

PART 0—VALUES, STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT, AND RELATED RESPONSIBILITIES

Subpart A—Core Values, Characteristics, and Customer Experience Principles of the Department

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AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 301; 38 U.S.C. 501; see sections 201, 301, and 502(a) of E.O. 12674, 54 FR 15159, 3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p. 215 as modified by E.O. 12731, 55 FR 42547, 3 CFR, 1990 Comp., p. 306.

SOURCE: 31 FR 5828, Apr. 15, 1966, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—Core Values, Characteristics, and Customer Experience Principles of the Department

SOURCE: 77 FR 41275, July 13, 2012, unless otherwise noted.

§ 0.600 General.

This section describes the Core Values, Characteristics, and Customer Experience Principles that serve as internal guidelines for employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These Core Values, Characteristics, and Customer Experience Principles define VA employees, articulate what VA stands for, and underscore its moral obligation to veterans, their families, and other beneficiaries. They are intended to establish one overarching set of guidelines that apply to all VA Administrations and staff of

fices, confirming the values already instilled in many VA employees and enforcing their commitment to provide the best experience possible to veterans, servicemembers, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

[84 FR 22710, May 20, 2019]

§ 0.601 Core Values.

VA's Core Values define VA employees. They describe the organization's culture and character, and serve as the foundation for the way VA employees should interact with each other, as well as with people outside the organization. They also serve as a common bond between all employees regardless of their grade, specialty area, or location. These Core Values are Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. Together, the first letters of the Core Values spell "I CARE," and VA employees should adopt this motto and these Core Values in their day-to-day operations.

(a) *Integrity*. VA employees will act with high moral principle, adhere to the highest professional standards, and maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom they engage.

(b) *Commitment*. VA employees will work diligently to serve veterans and other beneficiaries, be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission, and fulfill their individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

(c) *Advocacy*. VA employees will be truly veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of veterans and other beneficiaries.

(d) *Respect*. VA employees will treat all those they serve and with whom they work with dignity and respect, and they will show respect to earn it.

(e) *Excellence*. VA employees will strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement, and be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for their actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

§ 0.602 Core Characteristics.

While Core Values define VA employees, the Core Characteristics define what VA stands for and what VA strives to be as an organization. These are aspirational goals that VA wants

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its employees, veterans, and the American people to associate with the Department and with its workforce. These Core characteristics describe the traits all VA organizations should possess and demonstrate, and they identify the qualities needed to successfully accomplish today's missions and also support the ongoing transformation to a 21st Century VA. These characteristics are:

(a) *Trustworthy*. VA earns the trust of those it serves, every day, through the actions of its employees. They provide care, benefits, and services with compassion, dependability, effectiveness, and transparency.

(b) *Accessible*. VA engages and welcomes veterans and other beneficiaries, facilitating their use of the entire array of its services. Each interaction will be positive and productive.

(c) *Quality*. VA provides the highest standard of care and services to veterans and beneficiaries while managing the cost of its programs and being efficient stewards of all resources entrusted to it by the American people. VA is a model of unrivaled excellence due to employees who are empowered, trusted by their leaders, and respected for their competence and dedication.

(d) *Innovative*. VA prizes curiosity and initiative, encourages creative contributions from all employees, seeks continuous improvement, and adapts to remain at the forefront in knowledge, proficiency, and capability to deliver the highest standard of care and services to all of the people it serves.

(e) *Agile*. VA anticipates and adapts quickly to current challenges and new requirements by continuously assessing the environment in which it operates and devising solutions to better serve veterans, other beneficiaries, and Service members.

(f) *Integrated*. VA links care and services across the Department; other federal, state, and local agencies; partners; and Veterans Services Organizations to provide useful and understandable programs to veterans and other beneficiaries. VA's relationship with the Department of Defense is unique, and VA will nurture it for the benefit of veterans and Service members.

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§ 0.603 Customer Experience principles.

VA will provide the best customer experience in its delivery of care, benefits, and memorial services to veterans, servicemembers, their families, caregivers, and survivors. The delivery of exceptional customer experience is the responsibility of all VA employees and will be guided by VA's Core Values and Characteristics. Customer experience is the product of interactions between an organization and a customer over the duration of their relationship. VA measures these interactions through Ease, Effectiveness, and Emotion, all of which impact the overall trust the customer has in the organization.

(a) *Ease*. VA will make access to VA care, benefits, and memorial services smooth and easy.

(b) *Effectiveness*. VA will deliver care, benefits, and memorial services to the customer's satisfaction.

(c) *Emotion*. VA will deliver care, benefits, and memorial services in a manner that makes customers feel honored and valued in their interactions with VA. VA will use customer experience data and insights in strategy development and decision-making to ensure that the voice of veterans, servicemembers, their families, caregivers, and survivors inform how VA delivers care, benefits, and memorial services.

[84 FR 22710, May 20, 2019]

§ 0.605 Ethical framework principles for access to and use of veteran data.

(a) Veterans trust VA to promote and respect their privacy, confidentiality, and autonomy in the services we provide or support. We earn this trust when we adhere to VA's core values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence (commonly referred to as ICARE).

(b) Consistent with the values listed in paragraph (a) of this section, VA must promote and ensure responsible practices whenever veteran data is accessed, shared, or used by VA or its partners. Veteran data is accessed, shared, and used for many purposes which are developing at an unparalleled pace. While the regulatory and

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policy framework that governs data access, sharing, and use sets important standards about what is required with respect to data access, sharing, and use, it does not always provide definitive guidance about how VA should manage access, sharing, or use of veteran data when regulation and policy permit organizational discretion, except in cases where there are already established federally protected classes.

(c) The following principles establish an overarching ethical framework for all individuals, groups, or entities to apply when managing access to, sharing of, or use of VA veteran data. All parties who have or obtain access to and use VA veteran data are encouraged to carefully consider and apply this principle-based ethical framework when not contradicted by other specific clinical, technical, fiscal, regulatory, professional, industry, and other standards. VA and its partners must apply this principle-based ethical framework when accessing, sharing or using veteran data unless prohibited by law. Consistent application of this framework will ensure the integrity and trustworthiness that veterans and other stakeholders expect and deserve when veteran data is accessed, shared, or used.

(1) *Principle 1. The primary goal for use of veteran data is for the good of veterans.* Veteran data is personal and sensitive. Use of veteran data by VA and its partners must have the primary goal of supporting and improving overall veteran health and wellness, and the delivery of benefits and services to veterans at large.

(2) *Principle 2. Veteran data should be used in a manner that ensures equity to veterans.* The proper use of veteran data by VA and its partners must help to ensure equity so that no veteran population is disproportionately excluded from the benefits of, or burdened by the risks of, data use because of race, color, religion, national origin, limited English proficiency, age, sex (including gender identity and transgender status), sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital and parental status, disability, or genetic information.

(3) *Principle 3. The sharing of veteran data should be based on the veteran's meaningful choice.* When regulation and

policy permit organizational discretion, the sharing of veteran data by VA and its partners should be based on the veteran's meaningful choice to permit sharing their information for that specific purpose; exceptions for sharing based on a veteran's meaningful choice are treatment, payment, health care operations, public health and safety reporting, and when required by law. Timely, clear, relevant, concise, complete, and comprehensible information must be provided to the veteran to serve as a basis for their free and informed choice. A veteran's preference to change their mind about sharing or not sharing their information should be facilitated, with the understanding that information that has already been shared may be unable to be retrieved or retracted. A veteran's choice(s) about data sharing must not be the basis to deny care or benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. Meaningful choice may be expressed in many forms and a written requirement is not implied.

(4) *Principle 4. Access to and exchange of veteran data should be transparent and consistent.* Access to and the exchange of veteran data should be transparent and consistent, and in accordance with all applicable standards. For the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), this includes practices described in VHA's Notice of Privacy Practices. Data should only be shared or accessed for approved and specified purposes; there should be no unspecified use, or re-use of veteran data without VA agreement or approval. The release of veteran data for purposes other than those which were originally approved or specified, such as in an agreement, requires a separate approval and commitment of all parties to follow these principles. Failure to ensure such protections is a breach of veteran trust and confidentiality.

(5) *Principle 5. De-identified veteran data should not be reidentified without authorization.* Parties who receive de-identified veteran data must not attempt to re-identify the data in any manner without prior VA agreement or approval. VA considers unauthorized re-identification a breach of veteran trust and confidentiality.

(6) *Principle 6. There is an obligation of reciprocity for gains made using veteran*

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data. A financial or other gain from innovation by non-VA parties that uses veteran data obtained from VA creates a moral and tangible obligation of reciprocity to share this gain with veterans, veterans' service organizations, and/or veterans' causes. For example, parties could fulfill this obligation by giving back to the veteran community through support of veteran causes or organizations, by facilitating veteran access to innovations to which veteran data contributed, or, at a minimum, by publicly recognizing veteran contributions to the gain or innovation. Veteran data must not be sold by VA or its partners.

(7) *Principle 7. All parties are obligated to ensure data security, quality and integrity of veteran data.* All parties who send, receive, or use VA veteran data must ensure data security, quality, and integrity. In other words, that the data remain secure; accurate; complete; and representative of the data quality, meaning, and integrity when it was received or accessed from VA. Access to data by VA and its partners should be limited to the minimum amount needed to accomplish the stated purpose and should be terminated when no longer required. Data that are not necessary to accomplish the purpose for which it was obtained should not be retained longer than legally required. Transparency about breaches in data security, quality or integrity is also essential to promote trust and minimize impacts to veterans.

(8) *Principle 8. Veterans should be able to access to their own information. Veterans must have user-friendly access to their own information.* Access may be through electronic means such as mobile applications, web portals, or through convenient written or in-person processes.

(9) *Principle 9. Veterans have the right to request amendments to their own information.* Veterans must be able to request amendments to information in their VA records if they feel it is untimely, inaccurate, incomplete, or not relevant.

(d) As used in this section, *de-identified veteran data* means information that does not identify an individual and with respect to which there is no reasonable basis to believe that the in-

formation is individually identifiable information or can be used by any means to identify an individual. For protected health information (PHI), veteran data is not de-identified unless in compliance with 45 CFR parts 160 and 164.

[87 FR 40452, July 7, 2022]

Subpart B—General Provisions

SOURCE: Redesignated at 77 FR 41275, July 13, 2012, unless otherwise noted.

§ 0.735-1 Agency ethics officials.

(a) *Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO).* The Secretary will designate attorneys from the Office of General Counsel to serve as the Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO) and Alternate Designated Agency Ethics Official (ADAEAO).

(b) *Deputy ethics officials.* (1) The District Chief Counsels and attorneys on the Ethics Specialty Team are Deputy Ethics Officials. They have been delegated the authority to act for the DAEO pursuant to 5 CFR 2638.104(e).

(2) Other officials may also act as Deputy Ethics officials pursuant to delegations of one or more of the DAEO's duties from the DAEO.

[58 FR 61813, Nov. 23, 1993. Redesignated at 61 FR 11309, Mar. 20, 1996; 89 FR 15451, Mar. 4, 2024]

§ 0.735-2 Government-wide standards.

For government-wide standards of ethical conduct and related responsibilities for Federal employees, see 5 CFR Part 735 and Chapter XVI.

[61 FR 11309, Mar. 20, 1996. Redesignated at 63 FR 33579, June 19, 1998]

Subpart C—Standards of Ethical Conduct and Related Responsibilities of Employees

SOURCE: 58 FR 61814, Nov. 23, 1993, unless otherwise noted. Redesignated at 77 FR 41275, July 13, 2012.

§ 0.735-10 Cross-reference to employee ethical and other conduct standards and financial disclosure regulations.

Employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should refer to the executive branch-wide Standards of Ethical Conduct at 5 CFR part 2635, the executive branch-wide Employee Responsibilities and Conduct at 5 CFR part 735, and the executive branch-wide financial disclosure regulation at 5 CFR part 2634.

§ 0.735-11 Other conduct on the job.

Relationship with beneficiaries and claimants. Employees are expected to be helpful to beneficiaries, patients and claimants, but:

(a) An employee shall not procure intoxicants or drugs for, or attempt to sell intoxicants or drugs to, patients or members, or give or attempt to give intoxicants or drugs to them unless officially prescribed for medical use;

(b) An employee shall not abuse patients, members, or other beneficiaries, whether or not provoked.

§ 0.735-12 Standards of conduct in special areas.

(a) *Safety.* (1) Employees will observe safety instructions, signs, and normal safety practices and precautions, including the use of protective clothing and equipment.

(2) An employee shall report each work-connected injury, accident or disease he or she suffers.

(b) *Furnishing testimony.* Employees will furnish information and testify freely and honestly in cases respecting employment and disciplinary matters. Refusal to testify, concealment of material facts, or willfully inaccurate testimony in connection with an investigation or hearing may be ground for disciplinary action. An employee, however, will not be required to give testimony against himself or herself in any matter in which there is indication that he or she may be or is involved in a violation of law wherein there is a possibility of self-incrimination.

PART 1—GENERAL PROVISIONS

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