



Federal Update for September 21 - 25, 2015



Traumatic Brain Injury Update ► More Open Collaboration Needed

Investing in research and treatment of traumatic brain injury can ward off future problems for veterans, including unemployment, homelessness and suicide, Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald said 24 AUG during opening remarks of a two-day conference on head injury in Washington, D.C. Drawing more than 300 of the country's top TBI researchers, the VA's State of the Art Conference on traumatic brain injury aims to share cutting-edge approaches to detecting head injuries, treating them and solving related problems. Since 2001, more than 327,000 troops have been diagnosed with mild, moderate and serious head injuries, according to the Congressional Research Service. But that number is likely much higher since service members often don't report mild concussions or exposure to circumstances such as blasts that cause head injury, health officials believe. A 2008 RAND Corp. study estimated that up to that time, about 725,000 troops may have received a TBI or met the criteria for PTSD or combat-related depression.

Often diagnosed side-by-side with traumatic brain injuries are mental health conditions such as depression, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. According to the CRS, 138,197 post-9/11 veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD alone. The challenge for researchers is developing new methods to detect brain injuries, understand their scope and treat them, and the VA, with its unique patient population, is poised to be a "national leader" in the field, according to McDonald, "Our vision is VA can, should and must be the national leaders. ... We owe veterans more than 'a couple of beers, a six pack or a Darvon' to help with their pain," McDonald said, quoting lyrics from the 1984 Jerry Jeff Walker song, "Rodeo Cowboy." To ward off a future crisis similar to the scandals that rocked the VA in 2014, McDonald said, the department must solve the puzzle to help veterans now and as they age.

"The cost of war endures far longer than the wars themselves. ... What created the crisis at VA was not the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was the aging of the Vietnam veteran. ... We need the best estimates to secure resources and provide care. We need to do a really good job to forecast the challenges as we move forward," McDonald said. VA spent \$36,222,000 on research in 2014. McDonald said science is as important to VA health care as education and clinical care, the three pillars of the Veterans Health Administration. "We have an obligation to

get this right, otherwise, there's another axis problem lying in wait. Let's not leave another unresolved problem as our legacy. ... We owe it to all of our veterans," he implored researchers.

The conference addressed multiple aspects of TBI research and care, including concurrent mental health issues, head injury imaging and diagnosis, reintegration into society, pain management, best care practices, and more. On the second day, the conference held four special sessions for caregivers of veterans with head injury. Dr. Geoffrey Ling, director of biological technologies at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, said TBI is an insidious condition that physicians and anyone close to a veteran with a potential head injury must look for. Calling those with head injuries the "walking wounded," because many are unaware they have an impairment, Ling said VA is best positioned to lead research and foment change on treatment. "If you do not look, you will not find," Ling told physicians and researchers at the conference. "Someone has to lead the way. Let it be us."

Some of the nation's top minds involved in brain injury research took a tongue-lashing the first day from retired Gen. Peter Chiarelli, a former Army vice chief of staff who, in his current position as head of a nonprofit that promotes brain science, said the current research architecture hampers medical advancement. Chiarelli said the system recognizes "individual accomplishments and does not recognize team science." The end result is that the system fails patients, he said. As a case in point, Chiarelli cited a genetic variant — APO E4 — that, if passed to a child from both parents, may decrease the child's ability to recover from a concussion. First reported in 1997 in *The Lancet*, a top scientific journal, the variant has been mentioned several times in subsequent journals, and was well-known to a researcher who brought it to the attention of Chiarelli when he was serving as Army vice chief. But his effort to find out more about the variant revealed very little information outside medical journals.

"This is a problem," he said. "It doesn't give me, as a grandfather, the information to tell my granddaughter or grandson, 'You probably would not want to be a linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers.' Or, as a commander, to know the risk factors for assigning someone as a bomb disposal technician." Moving through a poster session, Chiarelli said he was dismayed to hear one attendee say he was unaware that so much research was happening across the VA. "We are not focused on the patient," Chiarelli said. "If we were, we would be handling these problems together." As head of One Mind for Research, the retired general's mission is to promote "open science," the concept of making scientific research, results and data available to anyone.

Research institutions, which pour millions into their medical programs, tend to be protective of their scientists and findings, in a belief that competition fosters medical advancements and breakthroughs. Chiarelli said great work is being done in government and university laboratories, but work on traumatic brain injuries and brain diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's could be advanced further and faster if the "silos" separating research could be

removed. "I'm not trying to be critical. I just see the power that people working together could accomplish," he said.

Dr. Carolyn Clancy, VA's chief medical officer, acknowledged that researchers in her department are no different. But she said the work at the summit, convened in an effort to jump-start collaboration, along with Chiarelli's observations, present "an opportunity, particularly for the [Defense Department] and VA." Clancy said VA research facilities could be centers of excellence for treating traumatic brain injury, "go-to" facilities for patients that would advance the science, similar to regional pediatric cancer centers that have changed the course of that disease for thousands of children. "I don't see a reason why we can't actually bring that to bear here," Clancy said. The conference was held 24-25 AUG in Washington D.C. near Capitol Hill. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | August 24 & 25, 2015 ++]

VA Employment Update ► 41,500 Vacant Medical Staff Positions

The Veterans Health Administration says it has 41,500 vacant medical staff positions throughout its network of 139 hospitals and clinics. Critics blame the complex hiring process, poor recruitment and low wages compared to the private sector. But according an analysis by USA Today, even a 1% increase in job vacancies contributes to more appointments being pushed past a month-long wait. According to data provided by the Veteran's Health Administration as part of an open records request, the Atlanta Medical Center was operating last month without nearly 25% of its staff, or 880 medical workers. It was the fourth highest number of staff vacancies in the country. Between the three hospitals in Decatur, Dublin and Augusta, the data revealed 505 vacancies for nurses, 137 for nursing assistants, 153 physicians and 205 medical support workers.

James Wright says it's obvious the pharmacy is also under staffed. "If you go there and get a prescription they say we'll mail it to you, because if you go to the pharmacy you'll sit there and wait, you'll be there all day," he explained. Wright spent 20 years in the Air Force as an aircraft engineer. The ringing in his ears, exposure to agent orange and nightmares bring him to the VA several times a years. He knows the common complaints. "Red tape. Lack of care. People walking around not – they're doing enough to keep their jobs but they don't care about the veteran," said Wright. When vets can't get approved care, they are allowed to see a private doctor, on the taxpayers' dime. VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson told Congress, the VA paid for 1.5 million veterans to see private clinicians last year, costing taxpayers \$7.7 billion dollars. Wright and several other veterans 11Alive's Rebecca Lindstrom spoke with, said the problems at the VA were getting better. But progress is slow "It's not going to get better overnight because it's ingrained over the years," said Wright. But Wright and several others I talked with say they are slowly seeing improvements.

Rich Sestili with Disabled American Veterans said, "VA hospital Director Leslie Wiggins has turned this place around. Over the past two years there is a new attitude. Once a month she has a town hall meeting at the hospital. This is a big deal." We asked to talk with Wiggins about the vacancies, but no one within administration would talk with us.

The medical center did release a written statement saying: "The Atlanta VA Medical Center is committed to providing timely, high quality care to our Veterans. To meet the demands as one of the VA's fastest growing medical centers, we have hired 219 employees from June 28, 2015 to present and plan to hire an additional 301 employees between September 9, 2015 and October 1, 2015. Currently, we have 30 open positions. When the recommended standard of care is not available within the medical center or if we are unable to provide the recommended standard of care within 30 days, patients are eligible for the Choice program and may receive non-VA care at VA expense."

We asked for clarification on why the medical centers local numbers were so different than the numbers coming directly from the Veteran's Health Administration, but received no response. VA leadership says hiring in the past year matched the 9% attrition rate, and actually added new employees. The agency hired an additional 1,000 physicians and 2,700 nurses in a 13-month period ending on May 1. The Choice Act passed last August also created 10,000 new medical positions to fill, making vacancy figures appear worse, a spokesman said. "It is unacceptable," said Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs committee. "This is a problem under bright sunlight now, and it needs to be fixed." To check VA's Interactive Database for vacancies in your geographic area refer to www.11alive.com/pages/interactives/critical-vavacancies/#search/tuscaloosa-vamc (Search by facility, city or state for details and wait time). [Source: Channel 11 Atlanta | Rebecca Lindstrom & USA Today | August 21, 2015 ++]

VA Claim Shredding Update ► VARO Surprise Inspections

A Statement from the VA Deputy Inspector General – The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG) received an anonymous allegation that staff at the Los Angeles VA Regional Office (VARO) were inappropriately shredding documents related to veterans' disability compensation claims. The complainant also alleged that supervisors were instructing staff to shred these documents. The OIG immediately deployed a team of inspectors to determine the merits of these allegations.

The OIG published an interim report (www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-15-04652-448.pdf) on August 17, 2015, and substantiated that the Los Angeles VARO staff were not following the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) January 2011 policy on management of veterans' and other Governmental paper records, resulting in nine claims-related documents inappropriately being placed in shred bins. The potential shredding of these documents would have prevented

them from being included as part of the veterans' permanent records and potentially affected veterans' benefits.

We found that the Los Angeles VARO Records Management Officer (RMO) position was vacant from August 2014 until our inspection in February 2015. RMOs are responsible for reviewing all claims-related materials submitted for shredding and ensuring that the destruction of documents complies with VBA policy. Staff assigned to perform the RMO's responsibilities were not properly trained on reviewing documents destined for shredding. They would only observe documents as they dumped the documents into the bin for contractor shredding. Not filling the RMO position weakened the final control in the VARO's authorized shredding process, which VBA established to prevent improper shredding of claims-related documents. If not for our review, it is likely that nine claims-related documents would have been destroyed.

The VARO also failed to provide any documentation of required shred logs for the past 2 years. In fact, the staff were unaware of VBA's requirement to log any material that was determined inappropriate for destruction. In the absence of the shredding logs, we could not measure the effectiveness of the VARO's reviews over the past 2 years to prevent claims-related documents from being improperly destroyed compared to what we found during our 1 week on site. The OIG team returned the nine claims-related documents to the VARO Director for immediate action. Eight of these documents had the potential to affect veterans' benefits. We did not substantiate that supervisors were instructing staff to shred these documents. In light of the issues identified at the Los Angeles VARO, I deployed 10 teams of benefits inspectors and auditors from various OIG offices across the country to determine whether this was an isolated issue or a systemic issue across VBA's nationwide network of VAROs. To gain the element of surprise, we performed unannounced inspections, and all teams arrived at the preselected locations simultaneously on July 20, 2015. The locations were: Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; Houston, TX; New Orleans, LA; Oakland, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Reno, NV; San Juan, PR; and St. Petersburg, FL.

The OIG team gathered and reviewed documents from shred bins, which are the last repository for documents prior to destruction. Our preliminary findings indicate that inappropriate shredding is also occurring at other VAROs and controls generally appear too weak to adequately protect against inappropriate shredding. In hopes of identifying other veterans who may have had their claims shredded by the Los Angeles VARO, I initiated a review of veterans' complaints of delayed VBA claim reviews received in the OIG Hotline. This additional review is important because neither VBA nor the OIG can identify claims-related information inappropriately destroyed. The OIG plans to perform similar work at other VAROs where shredding practices and controls are determined inadequate during the OIG's surprise nationwide inspection. Results of the 10 site reviews and the review of complaints received via the OIG Hotline are pending.

I believe that improper shredding of veterans' claims-related documents, no matter how small, has to be completely eradicated if the Department hopes to regain veterans' trust as this

causes excessive delays and can result in incorrect decisions to veterans attempting to obtain benefits. [Source: VAOIG | Linda A. Halliday | August 17, 2015 ++]

GI Bill Update ► VA Failed to Police Problematic Institutions

Many of the nation's largest for-profit college chains have seen enrollments plummet amid investigations into questionable job placement rates and deceptive marketing practices. One crucial source of revenue, however, has remained a constant: military veterans. For-profit colleges have collected \$8.2 billion from the latest GI Bill since it went into effect in 2009, according to a Los Angeles Times analysis of government data. Those colleges enroll only 8% of all U.S. students but 30% of the 1.4 million veterans who have used the most recent version of the GI Bill. That money for years helped prop up some of the industry's most distressed institutions — including ITT Educational Services Inc. and bankrupt Corinthian Colleges Inc. — which needed the funding to meet tough regulatory requirements.

To keep the GI Bill money flowing, the industry aggressively targeted veterans, and often hired them to help recruit their brethren returning home from the battlefields, according to internal school memos and interviews with former students and employees. U.S. Army veteran Don're Walker took one of those recruiting jobs at an ITT campus in Orange County in 2012. He quit less than a year later. His department faced intense pressure to enroll GI Bill beneficiaries, Walker said. Once he understood the school's high tuition costs — and students' low probability of transferring credits to traditional colleges — he regularly advised veterans against attending. "It was basically 'Get people in any way possible,'" he said. "They were exploiting my brothers."

For-profit colleges grew rapidly during the Great Recession by offering admission to almost anyone with a high school degree, flexible class schedules and promises of job training to displaced workers. As enrollments soared, regulators took notice of high tuition costs and poor student performance. For-profit colleges on average charge more than four times as much as community colleges, according to the College Board, and cost significantly more than the in-state tuition at public four-year colleges. Associate's degree programs in fields such as automotive repair and information technology can cost as much \$47,000. Many veterans were attracted to practical training programs that offered online coursework and start dates throughout the year. For veterans juggling families and other responsibilities and eager to get back in the workforce, it's a highly successful pitch, former students said. "You're jumping on the first thing that looks good," said Ryan Gregory, who attended an ITT campus in the San Diego area after U.S. Army tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. "You're thinking 'I got a late start and I've got to get going.' And they feed off that."

The new GI Bill, the most generous veteran education benefit in U.S. history, covers 36 months of tuition at any public school or just over \$21,000 a year at private institutions, as well as providing an ample housing allowance. It was a godsend to for-profit colleges, which had been

struggling to comply with a federal student aid regulation known as the 90/10 rule. The rule — which requires for-profit schools to derive at least 10% of revenue from non-federal sources — is a cost and quality-control measure. It ensures that schools do not operate solely on federal financial aid. By 2008, meeting the 90/10 rule was becoming more difficult as students found it harder to secure private loans amid a dismal economy. Because veterans' benefits are not counted as federal dollars in the equation, the bill offered a lifeline to schools that came dangerously close to violating the rule.

Corinthian Colleges had four institutions that failed to meet the federal 10% threshold in 2012 and 2013, putting the schools at risk of losing federal funding if they violated the rule for a second consecutive year. Together, ITT and Corinthian have collected more than \$1 billion in GI Bill benefits since 2009, the Times analysis shows. That's more than double the University of California, California State University, University of Texas and Arizona State University systems combined. Corinthian's deputy general counsel, William Calhoun, said in a statement that the company is proud of its programs and that veterans "clearly saw value in our flexible schedule and curricula offerings." The company filed for bankruptcy in May amid federal and state investigations and shut down its campuses this spring.

Government disclosures, conference calls with investors and internal company documents obtained during a U.S. Senate investigation show the pressure to capture GI Bill money. "Veterans will immediately have greater acceptance hearing our message from one of their own," read one such 2008 internal memo from the operations department of ITT. The company planned to "target the largest installations first," with goals to hire recruiters from every branch of the military, according to the memo. A spokeswoman for ITT, Nicole Elam, said the company has never had a "military-specific" recruiting program and the memo was a "draft" plan that was never carried out. Another internal memo from Danny Finuf, the president of Brown Mackie College, owned by Education Management Corp., directly connected veteran recruitment to the school's federal compliance struggles. "Never give up, especially when dealing with important issues such as 90/10," he wrote. "The VA is a terrific opportunity." A spokesman for Education Management Corp. declined to comment.

Apollo Group, which owns the University of Phoenix, has taken in about \$1.25 billion worth of GI Bill benefits since 2009 — by far the most of any higher education institution. Two former recruiters at the University of Phoenix in June filed a lawsuit in Kentucky alleging that employees were instructed to attend job fairs at military bases "under false pretenses." Phoenix recruiters showed up at military installations saying that they were there to hire veterans, but the suit says it was "a ruse for obtaining leads and enrollments." Mark Brenner, a spokesman for Apollo Group, said the University of Phoenix plans to "vigorously defend" against the former employees' "fictitious allegations." The U.S. Federal Trade Commission and California Atty. Gen. Kamala Harris' office recently ordered the University of Phoenix to provide documentation on its military recruiting practices, according to company filings.

U.S. Undersecretary of Education Ted Mitchell, who has overseen recent for-profit college regulations, has urged Congress to pass legislation closing the "inappropriate loophole" that fails to count veterans' benefits as federal dollars. Bills that would make that change have stalled in Congress. "The last thing we should be doing for our veterans is making them cash cows," Mitchell said in a recent interview. The industry's share of GI Bill money has held steady despite an executive order from President Obama, signed more than three years ago, calling on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to discipline schools that engage in "aggressive and deceptive" targeting of veterans — particularly at for-profit career colleges. VA officials said they are now providing more information to veterans, such as an online tool that lists overall graduation and loan default rates, and will soon publish data on veteran student performance.

Lawmakers and veterans' advocates argue that the VA has failed to police problematic institutions despite clear warning signs. In the case of Corinthian — which collapsed following a U.S. Department of Education probe into falsified job placement rates — the company had warned about an impending shutdown since June 2014. Though the VA administers the GI Bill, state-run veterans' agencies decide whether to revoke a school's ability to collect GI Bill money. Some states, including Massachusetts and California, stepped in quickly to cut off Corinthian's funding. Other states did nothing. When Corinthian closed its remaining campuses in April, 422 veterans were still enrolled at schools in Arizona, Hawaii, Oregon and New York. "While you could paint that as a negative, overall the effect on our beneficiaries was minimized," said Robert Worley, who directs the VA education service. Many states stepped in early to protect thousands more veterans, he said.

Worley suggested that students could have withdrawn if they had concerns following news reports of trouble at Corinthian. Charles Haislip, a former U.S. Army Military Police officer, attended Corinthian's Heald College in Honolulu. He said he had heard about Corinthian's problems, but he relied on the VA's continued approval as a reason to keep attending. When the college shut down, Haislip's GI Bill housing allowance was immediately cut off. He fell behind on his rent. "I didn't do anything wrong," said Haislip, who was just three classes away from graduating with a criminal justice degree. "I served my country. I enrolled in school and took advantage of my benefits. Why should I be punished?" Veterans left hanging when schools close have few options. Unlike students with federal loans, who can have their debt erased after a school shutdown, the GI Bill benefits simply vanish when their 36 months of tuition run out.

ITT is the latest test for state and federal authorities. This year the company was sued by the Securities and Exchange Commission for not fully disclosing to investors the risk posed by two of its private student loan programs. A separate civil lawsuit filed by the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau last year alleges that ITT engaged in predatory lending. The company is under investigation by more than a dozen state attorneys general. ITT has denied the allegations in the lawsuits, which are ongoing. Only New York and California have moved to suspend GI Bill benefits at ITT schools — and neither has succeeded. Meanwhile, legislative

efforts in Congress have failed to restore GI Bill eligibility for veterans attending schools that abruptly close. [Source: Los Angeles Times | Chris Kirkham and Alan Zarembo | August 18, 2015 ++]

Governor Challenges Communities to Significantly Reduce Veteran Homelessness in 100 Days

by Donnie La Curan in Veteran News

Governor Tom Wolf, along with officials from the Pennsylvania Departments of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Labor and Industry (L&I), Community and Economic Development (DCED) and Human Services (DHS), today challenged all commonwealth agencies and communities to reduce veteran homelessness by 40 percent in the last 100 days of 2015. The challenge, which kicks off on September 22, means that 550 veterans will achieve housing stability by the end of the year.

“Veterans are national heroes and I’m proud to join governors and mayors across the country as we work toward the goal of ending homelessness among our military veterans,” said Governor Tom Wolf. “In order to achieve this goal, Pennsylvania’s veterans and their families who are in need of permanent housing must have access to the programs and services that will help rebuild their lives, acquire meaningful employment, and successfully establish themselves in our communities.

The challenge, officially known as the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that was launched in June 2014. It was conceived as a means for local leaders to create and coordinate strategies to curb veteran homelessness. In early 2015, HUD conducted a point-in-time count which identified approximately 1,300 homeless veterans in Pennsylvania, down from over 1,400 in the 2014 count.

Across the United States, 550 mayors, eight governors and 151 county/city officials are currently participating. The eight governors that have committed to the challenge are from Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, Puerto Rico, and Virginia. Many of the participants involved in the challenge are well on their way to ending homelessness by the end of the year.

“The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, through our Office of Veterans Affairs, is coordinating the efforts of stakeholders in support of Governor Wolf’s challenge,” said Maj. Gen. James R. Joseph, adjutant general of Pennsylvania. “Pennsylvania’s success will be measured when we reach ‘functional zero’ which means having the process and the resources in place where we can immediately house a homeless veteran who wants to be assisted.” For more information about the challenge, visit the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.

VA Announces \$4 Million in Funding to Help the Homeless

WASHINGTON – Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald announced the award of \$4 million in renewal funding offered through the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program to 21 community agencies that currently provide enhanced services for homeless Veterans with special needs.

“These important grant renewals will allow community agencies to continue to provide critical transitional housing services where they are needed,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “As a key component of the VA’s plan to significantly reduce homelessness among Veterans, the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Special Need grants will provide funding to community agencies that provide services to homeless Veterans.

The program promotes the development and provision of supportive housing and services with the goal of helping homeless Veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and income, and obtain greater self-determination. Specifically, GPD Special Need grant funding will assist with additional operational costs that would not otherwise be incurred but for the fact that the recipient is providing transitional housing and services for the GPD “Special Need” populations, including women, chronically mentally ill, frail elderly, terminally ill, and individuals who have the care of minor dependents.

As a result of these and other efforts, Veteran homelessness is down significantly since the launch of the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in 2010. The state of Connecticut and cities of New Orleans, Houston, Phoenix, and Salt Lake City have all recently announced the achievement of significant milestones related to ending Veteran homelessness. More information about VA’s homeless programs is available at www.va.gov/homeless. Community organizations seeking details and/or more information may visit VA’s National Grant and Per Diem Program website www.va.gov/homeless/GPD.ASP.

VA Awards Local Grants to Prevent and End Homelessness

by Donnie La Curan in Veteran News

Thousands of very low-income Veteran families around the nation, who are permanently housed or transitioning to permanent housing, will continue to have access to crucial services with the renewal of approximately \$300 million in grants under the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program.

SSVF renewal funding, which supports outreach, case management and other flexible assistance to prevent Veteran homelessness or rapidly re-house Veterans who become homeless, went to 286 non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives in all 50 states, the

District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. A list of grantees is located at www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.

“SSVF grants empower our local partners to provide short-term-focused interventions that promote housing stability among the most economically vulnerable Veterans and their families,” said Department of Veterans Affairs’ Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “Whether they need rental or child care assistance, transportation vouchers or another type of support, SSVF grantees offer Veterans the mix of services they need to gain housing and stay housed.”

SSVF grantees typically serve Veterans with incomes below 30 percent of the area median income. Grantees must follow the housing first approach, which centers on permanently housing homeless Veterans quickly without preconditions and providing supportive services as needed. Additional SSVF requirements are that grantees engage in outreach to find and serve Veterans in need, provide Veterans with case management and assist them in obtaining VA and other public benefits.

SSVF served 127,829 participants in fiscal year (FY) 2014 and is on track to serve 135,000 Veterans and their family members by the end of FY 2015. As a result of these and other efforts, Veteran homelessness is down significantly since the launch of the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in 2010. Since 2010, nearly 230,000 Veterans and their family members have been permanently housed, rapidly rehoused or prevented from falling into homelessness by VA’s homelessness programs and targeted housing vouchers provided by HUD.

This funding announcement is the final award in new SSVF funds made available in fiscal 2014, an allocation that included approximately \$300 million to be competed in FY 2014 and \$300 million to be competed in FY 2015. The funding announced today will support SSVF services in FY 2016, which starts October 1, 2015, and ends September 30, 2016.