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**Subject:** VA Hires Over 1600 Mental Health Professionals to Meet Goal, Expands Access to Care and Outreach Efforts, Directs Nationwide Community Mental Health Summits  
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VA Hires Over 1600 Mental Health Professionals to Meet Goal, Expands Access to Care and Outreach Efforts, Directs Nationwide Community Mental Health Summits

WASHINGTON – Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has met the goal to hire 1,600 new mental health professionals outlined in President Obama’s Aug. 31, 2012, Executive Order to Improve Access to Mental Health Services for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families.

“Meeting this hiring milestone significantly enhances our ability to improve access to care for those Veterans seeking mental health services and demonstrates our continued commitment to the health and well-being of the men and women who have served the Nation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “Meeting this goal is an important achievement, but we recognize that we must continue to increase access to the quality mental health care Veterans have earned and deserve.”

As of May 31, 2013, VA has hired a total of 1,607 mental health clinical providers to meet the goal of 1,600 new mental health professionals outlined in the Executive Order. Additionally, VA has hired 2,005 mental health clinical providers to fill existing vacancies. VA has also hired 318 new peer specialists towards the specific goal of 800 peer specialists by Dec. 31, 2013 as outlined in the Executive Order. VA expects to meet that goal as well.

VA also recognizes that meeting the needs of Veterans and their families requires collaboration and partnership between VA, other federal agencies, and local communities. “Locally-driven summits provide a well-established method to strengthen our community partnerships, and they have been successful in support of VA’s goal to end homelessness among Veterans,” said Veterans Health Administration, Undersecretary for Health, Dr. Robert Petzel. “The President is directing all VA health care systems nationwide to conduct locally-driven Mental Health Summits to further engage with local community partners and nurture community engagement to address the broad mental health needs of Veterans and their families.” Each VA health care system will reach out to relevant Veteran Service Organizations, community based organizations, health care providers, and local governments to develop and conduct the Summits.

VA provides a full range of comprehensive mental health services across the country. In Fiscal Year 2012, more than 1.3 million Veterans received specialized mental health care from the VA. This number has risen each year from 927,052 in Fiscal Year 2006. In addition to hiring more mental health professionals, VA is expanding the use of innovative technology to serve Veterans in rural or underserved areas. VA expects to double the number of Veterans receiving care from tele-mental

health services to over 800,000 in fiscal year 2013, and has increased the number of Vet Centers, which provide readjustment counseling and referral services from 233 in 2008 to 300 in 2012.

In November 2011, VA launched an award-winning, national public awareness campaign called Make the Connection, which is aimed at reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care and informing Veterans, their families, friends, and members of their communities about VA resources. More information on Make the Connection can be found at [www.maketheconnection.net](http://www.maketheconnection.net).

Mental health professionals interested in seeking employment with the Department of Veterans Affairs can obtain information at [www.vacareers.va.gov](http://www.vacareers.va.gov). Veterans and their families interested in learning more about the mental health services provided by VA can go to [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov).

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