



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON DC 20420

OCT 31 2003

Mr. Ronald P. Sanders
Associate Director for Strategic Human Resources Policy
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW, Room 6500
Washington, DC 20415-9800

Dear Mr. Sanders:

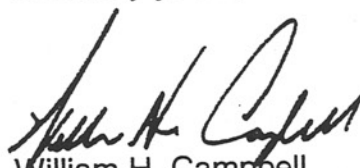
Enclosed are the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) FY 2004 Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program Plan Certification and the FY 2003 Accomplishment Report.

I would like to share two FY 2003 highlights. VA opened the Veterans Affairs Satellite One-Stop Career Center at the Washington, DC, Regional Office. This is the Department's first One-Stop Center in the Nation that provides full-time collaborative veterans benefits with comprehensive job search and training assistance located in a VA facility. The Center is the result of a partnership between the Washington, DC, Regional Office Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment staff and the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services. In addition, VA enjoyed outstanding success with the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program at the Washington, DC, Medical Center. One hundred and fifty-five veterans received CWT training, and 49 graduated from the program. Of the 49 graduates, the Medical Center hired 13 and assisted 31 with employment opportunities at other agencies.

As of September 30, 2003, veterans represented 25.7 percent of VA's workforce, and disabled veterans represented 7.2 percent. Compared to FY 2002 statistical data, the representation of veterans decreased by 0.5 percent and the representation of disabled veterans increased by 0.1 percent. VA will continue its efforts to increase employment opportunities for our Nation's veterans.

If there are questions concerning this submission, please have a member of your staff contact Noemi Pizarro-Hyman, National Program Manager for People with Disabilities, at (202) 501-2031.

Sincerely yours,



William H. Campbell
Acting

Enclosures

Annual Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP) Plan Certification – Fiscal Year 2004

Please type or print clearly and return this sheet **with an original signature** to:

Mr. Ronald P. Sanders
Associate Director for Strategic Human Resources Policy
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW, Room 6500
Washington, DC 20415-9800

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

A. Name and Address of Agency

Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

B. Name and Title of Designated DVAAP Official

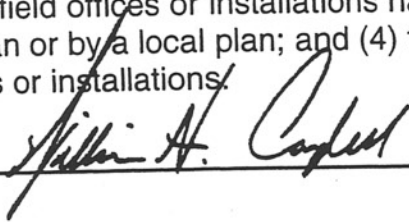
Susan C. McHugh, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity
Telephone: 202-501-1970 Fax: 202-501-2145

C. Name and Title of Contact Person

Noemi Pizarro-Hyman, National Program Manager
People with Disabilities Program
Telephone: 202-501-2031 Fax: 202-501-2145

Certification: I certify that the above named agency: (1) has a current DISABLED VETERANS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM (DVAAP) plan and the program is being implemented as required by 38 U.S.C. § 4214, as amended, and appropriate regulations and guidance issued by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management; (2) that all field offices or installations having less than 500 employees are covered by a DVAAP plan; (3) that all field offices or installations having 500 or more employees are covered either by this plan or by a local plan; and (4) that such plans are available upon request from field offices or installations.

SIGNATURE



DATE 10/31/2003

**Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program
FY 2003 Accomplishment Report**

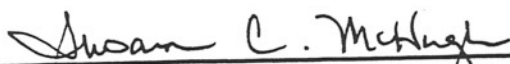
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Number of Employees Covered by this Report
as of September 30, 2003:

230,406

Person Preparing Report:
Noemi Pizarro-Hyman

202-501-2031



Susan C. McHugh, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity

10/30/03

Date

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mission is to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion and be their principal advocate in ensuring that they receive medical care, benefits, social support, and lasting memorials promoting the health, welfare, and dignity of all veterans in recognition of their service to the Nation.

In efforts to evaluate VA's compliance with the terms of the Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP), VA's major components were asked to prepare and submit a consolidated report of their activities in accordance with Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart C of Part 720. As a result, the following information is submitted:

Section A – Methods Used to Recruit and Employ Disabled Veterans, Especially Those who are 30 Percent or More Disabled

National Cemetery Administration (NCA): NCA's Human Resources Services used veteran-specific hiring authorities, which allowed selected officials to engage in direct appointments without examination. A Memorandum of Understanding between NCA and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Division was established to provide greater job recruitment opportunities to veterans who return to the workforce following medical rehabilitation. Additional recruitment resources included Delegated Examining Units, VBA's Employment Specialists, and Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Coordinators.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA): VHA's medical centers continued to work with local Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Service, and Employment Service Centers to exchange employment information and establish recruitment sources for referring disabled veterans for employment. Human Resources Management (HRM) staff provided copies of job announcements to state and local government agencies and veterans service organizations; reasonable accommodation statements were placed on the announcements. Maximum consideration was given to veterans with Veterans Readjustment Act, Veterans' Employment Opportunities Act of 1998, and 30 Percent or More Service-Connected appointment preferences. VHA facilities used the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Web site to post vacancies.

The Washington, DC, VA Medical Center made excellent use of the CWT program to hire disabled veterans into permanent positions. In FY 2003, 155 veterans received CWT training. Of those, 49 successfully graduated from the program. Of the 49 graduates, the Medical Center hired 13 of them and assisted 31 with employment opportunities at other agencies. This facility also held a job fair in support of veterans' employment with over 242 veterans attending the event.

Through training, staff meetings, and routine communications with managers, supervisors, human resources specialists, and selecting officials, facilities maximized the use of special appointing authorities to aggressively recruit qualified veterans with disabilities.

Various medical centers provided office space to veteran representatives from local Employment Service Commissions. Representatives were available to veterans during regular work hours to render assistance with job referrals and employment placement opportunities. Other facilities participated in health, job, and career fairs, which served as opportunities to recruit persons with disabilities. A large number of VHA facilities used newspaper advertisements and trade journals to announce their vacancies.

At VHA's Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network (MAHCN), recruitment efforts were extended into local technical and traditional colleges and universities where veterans and disabled veterans participated in the work-study program. Contacts were made with several area military installations as possible recruitment sources.

Information packets were sent to recently discharged veterans in the MAHCN. The packet included a thank-you letter to the veteran for their service to the Nation and an invitation to seek employment with VA. The packet also included information on applying for Federal jobs and contacting medical centers in the MAHCN. In addition, the MAHCN effectively used the Incentive Therapy Program (ITP) as a recruitment tool. The ITP is designed to support disabled veterans unable to return to gainful employment by engaging them in meaningful work in exchange for a small stipend.

VHA's Illiana Health Care System (IHCS) established a collaborative working relationship between its Human Resources Department and the Illinois Department of Employment Security to aggressively recruit veterans. In addition, IHCS used the CWT program as a recruitment tool. Memoranda of Understanding were established within the IHCS and various local businesses to provide veterans with training and work experiences in the areas of housekeeping, grounds maintenance, lodging facilities, management, food service, wheelchair repair, and computer laboratory monitoring.

A VA grant was awarded to the Service Center at Goodwill Industries to provide vocational rehabilitation services for homeless veterans. The expected outcome is to help homeless veterans find and sustain employment in the community. Service Center grants are part of an overall strategy to end homelessness by ensuring that homeless veterans have access to affordable housing, adequate support services, and sufficient income to meet their needs.

VA Central Office (VACO): At VACO, the Central Office Human Resources Service staff visited military bases and attended job fairs to provide counseling and employment information to military personnel and veterans.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA): VBA's Human Resources staff at the Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center (RO&IC) met on a regular basis with the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Division and staff to discuss employment opportunities for disabled veterans. A human resources specialist interviewed all appointment-eligible veterans when they inquired about employment with VA and discussed eligibility for the various special appointment authorities.

Ten national and state veterans organizations maintained offices in the Philadelphia RO&IC. These organizations met regularly with RO&IC officials to discuss the employment of veterans. To further support veterans' employment, office space was provided to a labor placement specialist from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor.

The VR&E Division held semi-annual workshops throughout the Philadelphia VARO&IC jurisdiction, with special emphasis placed on veterans with disabilities.

At the Atlanta Regional Office (ARO), external vacancy announcements were opened to veterans and to 30 percent or more service-connected disabled veterans. ARO staff attended job fairs targeting applicants with veteran-preference eligibility.

As an external recruitment source, the St. Petersburg Regional Office (SPRO) maintained liaison with veterans employment representatives in the State Employment Services Office.

The VR&E Division of the Muskogee Regional Office (MRO) and the Oklahoma State Employment Service were the primary sources for recruiting and hiring disabled veterans within the MRO. Supported by the local VR&E staff, the Oklahoma State Employment Service hosted monthly Job Clubs. Held in three different locations within the state, the clubs assisted disabled veterans with preparing resumes, completing application forms, and searching for jobs. They also provided a network for veterans to find suitable employment. In FY 2003, the MRO hired 5 veterans; of those, 2 were rated at 30 percent or more service-connected disability rating.

The Waco Regional Office's HRM staff established contacts with the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) representatives at the Waco and Temple offices of the Texas Workforce Commission to enhance opportunities for recruiting disabled veterans. These representatives were notified when external recruitment occurred, and HRM clarified where the announcements could be found on OPM's Web site. HRM also provided vacancy announcements and application materials to the DVOPs.

The HRM liaison worked closely with the VR&E Employment Specialist in referring and hiring veterans who had service-connected disability ratings of 30 percent or more. HRM also networked with veterans service organizations to provide disabled veterans with employment information.

In addition, the Human Resources Specialist and Military Services Coordinator (MSC) participated in job fairs at the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) Center at Fort Hood, Texas. In November 2002, the HRM liaison and the MSC coordinator also participated in the Central Texas Community Job Fair, which was co-sponsored by the Fort Hood ACAP Center and the Army Community Service Employment Readiness Branch. The HRM Liaison and a Supervisory Veterans Service Representative also conducted recruitment at the San Antonio Colleges and Universities Placement Association Job Fair. Twelve minority colleges and universities were represented at the fair. Application procedures and informational materials regarding nationwide vacancies were distributed to students and separating service members.

At the Houston Regional Office (HRO), the VR&E Division continued to refer applicants under Chapter 31, as well as other disabled veterans. Applicants under the Chapter 31 program are placed in on-the-job training programs, which last 12 months. Upon successful completion of the training period, veterans are converted to a provisional appointment in a career-ladder position in their training area. In spite of the hiring freeze, one disabled female veteran was placed into a permanent Loan Specialist position. Thirty percent or more service-connected veterans were referred to Human Resources through the Veteran Service Center work-study program when positions became available. Applicants were encouraged to include a veteran's preference letter and a copy of their DD Form 214 along with the application for employment.

The Washington Regional Office, in partnership with the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services, opened a Veterans Affairs Satellite One-Stop Career Center. The Center is VA's first in the Nation that provides full-time collaborative veterans benefits with comprehensive job search and training assistance located in a VA facility.

Other VBA regional offices reported using the Federal Unpaid Work Experience (FUWE) Program as a recruitment source. Of the two 30 percent disabled veterans hired by the Newark Regional Office, one was a FUWE applicant referred by the VR&E Division. The other disabled veteran was hired after being encouraged to apply for a vacancy upon completion of his vocational rehabilitation. The VR&E Division in the Little Rock Regional Office used the FUWE program to place four disabled veterans in positions within VHA, leading to the permanent placement of two disabled veterans. They also received a Department of Labor certificate of appreciation for outreach efforts in support of disabled veterans. The Winston-Salem Regional Office benefited from its collaboration with the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, which resulted in the hiring of 12 disabled veterans; 8 of these were rated at 30 percent disability or more. The Salt Lake City Regional Office (SLCRO) participated in three job fairs with the Office of Personnel Management and the Utah State Employment Office. The SLCRO filled a VR&E Rehabilitation Counselor's position with a Chapter 31 vocational rehabilitation 30 percent or more veteran. Of 12 individuals hired at the SLCRO, 9 were veterans (8 of those were disabled veterans), and 2 had 30 percent or more disability ratings.

Section B – Methods Used to Provide or Improve Internal Advancement Opportunities for Disabled Veterans

NCA: NCA used individual development plans, which enabled management to identify training needs and resources to improve internal advancement. Disabled veterans were encouraged to participate in available on-line training offered through VA's Learning University, broadcast system, and the Memorial Service Networks resource library; these provided a myriad of continuing education and self-improvement courses.

VHA: EEO Managers discussed results of the DVAAP report with managers and supervisors throughout the year to encourage and promote strong internal advancement opportunities. In addition, managers were made aware of disabled veterans who made the best-qualified list and were reminded of their responsibility to support DVAAP.

VHA facilities used career ladder promotion, which allowed recruitment at any entry level and required less specialized knowledge that can be obtained on the job. Other methods included the use of the VRA authority, which supports training agreement programs and the use of tuition support and reimbursement program to develop and advance current employees. Upward Mobility and Worker Trainee positions were also used as internal advancement opportunities.

At the VA Health Care Network Upstate New York, all employees, volunteers, and CWT participants received regularly scheduled orientation that provided information on various recruitment processes and merit promotion plans. Job applications were accepted and filed by veteran status, disability rating, and qualifications. The Network greatly increased the use and awareness of the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998 appointing authority, which allows qualified veterans to compete with current VA employees for employment opportunities. Tuition support and self-enhancement programs, which improved individual marketability, were available to employees through the local and network educational councils.

Some of the medical centers benefited from the partnership between VA and the Department of Defense's Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP). CAP improved worksite efficiency and skills, which enabled internal advancement opportunities.

Handouts on CAP, reasonable accommodation, special appointing authorities, and the employment of disabled veterans and persons with disabilities were distributed at supervisory training to increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of supervisors and managers in the employment decision-making process.

Education and career counseling opportunities were offered at many medical centers in efforts to enhance job opportunities for veterans. Disabled veterans were included as participants on local committees and task forces to solicit their cooperation and support for DVAAP.

VACO: VACO Human Resources Service staff shared information about the special laws and authorities enacted by Congress that provide veterans preference, while conducting basic supervisory training and meeting with human resources management liaisons.

Separating disabled veterans were interviewed to ensure that retention methods were not overlooked.

VBA: At the Atlanta Regional Office, qualified 30 percent or more disabled veterans and Vietnam Era veterans were given veterans preference for the 962 (Contact Representative), 996 (Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist), and 1801 (Educational Liaison/Compliance Survey Specialist) occupation series positions.

The St. Petersburg Regional Office continued to use veterans' preference for qualified Vietnam Era and disabled veterans for employment and promotion opportunities also in the GS-996 series. The station used its intranet site to post all vacancy announcements.

The Muskogee Regional Office Director pledged his personal commitment to the advancement of disabled veterans. He strongly communicated that commitment at management briefings, as well as in staff meetings. The MRO also used veterans' preferences in all internal promotion certificates in the GS-996 series.

At the Waco Regional Office, advancement opportunities for merit promotion vacancies were announced according to contractual requirements. HRM discussed personnel practices with selecting officials to identify recruitment barriers and assure compliance with the station's affirmative action goals and objectives. The Regional Office is proud that 47 percent of its workforce consists of veterans; 62 percent of them are disabled. Management consistently focused on the advancement of disabled veterans, employees with disabilities, and minorities for a diverse employee representation at all levels of the organization.

The Houston Regional Office continued to make positions available through the Upward Mobility Program and the merit promotion system. Work areas were evaluated and modified to accommodate disabled veterans and provide them an opportunity to be more competitive for internal advancement opportunities. The Regional Office will continue to provide training designed to improve their opportunities.

The Hartford Regional Office modified the job requirements of veterans with severe disabilities so that their service-connected illness did not impair advancement opportunities. Job redesign and restructuring were routinely used to place veterans with disabilities into competitive positions.

Section C – Description of How the Activities of Major Operating Components and Field Installations Were Monitored, Reviewed, and Evaluated

VA's main statistical instrument for monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating its major operating components and field installations is the Computer Output Identification Number Personnel and Accounting Integrated Data (COIN PAID) Report 204. This report is published on a quarterly basis and provides information by facility and nationwide.

More specifically, the COIN PAID reports veteran-specific data under the following 11 categories, including hires and promotions:

- a. All Employees
- b. All Veterans
- c. All Veterans - Male
- d. All Veterans - Female
- e. Disabled Veterans
- f. Compensable Disabled Veterans
- g. Veterans 30% or More Disabled
- h. Vietnam-Era Veterans
- i. Disabled Vietnam-Era Veterans
- j. Compensable Disabled Vietnam-Era Veterans
- k. Vietnam-Era Veterans 30% or More Disabled

Other forms of monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating included the use of the performance appraisal system to ensure accountability; VA Form 4096, "Record of Exit Interview," as an assessment tool; feedback provided by local EEO Managers and People with Disabilities Program Managers; and discussion of weekly and quarterly accessions and promotions within divisions for management team evaluation.

Special appointing authority appointments were discussed at Directors' staff meetings, where selecting officials were routinely reminded of these authorities while discussing recruitment strategies. Human Resources Management staff, VR&E specialists, and Veterans Service Centers also received periodic training in the use of special appointing authorities. Supervisors and selecting officials were made aware of the President's and Secretary's special interest in employing disabled veterans. They were also reminded of their responsibility to consider all qualified disabled veterans referred for vacancies. Field facility directors, supervisors, and managers currently have general EEO performance requirements.

The Houston Regional Office's EEO Program Committee Coordinator took an active role in monitoring the hiring of disabled veterans and minorities by completing a close review of statistical and narrative data contained in the Director's Quarterly Briefings. The Coordinator actively solicited advice from program coordinators and employees on station.

At NCA, a Workforce Planning Council (WPC) met on a quarterly basis to monitor, evaluate, and provide recommendations to the DVAAP. In addition, NCA created a Diversity Advisory Board consisting of charter members throughout the Administration who participated in monitoring and reviewing the DVAAP.

Section D: Explanation of Agency's Progress in Implementing its Affirmative Action Plan During the Fiscal Year

As of September 30, 2003, VA's total workforce was 230,406. Of those, 59,154 (25.7%) were veterans, and 16,501 (7.2%) were disabled veterans. Overall, the veteran employee representation decreased by 0.5 percent—from 26.2 to 25.7 percent—and the disabled veteran employee representation increased by 0.1 percent—from 7.1 to 7.2 percent. Thus, VA statistics are stable with only marginal variations. Hiring freezes have hindered recruitment efforts; however, VA will continue to take advantage of every opportunity given to hire to ensure equal access for veterans.

VA's major components will continue to attend job fairs and strengthen its outreach programs. VA will also continue its collaborations with military bases to provide employment opportunity information and will continue to involve senior executive managers, managers, and supervisors in the support of DVAAP.