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News Release

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VA to Increase Mental Health Staff by 1,900

WASHINGTON –Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki today announced that the department would add approximately 1,600 mental health clinicians – to include nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers as well as nearly 300 support staff to its existing workforce of 20,590 mental health staff as part of an ongoing review of mental health operations.

“As the tide of war recedes, we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “History shows that the costs of war will continue to grow for a decade or more after the operational missions in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended. As more Veterans return home, we must ensure that all Veterans have access to quality mental health care.”

VA’s ongoing comprehensive review of mental health operations has indicated that some VA facilities require more mental health staff to serve the growing needs of Veterans. VA is moving quickly to address this top priority. Based on this model for team delivery of outpatient mental health services, plus growth needs for the Veterans Crisis Line and anticipated increase in Compensation and Pension/Integrated Disability Evaluation System exams, VA projected the additional need for 1,900 clinical and clerical mental health staff at this time. As these increases are implemented, VA will continue to assess staffing levels.

“Mental health services must be closely aligned with Veterans’ needs and fully integrated with health care facility operations,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel. “Improving access to mental health services will help support the current and future Veterans who depend on VA for these vital services.”

VA will allocate funds from the current budget to all 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) across the country this month to begin recruitment immediately. Under the leadership of President Obama and Secretary Shinseki, VA has devoted more people, programs,

and resources toward mental health services to serve the growing number of Veterans seeking mental health care from VA. Last year, VA provided specialty mental health services to 1.3 million Veterans. Since 2009, VA has increased the mental health care budget by 39 percent. Since 2007, VA has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of Veterans receiving mental health services, and a 41 percent increase in mental health staff.

VA has enhanced services by integrating mental health care into the primary care setting, developed an extensive suicide prevention program, and increased the number of Veterans Readjustment Counseling Centers (Vet Centers). VA's Veteran Crisis Line has received more than 600,000 calls resulting in over 21,000 rescues of Veterans in immediate crisis.

"The mental health of America's Veterans not only touches those of us at VA and the Department of Defense, but also families, friends, co-workers, and people in our communities," said Petzel. "We ask that you urge Veterans in your communities to reach out and connect with VA services."

To locate the nearest VA facility or Vet Center for enrollment and to get scheduled for care, Veterans can visit VA's website at www.va.gov. Immediate help is available at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (push 1) or texting 838255.

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