



USA CONTACT

GSA's Contract Vehicle Helps Agencies Serve Citizens

Partner Agency: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Combat Veterans Call Center

The Situation:

As of January 2008, more than 850,000 combat veterans had returned from the Global War on Terrorism. Although entitled to medical care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for most conditions for five years after they separate from active duty, more than 550,000 of these veterans had not used these services.

The National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2008 which was signed into law (Public Law 110-181) January 28, 2008, extended the period of enhanced enrollment opportunity for health care eligibility provided to veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998. Those who were discharged from active duty between November 11, 1998, and January 27, 2003, but have not enrolled for benefits may apply for this enhanced enrollment opportunity through January 27, 2011.

The VA Secretary, Dr. James Peake, wanted these combat veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) to be aware that the eligibility for benefits has been extended for combat veterans and to let them know about the VA's new Veterans Employment Coordination Service. The new service promotes and advocates the hiring of veterans by VA managers and supervisors and educates selecting officials on veterans' preference and federal hiring authorities developed to assist veterans in gaining federal employment. But most of all, the Secretary wanted to be sure OEF/OIF veterans were receiving the medical care that was needed.

VA personnel are deployed to the military's major medical centers to assist wounded service members and their families during their transition to civilian lives. Those veterans identified as sick or injured during their combat tours can have a VA care manager appointed to work with them. VA care managers ensure that veterans receive appropriate care and are fully informed about their VA benefits. Approximately 17,000 of these veterans were, based on their wartime injuries and illnesses, considered candidates for care management and assigned an individual care manager, but none had contacted VA.

VA decided to launch a concentrated outreach and education campaign in an effort to reach OEF/OIF combat veterans to make them more aware of health care services and benefits available from the VA. Having worked closely and successfully with GSA's Office of Citizen Services in the past, the VA once again turned to GSA to establish a new "Combat Veteran Call Center" to fill the need.

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How GSA's Office of Citizen Services Helped:

Securing the Contract

Using its USA Contact contract vehicle, GSA worked closely with VA staff to finalize its statement of work and issue a request for proposals to the nine USA Contact solutions partners. Proposals were received and in April 2008 the task order was awarded to EDS, an industry leader with 45 years experience in information technology and contact center experience.

Calling the Veterans

On May 1, 2008, the Combat Veteran Call Center began its mission with targeted calls to 17,000 combat veterans who were sick or injured while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. The veterans received an offer to have a care manager appointed to work with them if they did not already have one. Care managers ensure veterans receive appropriate care and know about available VA benefits.

"We promised to reach out to every OEF and OIF veteran to let them know we are here for them – and we are making real progress in doing so," Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs stated.

Call Expansion

By May 30, 2008, the Combat Veteran Call Center had completed the first phase of the outreach. Call center agents were given contact information for 15,532 veterans in the care management group who were of highest priority for assignment of an individual care manager given their injuries and illnesses. Of the contacts made with these veterans, 94 percent

agreed to be interviewed by the contact center agent. At the same time, the Combat Veteran Call Center also began calling the nearly 550,000 who had not contacted VA for health care. If the veteran requests health care or benefit information, the Contact Center mails VA publications by either postal mail or email and will make referrals to VHA or the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) as needed. If the veteran needs immediate attention, the agent immediately transfers the veteran's call to a VA facility.

Quality assurance is monitored closely by VA. From the base period through the first month of the option period, over 9,000 calls have been monitored with an average score above 98 percent. Over 91% of calls monitored scored above 94%. The veterans interviewed continued to be pleased that the VA was taking this initiative.

EDS completed the base period of this project's task on September 30, and VA immediately extended the task order to continue its work. By the end of this initial period, EDS had completed over 600,000 contacts, including both calls and fulfillment activities for the vets.

"This is a mission that we take on with great pride," said Martha Dorris, GSA Deputy Associate Administrator for Citizen Services. "We owe it to our veterans to make sure they receive the benefits and services they need and deserve."

In a public statement dated May 30, 2008, Secretary Peake confirmed this sentiment: "*VA is focused on getting these veterans the help they need and deserve. I expect these calls to make a real difference in many veterans' lives.*"



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