

## How and What are We Doing at the VA?

Natasha Skinner\*

School of Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska, United States

\*Corresponding author: Natasha Skinner, School of Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska, United States, Tel: 347-885-1230; E-mail: [natashaskinner56@gmail.com](mailto:natashaskinner56@gmail.com)

Received: July 27, 2024; Accepted: August 08, 2024; Published: August 23, 2024

### Abstract

Unlike any government agency the Veteran Affairs (VA), has been known and called many names and has countless positions within the Department of Veteran Affairs and its three administrations regarding the mental, physical, safety and wellbeing of Vets and their families, regardless of whether they are alive or deceased because the VA also takes care of the Vets and their families funeral services. Besides those aspects, it's impossible to give the responsibilities of the VA as a whole any brevity or even trying to expand on it verbally because the VA and its entirety are always changing. The VA and its administrations CARES comes from the VA's core values of I CARE. According to the VA, their mission comes from fulfilling former President Lincoln's promise of "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan "by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans [1]. To briefly state, this basically means that the VA's guiding principles are how all VA employees execute their duties to Veterans, plus their caregivers, survivors and families. The VA's acronym of I CARE stands for I is for integrity, C is for commitment, A is for advocacy, R is for respect and E is for excellence. When defining I CARE it just means that VA employees care about service members, about their VA colleagues, making choices that involve basically the toughest of decisions instead of making the easier of wrong ones and performing their VA duties to the best of their abilities. Basically this paper, will speak to how the VA as an entity and its three administrations execute the VA's I CARE values throughout their duties, sacrifices and time as the Department of Veteran Affairs workforce.

**Approach:** To express what the Veteran Affairs is, its history, its many titles and what it means to be employed by any part of the VA would be detailed by visiting VA related websites and utilizing parts of its labor force periodical, as well as a brief inaction interview with both a Vet and staff member that said that even though you are a service member, working for any part of the VA is a learning experience that takes time. Plus, like him no matter how long you have worked for the VA, everyday is a day of learning something new.

**Findings:** The results will tell that not only the VA has a history to tell, but the fellow employees of this government agency network do too, which varies by the governmental department of the Department of Veteran Affairs that they work for.

**Keywords:** VA; Veteran; WCPAC; Department of Veteran Affairs; Service members

## 1. Abbreviations

VA: Veteran Affairs; I CARE: (**I** is for integrity, **C** is for commitment, **A** is for advocacy, **R** is for respect and **E** is for excellence); VA: Veteran Affairs Department; Vets: Veterans; VBA: Veteran's Benefits Administration; VHA: Veteran's Health Administration; NCA: National Cemetery Administration; PSRW: Public Service Recognition Week

## 2. Introduction

When you think, hear or view anything VA (Veteran's Administration) related you think military and you would be right, but there is a lot more happening in this government agency than is realized by the public or those who work outside of this agency. The acronym VA has been called by more than one name and stands for something. In actuality, according to Joseph K. Gerideau, seasoned Army Veteran of 8 years and 18 years as a Veteran Services Supervisor for West CPAC in Las Vegas, NV, this government agency is called Veterans Administration (VA), but it's also called the Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Department of Affairs. (Joseph K. Gerideau, MBA, MHM, personal communication, March 7, 2023.) The many name changes occurred for the purpose of adequately allocating federal funding and properly distributing the myriad duties of this federal government agency and it was therefore divided. What isn't known about the VA is that it dates far as, back as the American colonies, which would be to the year 1636 [2]. Therefore, this would indicate that because the VA itself has been around for that many hundreds of years that it would make sense for this government agency to be called by other older version names like the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, Bureau of Pensions, Veterans Bureau and War Risk Bureau, so many names [2].

## 3. What is the VA?

Like its many names, a description of the Veteran's Administration can't be stated in one gulp. For instance, because the Veteran's Administration is quite the federal agency with a myriad number of responsibilities when it comes to ensuring the benefits and care of the Veterans of the United States and their families it's complemented by three administrations and each of the three VA administrations has their specific duties regarding Veterans and their families [3]. The Veteran Affairs Department (VA) as a whole regards program that assist Veterans (Vets) and members of their families. The VA offers educational and rehabilitation services, and it also offers Veterans compensation payments when it comes to disabilities, funeral costs for deaths related to their military service [3]. Moreover, the VA offers their Vets home loan guaranties, burials, pensions and health care services and benefits that include nursing home services, medical centers and clinics, which just briefly describes the responsibilities of the VA in relation to Vets and the members of the family.

## 4. What's the VBA?

Of the three administrations within the VA department, the 1st VA administration, which would be the Veteran's Benefits Administration (VBA), executes the responsibility of ensuring that Vets, their survivors and dependents receive benefits that include financial and educational resources. Such benefits that the VBA provides are education and training (for active & retired service members, compensation service (service-connected disability benefit), insurance services (life insurance programs) to give Vets and their families, employment placement aid and vocational rehabilitation [2]. Other services provided by the VBA to Vets are home loan guaranty service (various housing programs and grants) for Vets/disabled Vets and

pension/fiduciary service, which aids wartime Vets, their families and survivors who are plagued with life's financial challenges with additional income through death and Veterans pension, and dependency and indemnity compensation. With these types of VBA benefits, Vets who experience illnesses, injuries and sickness because of their advanced age and are incapable of managing their VA benefits become the at-risk recipients [2]. Therefore, it's made certain by the VBA that the Vet's benefits are protected.

## **5. What's the VHA?**

In the 2nd VA administration, otherwise known as the Veteran's Health Administration (VHA), is responsible for providing specialized care, primary and medical care, as well as social support services to United States Vets [2]. The VHA is known to be the largest integrated health care system in the United States, which provides at least 1,298 healthcare facilities, plus 171 VA medical centers, and in addition to 1,113 outpatient sites. The VHA has a number of healthcare facilities that vary in medical services. For instance, the VHA's common medical centers are capable of providing Veterans with typical hospital-based medical services like surgeries, pharmacology, mental health, radiology, critical care, orthopedics and physical therapies [2]. While their other medical facilities offer other medical and surgical specialist services like vision care, pathology, geriatrics, oncology, podiatry, dermatology, speech pathology, dentistry, neurology, prosthetics, audiology and urology. In addition to these medical and surgical services, the VHA also has medical centers that are available with more complex services like plastic surgeries and organ transplants.

When it comes to the health and wellbeing of Veterans, the previous bestowments of the VHA's medical facilities aren't even all of what this VA administration is able to provide for Veterans. This VA administration also has patient advocates at their medical centers that are trained to aid vets with any concerns related to their health such as any questions, special and/or specific issues and refer them to the appropriate staff member at the medical centers.

## **6. What is the NCA?**

The third and final VA administration is the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). This VA administration is in charge with providing burial plots for Vets and their eligible family members (spouse and children). The NCA shows its regard for the buried Vets by maintaining its national cemetery as nationwide shrine to honor the United States' fallen soldiers and their memory [3]. In addition, the National Cemetery Administration makes certain to ensure that the fallen Vets that are interred in the cemetery are properly memorialized. What is probably unknown about the National Cemetery Administration is that it dates back as far as the Civil War. Currently, it's responsible for 155 national cemeteries [4]. Additionally, the NCA is also responsible for 34 soldiers' lots, 121 VA grant-funded state, as well as territory and tribal Veterans cemeteries in the United States and providing headstone and memorial benefits to qualified Vets of the military services, former service members and Veterans who have met the active-duty service requirements and who were honorably discharged from their military service.

Regarding burial services, the NCA provides the gravesite, grave liner government headstone, Presidential Memorial Certificate, opening/closing of the grave, United States burial flag and the continuous care of the gravesite at no financial cost to the Veteran's family [4]. Additionally, the NCA also provides continuous care to all VA cemeteries in 49 states and territories (Guam and Saipan) and tribal trust lands. Even if Vets aren't buried in any of the National Cemetery Administration plots, they

still receive headstones, as well as markers to honor and remember their service. What is also probably an unknown facet about the National Cemetery Administration is that it has burial plots of more than four million fallen Vets and also service members of every war and conflict having been buried and venerated in the cemeteries.

## **7. What's It Like Being Apart of the VA Network Workwise?**

In recognition of Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW) 2023, which is an annual celebration held during the first week of May. This week regards public service workers in federal, county, local government and state for their public service with ensuring the VA's purpose of taking care of the United States' Vets, caregivers, survivors and families [5]. To reward public service workers, for the week the VA provides openings for service workers to reconnect with their fellow workers, encourage their inventiveness, stimulate self-care and other activities.

In addendum to the previously mentioned activities, just to say thank you to public service workers the VA also identifies the VA employees who have given their time, personal sacrifices, and support, in spite of the unpredictability of times to the nation's service members and their families by having activities for VA public service workers to aid them in physical and mental wellbeing activities all in all so that they feel a sense of belonging and gratitude as VA employees. As an addenda, like Vet and VA employee Joseph K. Gerideau all VA workforce every VA has their own story to tell about their time in the VA's network system.

## **8. Discussion and Conclusion**

It doesn't matter which VA administration you work for because as an employee of the VA you can only discuss the responsibilities of any of the VA organizations in the VA division that you are employed with and your respective duties for it. There is so much involved in the VA itself and its three organizations that the VA with its subsidiary companies are forever changing. As long as the expectation of the 65+ years of the United States population of Vets continues to increase in say the next thirty years, the VA would have to continuously change the methods it utilizes to aid vets and their families in not only their safety, wellbeing, but healthcare issues and how it communicates in all means with military families as well in times of calmness and unpredictability.

### **REFERENCES**

1. I CARE. 2021. Retrieved July 8, 2023, <https://www.va.gov/icare/index.asp>
2. History of VA and its administrations. 2023. Retrieved May 10, 2023, <https://www.department.va.gov/history/>
3. A-Z index of U.S. government departments and agencies. 2023. Retrieved May 10, 2023, <https://www.usa.gov/agency-index/v>
4. National Cemetery Administration. 2023. Retrieved July 1, 2023, [https://www.cem.va.gov/facts/NCA\\_History\\_and\\_Development\\_1.asp](https://www.cem.va.gov/facts/NCA_History_and_Development_1.asp)
5. Office of Human Resources & Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness 2023, Diversity @ Work, May: 1-5.