



**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) 2007 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. This letter transmits recommendations adopted by the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) National Advisory Committee (NAC) at its 2007 annual meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and provides Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) comments.

2. The following 2007 recommendations are stated verbatim as adopted by the VAVS NAC. These recommendations are identified by quotations and each is accompanied by VA's comments:

a. **RECOMMENDATION:** "VA currently administers a number of services that are geared towards providing support to severely disabled or aging veterans, and the families of those veterans, who can no longer care for themselves but who do not want to be cared for in an institutional setting. These programs include, but are not limited to: adult-day care, respite care, case management and coordination, transportation services, home care services, hospice, and general caregiver support. VA accepts volunteer services as supplementary to essential personnel in providing hospital and outpatient care, other health-care services, and any health-care support or administrative services. As VA undertakes initiatives to assist veterans in maintaining independent living, as well as living and care options for those veterans facing life-limiting conditions, non-traditional services for those veteran patients may be warranted (e.g. homemaker/domestic services, shopping, etc.). Therefore, it is recommended that VA seek whatever legislative/regulatory remedy necessary to permit VAVS volunteers to serve in assignments other than as traditional health care resources.

VA COMMENT: Approved. Voluntary Service will provide supplemental support to Nursing or Social Work by implementing a volunteer assignment, training volunteers, and placing volunteers in assignments that may provide respite to the caregivers. However, volunteers are not serving in the capacity of caregivers and are not providing any direct caregiver services. This is in line with the services volunteers are allowed to provide through VAVS. However, this will not require legislation.

b. **RECOMMENDATION:** "In managing the Voluntary Service System (VSS) timekeeping package for volunteer records, Voluntary Service staff is responsible for recording the data for attendance at VAVS quarterly meetings (135A), Occasional Hours (OC), and Regularly Scheduled (RS) hours for those volunteers without access to computer sign-in. These entries are to be completed by the 6th of the month immediately after the month in which those

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hours were accrued. Facility VAVS staff have 3 months or 90 days to make corrections; after 90 days, they must contact the VSS National Help Desk for assistance. The 90-day window of opportunity for corrections is diminished by its proximity to the close of the fiscal year, after which no entries or corrections are permitted (e.g., if an August quarterly meeting is not entered into the system on 09/06, it must be reported by 10/06, otherwise it is lost to the reporting, depriving organizations of the 135A credit). This exclusion is detrimental to NAC member organizations, denying them an accurate accounting of their representatives' and deputy representatives' participation, and could have a negative impact on NAC membership. National Representatives are not aware of discrepancies until they reconcile the Cumulative Attendance Listing (CAL) attached to the quarterly minutes, with VHA 37, Part I, and due to the lag time in receipt of either, or both, it is often well past the 90 day period allotted for local correction, especially if it occurs in the last quarter of the fiscal year. Currently, VHA 37 is distributed semi-annually, although VHA Handbook 1620.1 subparagraph 11c (pg. 31) states that "National Reports of Service" "...will be provided quarterly..." to VAVS National Representatives. Implementing quarterly distribution of VHA 37 would be helpful, but there is still the lag time in receipt of corresponding minutes, necessary for verification of attendance; and it would not address the issue of the inability to make necessary corrections after the close of the fiscal year. It is disheartening to have minutes attesting to representation, yet not have that reflected on VHA 37, and not be able to correct that deficiency. Therefore, it is recommended that VA modify the Voluntary Service System (VSS) timekeeping package to allow corrections after the close of the fiscal year to provide local VAVS staff sufficient time to report critical data; and to accommodate those organizations able to provide verification of quarterly meeting attendance, thereby ensuring a more accurate assessment of representative and deputy representative participation, and to avoid potential erosion of membership criteria."

VA COMMENT: Approval of the concept is acknowledged; however, funding for further development of the VSS system has been temporarily halted, which prevents any modifications. VA staff will be educated in the importance of prompt and accurate reporting.

c. **RECOMMENDATION:** "In providing minimum guidelines for minutes, VHA Handbook 1620.1 subparagraph 6b(8)(a)8 (pg. 9) states: "A treasury report or a VAVS committee financial report, if it is presented during the VAVS committee meetings." When referencing policies and procedures governing General Post Funds (GPF), VHA Handbook 1620.1 subparagraph 10b(1), lines 6-8 (pg. 29) states: "A Treasury Report and VAVS Committee Financial Report of those VHA GPF accounts controlled by VAVS Committee and/or Executive Committee is to be provided at the quarterly VAVS committee meetings." The seemingly contradictory language creates confusion as to implementation and/or adherence to policy. Therefore, it is recommended that for conformity, consistency, and continuity, VA clarify the applicable language to ensure compliance with VA's stated policies and procedures."

VA COMMENT: Approved. Voluntary Service will make necessary changes to VHA Handbook 1620.1.

d. **RECOMMENDATION:** "VHA Handbook 1620.1 subparagraph 6b(6) (pg. 8), Termination of Membership, states: "Organizations will be removed from the VAVS Committee when none of the certified members is in attendance at three consecutive meetings. Membership

can be renewed with a letter of certification to the facility Director indicating the attendance requirement will be met. Representatives-at-large and the nonaffiliated Representative will be removed from the membership listing when they miss three consecutive meetings.” By not including reference to those individuals representing the stated organizations, it has allowed sufficient ambiguity in applicable attendance requirements to warrant VA to include language specific to individuals in VHA Directive 2001-043, which has since expired. To ensure clarity, consistency, and continuity, it is recommended that VA adopt the following statement for inclusion in VHA Handbook 1620.1, after the first sentence in the cited reference: “Individual representatives will likewise be removed from the listing after being absent for three consecutive meetings.” (VHA Directive 2001-043 subparagraph 4h(1), lines 2-3 (pg. 2.), and to include, if necessary “deputy representatives.”

VA COMMENT: Approved. VHA Directive 2001-043 will not be renewed since it is a duplication of the reference in VHA Handbook 1620.1. The statement can be included in the next revision of VHA Handbook 1620.1.

e. **RECOMMENDATION:** (Deferred from 2006) “VHA Handbook 1620.1 subparagraph 7b(4)(b) (pg. 11) states: “Members on the facility VAVS Committee must be certified in writing by the National Certifying Official, or other designated person, as selected by the highest elected or appointed official of each member organization.” It is recommended that after the words “...certified in writing...” the following language be added: “...or e-mail followed by a letter if needed.” A similar submission in the 2003 recommendations’ cycle was disapproved stating: “Current policy ...does not prohibit the use of e-mail as a form of communication from the certifying official to local facilities appointing local VAVS Representatives. The communication is to be addressed to the Facility Director, ATTN: Voluntary Service Program Manager. It should be noted that standard business letter is preferred.” (Executive Committee Minutes, 10/14/02-10/15/02, page 9; NAC Annual Meeting Minutes, 04/30/03-05/03/03, page 16.) Although VHA Handbook 1620.1 does not preclude the use of e-mail certifications, and the proposed recommendation contains its own remedy, for consistency, clarity, and conformity, the Executive Committee suggests approval of the electronic certification option.” (It should be noted that in the interim, VA has approved undertaking a pilot program “...to assess the efficacy of distributing VAVS quarterly meeting minutes electronically.”)

VA COMMENT: Approved.

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

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Under Secretary for Health

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