



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 27, 2010

Secretary Shinseki Announces Gulf War Task Force Report

Comprehensive approach to delivering care and benefits to Veterans

WASHINGTON – Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that the department’s Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses Task Force has nearly completed a comprehensive report that will redefine how VA addresses the pain and suffering of ill Veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991.

“At VA, we advocate for Veterans – it is our overarching philosophy and, in time, it will become our culture,” Secretary Shinseki said. “Every day we must challenge our assumptions to serve our Nation’s Veterans.”

The mission of VA’s Gulf War Task Force is to identify gaps in services as well as opportunities to better serve Veterans of the Gulf War. Of the almost 700,000 service members who deployed to Operation Desert Shield in 1990 and Operation Desert Storm in 1991, there have been 300,000 Gulf War Veterans with claims decisions, over 85 percent were granted service connection for at least one condition, and over 14 percent were not granted service connection for any condition.

“We must learn from the past and take the opportunity to anticipate the future needs of our Veterans,” Shinseki said. “This new approach is the first step in a still unfolding comprehensive plan of how VA will treat and compensate Veterans of the Gulf War era.”

The chairman of the Gulf War Task Force is John R. Gingrich, Chief of Staff at Veterans Affairs and retired Army officer who served during the Gulf War. “Reaching out to Gulf War Veterans is not only essential to our transformation of VA, for many of us it is also personal,” Mr. Gingrich said. “Having commanded troops in Gulf War, and then witness some of them fall to mysterious illnesses has been very difficult to watch. With this Task Force, I am hopeful we can provide these men and women a better quality of life.”

VA’s Gulf War Task Force recommendations build on the findings from the 2008 VA Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses. The Task Force’s recommendations include:

- Improve data sharing with Department of Defense to notify Veterans of potential exposures, monitor their long-term health and inform them about decisions regarding additional follow up.
- Improve the delivery of benefits to Veterans with Gulf War-related disabilities by
 - a. Reviewing, and if necessary, updating regulations affecting Gulf War Veterans.
 - b. Expanding training for VBA examiners on how to administer disability claims with multiple known toxin exposure incidents.
- Improve VA healthcare for Veterans through a new model of interdisciplinary health education and training.
- Increase number of long term, Veteran-focused studies of Veterans to enhance the quality of care VA provides.
- Transition from reactive to proactive medical surveillance to help better manage Veterans’ potential hazardous exposures.
- Find new treatments for Gulf War Veterans through new research.
- Enhance outreach to provide information and guidance to Veterans about benefits and services available to them for injuries/illnesses associated with Gulf War service.

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