

As required by the [Federal Agency Climate Change Adaptation Planning Implementing Instructions](#), the Department of Veterans Affairs is releasing a statement that commits the Department to addressing the impacts climate change may have on its operations and assets through adaptation planning.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Policy Statement on Climate-Change Adaptation

Purpose

As required by the [Federal Agency Climate Change Adaptation Implementing Instructions](#), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is releasing this policy statement that commits the Department to addressing the impacts of climate change on its operations, assets, and most importantly, America's Veterans.

Background

On October 5, 2009, President Obama signed [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 13514, Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance](#). E.O. 13514 expanded the Federal Government's role as stewards of the environment and our natural resources. The order calls for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, fossil fuel and water use, and other important actions – all of which will help to build a clean energy economy and mitigate climate change.

The climate is changing at an unprecedented pace. Numerous scientific panels, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. Global Change Research Program, have published data about ways climate change is *already* negatively impacting nearly every part of our nation.

Americans increasingly face hazards linked to climate change. For instance, nearly every night on the news we are informed about extreme weather conditions and events such as persistent wildfires in the Southwest to blizzards in the Northeast, from hurricanes that batter the Gulf Coast to floods and tornadoes in the Midwest. In the future, scientists predict increases in the severity and frequency of these weather-related events; changes in incidences and ranges of infectious diseases; and threats to coastal communities from rising sea levels.

Vision

As the second-largest Federal agency, VA's primary responsibility is to care for America's Veterans, their families and survivors. In order to continue providing Veterans with the best health care and benefit services, VA must adapt to climate change. VA understands that climate change will affect America's Veterans, which like America's general population, is aging. To this end, VA will assess and respond to the challenges that a changing climate poses to its ability to serve and honor America's Veterans. VA will adopt the [Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force Guiding Principles](#), which will inform its adaptation strategy.

The impact of climate change on human health and infrastructure will pose the greatest challenges to VA. Health-related impacts of climate change will be particularly felt by the most vulnerable among our Veteran population: those with existing health conditions, the elderly, the poor, and those who live in high-risk geographic areas.

VA is already working to improve its infrastructure by renovating aging facilities and building new medical centers in underserved areas. VA is committed to taking all steps necessary to strengthen its infrastructure and institutional capacity so that VA will continue to serve all Veterans, especially those least able to help themselves, during these challenging and uncertain times.

Coordination and Implementation

Adapting to climate change in an agency as large and diverse as VA will not be easy. VA will tailor its climate change adaptation strategy and planning so that each of VA's three administrations, the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration, and National Cemetery Administration, are able to adapt to climate change.

Over the next year, VA will analyze how climate change may impact its ability to serve Veterans, their families and survivors. The climate change adaptation policy will complement and build upon VA's [Strategic Sustainability Performance Plan](#). Specifically, VA will:

- Collect and analyze existing and emerging scientific data,
- Identify risks and vulnerabilities,
- Assess its organizational capacity to adapt to both short- and long-term climate threats,
- Prioritize responses given threat severity,
- Continue to integrate sustainability considerations into decision-making,
- Collaborate with other agencies to share best-practices, and
- Increase employee awareness through its [VA Green Routine](#) initiative.

Conclusion

While VA is just beginning to assess and respond to the challenges posed by climate change, its efforts to incorporate sustainability are not new. VA will build upon its previous sustainability successes to adapt to climate change. Despite an uncertain future, VA will continue to provide high-quality care and services to America's Veterans and their families and survivors.

/s/Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs