IBM Center for The Business of Government

Improving the Delivery of Services and Care for Veterans

A Case Study of Enterprise Government

Zachary S. Huitink • Nicholas J. Armstrong • Matthew A. Hidek • Nathaniel Birnbaum

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FOREWORD

On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report, *Improving the Delivery of Services and Care for Veterans: A Case Study of Enterprise Government,* by a team of authors with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University.

DANIEL J. CHENOK

MARK NEWSOME

Delivering results on key national challenges inevitably involves multiple stakeholders and delivery partners, whether such challenges include the environment, transportation, health care, or social services—all of which have decentralized systems and target populations. Coordination in these and similar policy areas is never easy, but is critical for successful implementation.

This report examines service coordination by focusing on a well-defined target population—veterans of military service and their families. Yet, as the report notes, delivering benefits and services to these individuals is both complex and complicated.

Based on their research, the authors find that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is working to simplify its part of the broader puzzle. VA has created the Office of Veterans Experience, and recently launched a new website to organize benefits and services around the needs of veterans and their families. While these efforts are an important start, the report notes that a comprehensive approach will require a broader effort:

> *The VA and its federal partners may possess the necessary authority and resources to team up and create strategies, but (also) providing adequate support for veterans requires actual engagement with community-based organizations that have local legitimacy and many active supporters. In essence, the delivery of sound veteran programs ultimately requires strategic thinking, interaction, and communication among diverse actors.*

The authors note that more than 40,000 other groups—including states, localities, and nonprofits—also support veterans. As a result, the report advocates that the federal government take a more enterprise, or holistic, approach to serving veterans. The authors describe five building blocks for creating such an enterprise approach, and offer recommendations and specific implementation actions. These building blocks can be applied in other policy domains as well to address broad national challenges in a more integrated way.

This report builds on prior IBM Center reports that address enterprise government—*Building an Enterprise Government,* by Jane Fountain, and *Collaboration Between Government and Outreach Organizations: A Case Study of Veterans' Affairs,* by Lael Keiser and Susan Miller, who discuss the coordination of service delivery for veterans.

We hope the insights and recommendations in this report provide leaders serving veterans and other populations with a roadmap for creating an enterprise approach that improves how our nation helps its citizens.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates the nation's largest integrated health care system and manages a wide range of federal benefits and services for veterans, their dependents, and survivors.

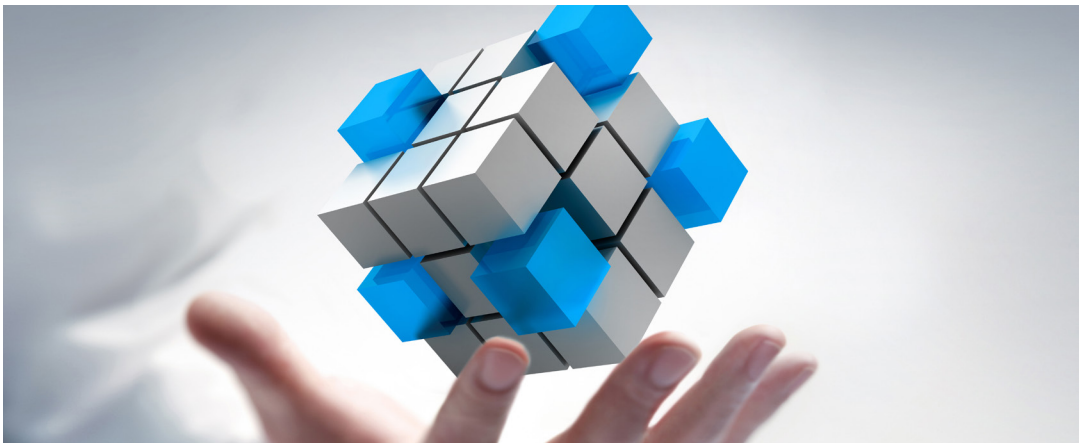
At the same time, federal services and care for America's military veterans span across multiple agencies beyond the VA to include the Departments of Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and the Small Business Administration, among others. The network of benefits and services for veterans extends beyond just the federal government to include state and local governments, a patchwork of more than 40,000 veteran-serving nonprofit organizations and charitable institutions, and tens of thousands more local health and human service providers across the United States.

Taken together, these organizations offer supportive services and health care in the places to which members of the military ultimately transition—within the cities, towns, and villages where they live, work, and attend school. Yet, while the VA leads an internal strategic planning process aimed at linking national and local action, to date, no mechanism exists to establish priorities, resources, and responsibilities across the federal government and align federal efforts with those of the broader public (state and local), private, and nonprofit sectors working to serve the veteran community.

As with other challenges characterized by such widely shared responsibility—national security, for example—in the case of veterans' affairs we would expect the federal government to use a comprehensive approach that coordinates the efforts of each agency to achieve common purposes. This model, increasingly referred to as "enterprise government," involves a coordinated cross-agency planning and governance system that aims to achieve goals spanning organizational boundaries.

However, the current federal effort to support veterans beyond the VA itself revolves around numerous ad-hoc task forces, working groups, and other interagency bodies focused on one or a few issues instead of serving the veteran as a whole person. Such a patchwork approach does not fit with the reality that helping veterans entails meeting a range of needs during and after the transition to civilian life. Nor does it adequately engage state and local governments, veteran-serving nonprofits and charities, and the array of civilian human service organizations working in the communities where the transition process actually happens.

Drawing from research and practice on strategic planning, interagency collaboration, and related areas, this report examines the opportunities, challenges, and means of developing an enterprise approach to guide the federal government's contribution to a truly national effort to serve veterans. The report presents a road map for developing an enterprise approach to federal veterans' services and care—one that aligns interagency planning and service delivery to support veterans holistically, and does so in a way that promotes robust engagement with communities. Specifically, the report presents five building blocks for moving toward an enterprise approach, and an accompanying set of recommendations and key action steps to put these building blocks in place.



Five Building Blocks to Create an Enterprise Approach to Serving Veterans

Building Block One: An Appropriate Interagency Collaboration Mechanism—that sustains leadership engagement and participation, effective cross-agency planning and collaboration, and accountability for implementation actions.

Building Block Two: A Comprehensive Understanding of the Challenges to Delivering Effective Services and Care—by appreciating that the challenge of supporting veterans is multi-dimensional and should be defined in terms of meeting a range of needs, such as health, education, employment, family, housing, and income supports—rather than each need in isolation from the others.

Building Block Three: A Coordinated Set of Agency Core Competencies—by allocating effort and responsibility across agencies based on expertise, capabilities, and mission focus.

Building Block Four: A Robust Engagement Strategy with Community-Level Stakeholders—by regularly engaging with state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private sector stakeholders supporting veterans at the community level.

Building Block Five: The Effective Use of Technology and Data—by harnessing technology solutions that capture the perspectives of disparate actors, facilitate sharing of information and insight, and enable data-driven decisions in strategic planning and service delivery.

Recommendations and Key Action Steps

Recommendation One

Create and use a broad, enterprise interagency collaboration mechanism of sufficient scope and leadership seniority to guide overall policy, planning, and implementation of federal veterans' services and care.

Key Action Steps

- The White House Chief of Staff should establish an overarching interagency group on veterans' services and care, under the direction of the White House Domestic Policy

Council, to align all federal policy, issue-based or ad hoc planning groups (e.g., multi-agency councils, task forces, committees, etc.), and agency programs across the federal government.

- In addition to every relevant agency that is already a regular participant on the Domestic Policy Council, this proposed interagency group should include the Department of Defense, the Small Business Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, and any other departments or agencies deemed appropriate based on their role in service member transition and support for veterans.
- As appropriate, the policy and implementation strategies developed by this proposed interagency group should be informed by foreign policy and use-of-force decisions made by the National Security Council, with the group's Defense representative acting as a liaison to the Council.

Recommendation Two

Define, plan, and monitor progress toward the delivery of comprehensive support for veterans.

Key Action Steps

- The proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should develop a "whole-of-nation" enterprise approach that reflects its understanding and commitment to a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted challenge of supporting veterans and transitioning service members.
- Through the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care, the Administration should consider developing a multi-year, capstone strategic planning document and review process for veterans' services and care akin to the quadrennial review process for other complex policy areas like national defense, homeland security, and diplomacy.
- As a catalyst for the creation of an enterprise approach to serving veterans, the Office of Management and Budget should develop a Cross Agency Priority goal focused on comprehensive support for veterans. The interagency group on veterans' services and care should be responsible for overseeing the goal's implementation.

Recommendation Three

Ensure existing federal-wide efforts to support veterans are engaged effectively according to agency roles, missions, and areas of comparative advantage—as well as provide sufficient leadership authority to execute their charge.

Key Action Steps

- The Administration should task the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care to develop an inventory of existing programs and conduct a comprehensive review of agency roles, missions, responsibilities, and core strengths across the multiple issue-areas affecting veterans (e.g., health, employment, education, human and social services).
- As part of this effort, the proposed interagency group should develop journey maps to model when and where veterans and transitioning service members come into contact with federal services during and after the transition process; isolate gaps and potential areas where veterans may experience challenges navigating services; and identify opportunities where modifying roles, missions, and responsibilities could reduce these changes.

- Based on its review, the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should make recommendations to the Administration and to Congress regarding any changes in roles, missions, and authority it deems necessary, whether through legislation, executive orders, or actions that can be taken within existing authority.

Recommendation Four

Create regular forums to engage community-based stakeholders, leverage their insight and expertise, and align plans and service delivery strategies to complement and empower community-based efforts.

Key Action Steps

- The proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should provide a mechanism for community-based stakeholders—state and local governments, veteran service organizations, human service organizations, and the business community—to participate in its deliberations and provide input into interagency plans and strategies.
- Similarly, agencies represented in the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should, as appropriate, incorporate non-federal and non-governmental partners into their own strategic planning processes.
- Agencies represented in the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should engage vigorously in community-based outreach, including through attending recurring community stakeholder convenings and empowering their local representatives (e.g., leaders at local VA facilities, the Department of Labor's American Job Centers, and local Small Business Administration representatives) to form partnerships with other actors at the community level.
- Agencies represented in the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should consider the increased use of business models that promote localized innovation, coordination, and bottom-up engagement in communities such as public-private partnerships and block grants.

Recommendation Five

Identify, acquire, and deploy information technology tools and data management structures to support enterprise planning.

Key Action Steps

- Consistent with the U.S. Federal Data Strategy and recommendations two and three above, The Administration should task the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care to: (1) develop an inventory of relevant interagency and public-private data sharing initiatives; and (2) create a master data governance framework to coordinate disparate data sharing initiatives, establish policies and procedures for data stewardship and access, and prioritize opportunities for improved interagency data sharing and evidence-based planning in veterans' services and care.
- The proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should take full advantage of partnerships with private industry and academia to assess the feasibility and drive implementation of digital innovation and data transformation initiatives that promote greater flexibility and interoperability across federal agencies and with the broader public (state and local), private, and nonprofit sectors working to serve the veteran community.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leads the national effort to care for America's nearly 20 million military veterans.

The VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system and manages a wide range of benefits and services for veterans, their dependents, and survivors. Reflecting its original mission, however, the VA serves as a safety net for honorably discharged veterans with service-connected injuries—it was never intended to meet the broad health, socioeconomic, and psychosocial needs of all former service members.

Today, fewer than half of veterans seek help from the VA for any benefit or service, and under one-third use VA health care services (VA, 2017b; Bagalman, 2014). Many other federal agencies—including the Departments of Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and the Small Business Administration, among others—also provide veterans programs and services. In addition, state and local governments, a patchwork of more than 40,000 veteran-serving nonprofit organizations and charitable institutions (Carter & Kidder, 2015), and many thousands more community-based human service organizations serving all Americans (veterans included) provide a strong complementary effort to the VA and its federal partners. These organizations offer supportive services and care in the places where members of the military ultimately transition—within the cities, towns, and villages where they live, work, and attend school.

Yet with few exceptions,[1] community-based efforts supporting veterans remain largely disconnected from any national planning or coordination process. While the VA leads an internal strategic planning process aimed at linking national and local action, to date, no mechanism exists to establish priorities, resources, and responsibilities across the federal government and align federal efforts with those of the broader public (state and local), private, and nonprofit sectors working to serve the veteran community.

While comprehensive support for veterans is beyond the reach of the federal government on its own—much less any one agency (Government Accountability Office, 2014; Institute of Medicine, 2013)—there is no doubt of the central role that the federal government plays in

1. Such as community-focused grant programs like the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families program and the Department of Labor's Jobs for Veterans State Grants program.

this regard. Additionally, there has been no public or political debate about how the country will continue to pay for more than seventeen years of war. The full cost of the country's war effort is expected to rise for several decades and peak 30 to 40 years post-conflict (Bilmes, 2016a; 2016b; Bilmes & Stiglitz, 2008, 2012). Current war-related expenditures, including those for veterans' post-service care and benefits, are projected to reach a level of more than $5 trillion. Moreover, the United States is in a state of persistent conflict, marked by a volatile geopolitical environment that makes future U.S. military intervention and rising costs inevitable, if not a norm (Bacevich, 2016; 2013).

The complexity of these mounting challenges requires an approach with greater value, efficiency, and unity of effort. Herein lies the problem. In 2016, Jordan Tama produced a report for the IBM Center entitled *Maximizing the Value of Quadrennial Strategic Planning,* a military-based planning model that federal agencies have increasingly adopted to drive their internal planning on a four-year cycle. Such reviews, like the VA's Quadrennial Strategic Planning Process, seek to enhance and develop partnerships with other federal agencies, state and local governments, and veteran service organizations. As required by the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010, the VA and other federal agencies are charged with developing and implementing new strategic plans at the outset of each new presidential administration. Among several key directives, the law created a new framework that seeks to improve connections among plans, programs, and decision making by establishing quarterly reporting requirements for agency and cross-agency priority goals focused on improving performance.

This process is intended to help agency leaders and their subordinates define a set of specific organizational inputs by providing a mechanism that enables planners to turn "big strategies into little strategies" (Plowman, 2017, 1) through research, synchronization, information sharing, goal setting, and the like (Petreaus, 2015). Tama's research, however, uncovers how strategic planning throughout executive branch agencies—though somewhat effective for bureaucratic management, legislative oversight, and organizational reforms—has failed to deliver on its transformational purpose (Tama, 2016; 2017a; 2017b). Indeed, in lieu of being driven by conscious strategic planning processes, transformation initiatives often form instead in response to an acute crisis that demands immediate action. One key example is the VA's ongoing reforms, launched after departmental employees' manipulation of data systems and records to cover up long waiting times for hospital appointments. This scandal led to nationwide public outrage and a Congressional investigation conducted from 2014-2016, which revealed chronic mismanagement and insufficient planning as major contributing factors to VA's systemic problems.

The strategic plans and managerial processes set up to support large-scale efforts like serving veterans operate through an intricate web of functional connections that extend from the local to the regional to the national level. Essentially, the degree to which leaders align their organizational designs with strategic planning defines the extent to which resources and practices can be bundled and synchronized. Orchestrating these components transforms resources into assets, leading to the creation of greater value for the overall system (Miles & Van Clieaf, 2017).

Drawing from research and practice on strategic planning, interagency collaboration, and related areas, this report examines the opportunities, challenges, and means of developing an "enterprise approach" to guide the federal government's contribution to the national effort to serve veterans.

A number of approaches to strategic planning and policy implementation use the term "enterprise" or purport to follow enterprise models of organizational action. These range from nar-

rowly focused activities like enterprise resource planning—integrated management and information sharing across core mission support functions (e.g., finance, human resources, and procurement; see Wailgum & Perkins, 2012)—to broader strategic planning methods that account for the external environment and aim to align people, budgets, and lines of business to fulfill mission requirements (albeit still for one organization overall).

This report defines an enterprise approach more broadly as a *system of coordinated planning and governance to pursue goals that span organizational boundaries.* Such a definition captures both arrangements to unify common operations across organizations (through mechanisms like shared services or category management), as well as collaborative efforts to plan and deliver services for citizens (Fountain, 2016). This report focuses on the latter, while acknowledging the former as being key to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery.

Numerous organizations in government, academia, and the nonprofit sector use enterprise-based models to define strategic requirements, and federal experiments with enterprise planning and implementation have ranged from homelessness and food safety to environmental restoration, homeland security, and various challenges in foreign affairs. While enterprise and related terms such as "holistic," "resilience," and "sustainability" have gained similar traction in recent years, this type of language can be vague—or even unexplainable at times by the people who use it. When carefully defined and applied, however, these words bring attention to the need for collaboration and transformation (Grindsted, 2018; Scudellari, 2017).

Taking these efforts as a point of departure, this report examines how to create a more robust interagency mechanism to align federal veterans' services and care and more effectively connect federal strategy to community-level action. Because veterans transition to civilian life within actual communities, it is essential that an enterprise approach to coordinating federal efforts accounts for the networked processes through which government—federal, state, and local—functions at various geographical scales (Brenner, 2004) and with private and social sector efforts. Public policy experts also generally accept that prescriptions for complex social challenges are typically marked by problems with shared understanding, coordination of expertise and resources, and widespread obstacles to effective implementation across geographical and institutional boundaries (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Rittel & Webber 1973; Schon, 1983).

Developing a more unified, enterprise planning and governance system requires well-defined mechanisms to fuse "expert" and "local" knowledge (Head, 2008; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Rein, 1976; Rittel & Weber, 1973; Schon & Rein, 1994; Wisner, 1995). Indeed, because the coordinated web of services does not operate through a single agency or mechanism, a flexible, horizontal arrangement is needed to "get the mix right" (Bryson, Edwards, & Van Slyke, 2018; Keast, Brown, & Mandell, 2007). Ultimately, because service delivery is directly affected by these considerations (Davis & Chapa, 2015), and because the federal government plays an important role in addressing them, a critical first step is to trace the interactions and problems among the different actions generated by federal plans and policies (Philo & Parr, 2000; Shore & Wright, 2003).

With these issues in mind, this report presents five building blocks to develop a greater enterprise approach to federal services and care for veterans. Collectively, these building blocks constitute the fundamental components of a cohesive federal strategy that is more strongly connected to communities and takes a holistic approach to meeting veterans' needs. In short, a more coordinated federal strategy allows the federal government to operate with unified purpose in supporting veterans, contribute to community-level action, and take a "whole-person" approach to the challenge of supporting veterans' transition success and well-being in civilian life.

The building blocks are as follows:

Building Block One: An Appropriate Interagency Collaboration Mechanism—that sustains leadership engagement and participation, effective cross-agency planning and collaboration, and accountability for implementation actions.

Building Block Two: A Comprehensive Understanding of the Challenges to Delivering Effective Services and Care—by understanding that the challenge of supporting veterans is multi-dimensional and should be defined in terms of meeting a range of needs, such as health, education, employment, family support, housing, and income support—rather than each need in isolation from the others.

Building Block Three: A Coordinated Set of Agency Core Competencies—by allocating effort and responsibility across agencies based on expertise, capabilities, and mission focus.

Building Block Four: A Robust Engagement Strategy with Community-Level Stakeholders—by regularly engaging with state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private sector stakeholders supporting veterans at the community level.

Building Block Five: The Effective Use of Technology and Data—by harnessing technology solutions that capture the perspectives of disparate actors, facilitate sharing of information and insight, and enable data-driven decisions in strategic planning and service delivery.

This report is the product of an extensive review of existing research, policy, and current strategic planning practices employed in the federal government. It further stems from an examination of the inner workings of the VA and the interagency context, through in-depth interviews with more than two dozen subject matter experts drawn from VA, its partners in other federal agencies, and stakeholders involved in strategy formulation and service delivery in states and communities. Appendix 1 further describes the background research, interviews, and overall study design.

The remainder of this report is organized in four sections:

- The first section provides background and a conceptual foundation for examining an enterprise approach to federal veterans' services and care. It presents a brief overview of strategic planning, key policies and practices governing planning, goal setting, and cross-agency collaboration in the U.S. federal government, and a formal definition of the enterprise approach to planning and governance.
- The second section presents the case for an enterprise approach to federal veterans' services and care, based on the need to coordinate multiple agencies' efforts using a more expansive mechanism than the VA's current strategic planning process or narrowly focused interagency initiatives.
- The third section presents the five building blocks of an enterprise approach to federal veterans' services and care, with recommendations and key action steps to put each building block in place.
- The final section concludes the report.

Strategic Planning and the Use of an Enterprise Approach in the Federal Government

Developing the building blocks of an enterprise approach to federal services and care for veterans requires a basic conceptual understanding of strategic planning, familiarity with strategic planning practices in the federal government, and a formal definition of an enterprise-based model of planning and service delivery. The design of this framework must also account for the barriers, complexities, and challenges inherent to the dynamics of intergovernmental relations and cooperation. Accordingly, this section provides a high-level overview of strategic planning in theory and practice, the federal planning process, and the definition of the enterprise approach.

Strategic Planning in Theory and Practice

What is Strategic Planning? While there is no single concept or definition of strategic planning, most accounts describe a structured process that seeks to meet goals by synthesizing knowledge, analysis, and reason (Mannheim, 1951). Along these lines, one commonly cited description refers to strategic planning as a "deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why" (Bryson, 2011, 7-9). Although the ideas, methods, and practices at work today originate mainly from the private sector (Bryson & Roering, 1987; Bryson et al., 2018; Freedman, 2013), strategic planning was first applied by the federal government to support military affairs and diplomatic relations (Freedman, 2013; Bryson et al., 2018).

Strategic Planning in Theory—the Rational Approach. Because there has historically been no standard template for how organizations could best apply strategic thinking, the social sciences served as a broad interpretive lens as planning emerged as a formal discipline within the 1950s and 1960s. The logic underpinning the early days of planning was straightforward—define priorities and goals, predict causes and effects, take action steps to maximize strategic objectives, develop alternative courses of action, and evaluate outcomes (Friedmann, 1969). This is called *rational planning.*

Strategic Planning in Theory—the Adaptive Approach. Critics of the rational approach have consistently pointed out the tendency of actors (people or organizations) to engage in simplification, a process whereby complex problems are watered down into more controllable subproblems. From this perspective, the degree to which a given actor follows ordered steps in the planning process determines whether planning is "good" and "comprehensive," or not (Banfield, 1959; Scott, 1998). As a famous critique put it, rational planning is ultimately a process of shaping future action through a series of choices, but developing the ability to adapt is among planning's core purposes—and how it tends to actually work in practice (Davidoff & Reiner, 1962). Here, planning begins with a general strategic framework, and then is refined based on unfolding situations (Altschuler, 1972). The focus is on establishing goals and building strategies without always projecting a complete end state, using practical know-how, innovation, and futuristic thinking so that better management of the planning process can take place (Jackson, 2003; Smit & Wandel, 2006; Wilensky, 1978, 1981). In contrast to the rational style, where senior-level executives pass directives down to middle and lower level managers for implementation (O'Shannassy, 2003), planning from the this standpoint makes strategic inferences by interpreting the goals and plans of various actors (Wilensky, 1978; Scott, 2005). It stresses calculated adjustments and learning-by-doing rather than following a pre-determined comprehensive or "master plan" (Lindblom, 1959). This is called adaptive planning.

Strategic Planning in Practice. In practice, strategic planning may lean toward the rational approach, but will always be adaptive to one extent or another. Whether in business, government, or nonprofit organizations, planners consistently confront the dilemma of having to devise strategies in real world settings characterized more by uncertainty than constancy and

predictability (O'Shannassy, 2003). They will never be able to anticipate every future state their organizations may face (Bryson et al., 2018). As a result, decisions must be made based on incomplete information and the potential for unforeseen consequences of actions taken by institutions and the individuals leading them (Clarke, 1999). The upshot is that even well formulated strategies may not produce desired performance (Kotlar et. al, 2018), meaning leaders must diligently look out for pitfalls, be prepared to make adjustments, and be flexible and creative to achieve success (Martin, 2014; Mintzberg, 1994; Wolf & Floyd, 2017). This is particularly critical in government. For example, while a strategic plan in a business may focus principally on creating value and maximizing profits, a plan developed by a government agency must usually account for a broader number of goals—to include value for taxpayer dollars, but also equity in access to services, fiscal transparency, and accountability to political overseers and citizens. Moreover, while both governments and private sector organizations must take stock of numerous external stakeholders that could affect their performance, government may need to work with significantly more of these stakeholders in the actual implementation phase. Accordingly, it is especially incumbent upon governments to ensure that their strategic plans emphasize collaboration with other actors to get things done.

Strategic Planning in the U.S. Federal Government

Strategic planning in the federal government stretches back several decades, reflecting a wide variety of approaches over time and across agencies. The Department of Defense (DOD) maintains the most sophisticated process—arguably the closest to rational planning—starting from the President's National Security Strategy and then developing specific strategies for national defense and the military services. DOD further operates an annual Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution process to align resources and strategic priorities, and since 1997 has conducted five quadrennial defense reviews—strategic reviews undertaken every four years to align national defense with the demands of the international security environment. This planning process, subsequently replicated at the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Energy, has since been replaced by a broader strategic review, but was nonetheless significant in its importance to policymakers and its incorporation into civilian agency planning (Tama, 2016a). Indeed, as described below, the current federal planning framework operates on a quadrennial cycle. Like the original DOD model, however, it still only approximates a fully-fledged rational approach, and as the below description suggests, it incorporates adaptive elements including processes for annual adjustment and a focus on interagency collaboration.

The roots of the current federal planning system lie in the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. This legislation was significant in making strategic planning a statutory requirement for most federal agencies (Brass, 2012). As part of a broader legislative agenda to improve government performance, GPRA enshrined three major requirements in law:

- First, *agency strategic plans*—multi-year planning documents to be updated at least every three years and, with each update, to cover the ensuing five-year period.
- Second, *agency performance plans*—annual planning documents that contain goals and associated measures for each of an agency's programs.
- Third, *agency performance reports*—annual review documents comparing actual performance in the most recently concluded fiscal year to that year's goals.

These measures went into full effect following a four-year phase-in period after 1993, and remained in place for more than a decade. Formal reviews suggest, among other findings, that the GPRA requirements created a more systematic, results-oriented planning process in agencies; established numerous new performance measures; and, to some extent, promoted more linkage between agency planning and resource allocation decisions (GAO, 2004). Still, the government's initial experience with GPRA revealed several flaws. For example, the multi-year

agency strategic planning cycle did not align with four-year presidential terms of office. Consequently, many agencies found themselves updating their strategic plans shortly before the transition to a new administration rather than after it, meaning the updated plan would not necessarily reflect a new president's priorities. GPRA also did not encourage sufficient interagency coordination despite the clear need to enact policies and plans that could span organizational boundaries and areas of responsibility (GAO, 2004).

In response to these and related issues, Congress updated the law by passing the GPRA Modernization Act (GPRAMA) of 2010. GPRAMA made wide-ranging changes to the original planning and reporting framework, including revisions to all three of GPRA's major requirements. The modifications included:

- Aligning agency strategic plans with presidential terms through transitioning to a four-year planning timeframe
- Expanding the scope of agency performance plans from one to two years
- Mandating that agency performance plans align more closely with multi-year strategic plans

The 2010 legislation also required agencies to report on past performance more frequently (more often than just after the end of the fiscal year), and established a process for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to review unmet goals.

From a cross-agency standpoint, GPRAMA also reworked the original GPRA requirement for an annual governmentwide strategic plan. Whereas under the original legislation the president's annual budget submission was used by OMB to fulfill the governmentwide planning requirement, the new law mandates the designation of governmentwide performance goals to accompany the annual budget submission. These goals are comprised of a set of Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goals that are cross-agency, targeted, and outcome-oriented.

Since their establishment, CAP goals have addressed issues ranging from cybersecurity, climate change, and service member/veteran mental health to procurement, IT, and data management initiatives. Progress is reported quarterly over the quadrennial planning cycle (GAO, 2016a). Reflecting GPRAMA's overarching vision, these revamped governmentwide planning requirements seek to promote increased collaboration and stronger alignment of efforts between federal agencies.

The Enterprise Approach

Mechanisms like governmentwide planning, organization-spanning goals, and accompanying implementation initiatives—from working groups to task forces—reflect the reality that while individual agencies of government pursue specific missions, much of what they aim to do spans spheres of responsibility. Accordingly, to get things done, agencies must often work together. Across policy areas and operational functions, such teaming goes by a number of different names, but is increasingly organized and classified under the concept of *enterprise government.*

The term *enterprise* is used in a variety of situations and contexts in government, business, and the nonprofit world. *Enterprise resource planning (ERP),* for example, speaks to integration of an organization's various mission support functions, done to promote information sharing, data-driven decision-making, and a holistic view of how different efforts and lines of business interact with one another for purposes of achieving goals and objectives. Broader strategic planning approaches may also include enterprise in their names or descriptions, and reference planning methods that aim to align goals, objectives, and strategy with analyses of an organization's environment and available resources—whether human, physical, financial, or

and others. Like ERP, these approaches often focus on enabling a single organization or actor, no matter the complexity to achieve its ends rather than multiple organizations working together.

This report uses the term enterprise specifically in reference to situations involving multiple organizational actors (here, multiple agencies of government), and defines the enterprise approach as *a system of coordinated planning and governance to pursue goals that span organizational boundaries.*

This definition stems from and distills recent research and practice-oriented analysis of numerous cases involving federal agencies teaming up to address shared management challenges and tackle policy issues cutting across areas of responsibility (for example, see Fountain, 2016). In these respects, the definition accounts for two distinct types of arrangements:

- Unifying common operations to harness economies of scale, standardize common processes, and pool resources
- Collaborating in planning and implementation to serve citizens

Examples of the first type of arrangement include shared services and category management, where agencies may elect to use a common provider or tool for administrative activities (e.g., payroll processing), or combine their purchasing power in areas where they buy similar products (e.g., office supplies). Examples of the second type of arrangement include a now numerous array of cross-agency institutions—councils, task forces, working groups, and so on—intended to promote stronger collaboration. In contemplating an enterprise approach to veterans' services and care, this report focuses on this latter type of arrangement, while acknowledging the critical importance of the former—including and especially through its role in unifying operational functions, which by itself may promote stronger collaboration (see Fountain, 2016).

An Enterprise Approach to Delivering Veterans' Services and Care

Taken as a whole, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) assumes incredible responsibility for veterans' health and well-being. By law, it is responsible for supporting veterans via an array of benefit programs and health care services, totaling $194.5 billion for fiscal year 2019. As the nation's largest integrated health care system, the Veterans Health Administration—the VA's health arm—comprises the bulk of the department's day-to-day operations, with 168 VA medical centers and health care centers, 753 community-based outpatient clinics, 300 Vet Centers, and 80 Mobile Vet Centers, among other community-based sites. The Veterans Benefits Administration—the VA's benefits arm—provides benefits through 56 offices nationally, focusing on everything from disability compensation and educational assistance to loan guarantees, vocational rehabilitation, and pension programs. The VA also provides burial services through the National Cemetery Administration, which runs 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots across 40 states and Puerto Rico, and provides funding support for an additional 105 cemeteries maintained by 47 states and select territories (VA, 2018c).

Demand for these programs and services is expected to rise further in the coming years, and, in certain cases, demand will shift given changes in the veteran population—e.g., the rising number of women veterans and veterans between the ages of 65 and 84. At the same time, the VA is continuing with planned modernization efforts, including over $4 billion in information technology improvements and expansion of telehealth services for more than 700,000 veterans receiving care (VA, 2016; VA, 2017b).

Against this backdrop, the VA maintains a strategic planning process focused on evaluating key trends and forces that will influence services provided to veterans and impact the department's strategic position, workforce, and aspiration for veteran empowerment—a practice known as "environmental scanning." In creating their latest publicly available strategic plan, an interdisciplinary team with representation from program offices throughout the department, led by the VA's Office of Enterprise Integration (home of the department's centralized strategic planning operation), developed more than 100 issue papers articulating likely factors that will drive changes over the next 15-20 years. More than 50 interviews with leaders were also conducted, along with senior-level input from an annual internal summit, the National Leadership Council (GAO, 2016b). According to one senior-level VA official, "...the strategic plan is essentially the document that gets you four to six years of help. It provides us, using military terminology, an aim point...and, most importantly, what we've tried to do with it is instill a set of strategies that really articulate what our administration and staff officers are going to do to achieve those goals and objectives" (personal communication, 13 October 2017).

The VA's FY 2018-2024 strategic plan acknowledges that wellness depends importantly on sustaining physical health and meeting material needs. However, given that many of the organizations and individuals influencing veterans' lives—family, friends, colleagues, employers, and schools, to name a few, are local (Armstrong, McDonough, & Savage, 2015) and that veteran well-being more broadly entails building social capital, cultivating relationships, and discovering and maintaining a sense of purpose and belonging (Berglass & Harrell, 2012)—the plan also emphasizes community-based partnerships involving additional organizations that can fill service gaps. Specifically, the plan states that its overall approach will shift "from a system primarily focused on disease management" to one that stresses "self-empowerment, self-healing, self-care, and improvements in the social determinants of health" (VA, 2018a, 15-16).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FY 2018-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN: SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC GOALS

The most recent strategic plan of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is organized around four overarching Strategic Goals:

Goal 1: Veterans Choose VA for Easy Access, Greater Choices, and Clear Information to Make Informed Decisions

Goal 2: Veterans Receive Timely and Integrated Care and Support that Emphasizes their Well-Being and Independence throughout their Life Journey

Goal 3: Veterans Trust VA to be Consistently Accountable and Transparent

Goal 4: VA will Modernize Systems and Focus Resources More Efficiently to be Competitive and to Provide World Class Capabilities to Veterans and its Employees

An enterprise approach that fosters greater collaboration between the VA and its federal partners, and further aligns their collective efforts with community-based actors, is essential to achieve the vision laid out in the VA's strategic plan. While the VA operates as the federal government's lead agency for veterans, numerous other agencies provide a wide range of valuable services to veterans and the military-connected community. The statutory federal veterans' hiring preference affords qualified veterans and their dependents advantages in competition for jobs at most agencies. Also, provisions in the federal procurement code assist, for example, owners of Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Businesses through contracting opportunities—with U.S. state governments providing similar advantages in hiring and contracting.

Beyond these general forms of support, a handful of VA's federal partners—including the Departments of Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and the Small Business Administration—offer more targeted, in-depth forms of assistance with reintegration to the civilian world, from the point of separation from the armed forces and throughout one's post-service lifetime. The list is extensive and includes:

- Benefits and compensation
- Behavioral and mental health
- Community-based care
- Education and vocational training
- Employment
- Caregiver providers and support
- Health care
- Housing and shelter
- Substance abuse

Collectively, the programs and services in these areas address the numerous dimensions of the military-to-civilian transition, but more in isolation than as part of a coordinated strategy. The U.S. government generally functions through administrative and programmatic silos, with a set of institutional arrangements and constraints—"legal, policy, and budget"—that "reinforce [an] agency-centric perspective" (Fountain, 2016, 7; also see Blair & Starke, 2018; Heberle et al., 2017).

The VA planning process in and of itself cannot function as a mechanism to coordinate these efforts. To be sure, the latest plan professes an appreciation for the multifaceted nature of veteran health and well-being, and focuses appropriately on cultivating partnerships. Of the plan's four overarching strategic goals, for example, Goal 2—"Veterans receive timely and integrated care and support that emphasizes their well-being and independence throughout their life journey"—envisions more substantive integration of health, benefits, and other service supports. It also calls for tailored, holistic care solutions to address select social determinants of health—poverty and homelessness—and strongly stresses connections among DOD, VA, and community partner efforts from the point of a service member's separation and throughout their civilian life course.

Ultimately, however, this plan is an agency-centric document created and used for the sake of giving the VA its strategic direction. And, while some mechanisms exist to coordinate interagency efforts, such as the Joint Executive Committee to create a joint-strategic plan that promotes interoperability in select physical/mental health and benefits issues that span the DOD-VA boundary, these are largely issue-specific or are not (in instances where it would otherwise be beneficial) sufficiently focused on how federal actions can be aligned to support effective service delivery at the community level. Even the more expansive mechanisms such as CAP goals, ostensibly meant to maximize jointness and unity of federal effort toward collective outcomes, have at least thus far been restricted to particular aspects of veteran well-being—e.g., mental health.

Through its Veterans Experience Office, the VA has worked to improve its services with efforts such as creating veteran-/customer-centric benefits and care processes and implementing Community Veteran Engagement Boards (CVEBs)—a network of community-based engagement forums intended to promote greater dialogue and cooperation between local VA and non-VA providers. Even so, the VA's customer experience work focuses largely on VA's own health and benefits operations, and the CVEBs (as further discussed below), while a valuable model that could be built upon to expand federal-to-community connections, have heretofore focused mostly on VA's—rather than the broader federal enterprise's—engagement with community actors. What will be needed to achieve VA's strategic goal to "deliver integrated and seamless benefits, care, and support" is an approach that coordinates veteran-focused policy, strategy, and programs across the federal government—one that connects and coordinates efforts to support veterans more holistically. What is needed is an enterprise approach that reaches beyond the VA to encompass veterans services and care across the federal government, and promote robust federal connections to community-level action.

Five Building Blocks to Create an Enterprise Approach to Serving Veterans

An enterprise approach to U.S. federal veterans services and care requires robust collaboration across departments and agencies with veterans-focused programs; a clear, comprehensive definition of the challenges providing supportive services and care entails; and strategic alignment of agency responsibilities, community engagement, and technology solutions. These imperatives can be distilled into five major building blocks:

- Building Block One: An Appropriate Interagency Collaboration Mechanism
- Building Block Two: A Comprehensive Understanding of the Challenges to Delivering Effective Services and Care
- Building Block Three: A Coordinated Set of Agency Core Competencies
- Building Block Four: A Robust Engagement Strategy with Community-Level Stakeholders
- Building Block Five: The Effective Use of Technology and Data

1 Building Block One: An Appropriate Interagency Collaboration Mechanism

Similar to other complex problems, the multifaceted nature of the needs of veterans means they ultimately cut across numerous agency boundaries and areas of responsibility. This reality establishes the business case for an interagency mechanism to align and govern execution of effort.

Veterans' transition process begins while still in uniform, with the Department of Defense (DOD) providing transition assistance through services such as the Transition Assistance Program—which is itself delivered in coordination with the VA, the Departments of Education and Labor, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Small Business Administration—to formulate a transition plan, set individual post-service vocational and educational goals, and receive instruction on VA benefits. Upon separation, eligible veterans then fall under the purview of the VA health and benefits systems, which provide health care at VA hospitals and clinics and (depending on meeting eligibility requirements) benefits like disability compensation, educational assistance, home loans, life insurance, and other forms of support.

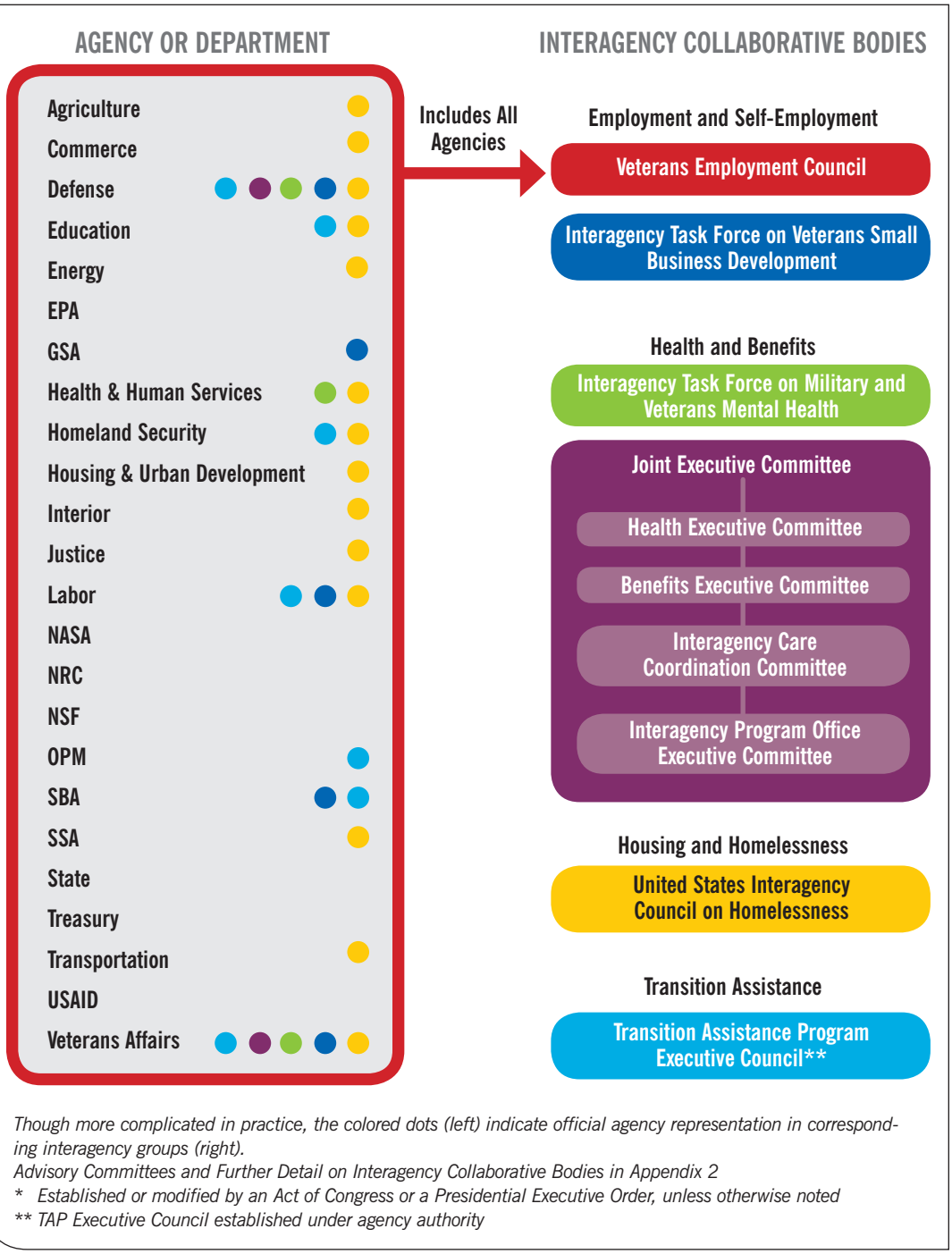
Additional veteran programs and services, dispersed across the federal landscape, complement these benefits. Through the Veterans Employment and Training Service, the Department of Labor offers veterans employment resources, promotes veterans to employers, and aids veterans and military-connected family members with job training programs. The Department of Education offers educational resources ranging from discretionary grant programs to support veteran higher education preparation, to programs that support veterans seeking teaching positions in the K-12 education system. Through its Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services maintains a 24/7
veterans crisis line that connects veterans and military family members with care providers—including VA personnel—and operates the Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families Technical Assistance Center that supports states and communities in developing behavioral health solutions. In partnership with VA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development Supportive Housing program offers rental assistance and housing choice vouchers to currently homeless veterans. Finally, Small Business Administration programs like Boots to Business train veteran entrepreneurs. All these resources form part of a broader patchwork that also encompasses agencies as diverse as the Departments of Agriculture, Energy, Justice, and Transportation.

Problem: The federal government does not currently have an interagency mechanism to coordinate all its veterans programs.

While the federal government offers a broad swath of programs for veterans, it does not currently coordinate all of them through a single interagency mechanism. Instead, it relies on many

smaller scope arrangements that link individual agencies working on specific issues. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of the complexity of just some of the existing interagency initiatives supporting veterans, transitioning service members, and their families.[2]

Figure 1. U.S. Federal Veterans Services and Care: Select Interagency Groups, 2001-Present*



Though more complicated in practice, the colored dots (left) indicate official agency representation in corresponding interagency groups (right).
Advisory Committees and Further Detail on Interagency Collaborative Bodies in Appendix 2
** Established or modified by an Act of Congress or a Presidential Executive Order, unless otherwise noted*
*** TAP Executive Council established under agency authority*

2. Unless otherwise indicated, the initiatives selected for Figure 1 are limited to those originating from an act of Congress or a Presidential executive order. This decision was made to show that interagency efforts to provide veterans services and care are highly complex even when limited to efforts resulting from policies made at the highest levels of political leadership, and because there is to our knowledge no systematic listing of interagency initiatives based on agreements made by actors at the agency level. Appendix B provides further description of each initiative in the figure, as well as on the select federal advisory committees and commissions to which the figure alludes. The advisory committees and commissions were similarly selected based originating from an act of Congress or an executive order, unless otherwise indicated.

Of course, despite working within an otherwise highly complex system, these interagency efforts do provide important support. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), for example, is often held up as a case study of success. Created through federal legislation originally passed in 1987 and most recently reauthorized in 2009, the USICH initiative brought together representatives from 19 federal agencies, including regional coordinators working with state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and select private sector partners in a highly cooperative effort to end homelessness in the United States. While homelessness itself may stem from numerous socioeconomic and other factors—making it difficult to establish a direct relationship between the initiative and subsequent results—following the launch of USICH veterans experiencing chronic homelessness declined by 46 percent, or roughly 34,000 people between 2010 and 2016 (Solari, Shivji, & de Sousa 2016). Among other potential drivers of success, observers have pointed to the fact that USICH benefited from highly committed leadership—including the White House and the secretaries of both departments—as well as guidance from a first-of-its-kind national strategic plan on ending homelessness, a joint funding arrangement, and sustained community engagement involving "field visits, a shared website, shared materials and webinars that regularly bring local managers from across the country together with federal managers" (Fountain, 2016, 12).

While lauding USICH as an exemplary case, one VA official cautioned that it is nonetheless (like a number of other successful interagency efforts) an example of work in a "very specific topic area where, if you're fortunate, can start to make connections [among agencies and operations]," but it's still not a "panel that looks holistically at all of the range of issues so that we can leverage synergies as opposed to sort of hunt for them" (personal communication, November 13, 2017). In other words, compared to a comprehensive approach to coordination, relying exclusively on a plethora of narrower working groups and task forces—even ones with potential for success—forfeits opportunities to proactively collaborate on a larger scale. As one former federal official explained (personal communication, January 10, 2018):

> *...[Nearly] every single federal agency—in my experience, every single one of them has some sort of special veterans' program...it would be very, very helpful to bring all of those agencies together as a way of inventorying all the programs, and then talking about the interaction between the programs. It could streamline them. You could simplify the user approach to them, and you could start to measure effectiveness.*

These benefits—a single interagency architecture, a full inventory of existing programs, better synchronization of each agency and programmatic efforts, improved efficiency, a better veteran experience (predicated on simplicity in navigating and accessing services), and opportunities to benchmark performance against comprehensive objectives—are critical, and contrast notably with challenges facing key existing interagency initiatives.

One example in this regard is the Joint Executive Committee (JEC), a DOD-VA working group established by Congress in 2003 to improve health care coordination between the two departments. While the JEC purview has expanded to include benefits, behavioral and mental health, sexual assault counseling, suicide prevention, and various operational functions, it remains focused on a subset of issues concerning service members transitioning from the DOD to the VA support systems. This arrangement may be best to achieve the JEC's own intent, but the often co-occurring nature of veterans' and transitioning service members' needs—both health and socioeconomic—suggests the JEC should ideally be aligned within a broader interagency effort that provides more coordinated, holistic support. That is, neither JEC nor other interagency bodies should be working in isolation. As one VA official put it (personal communication, September 20, 2018):

> *VA officials will often point to established entities like the JEC and the HEC [Health Executive Committee, a group under the JEC]…and say they are the proper channels to address the issue. While the committees are versed in executing activities prescribed by law, they look at things through a strict programmatic lens and lack perspective from outside their program office or agency. And if you talk to leaders offline, they will admit that the bureaucratic nature of these committees makes them very ineffective; they know that the existing approach to [supporting military-to-civilian] transition is broken.*

In addition, the JEC itself his has faced additional issues regarding department representation and leadership. For instance, whereas the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs is the VA's formal JEC representative, DOD is represented by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (P&R). From a DOD standpoint this individual exercises responsibility over many of the issues within the JEC mandate, but their portfolio does not include key programs and policies (e.g., about troop levels, deployments, etc.) that ultimately impact the nature and needs of the veteran and transitioning service member populations. Moreover, according to a former DOD official, while the VA staff supporting the committee fall under the direct authority of their leaders, "this [is not always] the case on the DOD side," creating problems with accountability (personal communication, January 18, 2018).

Recommendation One

Create and use a broad, enterprise interagency collaboration mechanism of sufficient scope and leadership seniority to guide overall policy, planning, and implementation of federal veterans' services and care.

An interagency working group with a federal-wide purview and leadership at the highest political level should be created. The group should encompass each federal agency offering veterans programs, provide strategic direction to those efforts, and coordinate their actions in order to provide a seamless experience for the veterans. According to one former DOD official, this proposed approach would invest the effort with the required level of political leadership, as well as "throw a net over all the departments that are doing veteran work and bringing them together" (personal communication, January 8, 2018). In fact, this official went so far as to suggest that veterans policy considerations begin at the level of the National Security Council

(NSC), given that decisions about national security and the use of military force ultimately impact the size, composition, and needs of the veteran population. In this individual's words (personal communication, January 8, 2018):

> *Suppose [the Secretary of Defense] said, 'I'm discharging people. We are doing a major reduction...and says, [VA], are you ready to receive? Labor, are you ready to receive? Education, are you guys ready? Okay. Let's do it together.*

Precisely how the veterans-related implications of foreign policy and national security decisions are incorporated into veterans strategic planning and service delivery should ultimately be left to the administration. More explicitly connecting the two, however, would be productive. It would aid DOD in its planning, resourcing, and delivery of transition support, as well as help VA and the rest of its federal partners in mapping out the programs and resources they will require to support veterans and the military-connected community. In terms of coordinating individual support programs and bringing efforts under a single interagency mechanism, a working group chaired by the leadership of the White House Domestic Policy Council (DPC)—with the inclusion of both agencies regularly represented on the DPC and all those others that play a role in service member transition and support for veterans and military families. Such an arrangement would provide for broad agency representation in planning and coordination efforts, sufficient scope to address veterans' support holistically, and leadership from the administration and each department's senior officers.

Key Action Steps

- The White House Chief of Staff should develop an overarching interagency group on veterans services and care, under the direction of the White House Domestic Policy Council, to align all federal policy, issue-based or ad hoc planning groups (e.g., multi-agency councils, task forces, committees, etc.), and agency programs across the U.S. federal government.
- In addition to every relevant agency that is already a regular participant on the Domestic Policy Council, this proposed interagency group should include the Department of Defense, the Small Business Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, and any other departments or agencies deemed appropriate based on their role in service member transition and support for veterans.
- As appropriate, the policy and implementation strategies developed by this proposed interagency group should be informed by foreign policy and use-of-force decisions made by the National Security Council, with the group's Defense representative acting as a liaison to the Council.

2 Building Block Two: A Comprehensive Understanding of the Challenges of Delivering Effective Services and Care

Supporting veterans is a multi-dimensional challenge and should be defined in terms of meeting a range of needs—to include health and benefits but also education, employment, family support, housing, and others—rather than any one need in isolation. Health care and benefits provided through the VA are essential, but no single organization or service can support veterans' successful reintegration into communities and provide for healthy, fulfilling, and

economically secure lives after separating from the military. While challenges such as post-traumatic stress and suicide demand the American public's attention and concern, addressing these problems goes far beyond providing better mental and behavioral health care to the veteran population. Certainly, combat exposure and post-traumatic stress play a role in veteran suicide, but so do other social factors such as unemployment, financial stress, and strained relationships.

As these latter factors suggest, the needs of veterans are typically co-occurring and connect with one another in a complex web (Armstrong, McDonough, & Savage, 2015). A veteran's prior education and experience affect their long-term employment opportunities, which, in turn, affect their ability to provide for basic individual and family needs—e.g., food, shelter, and safety. Consequently, ensuring this collective set of needs affects one's overall health and well-being.

Problem: Existing federal goals and collaboration approaches do not reflect a comprehensive understanding of the challenge of supporting veterans.

In light of these connections, we would expect federal planning and service delivery in veterans' affairs to center on setting comprehensive goals and delivering solutions that integrate the efforts of actors addressing each part of the problem. Complicated societal challenges demand as much. Yet as discussed above, at the federal level, veterans' services and care remain highly fragmented, lacking an overarching governance perspective that emphasizes inclusivity, comprehensiveness (of both actors and issues to be addressed), and a focus on the veteran as a whole person.

Such lack of a comprehensive vision manifests itself in a variety of ways. It contributes to problems of administrative siloing and insufficient collaboration. Perhaps even more troublingly, it constrains the scope of promising collaborative efforts, contributing to (as shown above) proliferation of issue-specific interagency goals, plans, and service delivery arrangements rather than broader forms of coordination. Of course, not all of these initiatives lack value, but they remain mostly focused on particular subsets of veterans' needs. Moreover, they may not be sustainable and, in some instances, they neglect perspectives of non-federal stakeholders who may possess valuable insight and, whether or not they are consulted, will be impacted by efforts to alter how federal actors work.

Veteran-focused Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goals provide a particularly telling illustration of the federal government's shortcomings in defining the challenge of supporting veterans in a broad fashion. As an organizing device, CAP goals exist to orient the efforts of every relevant component of the federal enterprise toward a collective outcome, making them an ideal mechanism around which to shape and guide progress on multifaceted challenges such as supporting veterans. However, in the case of veterans and the military-connected community, these goals have heretofore been limited to specific issue areas. For example, the "Service Members and Veterans Mental Health" CAP goal, introduced in 2014, called for improving mental health for service members, veterans, and their families, with emphasis on actions such as reducing barriers to care, improving care quality, implementing new and leading practices in service delivery, and supporting research. "Veteran Career Readiness"—originally proposed as a CAP goal and later folded into the VA's fiscal year 2017-2018 agency priority goals—called for promoting veteran employment through career preparation and training, public-private partnerships, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

While laudable in and of themselves, these kinds of goals—particularly those ultimately set at the cross-agency level, such as the mental health CAP goal—do not account for the broader spectrum of needs that must be met to facilitate veterans' transition from the military and

success as civilians. Mental health and employment are two important parts, but as one VA official put it, supporting veterans amounts to something much bigger and longer term (personal communication, October 25, 2017):

> *Most of the problems or reasons why federal governments are in place is that we are dealing with really big problems that are cross-generational, right? They are not going be solved in one or two years or even in a single strategic cycle [e.g., four years].*

In the view of this official, defining the challenge of supporting veterans more comprehensively would yield a number of benefits, including a stronger sense of purpose, greater unity of effort, and longer-term sustainability. With respect to this last consideration, the official argued more expansive goals and objectives would also help by necessitating the creation of a more robust interagency governance structure. This contrasts with the status quo, which the official described as follows (personal communication, October 25, 2017):

> *The process is the problem...and we don't have much of a governance structure that would enable departmental collaboration. We set up lots of little task forces and then they go away. They disband.*

Recommendation Two

Define, plan, and monitor progress toward the delivery of comprehensive support for veterans.

Overcoming problems associated with limited vision, goals, and mechanisms for joint action must start from the standpoint of recognizing that veterans' needs are multiple and interrelated. From here, more expansive goals and a sustainable infrastructure to promote collaboration can be put in place. For purposes of promoting and operationalizing a comprehensive understanding of the challenge that supporting veterans presents, the federal government should consider using a strategic tool such as the CAP goal process to define its desired direction in broader terms. Prior CAP goals on cybersecurity and climate change, for instance, have placed specific agencies in lead roles, but emphasized the important contributions organizations across the federal enterprise make in realizing mission outcomes in these areas.

Similarly, a CAP goal centered on supporting a successful military-to-civilian transition—defined and measured using a combination of metrics focused on issues such as health, educational access, employment, housing situation, and financial security—would account for the multi-dimensional nature of veterans' needs, and along with it, expand the scope of participating agencies with responsibilities and programs focused on veterans issues. More broadly, it

would focus agencies on the full scope of needs that must be met to help veterans readjust and thrive in their post-service lives, organize strategic planning processes around a common objective, and drive unity-of-effort and a more productive contribution that effectively aligns with those of other stakeholders—including states, communities, and organizations in the non-profit and private sectors. The DPC-led interagency working group outlined above would be a logical candidate in which to invest responsibility for overseeing this CAP goal's implementation, and executing on such a responsibility would be an ideal manner in which to lay a foundation for longer-term planning, strategy, and implementation of coordinated services and care.

Key Action Steps

- The proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should develop a "whole-of-nation" vision statement that reflects its understanding and commitment to a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted challenge of supporting veterans and transitioning service members.
- Through the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care, the administration should consider developing a multi-year, capstone strategic planning document and review process for veterans services and care akin to the quadrennial review process for other complex policy areas like national defense, homeland security, and diplomacy.
- As a catalyst for the creation of an enterprise approach to serving veterans, the Office of Management and Budget should develop a Cross-Agency Priority goal focused on comprehensive support for veterans. The interagency group on veterans' services and care should be responsible for overseeing the goal's implementation.

3 Building Block Three: A Coordinated Set of Agency Core Competencies

Establishing comprehensive goals and interagency mechanisms that foster broad-based coordination facilitates allocation of responsibility for supporting veterans in a way that reflects each agency's mission, and centers them on what they do best. Each agency brings specific capabilities and knowledge to the table. The essence of the enterprise approach lies in tapping these strengths, and deploying agency resources and expertise in a way that maximizes their contribution to the collective outcome. More specifically, it entails *determining which agency should play a lead role in meeting each of the major dimensions of veterans' needs,* from health and benefits to education, employment, financial issues, housing, and others. Making appropriate determinations in this regard ensures agencies focus on their core competencies rather than expending effort in less productive areas. It also curtails duplication, overlap, and fragmentation in services, issues with which the federal government has long wrestled and that, in recent years, have been highlighted repeatedly in important areas related to veteran support—e.g., STEM education, a field public and private employers are actively encouraging veterans to pursue, but for which, according to the Government Accountability Office, the federal government currently operates 163 programs across 13 different agencies.

Problem: Existing federal veterans programs and services do not allocate responsibility in accordance with what each agency does best.

At present, the arrangement of veterans programs and services across federal agencies does not necessarily reflect core agency strengths; problems with duplication, overlapping, and fragmented support persist. While each agency's role and mission invests it with responsibilities that may include meeting particular needs of veterans, it is not always clear which agencies lead—or should lead—in a given area.

According to one former federal official, there is a tendency among some stakeholders to see veterans as inextricably linked with the VA, and to assume that it has—or ought to be invested with—comprehensive authority over veteran-facing programs and services. In the view of this official, this mentality extends to include Congress, where, given committee jurisdictions, actions on new veterans' policies and forms of support can reinforce a VA-centric rather than federal-wide approach. In their words (personal communication, January 10, 2018):

> *Everybody wants to be in support of veterans, and they know the VA [is] for veterans. So whenever they think they have a great idea about improving veteran outcomes, they make that a VA program. So the congressional reinforcement of VA's prominence in veterans' outcomes, separate from health, benefits, and cemeteries, is reinforced by the congressional approach to it.*

One area of ongoing difficulty in this regard concerns promoting veterans' employment. By charter, the Department of Labor (DOL) is the lead federal agency for employment-related policy. Yet, according to a former federal official, there is persistent disagreement over whether and to what extent responsibility for veterans' employment issues should be vested principally with DOL or with VA (personal communication, January 10, 2018). One view is that while VA works most with the veterans population, it does not possess the resources, expertise, or infrastructure—the cadre of jobs counselors and network of community-based service centers that DOL does—to provide employment support (whether counseling, resume preparation, or job search assistance) to large numbers of veterans seeking work.

Taking an alternative view, one former VA official questioned whether DOL's employment and training services could be sufficiently adapted to veterans. As this individual argued (personal communication, January 25, 2018):

> *...through DOL, veterans may get first in line privileges at American Job Centers [a network of DOL-funded employment resource centers across the country], but [they] don't get veteran-centric services.*

Here, as in other needs areas—e.g., educational support, housing, and mental health—the issue is partly one of whether and to what extent an agency geared toward serving the general civilian population can effectively account for and tailor its approaches, as necessary, to veteran-specific needs. Whereas VA specializes in supporting particular aspects of veterans' employment through benefits such as vocational rehabilitation, Labor offers a broader swath of employment-related support that includes some services geared toward veteran job seekers. The challenge, to date, has stemmed from establishing an understanding at both an individual and an institutional level between the agencies regarding *which organization is responsible for what part of the outcome,* and striking the right balance between them. Particularly in areas where both agencies have very particularized roles to play—as in the case of employment—

aligning closely-related efforts without creating dispute, misunderstanding, or confusion over responsibility, and managing through differences of opinion over ownership, continues to pose problems.

Recommendation Three

Ensure federal-wide efforts to support veterans are allocated effectively according to agency roles, missions, and areas of comparative advantage; and provide sufficient leadership authority to execute their charge.

Surmounting difficulties attributable to a lack of clarity or institutional conflicts over roles is key to ensuring that federal agencies can work effectively together toward comprehensive veterans support outcomes. This is where having appropriately designed interagency collaboration mechanisms with the right leadership becomes particularly important. Strong political and organizational leadership, in particular, is key to resolving agency disputes and making decisions about where responsibilities should ultimately lie. It is also essential to work with Congress to provide feedback, insight, and input on whether applicable legislation contributes to or detracts from a rational separation of mission responsibility. Overall, according to a former DOL official, it entails a frank assessment of what an agency does and does not do well (personal communication, January 10, 2018):

> *Until you get a senior leader who says here's what I understand VA's core competencies to be, here are where the needs of veterans are and where our core competencies don't align with all the needs of veterans, we're going to seek supporting agencies who have that responsibility.*

In support of such assessments, strategic planners, policy analysts, and managers operating in cross-agency capacities must continue to work together to understand where and how they can complement one another—especially in areas where most productively separating out roles and functions entails a nuanced understanding of how each in a set of actors contributes to a particular outcome. Returning to employment as an example, it is imperative that stakeholders working at the boundaries of VA, DOL, and their partners recognize where each one adds value, and how their contributions can be fit together to maximize the beneficial impact on veterans and service members transitioning to civilian job markets.

Key Action Steps

- The administration should task the proposed interagency group on veterans services and care to develop an inventory of existing programs and conduct a comprehensive review of agency roles, missions, responsibilities, and core strengths across the multiple issue-areas affecting veterans—e.g., health, employment, education, human and social services).
- As part of this effort, the proposed interagency group should develop journey maps to model when and where veterans and transitioning service members come into contact with federal services during and after the transition process; isolate gaps and potential areas where veterans may experience challenges navigating services; and identify opportunities where modifying roles, missions, and responsibilities could reduce these changes.

- Based on its review, the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should make recommendations to the administration and to Congress regarding any changes in roles, missions, and authority it deems necessary, whether through legislation, executive orders, or actions that can be taken within existing authority.

4 Building Block Four: A Robust Engagement Strategy with Community-Level Stakeholders

Insofar as the veteran transition process ultimately occurs in a community setting, it is critical that in better coordinating their efforts, federal actors account for and incorporate the perspectives and insights of community-based stakeholders. Indeed, given the centrality of communities in the military-to-civilian transition and the system of post-service support, enabling more effective community-level action must be a key part of what the federal government aims to achieve in moving toward a greater enterprise approach.

The federal government's engagement with state and local government agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations is pivotal to an effective enterprise approach that serves veterans and their families. The ability of a service network to function effectively and efficiently requires interdependence based on reciprocity. Players must each possess something others want and need something others can provide. For example, the VA and its federal partners may possess the necessary authority and resources to team up and create strategies, but providing adequate support for veterans requires actual engagement with community-based organizations that have local legitimacy and many active supporters (Booher & Innes, 2002). In essence, the delivery of sound veteran programs ultimately requires strategic thinking, interaction, and communication among diverse actors.

Such an approach accords with principles put in place to successful effect in other large, complex project- and service-based endeavors. Approaches like the "open project" model of collective action—where numerous disparate actors come together to address expansive, multifaceted problems through decentralized action, informal coordination, robust information sharing, and cooperative problem solving—stress among other things "letting everyone play," "using multiple communication channels," and "taking advantage of all types of organizations" (Witzel, 2012). This model has been adapted to address complex problems ranging from economic recovery and food safety to traffic congestion and integration of efforts across many organizations to manage environmental resources, deliver local public services, and even develop the Internet (Witzel, 2012). Because supporting veterans and military-connected families entails actors across levels, sectors, and geographic space working together, these principles are readily applicable in the veterans' affairs context, and reiterate the need for the federal government to engage its external stakeholders as part of moving toward and implementing an enterprise approach.

Federal agencies need their state and local counterparts not only as active service providers, but also to gain insight on localized impacts of social problems. Adopting a client-centered approach, developing a shared vision, and negotiating organizational and political differences are critical ingredients for social service provision (Winters et al., 2016). Reflecting the real world in which it operates, this approach encourages different members within a larger group to use varying perspectives, explanations, and original ways to solve problems (Leimeister, 2010; Malone et al., 2009; Secundo et al., 2016). As in other areas, in the context of veterans services it holds much promise for determining how coalitions evolve, how they are governed, and, ultimately, how collective insight can be shared and harnessed (Knight & Pye 2005, Provan et. al 2007, Weber & Khamedian, 2008).

Problem: With few exceptions, current federal strategic planning and service delivery coordination processes do not provide for robust engagement and communication with state and community-level partners.

Despite the importance of state and community-level partners, existing planning processes and service delivery efforts undertaken by the VA and other federal agencies do not always provide for sufficiently robust engagement with these stakeholders. Knowing that government has limitations, individuals interviewed for this report acknowledged the important role of state and local governments, nonprofits, and private service providers, but stressed there are not sufficient formal procedures through which they can be consulted, engaged, and coordinated with during planning and program implementation. The negative consequences can be significant. Such lack of engagement can make it very difficult even to establish awareness and familiarity among the VA, other federal actors, and community organizations working at the ground level (personal communication, December 19, 2017).

VA strategic planners have acknowledged the important role of nonprofit and local government service providers, but there are often not robust procedures for ensuring that their expertise is consulted in planning processes. When executives at the VA and their federal partners decide to fully support targeted issues that require national-to-local level coordination, successful outcomes have taken place. For example, through the Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) Technical Assistance Center, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in HHS (home of the interagency working group on military and veterans mental health) runs "policy academies" that bring stakeholders from individual communities to multi-day workshops where they receive support from subject matter experts and onsite representatives of federal agencies to develop strategies and implementation plans to address complex problems—homelessness and suicide—impacting the veteran and military-connected community. With due acknowledgement to individual examples like these, routine intergovernmental functions still tend to exhibit persistent complications with program coordination, alignment of resources, and service delivery. The following, from a highly experienced, community-level practitioner speaks to the issue (personal communication, January 8, 2018):

> *I used to say this to the local VA director. Imagine this is the sun and then you have got all of the planets in an orbit. You guys think you are the sun as the VA program. You are a planet. The VFW and the community are planets. Schools are a planet. And these are all community programs. But the sun is the veteran. And if we don't think of it that way in the community, then we are looking at the wrong thing. If you go to most VA facilities, their mentality is they are the single point of contact in the community for all veterans.*

Even among ground-level actors that are otherwise cognizant of VA efforts and attempt to work in tandem with them, many of the nonprofit actors are neither VA-related nor VA-funded. Accordingly, they lack the connections and capacity to influence policy in ways national veteran-serving nonprofits like the "Big Six" veterans service organizations—American Legion, AMVETS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Disabled American

Veterans, and Paralyzed Veterans of America—can to promote their stances. These positions, according to one veteran services officer working at the local level, do not always map onto actual community-based conditions and needs. As a local government veterans services official argued (personal communication, January 12, 2018):

> *There is a disconnect between national leadership and local implementation. Much of the veteran services have to be provided at the local level, but the fundraising [and policy influence are] performed at the national level. The engagement provided at the national level isn't as impactful for veterans as it is at the local level.*

A manager overseeing veterans programs in the Department of Health and Human Services echoed this sentiment, stressing the importance of engagement at the state and local level to ensure policies and plans made at higher levels address the right issues—and aim to serve the right people (personal communication, January 5, 2018):

> *It's the grassroots level that gets the work done. The federal policies are great, but being able to ensure that the program or the resources are getting to the folks that we intend for them to get to requires us to interact with our cities and our states.*

Because cross-sector service provision is typically governed under separate units or socialized differently based on workplace cultures, providing unity of effort can be extremely challenging. Services are delivered through networks of decentralized, independent providers. More frequently than not, the integration of services faces barriers produced by circumstantial, institutional, and professional factors. These obstacles not only affect collaboration but also efforts aimed at innovation, strategy implementation, and organizational change (Auschra, 2018). These, however, are the driving forces behind services integration and a community-centered, holistic treatment approach for those with complex rehabilitative and readjustment needs (Fisher & Elnitsky, 2012).

VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS: A CASE STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

Even though community-based service networks have been hindered by coordination problems, it is important to point out that in some cases local leaders and federal officials have developed strong working relationships. One area in which personal relationships and creativity played a major role with advancing innovation can be seen through the history of veterans' treatment courts. In Buffalo, New York, collaboration among a group of key individuals was instrumental in establishing a hybrid approach to serving veterans who are battling mental illness and substance abuse by diverting them from the conventional criminal justice system into a specialized veterans treatment court (VTC). Judge Robert T. Russell, Jr., who led the formation of a drug treatment court in 1995, worked with others to use it as an impetus for a mental health treatment court in 2000 that evolved to include veterans.

Later, in 2008, Judge Russell worked with a small group of experienced advocates to set up a structured process to hear and try cases. According to one insider familiar with the growth of this effort, a former Deputy Undersecretary for Health Operations and Management at the VHA was very familiar with the Buffalo initiative, became a staunch supporter, and strongly promoted veteran treatment courts to senior VA senior executives. Over the past several years, Judge Russell and staff at the Buffalo court have partnered with VA and the Bureau of Justice Assistance at DOJ to set up a national model that works with veteran service organizations, state and local government agencies, and community-based nonprofits. Today, over 400 of these courts serve veterans in almost every state, and work with one another through training and the use performance measurement systems.

VA supports this effort through its Veterans Justice Outreach Program, which employs over 200 specialists working in cooperation with local treatment courts (Flatley et. al, 2017). While there is still much to ascertain about the courts, early studies examining their value suggest they show great potential (Easterly, 2017). Courts concentrate on supervision of the veteran throughout a treatment plan that can reduce recidivism, thereby reducing long-term expenditures for taxpayers and increasing public safety (Russell, 2014). Though recidivism can be a relative term, early analysis of program outcomes indicates that VTCs have sharply reduced rates throughout the country (Baldwin, 2012; 2017; Easterly, 2017). Research also suggests that treatment courts may have broad impact in terms of addressing a number of risk factors related to addiction, behavioral health, family functioning, and social connectedness (Blonigen et. al, 2017; Knudsen & Wingenfeld, 2015). As one of the people that helped establish the VTC in Buffalo articulated (personal communication, December 19, 2017):

> *It's a great story because when we decided to do it, it's one thing deciding to do it and then trying to formalize it. We had a series of meetings that took a year between the VA hospital, all of the community advisors and the court. What we found was very few people in the community knew what the VA did and very few people at the VA understood what community providers did. There were two distinct entities but through these meetings we all got to understand each other better.*

Recommendation Four

Create regular forums to engage community-based stakeholders, leverage their insight and expertise, and align plans and service delivery strategies to complement and empower community-based efforts.

To maximize impact in adopting an enterprise approach, government must create mechanisms for regular, substantive engagement with its community partners. It has many options to do so, ranging from creating scope for state and community input into strategic planning (both at the interagency level and within individual agencies' planning processes), to contributing time and expertise to planning-based exercises in communities themselves. With respect to communities being engaged in federal planning and strategy making, one community nonprofit manager envisioned a model involving local level actors directly liaising with strategic planners in a manner akin to the following (personal communication, January 17, 2018):

> *I think they need to set it up to where, in a serious manner...not to where they are just placating a bunch of community organizations, even if it is quarterly, invite community organizations into D.C., ones that have a solid track record of being around. Not the ones that come and go. They have a database of the organizations that are established [and] periodically invite them in for some of their strategy sessions...just to get their voices heard.*

When operationalizing this kind of engagement, one could envision a number of approaches, such as recurring sessions and idea generation exercises with a diverse set of state and local stakeholders. For example, a group comprised of representatives from across states and communities representing different geographic regions, urban versus rural environments, larger and smaller veterans populations of different demographic and socioeconomic profiles, and so on, could be quite effective. These individuals and groups could be plugged directly into strategic planning with the VA and its agency partners as well as, on rotating basis, attend and formally participate in convenings of the federal-wide interagency service coordination body described above.

With respect to federal actors engaged in community planning and strategy formation, federal agencies could work through similar mechanisms to engage in deliberations at the local level. Through its Community Veterans Engagement Boards (CVEBs), for example, the VA has aimed to establish a national network of community-based forums where local VA representatives convene with community partners to coordinate efforts. With the intent of promoting inclusiveness, accessibility, and information sharing to maximize collective impact, these boards are open to actors from across the community setting, including stakeholders from state and local government, community nonprofits, and even individual veterans and military-connected family members. The intent behind these collectives is sound, and continuing to pursue community-centric collaboratives will be essential to adjoining local action and strategy making at the federal level. However, the key, as one local nonprofit manager argued, is to ensure a close link and clear communications back to higher-level interagency efforts. In their words (personal communication, January 17, 2018):

> *The CVEB [idea] is awesome if the community uses it right and then [the VA representatives] go back and actually report the [important information] up the chain. But, [the key is] that the chain [not have] so many links to where the messages are actually going to get lost.*

Key Action Steps

- The proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should provide a mechanism for community-based stakeholders—state and local governments, veteran service organizations, human service organizations, and the business community—to participate in its deliberations and provide input into interagency plans and strategies.
- Similarly, agencies represented in the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should, as appropriate, incorporate non-federal and non-governmental partners into their own strategic planning processes.
- Agencies represented in the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should engage vigorously in community-based outreach, including through attending recurring community stakeholder convenings and empowering their local representatives —e.g., leaders at local VA facilities, the Department of Labor's American Job Centers, and local Small Business Administration representatives—to form partnerships with other actors at the community level.
- Agencies represented in the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should consider the increased use of business models that promote localized innovation, coordination, and bottom-up engagement in communities such as public-private partnerships and block grants.

5 Building Block Five: The Effective Use of Technology and Data

Information technology (IT) and data governance are fundamental to the business of government—and for organizations attempting to work with one another across boundaries, mission areas, and geographies—it is essential for effective operations. Over the past two decades, enterprise architecture has become increasingly critical to effective public management by offering more integrated, modern, and customized public services (Dawes, Cresswell & Pardo, 2009; Gilman, 2017; La Vigne, 2017). Digital platforms provide more transparency about government decision-making by providing opportunities for participation, feedback, and accountability. And, there is a natural synergy between the implementation of strategic plans and the systems through which knowledge is managed and multiple stakeholders can interact, share data and information, and provide better coordinated and more effective services (Whittington, 2014). This has enabled collaborative initiatives to become more efficient by enhancing the capacity to store, manage, and distribute information (Dawes, Creswell & Pardo, 2009; Liebowitz, 1997).

Yet, with some exceptions in areas such as law enforcement and homeland security, public sector IT infrastructure has lagged behind the need for more robust systems that reduce the barriers to interagency, cross-jurisdictional, and public-private data sharing (Desousa, 2018; La Vigne, 2017). Absent new policies mandating technology-based transformations that are

aligned with agency missions, the public sector remains slow to adopt new digital platforms due to multiple technological, workforce, and cultural barriers—e.g., legacy systems, interoperability, IT project management, data culture, executive leadership prioritization and ownership (Desouza, 2018; Klievink et al, 2017; Lute & Taylor, 2018; Mergel, 2017).

In veteran services and care especially, maintaining well-functioning systems that can track veterans' cases, interactions with care and benefits professionals, and treatment regimens that cross agencies, governments, and sectors is especially critical. For example, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), through its Telehealth services, encompasses health informatics, disease management, and information and telecommunication technologies to deliver consultation, case management, and patient care. Video conferencing and peripheral devices are the most common examples of current technological innovations. Still, while the VHA has strategically adjusted its approach to health care innovation and communication networks over time, opportunities remain to exploit existing technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), biosensors, mobile applications, and process automation.

Applications like AI and cloud-based data sharing also extend well beyond health care delivery and are especially relevant to how the federal delivers services and care at the enterprise, interagency level (Desouza, 2018). Current approaches to measuring the long-term success of various veterans programs—in both the public and private sectors—are limited often because the most meaningful administrative data that on key outcomes (e.g., employment status, earnings, utilization of other non-VA supportive services) are collected by agencies other than those that deliver the program. There is even less understanding about how veterans navigate and utilize government services and benefits *across* agencies and which programs or combinations of programs have the greatest positive long-term effect on veteran well-being. Keeping abreast of the increasingly faster pace of technology change will be vital to ensure veterans get the "right care in the right place at the right time," not only as the VA supplements its brick and mortar approach with technological systems and digital platforms (Darkins, 2014; VA, 2018b), but as communities continue developing their own localized innovations and solutions to coordinated, cross-sector service delivery (Armstrong, et al, 2018).

For purposes of devising strategies and engaging stakeholders, adept application of technology solutions can surmount physical and administrative barriers that may otherwise work to inhibit sharing of information and perspectives—particularly from on-the-ground actors to those working in an organization's centralized planning functions (Al-Kodmany, 1999; Pee & Kankanhalli, 2016). This is especially pivotal in context of veterans' services, given the sheer number of actors involved at the national and local levels. Accordingly, for gathering and sharing information, perspectives, and insights among disparate actors—key to implementing the enterprise approach—IT and data management are powerful and much needed tools.

Problem: The federal government's existing information technology governance and data management systems do not adequately support an enterprise approach to delivering services and care to veterans.

The integration of technology into enterprise government approaches requires careful consideration of data management, governance, and cybersecurity, among other important factors. "Big data" holds great potential value for government, but many public organizations are uncertain about their technical capability to use it effectively (Klievink et al., 2017). At the same time, and relatedly, the implementation of "e-government' has not been as transformative as early proponents visualized, due mainly to deep-rooted political and institutional limitations (Gilman, 2017).

Many agencies have not adopted data-driven decision processes, especially because public programs are not able to collect, and then "mine" reliable data sets. Agencies have also struggled to centralize and put together data that gives them a consolidated picture of their programmatic, budgetary, and operational picture. As one VA strategic planner put it (personal communication, November 17, 2017):

> *We've got dashboards all over VA, but there's not one, there's not one, maybe two or three that link all of these things together to give senior leaders that kind of real time info that I think they need for actionable decision making. We just don't have that.*

Such lack of a strategic view of an organization impedes both near-term operational decision-making, as well as choices about resource allocation and longer-term planning. These problems become even more pronounced, however, as strategy formation and service delivery shift from a single organization to a collection of disparate organizations and actors. Particularly in veterans' affairs, planning within and across organizations should emphasize gathering and harnessing the insights of actors across the federal interagency context, as well as at the community level. But, most subject matter experts interviewed for this report could not speak to specific technology applications they are familiar with or have used for purposes of conducting large-scale strategic planning exercises that incorporate the participation and input of multiple, disparate actors. Applications such as social intranets, IT- and software-enabled scenario building tools, and interactive data aggregation and visualization, do not appear to have taken root in nascent enterprise efforts in the veterans' affairs arena.

Recommendation Five

Identify, acquire, and deploy information technology tools and interagency data management structures that support enterprise planning.

Acquiring IT and data tools useful for implementing an enterprise approach to the delivery of care and services must necessarily start from the basics, as there has been little apparent effort to identify available solutions. Data held across federal agencies pertaining to veteran services and care should be treated as a strategic asset to any enterprise-level planning effort. As part of its broader efforts to move toward an enterprise model of planning and governance—including establishing goals, identifying and working through appropriate interagency mechanisms, allocating roles, missions, and responsibilities based on core competencies, and creating processes for stakeholder engagement—the federal government must define its IT and data requirements. Such a process and eventual set of solutions need not be complex. For purposes of incremental development and deployment of these tools, the government could look to see if one or more commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) products—those already developed and sold widely in commercial marketplaces—could meet its needs.

Among other considerations, as the government explores available technology and data options, it should ensure they provide capabilities for a widespread set of actors to share information and input into interagency planning processes and deliberations. Moreover, the tools it uses should ideally be able to merge, aggregate, and visualize data from across agencies, community settings, and key issue areas to support data-driven decision-making, such as cloud-based digital platforms that afford high levels of interaction and flexibility across organizations.

Key Action Steps

- Consistent with the Federal Data Strategy and recommendations two and three, the administration should task the proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care to: (1) develop an inventory of relevant interagency and public-private data sharing initiatives; and (2) create a master data governance framework to coordinate disparate data sharing initiatives, establish policies and procedures for data stewardship and access, and prioritize opportunities for improved interagency data sharing and evidence-based planning in veterans' services and care.
- The proposed interagency group on veterans' services and care should take full advantage of partnerships with private industry and academia to assess the feasibility and drive implementation of digital innovation and data transformation initiatives that promote greater flexibility and interoperability across federal agencies and with the broader public (state and local), private, and nonprofit sectors working to serve the veteran community.

CONCLUSION

This report presents five building blocks and related actions to improve the delivery of services and care for veterans through an enterprise approach. Foremost among them is establishing a unifying system of governance and strategic planning that spans the federal government, and integrates state and local governments, and private and nonprofit sector stakeholders, to pursue national goals.

Consider U.S. national security, for example. In this case, strategic planning originates in the National Security Council (NSC), within the Executive Office of the President. The NSC tackles an exceptionally complex international security environment while maintaining a persistent, albeit limited, wartime footing abroad. To address these myriad cross-agency challenges, the NSC employs an enterprise approach.

By comparison, and as a domestic consequence of U.S. military operations over the last two decades, the scale and complexity of needs facing veterans as they transition to civilian life presents a different, yet similarly complex set of challenges that no one organization can address alone. Presented here, the federal government has constructed multiple different, issue-based, interagency councils, task forces, or committees on focus areas such as veteran health and benefits, mental health, homelessness, and more. Yet, there is no enterprise system to govern or coordinate such activities, certainly not comparable to the NSC in the national security sector.

Moreover, government benefits and services for veterans, by themselves, are insufficient to meet the range of needs that veterans may encounter post-service. In addition to health care and federal benefits, many needs are social or local in nature. After all, "veterans don't come home to federal agencies; they come home to communities, and meeting their greatest needs often falls on the shoulders of county and city organizations" (Flournoy, 2014). Needs often manifest in co-occurring ways—e.g., housing and employment—and therefore require providers to adopt a coordinated, individualized approach to care (Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Carter, Kidder, & Schafer, 2016; Castro et al., 2013; Schell, Tanielian, et al., 2011). At the same time, more than 40,000 veteran serving nonprofits and charities deliver these supports—in addition to human service organizations that serve all Americans—in communities across the country (Carter & Kidder, 2015). Still, despite the ostensible wealth of available resources, veterans often cite navigation difficulty to and across public and private resources from the diversity and fragmented landscape of veterans' services (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). Thus, strategic planning that addresses this complexity must traverse boundaries across not only federal agencies, but also state and local governments, and the private and philanthropic sectors.

Federal-wide planning is necessary, without question, to set clear priorities, allocate resources, and create a comprehensive approach to provide care and supportive assistance

to veterans. Yet, while VA strategic plans clearly identify the need for collaborative partnerships at the federal, state, and community levels, in practice, the functioning of veteran service networks at the community level still operate largely independent from a federal planning process with a deep-rooted dependence on centralized planning and policy coordination. The VA is not likely to meet its stated objective to build "high-performing and integrated service delivery networks" (VA, 2018a, 14) unless communities become a primary focal point—the center of gravity—in the delivery of care and supportive services.

This report demonstrates the need for an enterprise approach that clearly defines a national strategic vision for veterans' care; identifies short-, medium-, and long-term planning goals across the federal government; and establishes formal coordination mechanisms to drive effective coordination and execution. Beyond the historical and social contract-based arguments about what the United States owes its veterans, the economics are clear. Costs of care and demand for a more unified effort that provides veterans with efficient, effective services and support—across all sectors—will remain high for the near future. Improvements in cross-organizational strategy formulation and execution can meaningfully contribute to a more cost effective system of services and care, thus providing an economic imperative for moving toward an enterprise approach to the delivery of services and care to veterans.

From this follows a necessity to develop an enterprise approach that aligns efforts of the VA, its federal, state, and community partners, and the array of veteran-serving nonprofits and human service organizations across the country into the "better system" that the public and policy experts have demanded for years, if not decades (Carter, 2017). In the absence of a clearly defined long-term national strategy, planners must still develop and maintain a framework based on an understanding of emerging trends, fiscal constraints, and strategic foresight.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research Methods

In addition to public documents and policy, this report is supported further through the analysis of 24 confidential, semi-structured interviews with senior executive and political elite with direct experience or expertise in agency and interagency planning efforts supporting veterans. Participants represent a diverse selection of key agency constituencies with respect to veterans' issues across the U.S. government, as well as philanthropy and the social sector. Data collection was augmented with an extensive review of existing strategic planning processes employed in federal agency and interagency context, as well as a thorough review of the origins and experiences of past and current interagency, intergovernmental, and inter-sectoral initiatives addressing specific dimensions of the veterans support challenges.

Conducting research on the complicated, and often hidden, process of governmental planning, strategy development, and execution, requires analysis of intersecting insider perspectives (Smith, 2005; Walby, 2007). While networked relationships have been examined from the perspective of practice, less is known about how day-to-day practices bring purpose-oriented networks into being (Berthod et. al, 2017; Rhodes, 2006). A full picture of policy making and planning can only be obtained by explaining the regular interactions and problems among the different levels, sites, and people involved (Shore & Wright, 2003; Taylor, 1997).

In this case, the authors examined two interrelated components that affect intergovernmental and cross-sectoral planning: (1) federal policy initiatives in the form of strategic planning; and (2) collaborative and networked governance in the form of service provision for veterans. Because the "elites" that create and implement public policy may be inherently biased or isolated within the bureaucracy, it is important to account for this potential limitation by creating more than one technique to collect data (Lilleker, 2003). The authors' intent was to collect a range of individual and institutional perspectives inherent to veteran service provision, then to analyze the intersection of macro-level strategic planning with community planning systems. Accordingly, interviews focused on triangulating the perspectives of a diverse array of federal, state, community, non-governmental stakeholders participating in veterans policy planning and service delivery processes.

Together these efforts provided the background, context, and effective mix of primary and secondary data to conduct a robust investigation intended to identify the challenges, imperatives, and recommended courses of action to drive an enterprise approach in U.S. federal veterans' services and care.

Appendix 2: List of Select Federal Interagency Coordinating Mechanisms for Veterans' Services and Care

Table 2-1: List of Select Interagency Collaboration Mechanisms

Collaboration Mechanism	Originating Authority	Agencies Involved	Leadership	Description
Council on Veterans Employment	Executive Order	Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, EPA, GSA, Health & Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing & Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, NASA, NRC, NSF, OPM, SBA, SSA, State, Transportation, Treasury, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by the Secretaries of Labor and Veterans Affairs	Interagency group dedicated to improving veterans employment opportunities in the federal government
Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development	Act of Congress Executive Order	Defense, GSA, Labor, OMB, SBA, Treasury, Veterans Affairs	Chaired by the Administrator of SBA	Interagency group promoting veterans small business ownership through improved access to capital, business development, and federal contracting opportunities
Interagency Task Force on Military and Veterans Mental Health	Executive Order	Defense, Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by the Secretaries of Defense, Health & Human Services, and Veterans Affairs	Interagency group advancing suicide prevention through agency training, state and community partnerships, enhanced data on behavioral health use and outcomes, and related efforts
Joint Executive Committee	Act of Congress	Defense, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness and the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs	Interagency group collaborating across the DOD-VA boundary to promote coordination in healthcare, sharing of information and resources, interoperable health records, purchased care, suicide prevention, and related efforts
Health Executive Committee	Act of Congress (pursuant to law establishing JEC)	Defense, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health and the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health	Interagency group operating under the auspices of the Joint Executive Committee, focused on promoting DOD-VA collaboration and resource sharing in health matters
Benefits Executive Committee	Act of Congress (pursuant to law establishing JEC)	Defense, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness and the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Benefits	Interagency group operating under the auspices of the Joint Executive Committee, focused on promoting DOD-VA collaboration and resource sharing in benefits matters

Table 2-1: List of Select Interagency Collaboration Mechanisms (cont.)

Collaboration Mechanism	Originating Authority	Agencies Involved	Leadership	Description
Interagency Care Coordination Committee	Act of Congress (pursuant to law establishing JEC)	Defense, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health and the Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Enterprise Integration	Interagency group operating under the auspices of the Joint Executive Committee, focused on promoting DOD-VA collaboration in matters of care for individuals with complex care needs
Interagency Program Office Executive Committee	Act of Congress	Defense, Veterans Affairs	Chaired by the Director of the Defense/Veterans Affairs Interagency Program Office	Interagency group operating under the auspices of the Joint Executive Committee, focused on promoting DOD-VA collaboration in matters of information sharing and interoperability of information and technology systems
United States Interagency Council on Homelessness	Act of Congress	Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, GSA, Health & Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing & Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, OMB, Transportation, SSA, Veterans Affairs, US Postal Service, Corporation for National & Community Service, White House Faith & Opportunity Initiative	Chaired by the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, Housing & Urban Development (chair leadership rotates annually)	Interagency group working to prevent and end homelessness in America, with attention toward intergovernmental and inter-sectoral partnerships addressing veteran homelessness, chronic homelessness, and homelessness among youth and elderly populations
TAP Executive Council	Agency Authority	Defense, Education, Labor, Homeland Security, OPM, SBA, Veterans Affairs	Co-Chaired by Secretariat Senior Leaders of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs (chair leadership rotates annually)	Interagency group to collaborate in the delivery and assessment of the Transition Assistance Program

Table 2-2: List of Select Veterans-Related Federal Advisory Committees

Committee	Originating Authority	Agencies Involved	Description
Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach	Act of Congress	Defense, Labor, OPM, SBA, Veterans Affairs	Committee to assess employment needs of veterans and efficacy of current DOL programs to support veterans moving into the civilian workforce
Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans	Act of Congress	Agriculture, Health & Human Services, Housing & Urban Development, Labor, Veterans Affairs	Committee to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs regarding Department of Veterans Affairs programs and services on veteran homelessness
Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans	Act of Congress	Veterans Affairs	Committee to ensure the needs of minority veterans are being met effectively through Veterans Affairs programs and services
Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans	Act of Congress	Veterans Affairs	Committee to assess the needs of veterans who have served in combat theaters
Advisory Committee on Women Veterans	Act of Congress	Labor, Veterans Affairs	Committee to ensure the needs of women veterans are being met effectively through Veterans Affairs programs and services
Creating Options for Veterans Expedited Recovery (COVER) Commission	Act of Congress	Veterans Affairs	Committee to assess programs, services, and treatment models intended to support the Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention strategic priority
Veterans' and Community Oversight and Engagement Board	Act of Congress	Veterans Affairs	Committee to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on community-based partnerships supporting veterans
Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education	Act of Congress	Education, Labor, Veterans Affairs	Committee to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on veterans' education and employment needs, programs, and services
Veterans' Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation	Act of Congress	Education, Labor, Veterans Affairs	Committee to assess rehabilitation needs of veterans with disabilities
Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor Advisory Committee	Agency Authority	Veterans Affairs	Committee to advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on programs and services to further support veterans' caregivers, family members, and survivors
Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs	Act of Congress	SBA	Committee to advise the SBA Administrator and other policymakers on promoting veterans' access to capital and veterans' small business activities
Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development	Act of Congress; Executive Order	SBA	Committee advising the federal Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development

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