

Report on the Establishment of Environment of Care Standards and Inspections at Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers



Department of Veteran Affairs
June 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Statutory Requirement.....	2
Alignment of the Requirements for Such Standards and Inspections with the VHA Directive 1330.01(4)	2
Establishment of EOC Standards and Inspections Policy.....	3
Conclusion.....	4

Introduction

The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315) encompasses broad areas of Veteran care and well-being. Pursuant to section 5103, this report certifies that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has finalized policy for the environment of care (EOC) standards and inspections at VA medical centers (VAMC) and disseminated the policy to all VAMCs.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 1608, *Comprehensive Environment of Care*, established policy and assigned responsibilities for the Comprehensive Environment of Care (CEOC) Program. Provided under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7301(b), VHA Directive 1608 is intended to promote consistent operation of the CEOC program by establishing accountability, performance and program oversight standards that can be monitored at all levels of VHA. VHA has a strong commitment to ensuring that all facilities have appropriate systems in place to meet The Joint Commission Environment of Care Life Safety and Infection Control standards. As part of this commitment, VHA collaborates with regulatory and accrediting bodies to ensure the provision of a safe and clean health care environment that meets the highest standards in the health care setting.

Statutory Requirement

Section 5103 requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a policy under which the EOC standards and inspections at VAMCs shall include (1) an alignment of the requirements for such standards and inspections with the women's health handbook of the VHA, (2) a requirement for the frequency of such inspections, (3) a delineation of the roles and responsibilities of staff at each medical center who are responsible for compliance, (4) the requirement that each medical center submit to the Secretary and make publicly available a report on the compliance of the medical center with the standards and (5) a remediation plan.

Furthermore, section 5103 requires VA to submit to Congress a report certifying that the policy has been finalized and disseminated to all VAMCs.

Alignment of the Requirements for Such Standards and Inspections with the VHA Directive 1330.01(4)

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs established a policy for the EOC standards and inspections at VAMCs that fully aligns with VHA Directive 1330.01(4), *Health Care Services for Women Veterans*. VHA Directive 1330.01(4), first issued on February 15, 2017, and amended January 8, 2021, can be found in its entirety as Attachment A. This policy alignment to VHA Directive 1608 is in parallel with the requirements within the women's Veteran handbook. This enhancement regarding the oversight of care for women Veterans puts VA on course to properly address and sustain the privacy and dignity issues for women Veterans. In addition, VA is incorporating gender-specific

health care delivery needs as required. The automated CEOC assessment tool, used within VHA, now encompasses a modified checklist with a uniform focus on the privacy and dignity of all Veterans. The Veterans Privacy and Dignity Checklist can be found, in its entirety, as Attachment B. The tool is used no less than semi-annually in health care settings to aid in identifying the facility's compliance with standards on a sustained basis; and is now the foundation for a uniform EOC standard throughout VHA, inclusive of regular inspections, ongoing compliance reports and remediation plans for any facilities identified that fall short. Using the mutually dependent CEOC assessment tool, along with updated VA design guidance, facilitates VHA's application of critical, life-saving standards that dictate facility renovations and projects. The policy clearly and unambiguously addresses the privacy and dignity needs of all Veterans and recognizes that proper environmental conditions are essential to meet the women's Veteran health care and related service needs. This effort not only updated the physical facility design standards, but also extended those requirements to all new and existing VA health care settings.

Establishment of EOC Standards and Inspections Policy

VHA Directive 1608 can be found, in its entirety, as Attachment C. VHA Directive 1608 accomplishes the following:

1. Requires VAMCs to conduct CEOC rounds in all VHA owned or leased spaces, including off-campus sites. This includes all buildings, floors, rooms and spaces. The frequency must be a minimum of once per fiscal year in non-patient care areas and twice per fiscal year in all areas where VA delivers patient care.
2. Delineates the roles and responsibilities of the staff responsible for each VAMCs CEOC compliance. Within VHA Directive 1608, each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director, or designee, is responsible for ensuring CEOC program requirements for VA medical facilities are met at all facilities within their VISN. Each VAMC Director is responsible for assessing facility CEOC program compliance and appointing a CEOC Rounds Coordinator who will coordinate all aspects of the CEOC Program at the VAMC.

VHA Directive 1608 requires CEOC rounds to fall under the purview of a facility-level CEOC Committee. The designated VA medical facility Executive Leadership Team (ELT) member, designated as the CEOC Committee Chair, has full line authority and responsibility for the VA medical facility CEOC program to include assessments, evaluations and metrics associated with the following:

- Infection Prevention Control;
- Patient Safety;
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act/Privacy rules;
- Safety (excludes Annual Workplace Evaluations/Exposure Assessments);
- Engineering Programs;
- Health Technology Management;

- Healthcare Environmental Sanitation;
 - VHA Law Enforcement and Security;
 - Privacy and Dignity;
 - Supply Chain Management; and
 - Interior Design.
3. Requires VHA's CEOC Steering Committee to report compliance with the CEOC standards to the Under Secretary for Health annually. In addition, VHA Directive 1608 requires each VISN Director to submit a compliance report, incorporating data from each VA medical facility under their purview, to the CEOC Steering Committee annually.
 4. Requires each facility level CEOC Committee to monitor CEOC performance metrics on a quarterly basis. A quarterly CEOC medical center remediation plan is required if noncompliance with an EOC performance metric is identified.

Remediation projects are dependent upon available funding, and each facility prioritizes its remediation efforts to ensure the most critical safety deficiencies are the first corrected. When the remediation project exceeds the facility's available funding level, the facility submits a project request to the VHA Strategic Capital Investment Program (SCIP). The SCIP process is also prioritized based on need. VHA tracks the need as part of the individual Facility Condition Assessment grade when maintenance is deferred due to a lack of funding.

Conclusion

The CEOC standards and inspections at VA medical facilities fully align with VHA Directive 1330.01(4). VA will conduct CEOC rounds in all VHA owned or leased spaces, including off-campus sites, a minimum of once per fiscal year in non-patient care areas and twice per fiscal year in all areas where patients are served. Pursuant to section 5103, VA has defined CEOC compliance roles and responsibilities of each VISN Director, VA Medical Facility Director and designated ELT member designated as the chair of the facility CEOC committee. The Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Support will assess VA medical facility compliance with VHA Directive 1608 and ensure a compliance report is made publicly available. The CEOC Steering Committee will report compliance with CEOC standards to the Under Secretary for Health annually. In addition, each VA Medical Facility Director will ensure the facility level CEOC Committee monitors the CEOC performance metrics quarterly and develops a quarterly CEOC medical center remediation plan if noncompliance with an EOC performance metric is found.

VHA will evaluate, monitor and improve the CEOC Program to ensure a safe, clean and high-quality environment of care for Veterans, their families, visitors and employees.

Department of Veterans Affairs
June 2021

Attachments:

- A. VHA Directive 1330.01(4): *Health Care Services for Women Veterans*
- B. National CEOC Veterans Privacy and Dignity Checklist
- C. VHA Directive 1608: *Comprehensive Environment of Care Program*