

Saint Leo University
HCA 303
Module 3: Application to Management Practice

**Further Applications to Health Care Management Careers:
Strategic Plan of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

The next topic we are going to examine is strategic planning. The text defines it as “the process of identifying a desired future state for an organization and a means to achieve it.” In this document, we present the structure and highlights of the strategic plan of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. As Secretary Eric Shinseki explained in a 2011 speech, VA is a large organization with a diverse and complex mission to provide health care, disability benefits, pensions, home loans, life insurance, and educational assistance, and to run the nation’s largest cemetery system. It’s likely that a significant percentage of you, watching and listening to this presentation, have served our country, or are currently serving, or work at a Department of Veterans Affairs facility. VA is responsible for a timeless mission: To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise to care for those who have borne the battle, and their spouses, and orphans. Now, let’s examine the strategic plan of the largest health care system in the United States.

Strategic Plan 2011-2015

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2011 to 2015 is structured into five sections.

The first is a letter from Secretary Shinseki, the leader of VA and its 300,000 employees. In this letter he writes, “I intend to make bold and comprehensive changes to transform VA for the 21st century. These changes will directly benefit Veterans, and, indirectly, all Americans.”

The second section is an introduction section that provides the background and context for the strategic plan, discussion of the changing Veteran population, and opportunities to improve performance.

The next two sections, the strategic planning framework and plan for executing the strategy, are the focus of this presentation. Finally, supporting appendix materials complete the strategic plan document.

Strategic Planning Framework

Quoting the strategic plan: “This strategic plan tells the story of how we will transform VA over the next five years. It is a long-term plan, presenting a deliberate but inspired strategy based upon three guiding principles to achieve four strategic goals. In order to reach our strategic destination, we must determine how we are going to go about accomplishing our strategic goals. Three integrated objectives provide a common set of premises upon which operational strategies and initiatives are based. They are designed to be used as a foundation on which to build strategies and initiatives to achieve VA’s strategic goals. The 14 integrated strategies are the ways and means, or courses of action, that have been designed to realize VA’s objectives. They are to be utilized as the high-level approach to developing department and organizational initiatives and programs. The 16 major initiatives serve as a platform from which to launch and execute the VA Strategic Plan over the next five years. These crosscutting and high-impact priority efforts were designed to address the most visible and urgent issues in VA.” Let’s take a closer look at the elements in the strategic plan framework and execution.

Guiding Principles

The strategic direction and initiatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs are built on three guiding principles:

To be people-centric. The document states, “Veterans and their families are the centerpiece of our mission and of everything that we do. Equally essential are the people who are the backbone of the Department – our talented and diverse workforce.” This guiding principle includes honoring and serving

Veterans and their families as well as embracing the VA core values of compassion, integrity, respect, and commitment.

Second, to be results-driven. “We will be measured by our accomplishments” in such areas as improving access for all Veterans, providing high quality care, leveraging technology and adapting business processes with agility, as well as demonstrating leadership, accountability, and effective results.

Finally, to be forward-looking. “We will seek out opportunities for delivering the best services with available resources, continually challenging ourselves to do things smarter and more effectively.” This includes proactively anticipating and meeting Veterans’ needs.

Strategic Goals

Four strategic goals represent the top priorities of the Department:

First, improve the quality and accessibility of health care, benefits, and memorial services while optimizing value;

Next, increase Veteran client satisfaction with health, education, training, counseling, financial, and burial benefits and services;

The third strategic goal is to raise readiness to provide services and protect people and assets continuously and in a time of crisis; and

And fourth, improve internal customer satisfaction with management systems and support services to achieve mission performance and make VA an employer of choice by investing in human capital.

Integrated Objectives

Objective 1

“Make it easier for Veterans and their families to receive the right benefits, meeting their expectations for quality, timeliness, and responsiveness”

The first of the three integrated objectives is to “Make it easier for Veterans and their families to receive the right benefits, meeting their expectations for quality, timeliness, and responsiveness.” Three examples of integrated strategies to achieve this objective include: First, improving and integrating services across Veterans Affairs to increase reliability, speed and accuracy of delivery; second, developing a range of effective delivery methods that are convenient to Veterans and their families; and third, improving VA’s ability to adjust capacity dynamically to meet changing needs, including preparedness for emergencies.

Objective 2

“Educate and empower Veterans and their families through proactive outreach and effective advocacy”

The second objective is to “Educate and empower Veterans and their families through proactive outreach and effective advocacy.” Two strategies to accomplish Objective 2 include: Using clear, accurate, consistent, and targeted messages to build awareness of VA’s benefits among employees, Veterans and their families, and other stakeholders, and leveraging technology and partnerships to reach Veterans and their families and advocate on their behalf.

Objective 3

“Build our internal capacity to serve Veterans, their families, our employees, and other stakeholders efficiently and effectively”

The third integrated objective is to “Build our internal capacity to serve Veterans, their families, our employees, and other stakeholders efficiently and effectively.” In all there are 14 integrated strategies across the three integrated objectives. Two of these strategies under the third objective are: Recruiting,

hiring, developing, deploying, and retaining a diverse VA workforce to meet current and future needs and challenges, and creating and maintaining an effective, integrated, Department-wide management capability to make data-driven decisions, allocate resources, and manage results.

Major Initiatives

The 2011-2015 document identifies 16 major initiatives that serve as a platform from which to execute the strategic plan. As examples, four of these major programs are:

- Addressing Veteran homelessness,
- Improving Veteran mental health through research and an expanded mental health system,
- Ensuring preparedness to meet national needs in times of emergency or crisis, and
- Transforming health care delivery through health informatics.

These are high-impact priority efforts toward executing the strategic plan. All of these objectives, strategies, and initiatives are supported by a set of performance measures to monitor and report results and progress.

Strategic Plan Refresh FY 2011-2015

In summary, the Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan Refresh for the fiscal years 2011 to 2015 reaffirms commitment to mission and details top priorities. The strategic plan is framed and executed through a set of three guiding principles, four overarching strategic goals, three integrated objectives, fourteen integrated strategies, and sixteen major initiatives, all supported by performance indicators to track and measure organizational progress.

In the Webliography of this course is a link to this document. Please go ahead and page through the Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan Refresh 2011 to 2015 as a real world example of a strategic plan that's guiding the work and direction of a large, complex health care organization.

Reference:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2011). *Strategic plan refresh FY 2011-2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.va.gov/performance/>