



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**Inspector General**  
Washington DC 20420

July 9, 2020

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Government Operations  
Committee on Oversight and Reform  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write in response to your letter of June 15, 2020, requesting that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) examine the plans and procedures of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for returning employees to federal offices in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The OIG shares your deep concerns about the health and safety of all VA employees and understands the risks involved with returning personnel to the workplace. VA has an expansive national footprint, with over 400,000 employees and contractors with diverse responsibilities to serve veterans, their family members, and caregivers. Due to the variability in VA's presence throughout the country, employees can have widely differing experiences with the response to the pandemic, including the level of risk in their area and relevant guidance from state and local officials. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest employer within VA, and its 170 medical centers and the majority of its over 1,000 community-based outpatient clinics have continued to operate during the pandemic. These factors make a review of VA's plans to return employees to the workplace unusually complex and difficult to report in real time as circumstances continually shift. Accordingly, we plan to address related issues as they are detected in the course of our many ongoing reviews related to VA's response to COVID-19.

We have a number of projects in process that will provide oversight of VHA's actions during the pandemic, including reviews of their management of medical appointments, their use of telehealth, the closure of certain community-based outpatient clinics, and their overall response to and lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis. Several ongoing projects also build on a report we released in March that assessed VHA's COVID-19 screening processes and pandemic readiness—particularly your concerns regarding supplies and protective equipment.<sup>1</sup> We are also reviewing how the

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<sup>1</sup> [OIG Inspection of Veterans Health Administration's COVID-19 Screening Processes and Pandemic Readiness, March 19–24, 2020](#), March 26, 2020.

Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) operations have been affected by the pandemic. Ongoing OIG projects focus on VBA's significant challenges in processing veterans' claims and how its personnel is working to mitigate those issues.

We also routinely coordinate with the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which is conducting a review of federal agency responses to the pandemic. In answer to a question you asked at the June 25, 2020, House Oversight and Reform Committee hearing, GAO's witness stated they plan to request and review each agency's return to work plan and would attempt to identify any inadequacies or inconsistencies. We look forward to reviewing GAO's report and will determine if additional work is necessary based on their findings.

The OIG is committed to providing comprehensive and timely oversight of VA's response to COVID-19 and the stresses on more routine operations. Our resources and staff have been aligned to ensure we can continuously review VA's ability to provide veterans with the benefits and care they have earned as the pandemic landscape shifts. We look forward to continuing to engage with your Subcommittee as this work moves forward.

If you need additional information, please contact Mr. Michael Cheman, Congressional Relations Specialist, at (202) 461-4648 or [Michael.Cheman@va.gov](mailto:Michael.Cheman@va.gov).

Thank you for your interest in the OIG.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL J. MISSAL

copy to: The Honorable Jody B. Hice, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Government Operations