

Testimony
of
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Chairman Rosendal and esteemed members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence to enhance healthcare for our nation's veterans.

As the VA increasingly looks to incorporate AI tools to improve efficiency, accuracy, and personalization of care, we must be vigilant in creating proper safeguards around veteran data privacy and security. If implemented conscientiously, AI systems present a tremendous opportunity to better serve veterans' health needs. My testimony will focus on best practices and considerations for that responsible integration.

First, any AI tools leveraged by the VA must be deployed in accordance with the Department's Trustworthy AI Framework centered on six fundamental principles: purposeful, safe, and effective, secure and private, fair and equitable, transparent and explainable, and accountable and monitored. Adhering to these values can foster confidence and adoption of AI innovation among veterans.

The VA should assemble dedicated, multidisciplinary teams combining healthcare expertise, technical capabilities, and ethics specialization to evaluate AI systems at every phase – from initial procurement and design through validation, implementation, and continuous improvement. These teams can ensure tools align with intended use cases while meeting stringent standards around security, explainability, and unbiased outputs that impact care.

Ongoing community participation is also instrumental. Veterans should have opportunities to actively inform system requirements and provide feedback on AI experiences as part of closing the loop—their real-world insights further accountability while enhancing utility. External third-party testing around safety, security, and fairness further verifies performance to standards for VA procurement approval before systems interact with sensitive data.

Any AI tools or platforms brought in must then operate within comprehensive data privacy environments matching the rigor of HIPAA controls already governing healthcare data security – including encryption, access management, activity monitoring, and audits.

The Veterans Affairs Department should institute de-identification techniques like differential privacy to minimize reliance on personal information for development or analytics while preserving analytical validity. When systems utilize private data temporarily, they should quickly dissociate any data, securing veterans' details.

The VA must retain clear ownership and governance of veterans' healthcare data through this AI journey, avoiding reliance on external software vendors or open databases that cannot provide assurances on control or appropriate use aligned to individuals' preferences.

Here are some additional ideas for the Veterans Affairs Department to consider regarding the enhancements available to current systems by using artificial intelligence in veterans' healthcare:

Advanced Diagnosis and Treatment: There is massive potential for AI to assist healthcare providers with more accurate and timely diagnosis of veterans' health issues. AI can analyze vast medical data sets, including electronic health records, imaging, and genetic information, to identify patterns and suggest personalized treatment plans. These enhancements could lead to quicker interventions and improved health outcomes.

Predictive Healthcare: The power of AI to utilize predictive analysis in potential health issues for veterans could be a key asset for early medical treatments that could get ahead of larger problems with scheduled monitoring and counseling earlier in the process. Machine learning algorithms can analyze historical data to identify veterans at higher risk of specific conditions, allowing for preventive measures and early interventions.

Virtual Health Assistants: Eventually AI-powered virtual health assistants can provide veterans with 24/7 access to healthcare information, answer questions, schedule appointments, and even provide mental health support, improving the overall patient experience once the processes have been tested for accuracy and consistency in their responses to enable a cohesive network application available to Veterans who want to use the AI driven program.

Data Integration: Thoughtful introduction of AI systems integration could enable VA healthcare infrastructure to ensure that AI tools complement and enhance the work of healthcare providers rather than disrupt their workflows.

Telemedicine: AI can improve telemedicine services for veterans, making it easier for them to access healthcare remotely. AI-driven chatbots and virtual consultations can provide immediate assistance and reduce the burden on VA healthcare facilities by unitizing chatbot technology for the first layer of questions for the operators interacting with a patient that is then sent to the right branch of the medical practice group after the stated concerns of the patient have been reviewed while looking at health patterns and their health history. A human would be the most important element of a telemedicine visit, but AI could speed up the initial entrance into the visitation system.

Mental Health Support: AI can play a crucial role in identifying early signs of mental health issues, providing resources, and connecting veterans with appropriate care through more efficient pattern recognition and effective solution set matching to the diagnosed problem.

Ethical AI Use: The importance of adhering to ethical guidelines must be part of the development and deployment phases AI in healthcare. Transparency in AI algorithms so that

veterans and healthcare providers can understand the use of artificial intelligence tools in decision-making is critical.

Education and Training: The VA will need to invest in training healthcare professionals to work effectively with AI systems. Proper education and understanding of AI technologies will ensure a higher level of the healthcare professionals responsible and effective use of the AI toolsets.

Collaboration with AI Industry: The potential for collaboration with AI companies and researchers to leverage the latest advancements in AI technology for veterans' healthcare can accelerate progress in this field.

Data Sharing and Research: Collaborative research efforts can lead to breakthroughs in veterans' health. However, the importance de-identified healthcare data for research purposes is vital for ensuring privacy and security must be a top priority.

Continuous Monitoring and Improvement: The practice of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of AI systems with regular audits and assessments can ensure that AI tools continue to meet the highest standards of performance, fairness, and security.

Veteran Inclusivity: Making AI tools and services accessible to veterans of all backgrounds, including those with disabilities is a crucial part of this effort. Veterans Affairs must ensure that medical system's design utilizing AI systems includes inclusivity.

Public Awareness: Clear communication can alleviate concerns and build trust among veterans and their families. There should be educational initiatives to raise public awareness about AI's benefits and responsible use in veterans' healthcare.

International Collaboration: The potential for collaboration with international partners in AI research and healthcare will allow for the sharing of knowledge and best practices globally, which can lead to faster advancements.

Budget Allocation: Adequate budget allocations are vital for AI initiatives in veterans' healthcare. Funding is essential to support AI system research, development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance.

By incorporating many of these additional ideas the Department of Veterans Affairs could provide a more comprehensive overview of the benefits veterans' healthcare will receive from using AI tools in the decision-making processes while ensuring the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence.

In closing, I reiterate my conviction that AI and machine learning can unlock immense potential in enhancing experiences, outcomes, and care availability for those who bravely served our country. As the VA advances its AI strategy for veterans, instilling Trustworthy AI principles centered on security, fairness, and accountability at every step is paramount to delivering on that promise.

I welcome any questions on components of the framework or recommendations to actualize AI's benefits for veterans while upholding their rights to informed consent and confidentiality through this transition. Getting the balance right will prove key to unlocking AI's immense potential while retaining foundational trust.