



US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Office of Healthcare Inspections

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Inspection of Select Vet Centers in North Atlantic District 1 Zone 3

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Report Overview

The purpose of the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) Vet Center Inspection Program is to provide a focused evaluation of the quality of care delivered at vet centers. Vet centers are community-based facilities that offer a wide range of psychosocial services to clients, including eligible veterans, to support a successful transition from military to civilian life.¹

Vet center inspections are one element of the OIG's oversight to ensure the nation's veterans receive high-quality and timely mental health care and VA services. The inspections evaluate key clinical and administrative processes associated with promoting quality care and service delivery at vet centers as set forth by Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 1500(4), *Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS)*.²

The OIG announced the inspection to district leaders on June 9, 2025, and conducted subsequent on-site and virtual visits from June 10 through July 1, 2025. The inspection also included a retroactive review of vet center operations from October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024. The OIG randomly selected three vet centers throughout North Atlantic District 1 zone 3: Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak, Pennsylvania.³

The inspection included four review areas:

- Suicide prevention
- Consultation, supervision, and training
- Outreach
- Environment of care

The findings presented in this report are a snapshot of the selected vet centers' performance within the identified review areas at the time of the OIG's inspection. The findings should help

¹ To be consistent with Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) policy and terminology, the OIG refers to veterans receiving readjustment services as *clients* in this report.

² VHA Directive 1500(3), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, January 26, 2021, amended June 5, 2023, was in effect during part of the OIG's inspection period. It was replaced by VHA Directive 1500(4), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, January 26, 2021, amended November 21, 2023. This directive was replaced by VHA Directive 1500(5), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, January 26, 2021, amended March 3, 2025. Unless otherwise specified, the requirements in the directives contain the same or similar language. As a result, the OIG references VHA Directive 1500(4) throughout this report. Vet centers provide counseling for readjustment concerns related to specific types of military deployment stressors. "Readjustment counseling services are designed by law to be provided without a medical diagnosis." Therefore, individuals receiving readjustment services are not considered patients.

³ RCS is divided into five districts. Each district consists of two to four zones. Each zone consists of 16 to 24 vet centers.

vet centers to identify areas of vulnerability or conditions that if addressed could improve safety, accessibility, and quality of care.

Review Topics and Inspection Results

Suicide Prevention

The OIG found all three vet center directors (VCDs) ensured the attendance of a licensed provider at the supporting VA medical facility's mental health executive council meetings as required by VHA Directive 1160.01, *Uniform Mental Health Services in VHA Medical Points of Service* and VHA Directive 1500(4).⁴ Staff at all three vet centers documented all client contacts and outcomes in the [high risk suicide flag \(HRSF\) SharePoint site](#) as required by Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Services, "High Risk Suicide Flag Outreach," memorandum to all vet center staff.⁵

The OIG made no recommendations related to suicide prevention.

Consultation, Supervision, and Training

As required by VHA Directive 1500(4), the OIG found all three vet centers had an assigned [clinical liaison](#) and [independently licensed mental health external clinical consultant](#) from a supporting VA medical facility.⁶ In addition, all three VCDs completed monthly reviews of 10 percent of each counselor's client records.⁷ Although external clinical consultation for clinically complex cases occurred at all three vet centers, the Lancaster VCD did not ensure completion of at least four hours of external clinical consultation per month.⁸ Staff at all three vet centers completed select required training related to suicide prevention, military sexual trauma,

⁴ VHA Directive 1160.01, *Uniform Mental Health Services in VHA Medical Points of Service*, April 27, 2023, contains a mental health executive council requirement with a purpose focused on ensuring "the delivery of high-quality Veteran mental health care that is evidence-based and responsive to Veterans' preferences"; VHA Directive 1500(4). RCS requires a licensed vet center staff member to participate on all supporting VA medical facility mental health executive council meetings to assist with care coordination and collaboration for clients.

⁵ On May 11, 2020, RCS implemented a HRSF SharePoint site containing names of RCS clients who also receive services at a VA medical facility and have a high risk for suicide flag; Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Services, "High Risk Suicide Flag Outreach," memorandum to all vet center staff, April 27, 2020. RCS staff confirmed as of June 2021, the SharePoint site was expanded to include Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET) data. VA's REACH VET is a predictive analytics program developed to determine veterans who have a higher risk for suicide; The underlined terms are hyperlinks to additional information. To return from the linked information, press and hold the "alt" and "left arrow" keys together.

⁶ VHA Directive 1500(4). Each vet center aligns with a VA medical facility to ensure access to clinical services and coordination of care for shared clients.

⁷ VHA Directive 1500(4).

⁸ VHA Directive 1500(4).

and basic life support; however, staff at the White Oak Vet Center did not complete required lethal means training.⁹

The OIG issued two recommendations to district leaders and Lancaster and White Oak VCDs specific to completion of four hours of monthly external clinical consultation, and training of counselors.

Outreach

The OIG found all three vet centers had [outreach plans](#) to engage eligible veterans and their families and promote relationships with community partners and stakeholders. However, each plan lacked one or more required strategic components required by VHA Directive 1500(4). The OIG was unable to evaluate if outreach activities were tailored to the eligible population in the veterans service area in the Lancaster Vet Center outreach plan because this component was not included in the plan.¹⁰

The OIG issued one recommendation to district leaders and the Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak VCDs specific to outreach plans containing all required components.

Environment of Care

The OIG reviewed the requirements identified in the RCS, *Administrative Site Visit (ASV) Protocol* and found all three vet centers had a fire or safety inspection completed annually, fire extinguishers inspected monthly and serviced annually, an [automated external defibrillator](#) on-site that was inspected monthly and serviced annually by VA medical

⁹ VA Secretary, “Agency-Wide Required Suicide Prevention Training,” memorandum to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials, October 15, 2020; VHA Directive 1071(1), *Mandatory Suicide Risk and Intervention Training*, May 11, 2022, amended June 21, 2022; Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services/Chief Medical Officer (CMO), “Lethal Means Safety (LMS) Education and Counseling,” memorandum to Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Director (10N1-23), Medical Center Directors (00), VISN CMOs (10N1-23), VISN Chief Mental Health Officers (10N1-23), Readjustment Counseling Services (RCS) District Directors, RCS Deputy District Directors VISN CMOs (10N1-23), March 17, 2022; VHA Directive 1115.01(1), *Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Mandatory Training and Reporting Requirements for VHA Mental Health and Primary Care Providers*, April 14, 2017, amended May 8, 2020. This directive was in place during the time of the events discussed in this report. It was rescinded and replaced by VHA Directive 1115.01(1), *Military Sexual Trauma Mandatory Training Requirements*, July 15, 2024, amended March 7, 2025; VHA Directive 1177, *Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation*, January 4, 2021.

¹⁰ VHA Directive 1500(4). Required strategic components include: a strategic map of the vet center veterans service area identifying eligible population concentrations; strategic coordination with mobile vet center operations; background information of the local eligible communities; personal points of contact for non-VA service providers; and strategic VA medical facility partners including clinical and administrative liaisons, the external clinical consultant, the suicide prevention coordinator, and the facility contact for the prevention and management of disruptive behavior coordinator. RCS requires the outreach activities to be tailored to eligible individuals.

center biomedical engineering, a building evacuation plan posted in a communal area, and a crisis and emergency plan with all required components.¹¹

At the time of the inspection, the OIG found none of the three vet centers had VA police or local law enforcement complete annual risk and vulnerability assessments.¹² In early 2025, the OIG identified inconsistency between the RCS administrative site visit protocol requirement for an annual risk and vulnerability assessment and VA police guidance and issued a recommendation related to assessment frequency to the RCS Chief Officer.¹³ Subsequently, in October 2025, RCS eliminated the annual requirement and aligned risk and vulnerability assessment frequency with VHA policy; therefore, the OIG did not make a recommendation.

The OIG made no recommendations related to environment of care.

Conclusion

The OIG conducted a focused inspection in four review areas and made three recommendations to the District Director and the Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak VCDs. These recommendations are intended to be used as a road map to help improve operations and clinical care. The recommendations address systems' issues and site-specific findings that may compromise quality care.

The OIG is aware of VA's transformation in VHA's management structure. The OIG will monitor implementation and focus its oversight efforts on the effectiveness and efficiencies of programs and services that improve the health and welfare of veterans and their families.

VA Comments and OIG Response

On February 9, 2026, the Chief Readjustment Counseling Officer and District Director concurred with the findings and recommendations and provided an acceptable action plan (see appendixes B and C). District leaders reviewed requirements and developed processes to ensure compliance

¹¹ RCS, *Administrative Site Visit (ASV) Protocol*. Vet centers are required to have a fire or safety inspection and a risk and vulnerability assessment annually. The risk and vulnerability assessment must be completed by VA police or local law enforcement. Vet centers must also have fire extinguishers and an AED available for staff, both requiring annual servicing and monthly inspections to ensure proper functioning. RCS requires vet centers to have a current emergency and crisis plan that includes contingencies for the following: phone and computer disruptions; weather and natural disasters; site, facility, and building emergencies; site, facility, and building temporary relocation; management of disruptive behavior; violence in the workplace, including active shooter plan; and handling of suspicious mail and bomb threats. Additionally, RCS requires the posting of a building evacuation plan in a common area for staff and visitors to reference in case of an emergency.

¹² RCS, *ASV Protocol*.

¹³ VA OIG, [Inspection of Select Vet Centers in Midwest District 3 Zone 1](#), Report No. 24-00393-180, August 5, 2025. On October 6, 2025, the RCS Office of Policy and Oversight implemented a new vet center quality review protocol, which combines the administrative and clinical site visits and aligns risk and vulnerability assessment frequency with VHA policy.

with external clinical consultation and outreach plans with VCDs. Further, district leaders ensured staff are compliant with required training. Based on information provided, the OIG considers all three recommendations closed.



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Contents

Report Overview	i
Abbreviations	vii
Introduction.....	1
Scope and Methodology	2
Overall Findings.....	3
Suicide Prevention	3
Consultation, Supervision, and Training.....	5
Outreach	8
Environment of Care	10
Conclusion	12
Appendix A.....	13
Dubois Vet Center.....	13
Lancaster Vet Center.....	15
White Oak Vet Center.....	16
Appendix B: RCS Chief Readjustment Counseling Officer Memorandum	18
Appendix C: RCS North Atlantic District 1 Director Memorandum	19
Glossary	22
OIG Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	23
Report Distribution	24

Abbreviations

AED	automated external defibrillator
BLS	basic life support
HRSF	high risk suicide flag
OIG	Office of Inspector General
RCS	Readjustment Counseling Service
VCD	vet center director
VHA	Veterans Health Administration



Introduction

Oversight authority to review the programs and operations of VA medical facilities is authorized by the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, 5 U.S.C. §§ 401–424. The VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviews available evidence within a specified scope and methodology and makes recommendations to VA leadership if warranted. Findings and recommendations do not define a standard of care or establish legal liability.

The purpose of the OIG Vet Center Inspection Program is to conduct oversight of vet centers that provide readjustment services to clients.¹ The OIG reports findings to Congress and Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) leaders so informed decisions can be made to improve care.

RCS is an autonomous organizational element in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) with authority for and oversight of vet centers and the provision of readjustment counseling services. Vet centers are community-based facilities that provide a wide range of psychosocial services to clients to support a successful transition from military to civilian life.²

The OIG conducted this inspection in accordance with OIG standard operating procedures and *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* published by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

The OIG is aware of VA’s transformation in VHA’s management structure. The OIG will monitor implementation and focus its oversight efforts on the effectiveness and efficiencies of programs and services that improve the health and welfare of veterans and their families.

¹ VHA Directive 1500(3), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, January 26, 2021, amended June 5, 2023, was in effect during part of the OIG’s inspection period. It was replaced by VHA Directive 1500(4), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, January 26, 2021, amended November 21, 2023. This directive was replaced by VHA Directive 1500(5), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, January 26, 2021, amended March 3, 2025. Unless otherwise specified, the requirements in the directives contain the same or similar language. As a result, the OIG references VHA Directive 1500(4) throughout this report. Vet centers provide counseling for readjustment concerns related to specific types of military deployment stressors. According to VHA Directive 1500(4), “readjustment counseling services are designed by law to be provided without a medical diagnosis.” Therefore, individuals receiving readjustment services are not considered patients. To be consistent with Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) policy and terminology, the OIG refers to veterans receiving readjustment services as *clients* in this report.

² VHA Directive 1500(4). Vet center counselors provide readjustment counseling to assist clients with psychological and psychosocial readjustment.

Scope and Methodology

The OIG randomly selected district 1 and the following three vet centers in zone 3 for review: Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak, Pennsylvania (see figure 1).³

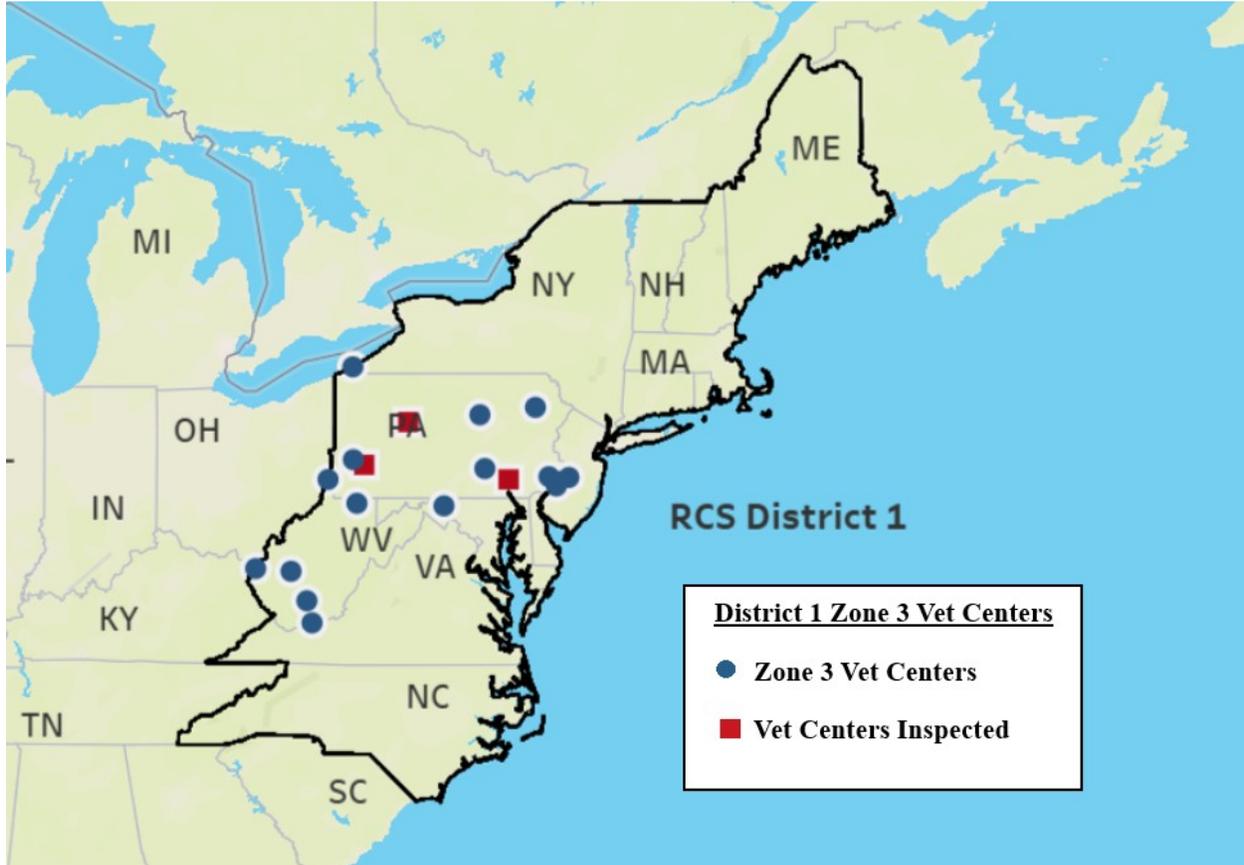


Figure 1. Map of North Atlantic District 1 zone 3 vet centers, including sites visited by the OIG.

Source: The OIG using RCS vet center data.

The OIG announced the inspection to district leaders on June 9, 2025, and conducted subsequent on-site and virtual visits from June 10 through July 1, 2025.⁴ The OIG inspection included a

³ RCS is divided into five districts. Each district consists of two to four zones. Each zone consists of 16 to 24 vet centers.

⁴ For the purposes of this report, the term “district leaders” refers to a combination of two or more of the following: district director, deputy district director, associate district director for counseling, and associate district director for administration.

retroactive review of vet center operations from October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024, in the following categories:⁵

- Suicide prevention
- Consultation, supervision, and training
- Outreach
- Environment of care

The OIG notified each selected vet center director (VCD) one day prior to the site visit. During the site visits, the inspection team interviewed VCDs and key staff and reviewed RCS practices and policies.

In the absence of current VA or VHA policy, the OIG considered previous guidance to be in effect until superseded by an updated or recertified directive, handbook, or other policy document on the same or similar issue(s).

Overall Findings

The OIG reviewed VHA and RCS requirements and below are the inspection findings for the three selected vet centers. For additional details related to specific site findings, select the vet center in the respective review table.

Suicide Prevention

Early identification of clients at high risk for suicide allows for the provision of enhanced services and may prevent ongoing suicidality.⁶ In an effort to reduce client risk for suicide and enhance care, each vet center aligns with a supporting VA medical facility.⁷ According to VHA Directive 1160.01, *Uniform Mental Health Services in VHA Medical Points of Service* and VHA Directive 1500(4), *Readjustment Counseling Service*, VHA and RCS staff members are required to participate in the supporting VA medical facility's mental health executive council meetings to coordinate the care of shared clients.⁸

⁵ The OIG review period was from October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024, (fiscal year 2024) unless otherwise noted.

⁶ VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, *Suicide Prevention Program Guide*, November 1, 2020.

⁷ VHA Directive 1500(4). Each vet center aligns with a supporting VA medical facility to ensure access to clinical services and coordination of care for shared clients.

⁸ VHA Directive 1160.01, *Uniform Mental Health Services in VHA Medical Points of Service*, April 27, 2023, contains the mental health executive council requirement with a purpose focused on ensuring "the delivery of high-quality Veteran mental health care that is evidence-based and responsive to Veterans' preferences"; VHA Directive 1500(4). RCS requires a licensed vet center staff member participate on all supporting VA medical facility mental health executive council meetings to assist with care coordination and collaboration for clients.

The [high risk suicide flag \(HRSF\) SharePoint site](#) is part of an RCS national process intended to increase communication and coordination with VHA to ensure identification of clients at risk for suicide and provide resources that may reduce client risk as required by Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Services, “High Risk Suicide Flag Outreach,” memorandum.⁹

Table 1. Suicide Prevention Results

 Compliant  Noncompliant RCS Requirement	Dubois Vet Center (supported by James E. Van Zandt Veterans Affairs Medical Center)	Lancaster Vet Center (supported by Lebanon VA Medical Center)	White Oak Vet Center (supported by VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System)
A licensed vet center staff member participates in all supporting VA medical facility mental health executive council meetings.*			
VCD ensures client contacts and outcomes are documented in the HRSF SharePoint site.‡			

Sources: VHA Directive 1500(4); VA Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service (10RCS); OIG analysis of vet center data.

*The OIG reviewed mental health executive council meeting documentation to evaluate if required vet center staff participated in the meeting.

‡The OIG reviewed client contacts and outcomes in the HRSF SharePoint site from June 2024 to September 2024.

The OIG found all three VCDs ensured a licensed staff member participated in all supporting VA medical facility mental health executive council meetings and staff documented client contacts and outcomes in the HRSF SharePoint site.

The OIG made no recommendations related to suicide prevention.

⁹ On May 11, 2020, RCS implemented a HRSF SharePoint site containing names of RCS clients who also receive services at a VA medical facility and have a high risk for suicide flag; Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Services, “High Risk Suicide Flag Outreach,” memorandum to all vet center staff, April 27, 2020. RCS staff confirmed as of June 2021, the SharePoint site was expanded to include Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health-Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET) data. VA’s REACH VET is a predictive analytics program developed to determine veterans who have a higher risk for suicide; The underlined terms are hyperlinks to additional information. To return from the linked information, press and hold the “alt” and “left arrow” keys together.

Consultation, Supervision, and Training

As required by VHA Directive 1500(4), consultation with an [independently licensed mental health external clinical consultant](#) on clinically complex or high risk cases improves client access to VA health care and ensures that counselors receive supervision through ongoing feedback regarding documentation, case planning, and compliance with RCS guidance and procedures.¹⁰ Mandatory training completion supports a competent and skilled staff to provide services to clients.¹¹

Reviewed training included

- Nonclinical staff
 - Initial or annual S.A.V.E. training [**S**igns of suicide, **A**sk about suicide, **V**alidate feelings, and **E**ncourage seeking help and **E**xpedited treatment] (as required by VA Secretary, “Agency-Wide Required Suicide Prevention Training,” memorandum and VHA Directive 1071(1), *Mandatory Suicide Risk and Intervention Training*)¹²
- Clinical Staff
 - Initial or annual suicide risk management training (as required by the VA Secretary, “Agency-Wide Required Suicide Prevention Training,” memorandum)¹³
 - One-time lethal means safety education and counseling (as required by the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services/Chief Medical Officer

¹⁰ VHA Directive 1500(4).

¹¹ VHA Directive 1052, *Appropriate and Effective Use of VHA Employee Mandatory and Required Training*, June 29, 2018.

¹² VA Secretary, “Agency-Wide Required Suicide Prevention Training,” memorandum to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials, October 15, 2020; VHA Directive 1071(1), *Mandatory Suicide Risk and Intervention Training*, May 11, 2022, amended June 21, 2022. Vet center nonclinical staff include a veterans outreach program specialist and program support assistant or office manager.

¹³ VA Secretary, “Agency-Wide Required Suicide Prevention Training,” memorandum; Skills training for evaluation and management of suicide completion is required within 90 days of hire for new clinical providers and annually for current clinical providers. VHA considers clinical staff to include psychologists, social workers, case managers, and vet center counselors; VHA Directive 1071(1).

(CMO), “Lethal Means Safety (LMS) Education and Counseling,” memorandum)¹⁴

- One-time military sexual trauma training (as required by VHA Directive 1115.01 (1), *Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Mandatory Training and Reporting Requirements for VHA Mental Health and Primary Care Providers*)¹⁵
- All staff
 - Biannual basic life support (BLS) certification (as required VHA Directive 1177, *Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation*)¹⁶

¹⁴ Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services/Chief Medical Officer (CMO), “Lethal Means Safety (LMS) Education and Counseling,” memorandum to Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Director (10N1-23), Medical Center Directors (00), VISN CMOs (10N1-23), VISN Chief Mental Health Officers (10N1-23), Readjustment Counseling Services (RCS) District Directors, RCS Deputy District Directors VISN CMOs (10N1-23), March 17, 2022. Lethal Means Safety Education and Counseling training completion is required within 90 days of entering the position for new clinical providers or within 90 days of training assignment for current clinical providers.

¹⁵ VHA Directive 1115.01(1), *Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Mandatory Training and Reporting Requirements for VHA Mental Health and Primary Care Providers*, April 14, 2017, amended May 8, 2020. This directive was in place during the time of the events discussed in this report. It was rescinded and replaced by VHA Directive 1115.01(1), *Military Sexual Trauma Mandatory Training Requirements*, July 15, 2024, amended March 7, 2025. The two directives contain the same or similar requirements for training. Military sexual trauma training completion is required within 90 days of entering the position for clinical providers or “a provider must have completed the assigned training program (or passed the test-out, if applicable) in TMS [Talent Management System], or have time remaining until the assignment due date.”

¹⁶ VHA Directive 1177, *Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation*, January 4, 2021. Any VA healthcare provider actively participating in direct patient care must maintain BLS training. The OIG was informed by an RCS leader that all RCS staff are required to complete BLS training biannually.

Table 2. Consultation, Supervision, and Training Results

 Compliant  Noncompliant RCS Requirement	<u>Dubois Vet Center</u>	<u>Lancaster Vet Center</u>	<u>White Oak Vet Center</u>
Consultation: Assignment of a <u>clinical liaison</u> .			
Consultation: Assignment of an independently licensed mental health external clinical consultant.			
Consultation: Completion of four hours of monthly external clinical consultation for clinically complex cases.			
Supervision: VCD monthly review of 10 percent of active client records for each counselor’s caseload.			
Training: Staff completion of select training in the required time frame.*			

Sources: VHA Directive 1500(4); VHA Directive 1115.01(1); VHA Memorandum, “Lethal Means Safety (LMS) Education and Counseling”; VA Memorandum, “Agency-Wide Required Suicide Prevention Training”; VHA Directive 1071(1); OIG analysis of vet center results.

*The OIG reviewed training records or BLS card copies and had findings with recommendations if one or more training elements were not completed within the required time frame. The OIG evaluated BLS training for all staff and evaluated annual training requirements for staff who had been employed prior to July 1, 2024. The OIG evaluated timeliness for completion of initial training for staff hired between October 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

The OIG found all three vet centers had an assigned clinical liaison and an independently licensed mental health external clinical consultant. Additionally, all three VCDs completed a monthly review of 10 percent of active client records for each counselor’s caseload.

In the identified areas, the VCDs reported the following explanations for noncompliance.

- *Completion of required four hours of monthly external clinical consultation:* Staff at the Lancaster Vet Center received consultation hours from a district leader instead of an external clinical consultant and the VCD was not aware this did not meet consultation requirements.

- *Completion of select staff training:* The White Oak VCD was aware of the requirement for new staff to complete training within 90 days but did not track the time frame.

The OIG made two recommendations related to consultation, supervision, and training.

Consultation, Supervision, and Training Recommendations

Recommendation 1

District leaders and the Lancaster Vet Center Director determine reasons for noncompliance with completing four hours of external clinical consultation for clinically complex cases per month, ensure a process is implemented to complete consultation requirements, and monitor compliance.

Recommendation 2

District leaders and the White Oak Vet Center Director determine reasons for noncompliance with employees completing select training in the required time frame, ensure completion, and monitor compliance.

Outreach

As required by VHA Directive 1500(4), each vet center must have an annual written [outreach plan](#) that identifies events to engage eligible veterans and their families and promote relationships with community partners and stakeholders.¹⁷

¹⁷ VHA Directive 1500(4).

Table 3. Outreach Results

 Compliant  Noncompliant RCS Requirement	<u>Dubois Vet Center</u>	<u>Lancaster Vet Center</u>	<u>White Oak Vet Center</u>
Presence of a written current outreach plan.			
Inclusion of required outreach plan strategic components.*			
Outreach activities tailored to eligible individuals.		NA [‡]	

Sources: VHA Directive 1500(4); OIG analysis of vet center results.

*The OIG reviewed outreach plan requirements including a strategic map of the vet center service area identifying eligible population concentrations, strategic coordination with mobile vet center operations, personal points of contact for non-VA service providers, and identification of all strategic VA medical facility partners.

[‡]NA indicates the OIG could not evaluate if outreach activities were tailored to eligible individuals in the veterans service area because the component was not included in the plan.

The OIG found that all vet centers had an outreach plan; however, only two of the three plans contained outreach activities tailored to eligible individuals in the vet center service area.¹⁸

In the identified area, the VCDs reported the following explanations for noncompliance.

- *Inclusion of required strategic components:* All three VCDs used a template provided by the district to complete their outreach plan; however, the template was missing some of the required outreach plan components. The VCDs were also unaware of the requirements and could not recall receiving any training specific to outreach plans.

The OIG made one recommendation related to outreach.

¹⁸ VHA Directive 1500(4).

Outreach Recommendation

Recommendation 3

District leaders and the Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak Vet Center Directors determine reasons for noncompliance with completion of an outreach plan with all required strategic components, ensure completion, and monitor compliance.

Environment of Care

Safety in the physical environment is essential for promoting effective therapeutic work and requires adherence to general safety and emergency preparedness standards.¹⁹ The OIG reviewed the requirements in table 4 as set forth by the RCS, *Administrative Site Visit (ASV) Protocol*.

Table 4. Environment of Care Results

 Compliant  Noncompliant RCS Requirement	Dubois Vet Center	Lancaster Vet Center	White Oak Vet Center
Fire or safety inspection completed annually.			
Risk and vulnerability assessment completed annually by VA police or local law enforcement.*			
Fire extinguishers inspected monthly.			
Fire extinguishers serviced annually.			
Automated external defibrillator (AED) located on-site.			
AED inspected monthly.			

¹⁹ VHA Directive 1608, *Comprehensive Environment of Care Program*, June 21, 2021; VHA Directive 1608(1), *Comprehensive Environment of Care Program*, June 21, 2021, amended September 7, 2023. Unless otherwise specified, the requirements in the June 2021 directive contain the same or similar language as the amended September 2023 document. The OIG evaluated compliance of monthly inspections for fire extinguishers and AEDs by reviewing inspection documentation for the three full months prior to district notification. The OIG evaluated the presence of an AED and a building evacuation plan during on-site inspections.

 Compliant  Noncompliant RCS Requirement	<u>Dubois Vet Center</u>	<u>Lancaster Vet Center</u>	<u>White Oak Vet Center</u>
AED serviced annually by VA medical center biomedical engineering.			
Building evacuation plan posted in communal area for staff and visitors to reference.			
Emergency and crisis plan with required components. [‡]			

Sources: RCS, Administrative Site Visit Protocol; OIG analysis of vet center results.

*As of October 2025, RCS eliminated the annual requirement and aligned risk and vulnerability assessment frequency with VHA assessment timeliness.

‡The OIG evaluated if the plan had been reviewed or updated within two years of the inspection date. The emergency and crisis plan includes contingencies for phone and computer disruptions; weather or natural disaster emergency plan; site, facility, or building temporary relocation plan; management of disruptive behavior plan; violence in the workplace plan (including active shooter plan); and handling of suspicious mail and bomb threats.

The OIG found all three vet centers had a fire and safety inspection completed annually, fire extinguishers inspected monthly and serviced annually, an AED on-site that was inspected monthly and serviced annually by VA medical center biomedical engineering, building evacuation plans posted in a communal area, and an emergency and crisis plan with all required components.

In the identified area, the VCDs reported the following explanations for noncompliance.

- *Risk and vulnerability assessment:* All three VCDs were unaware of the RCS requirement to complete the assessment annually and deferred to the VA police for frequency of the assessment.

In early 2025, the OIG identified inconsistency between the RCS administrative site visit protocol requirement for an annual risk and vulnerability assessment and VA police guidance and issued a recommendation related to assessment frequency to the RCS Chief Officer.²⁰ In October 2025, RCS updated risk and vulnerability assessment requirements to

²⁰ VA OIG, [*Inspection of Select Vet Centers in Midwest District 3 Zone 1*](#), Report No. 24-00393-180, August 5, 2025.

align with VHA assessment timelines and therefore, the OIG did not make a recommendation.

The OIG made no recommendations related to environment of care.

Conclusion

The OIG conducted a focused inspection in four review areas and made three recommendations to the District Director and the Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak VCDs related to completion of four hours of monthly external clinical consultation, training of counselors, and outreach plans containing all required components.

In response, district leaders provided guidance to VCDs, developed processes to ensure compliance with external clinical consultation and outreach plans with VCDs. Further, district leaders ensured staff are compliant with required training.

The OIG is aware of VA's transformation in VHA's management structure. The OIG will monitor implementation and focus its oversight efforts on the effectiveness and efficiencies of programs and services that improve the health and welfare of veterans and their families.

Appendix A

This section presents an overview of each selected vet center along with inspection results. For an overview of all results see [Overall Findings](#).

Dubois Vet Center

The VCD reported the DuBois Vet Center serves clients throughout 12 counties in Pennsylvania: McKean, Forest, Cameron, Elk, Clearfield, Jefferson, Armstrong, Clarion, Centre, Indiana, Cambria, and Blair, and is supported by the James E. Van Zandt Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The VCD reported 54,562 eligible veterans reside in the veterans service area, which includes the 258th Air Traffic Control Squadron. The VCD highlighted the creation of new recreational groups, including veterans hiking and introduction to fly fishing, and the establishment of a new community access point in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania.²¹

Table A.1. Fiscal Year 2024 Vet Center Profile

Profile	Dubois Vet Center
Budget	\$706,793.73
Total Unique Clients	264
New Clients	126
Active Duty Clients	1
Bereavement Clients	3
Family Clients	29
Total Authorized Full-time Positions	6
Total Filled Positions	5
Total Vacancies	1

Source: RCS data.

For compliant element findings, please see findings related to [Suicide Prevention; Consultation, Supervision, and Training; Outreach](#); and [Environment of Care](#).

Identified Deficiencies

[Outreach](#)

Outreach plan: The outreach plan was missing two required strategic components: points of contact for non-VA service providers and strategic VA medical facility partners.²²

²¹ A community access point (also referred to as a CAP) is a no-cost site established with a vet center community partner that hosts a vet center counselor who provides readjustment counseling on its premises on a regular recurring basis.

²² Strategic VA medical facility partners did not include clinical and administrative liaisons, an external clinical consultant, a suicide prevention coordinator, or the facility contact for prevention and management of disruptive behavior.

Environment of Care

Risk and vulnerability assessment: VA police completed the most recent risk and vulnerability assessment in September 2020.

Lancaster Vet Center

The VCD reported the Lancaster Vet Center serves clients throughout three counties in Pennsylvania: Lancaster, Lebanon, and Berks and is supported by the Lebanon VA Medical Center. The VCD reported 33,550 eligible veterans reside in the veterans service area, which includes a large Latin population, and is home to the most active National Guard training center on the East Coast, Fort Indiantown Gap. The VCD highlighted partnering with three Veteran Service Organizations to provide weekly on-site veterans benefits assistance and graduating two ‘Guitars4Vets’ cohorts.

Table A.2. Fiscal Year 2024 Vet Center Profile

Profile	Lancaster Vet Center
Budget	\$634,818.73
Total Unique Clients	174
New Clients	109
Active Duty Clients	1
Bereavement Clients	0
Family Clients	20
Total Authorized Full-time Positions	5
Total Filled Positions	5
Total Vacancies	0

Source: RCS data.

For compliant element findings, please see findings related to [Suicide Prevention](#); [Consultation, Supervision, and Training](#); [Outreach](#); and [Environment of Care](#).

Identified Deficiencies

[Consultation, Supervision, and Training](#)

External clinical consultation hours: Four hours of external clinical consultation were not provided for 4 of the 12 months reviewed.

[Outreach](#)

Outreach plan: The outreach plan was missing four required strategic components: a strategic map of the vet center service area identifying local eligible population concentrations, personal points of contact for non-VA service providers, identification of VA medical facility partners, and strategic coordination with mobile vet center operations.²³

[Environment of Care](#)

Risk and vulnerability assessment: VA police completed the most recent risk and vulnerability assessment in June 2023.

²³ Strategic VA medical facility partners did not include clinical and administrative liaisons, an external clinical consultant, a suicide prevention coordinator, or the facility contact for prevention and management of disruptive behavior.

White Oak Vet Center

The VCD reported that the White Oak Vet Center serves clients throughout four counties in Pennsylvania: Allegheny, Westmoreland, Somerset, and Bedford and is supported by the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. The VCD reported 45,857 veterans reside in the veterans service area, which includes several Reserve and National Guard bases including the Pennsylvania Air National Guard’s 171st Air Refueling Wing, the US Air Force Reserve’s 911th Airlift Wing, US Army Reserve’s 316th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, Pennsylvania Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment in Mount Pleasant, 99th Readiness Division, and the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. The VCD highlighted that the vet center established an annual Galentine’s Day event for women veterans that was attended by the mayor who gave a formal proclamation, and two new community access points. One access point is located at an equine therapy site called Horses with Hope and the other is located at the Westmoreland County Courthouse for inclusion of court participants who are eligible for vet center services. For compliant element findings, please see findings related to [Suicide Prevention](#); [Consultation, Supervision, and Training](#); [Outreach](#); and [Environment of Care](#).

Table A.3. Fiscal Year 2024 Vet Center Profile

Profile	White Oak Vet Center
Budget	\$723,953.12
Total Unique Clients	389
New Clients	228
Active Duty Clients	4
Bereavement Clients	4
Family Clients	45
Total Authorized Full-time Positions	8
Total Filled Positions	7
Total Vacancies	1

Source: RCS data.

Identified Deficiencies

Consultation, Supervision, and Training

Staff training: Two of five clinical staff did not complete lethal means safety training.

Outreach

Outreach plan: The outreach plan was missing two required strategic components: personal points of contact for non-VA service providers and identification of VA medical facility partners.²⁴

²⁴ Strategic VA medical facility partners did not include clinical and administrative liaisons, an external clinical consultant, a suicide prevention coordinator, or the facility contact for prevention and management of disruptive behavior.

Environment of Care

Risk and vulnerability assessment: VA police completed the most recent risk and vulnerability assessment in June 2023.

Appendix B: RCS Chief Readjustment Counseling Officer Memorandum

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: February 9, 2026

From: Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service (10RCS)

Subj: Inspection of Select Vet Centers in North Atlantic District 1 Zone 3

To: Director, Office of Healthcare Inspections, Vet Center Inspection Program (VC00)
Director, GAO/OIG Accountability Liaison (10OIC GOAL)

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Office of Inspector General (OIG) draft report, Inspection of Select Vet Centers North Atlantic District 1 Zone 3. I have reviewed the recommendations and submitted action plans to address all the findings in the report.
2. Should you require any additional information, please contact Readjustment Counseling Service.

(Original signed by:)

Michael Fisher

[OIG comment: The OIG received the above memorandum from VHA on January 16, 2026, and updated on February 9, 2026.]

Appendix C: RCS North Atlantic District 1 Director Memorandum

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: February 9, 2026

From: District Director, North Atlantic District 1 (RCS1)

Subj: Inspection of Select Vet Centers North Atlantic District 1 Zone 3

To: Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service, (10RCS)
Director, GAO/OIG Accountability Liaison (10OIC GOAL)

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Office of Inspector General (OIG) draft report, Inspection of North Atlantic District 1 Zone 3.
2. I have reviewed the draft report and request closure of all recommendations. District leaders and Vet Center Directors (VCD) took action to resolve concerns identified during the District 1 Zone 3 inspection. Specific actions taken are in the attachments.
3. Please express my thanks to the team for their professionalism and assistance in our continuing efforts to improve the care we provide to our Veterans.

(Original signed by:)

Joanne Boyle

[OIG comment: The OIG received the above memorandum from VHA on January 16, 2026, and updated on February 9, 2026.]

District Director Response

Recommendation 1

District leaders and the Lancaster Vet Center Director determine reasons for noncompliance with completing four hours of external clinical consultation for clinically complex cases per month, ensure a process is implemented to complete consultation requirements, and monitor compliance.

Concur

Nonconcur

Target date for completion: Request Closure

Director Comments

In Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), the Lancaster Vet Center was utilizing District staff and Zone 3 Vet Center Directors (VCDs) for external consultation when their VA Medical Center External Consultant was unavailable. District leadership provided guidance to all VCDs that this practice was not in compliance with the requirements as outlined by the VHA Directive 1500(5). The Lancaster Vet Center is now compliant. VCDs are tracking compliance locally, and district leadership is monitoring this monthly to demonstrate ongoing compliance. District leadership will also verify sustained compliance during the annual quality review site visit.

OIG Comments

The OIG considers this recommendation closed.

Recommendation 2

District leaders and the White Oak Vet Center Director determine reasons for noncompliance with employees completing select training in the required time frame, ensure completion, and monitor compliance.

Concur

Nonconcur

Target date for completion: Request Closure

Director Comments

In FY24, the White Oak Vet Center did not achieve full compliance with mandatory staff training. Specifically, Lethal Means Safety Education and Counseling. This non-compliance stemmed from new clinical providers not completing the training within 90 days of hire. District leadership has instructed VCDs to ensure completion of mandatory training within the required

time frame. Vet Center staff training is recorded in the Talent Management System and tracked locally by VCDs. The two new clinical staff at White Oak Vet Center completed the required Lethal Means training in March 2024 and July 2024. District leadership will verify sustained compliance during the annual quality site visits.

OIG Comments

The OIG considers this recommendation closed

Recommendation 3

District leaders and the Dubois, Lancaster, and White Oak Vet Center Directors determine reasons for noncompliance with completion of an outreach plan with all required strategic components, ensure completion, and monitor compliance.

Concur

Nonconcur

Target date for completion: Request Closure

Director Comments

During FY24, the outreach plans at these Vet Centers did not include all required strategic components. Reasons for non-compliance included a program transition to a new outreach template during FY24 and a lack of understanding of how certain strategic components were relevant to their plan. District leadership provided guidance on creating an outreach plan that incorporates all strategic components listed in VHA Directive 1500(5). VCDs and Veterans Outreach Program Specialists utilized the current Vet Center Outreach Plan template, and their plans are now compliant. VCDs will track compliance locally on an ongoing basis, and district leadership will monitor compliance during the annual quality site visit.

OIG Comments

The OIG considers this recommendation closed

Glossary

To go back, press “alt” and “left arrow” keys.

automated external defibrillator. Is “a sophisticated, yet easy-to-use, medical device that can analyze the heart’s rhythm and, if necessary, deliver an electrical shock, or defibrillation, to help the heart to re-establish an effective rhythm.”²⁵

clinical liaison. Mental health professional assigned by the supporting VA medical facility who assist the VCD in coordinating care and suicide prevention activities and making referrals for shared VA medical facility clients.²⁶

high risk suicide flag (HRSF) SharePoint site. Lists names of RCS clients identified by VA medical facilities as high risk. VCDs are required to review the HRSF SharePoint site monthly to identify clients who receive or have received vet center services in the past 12 months to determine the need for client contact, and complete follow-up, as appropriate.

independently licensed mental health external clinical consultant. Is assigned by the supporting VA medical facility to provide vet center counseling staff with a minimum of four hours per month of consultation for clinically complex cases. “In situations where the VA medical facility is unable to provide an external consultant due to local staffing logistics, the Vet Center will be authorized to seek such services from the private sector.”²⁷

outreach plan. A written strategic document developed for eligible individuals within that vet center’s service area. The outreach plan identifies specific outreach locations and events that will allow vet center staff to directly provide eligible individuals and families with information about vet center services. Additionally, the outreach plan identifies local service providers, within the VA and non-VA, to establish referral networks for vet center clients. Outreach plans are updated annually.²⁸

²⁵ “What is AED?,” American Red Cross, accessed August 8, 2022, <https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/aed/using-an-aed/what-is-aed>.

²⁶ VHA Directive 1500(4).

²⁷ VHA Directive 1500(4).

²⁸ VHA Directive 1500(4).

OIG Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

Contact For more information about this report, please contact the Office of Inspector General at (202) 461-4720.

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