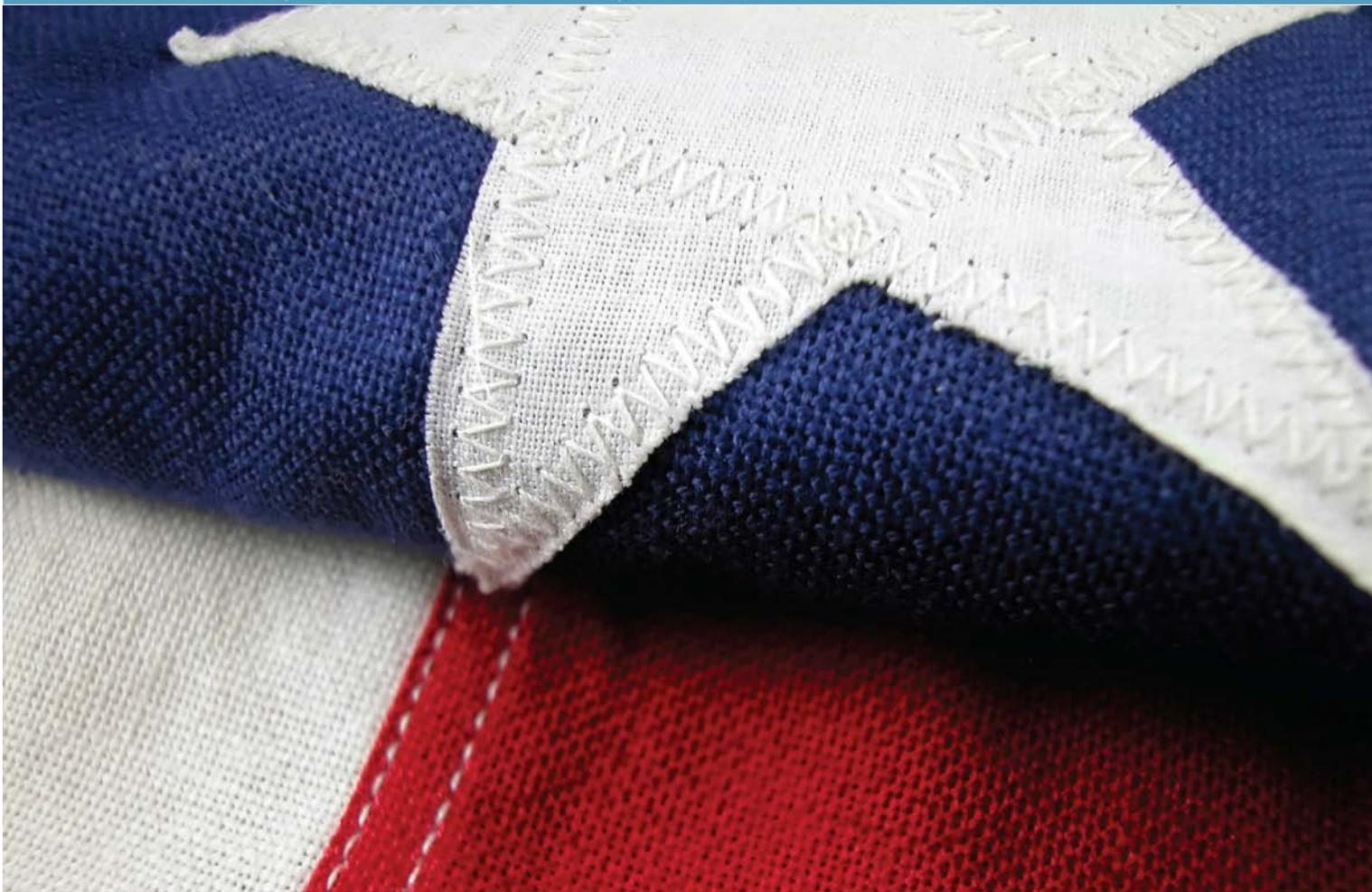


VA New England Healthcare System
Strategic Plan
FY 2012–2016



Message from the Network Director

VA New England Healthcare System Strategic Plan FY 2012–2016

Veterans met the demands of our country proudly and with sacrifice. In honor of their service, VA New England Healthcare System (VISN 1) is committed to providing exceptional care that improves their health and well-being.

Since his first day in office as Secretary of the VA, Secretary Shinseki communicated a vision for the Department that is transformational. VISN 1 is working hard to implement the national initiatives aimed at fulfilling this vision. These include reducing homelessness, improving Compensation and Pension exam timeliness, and improving access.



To be successful we must also take time to reflect upon what our particular mission and goals are, where we currently stand, what is happening in the environment around us, and what the gaps are between our hopes and reality. The leadership of VISN 1 spent time to systematically address these questions over the past year. We then selected key initiatives to help close the gaps and have been working steadily to implement these initiatives. By doing so, we believe we can better play our part in the national effort, tailored to the unique needs of New England Veterans and our own organizational history.

This document summarizes these reflections and the initiatives they led to. Our strategic efforts are well underway. The feedback and support of all VISN 1 stakeholders—our Veterans, staff, partners, and others—has been invaluable in guiding us through the strategic planning process. I look forward to working with you in our continued collaboration and efforts across VISN 1 to achieve the strategic goals and objectives of this plan.

Michael Mayo-Smith, MD, MPH
Network Director, VISN 1



Framing the Plan: VHA and VISN 1



VA | Defining
HEALTH CARE | **EXCELLENCE**
in the 21st Century

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), a part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), serves America's Veterans through the largest integrated health care system in the nation. The VHA system consists of 152 medical centers and nearly 800 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), along with community living centers (i.e., nursing homes), and domiciliary residential rehabilitation treatment programs. Together, these health care facilities—with the more than 53,000 independently licensed health care practitioners who work within them—provide comprehensive care to over 6 million Veterans each year.

Traditionally, VHA was organized around a hospital-based model. Over the past 20 years, however, it has shifted to the creation of population-based regional health care systems that provide a full range of services to a population of Veterans in a coordinated fashion. Today, VHA operates its medical facilities through a system of 21 integrated regional networks, known as Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). It has also expanded outpatient activities and opened multiple CBOCs with the goal of improving access to Veterans across urban and rural environments.

VA NEW ENGLAND HEALTHCARE SYSTEM (VISN 1)



Established in 1995, the VA New England Healthcare System (VISN 1) is one of the 21 VISNs within VHA. Comprising 8 Joint Commission-accredited medical centers, over 46 CBOCs and outreach clinics, 6 community living centers, and 5 domiciliaries situated throughout New England, VISN 1 is a comprehensive, integrated health care delivery system providing health care services to more than 252,000 Veterans in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. With an annual budget of \$2.4 billion in fiscal year 2011, VISN 1 employs over 13,600 staff, including clinicians, administrators, and support staff throughout 65 sites of care. VISN 1 is also highly affiliated with medical schools and universities throughout New England, providing medical residents and students invaluable teaching and enabling continued academic research to advance VA's mission.

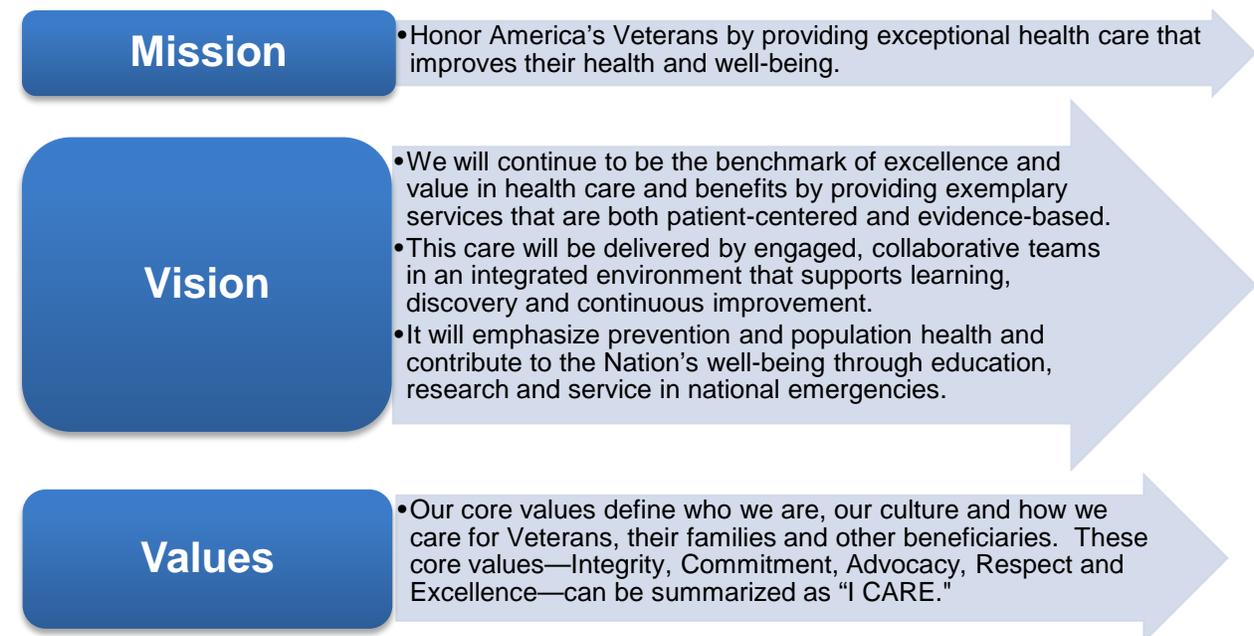
Overview of the Plan

The *VA New England Healthcare System Strategic Plan FY 2012–2016* addresses the complexities of providing quality Veteran-centric health care along the full continuum of care, with a focus on VA’s changing demographics including an aging population, a cohort of younger Veterans, increasing numbers of females, and other emerging special needs populations. It is consistent with and supportive of the priorities and guidance established by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the VHA Under Secretary for Health, and VHA Policy & Planning. Importantly, this plan embodies a strategic framework for advancing VHA’s mission and priorities in the six New England states and represents the priorities the Network and its executive leadership identified for our health care system.

Specifically, this plan provides the road map for how we will organize and prioritize our work over the next five years. This plan is designed to:

- incorporate and execute applicable VA priorities and VHA strategic goals and transformation initiatives;
- provide a framework for strategic planning across the health care system; and
- increase communication to internal staff and external stakeholders.

The foundation of this plan is our mission, vision, and values that honor our Nation’s Veterans. Based on that foundation, we have identified five strategic goals to provide excellence in population health, patient experience, financial stewardship, workforce, and service to our communities. Providing exceptional patient-centered care and striving for continuous improvement are the guiding principles that shape the overall approach to how we will deliver health care and achieve the goals set forth in this plan.



In order to enable achievement of our mission and vision, VISN 1 identified the following organizational core competencies:

Core Competencies		
Expertise in care and services (including health professional training and research) for conditions that are specific to and/or common in the Veteran population	Creation of an environment where the experience of military service is understood, respected and honored	Delivery of highly integrated comprehensive health care (both within a given site, as well as across New England)

Achieving VISN 1’s mission, vision, and values depends on a set of identified strategic goals and related objectives aimed to achieve those goals. These goals and objectives create the framework for the Network’s operational and program activities over the next five years. They are based on the findings of the extensive environmental scan and stakeholder analyses undertaken for the 2011 VISN 1 ELB Strategic Planning Retreat. The VISN 1 Strategic Goals also align with core VA and VHA strategic goals and leadership priorities.

VISN 1 STRATEGIC GOALS, FY 2012–2016

Goal I: Excellence in Population Health

- *Provide effective, safe, and equitable medical care that improves the health of the population we serve*

Goal II: Excellence in Patient Experience

- *Provide accessible, patient-centered, and compassionate care for a positive experience for our patients and their families*

Goal III: Excellence in Financial Stewardship

- *Obtain the resources needed to carry out the mission and use them efficiently*

Goal IV: Excellence in Work Force

- *Provide a supportive and professionally rewarding workplace to become the employer of choice*

Goal V: Excellence in Service to Our Communities

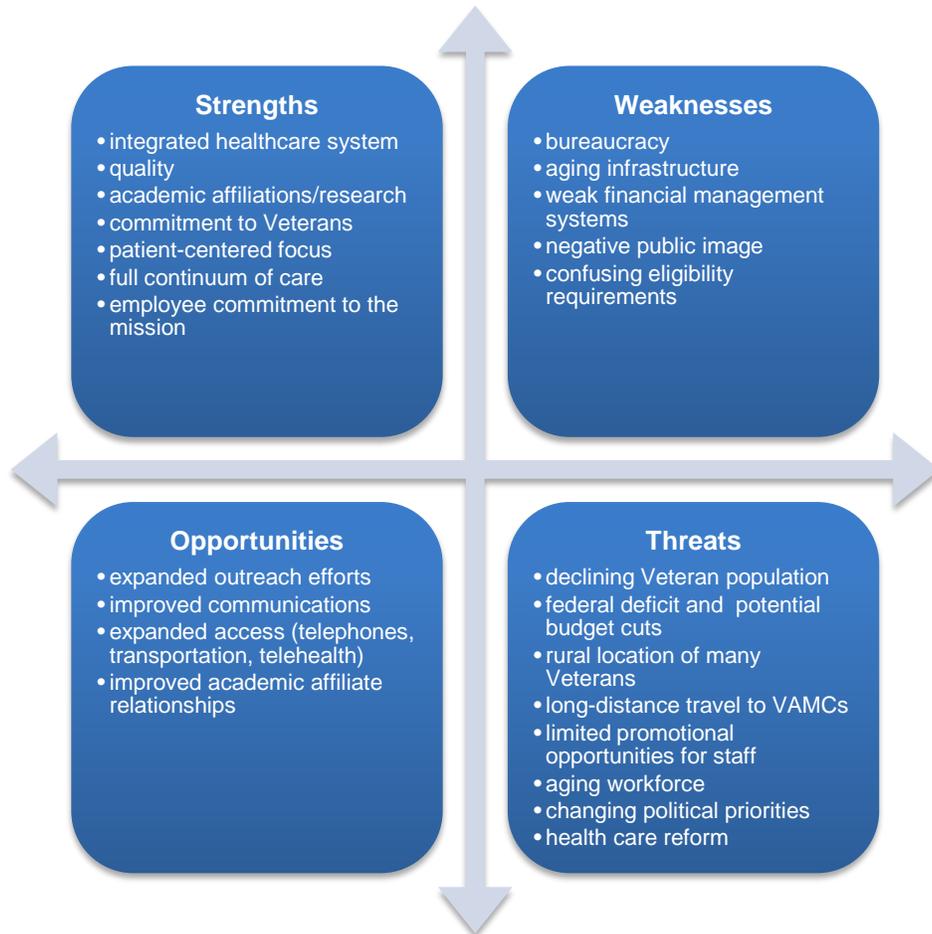
- *Support the well-being of our society through activities such as teaching, research, and emergency preparedness*

The Strategic Planning Process

The VISN 1 strategic planning process is cyclical in nature, and designed to enhance our ability to think, act, and learn strategically; improve our efficiency and effectiveness; and increase the likelihood of attaining or exceed our goals. We reassess and revise the plan on an annual basis, allowing us to rapidly respond to changes in the strategic environment, organizational priorities, and the needs of our stakeholders. This approach ensures that we act strategically in moving the organization forward and advancing the care of Veterans. This plan also reflects input from staff throughout the VISN, as well as representatives of Veterans and their families, academic affiliates, and other key stakeholder groups.

This Strategic Plan represents the priorities the Network and its executive leadership identified for our health care system. To determine these strategic goals and objectives, VISN 1 evaluated its internal strengths and opportunities for improvement, and the external political, economic, social, and technological factors impacting our health care system. We also sought input from various stakeholders from within and outside the Network. Through this plan, VISN 1 strives to ensure high quality patient-centered care that is provided by the right people, accessible to Veterans in the right place, in the right way, and at the right time.

In order to successfully serve the health care needs of New England's Veterans, it is crucial for us to understand the environment in which we operate, our key stakeholder needs, as well as our own specific strengths and challenges. This is particularly important given the size and complexity of VISN 1. As such, in June 2011, the VISN 1 Executive Leadership Board (ELB) held a Strategic Planning Retreat during which time VISN and medical center leaders reviewed extensive local, regional, and national stakeholder feedback gathered by members of the VISN 1 Strategic Planning Committee via various focus groups, interviews, meetings, and surveys. At the retreat, ELB members—who represent senior leadership at each of the VISN 1 medical centers as well as leaders of each of our clinical and administrative service lines—also identified our core competencies, strategic challenges, and strategic advantages based upon their experience and knowledge of major policies, trends, opportunities, and threats to providing consistent, high quality care to Veterans. This comprehensive assessment and analysis assists us in strategically positioning VISN 1 to meet the challenges of providing care in the future. At the retreat, a thorough stakeholder needs assessment was completed, as well as a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, in order to identify what needs to occur to move the Network to the next level of excellence. Once this analysis was completed, ELB selected the strategic goals and objectives that will guide our work for the coming years.



During this process, we identified the following six key stakeholder groups: Veterans; family members of patients; employees; academic affiliates; members of Congress and staff from each New England state; and VA Central Office (VACO). We developed this plan in response to the needs of these key stakeholders as well as the changing economic, regulatory, and technological contexts in which we deliver health care. Understanding these environmental contexts—and their implications for VISN 1—is critical to ensuring that our Strategic Plan will be effective and meaningful over the next five years.

Our Strategic Environment

The VISN 1 planning environment is characterized by certain issues, challenges, and realities—both internal and external in nature—that influence how VISN 1 delivers programs and services to meet the evolving and increasingly complex needs of Veterans. Through a comprehensive process involving VISN leadership, strategic challenges and advantages were identified for the following four categories: health care services, operational, societal responsibility, and human resources (see Table 1 & 2).

TABLE 1: VISN 1 Strategic Challenges

Health Care Services	Operational	Social Responsibility	Human Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing care to a broad Veteran population across the spectrum of geographic locations, age, and medical needs • Delivery of services to a younger, more diverse (e.g., gender and ethnicity), and more technologically savvy population of Veterans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged infrastructure • Limited marketing tradition and activity compared to competitors • Changing federal legislation and political climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the needs of returning combat Veterans • Veteran Homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging workforce, with impending retirements of boomers and loss of corporate knowledge

TABLE 2: VISN 1 Strategic Advantages

Health Care Services	Operational	Social Responsibility	Human Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic affiliations • Expertise in conditions prevalent in the Veteran population • The Nation's most robust and comprehensive mental health system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration • Volume discounts • Standardization and cost efficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitated budget • Special funding streams for social issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noble mission • Loyalty and commitment of staff • Job security and stability

Health care is an increasingly competitive environment and, in order to successfully serve the health care needs of New England’s Veterans, it is crucial for us to identify and understand key stakeholder needs (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: Stakeholder Needs

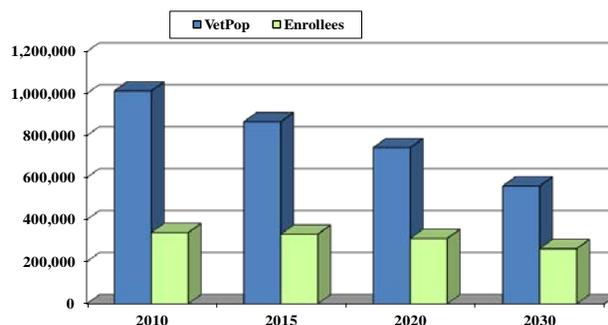
<p style="text-align: center;">Veterans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventative care, chronic disease management, and acute care • Longitudinal relationship with primary care PACT • Access (e.g., telephones, transportation) • Care coordination • Effective communication • Satisfaction (i.e., customer service) • Timely access to specialists and specialty care • Compassionate care • Care in the least restrictive environment (e.g., home or community) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Patients' Family Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication • Education on VA services • Quality care 	<p style="text-align: center;">Employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition • Career development • Work / family balance
<p style="text-align: center;">Academic Affiliates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality training environment • Support for research 	<p style="text-align: center;">Members of Congress and Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality care • Responsiveness to the needs of local Veterans 	<p style="text-align: center;">VA Central Office (VACO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively implement national initiatives • High performance on national performance metrics • Manage within assigned budget • Contented stakeholders

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The number of Veterans in New England is just over one million, with significant declines anticipated over the next 10–20 years due primarily to mortality and geographic migration. Enrollee projections for VISN 1 also show progressive declines, but to a lesser extent than the declining Veteran population. As a result, increasing the use of our system has been identified by VISN leadership as a strategic priority.

In addition, the total Veteran population is increasingly made up of older individuals. In 2010, 44% of the population was 65 and older; this is expected to increase to 51% by 2020. It is expected that the health care needs of this age cohort will result in a need for more health care services.

In addition, the number of female enrollees Veterans is expected to increase from 5% to 9% over the next 20 years.



Of the 350,000 New England Veterans enrolled in VISN 1, more than one-third reside in rural or highly rural areas. Particularly in the Far North Market (Maine), access to primary care has remained a challenge. This is being addressed through a number of telehealth projects and other rural initiatives.

Providing care to a broad Veteran population across the spectrum of geographic locations, ages, and medical needs remains a persistent challenge, as does the delivery of services to the segment of younger, more diverse (e.g., gender, ethnicity), and more technologically savvy population of Veterans. Due to changes in medical technology—including ambulatory surgical interventions and the use of more pharmaceuticals and system efficiencies—the trends in inpatient and outpatient facility projected workload demand have dramatically changed.

Other challenges include meeting the needs of returning combat Veterans and facing the complex and serious issues surrounding Veteran homelessness. Our nation's prolonged conflicts overseas—OEF and OIF have together lasted longer than World War II—means that we must be prepared to accommodate an influx of new Veterans, both male and female, requiring our services. The new nature of warfare, and the specific injuries and illnesses associated with it, is likely to create a new demand for VA services and infrastructure. To be a lean, efficient, and relevant health care system, we must address the challenges these changing Veteran needs pose and we must transform the way we deliver our care.

As a large health care system that employs over 13,600 federal employees, we are faced with potential challenges in meeting complex Veterans' needs that require a responsive, competent workforce. VISN 1, like the rest of the Federal Government, will soon face a wave of retirements, with impending loss of organizational knowledge. Moreover, a younger generation of employees brings a new set of expectations and workforce needs that challenge VISN 1 to evaluate how it develops a twenty-first century workforce. The VISN 1 Workforce Succession Plan addresses these key workforce issues. To be successful, this will require the implementation of a fundamentally different workforce management strategy, and a focus on continued improvement in operations in order to ensure we are meeting Veteran needs.



OTHER STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

In addition to changes in the Veteran population and the dedicated VA employees who serve them, we face a number of uncertainties in our external environment. National health care reform remains one of the key changes that could have a significant, though uncertain, impact on VISN 1—and VA as a whole. How the health care industry will respond to changing regulations and how that will reshape VA health care remains unclear. Conversely, however, significant opportunities for collaboration and innovation may also arise from national health care reform since VISN 1 is a proven, role-model integrated health care delivery system with processes and outcomes often exceeding the private sector.

Nationwide, advances in chronic disease diagnoses and challenges in health care delivery are reorienting health care away from an acute care model, toward a more patient-centered model that focuses on wellness and disease prevention. In VISN 1, this model engages Veterans in monitoring and managing their own disease symptoms, including expanded use of remote user technology such as telehealth modalities. Ultimately, this change to a more patient-centric approach to health care delivery will lead to better outcomes for patients and may reduce health care costs.

OUR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

With the ultimate goal of improving the health of Veterans in New England, VISN 1 is committed to addressing the challenges and opportunities presented in the strategic environment. As a health care system trying to meet the demands of a twenty-first century Veteran population and workforce, we need to better embrace technological innovation to improve care and outreach. While significant progress has been made, we still have some distance to go to better meet the challenges that we face. As such, we are committed to improving our outreach and communication strategies to the Veteran population of New England, as well as the care we provide. We, therefore, now turn our attention to a set of identified objectives and strategies that will improve our performance and the quality of care we provide.



VISN 1 Strategic Plan, FY 2012–2016

Our plan for achieving the VISN 1 Strategic Goals outlined above calls for a VISN-wide effort to focus on the needs, expectations, and experiences of our key stakeholders while maximizing efficiency and value. To this end, we have committed to five specific objectives that strengthen our capacity to improve the lives of New England's Veterans and provide them with the best care anywhere. If the goals create the framework of our plan, the objectives provide the roadmap for achieving those goals. These objectives are the collective responsibility of the entire VISN; achieving them will require collaboration between the VISN and medical centers, and between the leadership and frontline employees. By working together in this way, and taking a Veteran-centric perspective in everything we do, we will continue to uphold our mission while transforming the VISN into the best performing health care system in New England.

Strategic
Objective

1

Build a Culture of Improvement

Providing excellent care to Veteran patients and achieving a sustainable patient-centered health care system requires continual innovation and improvement throughout the entire organization. Building a culture of improvement will not only improve the quality, safety, and efficiency of our health care services, but it will also create a challenging, rewarding work environment for staff. Leading health care services of the future will be distinguished by their ability to continuously improve every facet of their operations.

The VISN 1 culture of improvement program is designed to spread an improvement culture so that all staff work to incrementally improve our health care system toward excellent care. The activities taking place under this strategic objective focus on engaging work teams in improvement work and achieving numerical goals for project types selected because they will teach improvement methods to staff and deliver results for Veterans. In achieving this objective, VISN and medical center improvement leaders will facilitate the strategies listed below.

Our long-term strategic target is to be the leader in health care quality in New England and to be in the top quarter of VISNs in the improvement index from the All Employee Survey. To achieve this, we will identify and train 1,000 engaged work teams and complete 500 annual improvement projects by the end of 2013.

Strategies | Our strategies for this objective are to:

- create learning programs to develop capacity and capability for improvement;
- provide staff with coaching support for each type of improvement project; and
- recognize and share successes across VISN 1.

Targets | Our targets for FY 2012 are to:

- identify and train 377 engaged work teams throughout VISN 1 by September 30; and
- complete 700 improvement projects by September 30.



Strategic
Objective

2

Increase Accessibility of VA Services

VISN 1 is committed to supporting VHA's goal of enhancing Veterans' health care experience while continuing to focus on quality and safety. A significant component of this commitment is to increase accessibility of VA services in ways that best meet the needs of Veterans and their families. Throughout its strategic and operational efforts, VISN 1 will ensure that all channels through which Veterans choose to access VA services are convenient, easy to use, and provide the same high level of quality care and service.

This strategic objective is divided into three distinct initiatives: virtual care, telephones, and transportation.

VIRTUAL CARE

For many Veterans, traveling to a VA medical center can be a very complicated and sometimes arduous task, particularly if the Veteran lives in a rural area, far away from the medical center. To increase accessibility to VA services, VISN 1 has established over 40 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) to bring VA care closer to home for Veterans. Even with these improvements, however, some specialty care is available only at the regional medical center.

The aim of this strategic initiative is to integrate virtual care modalities to enhance the Veteran experience and improve access to health care. Leveraging technology to the greatest extent possible and implementing a standardized approach to virtual care—which includes telehealth clinical pathways and MyHealthVet’s online gateway to VA benefits and services—across the Network will help us to better achieve our mission of providing patient-centered care to the Veteran population, including but not limited to primary care, mental health, specialty care, and women’s health. Thanks to these virtual care modalities, VA providers will be able to make diagnoses, manage care, perform check-ups, communicate, and actually provide care from almost anywhere. Telehealth technologies will make it possible for Veteran patients to come to any of VISN 1’s CBOCs and connect to a specialist physician or other practitioner who may be in a hospital that is dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of miles away. And MyHealthVet makes it possible for Veteran patients to access their electronic medical records and use secured messaging to communicate with their providers in a secure online environment. For our medical centers and staff, providing virtual care means we will be able to meet our Veteran patients’ needs where and how *they* prefer.

Our long-term strategic target is to reach over 50% of New England Veterans via virtual care modalities by 2014.

Strategies | Our strategies for this initiative are to:

- create and implement a robust infrastructure to support virtual care integration (e.g., equipment, staff, space, training);
- support the widespread use of MyHealthVet patient portal, including its secure messaging system; and
- implement innovative telehealth approaches into clinical care delivery using three main telehealth modalities—home telehealth, clinical video telehealth, and store-and-forward telehealth.

Targets | Our targets for FY 2012 are to:

- achieve a minimum of 15% Veteran participation in virtual care modalities; and
- achieve 59,107 patient encounters involving telehealth technologies.

TELEPHONES

Veterans and their family members deserve prompt, responsive service when they call our facilities. In order to provide this, it is imperative that an efficient, coordinated telephone service is in place. The VISN 1 call centers are the central mode of communication between Veterans and our medical centers, and it is critically important that they be beneficial to both in every way. Currently, however, Veterans with multiple needs must navigate through a complex system of contact points in order to get the information and care they need. By using our staff appropriately and optimizing technologies that enable call center agents to better serve Veterans, their families, and other users, VISN 1 will be able to improve accessibility of VA services in New England.

The VISN 1 telephone initiative has two components—a short-term set of performance metrics to improve responsiveness in our telephone services, and a long-term plan to migrate to a consolidated, virtual call center for the Network. Through the implementation of these strategies across VISN 1, we will provide better access, enhance user satisfaction, and serve Veterans more efficiently.

Our long-term strategic target is to migrate to a consolidated, virtual call center providing high levels of consistent service across the entire Network by 2016.

Strategies | Our strategies for this initiative are to:

- implement a comprehensive reporting system to track productivity and performance within all call centers; and
- develop a strong call center infrastructure, with the most advanced technologies and highly trained staff.

Targets | Our targets for FY 2012 are to:

- achieve an average speed of answer (ASA) rate of 30 seconds or less;
- achieve an abandonment rate of 5% or less; and
- achieve a blockage rate (i.e., busy signal) of 5% or less.

TRANSPORTATION

VISN1 provides transportation to eligible Veterans between 8 medical centers and over 40 CBOCs across New England. The service area varies from dense urban centers to sparsely populated rural areas, presenting a dynamic challenge for VISN 1's coordinated transportation system. This strategic initiative aims to improve access to transportation services for Veterans relying on personal transportation, VA shuttles, or various voluntary community resources, while improving our internal processes to ensure efficiency and timely access to VA health care.

As part of this initiative, we will establish partnerships with other transportation networks to expand our capacity. In addition, we will improve the integration of transportation processes into existing discharge planning and standardize our processes to improve the flow of information, thereby creating a more efficient and accessible transportation system. Improving access through an integrated transportation system is crucial for improving Veteran patient satisfaction, quality, and safety.

Our long-term strategic targets are to (1) develop and deploy a successfully integrated VISN 1 transportation system by 2016 in order to maximize Veteran access, reduce beneficiary travel, increase patient satisfaction, and increase cost efficiencies; and (2) develop at least two partnerships with local or non-profit transportation systems per medical center by 2016.

Strategies | Our strategies for this initiative are to:

- develop a set of standardized key performance metrics to track transportation outcomes and cost efficiencies at each medical center and across the Network; and
- establish partnerships with state, local, and non-profit agencies to increase access to transportation services for Veterans.

Targets | Our targets for FY 2012 are to:

- create a tracking mechanism to monitor key performance metrics; and
- develop a framework for transportation integration in VISN 1.

Strategic
Objective

3

Improve Efficiency of the Organization

In an era of rising health care costs and economic uncertainties, we must improve operational efficiencies in order to provide the same level of high quality clinical services despite flattened or reduced future budgets. Through these efforts, VISN 1 will promote an organization that reduces operational costs and captures efficiencies, while continuing to provide Veterans with high quality care.

In FY 2012, VISN 1 will undertake two major initiatives to improve the efficiency of the organization—logistics management and staffing optimization. First, we will improve our efforts in the area of logistics management by developing enhanced inventory management and work processes for the ordering, stocking, and tracking of supplies and materials within the Network. Second, we will employ data-driven analysis tools to improve our staffing efficiency and avoid inefficient use of our resources. Streamlined staffing models will help us achieve an optimal allocation of resources by developing and deploying talent, funding, and other critical assets across the VISN in the right places at the right time.

Our long-term strategic target is to be in the top quarter of VISNs for cost efficiency measures by 2016.

Strategies | Our strategies for this objective are to:

- develop an effective, integrated, VISN-wide management capability to make data-driven decisions, allocate resources, and manage results based on supply chain analysis;
- develop optimal staffing models by linking clinical mapping to fiscal tracking and productivity measures; and
- engage medical centers in an ongoing discussion of efficiency priorities and programming.

Targets | Our targets for FY 2012 are to:

- achieve \$1 million annualized savings through improved logistics management; and
- achieve \$1 million annualized savings through staffing optimization and management.

Strategic
Objective

4

Expand Our Patient Base

As a highly integrated, comprehensive health care system with nationally recognized expertise in the care and support of Veterans and where we understand, respect, and honor their service and sacrifice, VISN 1 is committed to ensuring that any eligible Veteran can receive the best health care anywhere. Part of our commitment to excellence includes the responsibility to encourage and welcome Veterans into our world class health care system.

This long-term strategic objective requires a dedicated team of outreach professionals to deploy coordinated outreach initiatives across the six New England states. VISN 1 will continue to have a presence at significant regional events, such as the Big E annual fair and Veterans and Memorial Day activities. We will also launch coordinated direct mail campaigns, public service announcements, and continue our outreach efforts through New England's professional sports teams. Most importantly, we will focus our outreach efforts so that every Veteran in New England is aware of the benefits and health care services available within VISN 1.

Our long-term strategic target is to aggressively educate, enroll, vest, and retain Veterans in order to expand our patient base and increase the number of patients receiving care within our system from the current total of approximately 250,000 to 300,000 users by the end of 2015.

Strategies | Our strategies for this objective are to:

- develop and enhance relationships with state and national Veterans service organizations; state and local agencies; and non-profit organizations;
- enhance collaborative relationships between VA and DOD in New England; and
- deploy coordinated outreach efforts across New England in order to educate Veterans of their benefits and encourage them to enroll.

Targets | Our target for FY 2012 are to:

- increase the number of users of our health care system to 6,500 by September 30.

Strategic
Objective

5

Enhance Academic Relationships

Strong partnerships with our academic affiliates form the core of VA's research and education programs and contribute to our strategic goal of maintaining excellence in population health and service to our communities. These programs benefit Veterans by bringing top academic talent into VA clinical service. VISN 1 ranks among the top VISNs in the nation for research funding and has one of the largest training programs in VA with over 7,000 trainees. VISN 1 is also well on its way to establishing academic affiliations and research programs at all eight of its medical centers.

Enhancing academic relationships will involve building on our strengths in the areas of research and training in collaboration with our academic partners, as well as augmenting these programs for a robust future. Through our Career Development Awards and Research Enhancement Fund, VISN 1 aims to attract and retain high quality researchers within the Network. Over the next five years, these programs will contribute to increasing research funding, expanding our clinical education programs, and improving the learning experience for our clinical trainees—all of which are crucial as we develop our knowledge and evidence-based practices in the important area of population health.

Our long-term strategic target is to be the leading VISN in annual research funding, with over \$200 million research dollars per year, by 2016.

Strategies | Our strategies for this objective are to:

- develop a tracking tool for research funding, projects, and outcomes;
- produce guidelines for medical centers looking to develop clinician-educator tracks; and
- establish and implement a VISN-wide Research Enhancement Fund.

Targets | Our targets for FY 2012 are to:

- award 5 new VISN 1 Career Development Awards to and mid-career investigators; and
- receive at least \$185 million in annual research funding for FY 2012.



Conclusion – The Way Ahead

The VISN 1 Strategic Plan's performance-based methodology clearly defines the strategies and performance measures that will help improve accountability within each of the Network's strategic objective initiatives. In order to ensure a robust strategic planning process, VISN 1 constantly aims for continuous improvement. Each year we conduct an annual review of our planning process in order to enhance our approach and deployment of the Strategic Plan. This year, we initiated a project management approach to the development and implementation of strategic objective project plans. In conjunction with a formal tracking and reporting system, these improvements help VISN 1 to oversee the performance of our various initiatives and allow us to more effectively monitor their status and progress. Through successful planning and implementation, VISN 1 fosters collaboration and momentum into the future in order to ensure that the Veterans of New England receive the best care anywhere.

Point of Contact

Questions about the VISN 1 Strategic Plan should be directed to the VISN Strategic Planner, Gail Goza-MacMullan, via e-mail at Gail.Goza-MacMullan@va.gov or by telephone at (207)771-3553.