



## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

### **Funding Highlights:**

- Provides \$65.3 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to provide needed care and other benefits to veterans and their families. In addition, the Budget includes \$3.1 billion in estimated medical care collections, for a total budget authority of approximately \$68.4 billion. This includes:
  - Protecting critical funding for VA medical care by providing \$56 billion, in addition to requesting \$58.7 billion in 2016 advance appropriations for medical care programs, to ensure continuity of veterans' health care services;
  - Funding programs that, along with programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other Federal agencies, aim to end veterans' homelessness; and
  - Supporting continuing improvements in the delivery of mental health care and the development of telehealth technologies, specialized care for women veterans, and benefits for veterans' caregivers.
- Includes \$1 billion in mandatory funding to create the Veterans Job Corps program that would put thousands of veterans back to work over the next five years protecting and rebuilding America.

### **Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative:**

- Through the Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative, supports:
  - An additional \$400 million investment in high priority capital projects to address critical safety issues, improve services, and meet increased demand for veterans' services.

### **Reforms:**

- Addresses the VA claims backlog and improves the Department's efficiency by investing \$138.7 million in the Veterans Claims Intake Program, continuing to implement the paperless claims system, and undertaking additional efforts to provide faster and more accurate benefits claims processing and improve veterans' access to benefits information.

The Nation has a solemn obligation to take care of its veterans and to honor them for their service and sacrifice on behalf of the United States. To deliver on this commitment, the Budget provides \$65.3 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), a three percent increase above the 2014 enacted level. In addition, the Budget includes \$3.1 billion in estimated medical care collections, for a total budget authority of approximately \$68.4 billion. This funding will continue to drive improvements in efficiency and responsiveness at VA, enabling the Department to better serve veterans and their families. The Budget supports efforts to ensure the needs of today's veteran population are met and invests in the continued modernization of VA to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges. The Budget also addresses anticipated growth in the number of veterans, dependents, and survivors projected to use VA services in 2015—an estimated 9.3 million veterans enrolled in VA's health care system and 4.9 million veterans and survivors receiving disability compensation.

### ***Sustains and Strengthens Services for Veterans and Their Families***

**Protects Critical Funding for VA Medical Care.** The Budget provides \$56 billion for VA medical care, a 2.7 percent increase above the 2014 enacted level, to provide high-quality and timely health care services to veterans and other eligible beneficiaries. These services include innovative programs to educate and support veterans' caregivers, enhance veterans' access to care through telehealth technologies, and support equitable, high-quality care for women veterans in an appropriate and safe environment. In addition, the Budget proposes \$58.7 billion in advance appropriations for the VA medical care program in 2016, which will provide timely and predictable funding for VA's medical care to prevent veterans from being adversely affected by any potential delays in annual appropriations. In addition, the Administration's Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative includes a one-time investment of \$400 million to support one additional major construction project and other high priority

capital projects to address critical safety issues, improve services, and meet increased demand.

**Strengthens Mental Health Care Services.** The Budget provides over \$7 billion to continue VA's focus on expanding and transforming mental health services for veterans to ensure accessible and patient-centered care, including treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, ensuring timely access to mental healthcare, and treatment for Military Sexual Trauma. This funding will allow VA to continue its collaborative efforts with the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Health and Human Services, as directed in the President's Executive Order on improving access to mental health services for veterans, service-members, and military families, to help veterans receive timely access to mental health services, including through enhanced partnerships with community providers.

**Ends Veterans' Homelessness.** Between 2010 and 2013, the number of homeless veterans has decreased by 24 percent. The Budget invests \$1.6 billion to serve homeless and at-risk veterans, including \$500 million for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program to provide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services, and \$321 million for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-VA Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH) for VA case management services. The Budget also includes \$75 million in HUD funding for 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers to permanently house homeless veterans. Through these investments and collaborative partnerships with local governments, non-profit organizations, and Federal agencies, the Administration will continue to make progress toward the President's goal to end veterans' homelessness in 2015.

**Addresses VA Claims Backlog and Continues Implementation of the Paperless Claims System.** Over the last decade, VA has received an increasing number of disability claims from veterans. Past growth in the disability claims backlog has been due to a variety of circumstances, including the 255,000 claims

received because of VA's decision to expand disability compensation eligibility to veterans for their exposure to Agent Orange. To eliminate the backlog, the Budget includes \$138.7 million to enhance VA's Veterans Claims Intake Program, allowing the Department to continue to directly receive and convert paper evidence, such as medical records, into a digital format for increased efficiency in claims processing.

The Budget also supports transformation initiatives, including the continued development of a digital, near-paperless environment that allows for greater exchange of information and increased transparency for veterans. Specifically, the Budget includes \$173.3 million for the Veterans Benefit Management System, designed to reduce the processing time and the claims backlog, automate claims tracking, and facilitate quality improvements including service-connected disability evaluations.

These overall efforts support VA's efforts to eliminate the claims backlog and achieve the Department's goal of processing all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy in 2015. VA continues to make considerable progress in reducing the disability claims backlog, defined as those claims pending longer than 125 days.

**Advances Medical and Prosthetic Research.** The Budget includes \$589 million for medical and prosthetic research to support veterans wounded in service. As part of the largest integrated health care system in the United States,

the VA research program benefits from clinical care and research occurring together, allowing research to be directly coordinated with the care of veterans.

**Supports Veteran Employment.** To help the newest veterans transition to civilian life and find good jobs, the Budget provides \$33 million to continue the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) and VetSuccess on Campus initiatives. IDES and VetSuccess counselors ensure that veterans, especially wounded warriors and students, receive timely information about education opportunities, job counseling, and placement. The Budget also proposes \$1 billion to create the Veterans Job Corps program that would put thousands of veterans back to work over the next five years protecting and rebuilding America. In addition, the Department of the Interior's historic Centennial Initiative will engage hundreds of veterans to upgrade and rebuild national parks.

**Improves Access to Comprehensive Services and Benefits.** The Budget supports VA's efforts to ensure consistent, personalized, and accurate information about services and benefits, especially in the delivery of compensation and pension claims processing. To improve the speed, effectiveness, and efficiency of benefits service delivery, the joint DOD/VA eBenefits web portal provides veterans with critical self-service capabilities to manage their VA, military and personal information, apply online for benefits, and check the status of a claim.