

## Department of Veterans Affairs Our commitment to Veterans

**Rebuilding trust.** On July 31, 2014, the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert McDonald delivered a videotaped message to all Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees making clear his intention to rebuild trust with Veterans and other Stakeholders in the VA, in part, by increasing transparency, and holding people accountable. On August 22, 2014, he followed that message up with a directive that required every VA employee reaffirm their commitment to the VA values—integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence (ICARE). Further, Secretary McDonald reminded all employees that, in addition to demonstration of VA ICARE values, failure to adhere to ethical, legal, and/or professional standards of conduct will be considered as factors when evaluating performance.

**Responsibility at all levels.** VA is firmly committed to ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability throughout its rating and performance evaluation processes in all we do in VA to serve our Nation's Veterans. Secretary McDonald has described his vision for accountability in VA to all employees through a message on August 28, 2014. "Sustainable accountability" is a collaborative process where supervisors provide feedback, every day, and employees fulfill their responsibility to Veterans and to the Department to provide feedback and input on how we can better serve Veterans. Sustainable accountability means ensuring all employees understand how their daily work supports our mission, values and strategy.

As we confront our challenges in VA, it is essential to empower all employees to speak up when they see wrongdoing and protect them from unlawful retaliation. On June 4, 2014, VA's Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration announced new procedures to ensure that managers and supervisors are held accountable for discrimination or retaliation against employees. Moreover, Senior Executives whose conduct is under review for unlawful discrimination, retaliation, or other misconduct may have their performance evaluation deferred.

**Enhanced accountability.** By September 30, 2014, agencies must publicly post the procedure that has been put in place to consider conduct, as appropriate, when providing performance awards to SES, SL and ST officials. In August 2014, Secretary McDonald signed a new VA policy on accountability in accordance with provisions in the recently passed Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA). This new VA policy streamlines the process for removing senior executives for misconduct or poor performance when removal is in the best interest of Veterans.

VA is providing the following further information about the performance appraisal process for SES, SL and ST employees:

1. Rating assessments must be based on the evidence of performance against the written performance requirements or standards issued for the position with respect to the relevant rating period. Within that framework, all relevant factors of performance, applying the position specific performance elements and their relationship to organizational and individual performance results, must be considered, as appropriate, when assessing performance. If misconduct is related to or has impacted performance during the relevant appraisal period, the available evidence of such misconduct must be considered when assessing performance.

2. The Performance Review Board will be provided, and must take into account the impact of, any documented misconduct on the executive's performance during the relevant appraisal period when making recommendations on appraisals and performance awards.

3. Final rating and award decisions are solely the authority of the Secretary. All performance awards will be based on final performance ratings, whether the rating is derived solely on performance, or is the result of performance where misconduct has impacted the final performance assessment.

For additional information on VA's Senior Executive Performance Management Policies and Procedures, please contact Kia Williams at [Kia.Williams@va.gov](mailto:Kia.Williams@va.gov) or 202-461-5394.