals who may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers," as stated in the Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce (EO 13985).

CENTER FOR MINORITY VETERANS (CMV)

- CMV participates in continuous education and training on plain language and adopting best practices from other organizations and is forward leaning with improvement and innovative methods for its communication with minority and underserved Veterans.
- CMV employs collaborative outreach methods such as subscriptions, Veteran Community Resource Network, internal and external partner networks, and internal and external events to promote internal VA programs and services impacting minority and underrepresented Veterans.
- CMV, in collaboration with other VA partners, held a Latino Health Week of Action event, in English and Spanish, that focused on the needs of the population and provided, access, equity and inclusivity.

<https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/0286da46-daba-4262-a9ab-a7cce326d849@e95f1b23-abaf-45ee-821d-b7ab251ab3bf>.

- CMV's National Minority Veteran Program Manager coordinates with Minority Veteran Program Coordinators (MVPCs) daily for Veteran inquiries as well as assists, responds and coordinates MVPC presence at outreach and engagement events.
- CMV conducts regularly scheduled Minority Veteran Program meetings to ensure enterprise-wide consistency in providing information/responses to Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. In addition, CMV also provides Minority Veteran Program Coordinators from across the three administrations, with training and tools for continuous improvement for executing effective communications.

CMV Website, Social Media, Mobile Apps, Blogs

- Website: www.va.gov/centerforminorityveterans.
- Newsletter: [The Voice - Newsletter Index - Center for Minority Veterans \(CMV\) \(va.gov\)](#).
- Minority Veteran Program Coordinators: [Minority Veterans Programs Coordinators - Center for Minority Veterans \(CMV\) \(va.gov\)](#).

CWV Equity in Policies, Programs, Training and Activities

- CMV ensures that its briefing materials, posters, etc., include the full diversity of the Nation.
- CMV's outreach and engagement materials represent diversity and inclusion to ensure that minority and underserved minority Veterans see themselves.
- CMV's website content is 508 compliant prior to being uploaded for easy accessibility.
- CMV actively shares information for all communities but in this case particularly to underserved communities such as Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native, and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, North African persons and other underserved communities:
 - Hispanic Heritage Events:
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m0e646cdb12046b27583975af9fe9f156>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m0321cf201d69d1b8c6500dd06466b124>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m642c6e60ae493eafe59a3c91e1d56518>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m6b0f9686627634f541007ec59d8f06d1>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m62b53571ef9da0832cdd4f5d52480ff6>.
 - Native American Heritage Events:
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=ma8d1514532b7d308fc914397f8c46ff9>.

- <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m1a7520af2c988bb37cec26218751e04f>.
- Black/African American Heritage Events:
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=mcb652cd5da06f8f6e23e5990f044da24>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=m3893276c2778fc07bc56ab44942f112c>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=md42b8733df50cc1b4ca52976f13eba6b>.
- Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Month:
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=mc9e50dc4d657a6d618a9bb3b231f444f>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=mc9e50dc4d657a6d618a9bb3b231f444f>.
- LGBTQ+ Events:
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/ldr.php?RCID=e002b2ce8f233a2c3145d8379a8a4b78>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=ma27bac650728a2174b512c83de2f95a>.
 - <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/j.php?MTID=ma27bac650728a2174b512c83de2f95a>.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT OFFICE (ACMO)

ACMO participates in ongoing education and training on plain language and implements best practices garnered from other program offices and organizations. All new language and documents are updated in plain language prior to upload on its website, social media and blogs and *Federal Register* notices.

- ACMO Website content is reviewed quarterly and updated with plain language to include website banner use at www.va.gov/advisory. The website includes:
 - ACMO resources.
 - ACMO training materials.
 - Federal Advisory Committee Act resources.
 - Federal Register notices.
 - VA advisory committee links.
 - Ethics-related resources links.
 - VA social media blogs.

ACMO Equity in Policies, Programs, Training and Activities

ACMO ensures that our briefing materials, resources, social media include the full diversity of the Nation.

- ACMO ensures that our advisory committees are aware of ways to solicit underserved Veterans, survivors, caregivers and families to serve on VA advisory committees.
- ACMO ensures that our advisory committees are aware of ways to solicit new members which include the full diversity of the Nation.

- ACOMO actively shares information to our advisory committees and external stakeholders on ways to recruit qualified candidates to serve on the VA advisory committees such as:
 - Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native, and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African persons.
 - Individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming and non-binary (LGBTQ+) persons, and Veterans, military spouses, caregivers and family members.
 - Individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; Veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality.
 - Individuals who may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers as stated in the Executive Order 13985 on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce.

IV. Communication of Plain Writing Requirements

The Office of Executive Secretary (EXECSEC) has gained both strategic and operational agility towards fulfilling VA's mission by meeting challenges and coordinating efforts efficiently and effectively on behalf of Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. EXECSEC strives towards excellence in all business operations to include use of technology, data management, training and maximizing the contributions of all staff. EXECSEC supports the Department's 2022-2028 Strategic Plan by ensuring unity of effort from the Administrations and Staff Offices to deliver clear and consistent communications to external and internal audiences in a timely manner and reflects positive on VA.

EXECSEC provides guidance and training on writing and coordination standards and overview of adherence to established requirements associated with the VA brand. EXECSEC, in collaboration with Administrations and Key Staff Offices, provides an ongoing review and updates the VA Style Guide and Templates as needed to further clarify information and add annotated and formatted examples of commonly used documents reviewed by EXECSEC. The Style Guide is designed to be an easy-to-use reference tool for anyone in VA who handles, develops or participates in the development of VA written documents, thereby helps VA produce clear and consistent content across the organizations.

VA Administrations and Staff Offices use these standards to improve and provide communication products, materials and training to their staff members as well as use careful audience analysis and writing for the reader; active voice with a clear call to

action; ensuring materials are 508 compliant and accessible; presenting information in a logical order; and providing examples when appropriate.

VA's Office of Information and Technology works with partners across VA to ensure that all digital content and products we create for Veterans meet our high plain language and accessibility standards and meet Veteran needs. VA's standards are based on the following:

- Plain language and clear communication best practices.
- The latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- Ongoing usability and comprehension testing with Veterans.
- Ongoing monitoring of analytics and Veteran feedback.

V. Training

EXECSEC provides continuous learning around plain language writing through monthly Action Officer training for VA correspondence representatives, subject matter experts and other staff across the Department on VA style and brand, plain language, format, style guide, templates, naming convention, writing and standards related to correspondence to internal and external stakeholders, privacy and security practices of personal information and tips for great packages. Action Officer training provides employees with the needed training and tools to provide a consistent quality product and increase on-time rate for correspondence requiring the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Chief of Staff's signatures. Training ensures employees fully understand the importance of writing to our audience and how to do it effectively. In FY 2023, VA trained approximately 600 employees as well as provided 4 additional Action Officer training sessions as part of Staff Offices' agendas for their symposiums or yearly staff training.

VA Administrations and Key Staff Offices also provided plain language writing training to staff.

- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provided two plain writing training sessions for approximately 70 VHA staff members.
- Supervisors within Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Southeast (SE) office assigns [Writing in Plain Language](#) in TMS (NFED 7003174) and [Plain Language Writing Seminar](#) in VA's Talent Management System (VA 4621159) to ensure all staff members are using the plain language principles in their written products. Additionally, SE supports the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) with implementation of Public Law 117-62 related to language translation requirements. SE worked with VBA's lines of business to identify outdated or irrelevant fact sheets from its public-facing website. VA works to translate those public-facing fact sheets to the twelve languages as required by the law. SE continues to provide input to OPIA as it leads the integrated project team on this effort and will provide input to help standardize the template for VA fact sheets.
- The Office of Information and Technology (OIT) continues expanding content training and support opportunities for VA employees and contractors. OIT also continues using Veteran feedback to improve our content. Examples of training:

- Plain language and accessible, empathetic, equitable content presentations. OIT continues to present a 1-hour content education session across VA audiences. For example, this presentation was provided to over 1,400 VA employees as part of OIT’s “Tech Talk” webinar series this year.
- Content community of practice. OIT holds monthly content community of practice meetings, where VA employees and contractors in content-specific roles meet to learn from each other, get the latest guidance, and discuss ways to continue improving VA’s digital content. We also have a content community of practice channel for continued collaboration outside of meetings.

VI. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change

VA maintains a high level quality of all digital content and products created through a combination of governance documentation and processes, training, continuous research with Veterans and expert support from experienced content strategists, writers, and editors. Examples are:

- Content style guide: The [VA.gov content style guide](#) and [VA.gov design system](#) provide in-depth guidance and standards for ensuring accessible, inclusive content that is easy to find, understand and act on. We continue to deepen and expand the style guide. For example, we recently added several examples to our [top 10 plain language standards section](#) to illustrate how to apply the standards to VA content.
- Checklists: Our content and publication checklists provide a step-by-step process for content authors to follow to ensure quality and accessibility when creating content in our Drupal content management system. We also include inline guidance in the Drupal Content Management System.
 - [Content author’s checklist](#).
 - [Pre-publication checklist](#).
 - Our [multilingual content checklist](#) helps content authors to ensure that their plain language English content is ready for translation.
- Content briefs for topic-specific guidance for multi-channel communication: As VA continues expanding content across channels, from the website to the flagship mobile app to the VA.gov chatbot, we have established a template for content briefs. Our content leads use these briefs to share topic-specific content and terminology guidance and content-specific usability research insights to ensure reading comprehension and consistency across all products. VA created an [example content brief for appointment scheduling](#), and further started to build [topic-specific sections into the VA.gov content style guide](#).
 - VA.gov experience standards: Our [VA.gov experience standards](#) capture accessibility, content, design and information architecture standards for teams building products on the VA.gov platform.
 - Content placement criteria: To help content creators determine where to place content within VA.gov, we created [step-by-step guidance for content placement](#) based on analytics and Veteran feedback. Example of additional improvement initiatives:

- We have created a template for an annual content audit of both needed content timeliness updates as well as evolving plain language and accessibility standards and feedback from Veterans. We are currently auditing VA.gov pages against this template ([example audit page](#)) to ensure continuous improvement.

VII. Department Plain Writing Websites

- The VA Plain Language website, Contact Us, email, compliance reports and links to OMB and PLAIN at http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp.
- VA.gov Content Style Guide at <https://design.va.gov/content-style-guide/plain-language/>.
- <https://Digital.va.gov/web-governance/building-and-managing-va-websites/plain-language>.
- Link from VA's homepage at <http://www.va.gov/>.
- Link at bottom of the VA Open.gov page at <http://www.va.gov/open/>.

Other Websites:

- Government's Plain Language Standards at www.plainlanguage.gov.
- Guidance for U.S. government websites and social media at www.digital.gov/resources/plain-language-web-writing-tips/.

VIII. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation

VA's Office of Information and Technology created a template for an annual content audit of both needed content timeliness updates as well as evolving plain language and accessibility standards and feedback from Veterans. We are currently auditing VA.gov pages against this template ([example audit page](#)) to ensure continuous improvement.

Research-based updates to our "[Contact us](#)" webpage illustrate how we use Veteran feedback to make incremental improvements to our content. This page provides several ways for a Veteran to contact VA: using Ask VA or our chatbot, calling us or contacting a local VA facility. We iterate on our content as we learn from Veteran research where there are opportunities to improve comprehension. For example, when we conducted chatbot research, we discovered some users did not know if they would be communicating with a human when they used the chatbot. In response to this, we added this sentence to the chatbot section of the page: "The chatbot will not connect you with a person, but it can show you where to go on [VA.gov](#) to find answers to some common questions."

A comment from one of the judges for the 2022 Federal Report Card put out by the Center for Plain Language that assessed this webpage and other "Contact Us" pages across government agencies, stated this sentence as being helpful. Specifically, "The writing on this page is stellar plain language work. Each section of text is quite short, and sentences are direct and clear. The text on the page is consistently helpful, conversational, human and reader-facing." Additional quotes from the report card were:

- "The authors have clearly considered their audience and made all choices about this content with them in mind."

- “This is a great example of plain language writing that puts readers, their questions, and their next steps front and center in its design.”

IX. Conclusion

VA’s goal is to offer Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors secure, seamless and exceptional customer experiences. VA’s success during the unique environment during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic showed the true capabilities and talents of our teams. VA embraces our workforce diversity and Veteran population to include diversity of thought and perspective.

VA’s digital transformation acknowledges the Veteran’s digital experience by expanding virtual health technologies capabilities to easily connect with VA representatives, increase Veteran access to care supporting Veterans’ need for video telehealth appointments, tele-critical care as well as VA’s workforce shift to remote work. This allowed Veterans to easily interact with VA and choose their preferred communication channels to connect with VA staff members and health care professionals to ask questions, received care, schedule and manage appointments, update health records, monitor medications, refill prescriptions and more.

VA’s communication and information sharing begins at military service and continues throughout the Veteran’s life. VA consistently communicates with our customers and partners to assess and maximize performance, evaluate needs and build long-term relationships and trust. VA receives Veterans feedback that enhances VA’s understanding of needs and experiences that ensures equitable access and improves the quality of benefits, care and services provided especially to at-risk, underserved and marginalized Veterans.

VA offers multilingual customer experiences to meet the needs of a diverse Veteran population and in various ways to ensure equitable access to information and resources and support those with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.