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"ADVANCING VA CARE THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE"
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Chairman Barrett, Ranking Member Budzinski, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding VA's opportunity to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve health care and services to Veterans. Your longstanding support of Veterans and their families is greatly appreciated. I am accompanied today by Dr. Evan Carey, Acting Director of the National Artificial Intelligence Institute, Digital Health Office, Veterans Health Administration.

While the use of AI at VA is not new, recent advances in the capabilities of AI systems represent a significant opportunity for VA. Many of the most time-consuming tasks VA employees and Veterans must now complete manually could, in the future, be made dramatically faster and more accurate when assisted by effective AI-enabled software. VA, in partnership with industry, academia, and other Federal agencies, is working rapidly to seize this opportunity.

VA's strategic vision is to make the Department an industry leader in AI that improves Veterans' lives by delivering faster, higher quality, and more cost-efficient services, with strong governance and trust.

We have distilled this strategy into five execution priorities: (1) expanding AI access across the VA workforce; (2) reimagining high-impact workflows with AI and automation; (3) ensuring the most promising AI projects receive prioritized investment;

(4) building an AI-ready workforce; and (5) running transparent and effective AI governance.

To realize this strategy, VA is increasingly investing in AI-driven tools that enhance productivity, reduce manual burden, and improve service delivery to Veterans. In VA's 2024 inventory, we reported 227 AI use cases, representing nearly 100 more use cases than in the 2023 report. We expect this increase to continue in our 2025 report.

These investments are yielding tangible results. In one highly anticipated use case, VA now offers an on-network generative AI tool known as VA GPT. Over 85,000 users are engaged with the tool which assists with basic administrative tasks such as drafting emails and summarizing documents and meetings notes. A survey of VA GPT users found that the tool saves its users an average of 2.5 hours per week, with more than 80% agreeing that it has made them more efficient.

Furthermore, we have successfully piloted and scaled an AI-assisted software development tool called GitHub Copilot, now used by over 2,000 developers within OIT and our contract partners. These software developers indicate this AI-assisted software development tool is helping them deliver capabilities faster and saving them over 8 hours a week. This includes faster development of Veteran-facing features on VA.gov, making it easier to refill prescriptions and apply for benefits, and the improvement of backend systems that accelerate claims processing.

AI-augmented tools are also driving improvements in clinical care, with 82% of the over 200 use cases in VA's inventory coming from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). VA's Stratification Tool for Opioid Risk Mitigation (STORM) uses machine learning to identify and mitigate the risk of overdose and suicide among Veterans prescribed opioids or with opioid use disorder. By summarizing patient risk factors, STORM identifies high risk Veterans for review by expert health teams. Health care teams reviewed the care of over 28,700 Veterans identified by STORM in the past year alone, decreasing mortality in high-risk patients by 22%. Since its launch in 2017, the REACH VET program has used tools like STORM to identify and bring clinical attention to nearly 135,500 Veterans, improve outpatient care, reduce suicide attempts, and decrease the number of mental health emergencies.

Additionally, VHA has deployed 84 AI-assisted devices that have been authorized by the , including one that uses computer vision to enhance clinical outcomes such as early tumor detection. One VA study showed that using AI-assisted colonoscopy devices increased adenoma detection rates by 21%, which is associated with lower late-stage cancer incidence and reduced mortality.

VA is committed to implementing innovative, AI-powered tools that advance health care for Veterans, improve the experience of care teams, and optimize VA's workforce. As part of this commitment, VA will pilot ambient scribe technology at 10 sites beginning this fall. Ambient scribe is an AI technology that listens to and documents the conversations between health care providers and patients. AI processes a transcript of the encounter to generate secondary outputs like clinical encounter notes and coding recommendations. It has the potential to transform health care by reducing clinician burdens, enhancing efficacy, improving patient care quality and experience, and engaging with clinical decision support services. Ultimately, it allows the provider to spend more time face-to-face with Veterans.

As we progress, protecting Veterans' data privacy while responsibly leveraging AI's potential is a top priority for the Department. Like all software approved for use at VA, AI systems must meet VA's rigorous security and privacy standards before they receive an Authority to Operate. Additionally, consistent with the Office of Management and Budget memorandum M-25-21, our team is facilitating an agency-level review of each AI use case to ensure the tool meets the Government's standards for innovation, governance, and public trust. Each use case undergoes an AI Impact Assessment to identify and mitigate risks.

Further, VA has established and is committed to maintaining an annual AI use case inventory. First released in December 2024, we are on track to provide an update to this inventory in December 2025. This inventory positions VA among the most transparent health care systems in the country regarding AI.

Looking ahead, our focus over the next 12 months will be implementing our strategic execution priorities by expanding employee access to generative AI to 100% of VA staff, reimagining high-impact workflows, prioritizing investment strategy to high return-on-investment AI solutions, releasing new AI training opportunities for

employees, and maintaining transparent and effective AI governance by ensuring 100% of VA's high-impact AI use cases meet the Administration's standards.

Despite our industry-leading progress, VA acknowledges the adoption of AI tools presents significant challenges. Among them is integrating new AI solutions within VA's highly complex existing system architecture, and as a Government entity entrusted with Veterans' private information, balancing adoption of new and emerging tools and vendors with the Government's strict security compliance standards is crucial. Retention of AI experts is a challenge. Finally, scaling commercial AI tools will incur additional costs, making it an ongoing effort to align these costs with available technology funding. Cost is one of many reasons the Department encourages Congress to fully fund VA next year in lieu of another continuing resolution.

In conclusion, VA remains steadfast in its commitment to harnessing the power of AI to improve the lives of Veterans. By strategically investing in AI tools and enhancing our workforce's capabilities, we aim to deliver faster, higher quality, and more cost-efficient services. While we acknowledge the complexities and challenges inherent in this transformation, we are dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of governance, transparency, and ethical use of AI. With your continued support, we can ensure that VA leads in AI innovation and sets a benchmark for responsible AI use in public service. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.