



# CONVERGING LINES: VETERANS, HEALTH CARE & JOBS

White Paper | March 2015

UNITEDHEALTH GROUP



**Paralyzed Veterans  
of America**

*Expanding  
the National  
Narrative  
from  
Veterans Need  
Health Care  
to  
Health Care  
Needs Veterans*





# FOREWORD

**A**t UnitedHealth Group and Paralyzed Veterans of America we see both sides of the health care workforce – veteran employment coin daily. We see veterans, with and without disabilities, struggling to find not just jobs but meaningful careers so they can continue to have purpose and give back to the nation they pledged to serve.

We see military spouses and family members seeking flexible part-time work so they can balance employment with their responsibilities as caregivers.

We see a Veterans Affairs system urgently in need of additional clinical and non-clinical support, and a health care system and workforce trying to keep pace with a growing demand for health services.

We also see opportunity. This report highlights steps we can take, working together across government and industry and in local communities, to employ more veterans, advance new skill-sets across the workforce and develop new capabilities to meet emerging health care needs.

In 2014, our partners in health care, government and military and veteran groups came together in a first-of-its-kind event to explore how we can shift the national conversation from “veterans need health care” to “health care needs veterans.”

UnitedHealth Group and Paralyzed Veterans of America wish to extend a sincere thank you to all involved for your commitment to improving our nation’s health care system and the lives of America’s veterans.



**Richard Hughes**  
*Senior Vice President,  
UnitedHealth Group  
Human Capital*



**Sherman Gillums, Jr.**  
*Deputy Executive Director,  
Paralyzed Veterans of America*

“We as a country have not had the kind of conversation we need to have, at the level we need to act, about getting veterans into this field. The issues are not small, yet the solutions need not be overwhelming,”

—Richard Hughes, Senior Vice President of UnitedHealth Group



# INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Paralyzed Veterans of America and UnitedHealth Group hosted leaders from the health care industry, the federal government, and military and veterans service organizations to discuss the convergence of two issues: the needs of the health care workforce and the unique challenges of veterans employment.

Though there are a number of successful efforts to help veterans transition to civilian careers in retail, technology and construction, there is no similar effort in health care. Our gathering represented a first-of-its-kind forum to discuss best practices and opportunities to increase veteran hiring in health care. Specifically, we raised the following questions:

- What are the current employment trends in the health care industry?
- How are changes in the health care system impacting the industry's talent needs?
- What is being done to increase veterans employment in the health care industry?
- What federal programs are available and being communicated to veterans?
- What best practices can the private sector and nonprofits apply more broadly?
- What role can the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and military and veterans service organizations, play in matching and training veterans, families and caregivers with existing and emerging jobs in health care?

Meeting participants included leaders from the federal government, nonprofits in the veterans and health communities, and private sector health companies and associations:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ■ U.S. Senate   | ■ American Association of Home Health Care   |
| ■ U.S. Department of Labor                                      | ■ Spectrum Health                            |
| ■ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs                           | ■ Memorial Hermann Healthcare System         |
| ■ White House Joining Forces                                    | ■ Booz Allen Hamilton                        |
| ■ Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)               | ■ U.S. Chamber of Commerce Hiring Our Heroes |
| ■ National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC)      | ■ Center for a New American Security         |
| ■ Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) | ■ Optum                                      |
|   | ■ Paralyzed Veterans of America              |
|   | ■ UnitedHealth Group                         |





“The time is right to connect the dots between the needs of the health care industry and both the supply and demand of veteran job-seekers.”

—Sherman Gillums,  
Paralyzed Veterans of  
America



# CONVERGING LINES

A transformation is taking place across health care. There is an urgent need for talent in health sector jobs. Through 2022, health care employment is projected to grow more than twice as fast as the overall job market. In fact, by 2022 health care is expected to be the largest employment sector of the U.S. economy.

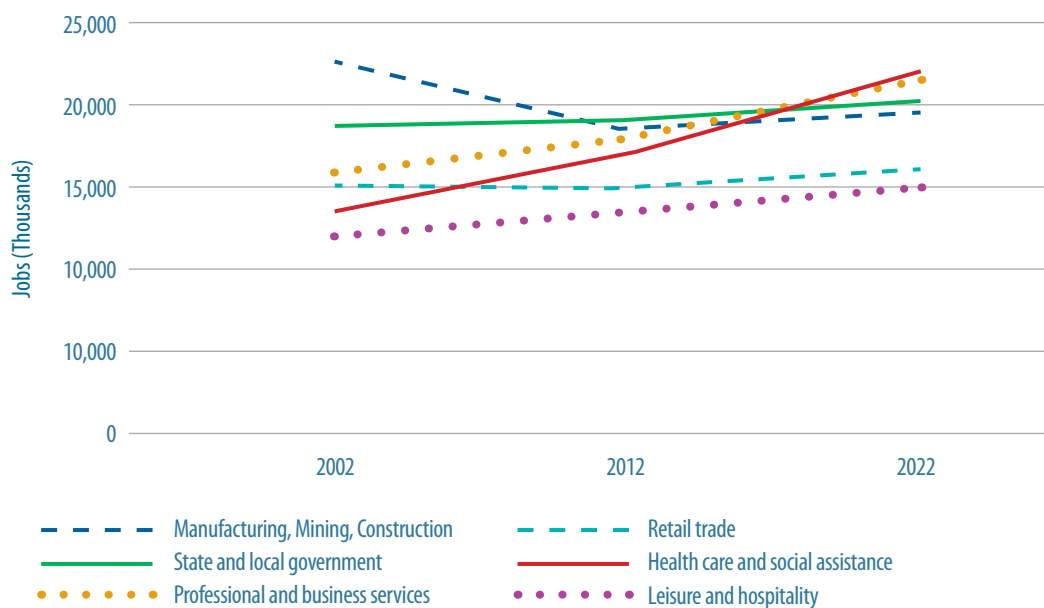
This anticipated growth is a daunting challenge for an industry already facing critical workforce shortages. As we have seen within the VA system, health care workforce shortages can directly compromise access, quality and the cost of health care.

At the same time, as the military drawdown from the nation's longest conflict sends veterans into the job market, our nation must help them find meaningful civilian careers. In 2014 between 250,000 and 350,000 military members will transition from active duty, the National Guard or reserve status to

a civilian status. This influx of veterans further compounds unemployment challenges for veterans over the age of 45, who currently represent 60 percent of the 722,000 unemployed veterans today.

These two national imperatives—building the health care workforce and improving veteran employment—are converging. Examined together, the challenges reveal significant opportunity. With the right strategies and coordinated action, the private, nonprofit and public sectors can solve the employment challenges facing both veterans and the health care industry.

Employment by Top 6 Industry Sectors



Source: Employment Projections Program, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

## WORKFORCE NEEDS OF THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

More than 4 million new jobs will open in health care within the next decade, and labor demand within medical professions will grow by 30 percent through 2020.

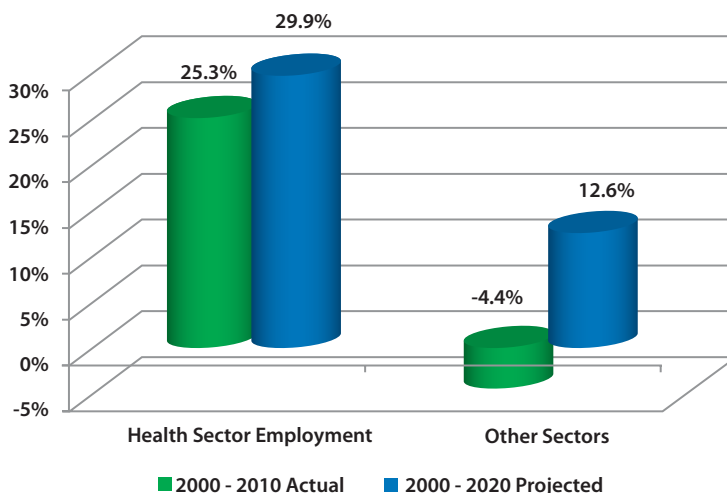
The boom in health care staffing needs can be attributed to several factors including an aging population, broader access to health benefits, new health care delivery models, and a current shortage of clinical and support personnel.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) estimates a current shortage of 6,000 primary care workers, and the need for doctors, registered nurses

and physician assistants is expected to increase to 20,000 by the year 2020.

Beyond primary care staff, health care organizations are urgently filling nonclinical support jobs, including data support, customer service, and other critical support functions in both patient-facing and behind-the-scenes fields. Rapidly expanding areas, such as health care IT and home health care, are compounding the need for additional talent and human resources.

**Percentage of Job Growth in the Health Sector Compared to All Other Employment Sectors in the U.S., 2000-2010 and 2010-2020 Projected**



*Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Employment Matrix, employment by industry, occupation, and percent distribution, 2010 and projected 2020; Employment and Output by Industry, Table 2.7; Current Employment Survey, 2000-2010.*



## TAPPING INTO THE TALENT OF VETERANS, FAMILY MEMBERS, AND CAREGIVERS

Even as health care jobs go unfilled, the number of veterans in or entering the workforce is on a fast upward track. More than 1 million veterans will seek civilian jobs in the next three years.

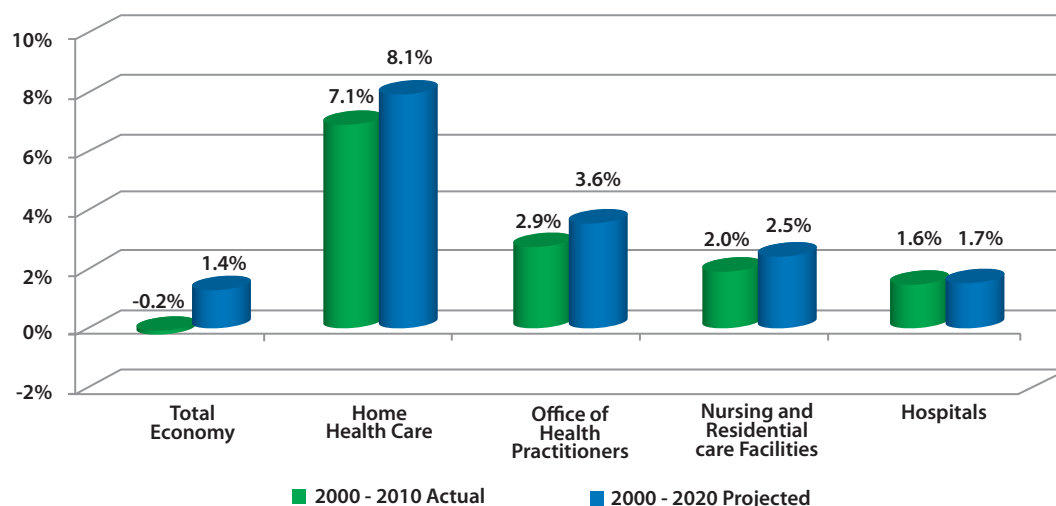
The military to health care career cycle is not just a smart solution to address workforce needs of the health care industry, it's a natural fit for veterans. These former and transitioning service members offer:

- **Core values, unique training, and disciplined attitudes**, including an appreciation for the roles of both skilled and support personnel.

- **A mission-oriented, ready-to-learn, ready-to-work mindset** that is the hallmark of American military training.
- **Leadership skills acquired through military experience** that make them natural mentors, coaches and leaders in any career path.
- **Professional expertise** that includes some medical-related military occupational specialties.

Many of America's transitioning service members already bring an impressive cache of medical experience to civilian life. Approximately 10,000 medically trained and rated service members leave the uniformed services each year, according to HRSA. Over the next decade, 100,000 medically rated veterans will play a role in the American health care delivery system.

**Average Annual Job Growth for Selected Settings within the U.S. Health Sector, 2000-2010 and 2010-2020 Projected**



Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Employment Matrix, employment by industry, occupation, and percent distribution, 2010 and projected 2020; Employment and Output by Industry, Table 2.7; Current Employment Survey, 2000-2010.

It's not just the traditional clinical jobs in health care that need to be filled.

Phil Carter, senior fellow of the Center for a New American Security, noted, "When you add veterans who could apply their skills to nonclinical positions, such as bioinformatics, logistics, and health care management, the number of Gulf-War-era veterans with suitable skill sets rises dramatically. Those veterans can be a solution to the increasing demand for nonclinical positions, such as health care IT, customer service and other support roles."

But looking at the sheer number of potentially qualified veterans is not enough. It's essential to remove impediments, such as military-civilian certification issues, that might discourage both medically trained and potential support personnel from pursuing health care careers.

Richard Hughes from UnitedHealth Group explained that efforts to educate service members about health care career opportunities are crucial.

"When service members hear health care they only think of hospitals," Hughes said. "But there is room for computer coders, data analysts...these jobs are in very high demand."

The path to health jobs and careers can be quick for veterans. Transitioning service members, for instance, can rapidly fill the growing demand for health coaches and health care navigators. Many veterans can certify as a health coach in a matter of months or be federally certified as a health care navigator in a matter of weeks following separation from the service.

Health care careers are also a natural fit for military spouses and caregivers. These individuals are often attuned to health care needs as caregivers, and many may be seeking full-time, flexible or part-time jobs.



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“It’s time to move beyond the phrase ‘hire veterans’, to saying, ‘Which veterans do you want to hire?’

What kind of veteran skills do you want? Where do you want the veteran to work?”

—Terry Gerton,  
Deputy Assistant  
Secretary of  
Labor



# THE CHALLENGES

Reducing veteran unemployment and resolving America's health care workforce shortage are substantial but not insurmountable challenges. Obstacles range from matching location, training and skill requirements with available personnel, to competition from other industries also seeking to identify veterans to fill job vacancies.

As the Labor Department's policy official for veterans' employment issues noted, "Programs do exist to add technical and professional training to the military leadership skills you value in our veterans."

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor Terry Gerton said, "It's time to move beyond the phrase 'hire veterans', to saying, 'Which veterans do you want to hire? What kind of veteran skills do you want? Where do you want the veteran to work?'"

Among the challenges we face:

**CERTIFICATIONS.** Beyond matching geography and resumes, placing veterans in any civilian field—especially clinical areas that often require formal civilian certification—can be a challenge. Adapting military training, certification and terminology demands planning and commitment from the military, employers and prospective employees.

**EXPECTATIONS.** The transition to a civilian job often requires a reality check on expectations. Many transitioning service members who have held leadership positions in the military need mentorship and guidance from other veterans to adapt to a corporate leadership culture. Veterans need to understand military experience does not necessarily prepare you for an equivalent level civilian job. As is the case with non-veterans who change careers or industries, veterans may have to start their civilian careers at a lower level in order to gain specific skills and knowledge required for the job they desire.

**BIAS TOWARD CLINICAL CAREERS.** Like many of us, veterans are likely to view

health care careers as clinical careers. Multiple participants commented that both the health care industry and military/veterans groups can better communicate the existence of a growing number of openings in non-clinical fields, such as health care information technology, administration, customer service and logistics support—all natural fields for individuals with parallel military experience. There is room, participants noted, to help veterans view non-clinical careers as a rewarding path, and to educate them on existing job training programs that can be applied to any health care career.

**STRUCTURAL BARRIERS.** It can also be challenging for health care employers to overcome a "one-size-fits-all" understanding of veteran employment. There are a number of structural barriers that exist for different veteran gender and age cohorts. For example, women veterans of different age groups have different employment profiles. Women veterans over age 45 have an unemployment rate of just 4.4 percent while women ages 18 to 24 have an unemployment rate this year as high as 11.5 percent.

**TRANSLATING MILITARY EXPERIENCE.**

Additionally, many health care employers do not have the ability to understand the often highly technical and specialized military resume of veterans and transitioning service members. While a number of skills translators have been developed to help veterans to communicate their professional experience in plain English, veterans service organizations, the VA and the DOD can do more to help.

**FUNDING.** Finally, funding remains a major challenge. This is the case for both planning and supporting seed programs to train veterans and transitioning service members, as well as for ongoing operational funds for training, awareness and clearinghouse activities.

Bethany Hamilton, program lead for the Community Health Corps of the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), noted that just because there is a “will” does not always mean there is an effective way forward. Finding veterans with the ready-to-go requisite skills is the most difficult aspect of veteran hiring, she said.





“When service members hear health care they only think of hospitals, but there is room for computer coders, data analysts...these jobs are in very high demand,”

—Richard Hughes, Senior Vice President of UnitedHealth Group



“The time is now. Awareness about veterans unemployment has been built and everyone wants to solve the problem, we are now at the next stage in the problem.”

—Col. Steve Parker, Director of Joining Forces



# THE OPPORTUNITIES

Industry, government and veterans organizations are recognizing the converging lines of veterans health and health care jobs. Other industries, such as technology, construction and retail have successfully engaged in efforts and campaigns targeting veterans, and we believe the health care industry is well-positioned to do the same.

**ESTABLISH HIRING TARGET.** The health care industry has an opportunity to commit to a hiring target (i.e., 250K veterans working in health care) by a certain date. A number of health care organizations and associations have already made similar pledges to hire veterans. For example, the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) has pledged to hire 8,000 veterans over three years. Inviting health care associations and employers from across the nation to be a part of this pledge will bring visibility and attention to this opportunity.

“The time for a pledge is now,” said Col. Parker of Joining Forces. “Awareness about veteran unemployment has been built and everyone wants to solve the problem. We are now at the next stage.”

While the projected growth of primary care physician shortages is a challenge to the health care industry, the overall staffing shortage presents a timely opportunity for veterans, according to Mary Anne Koines, senior vice president of operations for Spectrum Healthcare Resources.

Positions such as mid-level providers and support staff of all kinds will be needed, Koines said. “Those jobs will certainly be in demand with an aging population.”

## REDUCE COSTS FOR VETERANS.

Private and public universities and training facilities can be encouraged to waive or reduce costs and fees for veterans as a public health benefit, said Dr. Amy Justice, program manager, Veteran Career Services of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society. Justice cited Bellevue College, which waives certification fees, as just one example.

A number of educational institutions are helping veterans tap into their GI Bill benefits for licensure and certification reimbursement, and adding incentives for preparatory courses to increase interest in pursuing certain jobs in the health care industry.

**MODEL OTHER INDUSTRIES.** Existing models of excellence for veterans training can be duplicated in health care fields. Parallels exist in other fields. The telecommunications industry’s veteran outreach program offers six-week tower construction courses. Software company SAP deploys a similar model: an 11-week training course for veterans to earn consulting credentials. These models are not limited to recently transitioned service members, participants noted during discussion. They also represent an opportunity for veterans who have been out of work for an extended period.



## THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a readiness and desire to take next steps to connect veterans with the needs of the health care industry. The converging needs of filling health care jobs and meeting veterans employment requirements are clear. Matching health care jobs with veterans benefits not just the industry and the veterans themselves, but also Congress, the White House and the Administration—indeed, both national policy and national imperatives will be well served. Specific recommendations include the following:

- **Develop and expand federal initiatives** including current and new programs from the Department of Labor, Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Defense and other sources to train and certify veterans for health care jobs and careers.
- **Identify and engage partners across all sectors of the health care industry**, and expand existing partnerships and veteran-specific programs within health care industry associations.
- **Conduct additional meetings with military, veteran, health care and labor specialists** in multiple cities across the country as regional catalysts toward veteran, spouse, and caregiver health care careers.
- **Create and expand health care industry campaigns** to inform, identify, and train veterans for health care openings.
- **Promote the use of a nationwide clearinghouse** for public and private health care career opportunities, training, and job openings,
- **Educate exiting military and current veterans** by providing information and materials and resources on the range of health care positions and careers, with added emphasis on non-clinical opportunities.
- **Encourage military spouses and caregivers** to train and apply for full-time or flex-time health care jobs, such as billing and coding specialists, referral specialists, call center reps, and others; encourage health care providers and support firms to reach out to these populations.
- **Form media partnerships** and outreach activities to inform veterans, families, caregivers, and job providers of the potential veteran–health care connection.



*The lines are  
converging.*

*The time  
for action  
is now.*

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