

Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission

Site Visit Summary Final Report

January 19, 2007

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Commission Site Visits:



Seattle, WA

July 18-20



Chicago, IL

April 11-13



Boston, MA

Aug 2-4



San Diego, CA

June 5-7



St. Louis, MO

May 9-11



Atlanta, GA

Sept 5-7



San Antonio, TX

March 6-8



**Tampa/St.
Petersburg, FL**

Feb 15-17

Organizations:

- VA

- Regional Offices
- Medical Centers
- VISN Offices
- CBOC/Out-pt clinic
- Vet Centers
- NCPTSD
- RMC

- DoD

- Military Installations
- CBHCO
- NPRC

Joint Ventures:

- Great Lakes Federal
- Intrepid Rehab Center
- Active Duty Rehab Center

Veteran Demographics:

- **Almost 25 Million Veterans**
- **Over 19.5 Million Wartime Veterans**
- **Death rate of 1,200 per day**
- **TX & GA 10% growth / MA 15% loss**
(National: NV 30% growth / NY 20% loss)
- **Female veterans = 6%**
- **Average age is 58 years**

Regional Offices:

- **Directors**
- **Veterans Service Center Staff:**
 - **DRO**
 - **RVSR**
 - **VSR**
 - **VR&E Officers**
 - **OIF/OEF Coordinators**
- **VSO Service Officers**

RO Timeliness Measures:

Site Visit Location	Avg. <u>days</u> to complete	Productivity Index
St. Petersburg	171.3	94%
Houston (for San Antonio)	208.7	97%
Chicago	221.8	88%
St. Louis	164.0	86%
San Diego	171.8	110%
Seattle	170.8	95%
Boston	211.8	105%
Atlanta	196.2	91%
National Average	169.9	90%

VR&E Workload:

Location	Managers	Cases	Avg. Case Load
St. Petersburg	39	4,758	122
Houston	34	5,336	158
Chicago	15	1,739	116
St. Louis	8	1,383	173
San Diego	12	1,473	123
Seattle	23	2,836	123
Boston	10	979	98
Atlanta	27	2,970	110
National Totals	663	90,767	137

VR&E Caseload Comparisons:

- VA Recommends **125** cases per manager
 - VA Average caseload is **137**
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- DOL recommends **50** cases per DVOP
- Army Wounded Warrior recommends **40** cases per Specialist
- States DRS average **80-100** cases per manager

Medical Centers:

- **Directors (VISN & VAMC)**
- **C&P Examiners**
- **Rehabilitation Centers & Programs:**
SCI, PTSD, Blind, Amputee & Women's Health
- **Centers of Excellence**

- **QTC Exams**

VAMC Exam Timeliness:

Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN)	Performance Scores	Days Return Requests
VISN 1 (Boston RO)	70%	28
VISN 7 (Atlanta RO)	75%	34
VISN 8 (St. Petersburg RO)	71%	42
VISN 12 (Chicago RO)	76%	29
VISN 16 (St. Louis RO)	79%	39
VISN 17 (Houston RO)	81%	29
VISN 20 (Seattle RO)	72%	30
VISN 22 (San Diego)	76%	29
National Average/Standard	76%	34/35 goal

Vet Centers:

- **Established in 1979**
- **209 Vet Center locations in communities**
- **Combat era veterans, Sexual assault, Survivor Support (GWOT Outreach)**
- **High Veteran Satisfaction**
- **Not electronically integrated with VAMC**
- **Not well coordinated with RO to assist with claims, especially PTSD**

Defense Department:

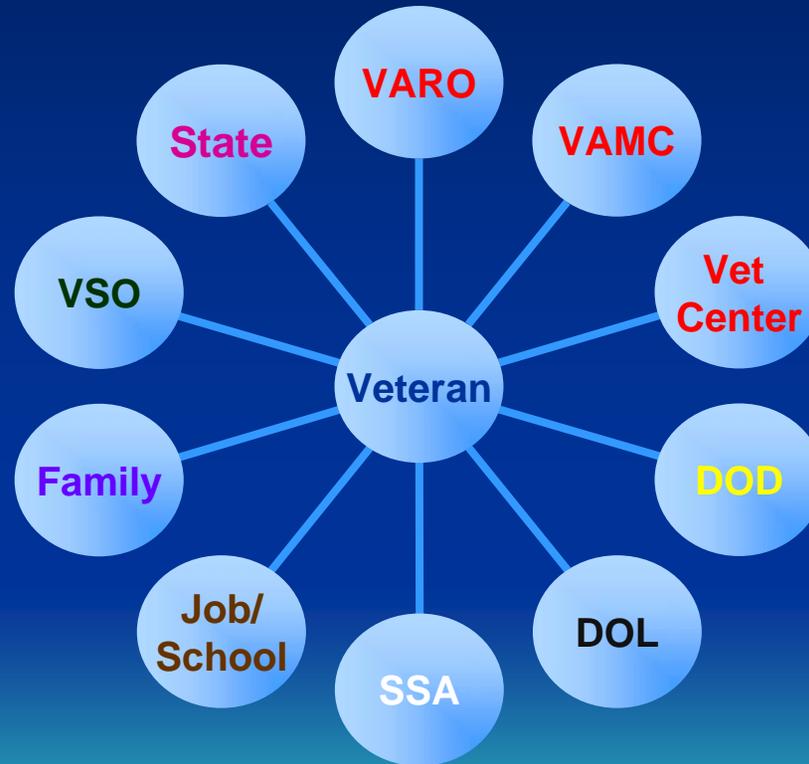
- Commanders
- TAP/DTAP:
 - DOL
 - VR&E
- BDD
- DES
- Casualty Affairs
- AHLTA/VistA
- CBHCO soldiers

Town Hall Meetings:

- **853 Participants**
- **182 verbal statements**
- **12 written statements**
- **Primary Concerns:**
 - **Difficulties with filing claims & appeals**
 - **Access to medical care, mental health**
 - **Inadequacies of survivor benefits**
 - **Environmental exposures & presumption**

Findings:

Multiple Systems for Veteran Interaction



Findings: Operational Challenges & Accomplishments:

- **IT is Key!**
- **AHLTA/Vista interoperability slow, but change is ongoing**
- **“Artificial Intelligence” & Electronic Templates**
- **Rate Claims in Real Time**

Findings:

Coordination & Cooperation:

- **Administration (VHA & VBA) & the Departments (VA, DOD, DOL, SSA) need to work together**
- **Availability of paper records**
- **Communication between examiners and raters needs improvement**
- **Vet Centers more involved**

Findings:

Efficiencies & Timeliness:

- **Average 6-8 months to process claims (non BDD)**
- **Award impacts seamless transition**
- **Sensitivity to generational and gender documentation**
- **VR&E workload is too high to be effective**

Findings:

Veteran Satisfaction:

Satisfied:

- Health Care
- Vet Centers

Unsatisfied:

- Claims Process
- VA Letters
- RO Backlog
- COLA
- Survivor Benefits

Findings: Unique Issues;

- **Great Lakes Federal Healthcare Facility**
- **Intrepid Rehab Center**
- **National Center PTSD**
- **Active Duty Rehab Center**
- **GA State Dept of Veteran Services**
- **Seattle Center of Excellence**
- **National Personnel Records Center**
- **Records Management Center**

General Suggestions:

- **Improve communications from VA & DoD to the field**
- **Include DOL, SSA & the States**
- **Improve IT capabilities**
- **Track paper records better**
- **Involve experts in C&P: Vet Center, Examiners**
- **Improve staff allocations, VR&E and VSC**

General Suggestions:

- **Mandate TAP classes**
- **One Exam: DoD, VA, SSDI**
- **Cultural/Gender Sensitivity Training**
- **Explore lessons learned from joint ventures & sharing agreements**
- **Review effectiveness of contracting out services (i.e. QTC & Military OneSource)**

Commission Site Visits:

Questions & Discussion