Appendix C

National Survey of Veterans
Caveats on Data Comparisons

Comparing the 2010 National Survey of Veterans to Other Survey Data

The 2010 National Survey of Veterans (NSV) Report includes comparisons between the 2010 NSV results and a variety of extant surveys including the 2001 National Survey of Veterans, the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), and the 2007 Employment History Survey (EHS). In this appendix we provide some cautions and caveats on comparing results from the 2010 NSV with these sources. Discussion is organized by survey.

The 2001 National Survey of Veterans

As introduced in section 1.1 of the report, the 2010 NSV utilized a different sampling frame and data collection modality than the prior survey conducted in 2001. This was done to reflect changes in American utilization of technology (both traditional and emerging). These changes in methodology mean that direct comparisons between the 2010 and the 2001 survey may be tenuous. This is particularly true for questions directly affected by the presence of visual cues. One example of this includes those survey questions that asked for reasons why a Veteran had not enrolled in certain benefit programs. In the mailed, paper survey (or the on-line web survey) the respondents are able to read all the various options and then check those that they believe represent their reasons. In the interviewer-administered, telephone survey the interviewer asks simply for the reasons and then she inputs, or codes, the reasons that the respondent mentions. There is generally a probe of "any other reasons?" but the interviewer does not read a prescribed list. This means that the distribution of answers to a self-administered questionnaire can be very different from one administered by an interviewer.

In the present report we present data comparisons between the 2001 and 2010 surveys. However, due to the impact of the data collection mode, some differences in the survey items may be due to the differences in administration (also known as "mode effects"). We therefore caution the reader to keep this in mind when trying to ascribe meaning to any 2001 and 2010 differences.

The 2008 American Community Survey

The American Community Survey (ACS) estimates presented in this report are based on the 2008 ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) file. The ACS is based on an Area Probability Sample that utilizes information from the Decennial Census as its sampling frame. Since it is based on an Area Probability sample, it includes all residential units, not only those that receive mail. The 2010

NSV sample included only those residential units that received mail directly from the U.S. Postal Service. One important difference between the two surveys is the coverage of individuals residing in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living facilities. The ACS sample covers individuals in these types of "group quarters" while the 2010 NSV does not.

The 2007 Employment History Survey

The Employment History Survey (EHS), sponsored by the VA, was designed and conducted in 2007. The survey sample was selected from records at the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and included only those who had discharged from active duty within the prior 3 years. The sample was stratified into four groups:

- Active duty discharged between December 2004 and November 2005
- Active duty discharged between December 2005 and January 2006
- National Guard/Reserves demobilized between December 2004 and November 2005
- National Guard/Reserves demobilized between December 2005 and January 2006

Close to 5,000 Veterans were selected from each of these four strata. Based on the Employment History Survey Report, it is unclear how the weighting was completed. It seems likely that the weights are intended to sum to the DMDC database of those recently separating from active duty. The 2010 NSV is weighted to sum to the overall population of residential Veterans, as determined from the VA's VetPop model. It is unclear whether and how the different sampling and weighting approaches might affect the estimates.