

**VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT**

**1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive provides policy for the quality and timeliness of correspondence prepared in VHA, including: White House mail, Congressional case mail, Veterans Service Organization mail, miscellaneous mail, and external mail, which reflects directly on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the services VA provides.

**2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** Response due dates for case mail from Congressional members and all other routine correspondence have been changed from 30 business days to 15.

**3. RELATED ISSUES:** None.

**4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Director, Office of Executive Correspondence (10B1) is responsible for the content of this directive. Questions may be referred to 202-461-7299.

**5. RESCISSION:** VHA Directive 2012-017, VHA Correspondence Management, dated June 25, 2012, is rescinded.

**6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of March 2024. This VHA directive will continue to serve as national VHA policy until it is recertified or rescinded.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

**BY DIRECTION OF THE UNDER  
SECRETARY FOR HEALTH:**

/s/ Lawrence B. Connell  
VHA Chief of Staff

/s/ Lawrence B. Connell  
VHA Chief of Staff

**NOTE:** All references herein to VA and VHA documents incorporate by reference subsequent VA and VHA documents on the same or similar subject matter.

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**CONTENTS**

**VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT**

1. PURPOSE..... 1

2. POLICY ..... 1

3. RESPONSIBILITIES ..... 1

4. TRAINING..... 4

5. RECORDS MANAGEMENT..... 4

6. REFERENCES..... 4

APPENDIX A

CORRESPONDENCE PROCESSING.....A-1

APPENDIX B

EXPLANATION OF TERMS.....B-1

APPENDIX C

CORRESPONDENCE PRIORITY RULES (CPR)..... C-1

## VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive provides policy for the management of correspondence within VHA, including: White House Mail, Congressional Case Mail, Veterans Service Organization Mail, Miscellaneous Mail and External Mail. This directive applies only to correspondence and does not cover policy documents or other assignments made through the electronic document management system (EDMS). **NOTE:** *The present EDMS is known as Veterans Affairs Integrated Enterprise Workflow Solution (VIEWS).* **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7301(b).

### 2. POLICY

It is VHA policy that correspondence is handled promptly and that requested information is provided in a courteous, compassionate manner with a customer service orientation.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary for Health is responsible for ensuring that VHA Senior Leadership, to include: VHA Chief of Staff, the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, and VHA Chief Officers, have effective correspondence programs in place within their functional areas and follow the appropriate requirements on how to prepare letters; memoranda; VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet; VA Form 0907, Strategic Communications Review; and other correspondence documents. These requirements can be found in Appendix A of this directive, on the Office of the Executive Secretary's (ES) Web site at: <http://vaww.execsec.va.gov/>, and on the Office of Executive Correspondence Web site at: <http://vaww.va.gov/com/correspond>. **NOTE:** *These are internal VA Web sites that are not available to the public.*

b. **Assistant Deputy Under Secretary or Chief Officer.** The Assistant Deputy Under Secretary or Chief Officer is responsible for developing effective correspondence programs within their functional areas and following the requirements listed in paragraph 3a and Appendices A and C.

c. **VHA Senior Leadership.** VHA Senior Leadership is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring that all correspondence requiring signature of VA and VHA leadership (paragraph 3a) is placed in the EDMS. Sensitive items placed in the EDMS must be marked as sensitive.

(2) Designating a correspondence liaison and a backup who is responsible for the management of correspondence within each program office.

(3) Reviewing all assignments daily to ensure assignments are correct. If a document needs to be reassigned to another program office, reassignments must be requested within 1 business day.

(4) Ensuring there are designees who can clear documents each workday to prevent delays.

(5) Working with 10B1 to provide a final draft that is responsive to the incoming correspondence, timely, factually correct, and consistent with general VHA and Departmental policy.

(6) Obtaining and monitoring all needed concurrences on correspondence assigned for the signature of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and the Under Secretary for Health, and lead program office (if designated) for drafting the response.

(7) Concurring on assigned correspondence within 2 business days, unless the lead program office grants an extension.

(8) Updating the EDMS to reflect the status of all correspondence assigned in their program areas.

(9) Monitoring correspondence for timeliness and completeness until it has been signed, if designated the lead program office for drafting the response. If there are follow-up actions noted in the signed response, the lead program office will track the actions until they are completed.

(10) Applying the same principles of quality and timeliness (as required for correspondence signed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, or the Under Secretary for Health) for correspondence assigned for signature of the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Community Care, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Organizational Excellence, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services or the VHA Chief Officer level. When 10B1 assigns correspondence for these signature levels, the program office bears full responsibility for:

- (a) Reviewing all assignments daily to ensure the assignment is correct;
- (b) Preparing a complete and timely response;
- (c) Signing and dispatching the signed response by the assigned due date;
- (d) Forwarding a copy of the signed response to 10B1 in the EDMS for information;
- (e) Tracking in the EDMS; and
- (f) Closing the folder.

d. **VHA Office of Executive Correspondence (10B1).** The VHA Office of Executive Correspondence (10B1) is responsible for overseeing the correspondence process from VHA's receipt of correspondence until signature and dispatch of the response. 10B1 is also responsible for conducting the Strategic Communications Review meeting on a weekly basis to discuss overdue correspondence.

(1) **10B1 Correspondence Management Staff.** 10B1's Correspondence Management Staff is responsible for:

- (a) Reviewing initial correspondence assignments to VHA;
- (b) Assigning, monitoring, and closing miscellaneous mail, Congressional case mail and White House correspondence assigned to program offices or field facilities;
- (c) Tracking VHA's correspondence workload daily;
- (d) Dispatching signed correspondence;
- (e) Facilitating extension requests from VHA program offices; and
- (f) Closing VHA assignments and folders for the Under Secretary for Health's signature.

(2) **10B1 Executive Reviewers.** 10B1 Executive Reviewers are responsible for:

(a) Reviewing final draft responses submitted by the Office of the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health and the Offices of the Deputy Under Secretaries.

1. If package is incomplete or requires major revisions, 10B1 will work with the Office of the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health and the Offices of the Deputy Under Secretaries.

2. Once revised, 10B1 will continue processing the final package.

(b) Ensuring that all appropriate concurrences are documented in the final package.

(c) Ensuring assignments are finalized for the signatures of VA and VHA Senior Leadership (paragraph 3.a.)

(d) Attending VHA mail call to obtain the signature or concurrence of the Under Secretary for Health.

1. Being prepared to effectively and succinctly summarize the documents to be signed, anticipate questions, and have all folders signature ready.

2. If package requires edits, or additional information, 10B1 will revise, or if necessary, return the folder to the Office of the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health and the Offices of the Deputy Under Secretaries.

3. Once revision(s) are complete, the package is returned to 10B1 for mail call and VHA approval.

(e) Ensuring that VHA responds to ES fast track items in an expeditious manner.

(f) Attending VA ES mail call (when needed) to support the Subject Matter Expert (SME) and ensuring that any due outs are accomplished timely.

(g) Providing guidance on correspondence issues.

(h) Serving as the primary point of contact with other VA elements on correspondence management issues.

(i) Providing formal and informal correspondence training for VHA.

#### 4. TRAINING

The Office of Executive Correspondence is responsible for developing training content related to this directive. For specific training courses, contact the program office at 202-461-7299.

#### 5. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

All records regardless of format (paper, electronic, electronic systems) created by this directive shall be managed per the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records schedules found in VA Records Control Schedule 10-1. If you have any questions regarding any aspect of records management you should contact your facility Records Manager or your Records Liaison.

#### 6. REFERENCES

a. 38 U.S.C. 7301(b).

b. VA Form 0907, VA Strategic Communication Review Form.

c. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet.

d. VA Records Control Schedule 10-1.

e. Office of Executive Secretary's (ES) Intranet Web site, <http://vaww.execsec.va.gov/>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.*

f. Office of Executive Correspondence Intranet Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/com/correspond>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site that is not available to the public.*

## CORRESPONDENCE PROCESSING

VHA correspondence processing emphasizes accountability, cooperation, and progress toward attainment of the goal of zero overdue correspondence. The process for correspondence prepared for the signatures of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and VHA leadership is as follows:

1. An incoming letter is received in 10B1, either from the Office of the Executive Secretary (ES) (001B) or from other Administrations and is entered into the electronic document management system (EDMS) and assigned to an appropriate lead program office(s) to prepare a draft response.

a. Draft responses must be specific and concise, contain pertinent information while avoiding “fluff”, contextually appropriate, and must answer all of the question from the incoming inquiry.

b. Lead program offices have 6 business days to prepare a final draft for Committee Chairs (Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, House Veterans Affairs Committee, Senate Appropriations Committee, House Appropriations Committee) unless the due date is shortened because of the sensitivity of an issue. For responses to other Congressional members, lead program offices have 15 business days to prepare a final draft.

c. When there are multiple, discrete issues presented requiring distinct responses from various program offices, 10B1 will assist the lead program office with collaborating with other program offices to coordinate and finalize the response.

d. Due dates for other correspondence are established based on the type of correspondence as outlined in Appendix C.

2. Program offices identified as the lead program offices must review assignments immediately to determine if an interim response is needed for the signature of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Affairs Chief of Staff, or the Under Secretary for Health. If an interim is needed, the lead program office needs to prepare the interim response within 1 business day of the assignment. **NOTE:** *The 10B1 liaison needs to be contacted if there is uncertainty about whether an interim response is needed.*

3. Requests for extension must be made by the lead program office to 10B1 within 1 business day of receipt of the assignment.

4. Informal external and internal VHA consultations are important steps in preparing the final draft that is assigned to 10B1; they are as follows:

a. The lead program office develops a final draft response addressing each of the issues raised in the incoming letter within the stated timeframe. VA Form 0907, VA Strategic Communication Review Form, must be prepared for all packages signed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet, must be prepared for all packages signed by the Under Secretary for Health. This

response is the official VHA position and must be fully coordinated. The forms can be found at <https://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA Web site and is not available to the public.*

b. The lead program office enters the draft response, as well as the appropriate VA forms and all pertinent background information into the EDMS and sends the response through appropriate internal and external channels for concurrence. The lead program office must obtain concurrence from their respective Deputy Under Secretary for Health before an assignment is made to 10B1.

5. When 10B1 receives a review assignment, the 10B1 staff review, edit, and may re-format the response letter (and the fact sheet and VA Form 0907, if required), in coordination with the lead program office. If a draft response has not fully addressed all the issues in the incoming letter, 10B1 staff will contact the appropriate correspondence liaison, or alternate, for clarification or additional information. The correspondence liaison must ensure that 10B1 has all the information necessary to fully address all issues.

6. Concurring offices are given 2 business days to concur on correspondence assigned to them by another program office. After entering a concurrence in the EDMS, an assignment must be made back to the requesting program office.

a. If a concurrence, or communication regarding the concurrence, is not received after 2 business days, concurrence is assumed. Folders are not held for overdue concurrences.

b. Concurring offices must resolve content issues with the lead program office. Concurring offices need to refer substantial (content) questions or concerns to the correspondence liaison in the lead program office for resolution.

c. The lead program office must address and respond to issues raised by a concurring office within 2 business days.

7. The lead program office finalizes the letter, assembles a folder, and brings it to 10B1 for final review and presentation at VHA mail call.

8. Upon leadership signature or approval, 10B1 dispatches the correspondence if it is for the signature of the Under Secretary for Health, or forwards it to 001B if it is for the signature of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. If questions are raised at mail call, 10B1 will consult with the appropriate correspondence liaison.



## EXPLANATION OF TERMS

- 1. Concurrences.** Upon completion of a final draft, the lead program office determines the concurrences that are needed and makes assignments to the appropriate concurring program offices for review and concurrence. Concurring offices have 2 business days to concur on correspondence. If a concurrence, or communication regarding the concurrence, is not received within this time, concurrence will be assumed and the response will be finalized for signature.
- 2. Concurring Office.** A concurring office(s) has specific expertise on a portion of what is contained in a draft response. A concurring office is responsible for concurring, or providing comments, on a draft response within 2 business days.
- 3. Correspondence Assignments.** Correspondence is assigned to a lead program office based on the predominant issue in the incoming letter. However, if a program office is designated as a lead program office for correspondence, which clearly should be answered more appropriately by another office(s), the initial lead program office must coordinate the transfer and obtain acceptance of the assignment by another program office(s) before reassignment is made.
- 4. Correspondence Liaison.** Each Chief Officer must designate a correspondence liaison who is to manage correspondence in the program office and work closely with 10B1 on issues relating to correspondence management, review, and control.
- 5. Dispatching Signed Correspondence.** Correspondence for the signature or concurrence of the Under Secretary for Health or the Deputy Under Secretary for Health must be dated and dispatched by 10B1. Correspondence assigned for other signature levels within VHA typically are signed and dispatched by the responsible action office and a file copy provided to 10B1. Correspondence for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs' signature is dispatched by 001B.
- 6. Electronic Document Management System (EDMS).** The EDMS is the tracking system that must be used by program offices to stay current on the status of each folder.
- 7. Interim Response.** Lead program offices must review assignments immediately to determine if an interim response is needed. Interim responses are needed when it is obvious that a reply cannot be prepared within the assigned timeframe. If an interim response is needed, it is to be prepared within 1 business day of the assignment. Program offices need to contact the 10B1 liaison if there is uncertainty about whether an interim response is needed.
- 8. Office of Executive Correspondence.** The VHA Office of Executive Correspondence (10B1) is responsible for correspondence administration, including the efficiency of VHA correspondence processing.

**9. Timeliness and Quality.** Lead program offices are given 6 business days to prepare and submit a final draft to the Office of Executive Correspondence (10B1) for high-priority correspondence. All issues are to be fully addressed. The necessary coordination and resolution of controversial issues need to be reconciled prior to the draft being sent to 10B1.

**10. VHA Senior Leadership.** VHA Senior Leadership is defined as VHA Chief of Staff, the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, the Deputy Under Secretaries for Health and VHA Chief Officers.

**CORRESPONDENCE PRIORITY RULES (CPR)**

**RULES FOR ASSIGNING DUE DATES TO INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE**

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has established the following protocol for establishing response due dates, depending on the nature of the incoming correspondence, unless otherwise specified. **NOTE:** *Response due date timelines start upon assignment of correspondence to the assigned program office.*

TYPE OF INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE	RESPONSE DUE
<p><b>1.</b> Committee Members: Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC), House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC), Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC), House Appropriations Committee (HAC).</p>	<p><u>6 business days from receipt.</u></p>
<p><b>2.</b> Other Congressional Members.</p>	<p><u>15 business days from receipt.</u></p>
<p><b>3.</b> White House special referral; personal letter from key Congressional members involving mismanagement, malpractice, prohibited personnel action (e.g., Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Whistleblowing), safety violations, or other serious allegations.</p>	<p><u>7 business days from receipt.</u></p>
<p><b>4.</b> Intergovernmental, e.g., Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Budget Office, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), etc., to include:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. Letters from Veterans Service Organizations;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">b. Time Sensitive letter from key Congressional members involving issues not identified in the preceding.</p>	<p><u>14 business days from receipt.</u></p>
<p><b>5.</b> White House bulk mail.</p>	<p><u>15 business days from receipt.</u></p>
<p><b>6.</b> Case mail from Congressional members; and all other routine correspondence.</p>	<p><u>15 business days from receipt.</u></p>