

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs Recommendations and Responses

Recommendation 1: Veterans Health Administration (VHA) maintains a strong commitment to the Whole Health approach to care which focuses on the connections between health and other aspects of a Veteran’s life. The Whole Health approach is patient-centric and empowers the patient to employ self-care as well as seek professional care and community support. The Whole Health model has many components essential to health and well-being, however it overlooks sensory health. Sensory health includes vision and hearing which are vital to the physical, social-emotional, mental health and general well-being of our Veterans. Impairments in sensory health impact activities of daily living and may result in isolation, withdrawal, and cognitive decline if not identified and remediated. In addition, impairments in sensory health may impede a Veteran’s confidence and ability for self-management which is a key factor in Whole Health. The impact of sensory health on well-being is more significant when more than one sensory system is involved, such as with both hearing loss and vision loss.

Whole Health will work with Audiology and Speech Pathology Service (ASPS) and with Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) to develop strategies to include sensory health in the Whole Health model for patient management and clinical care.

VHA should develop this plan over the next 12 months and report progress to the Committee during their meeting in October 2023.

VA Response: Concur

VA Action Plan						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status	Contact
Subject matter experts from the Office of Patient Centered-Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) (Whole Health), Audiology and Speech	OPCC&CT (Whole Health)	Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Service (RPS) ASPS BRS	Weekly meetings with liaison. Continued support to include presentations and collaborations.	Report status October 2023	Ongoing	Ben Kligler

<p>Audiology and Speech Pathology Service (ASPS) and with Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS), will work together to develop strategies to include sensory health in the Whole Health model for patient management and clinical care.</p> <p>Action Plan expands on the current collaboration between ASPS and BRS, and OPCC&CT.</p> <p>OPCC&CT liaison will continue to meet weekly with the Progressive Tinnitus Team and will continue collaborating with VA audiologists.</p> <p>OPCC&CT internal team was chartered to review current Whole Health resources and tools (e.g., Whole Health Implementation Guide) relative to sensory health.</p>			<p>OPCC&CT will charter a team that includes ASPS and BRS representatives and key stakeholders to develop an action plan to improve inclusion of sensory health in the Whole Health system of care.</p> <p>An improvement framework (e.g., Plan-Do- Study-Act) will be used.</p>			
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Recommendation 2: Recruitment of non-physician clinicians in Rehabilitation Services as well as retention of current clinicians is challenging due to salary levels and minimal opportunities for advancement.

Although VHA provides training opportunities for many non-physician specialists and clinicians in the Rehabilitation field, it is often difficult to retain these specialists. These unique training opportunities produce outstanding clinicians that are critical to the mission and the work of VHA.

VHA Office of Workforce Management (WMC) will work with Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services to develop a plan to better understand retention rates, what is needed to retain talent, and to develop strategies for recruiting and retaining staff, including but not limited to extending pay, recruitment, and retention incentives for non-physician clinicians within Rehabilitation Services.

VHA should develop this plan over the next 12 months and report progress to the Committee during their meeting in October 2023.

VA Response: Concur

VA Action Plan						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status	Contact
Examine retention rates. Develop strategies for recruiting staff. Examine retention strategies. Develop plan for incentives to assist in recruitment and retention for non-physician clinicians.	Office of Workforce Management	RPS		Report Status October 2023	Ongoing	Jessica Bonjorni

Recommendation 3: VHA Rehabilitation and RPS provides many opportunities to support the health and well-being of our Veterans. However, these opportunities could benefit from a coordinated communication and promotion plan. Increasing awareness of services and expanding outreach to Veterans may yield greater participation in disabilities programs and special events such as National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events (NVSPSE), as well as preventive health and wellness rehabilitation services.

RPS will collaborate with VHA Patient Care Services (PCS) and VHA Communications to:

- Develop a coordinated communication plan and toolkit to include the development of promotional materials intended for national and local use.
- Identify and engage with media sources for routine distribution of the materials.
- Broadcast and highlight Rehabilitation Services and Special-Disabilities Programs via traditional and social media platforms.
- Broaden outreach and distribution of content to Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), VHA Rehabilitation professionals, field Public Affairs Officers (PAO) and other identified stakeholders on a quarterly basis.

RPS, in collaboration with PCS and VHA communications teams, should develop this plan over the next 12 months and report progress to the Committee during their meeting in October 2023.

VA Response: Concur

VA Action Plan						
Steps to Implement	Lead Office	Other Offices	Tasks	Due Date	Current Status	Contact Person
Develop a coordinated communication plan and toolkit to include the development of promotional materials intended for national and local use.	RPS	Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Communications Patient Care Services (PCS) Communications	A. Develop toolkit for National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events to include flyers, social media graphics/content, electronic display board graphics, directors' messages, GovDelivery content for local sites and any additional materials that local VA Medical Centers can use to help promote activities and events.	Report status October 2023	Ongoing	David Otto

			<p>Submit toolkits to PCS for clearance and route to VHA Communications for additional concurrence and approval.</p> <p>Share toolkit widely through VHA Weekly Update emails, Public Affairs Officer (PAO) calls, the Veteran News Network (VNN), Veteran Service Organization (VSO) communicators calls, and via VHA and other Department of Veterans Affairs social media platforms.</p>			
--	--	--	---	--	--	--

<p>Identify and engage with media sources for routine distribution of the materials.</p>	<p>RPS</p>	<p>VHA Communications PCS Communications</p>	<p>NVSPSE to schedule meeting with PCS Communications and VHA Communications at least one month prior to activity or event to discuss currently planned media engagement activities proposed by the NVSPSE and VHA Communications to identify and engage with additional national media outlets. A. NVSPSE to add Veteran hometown to participant bios for quick locality reference for PAOs.</p>	<p>Report status October 2023</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>David Otto</p>
--	------------	---	---	---------------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

<p>Broadcast and highlight Rehabilitation Services and Special-Disabilities Programs via traditional and social media platforms.</p>	<p>RPS VHA Communications PCS Communications</p>		<p>During event weeks, NVSPSE will share developed content, videos, event highlights with PCS Communications and VHA Communications to assist in promoting content via VHA Communications social media platforms and additional traditional media platforms as identified.</p> <p>VHA Communications and PCS Communications will also share with VNN team to add content to patient waiting rooms for additional exposure.</p>	<p>Report status October 2023</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>David Otto</p>
--	--	--	--	---------------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

<p>Broaden outreach and distribution of content to Veterans, VSOs, VHA Rehabilitation professionals, field PAOs and other identified stakeholders on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Materials and communications strategies related to NVSPSE will be led by NVSPSE.</p> <p>Materials and communication strategies related to general RPS matters will be led by VHA and PCS Communications Teams with support from RPS as subject matter experts.</p>	<p>RPS VHA Communications</p> <p>PCS Communications</p>	<p>VHA</p>	<p>Attend VSO Communicators call quarterly to share toolkits for upcoming events and/or recap highlights from previous events.</p> <p>Share weekly recap of event highlights and stories with PCS and VHA Communications intended for Under Secretary for Health (USH)/Assistant USH message to all VA staff after each national event.</p> <p>Feature daily social media highlights via VHA social media channels during national events.</p> <p>Attend PAO call at least on a</p>	<p>Report status in October 2023</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>David Otto</p>
---	---	------------	---	--------------------------------------	----------------	-------------------

			quarterly basis to build awareness of events and to share toolkits for upcoming activities.			
--	--	--	---	--	--	--

Department of Veterans Affairs
June 2023