

VA MISSION Act of 2018: Section 505 – Personnel Transparency Quarter Ending December 31, 2021

Executive Summary

April 4, 2022

This report is submitted under Section 505 of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (VA MISSION Act) (P.L. 115-182), regarding “Personnel Transparency.” Under Section 505(a), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary shall make publicly available on a quarterly basis information pertaining to staffing and vacancies, specifically including the number of personnel encumbering positions, the number of accessions and separation actions processed during the prior quarter, the number of vacancies by occupation, and the percentage of new hires hired within the time-to-hire target of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

As of December 31, 2021, VA had 408,452 onboard employees (includes full-time, part-time and seasonal employees), representing a total of 399,458 onboard full-time equivalent employees (FTEs).¹ Despite successful budget execution, VA’s net gain of onboard employees during the 1st quarter of FY 2022 was 856, which was less than the prior quarter. This reflects an inability to hire at historical rates, due to similar challenges faced by other healthcare systems based on high demand for healthcare providers and tight supply.²

Note that these data represent a point in time (December 31, 2021). The reported vacancies are a best estimate based on available data, and may not align with data presented from other sources reflecting different points in time and different baseline measures.

VA continues to be successful in attracting and retaining talent and persists with aggressive hiring to meet expanding mission demands. This approach ensures VA is providing top-quality health care, benefits, and burial services to our Nation’s Veterans. While VA’s turnover rate has historically been extremely competitive at or below 9.6% annually, the turnover rate for VA increased to 9.9% in FY 2021, which is higher than VA has experienced in recent years.

In FY 2020, to gain more accuracy in reporting vacant positions, VA began distinguishing between funded and unfunded vacant FTEs in the MISSION Act reports. Additionally, VA incorporated position validation into the personnel transparency business processes to promote more precise reporting. Efforts to resolve issues impacting position and staffing data quality, and to improve data systems, continue throughout FY 2022.

VA facilities have the authority to use recruitment, retention and relocation incentives to attract and retain high-quality talent for specialized occupations. These incentives can be used to fill title 5, title 38 or hybrid title 38 positions, which are often hard to fill and retain due to being mission-critical or shortage occupations. VA maximizes the use of many other compensation flexibilities to include: superior qualifications appointments (also known as appointments above

¹ Department of Veterans Affairs, MISSION Act Section 505 Data. <https://www.va.gov/Employee/va-mission-act-section-505-data/>. The data exclude Office of the Inspector General, Veterans Canteen Service (VCS), intermittent employees, residents, interns, fellows, students, trainees, non-pay status and COVID-19 positions/employees.

² Net new employees are determined by the difference between new employee accessions of 10,549 and 9,693 losses, representing a net increase of 856 employees.

the minimum rate), special salary rates, student loan repayment, education debt reduction program, and incentives for health care occupations (such as nurses) and police officers to meet recruitment and retention needs.

VA is committed to accurate position management together with efficient staffing to fill vacancies and increase the size of the workforce to meet Veteran demand for health care, benefits, and memorial services. VA is continuing the position validation process and establishing a sound foundation for position management to ensure position data accurately reflect VA's budget and requirements. Historical staffing and vacancy data are available on VA's Web site at <https://www.va.gov/employee/va-mission-act-section-505-data/>.

How do I interpret the data?

Accessions (Hiring) and Separations

Accessions are personnel actions that result in an employee's addition to VA (i.e., transfers-in from another agency and new hires to the Federal Government) and contribute to increases in onboards.³ Separations are personnel actions resulting in the loss of an employee from VA (i.e., transfers-out, resignations, retirements, terminations or removals, death and other separations).

Full-time equivalents (FTEs)

Full-Time Equivalent refers to the total number of regular straight-time hours worked by employees divided by the number of compensable hours applicable to each fiscal year (regular method), or the total regular hours worked in a fiscal year (2,080 hours) divided by 26 biweekly pay periods (pay period method). OMB A-11 Circular § 85.5(c).

Onboard Employees

Onboards (i.e., the number of personnel encumbering positions) are the number of employees (i.e., headcount) onboard when the data are reported. Note, "onboards" differ from "FTE," which is a budgetary term based on compensable hours as opposed to headcount. VA hires some part-time employees (i.e., partial FTEs), as such, onboard figures consistently exceed FTE figures. Onboard counts do not include employee categories excluded from MISSION Act reports (intermittent staff, non-salaried health professional trainees, COVID-19, employees in a non-pay status or other volunteers).

Time-To-Hire

Time-To-Hire represents the percentage of new hires for the Department hired within the 80 calendar-day time-to-hire targets of the OPM, disaggregated by Administration. Per OPM's new Mission Critical Occupation (MCO) Resource Chart guidance, all hires in USA Staffing are now included in the time-to-hire calculation, including New Hires that are simply onboarded in USA Staffing and are not associated with an announcement (i.e., non-competitive hiring

³ Accessions and separations data reflects MISSION Act exclusion criteria.

actions). In Q2 FY 2021, VA added additional data on time-to-hire to comply with requirements in Section 3008 of the Isakson and Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315).

Vacant FTE

A vacant position is one that does not have an employee in the position, measured by the total number of compensable hours associated with that position (with one FTE equaling 2,080 hours). Vacant FTE does not include positions where the incumbent is in a non-pay status. Vacant positions may be funded or unfunded. As referenced earlier in this executive summary, work is ongoing to put controls in place to enhance position management processes with better data integrity and gain fidelity in the reported positions, particularly vacant positions. This work will improve the data quality of manpower and funding data.

Applying for a position at VA

Section 505(b) of the MISSION Act Annual Report (June 2021) identifies the steps VA is taking to achieve full staffing capacity. VA is continuously recruiting committed professionals who are dedicated to serving our Nation's Veterans. Employment at VA provides a competitive salary and benefits package and a strong work/life balance. Above all else, the highest honor in working at VA is the opportunity to serve the brave persons who have served our Nation. Additional information regarding careers at VA can be found at <https://www.vacareers.va.gov/>.