



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420**

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UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY SERVICE (VAVS)
NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NAC) 2006 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. This letter transmits recommendations adopted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VAVS) National Advisory Committee (NAC) at its 2006 annual meeting in Sparks, NV; and it provides the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) comments.

2. The following 2006 recommendations are stated verbatim as adopted by the VAVS NAC. These recommendations are identified by quotations and each is accompanied by VA comment:

a. **RECOMMENDATION:** "It is recommended that VA undertake a pilot program to assess the efficacy of distributing VAVS quarterly meeting minutes electronically. National and local representatives and deputy representatives without computer access could opt out of the e-mail program, and would continue to receive the minutes by standard mail delivery. If implemented, an electronic minutes distribution system could effectively reduce the costs to VA of postage, paper, photocopying, man hours, etc., and could increase compliance for distribution of minutes 'within 30 days of the meeting date."

VA COMMENT: Approved. Electronic distribution would be more cost effective, must remain sensitive to the fact some volunteers may not have access to computers and do not have email addresses or opt out of receiving electronic minutes. In those cases, hard copy minutes should be distributed.

b. **RECOMMENDATION:** "At the National Advisory Committee (NAC) Annual Meetings, there are four workshops presented to those in attendance. These workshops are really cutting edge presentations that provide the participants at the sessions with much needed information to help them fulfill their responsibilities as volunteers. It is recommended that a synopsis of each workshop be presented at each VA medical center quarterly VAVS meeting. This way we can keep all representatives and deputy representatives abreast of what is taking place at the national level."

VA COMMENT: Approved. Workshop materials will be made available to all members of the NAC and the Voluntary Service Programs Managers, for distribution at the local quarterly VAVS Meetings as an additional communication tool.

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c. **RECOMMENDATION:** The following recommendation was tabled at the NAC Meeting, May 25-28, 2005, at Scottsdale, AZ. Ralph Wozniak (who tabled the motion last year), made a motion to return the following recommendation to the floor: “While mindful of our national security issues, VA’s plan to implement a policy regarding background checks of all VAVS volunteers will be detrimental to the VAVS program. VAVS volunteers take seriously the safety and security of veteran patients, and their loyalty, dedication, and commitment to improving the quality of life of the veteran patients is demonstrated daily by the number of volunteers signing in and the hours they generate. Subjecting VAVS volunteers to the intrusive and time-consuming process of background checks will have a negative impact on both the retention of the more than 120,000 regularly scheduled volunteers of record and the recruitment of new volunteers. Just the daunting challenge of completing the required paperwork to initiate the background check will be a deterrent to volunteering. Another concern in these times of budgetary constraints is that the expense of executing background checks will be cost-prohibitive: Special Agreement Check (SAC) Electronic Fingerprint only is \$2,831,997; Finger Print only not electronic, \$3,101,711; National Agreement Check (NAC), \$10,249,132; National Agreement Check Inquiry (NACI), \$12,406,844. The consequences of implementing this policy will decimate the VAVS program and hinder VA’s ability to fulfill its mission of providing quality service, in a timely manner, to our nation’s veterans (many of whom are VAVS volunteers). Therefore, VA is urged to reconsider and reevaluate the policy to require background checks of all VAVS volunteers, and devise a broader plan to meet the needs of the agency and the needs of a viable VAVS program.”

VA COMMENT: Approved.

(1) VA’s policy for conducting background checks on volunteers is influenced by Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 201/1 and implementing OMB guidance, which provide that minimally, all individuals with long term physical access to VA facilities or logical access to VA information or information systems, must have a SAC completed and a NACI initiated to receive a Personal Identify Verification (PIV) card.

(2) Volunteers in the seven categories identified in VHA Directive 1620.1 and VHA Directive 0710 are required to have background checks; all other volunteers, including volunteers under the age of 18, will be issued a flash badge. (The three types of referenced identity cards are as follows: (1) Personal Identity Verification (PIV), (2) VA (Non-PIV), which is referenced on VA Form 0711, request for Personal Identify Verification Card; and (3) flash badge, which is to be developed soon.) *NOTE: This policy reflects VA’s desire to enhance security, privacy and access to sensitive, privacy and access to sensitive data. VA is confident this policy will satisfy new Federal guidelines without discouraging volunteers from supporting the VAVS mission.*

3. VHA Central Office, Voluntary Service Office (10C2), will distribute a copy of this Information Letter to all current VAVS NAC National Representatives.

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Acting Under Secretary for Health

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