

(Added Pub. L. 108-454, title V, §504(b)(1), Dec. 10, 2004, 118 Stat. 3621.)

EFFECTIVE DATE

Section effective on the first day of the seventh month beginning after Dec. 10, 2004, see section 507(a) of Pub. L. 108-454, set out as an Effective Date of 2004 Amendment note under section 5312 of this title.

CHAPTER 63—OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Sec. ¹	
6301.	Purpose; definitions.
6302.	Biennial plan.
6303.	Outreach services.
6304.	Veterans assistance offices.
6305.	Outstationing of counseling and outreach personnel.
6306.	Use of other agencies.
6307.	Outreach for eligible dependents.
6308.	Biennial report to Congress.

§ 6301. Purpose; definitions

(a) PURPOSE.—The Congress declares that—

(1) the outreach services program authorized by this chapter is for the purpose of ensuring that all veterans (especially those who have been recently discharged or released from active military, naval, or air service, or from a reserve component, and those who are eligible for readjustment or other benefits and services under laws administered by the Department) are provided timely and appropriate assistance to aid and encourage them in applying for and obtaining such benefits and services in order that they may achieve a rapid social and economic readjustment to civilian life and obtain a higher standard of living for themselves and their dependents; and

(2) the outreach services program authorized by this chapter is for the purpose of charging the Department with the affirmative duty of seeking out eligible veterans and eligible dependents and providing them with such services.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—For the purposes of this chapter—

(1) the term “outreach” means the act or process of reaching out in a systematic manner to proactively provide information, services, and benefits counseling to veterans, and to the spouses, children, and parents of veterans who may be eligible to receive benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary, to ensure that such individuals are fully informed about, and receive assistance in applying for, such benefits;

(2) the term “other governmental programs” includes all programs under State or local laws as well as all programs under Federal law other than those authorized by this title; and

(3) the term “eligible dependent” means a spouse, surviving spouse, child, or dependent parent of a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service.

(Added Pub. L. 109-233, title IV, §402(a), June 15, 2006, 120 Stat. 407; amended Pub. L. 110-181, div. A, title XVII, §1710, Jan. 28, 2008, 122 Stat. 494.)

PRIOR PROVISIONS

Provisions similar to those in this section were contained in section 7721 of this title prior to repeal by Pub. L. 109-233.

¹ Editorially supplied.

AMENDMENTS

2008—Subsec. (a)(1). Pub. L. 110-181, §1710(a), inserted “, or from a reserve component,” after “active military, naval, or air service”.

Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 110-181, §1710(b), added par. (1) and redesignated former pars. (1) and (2) as (2) and (3), respectively.

§ 6302. Biennial plan

(a) BIENNIAL PLAN REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall, during the first nine months of every odd-numbered year, prepare a biennial plan for the outreach activities of the Department for the two-fiscal-year period beginning on October 1 of that year.

(b) ELEMENTS.—Each biennial plan under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) Plans for efforts to identify eligible veterans and eligible dependents who are not enrolled or registered with the Department for benefits or services under the programs administered by the Secretary.

(2) Plans for informing eligible veterans and eligible dependents of modifications of the benefits and services under the programs administered by the Secretary, including eligibility for medical and nursing care and services.

(c) COORDINATION IN DEVELOPMENT.—In developing the biennial plan under subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with the following:

(1) Directors or other appropriate officials of organizations approved by the Secretary under section 5902 of this title.

(2) Directors or other appropriate officials of State and local education and training programs.

(3) Representatives of nongovernmental organizations that carry out veterans outreach programs.

(4) Representatives of State and local veterans employment organizations.

(5) Other individuals and organizations that the Secretary considers appropriate.

(Added Pub. L. 109-233, title IV, §402(a), June 15, 2006, 120 Stat. 408.)

§ 6303. Outreach services

(a) REQUIREMENT TO PROVIDE SERVICES.—In carrying out the purposes of this chapter, the Secretary shall provide the outreach services specified in subsections (b) through (d). In areas where a significant number of eligible veterans and eligible dependents speak a language other than English as their principal language, such services shall, to the maximum feasible extent, be provided in the principal language of such persons.

(b) INDIVIDUAL NOTICE TO NEW VETERANS.—The Secretary shall by letter advise each veteran at the time of the veteran's discharge or release from active military, naval, or air service (or as soon as possible after such discharge or release) of all benefits and services under laws administered by the Department for which the veteran may be eligible. In carrying out this subsection, the Secretary shall ensure, through the use of veteran-student services under section 3485 of this title, that contact, in person or by telephone, is made with those veterans who, on the

basis of their military service records, do not have a high school education or equivalent at the time of discharge or release.

(c) DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION.—(1) The Secretary—

(A) shall distribute full information to eligible veterans and eligible dependents regarding all benefits and services to which they may be entitled under laws administered by the Secretary; and

(B) may, to the extent feasible, distribute information on other governmental programs (including manpower and training programs) which the Secretary determines would be beneficial to veterans.

(2) Whenever a veteran or dependent first applies for any benefit under laws administered by the Secretary (including a request for burial or related benefits or an application for life insurance proceeds), the Secretary shall provide to the veteran or dependent information concerning benefits and health care services under programs administered by the Secretary. Such information shall be provided not later than three months after the date of such application.

(d) PROVISION OF AID AND ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall provide, to the maximum extent possible, aid and assistance (including personal interviews) to members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and eligible dependents with respect to subsections (b) and (c) and in the preparation and presentation of claims under laws administered by the Department.

(e) ASSIGNMENT OF EMPLOYEES.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall assign such employees as the Secretary considers appropriate to conduct outreach programs and provide outreach services for homeless veterans. Such outreach services may include site visits through which homeless veterans can be identified and provided assistance in obtaining benefits and services that may be available to them.

(Added Pub. L. 109-233, title IV, § 402(a), June 15, 2006, 120 Stat. 408.)

PRIOR PROVISIONS

Provisions similar to those in this section were contained in section 7722 of this title prior to repeal by Pub. L. 109-233.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT IMPROVEMENT

Pub. L. 115-240, Sept. 17, 2018, 132 Stat. 2888, provided that:

“SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

“This Act may be cited as the ‘Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018’.

“SEC. 2. HIRING BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OF ADDITIONAL VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH SPECIALISTS.

“(a) HIRING OF ADDITIONAL VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH SPECIALISTS.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act [Sept. 17, 2018], the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall hire not fewer than 50 Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists and place each such Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist at an eligible Department of Veterans Affairs medical center in accordance with this section.

“(2) REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary shall ensure that each Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist employed under paragraph (1)—

“(A) serves, either exclusively or in addition to other duties, as part of a justice team in a veterans

treatment court or other veteran-focused court; and

“(B) otherwise meets Department hiring guidelines for Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists.

“(b) ELIGIBLE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTERS.—For purposes of this section, an eligible Department of Veterans Affairs medical center is any Department of Veterans Affairs medical center that—

“(1) complies with all Department guidelines and regulations for placement of a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist;

“(2) works within a local criminal justice system with justice-involved veterans;

“(3) maintains an affiliation with one or more veterans treatment courts or other veteran-focused courts; and

“(4) either—

“(A) routinely provides Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists to serve as part of a justice team in a veterans treatment court or other veteran-focused court; or

“(B) establishes a plan that is approved by the Secretary to provide Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists employed under subsection (a)(1) to serve as part of a justice team in a veterans treatment court or other veteran-focused court.

“(c) PLACEMENT PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall prioritize the placement of Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists employed under subsection (a)(1) at eligible Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers that have or intend to establish an affiliation, for the purpose of carrying out the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, with a veterans treatment court, or other veteran-focused court, that—

“(1) was established on or after the date of the enactment of this Act; or

“(2)(A) was established before the date of the enactment of this Act; and

“(B) is not fully staffed with Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists.

“(d) REPORTS.—

“(1) REPORT BY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act [Sept. 17, 2018], the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation of this section and its effect on the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

“(B) CONTENTS.—The report submitted under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

“(i) The status of the efforts of the Secretary to hire Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists pursuant to subsection (a)(1), including the total number of Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists hired by the Secretary pursuant to such subsection and the number that the Secretary expects to hire pursuant to such subsection.

“(ii) The total number of Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists assigned to each Department of Veterans Affairs medical center that participates in the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, including the number of Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists hired under subsection (a)(1) disaggregated by Department of Veterans Affairs medical center.

“(iii) The total number of eligible Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers that sought placement of a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist under subsection (a)(1), how many Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists each such center sought, and how many of such medical centers received no placement of a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist under subsection (a)(1).

“(iv) For each eligible Department of Veterans Affairs medical center—

“(I) the number of justice-involved veterans who were served or are expected to be served by a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist hired under subsection (a)(1); and

“(II) the number of justice-involved veterans who do not have access to a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist.

“(2) REPORT BY COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 3 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation of this section and the effectiveness of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

“(B) CONTENTS.—The report required by subparagraph (A) shall include the following:

“(i) An assessment of whether the Secretary has fulfilled the Secretary's obligations under this section.

“(ii) The number of veterans who are served by Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists hired under subsection (a)(1), disaggregated by demographics (including discharge status).

“(iii) An identification of any subgroups of veterans who underutilize services provided under laws administered by the Secretary, including an assessment of whether these veterans have access to Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists under the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

“(iv) Such recommendations as the Comptroller General may have for the Secretary to improve the effectiveness of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

“(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) JUSTICE TEAM.—The term ‘justice team’ means the group of individuals, which may include a judge, court coordinator, prosecutor, public defender, treatment provider, probation or other law enforcement officer, program mentor, and Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist, who assist justice-involved veterans in a veterans treatment court or other veteran-focused court.

“(2) JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERAN.—The term ‘justice-involved veteran’ means a veteran with active, ongoing, or recent contact with some component of a local criminal justice system.

“(3) LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.—The term ‘local criminal justice system’ means law enforcement, jails, prisons, and Federal, State, and local courts.

“(4) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH PROGRAM.—The term ‘Veterans Justice Outreach Program’ means the program through which the Department of Veterans Affairs identifies justice-involved veterans and provides such veterans with access to Department services.

“(5) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH SPECIALIST.—The term ‘Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist’ means an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who serves as a liaison between the Department and the local criminal justice system on behalf of a justice-involved veteran.

“(6) VETERANS TREATMENT COURT.—The term ‘veterans treatment court’ means a State or local court that is participating in the veterans treatment court program (as defined in section 2991(i)(1) of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3797aa(i)(1)) [now 34 U.S.C. 10651(i)(1)]).”

OUTREACH PROGRAM TO VETERANS IN RURAL AREAS

Pub. L. 109-461, title II, §213, Dec. 22, 2006, 120 Stat. 3422, provided that:

“(a) PROGRAM.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct an extensive outreach program to identify and provide information to veterans who served in the theater of operations for Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and who reside in rural communities in order to enroll those veterans in the health-care system of the Department of Veterans Affairs during the period when they are eligible for such enrollment.

“(b) FEATURES OF PROGRAM.—In carrying out the program under subsection (a), the Secretary shall seek to

work at the local level with employers, State agencies, community health centers located in rural areas, rural health clinics, and critical access hospitals located in rural areas, and units of the National Guard and other reserve components based in rural areas, in order to increase the awareness of veterans and their families of the availability of health care provided by the Secretary and the means by which those veterans can achieve access to the health-care services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.”

INFORMATION TO ASSIST VETERANS RECEIVING EDUCATION BENEFITS

Pub. L. 101-237, title IV, §421, Dec. 18, 1989, 103 Stat. 2088, provided that:

“(a) IN GENERAL.—For the purpose of assisting individuals receiving education benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall prepare, and update periodically, a document containing a detailed description of the benefits, limitations, procedures, requirements, and other important aspects of the education programs administered by the Department.

“(b) DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary shall, beginning in fiscal year 1990 but not before July 1, 1990, distribute copies of such document—

“(1) to each individual applying for benefits under an education program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs and to each such individual at least annually in the years thereafter in which the individual receives such benefits;

“(2) to education and training institution officials on at least an annual basis; and

“(3) upon request, to other individuals significantly affected by education programs administered by the Secretary, including military education personnel.

“(c) FUNDING.—The Secretary shall use funds appropriated to the readjustment benefits account of the Department to carry out this section.”

OUTREACH SERVICES

Pub. L. 100-687, div. B, title XII, §1204, Nov. 18, 1988, 102 Stat. 4125, as amended by Pub. L. 102-4, §4, Feb. 6, 1991, 105 Stat. 15; Pub. L. 102-83, §6(k)(2), Aug. 6, 1991, 105 Stat. 409, provided that:

“(a) ONGOING OUTREACH PROGRAM.—(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct an active, continuous outreach program for furnishing to veterans of active military, naval, or air service who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam era information relating to—

“(A) the health risks (if any) resulting from exposure during that service to dioxin or any other toxic agent in herbicides used in support of United States and allied military operations in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam era; and

“(B) services and benefits available to such veterans with respect to such health risks.

“(2) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall annually furnish updated information on health risks described in paragraph (1)(A) to veterans referred to in paragraph (1).

“(b) INFORMATION IN AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall take reasonable actions to organize and update the information contained in the Department of Veterans Affairs Agent Orange Registry in a manner that enables the Secretary promptly to notify a veteran of any increased health risk for such veteran resulting from exposure of such veteran to dioxin or any other toxic agent referred to in subsection (a) during Vietnam-era service in the Republic of Vietnam whenever the Secretary determines, on the basis of physical examination or other pertinent information, that such veteran is subject to such an increased health risk.”

§ 6304. Veterans assistance offices

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish and maintain veterans assistance offices at such