



AMERICA'S WARRIOR PARTNERSHIP

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Statement for the Record  
House Veterans Affairs Committee  
“Building an Accountable VA: Applying Lessons Learned to Drive  
Future Success”  
February 28, 2023

By Jim Lorraine, America's Warrior Partnership

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, Honorable Members of the  
Committees:

It is an honor to present this statement for the record. The topic of  
accountability at the VA is necessary and long-overdue. Thank you for  
raising this issue, and dedicating time and attention to ensure the VA is  
providing the best possible service to our nation's veterans.

Over the past several decades, Congress has passed numerous laws  
providing widespread authority for the VA to expand programs, run  
efficiently, and increase the workforce. At the same time, Congress was  
also very clear that outcomes would be tracked, and improvements would  
need to be proven. If those were not met or issues arose, laws were  
created to enable the VA to demonstrate accountability.

However, in those decades, the changes have not materialized. The same  
issues that plagued the VA 30 years ago remain, and in some cases, have  
compounded. This has led to a loss in trust in the VA among veterans.

More accountability is needed at the VA for both programs and people.  
And senior leaders need to take responsibility for the programs and  
people they are charged with overseeing.

Problems such as access to care, long wait times, claims backlogs, and  
others, persist across the system. In fact, at America's Warrior  
Partnership, one of the biggest issues that veterans regularly  
communicate to us is confusion and delays in accessing health care.  
Whether it is the VA purposefully trying to keep services in the VA  
system, or veterans not being told of the ability to request a community  
referral, accessing care remains a top issue. And in response, veterans  
have requested more community referrals than ever, and continue to vote  
with their feet to show that the preference for many is not to get care in  
the VA.

The delays in accessing care have compounded re-occurring health  
issues, especially mental health. Waiting months to see a different mental  
health counselor every visit is taxing on the veteran and poor healthcare  
practice given an antiquated documentation system. It is amplified by the  
overwhelming urge of many mental health professionals to over-  
prescribe as a reflex to the challenges presented, rather than taking the  
time to build the necessary relationships with veterans.

This leads to an ongoing issue over over-prescribing and overdose. As AWP found in our Operation Deep Dive Study, drug overdose continues to plague the veterans community in the same manner it has infiltrated communities across the nation. This undercurrent is something that VA has not appropriately resourced or acknowledged. Fentanyl and opioids are dangerous. And they are more dangerous when individuals have access regular to them. This includes many of those veterans who seek help, only to end up with countless bottles of dangerous pills. The solution is not matching Narcan distribution to every opioid prescription. The solution is combining continuity of care with proximal and timely services.

Much of this is likely tracked by the VA. However, it is hard to tell because there is very little transparency by VA researchers who put together the Annual Veteran Suicide Study or overdose reports. In fact, both the House and Senate VA Committees have written letters laying out multiple questions regarding the methodology of the study. The VA needs to be much more open about what the data behind the study includes, how the numbers are gathered and determined, and what is left out the study.

By contrast, Operation Deep Dive has clear data: including names, manner of death, and full-service records of all those included in the suicide study. However, as we have mentioned to this Committee on numerous occasions, the one piece of data missing from the study is VA data. Congress has been very clear in law and intent; the VA must share data with research organizations. In fact, nearly all the organizations are attempting to help the VA tackle major issues. The VA must recognize that there is a common goal to be accomplished, and be a more productive partner – and it starts by sharing data.

Finally, the VA has spent great time and effort to create a professional atmosphere amongst employees and facilities. There are countless hard-working and dedicated VA professionals at well-run facilities throughout the United States. However, a small number of individuals continue to cause problems that damage the professional culture. This leads to a loss of trust amongst veterans and employees and has caused retention issues of top talent.

The VA must liberally and judiciously use authorities granted by Congress to remove bad employees within the VA, regardless of occupation, tenure, or demand. It is the only way top talent will stay at the VA and foster the professional culture required to fix systemic issues.  
the necessary relationships with veterans.

Again, thank you to all the Members of the House Veterans Affairs Committees for your thoughtful and diligent work on behalf of our nation's veterans. Your service in Congress to those who served in uniform is mirrored by the high regard our citizens have for their veterans. The respect is borne of great sacrifice, and it is an honor to work on their behalf.

With sincere thanks and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Lorraine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

Jim Lorraine  
President and CEO  
America's Warrior Partnership