

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In August 2009, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) directed a comprehensive review of the Department's approach and practices in meeting the needs of Veterans of the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The intended outcome of this review was a set of action plans to ensure the needs of Gulf War Veterans are met and improve their level of satisfaction with VA services. More broadly, these efforts reflect the cultural and institutional change within VA as it transforms into a 21st century organization.

This report reflects the efforts of an interdisciplinary team of subject matter experts from across multiple work centers within VA—a task force led by the senior Gulf War Veteran within VA leadership. The Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force (GWVI-TF) was established to identify gaps in services as well as opportunities to better serve this Veteran community and in so doing help guide efforts at making the VA people-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking. The GWVI-TF target population is Veterans who were deployed on the Operation Desert Shield and/or Operation Desert Storm components of the 1990 - 1991 Gulf War period. The Gulf War is legally defined as beginning on August 2, 1990, and extending through a date to be prescribed by Presidential proclamation or law. While the term "Gulf War Veterans" could refer to all Veterans of conflicts during this period, including Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and subsequent conflicts, this report will use the term "1990 – 1991 Gulf War Veterans" to mean those Veterans who served in Operation Desert Shield and/or Operation Desert Storm.

The GWVI-TF worked with great speed and agility over several months to develop a comprehensive plan of action consistent with the challenge inherent in Secretary Shinseki's pledge to all Veterans in his comments before the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution on January 9, 2010: *"At VA, we advocate for Veterans – it is our overarching philosophy and, in time, it will become our culture."*

The GWVI-TF identified seven areas where VA can—and will—improve services for this group. Among these improvements, VA will reconnect with Veterans from the 1990 – 1991 Gulf War, strengthen the training of clinicians and claims processors, and reenergize its research effort. VA will also strengthen partnerships and medical surveillance to proactively address the potential health impacts on Veterans from the environmental exposures on today's battlefields.

The report's action plans are an initial roadmap to transform the care and services we deliver to Veterans from the 1990 – 1991 Gulf War. Execution of these plans will deliver the critical tools for frontline staff to address real and perceived misunderstandings between VA and Gulf War Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations, Congressional Committees, and other external stakeholders. Specifically, this report establishes action plans to deliver new and improved tools for VA personnel to improve: