

VA PRIVACY SERVICE



WHO WE ARE...

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the second largest Federal Cabinet. It operates one of the largest healthcare organizations in the world and provides nationwide programs for financial assistance and burial benefits. VA has over 230,000 employees and maintains records on over 26,000,000 veterans, one third of which receive VA services and benefits. In July 2002, the VA Privacy Service was established to take the lead in protecting the confidentiality of veteran and employee data. We oversee all privacy efforts within VA and ensure all privacy laws are applied consistently throughout the Department. Our programs, products, policies, and procedures are developed centrally and implemented nationally by field-level privacy officers. Our customer base includes VA's three administrations – the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA); staff offices; Federal and state partners; business partners, and veterans.

WHAT WE DO...

Outreach and Communication

- Implement a comprehensive outreach and marketing program that includes posters, brochures, marketing material, and agency-wide emails to raise awareness about privacy issues.
- Conduct periodic privacy awareness surveys of a cross-section of VA employees around the country to measure the effectiveness of our activities and to identify emerging issues, communication needs, and preferences.
- Participate on the Federal Privacy Council and exchange information and lessons learned with other government agencies.
- Convene regular meeting with representatives from VA's administrations and staff offices to provide guidance and collect feedback on our programs.
- Conduct periodic employee focus groups to examine and clarify findings from the privacy awareness surveys.
- Develop and maintain a web-based portal to interface with VA's field-level privacy officer community.

Training

- Manage the annual privacy awareness training program, which is an integrated part of the Department's learning management system. This training is available on-line or via video and complements the more specialized training VHA provides to clinicians.
- Develop and deploy specialized privacy awareness training for privacy officers, program managers, and senior management.

Assurance

- Conduct periodic risk assessments to identify areas of privacy-related vulnerabilities and risks that are common across VA administrations. Then, we develop VA-wide solutions to mitigate common VA-wide risks.
- Review and approve Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs) for all Information Technology initiatives. PIAs enable privacy to be fully integrated into the VA investment lifecycle.
- Record and track all privacy violation allegations related to personal health information, and document the resolution. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires a covered entity (in VA, the covered entity is VHA) to document privacy complaints. The Privacy Violation Tracking System (PVTs) is used to track all VA privacy (HIPAA and non-HIPAA) complaints.

Policy

- Ensure VA's compliance with applicable legal and regulatory privacy requirements.
- Promulgate Department-level privacy policy, procedures, and guidelines that implement federal laws and regulations.

SOME FUTURE INITIATIVES...

- The professionalization of privacy officers and the development of an integrated, comprehensive, and enterprise-wide management of privacy-relevant data, processes, and business operations.

PRIVACYSERVICE@VA.GOV

202-273-5070