

March 24, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association, we would like to congratulate you on your confirmation as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We look forward to a continued and successful partnership between the VA and the psychiatrists and psychologists who provide essential care to veterans and their families. Our organizations stand ready to support you and your team to improve care, reduce wait times, advance research and train tomorrow's workforce in order to ensure that veterans' mental health care needs are met today and well into the future.

The VA employs a network of over 3,000 psychiatrists and 7,300 psychologists, each highly skilled and committed to delivering specialty care to Veterans in their local communities. We treat veterans with crippling Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Opioid Use Disorder, suicidality, and other mental health and substance use disorders. As part of the larger mental health workforce at the VA, there are other members of the care team that work in tandem with psychiatrists and psychologists to intervene and treat veterans in crisis and care thereafter. Psychiatrists and psychologists employed at VAs are also conducting key research into disorders impacting veterans as well as the most effective treatments. However, similar to the trends across the country, there is a shortage of psychiatrists and psychologists in the VA, leaving veterans with increasing wait times and fewer options to access quality care.

Over the past few weeks, our collective members have been increasingly concerned with the news of the dismissal of over 1,000 employees, endangering veterans' access to benefits and care.¹ We are concerned about reductions not only of psychologists and psychiatrists, but of VA administrative and support staff, as the latter will impact the ability of these highly trained clinicians to deliver needed services. Reports indicate reduction in staff responsible supporting the Veterans Crisis Line, which provides 24/7 confidential crisis support for veterans and their loved ones.² Crisis lines provide a "no wrong door" approach for Veterans to start their mental health and substance use treatment. Without these services operating at full capacity, veterans who are ready to initiate care may be missed and in the worst cases end up in the emergency room or die prematurely when effective and evidence-based interventions could have been made available.

We are also hearing reports that VA psychiatrists and psychologists, who were hired as fully remote employees, are being asked to report to a federal facility in order to continue their employment with the VA. For many of these employees, there is no VA facility within range of their current residences, and they are being told to report to any federal facility, including prisons, to conduct their virtual appointments with Veterans. For others, they were hired to provide care to areas where vacancies

¹ <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-dismisses-more-than-1000-employees/>

² [VA dismisses over 1,000 employees as part of probationary worker purge](#)

existed for years, and now that they are not able to work remotely, veterans are being left without care. As of 2024, 73 VA facilities faced a severe shortage of psychiatrists and 85 VA facilities reported a shortage of psychologists, highlighting the importance of the use of telemental health services. We are concerned that the return to office mandate may have unintended consequences, including increased wait times, reduced access to specialized mental health and substance use treatments, and increasingly negative impacts on veterans' health outcomes. Accordingly, our organizations respectfully request that you consider exceptions to some of the mandates to avoid serious impact on veterans' mental health.

The American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association have had a long and storied history with the VA from its inception, leading to groundbreaking research and treatments and a robust mental health workforce for all Americans. The power of the VA's integrated medical system and the benefits provided to the entire health care system cannot be understated.

Our organizations have always appreciated the collaboration over the years and hope that your team will carefully review the issues that will further erode the mental health workforce caring for American's veterans. Please contact Kristin Kroeger, American Psychiatric Association Chief of Advocacy, Policy, and Practice Advancement (kkroeger@psych.org) and Katherine B. McGuire, American Psychology Association Chief Advocacy Officer (KMcGuire@apa.org) with any questions or for further discussion.

Sincerely,



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