



Federal Health Matters

Recovery Act Distributions Top \$1B Mark

The VA has announced that, as of October 15, more than \$1 billion in funds made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 have been distributed to assist in modernizing and replacing existing VA medical facilities, improving national cemeteries, and awarding grants to states for veteran homes. A total of \$1.8 billion has been committed through the Recovery Act as part of an overall plan to improve services for America's veterans.

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki said the upgrades made possible through funds from the Recovery Act will help revitalize the VA's existing infrastructure, as well as inject money into the economy. "America's veterans are getting more modern, efficient, and greener facilities that are better suited to provide them the comprehensive care and service they have earned," he added.

Examples of improvements being made at VA medical facilities include the addition or repair of more than 26,000 parking spaces, the upgrading of nearly 14,000 inpatient bed spaces, the initiation of 16 pharmacy renovation projects to help provide medications quicker and more efficiently, and the undertaking of more than 14,400 clinical improvement projects.

Physical improvements to VA medical facilities include several projects that will encompass all stages of energy development. Nearly \$400 million overall is intended for energy projects while about \$90 million will be used for renewable energy studies and projects. Solar photovoltaic systems are being installed at facilities in Albuquerque, New Mexico;

Tucson, Arizona; Dublin, Georgia; Calverton, New York; and San Joaquin and Riverside, California. Metering systems also are being installed at all VA-owned facilities to monitor energy utilities, including electricity, water, steam, and natural gas consumption.

Energy and water infrastructure improvements totaling \$197 million are underway at facilities across the country that will upgrade properties and structures. Such improvements will help to reduce energy consumption and water usage, while also better managing related costs.

More than 390 improvement projects at the VA's system of 131 national cemeteries have been initiated using \$50 million of Recovery Act funds. The projects, which were identified by the National Cemetery Association, include restoring and preserving 47

Another \$150 million in VA Recovery Act grants are being utilized to assist states in constructing, improving, or acquiring nursing home, domiciliary, or adult day health care facilities.

Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 Signed Into Law

On October 13, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, which improves and modernizes certain benefits administered by the VA for veterans and their families, was signed into law by President Obama.

House VA Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-California) said the new law, which was a joint effort by all parties involved, will ensure that those who were willing to lay

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historic monuments and memorials; conserving energy and water by using wind turbines, solar power, and other measures; purchasing equipment for cemetery operations; upgrading access and visitor safety by improving roads and grounds; and raising, realigning, and cleaning nearly 200,000 headstones, markers, sunken graves, and turf at 24 VA national cemeteries.

down their lives for our country, and their families and survivors, receive meaningful, world-class, 21st century benefits.

The new law will address several important needs of veterans pertaining to insurance, health care, and benefits. The new law will enhance employment opportunities, increase care for homeless veterans, extend

and increase insurance limits (of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and Veterans' Group Life Insurance) for veterans and their families, protect service members who are called to combat, honor fallen service members and their families, strengthen education benefits, and invest in research for Gulf War veterans. Under the new law, housing needs of disabled veterans also will be addressed (by prohibiting a VA housing loan fee from being collected from veterans with a service-connected disability receiving active-service pay after being called to active-duty service).

Grants Awarded to Assist Patients

On October 19, HHS announced new Consumer Assistance Grants program awards of approximately \$30 million that will assist states and territories in helping patients take charge of their health care. The grants are designed to work in conjunction with states' ongoing efforts of establishing or strengthening assistance programs that provide direct services to consumers who have questions or concerns regarding their health insurance.

"The Affordable Care Act's Patient's Bill of Rights gives people important benefits and ends the worst insurance company abuses," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "These grants will help ensure consumers' rights are protected, and they are another way the new law is putting patients, not insurance companies, in charge of their health care."

A total of 35 states, 4 territories, and the District of Columbia applied for and will receive grant awards. The grants will help consumers enroll in health coverage, file complaints and appeals against health plans, track consumer complaints to help identify problems, and educate consumers as to their rights and encourage them to take action. California, Texas, and New York have been awarded the largest amounts (\$3.4 million, \$2.79 million, and \$1.76 million, respectively). A fact sheet of how each state or territory will use the new resources can be found at <http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/CAPGrants.html>.

Programs funded by these grants are intended to support consumers now during the transition to a more competitive and patient-centered health insurance marketplace in 2014, and also when the new marketplace is established.

Cyberspace: New Domain of Warfare

With the creation of the U.S. Cyber Command—whose basic mission is to protect DoD critical networks—and the recently announced agreement between DoD and Homeland Security regarding cyber security, DoD is ready to add cyberspace to sea, land, air, and space as the latest domain of warfare, said Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn III.

Lynn laid out a draft cyber strategy, of which the DoD is working to finalize, in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine. "There's no agreed-

on definition of what constitutes a cyber attack," Lynn said. "It's really a range of things that can happen—from exploitation and exfiltration of data to degradation of networks to destruction of networks or even physical equipment, physical property."

The agreement, announced on October 13 by Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, is to work together to better protect against threats to military and civilian computer networks and systems. The agreement was created for coordinating and improving efforts to secure the nation's critical cyber-based infrastructure. Under the agreement, cyber analysts from DoD and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will work together to formally support the Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center. In addition, a full-time DHS leader and assorted personnel will be provided to DoD's National Security Agency. The DoD began focusing on cyber defense in 2008, after an incident, involving malware being inserted into classified military networks via a flash drive, took place in the Middle East.

A senior DoD official said, "It may seem ironic in today's connected world, and especially for cyber security, that we're suggesting it's critical to have people work together on a daily basis, face-to-face. But that's the reality of how people work and from a DoD perspective we understand that this arrangement will help DHS compete more effectively for support from NSA." ●