

Summary of Points

The President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors and Related Research

History of Review of the Treatment of Veterans

The Commission's Report (the "Report") states that eleven (11) prior Commissions, Task forces, and Committees previously examined the same problems since 1956. Eight (8) of these groups examined the problems since May of 2003. In addition, the GAO has issued 31 reports addressing the problems since January of 2001. The Report also lists three (3) Joint Reports issue on the subject since 1994. (See the Appendix listing these reports on pages 29 through 33 of the Report.)

After completing its own study plus reviewing the previously issued reports listed above, the Commission concluded in its executive summary (pages 1 through 4 of the Report) that

We don't recommend merely patching the system, as has been done in the past. Instead, the experiences of these young men and women (those interviewed and surveyed by the Commission) have highlighted the need for fundamental changes..."

The Commission also concluded its executive summary that

Making the significant improvements we recommend requires a sense of urgency and strong leadership.

Employment, Education, and Training

Beginning on page 20 of the Report, the Commission examined the contribution of vocational rehabilitation programs in helping veterans, particularly injured veterans, to reenter civilian life. The importance of this concept was highlighted in the first sentence of the section of their report on this subject:

Employment is the dominant concern of most service member reentering civilian life.

The Commission proceeds to reach two conclusions in this section of its Report.

Participation in vocational rehabilitation programs can significantly increase employment and quality of life for people with disabilities. Unfortunately, the VA does not—and should—routinely track vocational rehabilitation participants over time to evaluate program outcomes and identify factors associated with success. As a result, it is impossible to determine which programs work best.

However, of the 65,000 veterans who apply for the program each year, only half qualify for it; of these, less than 40 percent complete either the education or independent living tracks.

Impediments to Improvements

The Commission also found that a complete restructuring of the system will be necessary because

The tendency to make systems too complex and rule-bound must be countered by a new perspective, grounded in an understanding of the importance of patient-centeredness.

Even a routine examination of the organization structure discloses the barriers that prevent the vertical or horizontal integration of common standards and best practices. Per the DVA web site, the system must operate through sixty-six (66) DVA Regional Offices (located throughout the 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines). The Regional Offices must coordinate and authorize benefits through the network of state government veteran offices and education regulatory departments/boards.