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# News Release

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## **VA Launches Vantage Point Blog**

### *Online Communications Tools Between VA and Veterans About to Increase*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is launching its first official blog, opening a new line of communication between the department and its stakeholders. The debut marks VA’s latest outreach effort aimed at improving the way VA and its clients engage online.

“As methods of communication change and evolve, we don’t just want to keep up at VA. We want to lead the way. This tool will allow us to interact with Veterans, their families, and the public in ways we’ve never done before,” said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. “Instead of waiting for Veterans to find us, we’re going to seek them out where they already are—which is, increasingly, online.”

The blog, called *Vantage Point*, will be edited by VA’s Director of New Media Brandon Friedman. The blog will launch with two primary features: a main column of articles written each day by VA staff and a section comprised of guest pieces submitted by other stakeholders including employees and the public. Readers will be able to comment and participate on all articles.

The main column will initially be authored by two VA employees. VA staff writer Alex Horton, a former infantryman who began his writing career by blogging from Iraq, will address Veterans issues, while Lauren Bailey, special assistant to the chief technology officer, will provide readers with the latest on VA’s information technology initiatives meant to modernize the department. Both writers will interact frequently with readers.

**- Blog -**

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*VAntage Point*'s guest pieces will function as "letters to the editor." Whether from a VA physician, a student going to school on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, or a representative from a Veterans Service Organization, all pieces will be considered for publication based on their rationale and reasoned points—not on how closely their views align with those of the department.

"Communication between VA, Veterans, and their families is no longer a one way street," said Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Tammy Duckworth. "Not only will *VAntage Point* improve our ability to get the right information to the right Veteran at the right time, but it will allow the department to hear directly from Veterans about their concerns."

*VAntage Point* is just the latest expansion of the department's outreach efforts to increase transparency, participation, and collaboration via social media. Since creating an Office of New Media in late 2009, VA has launched a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. Each major component of VA (health, benefits, and national cemeteries) has its own Facebook page and Twitter feed, while the department has simultaneously begun to roll out these platforms to all 153 VA medical centers. Currently, 55 medical centers maintain a presence on Facebook and 30 are operating Twitter feeds. The department currently has the largest Facebook subscriber base among cabinet-level agencies with over 70,000 subscribers.

To view the blog, please visit <http://www.blogs.va.gov>. For more information, visit <http://www.va.gov>.

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