



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

March 21, 2006



*Commemorating 75 Years of Service*

The Honorable Lane Evans  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Evans:

Thank you for your letter dated November 4, 2005, regarding the appropriate steps the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has taken to ensure compliance with Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). I apologize for the delay in responding to your request.

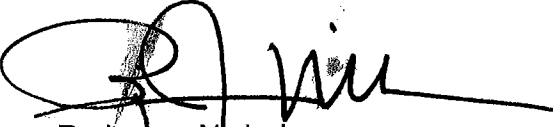
I am pleased to inform you that VA has assessed LEP needs throughout the Department and found that most facilities have implemented programs for providing meaningful access to benefits and services for LEP persons. The assessment identified that the predominant language, other than English, spoken by our customers, is Spanish. A summary of the LEP assessment results, provided in Enclosure 1, reveals that VA facilities have translated vital documents related to health care and benefits, as well as other materials, to Spanish. These documents are available upon request and are accessible on the Department's Web Site via the Internet. A current listing of the translated documents is provided in Enclosure 2.

VA recently implemented steps to improve its outreach efforts to veterans and their families by providing translation services for Spanish and other languages. Highlights of those activities for select offices, including VA's Office of Seamless Transition, are illustrated in Enclosure 3. VA facilities also contract locally for translation services, and some facilities have employees who can provide translation services.

VA's Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration have also evaluated the particular needs of its LEP community and developed action plans with targeted completion dates, Enclosure 4. An updated action report from each of the Administrations will be provided to me by December 2006.

While the assessment revealed many positive findings, it is clear that additional work is needed to ensure that VA complies with the intent of the Executive Order. I assure you that VA is committed to making its programs and services accessible to all. I hope you will find this information to be useful. A similar letter has been sent to all who co-signed the letter.

Sincerely yours,



R. James Nicholson

Enclosures

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)  
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT**

<b><u>FUNCTION</u></b>	<b><u>PERCENTAGE (%) OF VA FACILITIES THAT HAVE COMPLETED FUNCTION</u></b>
1) Developed a comprehensive written LEP Policy on language access	60%
2) Conducted an assessment of language assistance needed	65%
3) Hired bilingual staff with interpreter skills	56%
4) Trained staff to understand the policy and be competent interpreters	43%
5) Established contacts with outside interpreters	69%
6) Made arrangements for voluntary interpreters	82%
7) Arranged for telephone interpreter service	58%
8) Initiated regular monitoring of the language assistance program	49%
9) Identified Non-English language interpreter and established a list	87%
10) Translated written materials into languages encountered	24%

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**

**TRANSLATED DOCUMENTS**

All documents listed are available in Spanish. Many are also offered in other various languages.

- Agent Orange Information
- Assistance for Homeless Veterans
- Blood Sugar Levels
- Burial Flag
- Burial Plot-Interment Allowance
- CHAMPVA Handbook
- Community-wide Health Fair Day advertisements
- Counting Carbs
- Death Pension Benefits
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation
- Diabetes & You
- Disability Compensation Benefits
- Disability Pension Benefits
- Diversity Survey
- Do I Have Arthritis?
- EEO Settlement Agreements
- Gulf Veterans Illnesses
- Foot Care for Diabetics
- Former Prisoners of War (POW)
- Gulf Coast-Advance Directives
- Gulf Veterans Agent Orange Information
- Home Loan Guaranty Benefits
- How to Use Enoxaparin
- How to Use Metformin Medication
- How to Use Warfarin Medication
- Incarcerated Veterans Benefits
- Krames on Demand patient information (electronic patient education package)
- Living Will Information
- Local Outreach Materials
- Medical documents for determining service connection
- Medical Terminology Pocket Dictionaries
- Micromedex
- Montgomery GI-Bill - Active Duty - Chapter 30
- Montgomery GI Bill - Selected Reserves - Chapter 106
- Orientation Materials for Transplants

## **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**

### **TRANSLATED DOCUMENTS**

(Continued)

- Post-Vietnam Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) – Chapter 32
- Public Affairs documents
- Secondhand Smoking Brochure
- Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance
- Simple Interpretation Pocket Books
- Summary of VA Benefits
- Survivors & Dependents Educational Assistance – Chapter 35
- Training Materials
- Uses of Phenytoin Medication
- Veterans Benefits Dependents Brochure
- Veterans Health & Benefits Brochure
- Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits - Chapter 31
- Women Veterans Program
- Your Brain & You
- Your Rights Under the External Complaint Program

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**  
**LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY HIGHLIGHTS**

**SEAMLESS TRANSITION OFFICE**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)/Department of Defense (DoD) Social Work Liaison and Benefits Counselors stationed at eight Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) who receive patients injured in Iraq and Afghanistan occasionally encounter service members and their families with limited English proficiency (LEP). When this occurs, the VA Social Worker or Benefits Counselor utilizes the MTF's designated interpreters to communicate with the service member or the family members. Each MTF has a list of interpreters that can be utilized to communicate with patients or family members whose primary language is not English. When patients with LEP require transfers, VA Social Work Liaisons notify the receiving VA Medical Center that an interpreter may be needed to assist in communicating with the patient and family. This notification gives the receiving facility time to arrange to have an interpreter on hand when the patient arrives.

**VETERANS BENEFITS**

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides VA forms, pamphlets, and benefit fact sheets in Spanish. Information is distributed through a variety of outreach programs conducted by all business lines, including Compensation and Pension, Education, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, Loan Guaranty, and Insurance.

**OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND LABOR RELATIONS**

The Office of Worklife and Benefits provides a toll free number for Spanish speaking employees applying for the Child Care Subsidy Program. The Office of Marketing and Veterans Employment redesigned the VA Jobs Web site and will offer applicants information in English and Spanish in 2006. The Office of Resolution Management has resources in place for language assistance personnel capable of providing information and instruction to individuals whose primary language is not English.

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**  
**LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY HIGHLIGHTS**  
(Continued)

**CENTER FOR MINORITY VETERANS (CMV)**

The Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) orders, distributes and includes in its veteran educational toolkit materials on VA benefits and services when conducting outreach initiatives. This includes Spanish translation of the book on Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents and Quick Series Frequently Asked Questions for Women Veterans. Over 300 Minority Veteran Program Coordinators, assigned to each VA medical facility, regional office, and national cemetery assist veterans and their families through LEP programs at those stations.

**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHICS IN HEALTH CARE OFFICE**

A Spanish translation of an extensive set of patient education materials and informed consent forms that comprise the electronic product called iMedConsent will be available nationwide in the near future.

**VET CENTERS**

Vet Center policy is to tailor their local version of the mandated service mission of outreach and counseling to address the particular needs of the local veteran population for each center. Their focus is on the socio-economic and cultural needs of particular veteran groups. The Vet Centers maintain hiring preferences that promote the Vet Center team composition as being representative of the local veteran population. The Vet Centers have promoted cultural competence since the program began 25 years ago. The Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) tracks workload by veteran ethnicity to ensure that service levels provided are representative of or higher than the group's representation in the veteran population. RCS has a cadre of bilingual counselors on staff, and makes use of its extensive community-based networks to arrange for referrals to other bilingual counselors in the community for veterans and families needing special consideration. RCS is the only Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program that operates Vet Centers on Native American reservation lands, all of which are staffed by Native Americans, fluent in the local language and well-versed in the local culture.

On August 5, 2003, the Secretary authorized the Vet Centers to develop a program to provide bereavement counseling to surviving family members of Armed Forces personnel who died while on active duty in service to their country. The Vet Centers

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**  
**LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY HIGHLIGHTS**  
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are now actively providing bereavement counseling to military family members whose loved ones were killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since inception of this program, the Vet Centers have provided assistance to over 474 family members, including over 325 cases of military-related deaths. Current family utilization data indicate that the average number of counseling sessions per military death is six. Program clinical experience indicates that most families who have experienced such a loss, need a supportive therapeutic environment to assist them in processing the immediate stages of grief and to stabilize their situation sufficiently in order to mobilize their own coping resources. The Vet Center program has prioritized the development of this program as core to its readjustment counseling mission. The Vet Centers have responded to all requests for bereavement assistance within 24 hours. To facilitate program development, RCS identified members of its clinical staff with bereavement counseling skills and provided training to other members of its existing mental health professional staff.

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**  
**LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY ACTION ITEMS**

<b><u>VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION</u></b>	<b><u>TARGETED COMPLETION DATE</u></b>
1. Ensure remaining 40 percent of facilities develop a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) policy	Sep 2006
2. Ensure remaining 35 percent of facilities conduct a language assessment	Sep 2006
3. Ensure remaining 56 percent of facilities train staff to understand the LEP policy	Dec 2006
4. Ensure remaining 51 percent of facilities regularly monitor their LEP program.	Dec 2006
5. Ensure 76 percent of facilities that have not translated written materials into LEP languages assess this practice and translate materials appropriately	Dec 2006
<b><u>VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION</u></b>	
1. Implement LEP policy	Mar 2006
2. Assess language needs of the population served	Jun 2006
3. Train staff on the LEP access policy	Dec 2006
4. Monitor 10 percent of proprietary, for-profit, non-college educational institutions	Sep 2006
<b><u>NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION</u></b>	
1. Implement LEP policy	May 2006
2. Assess language needs of the population served	Sep 2006
3. Implement a language assistance program	Sep 2006
4. Train staff on the LEP Policy	Dec 2006