Commemorate Black History Month

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) joins the Nation in observing Black History Month this February. The observance of African American/Black History Month was established by Public Law 99-244. This observance runs through the month of February and celebrates the contributions of African Americans to our Nation. As established by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, “the 2019 theme Black Migrations emphasizes the movement of people of African descent to new destinations and subsequently to new social realities. While inclusive of earlier centuries, this theme focuses especially on the twentieth century through today. Beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century, African American migration patterns included relocation from southern farms to southern cities; from the South to the Northeast, Midwest, and West; from the Caribbean to U.S. cities as well as to migrant labor farms; and the emigration of noted African Americans to Africa and to European cities, such as Paris and London, after the end of World War I and World War II.”

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ORM
Steps Toward Conflict Resolution

Callers can REACH to the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) using the new number, 1-888-566-3982 (TDD: 1-888-626-9008), and speak with a specialist regarding Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint Processing, Alternative Dispute Resolution, and the Harassment Prevention Program. REACH to ORM is available from 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. in all time zones. To file a discrimination or harassment complaint, you must contact ORM within 45 calendar days of the date of the alleged discriminatory incident.
VA Launches Welcome Kit

**Kit Guides Veterans to the Benefits and Services They’ve Earned**

VA’s onboarding process can be overwhelming at times. Veterans who have visited a VA outreach booth, VA eligibility office, or have gone through a Transition Assistance Program know that VA has no shortage of technical handouts, benefits books and materials. But, even with all of these resources, Veterans are still asking, “Where do I start?”

Now, VA employees can point all Veterans to the VA Welcome Kit available online at [https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit](https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit). The kit is now available on Vets.gov and will soon be sent to all separating service members as part of VA’s existing welcome home process. Download your VA Welcome Kit and print out copies for yourself and others.

The Veterans Experience Office created the kit using human-centered design principles, including the feedback of more than 150 Veterans throughout the country. The guide will continue to be updated based on additional feedback and information.

Based on where they are in life, Veterans are supported by VA benefits and services in different ways. Whether an individual is just getting out of the service or has been a civilian for years now, the VA Welcome Kit can help guide a Veteran to the benefits and services he or she has earned. Veterans can turn to it throughout their lives—like when it’s time to go to school, get a job, buy a house, get health care, retire, or make plans for their care as they age.

Keep this welcome kit handy and feel free to share it with friends or family members who need help with their benefits, too.

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VA Team Works to Improve Services for Growing Populations

**Bilingual Communications Project Team Responds to the Demand for Spanish-Language Call Options**

When a VA Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) team was tasked with improving the effectiveness and accessibility of the VA Benefits and Services customer call service for Spanish-speaking callers, its members sought opportunities to make sure the toll-free number offers a Spanish-language option in a timely manner. The Bilingual Communications Project team discovered it took nearly 60 seconds for a caller to receive the option to speak with a Spanish-speaking individual and that the call menu was offered in English only.

Research also revealed that about one percent of callers request the Spanish-speaking option, but that percentage will likely increase—especially if Spanish menu options are immediately offered. In just six months, from October 2016 to April 2017, the number of calls directed to Spanish-speaking call service representatives increased from 468 to 1,480. In addition, VA’s 2015 Minority Veterans Report reveals that the number of Hispanic Veterans will likely double in the next 30 years.

The Bilingual Communications Project team responded to the demand for Spanish-language call options by producing a white paper outlining its research and the business case and recommendations for improving the call number’s user experience for Spanish-speaking callers. This was the big first step VA needed, and by documenting problems and solutions and recommending next steps, the team positioned the project for implementation.

So far, VBA and VHA have presented the research findings to officials throughout VA, showing the increasing need for a timely Spanish-speaking option for the toll-free number. The Bilingual Communications Project demonstrates VA’s commitment to inclusive communications with Veterans and their families. The ELP team has created momentum within VA for the Spanish-speaking community. Due to this, project plans have been put into place throughout VA to not only implement this project, but also to begin translation of formal documents, and develop a quality review team to monitor incoming bilingual calls to ensure everyone is getting the best service possible.

Learn more about the project by visiting the [2017 Bilingual Communications Project’s VA Pulse group](https://www.va.gov/2017-bilingual-communications-project-va-pulse-group).
Chinese-American World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act

Act Awards Congressional Gold Medal Collectively to Chinese-American Veterans

On Tuesday, January 29, 2019, VA Central Office hosted the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Chinese-American World War II Veterans Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230.

VA General Counsel James Byrne, performing the duties of Deputy Secretary, provided the introductory remarks. These were followed by remarks from five World War II Veterans: James L. Eng (U.S. Navy 1944-1946), Harry Jung (U.S. Army 1942-1945), Henry (Hank) Lee (U.S. Army 1946-1949), Robert M. Lee (U.S. Army Air Corps 1944-1946), and Elsie C.Y. Seetoo (U.S. Army Nurse Corps 1944-1946). The Honorable Secretary Elaine L. Chao, U.S. Department of Transportation, then provided the keynote remarks.

On December 20, 2018, President Trump signed into law the Chinese-American World War II Veteran Congressional Gold Medal Act, which had been passed unanimously on September 12, 2018, by the U.S. Senate (S. 1050) and unanimously on December 12, 2018, by the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 2358). The bill passed the House five days before the 75th anniversary of the 1943 Magnuson Act, which repealed the regrettable Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

By 1941, over 100,000 Chinese-Americans had immigrated to the United States. Before the Magnuson Act, the Chinese-American community faced widespread discrimination, in part due to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which restricted immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. More than 20,000 brave Chinese-American men and women rose to serve the country from every state in the union, in every theater of battle, and in each branch of the armed services. Many earned citations for their heroism and honorable duty to our nation.

The congressional bills, H.R. 2358 and S. 1050, were championed through the legislative process with support from the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (C.A.C.A.) and Veterans’ organizations across the country.

The Honorable Secretary Elaine L. Chao, U.S. Department of Transportation, VA General Counsel James Byrne, performing the duties of Deputy Secretary, and World War II Veterans James L. Eng, Harry Jung, Henry (Hank) Lee, Robert M. Lee, and Elsie C.Y. Seetoo (above).
"Such migrations resulted in a more diverse and stratified interracial and intra-racial urban population amid a changing social milieu, such as the rise of the Garvey movement in New York, Detroit, and New Orleans; the emergence of both black industrial workers and black entrepreneurs; the growing number and variety of urban churches and new religions; new music forms like ragtime, blues, and jazz; white backlash as in the Red Summer of 1919; the blossoming of visual and literary arts, as in New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Paris in the 1910s and 1920s. The theme Black Migrations equally lends itself to the exploration of the century's later decades from spatial and social perspectives, with attention to ‘new’ African Americans because of the burgeoning African and Caribbean population in the U.S.; Northern African Americans’ return to the South; racial suburbanization; inner-city hyperghettoization; health and environment; civil rights and protest activism; electoral politics; mass incarceration; and dynamic cultural production.” (https://asalh.org/project/asalh-announces-2019-black-history-theme-black-migrations)

Join the Blacks In Government (BIG) VA Headquarters Chapter as VA Central Office observes Black History Month on Thursday, February 14, 2019, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, from noon to 1 pm (ET). Mr. Stephen Dillard, Executive Director, Center for Minority Veterans, will serve as the senior host. Lieutenant General Gwen Bingham, Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, will be the guest speaker. The Honorable Robert Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, will provide special remarks. For more information, contact Mr. Dwayne Mitchell, President, BIG VA Headquarters Chapter, at Dwayne.Mitchell@va.gov; Ms. Renaee Allen, Program and Planning Chair, BIG VA Headquarters Chapter, at Renaee.Allen@va.gov; or Ms. Tynnetta Lee, VA’s National Black Employment Program Manager, at Tynnetta.Lee@va.gov. For more information on VA’s Nationals Black Employment Program, visit https://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/aa.aspx.

Customer Experience Strategy Officer Identified
Ms. Jolisa Webb Dudley Named to Head Customer Service Component

As part of the Secretary’s commitment to excellence in customer service, Ms. Jolisa Webb Dudley has been named the Customer Experience (CX) Strategy Officer for the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). Ms. Dudley will lead, build, and drive ODI and ORM initiatives utilizing the core CX capabilities and framework VA-wide. Additionally, she will facilitate the delivery of brandable, differentiated, and human-centered CX strategies across the enterprise.