



**Veterans
Healthcare
Policy
Institute**

Strengthening Care for Veterans and the Nation

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Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, AFGE Release Illuminating Report on VA's Severe Staffing Shortages and Mounting Privatization Threats

Ninety-six percent of Veterans Health Administration respondents indicated that their facility needs more frontline clinical staff.

OAKLAND – Today, the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, in association with the American Federation of Government Employees, released a comprehensive report on the urgent struggles of thousands of VA employees, and how they threaten to impede the future of America's best healthcare and benefits systems.

Entitled "Disadvantaging the VA: How VA Staff View Agency Privatization and Other Detrimental Policies," the 74-page [report](#) leans on dozens of interviews, hundreds of written comments, and thousands of survey responses, as well as Congressional testimony, federal watchdog reports, and other previous investigations. It shows how a series of detrimental policies are inhibiting the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) from maintaining its preeminence in providing unparalleled veterans' services.

Topline survey findings include:

- Seventy-five percent of VHA respondents said their facility needs more administrative staff
- Seventy-seven percent said there are vacant VHA positions for which no recruitment is taking place
- Seventy-six percent of VHA respondents have seen an increase of non-VA care that could be done in the VA
- Forty-eight percent of VHA respondents said that the Human Resources Modernization Project has exacerbated delays in hiring and is contributing to the hemorrhaging of staff
- Sixty-two percent of VBA respondents are considering leaving their job in the next few years

“For years, dedicated VA employees have been asked to do more with less,” said Suzanne Gordon, the report’s lead author and a Senior Policy Analyst at VHPI. “Our report amplifies the voices of these frontline health care providers and benefits claims processors whose essential role has been undermined by costly, wasteful, and ineffective outsourcing under three different presidential administrations.”

Dr. Russell Lemle, a Senior Policy Analyst at VHPI and the former Chief Psychologist at the San Francisco VA Health Care System, raised concern that overworking staff and needless outsourcing of patients are straining mental health care.

“Despite repeated assurances that veterans' suicide prevention and mental health are clinical priorities, VA mental health services are short-staffed across the system,” Lemle said. “There are over 1,400 vacant positions for VA psychologists. As long as they remain unfilled, there will be tens of thousands of fewer available appointments weekly, and more burdens placed on existing staff to meet demand. Mental health care is one of the VA’s crown jewels. It must be wholly supported.”

The report concludes with an alternative agenda for the VA — a series of commonsense solutions to address staffing shortages, improve and expand services, end the outsourcing of VA work to the private sector, and ensure the integrity and vitality of both the VHA and VBA for generations to come.

VHPI will be hosting an hour-long Zoom forum to discuss the report on **April 11 at noon PST/3 p.m. EST**. Those interested in attending the forum can sign up [here](#).