

Office of Information and Technology

VA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

2019 Year in Review

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Information and Technology



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TABLE OF CONTENTS



4 LETTER FROM THE CIO



6 OUR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION



12 GOAL 1: EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE



18 GOAL 2: IT MODERNIZATION



36 GOAL 3: STRATEGIC SOURCING



40 GOAL 4: IT WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION



46 GOAL 5: SEAMLESS AND SECURE INTEROPERABILITY



54 2020 LOOK AHEAD



LETTER FROM THE CIO

On January 7, 2019, I joined the Office of Information and Technology (OIT), just as VA was building momentum for its Digital Transformation. The challenges were complex, but it was readily apparent that the OIT Team was tackling the digital challenges head on. We saw many early gains toward our IT modernization and customer service efforts to provide Veterans with the seamless and unified experience that they deserve. It was—and is—an honor to be part of such an impactful transformation. Over the past year, OIT has clearly demonstrated value to our Business Partners and, in turn, to more than 20 million Veterans.

For years, VA has been striving to improve our customer service—but in just one year, we kicked it into overdrive. We're doing more than simply improving our customer

service; we're pursuing cultural transformation that completely overhauls how we approach the business, our partnerships, and the work each OIT employee performs in the field.

We set an example both for our partners in VHA, VBA, and NCA and for the IT industry at large. With customer service top of mind, we drove technology solutions created with Veterans, not just for them. Our customers, after all, are the mission. They are why we're here.

Any IT executive understands that the sheer volume of IT requirements, the scope of an agency's cybersecurity posture, and the rapidly evolving field of IT can often overtake the perspective of why we do what we do as public servants. We know that we're serving our nation's Veterans, but how does the work we do every day in OIT impact them, personally?

That's why we have our annual OIT Year in Review. It's the macro view of key initiatives in 2019—the infrastructure modernization and enhancements, the customer satisfaction score improvements, the training and re-skilling we've aggressively pursued, and the partnerships and relationships we've cultivated to help VA's IT office become an employer and a partner of choice.

The results speak for themselves.



Mr. James P. Gfrerer shakes hands with Mr. Paul Hardy, Middle Tennessee Area Manager.

We've advanced VA's place as a leader of government innovation through Lighthouse, our open-source API sharing platform. With it, leading developers in the broader industry have secure access to VA data so that they can put fresh ideas to work and create solutions, tools, and applications that solve the problems Veterans care most about. Thanks to industry talent and VA data, we're delivering new solutions like the Benefits Intake API and the Health API that give Veterans more agency over their data, how they use it to control their health care, and how they can speed up processing of their benefits applications.

Internally, we continued an enterprise-wide shift to a DevSecOps and Product Line Management methodology, which changes the way we approach IT development, operations, and deployment, with security baked in throughout the process. By incorporating customer feedback into the development cycle from the very beginning, we're embodying the principle of building with our customers, not just for them. Gone are the days of developing products, software, and services in siloes; we're pursuing commercial off-the-shelf products, Software as a Service, and customer-focused development processes to provide the right tools for our partners' requirements, speeding delivery and rapid iterations of tools that ultimately provide Veterans with better care and services.

And of course, VA's biggest win in 2019 was the incredible success we saw in June by meeting our first of many MISSION Act milestones. We brought the 8,000 employees and 8,000 contractors of OIT together with our business partners in VHA to support a crucial initiative that completely transformed how Veterans access community care. We stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our partners

in VA to break down every barrier, get buy-in from every stakeholder, communicate every challenge, and focus IT resources on every roadblock that stood in our way.

We'll be building on that success through 2020 as we work to continue support for the Colmery Act, expand capabilities for MISSION Act, and begin shifting to a fully seamless, interoperable Electronic Health Record for our Veterans, from the point they enter military service through their transition to Veteran status and beyond.

A new year isn't a new start; it's a continuation and re-commitment to the mission that brought us to VA in the first place. We'll continue to exceed the expectations of our customers just as we did over the past twelve months, but we'll also continue to learn and grow.

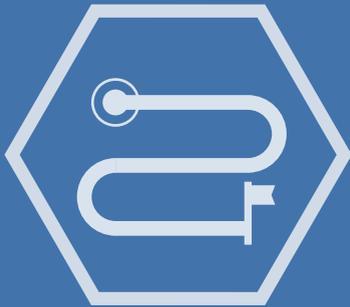
I'm so proud of each OIT employee and what they continue to deliver every day. I thank them for their service, passion, and dedication to the mission and our business partners. We in OIT are realizing our vision of becoming a world-class IT organization that provides a seamless, unified Veteran experience. We're doing this by focusing on VA's prime directive—improving our customer service—and in OIT, [It Starts With Us](#).



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James P. Gfrerer
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology
and Chief Information Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs



OUR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

OIT's Digital Transformation Strategy is our roadmap; it guides everything we do and ensures we're aligned to the VA Secretary's priorities. It keeps us focused on core principles that exemplify public service. It also aligns our actions to five goals and directs our progress across six focus areas that drive value for our Veterans, VA employees, and the taxpayers who fund VA.

VA'S PRIORITIES



Customer Service



MISSION Act Implementation



Business Transformation



VA/DoD Collaboration

Customer Service: Our goal is to make accessing VA services seamless, effective, efficient, and emotionally resonant for Veterans and their caregivers, beneficiaries, and families.

MISSION Act Implementation: This landmark legislation fundamentally transforms how VA approaches and delivers health care. As we improve our benefits and services for Veterans, we're also improving the choices they have over

where to receive that care and service. Since meeting our June 6 milestone, we have continued to make significant, impactful progress—but we are not finished yet.

Business Transformation: We empower our employees to provide the world-class customer service VA employees need and Veterans deserve. By reforming the IT systems responsible for HR Management, finance, and acquisition and supply chains, we're restructuring the very core of our operations in OIT.

VA/DoD Collaboration: We're working closely with DoD to implement a modern and fully interoperable electronic health record (EHR) inside and outside the departments. OIT is a crucial partner in this effort.

OIT'S FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Transparency



Accountability



Innovation



Teamwork

Transparency: We share our successes and our failures. We tell it like it is, instead of qualifying or glossing over the truth.

Accountability: We own the issues within our environment and our organization, and we hold ourselves accountable to take the steps to improve them while transparently sharing our progress along the way.

Innovation: We ask, "Why not?" and "What if?" We look at our environment and our Veterans' needs and find opportunities to change things for the better.

Teamwork: We work for the successes of the team, not the glory of the moment. We focus on outcomes. We ask ourselves, "Is this in the best interest of the Veteran?"

OIT'S FIVE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES/GOALS

These five imperatives drive our strategy and outcomes.

Exceptional Customer Service: Deliver exceptional customer service by reinvigorating partnerships with VA business lines to understand customer needs, prioritize business problems, and deliver IT solutions based on human-centered design and product management, culminating in a world-class Veteran experience.

Maps to: VA Secretary's priority of improving customer service

IT Modernization: Drive IT and VA capability modernization through digital transformation, the refreshing and decommissioning of software and infrastructure, and an OIT business value framework that is designed around customer-driven requirements.

Maps to: VA Secretary's priority of implementing the MISSION Act

Strategic Sourcing: Transform procurement and acquisition processes to support aggressive modernization efforts by optimizing all available sourcing capabilities and streamlining processes for selecting the right capability for each digital transformation requirement.

Maps to: VA Secretary's priority of completing business transformation

IT Workforce Transformation: Inspire a culture of digital transformation, IT modernization, and customer service in every OIT employee through education, training, reskilling, and professional certifications while transforming recruiting efforts to make OIT an employer of choice for next generation IT workers.

Maps to: VA Secretary's priority of completing business transformation

Seamless and Secure Interoperability: Achieve seamless and secure data interoperability across VA, DoD, Federal, and commercial partners by identifying, documenting, and disseminating well-defined, standardized, and secure design, interfaces, and processes to access authoritative data that streamlines the Veteran experience.

Maps to: VA Secretary's priority of Electronic Health Record Modernization



Exceptional
Customer Service



IT Modernization



Strategic Sourcing



IT Workforce
Transformation



Seamless and Secure
Interoperability

OIT'S SIX FOCUS AREAS

We are changing the way we procure services by taking a “buy first” approach to new systems, getting out of the business of building our own applications, and relying more on cloud, managed and shared services, and commercial-off-the-shelf products. To be successful we will need to focus on six areas.

Manage Data: We are defining authoritative data sources and ensuring data is consistent and secure across VA so we can better leverage our vast data stores, improve data-driven decision making, and simplify the way Veterans interact with VA platforms.

Migrate to the Cloud: We are migrating infrastructure and applications to commercial cloud providers to reduce operational costs and increase flexibility, allowing us to deliver services to Veterans more quickly and reliably.

Improve Cybersecurity: We are implementing an enterprise cybersecurity risk management framework—based on industry best practices—to stay at the forefront of protecting VA data and Veteran information from cyber threats.



Manage Data



Migrate to the Cloud



Improve Cybersecurity



Digitize Business Processes



Decommission Legacy Systems



Recruit and Retain a World-Class IT Workforce

Digitize Business Processes: We are upgrading VA's customer-facing digital tools to give Veterans easier access to their care and benefits while using new technologies and services to streamline our internal business processes.

Decommission Legacy Systems: We are moving critical functions from outdated platforms into more modern systems that operate at lower maintenance costs. We will reinvest these cost savings in projects to improve services for all Veterans.

Recruit and Retain a World-Class IT Workforce: We are not only dedicated to recruiting next generation IT workers to OIT, we are committed to training and re-skilling current employees and ensuring that VA has the right people powering its digital modernization.

COMBINING IT ALL TO BRING OUR STRATEGY TO LIFE

Everything that we do in OIT tracks directly to one of our five strategic imperatives and falls under one of our six focus areas.

Every OIT employee fits into this strategy like a single piece into a huge puzzle. No matter what state, town, or VA facility we're located in, we're intrinsically linked together by the strategy that defines our everyday work. From field employees at local VA Medical Centers to the

staff in the VA Central Office in Washington, D.C., we all have a crucial role in the success of major initiatives across the enterprise.

Our actions in 2019 are proof that even the smallest daily task can make a nationwide difference. With all of OIT working together from coast to coast, we can accomplish our goals and take great strides toward becoming the world-class IT organization Veterans need and deserve.

OIT EXECUTIVES RECEIVE 2019 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

From our executive officers to our field employees across the country, our organization is filled with women who are working to reshape the fields of information and technology in increasingly impactful ways. Ms. Susan Perez, Chief of Staff and Executive Director of the Office of IT Program Integration and Ms. Luwanda Jones, Deputy Chief Information Officer (DCIO) for Strategic Sourcing are two such women. They have been recognized with the 2019 Leading for Impact in Federal IT and Consulting: Women in Leadership award.

In addition to her role as OIT's Chief of Staff, Ms. Perez stood up the Office of IT Program Integration, which strives to maintain awareness of and connect the dots between cross-organizational initiatives. She explains her goal is to reduce siloed and duplicative efforts so that OIT staff can use their time and energy to focus on tasks that really matter: providing excellent customer service to our VA business partners.

As DCIO for Strategic Sourcing, Ms. Jones develops the plans and processes necessary to control, optimize, and leverage the volume of acquisitions across VA. Although OIT's Strategic Sourcing department is new, Ms. Jones has already cultivated a strong, talented

team that builds vendor relationships and implements new, innovative acquisition strategies and processes to ensure VA meets customers' requirements.

Two women from the larger VA organization who received this prestigious award are Dr. Laura J. Kroupa, the Chief Medical Officer of the Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization and Ms. Denise Kitts, Executive Director of Multi-Channel Technology in the Veteran Experience Office. They were recognized for their outstanding leadership and for guiding VA toward more innovative, Veteran-centric operations.



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Ms. Susan Perez speaking on a panel during the Women in Leadership Award ceremony.



VA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

GOAL 1: EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Deliver exceptional customer service by reinvigorating partnerships with VA business lines to understand customer needs, prioritize business problems, and deliver IT solutions based on human-centered design and product management, culminating in a world-class Veteran experience.

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION DEBUTS THE VETERANS LEGACY MEMORIAL

The Department of Veterans Affairs is making it easier for loved ones to find grave sites, digitally update burial plot information, and connect online with Veteran communities. A new digital platform called Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) that showcases service histories, biographical highlights, and military awards of deceased Veterans debuted in May 2019 from VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA).

VLM is an interactive digital application accessible via smartphones or other devices that features user-friendly information hosted securely in the cloud. Designed to empower and engage family members and friends of deceased service members, VLM helps users build communities in a virtual environment by sharing photos, stories, and information about their loved ones.

“For the first time, we’re giving voice to family members as to how their Veterans are memorialized,” said Dr. Bryce Carpenter, Program Director, Veterans Legacy Program.

The Veterans Legacy Program is an NCA effort partnering with universities and student volunteers to record deceased service members’ histories and served as a foundation for the VLM, said Dr. Carpenter. Developed in collaboration between NCA and OIT’s Enterprise Program Management Office, VLM has architecture and functionality built by third-party companies specializing in cloud infrastructure, and principles and protocols of user-experience (UX) and human-centered design.



Screenshot of the Veterans Legacy Memorial website

The project is part of VA's IT and Digital Modernization program and aligns with the President’s Management Agenda. Dr. Carpenter and other developers of VLM will be monitoring user experiences, adding new features, and making necessary adjustments to functionality as more capabilities are incorporated.

Dr. Carpenter said he is eager to begin receiving user feedback as the platform rolls out to all NCA’s sites over the next several months.

“We’re excited and honored to have developed VLM. It will greatly enhance the cemetery experience,” said Dr. Carpenter. “We can eventually import the stories of Veterans to homes, classrooms, and wherever family members and friends are found.”



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THE JOINT BUSINESS PLAN – A PATHWAY TO SUCCESS

VA's singular mission is to uphold President Lincoln's promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan." To fulfill this obligation requires collaboration and coordination between the Department's operating units and OIT. The OIT Account Management Office (AMO) is the linchpin between these organizations, charged with identifying investment opportunities to improve the Veteran experience.



As the face of OIT for VA's business partner administrations and offices, AMO strives to be a strategic partner and trusted advisor, working closely with business partners to determine the activities OIT should support. One of AMO's

key objectives is creating Joint Business Plans to collaborate on mutual business partner expectations, help find the critical funding for the agreed-upon initiatives, and track them until completion.

This document is AMO's prime artifact to build trust, teamwork, and transparency with OIT's business partners. It provides an integrated approach between OIT and the administrations, allowing for the alignment of goals, resources, and objectives to achieve targeted business outcomes. With a constant flow of moving parts across the entire VA enterprise, Joint Business Plans seek to organize the administrations' top priorities, show what can be accomplished with current funding, and keep a level of accountability that serves our Veterans just as President Lincoln set out to do.

CROSS-AGENCY COLLABORATION AND HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN ARE KEYS TO THE NEW DIGITAL DISABILITY COMPENSATION CLAIM TOOL

Filling out long paper forms can be a tedious, frustrating experience. That's why VA is continually looking to streamline processes for Veterans who apply for benefits. In March, VA rolled out an online Disability Compensation Claim Tool to make it more efficient for Veterans to submit disability claims. The tool is the digital front end that automatically populates a complex, 12-page form so that Veterans and their representatives don't have to do it manually.

In its first month alone, Veterans submitted 3,000 benefits compensation claims using the new tool.

This tool isn't just a digital version of the paper form, either—it implements several new features to improve the Veteran's experience, such as establishing an Intent-to-File date, asking user-friendly questions, automatically populating user answers into correct sections on the claims form, and shortening the overall claims adjudication. Most importantly, the Disability Compensation Claim Tool was

**PROCESSING
TIME FOR
DISABILITY
CLAIMS HAS
BEEN REDUCED
BY HALF**



created using human-centered design principles, with developers consulting Veterans at every step of the design process. By employing this methodology, developers can continue to tweak the tool to create the best possible experience for Veterans.

Since the tool's launch, overall processing time has been reduced by half. Before, the average disability claims processing time was somewhere between 108 and 120 days and could vary widely. Now, thanks to the Disability Compensation Claims tool, claims processing times are an average of just 63 days.



VHA AND OIT PARTNERSHIP LEVERAGES PROVIDER DATA TO IMPROVE VETERAN CARE

Through innovations like the VA MISSION Act, VA has been focused on providing Veterans with greater choice in selecting their health care providers. But we can't do it alone—and that's why the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and OIT closely collaborated to develop and launch the Provider Profile Management System (PPMS). As one of the many systems involved with successful MISSION implementation, PPMS helps VA employees give Veterans better access to available providers at VA medical centers and partnering community health providers.

Thanks to the close VHA-OIT partnership, this tool is revolutionizing the ways OIT and VA collect, store, and utilize provider data internally and within the external health care network, and this translates to enhanced customer service to Veterans. PPMS hosts information on providers and facilities that network with VA and makes the data available to VA employees, applications, and



Mr. Jack Galvin, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for IT Operations and Services, in the VHA OIT Joint Operations Center

the internal systems and tools that power the resources Veterans use to manage their care.

The data includes contact information of providers, their specialties and credentials, locations at which they offer care, and their affiliations to VA and other providers or organizations. PPMS also shows the relationships each provider has to VA and other providers. It is seamlessly interoperable with VA's other tools, systems, and

applications that require provider information, and acts as the main hub through which these resources can gather and report provider data.

Thanks to OIT's partnership with VHA and the successful implementation of the first requirements of MISSION Act, Veterans can have greater control over their health care and where they choose to receive it.

VBA EXCEEDS INDEPENDENCE DAY CHALLENGE GOAL

2019's Independence Day weekend marked the 243rd birthday of the United States of America—and it also marked a monumental week in which Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) broke a record for Veterans claims. To close out the VBA Independence Day Veterans Challenge in time for Independence Day, VBA completed over 260,000 claims in just eight weeks, significantly beating their goal to complete 255,000 Veterans claims by June 30.

Throughout the challenge, OIT supported VBA as our partners achieved their goal. We worked aggressively

to track down IT issues and swiftly implement solutions, including applying popular social media tagging methods to IT help desk tickets. VA staff tagged tickets with the #VBACLAIMS hashtag to identify and resolve high-priority issues.

Working #VBACLAIMS continues to be a priority for OIT as we support our business partners. Doing our best to ensure IT systems and services are working properly for claims specialists means our VBA business partners can continue to be successful every day, all year.



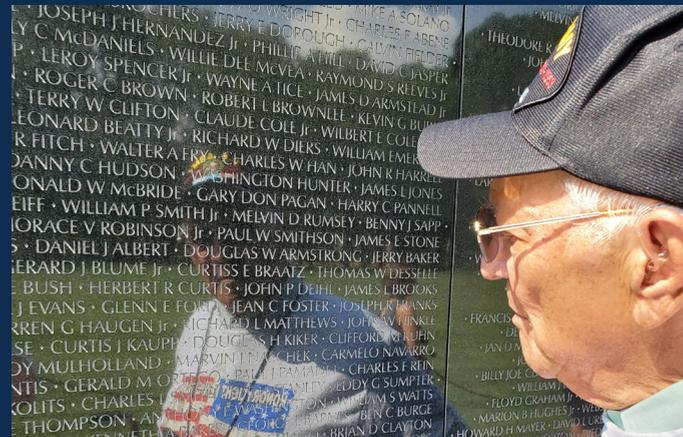
SELFLESS SERVICE TAKES FLIGHT

One VA employee has taken President Lincoln's charge to care for Veterans and their families to new heights—literally. Gloria-Ann Vieira, an IT professional supporting three VA health campuses in Boston, accompanied a Veteran from her community on an Honor Flight at the Veteran's special request.

In 2017, while participating in the Boston-area Operation Thank a Veteran, Ms. Vieira met Jose Cambara, an 86-year old Korean War Veteran who lives across the street from a Boston VA Medical Center (VAMC). The Cuban-born Mr. Cambara had not tried to access his earned benefits because he assumed that VA staff did not speak Spanish. Ms. Vieira took it upon herself to reassure him that there were always Spanish-speaking staff on hand and personally guided him through the process to formally access his VA benefits. Mr. Cambara now uses VA services regularly thanks to the outreach and outstanding customer service Ms. Vieira demonstrated.

With his permission, Ms. Vieira nominated Mr. Cambara for the Honor Flight Network, which sponsors and organizes memorable trips to Washington, D.C., free of cost to Veterans. When Mr. Cambara was selected in 2019 and Ms. Vieira asked who his escort would be, assuming it would be one of his daughters, he responded with a grin, "You're taking me, don't you know!" The two explored the nation's capital together and Mr. Cambara was able to visit the national war memorials while being honored by passersby.

When asked what she wanted others to learn from her experience, Ms. Vieira said "Something as simple as walking through the halls of VAMCs and thanking Veterans for their service can make all the difference. We're here to serve them because they've earned it."



Left: Ms. Gloria-Ann Vieira and Mr. Jose Cambara at the airport before the Honor Flight; Right: Mr. Cambara visits the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.



VA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

GOAL 2: IT MODERNIZATION

Drive IT and VA capability modernization through digital transformation, the refreshing and decommissioning of software and infrastructure, and an OIT business value framework that is designed around customer-driven requirements.

LIGHTHOUSE: VA'S VETERAN-CENTERED API PLATFORM

The availability of web and mobile applications for Veterans helps them quickly and conveniently connect with and use VA services to manage their health care and benefits. These applications help give Veterans seamless digital access to VA wherever they are—but VA wants to do more.

Lighthouse is VA's open Application Programming Interface (API) platform that creates a single, secure front door to VA's data for both VA and our partners. APIs are key to how data is accessed and controlled across the web. From leveraging single sign-on when logging into a website to automating the sharing of data from one service to another, they help us connect in ways that make our lives simpler.

Lighthouse began by using the same high-quality APIs as VA.gov and making them useful across VA and for third-party developers. We're partnering with developers who want to make apps that solve the problems Veterans care most about and giving them secure access to VA data to help them do it. Lighthouse hosts all of VA's APIs so developers can come in, get access to the data that they need to power their applications, and then share those applications with Veteran users. It's just one example of how OIT is strategically sourcing products and services that our Veterans need—and doing it by creating a

modern developer experience that is on par with top private sector companies.

VA's Developer Portal is a place for developers to easily learn about, access, and build on APIs available at VA. We continued iterating on the portal by talking to our users and learning their pain points and needs, shipping updates to production daily, and adding APIs. We have also added functionality, such as the ability to sign up for any of the APIs via self-service in a development environment. This self-service access lowers the barrier to entry and lets API consumers begin using VA APIs right away.

So far, more than 250 developers have signed up to test VA's APIs, with more getting access every day. As we continue to add APIs to Lighthouse, we hope that talented developers from across the industry will partner with us to create more mobile solutions.



The Lighthouse developer portal is a place for developers to learn about, access, and build on VA's APIs.

NEW VA.GOV IMPROVES VETERAN EXPERIENCE

VA redesigned and streamlined the VA.gov site so that Veterans can more easily find the information they need. Since its launch, the new VA.gov has served over 20 million unique users. After the project's completion in November 2018, the revamped site experienced an increase in customer approval and a surge in user engagement, resulting in dramatically improved data on site usage (data as of Dec. 2019):

- Eleven million unique logins in DSLogon, ID.me and MyHealtheVet—an increase of 278 percent
- Digital disability compensation application form submissions rose 27 percent
- Digital pension application form submissions rose 59 percent
- Digital pre-need burial application form submissions rose 91 percent
- Digital medical appointment scheduling transactions rose 57 percent
- Patient cancellations in VAR decreased 75.35 percent
- Claims views rose 572 percent
- Overall Customer Satisfaction Scores of all VA webpages rose 9 percent from 52.9 to 57.6. Scores on redesigned pages rose even higher to 66.3—a 25 percent increase

In addition, VA received an “A” grade for writing quality on its online resources from the non-partisan Center for



VA.gov home page designed with Veterans for Veterans

Plain Language, which specifically cited the new VA.gov's resources for suicide prevention as examples of gold-standard digital communication.

According to Mr. Charles Worthington, OIT's Acting Chief Technology Officer, "We don't just say the site works better. It's backed up by numbers. Our overall customer satisfaction score went up by five points—the biggest increase for a Federal agency." The new VA.gov is making it easier for Veterans to access the agency's most popular services, and the team will continue to make further updates and changes as the user population grows.



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OIT WINS AWARD FOR MODERN INTRANET SITE

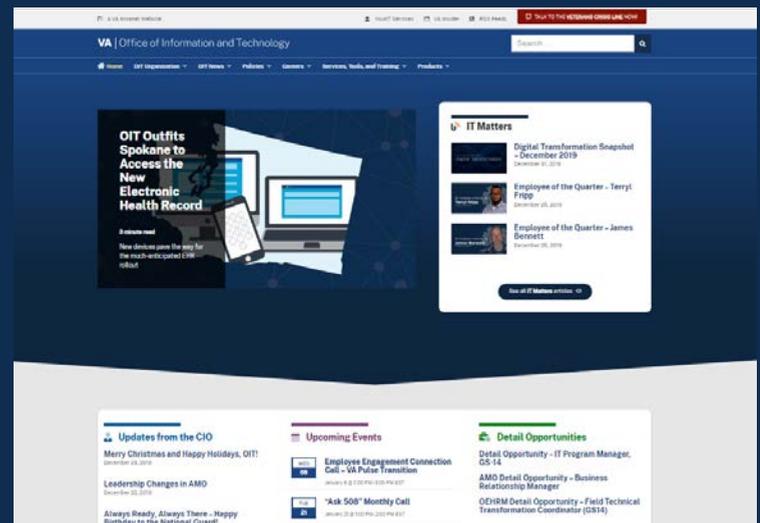
OIT's intranet site won an award for excellence as part of the Ragan Communications' 2018 Intranet Awards, which recognizes OIT's intranet site as user-friendly, navigable, accessible, and focused on human-centered design. The award demonstrates OIT's dedication to streamlining communication, enhancing our customer service, and championing a culture of accessibility.

OIT's intranet facilitates the exchange of information that helps our employees stay informed on organizational updates, learn how to use new IT tools and services, and enhance their professional development through a variety of programs and opportunities. Collectively, these IT capabilities underpin every benefit, service, and health interaction Veterans have with VA.

"Everything I do is focused on improving the customer experience," said IT Specialist Mr. Stephen Walker, who manages OIT's main web platforms. "I try to understand how our users would—or could—take advantage of the resources we make available and minimize the friction for them to get from point A to point B. People don't have the time to 'surf' our site looking for information, so I try to keep the site as solution-oriented as possible."

To promote the best experience using the OIT intranet—and in turn enable the exceptional customer service VA and our Veterans deserve—we embarked on a redesign in 2018 to conform to three important guiding principles:

- Adding content with purpose to meet employee needs
- Making content accessible to all users
- Using the natural capabilities of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) layouts for a clean, navigable look and feel.



The persistent focus on usability has driven a marked increase in the availability of information and resources relevant to OIT employees' daily jobs, empowering them with tools that enable the seamless, unified Veteran experience we envision. The information shared on the site affects everyone in OIT and VA—from how to use ServiceNow for help desk requests, upgrades to mobile devices, Windows 10 upgrades, and the Office365 rollout, to capabilities for IT support during natural disasters. Since the update, visits to the organization's intranet site have more than doubled.

Secretary Robert Wilkie consistently emphasizes that VA will continue to "come together across organizational boundaries" to focus on what's best for Veterans. OIT's intranet redesign demonstrates our commitment to building a world-class organization that works and communicates across organizational boundaries while championing a culture of accessibility.



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FIRST STEPS IN DEVOPS: ADOPTING A PRODUCT LINE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURE

As we embrace the culture and practices of a Development Operations (DevOps) environment, we are focusing on the evolution of several aspects of our organizational process and structure. One way we're beginning to do this is by migrating toward a Product Line Management (PLM) framework and structure to support DevOps. PLM is a strategic model focused on consolidating systems and projects that share business strategies, objectives, and customers within a common "product line." By aligning our workstreams to these product lines, we gain efficiencies in infrastructure, automation, and deployment and improve our ability to work collaboratively within OIT and with our business partners and end users.

Product Line Management in DevOps will promote coordination between our teams and our stakeholders, involving business customers, end users, development teams, and operations teams in every step of development and operations from product inception to product sunset.

This framework brings the customer focus back to the team and improves our ability to empathize with our end users, which in turn improves our results. Though we will have many separate product lines, we will be grouped within product line portfolios and unite through them as a single team with a shared goal.

We know that DevOps necessitates an IT mindset that encourages communication, collaboration, integration, and automation among each stakeholder involved in a product's lifecycle. We also know that OIT's product portfolios and complex infrastructure often call for rapid response situations where segmented groups can focus attentively on their specific challenges and overcome them. That is where the responsibility framework and our guiding principles in DevOps shine. By empowering accountability at the product line level, we ensure a dedicated, consistent and knowledgeable team that provides meticulous care and continuous innovation.

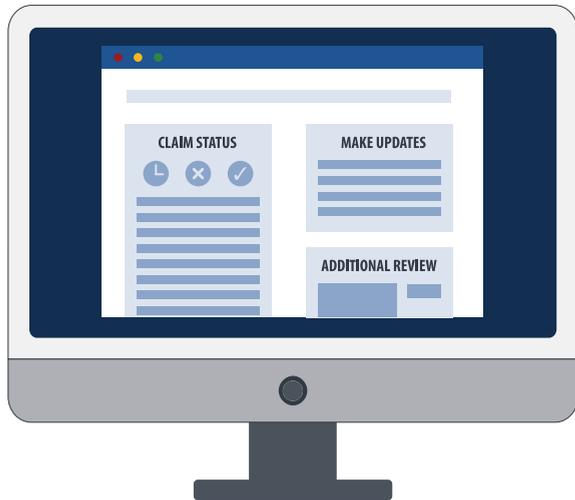
VA MAKES PROGRESS ON APPEALS MODERNIZATION

There are more than 18.2 million Veterans who need to access the care and benefits they've earned, yet who have been burdened by the process of retrieving updates on their claim decisions. With the tool, Veterans can see the status of their claim decision, make updates, request additional review, and more, all from a website that is easy to use and simple to navigate. As Mr. Christopher Given, a member of the development team, put it, "A tool like this is increasing the trust that Veterans can feel toward VA. It's VA being upfront with them, saying, 'We haven't forgotten about you.'"

And the Benefits Appeals Status tool is just one of the ways that VA has been working toward satisfying the requirements of Section 3 of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017: The Comprehensive Plan for Processing of Legacy Appeals and Implementing the New Appeals System. The Act—while

also requiring an overhaul of VA's current appeals process and providing Veterans and their families with increased choice in handling claims decision appeals—outlines specific areas of concern within VA, such as claim resolution options and the issue of slow or backlogged reviews.

VA re-examined the way it approaches the entire appeals process, which included implementing new options like the Status Tool, increasing its overall accountability, and working toward digital transparency. The process overhaul promises continued adherence to the Act's requirements and further improvements to internal processes across the enterprise. VA is focusing on implementing the new appeals system, processing pending legacy claim decision appeals, improving processing time within the new system, and monitoring the system implementation through measurable goals.



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VA PILOTING NEW TELEHEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

As part of VA's continued focus on preventing Veteran suicide, OIT partnered with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Telehealth Program in Wichita, Kansas. Together, OIT and VHA are piloting a new high-touch, high-tech way to help Veterans in distress: a VA Video Connect face-to-face video consult specializing in mental health.

Ms. Lyn Dickerson, Solution Delivery Endpoint Engineering, said of the partnership, "To properly serve those at risk for suicide, we need collaboration, innovation, and the ability to offer them a personal connection more than ever."

The video capabilities build on VA's Telehealth Suicide Prevention Program, which uses home telehealth data to monitor and respond to Veterans in mental or emotional distress. Since many of those at highest risk for suicide receive inpatient mental health care, they are enrolled in the three-month telehealth monitoring program prior to discharge. Now, in addition to receiving home telehealth monitoring devices, if a Veteran doesn't have a mobile device of their own, VA loans them an iPad. This allows VA health care providers to maintain an even stronger and more personal face-to-face connection. The iPads also offer Veterans another point of access to reach VA health care providers as well as the mobility to connect to providers no matter where they are.

"We know that the risk of suicide is highest during that first week following discharge from inpatient care, so we enroll them in the telehealth program before they leave facilities. Being able to now offer Veterans this face-to-face video telehealth connection capability is a tremendous benefit," said Ms. Melicia Jordan-Yette, Telehealth Program Manager for VHA's Home Telehealth/Telemedicine service offerings.



Although comprehensive evaluation of the pilot has not yet begun, health care providers believe that the video capabilities are making a difference. Ms. Jordan-Yette said, "Our providers report that face-to-face video connection is very impactful for Veterans. They need a personal connection in a time of crisis, and now, thanks to our partnership with OIT, we are deploying and refining enhanced tools to help them."

VA WINS EXCELLENCE AWARD AT TECHNOLOGY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

Author Arthur C. Clarke once said that “any sufficiently advanced technology is equivalent to magic,” and we’re making magic here in OIT. In November 2019, Chief Financial Officer Willie Gaddis and the IT Resource Management (ITRM) Technology Business Management (TBM) team took home the overall excellence award at this year’s TBM Conference.

This conference brought together a community of business technology leaders committed to improving technology investments and awarded those who have excelled in business alignment, IT optimization, and strategy and planning. The TBM excellence award recognizes organizations that have put all the pieces of TBM together with urgency, speed, and quality—moving beyond mere federal compliance to spending justification.

Mr. Gaddis’s TBM team went above and beyond in all these categories since launching the first version of their TBM tool in April 2019. In the last year, their hard work helped improve OIT’s already robust financial process, providing an unprecedented line of sight into cost and performance transparency. Through this model, we can better understand how resources contribute to outputs, find efficiencies, discover new opportunities, and align, train, and equip our people to become more agile in an ever-changing technology environment.

And we’re not the only ones who benefit; OIT’s TBM model drives accountability and transparency, helping us to be better stewards of taxpayer dollars and make better evidence-based decisions to improve the value and service delivery we provide to our most important customers—our Veterans.



Left to right: Mr. Joel Pearson, Ms. Emilee Pardo, Ms. Heather Wittneben, Ms. Leti Sierra-Fuentes, Mr. Stan Warren, Ms. Lei Bruno, Mr. Anthony Pember, Mr. Willie Gaddis, Mr. Ryan Woodward, Ms. Kristina Nguyen, Ms. Tanya Finley, Mr. Wally Potts, Ms. Faith Roy, Ms. Kristy McKenzie, Ms. Kimberly Clark, Mr. David Quirk, Ms. Glennette Brown, Mr. Larry Davis, Ms. Felicia Chao

VA VIDEO CONNECT POWERS TELE-COUNSELING

When the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service (VR&E) wanted to offer Veterans an upgraded, high-resolution, 508-compliant tele-counseling option for accessing VR&E services, they partnered with OIT to deliver VA Video Connect. Since its launch, Veteran usage of VR&E's tele-counseling increased by 200 percent.

Mr. Kevin Scott, VR&E's Assistant Director of Operations, said "Since the December launch, we've averaged over

1,000 tele-counseling appointments per month, versus the 200–300 per month we saw in the past using a different platform." VR&E leveraging VA Video Connect is one example of VA's efforts to modernize and improve customer service by providing Veterans greater flexibility in how they access services.



[Read More](#)

VA SQUARES UP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

For some Veterans, having no place to call home is a grim reality—a reality VA cannot accept. VA and OIT's Account Management Office are taking proactive steps to change this. By collaborating with VHA, AMO is developing strategies for leveraging technology to help combat the complex issue of Veteran homelessness.

SQUARES, or Status Query and Response Exchange System, is one of those solutions. By entering unique identifiers such as the individual's name, date of birth, and social security numbers into its web interface, SQUARES helps staff quickly retrieve reliable, detailed information about a Veteran's status and eligibility for homeless programs.

Veterans previously needed to submit a form to a VA Medical Center (VAMC) to inquire about their eligibility for homeless programs. This process was cumbersome and paper-based, delaying much-needed access to programs Veterans had earned and placing the responsibility on the Veteran him or herself.

NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

SOCIAL SECURITY #



The latest update to SQUARES allows VA Homeless Program grantees and other external organizations to apply for SQUARES access, streamlining eligibility. This partnership empowers community organizations to help Veterans connect to VA programs. It also reduces the number of hours spent by VA employees processing paper forms to confirm Veteran eligibility, resulting in a much-improved customer experience.

With nearly 700 service organizations registered, SQUARES is already making an impact on the lives of Veterans nationwide. With each new organization that comes

online, VA takes another step toward its goal of eradicating Veteran homelessness.

BENEFITS INTAKE API REDUCES VETERANS' CLAIMS PROCESSING TIME

As part of VA Secretary Robert Wilkie's commitment to improving customer service, OIT continues developing fresh tools that reduce claims application and processing time to streamline the benefits process for Veterans. Benefits application programming interfaces (APIs) are like electrical sockets that connect many different consumer devices to one power—or in this case, data—source. The Benefits Intake API and Benefits Claims API represent two of the many APIs currently available through VA's Lighthouse API program.

The Benefits Intake API accepts claim documents in PDFs and passes them digitally to mail processing vendors for uploading to VA's Centralized Mail Portal. Claims Assistants then enter claims in the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), allowing claims to be processed five to six days faster than those submitted via paper mail.

The Benefits Claims API lets organizations submit eligible Veteran claims electronically, allowing the API to automatically establish the claims in VBMS, reducing processing time by about 10 days.



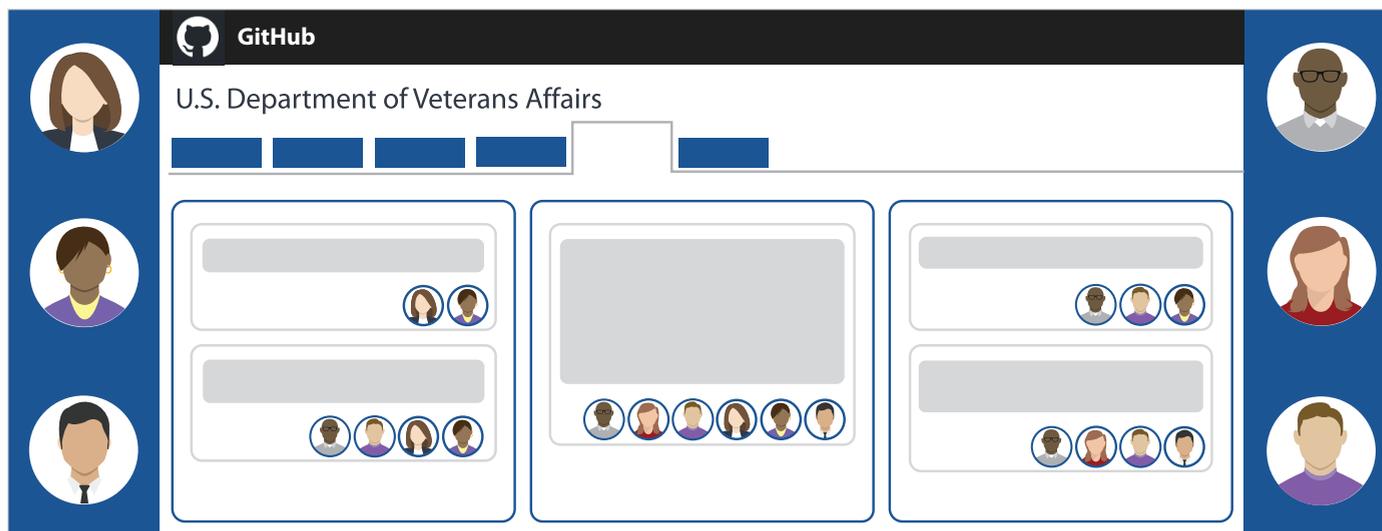
GITHUB: EMBRACING A MODERN TOOL FOR COLLABORATION AND AGILE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Collaboration, automation, and modern tools are fundamental elements of OIT's new DevOps approach. One tool in our DevOps toolkit, GitHub, embodies these principles and is proving to be indispensable to developers, product managers, and IT project teams.

GitHub is an open-source version control system that OIT is using as a software-as-a-service option for project planning and oversight. GitHub helps product and project management teams review changes, discuss problems, and identify potential solutions. GitHub's additional features, including pull requests and issue tracking, facilitate real-time collaboration

Thanks to this tool, developers can collaborate and contribute to product development teams on day one, eliminating lost time while waiting to obtain VA network access. GitHub is interoperable with other tools, like Jira, Jenkins, TravisCI, and CircleCI, to deploy software to staging, test, and production environments. For example, GitHub can be configured to alert an engineering team's Slack channel every time someone makes a new pull request requiring a code review.

Taking advantage of tools like GitHub is one way OIT is facilitating a DevOps approach and collaboration across the enterprise.





Mr. James P. Gfrerer, Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer with the OIT Senior Executive Leadership Team during a Digital Modernization strategy offsite

MISSION ACT

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act of 2018 strengthens VA's ability to offer community care. Through MISSION Act, VA is increasing access to community health care and local walk-in services, expanding benefit eligibility for Veteran caregivers, and increasing access to VA telehealth services.

On June 6, 2019, VA's Office of Information and Technology (OIT) launched the Decision Support Tool (DST) and enhancements to ten legacy systems across the country to fulfill key requirements of the MISSION Act's community care changes. Leading up to the initial delivery of these key requirements, OIT worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Veterans Health Administration (VHA) colleagues and other offices throughout VA to champion the initial launch of the capabilities and promote exceptional customer service across the enterprise.

“Never, in my experience, was VA ever so well-prepared to implement a major change as we were with this one.”

Dr. Steve Lieberman, Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health (VHA)

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Months of effort across OIT divisions facilitated success with our VHA customers and ultimately benefitted our Veterans.

Key OIT accomplishments include:

DevOps Integration: OIT accomplished in 5 months what would traditionally take over 18 months by leveraging DevOps methodologies and emphasizing collaboration and communication throughout the development, testing, fielding, operating, and monitoring of DST.

Development: OIT worked closely with VHA to elicit requirements, adopted the Agile discipline, and worked tirelessly to deliver functionality for DST and ten legacy supporting systems.

IT Operations: Over 6,000 members of the IT Operations and Services team were fully ready to support on launch day. Embracing DevOps collaboration, IT staff established the Joint Operations Center, conducted MISSION Act Daily Exercises, and established full Area Manager engagement, posturing the enterprise to deliver on June 6 and beyond.

Communication Planning: OIT set the standard for leading consistent and transparent communications with our internal and external stakeholders throughout this effort.

OIT'S ROLE AND FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIP

MISSION Act implementation on June 6 was a success due to the close partnership and communication between OIT and VHA. A key component of this success was the coordination and engagement with partners, stakeholders, and colleagues out in the field. Senior leadership engaged with area managers and field staff, both virtually and in person, as they worked to implement the requirements of the MISSION Act at each of their sites.

VHA and OIT worked shoulder-to-shoulder throughout the launch, setting up a Joint Operations Center at VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. to monitor planning, deployment, and application performance activities and to direct roll out of MISSION Act technologies and efforts across VA. The close alignment of business and IT functions paved a path of success on June 6; both teams were fully-prepared for launch. Everyone from leadership to end users to local IT staff worked together to train and prepare.



OIT and VHA staff monitor DST implementation from the VA Joint Operations Center in Washington, D.C.

EMISSARIES IN THE FIELD

OIT and VHA leadership visited 5 initial operating capability (IOC) test sites in May and 28 field locations across the country on June 6, 2019. Every leadership representative participating in the emissary visits found them to be a valuable and worthwhile experience that helped attendees learn more about VA, VHA, and OIT and empathize with business customers.

In addition, emissaries and leadership of both OIT and VHA regularly met with Area Managers to make sure that they had their fingers on the pulse of MISSION Act activities as they were happening. This led to improved responsiveness



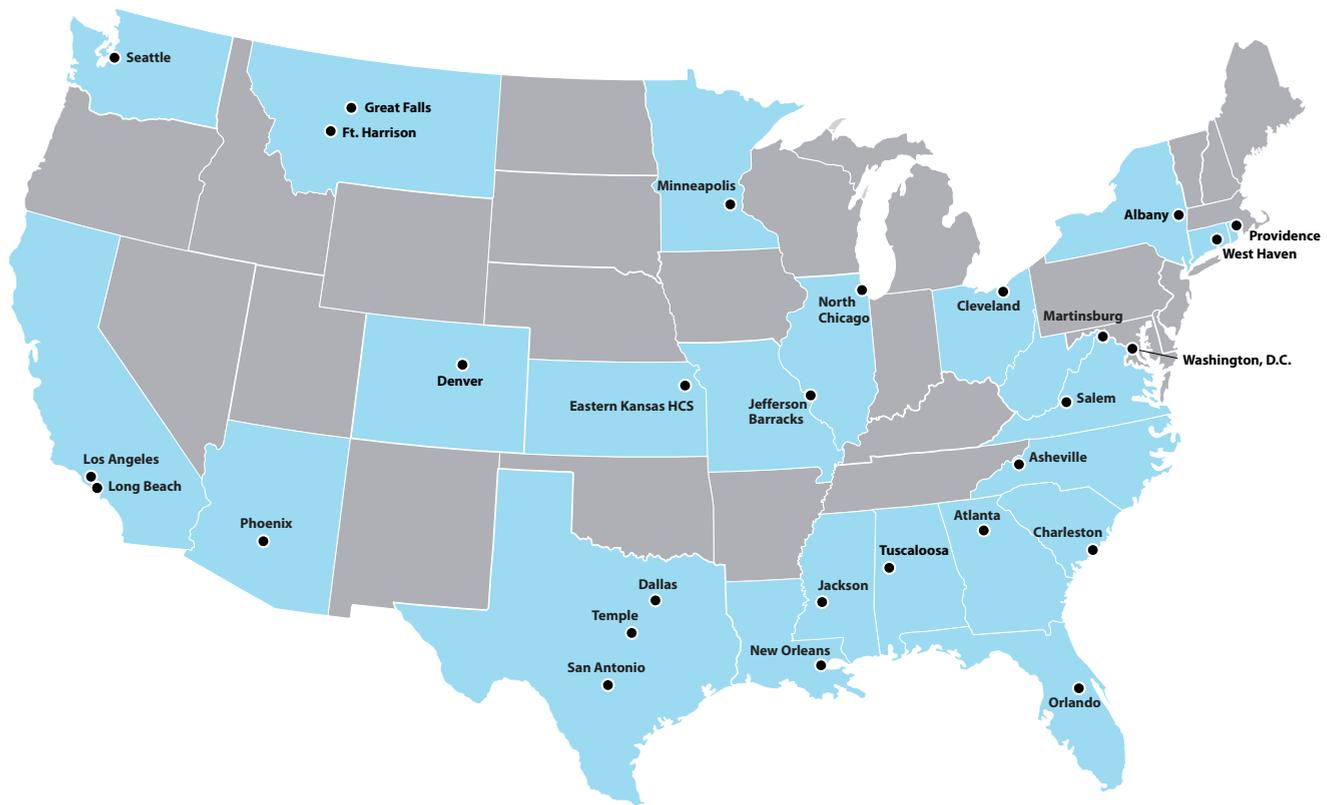
Mr. Gary Stevens, Deputy Chief Information Security Officer and Executive Director, Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy, and OIT colleagues in Cleveland, Ohio on MISSION Act launch day

and rapid resolution of issues, which in turn helped VA employees in the field focus on what mattered: learning to use the Decision Support Tool to improve Veteran care.

MISSION Act Champions engaged with OIT and VHA leadership, sharing updates, guidance, resources, and information with staff. Engaging, coordinating, and utilizing champions armed offices and programs with critical

information updates around MISSION Act progress and delivery.

Area leadership unanimously reported strong morale and well-trained personnel. They also reported excellent responsiveness from the cross-functional team in the Joint Operations Center.



June 6, 2019 emissary site visit locations

OPERATIONS PREPARATIONS LEADS TO LAUNCH SUCCESS

To facilitate a seamless Decision Support Tool deployment and uninterrupted service to medical personnel and Veterans, OIT worked closely with VHA staff to establish the Joint Operations Center. This hub served as a command center for VHA, OIT, and other key Department subject matter experts to ensure issues were quickly identified, escalated, and resolved. Medical centers established local area command centers to provide on-site support for clinicians and users.

Teams coordinated and thoroughly tested production support processes, roles and responsibilities, and knowledge management information prior to go-live. Month-long MISSION Act Daily Exercises prior to go-live helped set initial strategy and identify key points of contact for major incidents. In these exercises, OIT triage teams went through both large and small-scale hypothetical scenarios. The teams applied lessons learned to the potential real-life scenarios and worked through each situation. These exercises helped OIT anticipate possible worst-case scenarios and address them prior to launch.



Decision Support Tool testers at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

As part of the operations team's issue escalation and triage mechanisms, they determined efficient ways to identify ticket categories early in the issue resolution process. This streamlined the ticketing system and allowed IT support to prioritize tickets that affected MISSION Act-related activities and operations.

COMMUNICATION AND PLANNING

The communication planning and execution in OIT set the bar for consistent, transparent communication across the entire VA organization.

Sharing all progress, key milestones, future plans, and even road bumps in the process was crucial not only to maintaining trust, but also to ensuring that everyone was

educated and informed on the status of MISSION Act—maintaining high morale and dedication to delivery. OIT also took advantage of multiple communication routes such as Slack channels, daily and weekly scrum meetings, Skype meetings and calls, in-person check-ins, and travel to sites. These efforts ensured that activities were on schedule and that team members understood not only their roles

and responsibilities, but leadership's reinforcement and assistance with delivering MISSION Act key requirements.

In May, the Chief Information Officer designated the month as "MISSION Act Month," driving further content creation and drastically increasing traffic to the intranet site. This designation was made thanks to a suggestion by our team to personalize MISSION Act by featuring employees across the enterprise and their hard work, dedication, and collaboration throughout MISSION Act Month. Through frequent "MISSION Act Moments," OIT shared human-interest stories that spanned the entire country and showed VA employees' preparedness to deliver MISSION Act requirements on time.

By the time we achieved our initial June milestone, MISSION Act accounted for more than a quarter of the traffic on the OIT webpage.



OIT and VHA senior leaders in a joint MISSION Act Town Hall (left to right: Mr. James P. Gfrerer, OIT Assistant Secretary and Chief Information Officer; Dr. Jennifer MacDonald, VHA Director of Innovations and Education; Dr. Richard Stone, Executive in Charge for VHA; and Mr. Bill James, OIT Deputy Assistant Secretary for DevOps)

OIT MISSION ACT OUTREACH BY THE NUMBERS

- **42,444** unique page views on the MISSION Act intranet webpage
- More than **350** briefings
- Over **75** MISSION Act communications products created (and counting)
- More than **50** Frequently Asked Questions published
- **13** MISSION Act Moments published including blogs, photos, and videos
- **5** communication packages and toolkits prepared
- **4** training videos posted
- **3** websites launched
- **2** OIT-wide town halls conducted
- **2** fact sheets created
- **1** MISSION Act overview video published
- **1** crisis readiness communication plan published
- **1** OIT-wide MISSION Act After-Action Report published

WE'RE NOT DONE YET

MISSION Act didn't end in June. OIT continues to deliver new functionality, updates, and upgrades to IT systems to meet MISSION Act requirements. We're making continuous updates to the Decision Support Tool and the ten legacy systems tied to community care. We're also releasing IT software to support the expansion of VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers under the Caregiver Support Program. Over time—and beginning with OIT's recent nationwide rollout of the new Caregiver Record Management Application to support the Caregiver Support Program—more family caregivers will have access to the program expansion and more eligible Veterans will receive the support and benefits they need.

This year, embracing true DevOps culture, we improved our delivery, understanding, and use of Minimum Viable Products in OIT. We delivered initial versions of our IT products quickly, continuously improved them, iteratively added functions and features, and incorporated real-time customer feedback. Minimum Viable Products help VA reduce costs and deliver functionality more rapidly—enabling the exceptional service our Veterans deserve.

OIT delivered on our promise on June 6—but we're not done yet. We're taking the lessons learned from MISSION Act and applying them to all future launches for major programs, including the Caregiver Record Management Application, the Colmery Act, and Electronic Health Record Modernization.





VA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

GOAL 3: STRATEGIC SOURCING

Transform procurement and acquisition processes to support aggressive modernization efforts by optimizing all available sourcing capabilities and streamlining processes for selecting the right capability for each digital transformation requirement.

TECH INCUBATOR – HOW OIT IS FOSTERING INNOVATION THROUGH NEW SOURCING OPPORTUNITIES

Tech Incubators can be a viable solution for those who are just starting in an industry. They can be a way to get an unknown name out, help a new business venture get on its feet, or show future clients and customers what a talented engineer can do. But what exactly is a Tech Incubator, and how can a Federal organization like OIT take advantage of it?

Tech Incubators are organizational ventures with a goal of kick-starting innovation in a local—or even nation-wide—environment of an industry. An Incubator will invite developers, designers, software engineers, and technicians to come and perform their work and foster innovation within the company; in return, the company benefits from the innovations that are created. Large companies like Google and Microsoft might consider being a Tech Incubator to give up-and-coming software designers the resources and space they need to develop their products, then acquire the products and business once they are fully stood up.

But in OIT's case, our Tech Incubator is designed as a way to give outside developers and industry talent a foot in the door with Federal work, rather than a way for us to purchase new capabilities. With a Tech Incubator, OIT can strategically source these innovations and ensure that

With a Tech Incubator, OIT can strategically source these innovations and ensure that Veterans benefit from them, while being mindful of our own IT spend.

Veterans benefit from them, while being mindful of our own IT spend. As designers or developers work with the resources and capabilities offered by our Tech Incubator, the benefits are twofold: the designers get secure access to VA data and Federal resources, and OIT gets to be a part of the creation of new tools, applications, and services that Veterans need and want.

The end goal is to ultimately ensure that more products—whether they are smartphone apps, innovative new tech gadgets, or software and programs—are available to solve the problems Veterans care most about. In other words, it's not about profit or acquisition; it's about strategically sourcing new solutions that serve our nation's Veterans.

ADDING SOME SAAS TO THE OIT CUSTOMER SERVICE TOOLKIT

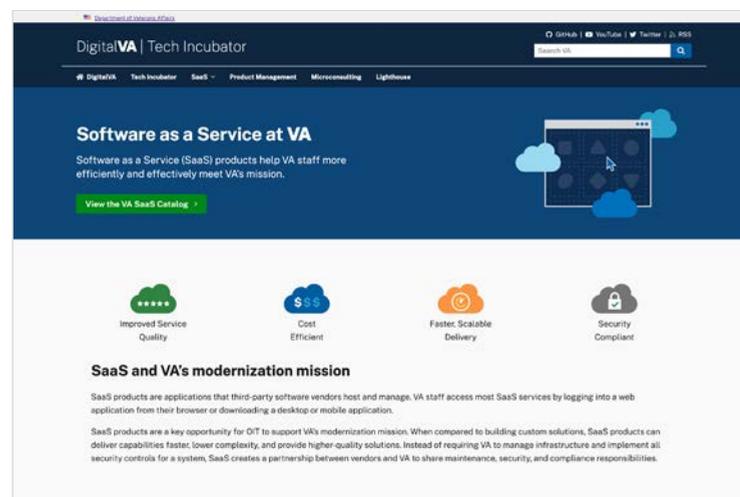
When you need to deliver higher-quality, user-friendly technology capabilities to your customers quickly and securely and equip them with the tools they need to serve Veterans, then you need Software-as-a-Service (SaaS). That’s why OIT offers “white glove” SaaS concierge solutions that empower customers to deploy software faster than ever.

SaaS products are cloud-hosted applications managed by a third-party software vendor. They’re products we can quickly adopt, versus spending time and resources developing more complicated solutions in-house. SaaS is not hosted in the VA environment or the VA enterprise cloud, so there’s no need for lengthy request and approval processes—the products are quickly deployed to provide much needed services. VA staff simply follow the assessment protocols outlined in the SaaS Inquiry form to see if their environment is appropriate for a SaaS product.

The SaaS Catalog lists some of the approved products already in use across VA. For example, Github allows users to securely work together on project and track their progress and actions for every team member to see, no matter where they’re located. Other offerings include Pluralsight, a training tool that builds technology skills

needed to deliver digital products, and Glooko, a diabetes-management tool for clinicians, coaches, and patients.

SaaS is a great way for VA to provide customers with digital tools to boost productivity and support exceptional customer service and IT Modernization goals—while controlling costs and being accountable stewards of taxpayer resources.



VA's Software-as-a-Service Catalog website

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

The weeks leading up to the holiday season can be busy, full of events and last-minute shopping. But for VA, it is one of the most wonderful times of the year—a chance to connect and collaborate with people looking to make a difference in the lives of Veterans.

From December 9 through 11, nearly 2,400 vendors and contractors met with 194 VA personnel at the ninth annual National Veterans Small Business Engagement (NVSBE) in Nashville, Tennessee.

This event, organized by VA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), is the largest procurement event of its kind, bringing together vendors from the information technology, medical, and specialty services fields to network with procurement-ready suppliers and buyers.

Ms. Ruby Harvey, OSDBU's Executive Director, opened the conference on Tuesday morning along with Mr. James Byrne, VA's Deputy Secretary.

"We're building VA for the 21st century," said Mr. Byrne in his welcoming address, speaking to the audience about VA's top priorities and the agency's history of transformation. "We're modernizing the IT infrastructure across the agency. Everything sits on this IT backbone without a degradation of service."

OIT's Office of Strategic Sourcing also presented, helping attendees understand how to do business with OIT and emphasizing the importance of strategic sourcing practices. Mr. James P. Gfrerer, VA's Chief Information Officer, made a guest appearance, helping to answer some audience questions.

"Strategic sourcing is a capability that's relatively new, and I'm proud of Luwanda [Jones] and her team as to how they're maturing," he noted. "Moving forward, we want to outsource commodity and insource complexity to free up our workforce to do important, impactful work."

During the conference's roundtable discussions, vendors were able to meet with key personnel in smaller, intimate sessions where vendors could make strong first impressions on leadership. In larger business opportunity sessions, OIT procurement decision makers presented new contracts and opportunities for the remainder of the fiscal year. Vendors were also able to network in the conference's vast exhibit hall, full of booths and product demonstrations.

As VA and OIT continue to improve and streamline the procurement process, events like NVSBE are essential to ensuring OIT collaborates with the best vendors to create the best experience for all Veterans.



Left to Right: Ms. Luwanda Jones, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Strategic Sourcing; Ms. Tina Burnette, Executive Director, Acquisition Category Management; and Mr. James P. Gfrerer, Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer, attend a session at NVSBE



VA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

GOAL 4: IT WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

Inspire a culture of digital transformation, IT modernization, and customer service in every OIT employee through education, training, reskilling, and professional certifications while transforming recruiting efforts to make OIT an employer of choice for next generation IT workers.

VA EARNS SECOND PLACE IN CYBERSECURITY COMPETITION

The Department of Veterans Affairs Cyber Security Operations Center (VA-CSOC) team demonstrated the Department's cybersecurity prowess in the Federal Cyber Fire Puzzle Challenge, which was sponsored by the Department of Energy Integrated Joint Cybersecurity Coordination Center. The VA-CSOC team, which included Mr. Ashraf Aziz, Mr. Matthew Benton, Mr. James Brackett, Mr. Allen Butler, Mr. Jesse Hutchinson, Mr. Alvin Nham, Mr. Khristopher Tolbert, and Mr. Sean Thompson, placed second after competing against 14 other teams representing federal and military agencies, including the Army, the Navy, and the Department of Homeland Security. The CSOC team's achievement in the competition underscored VA's role as a cybersecurity leader among peer agencies.

The competition challenged teams' critical thinking on a variety of cybersecurity areas, including "No Code," steganography, digital forensics, and code breaking. One example codebreaking puzzle included a simple music file with no instructions. After careful deliberation, the team managed to deconstruct the file and found a secret message hidden inside a series of folders with a text file and the answer. Hiding files is a common hacking technique that allows threats to slip through filters undetected, so puzzles like this help train staff to recognize these types of attacks.

The eight-person VA-CSOC team, composed of federal and contract staff, worked together to solve these multi-disciplinary puzzles. Mr. Sean Thompson, VA-CSOC team leader, emphasized that creative and collaborative problem

solving was key because no single team member knew everything necessary to complete each challenge. "It takes a lot of different layers and skills for problem solving," said Mr. Thompson.

"CSOC's second place finish shows that VA is one of the elite cybersecurity teams in the government, ensuring that Veterans' data is safe and secure," said Mr. Paul Cunningham, VA's Chief Information Security Officer.



The team worked remotely in shifts to tackle the puzzles. As team members rotated, they handed off crucial information—echoing how these and other cybersecurity professionals also handle issues in the real world. As Mr. Thompson explained, "Handing off information is a critical skill in and of itself."

The team's success in the competition demonstrates the organization's ongoing commitment to securing VA's systems and Veterans' data.

HCM PUTS VA ON RADAR FOR CYBERSECURITY PROS AT JOB FAIR

In OIT, we've always understood that Veterans put their trust in VA to keep their data secure, and they depend on us to continuously improve our cybersecurity measures. We're committed to hiring and retaining dedicated, talented employees who understand this and the constantly evolving cybersecurity landscape.

Representatives from OIT's Human Capital Management (HCM) office connected with about 900 well-qualified, prospective employees at the annual CyberCorps Scholarship for Service job fair and shared with them the benefits of working for VA and serving Veterans.

HCM's Ms. Donna Abernathy, Dr. Annette Taylor, Ms. Angela Dural, and Ms. Marixa Duarte, in collaboration with the Human Resource Management and Consulting Service, discussed VA internships and career opportunities with candidates at the Gaylord Resort and National Convention Center at Maryland's National Harbor. The HCM team received hundreds of resumes from highly qualified candidates who demonstrated a strong background in cybersecurity. Connecting with these skilled candidates is a win for HCM, helping to ensure OIT continues to streamline its hiring process and fill critical positions more quickly.



The Scholarship for Service program, managed by the National Science Foundation with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, demonstrates the critical need for information technology professionals in federal, state, local, and tribal governments. In return for scholarships, students agree to work in a cybersecurity-related positions for federal, state, local, or tribal government following graduation. Since its inception in 2001, Scholarship for Service has awarded scholarships to more than 35,000 graduate and undergraduate students from 70 institutions.

This job fair is one of many events HCM representatives attend to promote OIT's mission and vision and recruit a modernized workforce at VA.

VA'S CIO WINS FEDERAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer, Mr. James P. Gfrerer, received the 2019 FedScoop 50 Federal Leadership Award for his work as a “federal leader who helps their agency implement new technologies, strategies, and IT programs to lower the cost of government while making it more innovative, agile, and effective.”

As a leader, Mr. Gfrerer has stressed the importance of inter-departmental collaboration and the need for OIT to work shoulder-to-shoulder across the enterprise to deliver quality customer service for Veterans. This award is recognition of OIT's progress on those priorities.

Over the past year, Mr. Gfrerer has led OIT's support for implementation of MISSION Act. Under his leadership, OIT also closely collaborated with the Veterans

Benefits Administration to expand and enhance the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act—known as the “Forever GI Bill”—and he led creation of OIT's Digital Transformation Strategy.



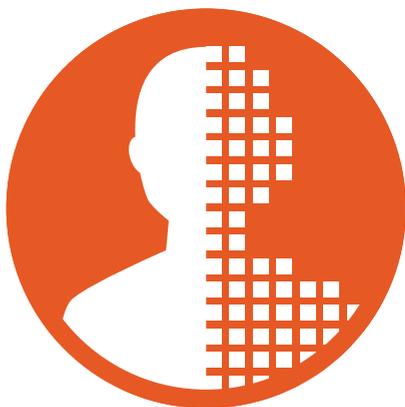
Top: Mr. James P. Gfrerer visited VA Medical Centers around the country in 2019. In Madison, Wisconsin he inspected parts of the IT network; Bottom: In Nashville, Tennessee, he learned about the DaVinci surgical robot, a high-tech medical device supported by the VA network (bottom).



[Read More](#)

OIT'S RESKILLING PROGRAM PILOT DRIVES IT MODERNIZATION

IT modernization is one important key to enabling our top priority: improving the customer experience for our Veterans. We're well underway with efforts like electronic health record modernization, telehealth expansion, and the new VA.gov, but this IT modernization isn't just about systems and technology—it's about people.



In its article, "Looking Inward for Talent: Retraining Employees for Tomorrow's Jobs," the Partnership for Public Service recognized VA's novel approach to reskilling and upskilling current OIT employees to meet the Department's IT modernization challenges today.

Started in 2018, this effort centered on an evaluation of the existing IT landscape and a forecast for technical and digital shifts in the IT field. VA also conducted a workforce study to forecast and assess the supply and demand for specific skills and roles. This assessment identified changing roles based on shifting agency priorities, increased demand for skills, and effective workforce strategies that address these challenges.

Reskilling employees allows VA to provide the level of care and services that Veterans have earned, but in new ways—similar to the customer experiences Veterans have come to expect from the latest technology, health care, and banking organizations in the private sector. Reskilling our employees is a critical component of the Department's wider modernization efforts and it will enable VA to effectively navigate the ever-changing IT landscape.



[Read More](#)

DOUBLING UP: OIT WINS GOLD AND HONORABLE MENTION IN THE AVA DIGITAL AWARDS

OIT won a Gold AVA Digital Award for the 2018 National Cybersecurity Awareness Month (NCSAM) video series and an Honorable Mention for the 2018 OIT Midyear Review.

As part of Secretary Wilkie's commitment to providing excellent customer service for all Veterans, OIT produced the 2018 Midyear Review video series to document stories and successes of VA employees' daily service to Veterans, including our unique perspectives on what it means to provide exceptional customer service to VA employees, who in turn provide exceptional customer service to our Veterans.

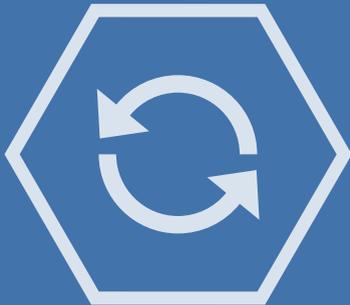
The Midyear Review video series features employees from across the country performing work in local VA medical centers, describing why they serve, and demonstrating the direct impact that IT modernization—and each OIT employee—has on the high-quality care and services Veterans receive at VA. Culminating in over 13 hours of raw footage, the 2018 Midyear Review's stories and passions earned an Honorable Mention in the 2019 AVA Digital Awards.



Top: Ms. Felicia Fisher, IT Specialist at the San Francisco VA Medical Center; Bottom: 2018 NCSAM video series showed audiences the difference between "Cyber Do" (the character featured here) and "Cyber Don't."



[Read More](#)



VA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

GOAL 5: SEAMLESS AND SECURE INTEROPERABILITY

Achieve seamless and secure data interoperability across VA, DoD, Federal, and commercial partners by identifying, documenting, and disseminating well-defined, standardized, and secure design, interfaces, and processes to access authoritative data that streamlines the Veteran experience.

VA BEGINS ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION

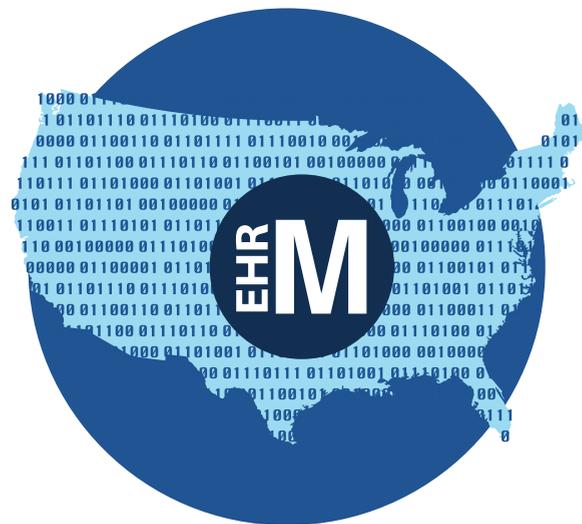
VA is in the early stages of moving from its current EHR system, Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA)—which stores health information and tracks patient care in 130 related but distinct health record systems—to Cerner Millennium. The system will integrate with DoD's Military Health System (MHS) patient records system, Cerner MHS GENESIS; unify all VA hospitals and medical centers within a single system; and simplify and expedite scheduling and other health care tasks for Veterans and the VA staff and clinicians who serve them.

VA selected the Spokane VAMC as the first VA site to pilot the VA's DoD-compatible EHR system because of its proximity to Fairchild Air Force Base (AFB) 92nd Medical Group, which is already using DoD's version of the Cerner EHR solution. Spokane is one of three initial operating capability sites where VA staff will deploy and test the new EHR system prior to enterprise-wide deployment, which will take place over the next 10 years.

OIT PREPARES FOR ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION

Over the past few years, OIT's Solution Delivery Health Systems Engineering team has led multiple VA offices in more than 100 major data migrations across the country. This extremely complex effort supports VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM).

This effort, which is currently focused on moving away from older legacy and proprietary hardware, will ultimately replace VistA with a new and improved EHR system developed by Cerner. To meet the current objectives, VA is updating VistA to a Linux platform to improve performance and functionality for Veterans and VA medical providers. The Linux platform offers upgraded operating and database software, improved system availability, and



quicker response time, as well as optimized storage and a virtual machine platform to support VA's next big step: moving our EHR to the cloud.

Since September 2012, the team migrated all 29 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) sites in Region 2, all 41 sites in Region 3, all 27 sites in Region 4, and 10 of the 35 sites in Region 1. In addition, the ten migrated sites in Region 1 have been moved to a fully virtualized Linux platform, which reduced hardware requirements for supporting multiple operating systems, an essential step before OIT

could evaluate moving VistA to the cloud. The remaining sites are expected to be migrated by 2020.

The success of VistA migrations is a model for VA teams in terms of excellent service delivery that can be achieved with cross-agency collaborations and detailed planning. The migrations are important to the VA mission and lead to improved health care for Veterans by ensuring more efficient record delivery when and where they are needed. Fewer delays in needed care leads to better health outcomes for individual Veterans.

MY HEALTHEVET MIGRATES TO VA ENTERPRISE CLOUD

Migrating My HealtheVet—VA's innovative online health care access and information gateway—to the VA enterprise cloud is netting big returns for Veterans, including improved system reliability and better response speeds. But the benefits don't stop there; My HealtheVet, now hosted by Amazon Web Services, has more robust data security, performance monitoring, and operating capabilities to meet Veterans' evolving needs.

As a result of the migration, OIT can monitor the My HealtheVet system, connections, and applications to continually improve the user experience. OIT can also take quicker action to make system modifications when needed. These improvements further bolster data security and ensure Veterans have access to most up-to-date information.

To achieve these benefits, OIT's My HealtheVet team set up development, testing, pre-production, and production environments. They migrated over 11 terabytes of data to the new repository, synchronized databases, completed over 10,000 test cases, verified connections with over 7,000 IP addresses, verified connections with 16 external applications, upgraded security access for more than 70 people, and obtained Authority to Operate, adhering to the Federal Information Security Act and Federal Risk and Authorization Program.

OIT continues to seek ways to improve the Veteran experience through modernization and improvement of existing IT tools focused on meeting Veteran needs.



[Read More](#)



VA OUTFITS SPOKANE STAFF WITH UPGRADED DEVICES TO ACCESS THE NEW ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD

To pave the way for the Electronic Health Record Modernization and the Cerner Millennium deployment, OIT furnished Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center staff with 1,700 laptops, desktops, and mobile devices with increased speed, better start-up and log-in times, increased security, and bigger screens.

The new EHR will deliver long-term continuity of records starting at enlistment to enhance the quality of health care and remove the burden from Veterans to locate, manage, and transfer health records across DoD, individual VA hospitals and medical centers, and community care providers.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AWARDS

In 2019, 320 OIT staff members at 22 sites were recognized for the excellent customer service they provided to their business partners in VHA, VBA, and NCA based on the 2018 IT Customer Satisfaction Survey. The survey measures customer satisfaction using the proven methodology, American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which provides benchmarks for over 300 public and private sector enterprises and has been used by OIT since 2010.

The winners were divided into two categories: Most Improved and Highest Overall Score.

TOP RATED:

1. Iron Mountain VA Medical Center (VAMC), Michigan
2. Manila Regional Office (RO), Philippines
3. Las Vegas West Consolidated Patient Account Center (CPAC), Nevada
4. Biloxi Health Care System (HCS), Mississippi
5. Kerrville Hospital, Texas
6. Batavia HCS, New York
7. St. Louis Regional Medical Office (RMO), Missouri
8. Long Beach HCS, California
9. White City HCS, Kansas
10. Bath VAMC, New York
11. Lake City VAMC, Florida

MOST IMPROVED:

1. Beckley VAMC, West Virginia
2. Kansas City Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), Kansas
3. Madison VAMC, Wisconsin
4. Kerrville Hospital, Texas
5. Anchorage HCS, Alaska
6. New Orleans VAMC, Louisiana
7. Saginaw VAMC, Michigan
8. Fayetteville VAMC, North Carolina
9. Fargo VAMC, North Dakota
10. Marion VAMC, Illinois
11. Leavenworth CPAC, Kansas
12. Walla Walla VAMC, Washington

BATAVIA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECEIVES A CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AWARD AS A TOP-RATED VA SITE

The team of IT specialists at the Batavia Healthcare System (HCS) in New York understands the greater cause behind their work—serving patients who served their country. Led by Ms. Margaret Senko, OIT Area Manager, the Batavia HCS provides exceptional customer service to its business partners, most notably the VHA staff providing medical care and services to Veterans.

Every day, the Batavia team lives the Department of Veterans Affairs' mission: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." Their hard work and dedication drive their stellar customer

service and resulted in their facility receiving a Customer Satisfaction Award this year as a top-rated VA site.

To better serve the Batavia HCS staff and the patients they care for, the team proactively reaches out to customers experiencing IT issues. By taking time to meet with their customers face-to-face, they provide a caring, human touch to otherwise frustrating situations. Ms. Senko describes her staff as "friendly and warm," and this team's positive spirit and hard work allow them to continue to provide exceptional customer service to their business partners.

ANCHORAGE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECEIVES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AWARD AS A MOST-IMPROVED SITE

Ms. Kathy Fanning, the Area Manager for the Anchorage HCS, has been with the Alaska VA for almost 35 years. If you were to ask her what makes her facility great, her answer would be simple—the staff. It's fitting that Ms. Fanning and her staff were recognized for their great work by receiving a Customer Satisfaction Award as one of the most improved VA sites.

Based on data gleaned from the American Customer Satisfaction Index's (ACSI) annual survey, CSAs are awarded to the ten top rated and ten most improved sites across the VA enterprise. Out of ACSI's 100-point scale, the Anchorage HCS's score jumped from 64 to 74.

When the Kenai Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) facility closed unexpectedly due to structural damage, many Veterans in the surrounding rural area were at risk for interruption of care and services. Ms. Fanning and the rest of the Anchorage HCS team responded, establishing a temporary space and providing laptops with Wi-Fi options and VPN access. They also provided training on connecting to VA resources remotely, allowing Kenai CBOC staff to securely connect to VA servers and resources from the temporary space. Their quick response minimized the impact of interrupted service on the Veterans and business partners who rely on the Kenai CBOC facility.

KERRVILLE VA HOSPITAL RECEIVES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AWARD AS A TOP-RATED AND A MOST-IMPROVED SITE

Kerrville, Texas, commonly referred to as the capital of Texas Hill Country, is known for its beautiful rolling hills along the Guadalupe River, its annual Texas State Arts and Crafts Fair, and exceptional customer service at its VA Hospital. Led by its Area Manager, Mr. Richard Hernandez, the IT specialists supporting this facility go above and beyond to serve the needs of their customers and business partners. Their efforts, and those of the entire Kerrville VA Hospital team resulted in the facility receiving a Customer Satisfaction Award as a top-rated and most-improved VA site.

Based on data gleaned from the American Customer Satisfaction Index's annual survey, VA awards CSAs to the ten top-rated and ten most improved sites across the VA enterprise. Out of ACSI's 100-point scale, the Kerrville VA Hospital scored an 82.

One best practice the Kerrville OIT team employs is establishing effective communication as its number one priority. Communicating clearly and effectively ensures they are meeting their customers' needs while providing end users and customers with the latest available information and top-notch support. Internally, OIT staff conduct bi-weekly huddles to discuss new and

updated technology, processes, and trends, enabling staff to exchange innovative ideas. These communication efforts enhance customer service and provide caregivers the support they need to focus on Veteran care without worrying about technical issues.

Effective communication played an important role in meeting the high demands and expectations of the ongoing Windows 10 deployment project. Mr. Hernandez credits his team's success in Windows 10 implementation to the fact that they created a system allowing the team to take inventory from activation, refresh, and just-in-time resources and apply them to the project. This system keeps the project moving forward without affecting the team's daily operations and equipment needs. He also mentioned an integral part of this approach included communicating effectively with customers to make sure they understand the big picture.

According to Mr. Hernandez, his motivated, resourceful, and willing-to-go-the-extra-mile staff drive the "culture of care" at the Kerrville VA Hospital, leading to exceptional customer service.



Mr. James P. Gfrerer, Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer, and Mr. Dominic Cussatt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, deliver awards to Anchorage, Kerrville, and Batavia VA Hospital staff.



2020 LOOK AHEAD

We want our customers to receive an outstanding experience that rivals the private sector in personalization, innovation, performance, and accessibility of the technology we provide. Our Veterans and our customers in VA deserve a seamless digital experience—and we’re demonstrating our commitment to delivering it.

We developed a comprehensive guide that shows how we’re approaching 2020 and beyond—efforts like our Electronic Health Record modernization project and our upcoming focus on mobile-first equipment deployments to initial sites. Our soon-to-be-published IT Information Resource Management (IRM) Strategic Plan details how we will transform OIT into the 21st-century IT organization VA and our Veterans deserve.

In 2020, we will continue to:

- Provide an exceptional customer experience
- Drive IT modernization through digital transformation
- Strategically source our IT acquisitions and transform our acquisition processes
- Recruit and retain a world-class IT Workforce
- Promote seamless and secure interoperability across VA and DoD

In OIT, we know that exceptional technology is the backbone of all modern organizations. To take full advantage of the benefits of technology, we must continue



to transform the way we do business. Technology success is business success, and with our strategic vision—alongside the dedication of every individual in OIT across the country—we’ll achieve both.

Our strategy is in place. We will prioritize transparency, hold each other accountable, strive for innovation, and foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork. Together, we will realize our vision of becoming a world-class IT organization that provides a seamless, unified Veteran experience through the delivery of state-of-the-art technology.

Our Veterans deserve exceptional customer service—and in OIT, [It Starts With Us](#).

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