



VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Policy Research Agenda – FY2015 Series

FY 2015 Veterans Policy Research Agenda

Highlights of Accomplishments

Office of Policy and Planning – Washington, DC 20420

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) FY 2015 [Veterans Policy Research Agenda](#) (VPRA) was VA's first-ever Department-wide policy research agenda. The FY 2015 VPRA covered four priority research areas: Reintegration, Veterans' Families and Children, Public-Private Partnerships, and Veterans Benefits and Federal Disability Compensation. The Office of Policy and Planning (OPP) developed the VPRA to help the Department achieve its strategic goals, as well as develop ideas and solutions for addressing issues affecting VA and the Veteran community.¹ The VPRA consists of a list of priorities for multidisciplinary research and analysis and is intended to accomplish the following goals:

1

Produce and disseminate research to assist VA and its federal and NGO partners in improving service delivery and linking complimentary programs that serve the Veteran community.

2

Encourage and support research that looks at the broad spectrum of programs and services available to Veterans.

3

Foster more collaborative Veteran-centric research across federal agencies, academic institutions, and think tanks.

OPP reviews the VPRA on an annual basis, and the activities and outputs from the VPRA will help to inform and update subsequent policy research agendas, as well as strategic and operational decisions – all with the ultimate goal of enhancing programs and services for our Nation's Veterans and their families. This report provides highlights of some of the accomplishments identified during OPP's annual review of the VPRA's activities and outputs.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The insights gained from the research and external engagements that were conducted based on the FY 2015 VPRA helped OPP to (1) build new and enhance existing relationships with external Veteran stakeholders; (2) inform enterprise-wide policy, strategy, and planning activities; and (3) encourage an informal community of interest around Veterans policy issues. These activities supported new research and fostered a more collaborative Veteran-centric focus on priority issues facing our Nation's Veterans and the Veteran community, which will serve to inform VA strategic decision-making going into FY 2016.

¹ The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Policy and Planning (OPP) serves as the principal advisor to VA leaders on all matters of policy and organizational strategy. OPP serves Veterans by providing VA decision-makers with the advice, counsel, and support necessary to fulfill the VA mission and to maximize Veteran satisfaction. For more information on OPP, please visit: <http://www.va.gov/op3>.

Relationships with External Stakeholders

OPP made extensive use of external engagements to help VA better identify, understand, and manage relationships with external stakeholders in the Veteran community. Throughout FY 2015, OPP engaged with more than 25 external stakeholders in the Veteran community, including academic institutions, foundations, federal and international government agencies, private industry, professional associations, and think tanks. These engagements helped VA promote independent, external research and analysis. In particular, OPP collaborated with two of its federal partners, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Social Security Administration (SSA), among others.

Department of Defense Transition to Veterans Program Office

In June 2015, OPP presented at the Transition Research Summit, sponsored and hosted by DoD's [Transition to Veterans Program Office](#) in Arlington, VA.² The one-day summit involved researchers and practitioners from across the federal government and the non-profit sector and focused on understanding and improving the transition process and outcomes. OPP's presentation generated a great deal of interest in the VPRA priority research areas of reintegration and Veterans families and children. Furthermore, OPP's presentation at the forum resulted in a productive conversation on the need to:

- Better define the term reintegration;
- Address data gaps; and
- Build a Veteran-centric, community-based approach to enable a successful reintegration.

Social Security Administration Disability Research Consortium

OPP partnered with the Social Security Administration's (SSA) [Disability Research Consortium](#) (DRC) to commission multiple Veteran-centric research projects related to the VPRA priority research area on federal disability. For example, DRC commissioned research to study the interrelationship between Veteran and disability programs in the area of individual unemployability. Furthermore, in August 2015, OPP was invited to present at and participate in an executive-level roundtable at the SSA DRC annual meeting to discuss Veteran demographics, the relationships between Veteran service-connected disability benefits and federal disability compensation, VA's programs and services for disabled Veterans, and policy priorities and areas for further research.

² The Department of Defense's (DoD) Transition to Veterans Program Office provides transition assistance policy and program oversight to promote, advance and instill a culture of career ready Service members. This includes the redesign, implementation and evaluation of the DoD Transition Assistance Program and Transition GPS.

VA Policy Research and Analysis Initiatives

Veterans' policy research and analysis is a formal process for analyzing issues related to the benefits and services needed for the overall health and wellbeing of Veterans and their families. To support this end, OPP utilized external engagement outputs and performed internal analyses related to the VPRA's research areas to inform enterprise-wide policy and strategy. OPP's work on public-private partnerships is of particular significance.

Enhancing VA's Public-Private Partnerships Process

On May 29, 2015, Secretary Robert A. McDonald signed VA's first-ever policy on public-private partnerships.³ This policy was developed by OPP in collaboration with VA's Public-Private Partnership Working Group. To support this effort, OPP completed a study that identified best practices across federal, private sector, and multi-lateral sectors for evaluating, prioritizing, and monitoring partnerships, as well as defining and measuring partnership successes. OPP also interviewed more than 20 diverse organizations representing government, industry, and NGO's for their perspectives. Furthermore, OPP participated in intergovernmental working groups, including the State Department's Public-Private Partnership Interagency Working Group. With the publication of the policy directive, OPP's work on public-private partnerships has further served as the foundation that enabled the Department's [MyVA](#) initiative to quickly initiate activities related to its strategic partnerships work stream.

Informal Community of Interest on Veteran Policy Issues

Throughout FY 2015, OPP attended and convened gatherings of leaders throughout the Veteran community to share ideas and collaborate on all four VPRA priority research areas. Throughout OPP's external engagements, representatives from academic institutions and professional associations expressed a great deal of interest in developing academic and research fields of studies on Veteran and family issues, many of which were directly related to the VPRA's priority research areas of reintegration and Veterans families and children. To generate further interest, OPP hosted its first-ever multidisciplinary policy forum in June 2015, which focused on Veteran and family reintegration.

VA Forum on Veteran and Family Reintegration

OPP convened a forum to discuss strategies and policy implications for improving reintegration outcomes for Veterans and their families. The forum brought together more than 30 leaders and practitioners from the Veteran community representing organizations from across the federal government, private sector, non-governmental organizations, and academia. The forum participants identified four areas to help improve reintegration outcomes for Veterans and their families: (1) Develop a framework and standard definition of Veteran and family reintegration; (2) Inventory current reintegration programs, services, and partnerships targeting

³ [VA Directive 0008](#), "Developing Public-Private Partnerships with, and Accepting Gifts to VA from, Non-Governmental Organizations."

Veterans' families; (3) Identify and explore data gaps that may exist related to Veterans' families; (4) Explore understudied areas related to Veteran family reintegration; and (5) Examine opportunities to address desired future states developed by forum participants. For more information on this forum, please visit OPP's Office of Policy website, listed below.

Strategic Insights from Veteran Policy Research and Analysis

VA and the rest of the stakeholders in the Veteran community continue to identify and implement ways to improve Veterans and families outcomes. In support of this effort, OPP's Veteran policy research and analysis identified the following strategic insights into current and future challenges which will (1) inform OPP's policy research and analysis for FY 2016 and (2) serve as areas of collaboration by stakeholders on policy issues affecting the Veteran community:

- Develop a framework and standard definition of "reintegration"
- Better understand Veteran family experiences and requirements
- Importance of accessing public-private partnership outcomes
- Synchronization of VA disability policies with changes in society and technology

NEXT STEPS

OPP will use the strategic insights from FY 2015 to inform and update, as necessary, the VPRA for FY 2016. Furthermore, OPP will continue to engage with its partners in the Veteran community in order to promote collaborative Veteran-centric research.

For more information on the VPRA or to discuss ways to collaborate with VA on priority policy issues affecting the Veteran community, please contact:

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or visit the Office of Policy's Website:

http://www.va.gov/op3/office_of_policy.asp