

LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive provides direction and policy for filling leadership positions in mental health.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This updated Directive adds announcement criteria for leadership positions in mental health and clarifies the applicable positions to which this Directive applies.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** None.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Patient Care Services, Mental Health Services (10P4M) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be addressed at 202-461-4142.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VHA Directive 2009-011, dated February 27, 2009, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of November 2020.

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LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive provides direction and policy in filling leadership positions in mental health. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 1706, 7401.

2. BACKGROUND

a. Providing high quality mental health services remains a priority of VHA. To support this outcome, it is important that the most qualified individuals be selected for leadership positions in mental health programs, regardless of their mental health profession.

b. This principle helps to ensure both a high-quality corps of mental health leaders and an appropriate diversity of professional backgrounds. Further, this approach is most consistent with interprofessional practice, which is the cornerstone of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mental health programs. Interprofessional practice is conducted in an integrated care environment that allows health care team members to use complementary skills to effectively manage the physical and mental health of their patients, using an array of tools that supports information sharing, in a secure environment, among relevant providers. High-functioning teams addressing behavioral and mental health needs require collaboration among diverse professions.

c. Mental health leadership positions require a set of skills that are not limited to or necessarily inherent in any one of the core mental health professions within VHA.

d. It is important to create and support innovative leadership models for all mental health professions. Promoting interprofessional recruitment for these important leadership roles supports VHA's goal of being the employer of choice in the health care field.

e. The provisions of this Directive apply to mental health leadership positions in which the incumbent has responsibility for an interprofessional mental health work force, typically involving direct supervision of interprofessional staff. However, hiring officials must consider recruiting from the broadest pool of appropriate professions whenever there is a vacancy in a leadership position that has broad oversight of interprofessional staff or mental health programs, even without supervisory line authority. Specific positions that are always considered to be mental health leadership positions include positions in VA Central Office with a national scope, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) mental health lead positions, and the Chief and Assistant Chief of a mental health service line at the medical facility level.

f. This Directive does not apply to leadership positions that oversee a single, specific profession (e.g., a Psychology Service Chief).

3. POLICY

It is VHA policy to recruit and hire the most qualified individuals for key leadership positions in mental health.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

The hiring official (e.g., Central Office Executive, VISN Director, or medical facility Director) is responsible for ensuring that:

a. Announcements for mental health leadership positions (as described in paragraph 2.e.) must reflect a commitment to the principles outlined in this Directive and invite applicants from as many of the six core mental health professions (psychiatry, psychology, social work, nursing, marriage and family therapist, and licensed professional mental health counselor) as appropriate to the leadership requirements of the position. The leadership requirements of the vacant position should always be the primary factor determining which professions are included in the posting for a leadership vacancy, but collateral clinical practice duties associated with the position may also be considered. By encouraging the six core mental health professions, the leader would also have a license to practice and capability to clinically supervise others who are practicing. Overarching leadership positions should be posted for as many of the six core mental health professions that meet the core functions of the position.

b. All applicants are reviewed in a fair process leading to selection of the most qualified applicant.

c. Any exception to this policy receives the concurrence of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management and Mental Health Operations who must collaborate with the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services and Mental Health Services.