

Final Report of Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans

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Research Advisory Committee on Gulf
War Veterans' Illnesses
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Committee Charter

- **Objective & Scope of Activity**-Advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the full spectrum of health care and benefits issues that confront veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990-1991 period of the Gulf War, paying particular attention to issues that are unique to these veterans.
- **To carry out its duties**, the Committee is expected to assess both the effectiveness of existing benefits and services and to determine the need for new initiatives and/or policies that relate exclusively to this population of veterans.
- **Life of Committee**-The Committee will complete its work and submit a report and recommendations to the Secretary within 18 months of its first meeting.

Composition of Committee

- Committee established by VA in April 2008
- 14 members
- Appointed by the Secretary
- Objective advisors, not representing any specific organization or group
- Knowledgeable experts, veterans and others with special competence to evaluate the particular needs of veterans who served during the 1990-1991 period of the Gulf War

Composition (continued)

- Committee membership included:
 - Active duty and retired service members
 - Veterans of Gulf War I and other conflicts
 - VSO representatives
 - Medical experts
 - Widow of a Gulf War I veteran

Committee Activities

- Eight Public Meetings (Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; Seattle, WA; and Atlanta, GA),
- The Committee met with and received information from the following sources:
 - VHA, VBA, NCA, BVA, RAC, CDC, various VA staff offices, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, VSOs, various State Departments of Veterans Affairs, representatives of Nat. Guard & Reserves
 - Also spoke with veterans & family members and received testimony from members of public at each meeting

Final Report

- Six areas/issues with specific recommendations for each area
- Final Report submitted September 29, 2009
 - Changing the Culture: Placing Care Before Process

Final Report

- Committee strived to present recommendations that are people centric, results-oriented, and forward-looking, in keeping with Secretary Shinseki's announced priorities for the transformation of the VA.
 - Goal-to improve access to VA benefits and health care services for veterans of Gulf War I.

Several Recurring Health Care & Benefits Themes Emerged

- Six issue categories:
 - Health Care Priority for Gulf War I Veterans
 - Access to and Quality of Care for Gulf War I Veterans
 - Undiagnosed Illnesses
 - Identification of Gulf War I Veterans in VA Records
 - Outreach
 - Timelines of Communication

Recommendations

- Issue 1: Health Care Priority for Gulf War I Veterans
 - Recommendation:
 1. Reinstate authority to enroll Gulf War I Veterans into health care Priority Group 6.

Recommendations

- Issue 2: Access to and Quality of Care for Gulf War I Veterans
 - Recommendations:
 1. Include Gulf War I Veterans in the Post Deployment Integrated Care Initiative(PDICI) or expand the services of Environmental Agents to include services provided through the PDICI.
 2. Implement specialized programs to educate VA & contract medical personnel on Gulf War I medical issues, research, and regulations.
 3. Establish a much stronger & more formal health care support mechanism for Veterans at VA facilities by assigning a "Point Man," a friendly and informed person during their initial interaction with VA.

Recommendations

- Issue 3: Undiagnosed Illnesses
 - Recommendations:
 1. Eliminate the end date for the presumptive period for compensation for Undiagnosed Illnesses in Gulf War I Veterans.
 2. Apply the same standardized diagnostic criteria in VHA diagnoses and VBA ratings in Undiagnosed Illnesses.

Recommendations

- Issue 4: Identification of Gulf War I Veterans in VA Records
 - Recommendations:
 1. Identify Gulf War Veterans as a distinct group in all VA databases pertaining to eligibility for healthcare and benefits services.
 2. Incorporate clinical reminders for identified Gulf War I Veterans in the VHA Computerized Patient Records System (CPRS).
 3. Devote increased attention to the quality of information that populates the VA databases from which data to evaluate services to Gulf War I Veterans are drawn.

Recommendations

- Issue 5: Outreach
 - Recommendations:
 1. Execute a comprehensive & targeted outreach to Gulf War I Veterans.
 2. Use the 20th Anniversary of the Gulf War as a positive opportunity to attract Gulf War I Veterans back to the VA.
 3. Contact Gulf War I Veterans who participated in the original Registry Exams and invite them back for follow-up exams.
 4. Place additional emphasis on outreach to female Veterans.
 5. Conduct a longitudinal study.

Recommendations

- Issue 6: Timeliness of Communications
 - Recommendations:
 1. Respond to inquiries from Advisory Committees within 30 days.
 2. Publish and distribute Gulf War Review Newsletters & other VA information products in a timely manner.