

# Review and List Of Communication Principles and Elements to Use Before, During, and After a Pandemic

## General Communication Principles

VA communications will be carried out in accordance with existing VA public affairs policy and guidance and will include the following principles in communicating before, during, and after the pandemic period:

- Aim for maximum disclosure with minimum delay.
- Be consistent ("speak with one voice") as well as timely, accurate, and appropriate.
- Provide regular and direct information about what is known and not known.
- Keep all key stakeholders informed and engaged: staff, veterans, and stakeholders external to VA.
- Employ multiple channels and formats for information.
- Be clear and use plain language.

## **Emergency Risk Communication Principles**

VA communications will use other principles in addition, particularly during a response to a pandemic, which are derived from emergency risk communications practice, such as:

- Use streamlined approval processes that enable accurate but rapid information.
- Provide information frequently and proactively.
- Listen to assess understanding, answer questions and concerns, and seek input and ideas.
- Be open and transparent.
- Seek information on and address rumors, inaccuracies, and misperceptions.
- Minimize stigmatization.
- Acknowledge anxiety, grief, and stress.
- Give people things that they can do.

#### Stakeholders

A wide array of individuals and organizations are concerned with VA and its actions before and during a pandemic. VA communication planning and actions will take into account as many of these stakeholders as possible.

#### **Internal Stakeholders**

- Every VA staff member, including those in
  - o Central Office
  - Veterans Health Administration
  - o Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)
  - o National Cemetery Administration
  - Veterans Integrated Service Network Offices
  - Medical centers
  - o Community based outpatient clinics, nursing homes, domiciliaries
  - o Readjustment counseling (vet) centers
  - VBA Area Offices
  - o Regional Offices (VBA benefits offices)

- o Memorial Network Offices
- National cemeteries
- VA leadership, including the
  - o Office of the Secretary and key staff
  - o Offices of the Under Secretaries for Health, Benefits, and Memorial Affairs and key staff
- VA clinical staff, including doctors, nurses, and other health care providers
- VA nonclinical staff in health settings
- VA contract staff
- Staff in special positions such as residents and interns
- Volunteers
- Unions
- VA chartered advisory committees
- Telephone operators
- VA emergency planners
- VA security and police staff
- VA Canteen Service
- VA Franchise Fund/VA Enterprise Centers
- VA public affairs officers and professional and patient educators and trainers

## Veteran Stakeholder Groups

- Veterans enrolled in VA health care or served by VBA or NCA
- Veterans in general, from the oldest veterans (World War I) to the newest (veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom)
- Families of veterans parents, children, spouses, significant others
- Veterans Service Organizations national, state, and local
- Veterans Service Officers local and state
- County veteran service officers

### **External Stakeholders**

- The White House
- · Congress and Congressional Staffs
- Other Federal health care systems
  - o Indian Health Service
  - o Department of Defense/military health care system
  - o Bureau of Prisons health care system
- Other Federal Agencies
  - Department of Health and Human Services, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and other components
  - Department of Defense
  - o Department of State
  - o Department of Homeland Security
- State government officials, including health and veterans affairs departments, and state legislators
- Local government officials
- Indian tribes
- National Guard units
- Community public health departments, health facilities, and health care providers
- Private sector health care and community partners
- Academic affiliates of VA medical centers (i.e., universities)
- Vendors (pharmaceutical firms, suppliers)
- VA building tenants and tenant organizations

- · Local law enforcement
- Local emergency management and response
- The media print, Internet, television, and radio at the international, national and local levels

## Channels for Reaching Stakeholders

VA will use a variety of channels to communicate both before and during a pandemic to insure that its many concerned stakeholders are reached. Channels of communication during a pandemic will need to include those that can be used rapidly and reach people in nontraditional ways. During a pandemic, traditional channels may work for parts of the country or community not currently affected by the pandemic and others may work for parts of the country or community that are affected. Information needed to access these channels should be up to date (for example, email lists, phone numbers). Communications channels include:

- Email (individual as well as Outlook groups)
- Internet (and VA Intranet from VA computers only)
- Telephone hotlines, conference calls, recorded messages for incoming calls, recorded messages for outgoing calls, call trees (cascades or call down systems)
- Satellite conferences/videoconferences
- Meetings small to large, including all-employee or "town hall" meetings that may involve staff or the community or both
- Media briefings face to face, phone, videoconference
- Faxes
- Mailings (of letters, postcards, trifolds, notices)
- Printed materials (such as brochures, fact sheets, wallet cards, pocket cards, flyers, trifolds, posters, notices, tent cards, tray liners)
- Newsletters and magazines
- Public service announcements (via print, Web, radio, TV)
- · Public address system
- · Closed circuit TV
- Employee home email and home phone numbers
- Ham radio system based on collaboration of VA facilities and ham radio clubs throughout country
- Employee email/telephone tree system for each organization and facility
- Commercial radio/TV public service air time
- Emergency contact call/email list (national and local) for national and local veteran service organizations, local military installations, public safety organizations, public health organizations, health facilities outside VA, municipal governments

#### Communication Tools/Vehicles

VA will use a variety of tools that will be employed to describe pandemic influenza, what individuals can do, and what VA is doing to prepare, and in the event of a pandemic, to provide this information plus updates on VA responses and status. Of the list below, tools most useful in a pandemic will be those that can be used quickly and widely. Materials and templates that have been prepared in advance will help speed up the process of providing information. Templates can also help ensure consistency of messages.

- Vanguard magazine (4-8 week lead time needed)
- Hey VA all-employee daily email/intranet messages
- Earnings and leave statement messages (2 or longer week lead time needed)
- VA Internet National VA site and MyHealtheVet

- VA Intranet
- VA Knowledge Network satellite TV system programming VA News, The American Veteran, public service announcements, education programs, including those with audience questions and answers
- VA Content Delivery System (i.e., posted video material on demand)
- Brochures, posters, fact sheets, trifolds (produced centrally and locally and shared via email)
- Organizational channels
- Management communications channels: VA headquarter program offices and administrations down to and up from regional and local levels via conference calls, meetings, newsletters, email
- Management communications channels at mid-level and local facility levels newsletters, email, web sites
- Cross disciplinary communications channels, e.g., for infection control professionals, occupational health, public affairs, prevention managers via conference calls, meetings, newsletters, email
- Education and training programs in person, by phone, by teleconference, and Web-based
- Facility level town hall meetings (hosted by director with involvement of facility and community experts and local veterans, media, and community), health fairs, planning meetings, participation in local meetings of first responder and health organizations communications channels at national, state and local levels
- Veteran services organizations at national state, and local levels newsletters, Web sites, email, meetings, gatherings, annual and other regular conferences and events
- News media at national and local levels and print, Web-based, TV, and radio via briefings, public service ads and announcements
- VA Canteen Service posters, tray liners, etc.

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