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Preface

“Welcome home!” Fellow veterans understand the great sense of camaraderie that such a simple salutation brings. It is a reminder of the distant battles left imprinted on the memories of those who knew the beaches of Normandy, the cold at the Chosin Reservoir, the leeches of the Delta, and the heat of the desert. It acknowledges the sacrifices. These words reach out a helping hand to another that bears the battle scars. They do not distinguish between a soldier, sailor, guardsman, airman or Marine, nor do they wait for rank. This phrase is not bound by race or gender, nor does it first ask about the mission. It comes with an unabashed handshake or embrace, reinforced with a knowing smile. It is an affirmation of survival, reunion, and readjustment back to civilian life. Family and stranger alike long to utter these words and show their support whether through joyous tears, the waving of the flag, or the wearing of a red poppy.

Military homecomings are filled with such joy that it is easy to overlook the real challenges and hardships on the road back to a civilian life. Each generation of veteran has faced those obstacles with help from their families, friends, communities, employers, or other veterans. The greatest institutional source of assistance has come in the form of benefits from the Federal government, primarily delivered by the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA), Labor (DOL), and Health and Human Services (HHS). The medical care, compensation, education and employment assistance, home loans, survivor programs, insurance, and burial allowances have assisted millions of veterans and their families.

Through these federally sponsored programs, veterans have achieved many successes. They have brought their military experiences to classrooms, corporations, and pastures across America, sometimes overcoming daunting disabilities and impairments to do so. Other times, those disabilities cause complications that resulted in the loss of a supportive social structure and the fragmentation of individual homeostasis leaving veterans vulnerable to addiction, divorce, homelessness, mental illness, incarceration, or suicide. The Veterans’

Disability Benefits Commission hopes that its work will ensure that all veterans are equitably and appropriately compensated for the sacrifices that they made for their country.

At this juncture, the Commission deliberates while American service members are protecting our national interests across the globe. They are wounded and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan while fighting the Global War on Terror. It is with this ever-present global reality, that this Commission conducts its work. Many of us have our own combat memories and military experiences that guide us, as well as our civilian careers and civic responsibilities to draw from as we watch a new generation of troops engaged in war. We have the opportunity to welcome them home by ensuring that the benefits and services available to them are the right ones and that they are being properly applied in a timely and appropriate manner.

As we submit this report, it is our hope that we will have found the key ingredients for successful transition from military service, overcoming disability, and a level of benefits and services to enable our veteran community to live healthy, happy, and productive lives in the civilian sector. The expeditious implementation of the recommendations made on the following pages by the responsible branches of government with the support of the veterans service organizations should give future generations of veterans a message that says, "Welcome home!"

Abbreviations

A & A: Aid and Attendance

ADLs: Activities of Daily Living

AHLTA: Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application

ANPRM: Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

AO: Agent Orange

ATSDR: Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry

BDD: Benefits Delivery at Discharge

BEC: Benefits Executive Council

BHIE: Bidirectional Health Information Exchange

BVA: Board of Veterans Appeals

C&P: Compensation and Pension

CACO: Casualty Affairs Casualty Officer

CAPRI: VBA's Compensation and Pension Records Initiative

CAVC: Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

CBO: Congressional Budget Office

CBHCO: Army Community Based Health Care Organization

CHAMPUS: Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services

CHAMPVA: Civilian Health and Medical Program of VA

CHDR: Clinical Health Data Repository

CNAC: CNA Corporation

COLA: Cost of Living Adjustment

COOL: Credentialing Opportunities On-Line

CPEP: Compensation and Pension Examination Program

CPRS: VA's Computerized Patient Record System

CPS: Current Population Survey

CRDP: Concurrent Retirement Disability Payments

CRSC: Combat Related Special Compensation

CT: Computed Tomography

CVA: Court of Veterans Appeals

DES: Disability Evaluation System

DIC: Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

DoD: Department of Defense

DOEHRS: Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System

DoL: Department of Labor

DOL-VETS: Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service

DRO: Decision Review Board

DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual

DSM-IV: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition

DTAP: Disabled Transition Assistance Program

DU: Depleted Uranium

ECVARS: Economic Validation of the Rating Schedule

FHIE: Federal Health Information Exchange

GAO: Government Accountability Office

GWOT: Global War on Terrorism

HEC: Health Executive Council

HHS: Department of Health and Human Services

HIPAA: Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act of 1996 (PL 104-191)

HRQOL: Health-Related Quality of life

IADLs: Instrumental Activities of Daily Living

ICD-10: International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision

IED: Improvised Explosive Device

IOM: Institute of Medicine

IT: Information Technology

IU: Individual Unemployability

JEC: Joint Executive Council

JEHRI: Joint Electronic Health Records Interoperability Plan

JIF: VA/DoD Joint Incentive Fund

LDSI: Laboratory Data Sharing and Interoperability software

LOD: Line of Duty

MCS: Mental Component Summary

MEB: Medical Evaluation Board

MIA: Missing In Action

MOS: Military Occupational Specialty

MRI: Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MSA: Military Sexual Assault

MSIC: Military Severely Injured Center

MTF: Medical Treatment Facility

NDAA: National Defense Authorization Act

NPRM: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom

OIG: Office of the Inspector General (VA)

PCB: Polychlorinated Biphenyls

PCCARWW: President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors

PCS: Physical Component Summary

PDRL: Permanent Disability Retired List

PEB: Physical Evaluation Board

PDHA: Post-Deployment Health Assessments

PDT: Post-Decision Team

POW: Prisoner of War

PPDHA: Pre- and Post-Deployment Health Assessments

PTSD: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

QOL: Quality of Life

RO: Regional Office

RVSR: Rating Veterans Service Representative

SAH: Specially Adapted Housing

SBP: Survivor Benefit Plan

SDVI: Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance

SHA: Special Housing Adaptation

SIMS: Severely Injured Marines and Sailors pilot study

SMC: Special Monthly Compensation

SSA: Social Security Administration

SSDI: Social Security Disability Insurance

STAR: Systematic Technical Accuracy Review

TAP: Transition Assistance Program

TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury

TCE: Trichloroethylene

TDRL: Temporary Disability Retired List

TMC: The Military Coalition

TRAAP: Temporary Residence Assistance Adaptation Program

TSGLI: Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance

VA: Department of Veterans Affairs

VASRD: VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities

VBA: Veterans Benefits Administration

VCAA: Veterans Claims Assistance Act

VCAC: Veterans Claims Adjudication Commission

VMET: Verification of Military Experience and Training

VETS: Veterans Employment and Training Service

VISN: Veterans Integrated Service Networks

VHA: Veterans Health Administration

VISN: Veteran Integration Service Network

VISTA: Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture

VJRA: Veterans Judicial Review Act

VMLI: Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance

VR&E: Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment

VSO: Veteran Service Organization

VSR: Veterans Service Representative