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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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B-114859

JUNE 29, 1979

D.

The Honorable Alan Cranston  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States Senate

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I REVIEW OF

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In your January 19, 1979, letter you requested that we study the Veterans Administration's (VA's) services to incarcerated veterans. You specifically asked that we (1) follow up on the findings of our 1974 report, "Need for Improved Outreach Efforts for Veterans in Prison or on Parole," and (2) provide additional information on VA's outreach efforts for incarcerated veterans.

Enclosure I details the results of our review. In summary, our work at the VA central office and in the New York City, Los Angeles, and Atlanta regions indicates that VA has increased its outreach effort in terms of the number of penal facilities visited to counsel veterans on their benefits, although some Federal and State prisons were not visited in 1978. Also, veterans appear more aware of their benefits and are using them more than those we spoke to in 1974. However, the outreach program still needs improvement.

Several matters regarding program administration require VA action. Although some regions exceeded the guidelines, in general they were not being met. Supervision of VA counselors was virtually nonexistent, outreach efforts varied, and coordination among VA and other groups making outreach visits to prisons could be improved. We believe that generally the outreach program has carried a low priority.

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Letter Report

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Because we were unable to identify from VA records veterans who are or have been in prison, we were not able to determine whether the use of VA benefits has contributed to the rehabilitation of such veterans. However, in February 1979, we issued a report 1/ on academic and vocational courses offered in Federal and State correctional institutions which showed that the courses did not prepare offenders for employment. This report did not, however, isolate courses approved for VA benefits.

As you are aware, an October 1978 Presidential message stated that, to succeed, veterans' programs must be targeted to those who continue to need help. One group specifically mentioned was incarcerated Vietnam Era veterans. Efforts are underway to contract for disseminating information to prison officials through the American Correctional Association, a professional association of prison officials. Other actions for disseminating information to correctional officials and incarcerated veterans are still in the planning stage.

In light of our findings, we recommend that the Committee assess the outreach program and determine the priority it should receive in relation to VA's other programs.

We recommend that the Administrator of Veterans Affairs direct VA regional offices to:

- Identify the number and location of incarcerated veterans within their jurisdictions and target their efforts to reach the greatest possible number.
- Provide appropriate supervision of VA representatives conducting the outreach effort.
- Identify the non-VA groups visiting prisons to counsel on veterans' benefits, and coordinate with these groups. To assure that correct information is relayed to veterans, counselors from these groups should be briefed and their literature reviewed by VA.

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1/"Correctional Institutions Can Do More To Improve the Employability of Offenders" (GGD-79-13, Feb. 6, 1979).

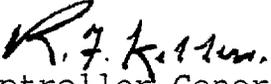
The Administrator should also direct that:

- Guidelines be revised to provide for briefings to probation and parole officers and appropriate organizations.
- Copies of the VA brochure developed specifically for incarcerated veterans be mailed periodically to every Federal, State, and major local penal facility.
- Reporting on this outreach effort be improved to provide more relevant information and to permit evaluations of the effort at both the regional and national levels.

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Because of your request that we provide you with this report before the Committee's July 12 hearings on this subject, we did not request written comments from VA. However, as agreed with your office, we discussed the report with officials of VA's Department of Veterans Benefits, and their comments are included where appropriate. Also, as arranged with your office, we are sending copies of this report to the Attorney General and the Administrator of Veterans Affairs. Copies will be provided to other interested parties within 15 days or at such time as you make public announcement concerning the contents of this report.

Sincerely yours,

  
ACTING Comptroller General  
of the United States

Enclosures - 5

VETERANS ADMINISTRATIONOUTREACH PROGRAMFOR INCARCERATED VETERANS

The Chairman, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, asked us to follow up on our December 30, 1974, report, "Need for Improved Outreach Efforts for Veterans in Prison or on Parole" (MWD-75-48). He was particularly interested in the Veterans Administration's (VA's) current effort in its outreach program for incarcerated, paroled, and probationed veterans.

BACKGROUND

The Congress has charged VA with responsibility for actively seeking out veterans eligible for benefits, providing them with information, and helping them as much as possible in applying for benefits (38 U.S.C. 240). Most veterans with other than dishonorable discharges are entitled to certain benefits. These benefits include stipends for education or training programs approved for VA benefits, medical services for those eligible, and compensation or pensions for those disabled or in financial need and for families of certain deceased veterans. VA may also offer such services as job placement, counseling, and social services.

Although benefit eligibility may depend on such factors as disability or income, the fact that some veterans are, or have been, in prison does not alter their eligibility. Indeed, these benefits could play a role in their rehabilitation.

Relationship of VA benefits  
and services to prison life

Inmates may study and/or work during their prison term. Vocational courses, such as office skills, food services, and equipment maintenance and repair, are often available. Academic work may involve anything from basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills to work at the college level. Inmates are sometimes charged tuition, especially for college courses offered either at the prison or on campus for those allowed to attend there. Inmates who work in prison industries are usually paid a small salary. Those attending school may or may not be paid by the prison.

Veterans can collect VA educational and training assistance benefits while in prison. These benefits are available to veterans with other than dishonorable discharges for 10 years after their release from the service. The benefits provide monetary assistance to veterans enrolled in courses approved for VA benefits, including basic education, high school equivalency, college, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job training.

A critical factor in an ex-offender's rehabilitation is getting a job. Preparing an inmate to readjust to society begins a few months before release. Prerelease centers acquaint inmates with agencies that can help them find work and housing or provide counseling. VA may be such a resource for a veteran. Many VA regional offices (1) employ social workers who can help veterans find needed housing, loans, and counseling and (2) have a representative of the State employment service. Any education or training that veterans receive in prison may help them get a job or encourage them to continue their education.

Counseling on veterans' benefits in prison and at pre-release centers is carried out not only by VA, but often by State or local veterans' affairs units and private organizations.

#### SCOPE

We reviewed policies and procedures and examined records at the VA central office in Washington, D.C., and at VA regional offices in New York City, Atlanta, and Los Angeles. We interviewed prison officials and 207 incarcerated veterans at three Federal, three State, and four local correctional facilities. (See enc. II.) Prisons were selected to get a sample of various types, a geographical mix, and a blend of those visited and not visited by VA. Also, we met with Federal and State probation and parole officers, 50 veterans on probation or parole identified by these officers, and officials of various State agencies and veterans' service organizations. Of the 207 incarcerated veterans we spoke to, 141 were Vietnam Era veterans; of the 50 probationers and parolees, 32 were Vietnam Era veterans.

The penal institutions did not keep records that enabled us to randomly select veteran inmates for interview. The names of veterans to interview were generally obtained through the education offices of the prisons because these offices

are responsible for veterans' services in most of the facilities we visited. As a consequence, the incarcerated population interviewed may contain a larger than representative sampling of veterans enrolled in educational programs.

#### OUTREACH EFFORTS HAVE INCREASED

Since our 1974 report, VA has increased its efforts to reach incarcerated veterans by issuing program guidelines; preparing appropriate informational material; and visiting many Federal, State, and local penal institutions. While no information is readily available on the effectiveness of VA's efforts, incarcerated veterans appear more aware of VA benefit programs, and more of them have participated.

#### December 1974 report

In December 1974, we reported that VA had no systematic effort to reach veterans in penal institutions and that such institutions were infrequently visited by VA representatives. In addition, slightly over half of the veteran inmates and parolees interviewed at that time thought they had lost their entitlement to veterans' benefits because of their imprisonment. As a result of recommendations in that report, VA issued guidelines requiring that:

- Semiannual visits be made to all Federal and State prisons where prison authorities believe it desirable and necessary to provide group briefings and individual counseling for veteran inmates.
- Annual briefings be given to prison officials on VA benefit programs.
- Information be disseminated on VA services available by mail and by its special toll-free Wide Area Telephone Service.
- Literature on VA benefit programs be revised and made available to prison officials to hand out to inmates.

#### Current outreach efforts

There are about 4,000 Federal, State, and local penal institutions in the United States, with an estimated population of about 460,000. (See enc. III.) Although estimates of veterans within this population vary, a VA official

estimates there are about 60,000 in Federal and State penal institutions. However, no information is available on how many of these veterans are still entitled to receive VA educational assistance benefits.

VA records show that 7,059 incarcerated veterans were counseled in group briefings and 17,125 in individual sessions in fiscal year 1978. However, some veterans may be counted two or more times in these figures, depending on the number of counseling sessions each attended.

To better understand the extent of VA's efforts, we asked VA for a list of all penal institutions visited in calendar year 1978 and the frequency of visits. Further, we asked for the reasons that any Federal or State institution was not visited semiannually, as VA guidelines require. VA's reply, summarized in enclosure IV, indicated that some Federal and State facilities were not visited in 1978. VA did not visit some prisons because they are youth facilities where the number of veterans is expected to be small. Similarly, some women's and men's penal facilities were not visited because they were believed to have few veterans. In some of these cases we checked available Federal and State computer lists and found one institution with only 1 veteran while two others had 100 or more veterans.

The three regions we visited varied in the extent of their outreach effort. The three Federal penitentiaries in our review were visited for inmate counseling, but the number of State prisons visited varied. VA reports show that in one region counseling visits were made to all State prisons; another region counseled at 12 (75 percent) of the prisons but was on call to all of them (that is, visits are made when specifically requested). The third region counseled at 10 (53 percent) prisons that VA believed had large veteran populations. However, some of the prisons not visited had large numbers of veterans.

In each of the three regions we visited, there was little evidence to substantiate the number of prisons visited, the frequency of visits, or the basis for not visiting certain prisons. Also, minor errors were made in the information supplied to us on the number and types of prisons in the regions. Therefore, VA's information may be regarded only as an indication of the level of VA's outreach effort.

Increased awareness and use of  
benefits by incarcerated veterans

A VA official told us that the outreach program's objective is to make incarcerated veterans aware of their benefits and to help them obtain these benefits. Compared to the situation we found in 1974, incarcerated veterans we spoke with during this review were more aware of their benefits and were using them more. However, the increased awareness and use varied widely among prisons, indicating a lack of consistency in outreach efforts.

Our interviews with incarcerated veterans developed the following information:

	<u>Number of incarcerated veterans (note a)</u>
Aware of VA benefits	171
Uncertain or uninformed about benefits	36
Had requested information on VA benefits at one time or another from	<u>b/98</u>
VA	61
Prison officials	27
Veterans groups	3
State or local officials	2
Others	17
Had been advised they were eligible for VA benefits	145
By VA	56
When released from service	44
By prison officials	15
Other	30
Receiving VA benefits	<u>b/57</u>
Educational assistance	31
Disability	20
Other	13

a/Out of a total of 207.

b/Some individuals had requested information from more than one source or are receiving more than one type of benefit.

Although 31 incarcerated veterans were receiving educational assistance benefits, 28 others who were taking either academic, apprenticeship, or on-the-job training courses were not receiving benefits. This shows that some will enroll even without VA benefits. Certain prison officials believed some veterans enroll in courses only for the money. Others said that, regardless of the veterans' motive for taking courses, any training or education might benefit them.

We analyzed the sentences of those receiving educational assistance benefits to determine whether there was any potential for using the knowledge gained. One veteran had a life sentence; the others had average minimum sentences of 8 years. We asked the veterans receiving educational assistance benefits if they would be taking courses without receiving VA benefits; 26 said they would.

VA had held counseling sessions at 6 of the 10 prisons we visited. Of the 154 veterans we spoke with in these six prisons, 68 said they had been counseled. More than half of those who had not been counseled were unaware that counseling sessions were held; the remaining veterans either were not interested or were unable to attend because of schedule conflicts.

Although we realize that other factors influence responses, to analyze the effect of VA counseling, we compared the responses of veterans in prisons not visited by VA to responses of veterans in prisons visited by VA, on the following:

	Veterans in prisons			
	Visited by VA		Not visited by VA	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	154		53	
Indicated eligible for VA benefits	91	59	29	55
Aware education benefits may be used in prison	78	51	23	43
Applied for VA benefits in prison	54	35	8	15
Currently receiving VA benefits	44	29	3	6
Currently taking courses	52	34	7	13

Because of the sample size and type of prison not visited by VA, we cannot project these results and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of VA counseling. However, the responses indicate that VA's counseling at prisons may have had a positive impact.

Increased awareness and use of benefits  
by veterans on probation or on parole

We interviewed 24 veterans who were on probation and 26 who were on parole. Of these 50, 29 had been in prison, but only 7 had been contacted by a VA counselor while incarcerated. Twenty-five of the 29 said that they had been in either a Federal or a State prison since 1975. This was when VA regulations were issued requiring semiannual visits to these prisons. Although we did not verify how long or during what period these individuals had been incarcerated, this does indicate that VA may not be reaching some eligible veterans.

We obtained the following information from our discussions with this group of veterans:

	Number of veterans on probation or parole (note a)
Believed they were eligible for VA benefits	36
Believed they were ineligible for VA benefits	2
Were uncertain about eligibility	12
Had been advised they were eligible for VA benefits	36
When released from service	17
By VA	7
By probation/parole officer	1
Other	11
Had applied for VA benefits at some time	40
Applied before imprisonment or probation	27
Used educational benefits during incarceration	5
Currently receiving VA educational assistance benefits	8
Currently receiving other VA benefits	8
Requested VA employment assistance	10
Obtained employment	5
Received interviews with employers	3
Received little or no help from VA	2

a/Out of a total of 50.

Current situation compared to 1974

A comparison of the results of our most recent study with those of our 1974 review shows that more veterans who are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole are now aware of and using their VA benefits. Although we cannot project the results of either review, they do give an indication of the situation at the time.

The most dramatic change over the last 5 years was in the number of veterans who believed they lost their VA benefits because of incarceration. In 1974, 72 of 137 veterans interviewed (53 percent) believed that incarceration resulted in a loss of VA benefits. During our latest review, only 1 of the 207 incarcerated veterans we spoke with had this misconception.

The following table contains some key comparisons of our 1974 and 1979 studies.

	<u>Number</u>		<u>Percent</u>	
	<u>1974</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1979</u>
<u>Incarcerated veterans</u>				
Total interviewed	107	207	-	-
Received other than dishonorable discharge	105	204	98	99
Not advised of their entitlement to VA benefits since imprisonment	87	35	81	17
Believed they lost their right to benefits due to incarceration	57	1	53	(a)
Intended to contact VA for assistance after release from prison	75	178	70	86
<u>Veterans on probation or parole</u>				
Total interviewed	30	50	-	-
Were receiving VA benefits:				
Educational assistance	2	25	7	50
Other	1	12	3	24
Not advised of their entitlement to VA benefits while in prison	29	17	97	34
Believed they lost their right to benefits due to incarceration	15	0	50	0
Wanted more information on VA benefits	24	35	80	70
Intended to contact VA	18	35	60	70

a/Negligible.

Factors which might affect awareness  
and use of VA benefits

On the basis of interviews at the prisons, we identified the prisons whose veteran inmates had the best awareness and use of VA benefits and prisons with the worst records. We then analyzed factors that may have contributed toward these situations. While it is not clear whether a positive attitude on the part of prison officials caused VA to visit often, or vice versa, these two factors seem to affect the program.

The prison with the best record in terms of awareness and use was the Federal Correctional Institution at Terminal Island, California. The admission and orientation sessions at this prison generally included a discussion of VA educational assistance benefits. Inmates signing up for courses were asked about their veteran status. The education officer and various prison instructors were aware of VA benefits and reportedly tried to answer questions of incarcerated veterans. Further, the inmate handbook mentioned that VA educational assistance benefits were available.

Terminal Island offered basic education, high school, college, vocational, and apprenticeship courses. Only the high school and college courses had been approved for VA educational assistance payments at the time of our visit. However, according to prison officials, approval for VA benefits for three or four apprenticeship courses were to be obtained.

This facility was visited monthly by VA representatives. Inmates were notified of VA counselors' impending visits over the loudspeaker system, and signup sheets were provided for those who wished to meet with them.

Four prisons, three local and one State, were ranked low by us in terms of inmates' awareness and use of benefits. Prison counselors at three of the prisons told us that they provided no VA benefit counseling, although one said a nearby State veterans' affairs office offered counseling. At the fourth prison, both the prison counselor and the Red Cross were available to counsel on veterans' benefits. VA provided no counseling at any of the facilities.

A wide range of education and training was available at these four prisons. Two offered high school equivalency courses that were not approved for VA benefits. A third

offered a vocational course and a range of educational programs from basic education through college. The college program was approved for VA benefits. The fourth prison offered high school equivalency as well as three vocational courses taught at a local school. Although the school's courses were approved for VA benefits, the limited number of hours the inmates were allowed to attend made them ineligible for VA benefits.

Prison officials at three of these four facilities were receptive to the idea of VA counseling inmates. The warden at the fourth prison was the only one we spoke to during this review who opposed VA counseling; he thought receipt of VA checks would be disruptive in that it would create bookkeeping problems.

#### OUTREACH PROGRAM NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

We believe that, generally, the outreach program has been given a low priority among VA programs. Several matters regarding program administration require VA action. Although some regions exceeded the guidelines, in general they were not being met. Supervision of VA counselors was virtually nonexistent, outreach efforts varied, and coordination among VA and other groups making outreach visits to prisons was limited.

#### Compliance with and completeness of guidelines

As stated earlier VA guidelines provide that:

- Semiannual visits be made to all Federal and State prisons where prison authorities believe it desirable and necessary to provide group briefings and individual counseling for veteran inmates.
- Annual briefings be given to prison officials on VA benefit programs.
- Information be disseminated on VA services available by mail and by its special toll-free Wide Area Telephone Service.
- Literature on VA benefit programs be made available to prison officials to hand out to inmates.

VA guidelines do not require VA to visit local prisons or to provide briefings to parole or probation officers or others involved in outreach efforts.

All three regions we visited found it necessary to visit one or more prisons more frequently than semiannually and to visit local penal institutions, as well as required Federal and State institutions. In two regions, parole and probation officers and representatives of private groups that counsel incarcerated veterans were invited to briefings on VA benefits.

Each region we visited was providing counseling in at least one local prison. VA's guidelines do not provide for visiting such institutions because VA believes that veterans generally stay there for a short periods and would therefore not be able to use educational assistance benefits. However, we noted inmates could serve up to life sentences in these institutions in one region we visited. Even though inmates might not be able to use educational assistance benefits when serving a short sentence, this might be a good time to remind them of available VA assistance.

A number of factors are involved in determining the most suitable frequency of visits to a particular prison. For example, more frequent visits might be needed if the prison has many veterans, if it has a work schedule that makes it difficult for incarcerated veterans to arrange an appointment, if inmates' terms of imprisonment are relatively short, or if a number of programs approved for VA benefits are available. However, if the prison is small or has few veterans, if it has an active veterans club which is well informed and able to counsel others on veterans' benefits, or if other groups are very active in counseling veterans there, VA might not have to visit twice a year.

VA's guidelines do not mention meeting with probation and parole officers, because veterans not in prison are free to contact VA themselves. Further, they do not recognize that many other organizations counsel incarcerated veterans. VA could increase its outreach efforts through better use of both of these groups.

In two regions we visited, parole and probation officers were invited to briefings on VA benefits. In one region only State officers were invited because the responsible VA official was unaware of the Federal probation system. Only a few of the probation and parole officers we interviewed had any contact with VA.

One function of these officers is to provide referrals for their clients. Many told us that they referred veterans to VA for educational assistance benefits and drug and alcohol treatment. However, for employment and social services they generally referred them to other organizations, such as:

- The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program.
- The Social Security Administration.
- State and county employment services.
- State vocational rehabilitation services.
- The National Alliance of Businessmen.
- Private organizations offering drug abuse treatment, employment referrals, and social services.

Many of the probation and parole officers we interviewed were aware of VA benefits because they are veterans themselves or because they learned about them from clients. However, most admitted that they were not well informed about VA programs and preferred to refer all questions to VA. One of the officers we interviewed was under the impression that a veteran had to have an honorable discharge to be eligible for VA benefits.

In 1976, VA sent a packet of materials on VA benefits to probation and parole officers and invited them to contact VA if they had any questions. According to VA officials, this effort drew little response, and VA never followed up with any more information. One of the probation officers we interviewed had received this packet and found it helpful.

Although information on their clients' military status was available to the probation and parole officers, many did not know which of their clients were veterans until we asked them. Unless they are aware of the assistance VA can offer veterans, probation and parole officers are likely to often overlook VA as a resource for aid and benefits.

Regarding the Wide Area Telephone Service system, many of the prisons we visited were close enough to a VA office to reach it with a local call. Many education officers said they would place a call to VA for a veteran, but unless a veteran is already taking courses, he may not contact the education office or be reluctant to involve a third party in his dealings with VA.

Of the 10 prisons we visited, 7 said they had no VA literature available for distribution, and 3, all in the same region, had limited literature available. For example, at all three, the education officer had a booklet on all VA benefits, and at one, the booklet could be borrowed from the prison library. At one other prison, the education officer told us the VA counselor brings literature when visiting, but does not leave any. He said that he has been trying to obtain a supply of this literature for some time. Since our recent visits to prisons, VA has published a pamphlet specifically directed toward incarcerated veterans.

Staffing, supervising, and reporting  
of outreach activities

According to VA, the number of personnel involved in its outreach program has been increasing slightly over the past few years despite a decline in the number of veterans representatives on campus (Vet-Reps). The Vet-Reps have been the most active persons providing counseling to incarcerated veterans. VA personnel making prison visits are generally not supervised to assure the effectiveness of the visits. In some situations it appeared that not all of the outreach personnel understood the purpose of the visits. Also, monthly reports prepared by the regional offices lack supporting documentation and are not evaluated; instead, they are merely forwarded to VA's central office for statistical reports.

VA personnel selected to serve as counselors are generally given 80 hours of training on VA benefits and counseling techniques. Upon completing this training, they are given on-the-job training at the regional offices. As trainees progress, they work on their own and eventually conduct on-site visits, such as visits to penal institutions. Persons involved in benefits counseling are given periodic refresher training on VA benefits and counseling. VA does not provide special training or written instructions for persons involved in counseling incarcerated veterans.

Information VA provided indicates that several types of regional office personnel have been involved in counseling incarcerated veterans. During the last 3 years, the types of personnel visiting penal institutions were as follows:

<u>Type of personnel</u>	<u>Number of persons</u>		
	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>
Vet-Rep	168	172	171
Veterans benefits counselor	48	50	59
Counseling psychologist	22	23	36
Veterans benefit specialist	13	14	25
Community service specialist	12	12	11
Other	<u>41</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>60</u>
Total	<u>304</u>	<u>317</u>	<u>362</u>

The largest category of personnel providing outreach to prisons is the Vet-Reps. These persons were stationed on college campuses when large numbers of veterans were using VA education benefits. Since some were located near prisons, they were also given the responsibility of providing outreach to incarcerated veterans. However, since the number of veterans receiving educational benefits has declined substantially, VA has been reducing the number of Vet-Reps. VA expects to reduce its force of Vet-Reps from about 661 in fiscal year 1978 to about 260 by the end of fiscal year 1979. Nevertheless, VA plans to continue its present level of service to incarcerated veterans. This, we were told, may require using other staff members to visit penal institutions.

In two of the three regions we visited, the supervisors of VA personnel making prison visits said that they do not get involved in the prison outreach effort. We found no instance in which a counselor had been observed by a supervisor in conducting an in-prison counseling session. Also, some VA personnel apparently believe this counseling is concerned with education benefits only.

At one prison, veterans told us that the Vet-Rep spoke only to veterans enrolled in the college program. When we asked prison officials about this Vet-Rep, none had heard of him. Discussion with the Vet-Rep revealed that all arrangements for his counseling at the prison were made through employees of the college at which he was stationed and which offered an academic program at the prison. He admitted that he had not met with prison officials and that most of the people he contacted were in the college program.

At another prison, the Vet-Rep was unaware of the situation of any veterans who were not enrolled in the prison's academic program. He had identified and met with 9 veterans

who were in the education program, but had not met with 150 others who were not. According to a VA official in one region, counseling is provided only in prisons with education programs approved for VA benefits. One of the Vet-Reps in this region recommended that counseling be discontinued at a prison when the prison stopped offering a college program approved for VA benefits.

Although VA counselors making prison visits are required to fill out visitation forms, the forms generally show only the name of the prison, the number of people counseled in group sessions and individually, and the number of briefings for prison officials and number of officials briefed. Few contain any comments. Officials in two of the three regions we visited said that the only reason this information was collected was that VA's central office required it. The regions we visited did not analyze these reports to determine which prisons were visited, or how often.

We attempted to verify information reported by the three regions on prison outreach in 1978. In one region, the Vet-Reps either did not submit information or had left VA and did not leave their reports. In another region, the level of outreach was understated. Counselors from two VA departments were duplicating each other's efforts by visiting some of the same prisons. The Department of Veterans Benefits was not aware of, or reporting, the efforts of VA's Department of Medicine and Surgery. The Vet-Reps in this region had been telephoning their information on prison visits to the regional office until October 1978, when written reports began to be submitted. The regional offices enter the information, in summary form, on a code sheet which is forwarded to VA's central office. From this, the central office compiles a statistical report containing the above-cited information. During our review, to be responsive to future inquiries, VA added information to this report on the amount of time VA personnel are devoting to the outreach effort.

Six staff members at the central office are involved in this outreach program. They told us that they spend an estimated 5 to 50 percent of their time on matters relating to incarcerated veterans. They are involved in coordinating with other agencies, analyzing variations in the statistics on service to incarcerated veterans, handling complaints, making speeches, and organizing special projects, such as preparing the pamphlet directed at incarcerated veterans.

Beyond analyzing variations in statistics, VA's central office oversight of this effort depends on evaluation teams which are supposed to visit VA regional offices every 18 months. The evaluators, aware of VA's guidelines, are required to report any problems noted. VA officials informed us that the latest evaluation reports for each of the VA regions in which we visited prisons contained no information on outreach efforts for incarcerated veterans.

VA has never attempted to evaluate this outreach effort. The data currently collected would not provide a basis for anything other than a cursory evaluation, and a VA official told us that VA is more concerned with providing information and trying to motivate veterans to use their benefits.

#### Outreach efforts vary

Despite VA directives targeting incarcerated veterans for special attention, this program has not been consistently emphasized within VA. A revealing factor is that, although the regions we visited had identified the prisons in their area, none had been able to identify the number of incarcerated veterans. However, we were able to get this information for the three Federal and for all of the State prisons in two of the three regions.

The lack of emphasis on the outreach effort was particularly evident in one region, which planned to virtually phase out this program by June 1979. At that time, officials planned to be visiting only the one Federal prison in its territory. According to officials of that region, most outreach will be discontinued because:

- The region does not have enough field resources (Vet-Reps) to visit prisons.
- Some prison officials do not want VA in their prisons.
- The outreach effort has a low payoff and resources could be better used elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that, although this region plans to visit only one Federal prison, we estimate that almost 1,300 (58 percent) of the State's incarcerated veterans are within a 2-hour drive of the regional office. Further, officials of the State's correction system and some prisons

indicated a willingness to have VA counsel in the prisons. In fact, a State corrections official told us that he had tried to coordinate with VA to provide orientation on VA benefits, but had been unable to get cooperation from VA over the past 15 months. A State official told us that VA was dealing with prison officials at the wrong levels and that they should have gone through channels to develop an effective outreach program. The VA regional official responsible for outreach admitted that he had not taken the initiative to meet with top State officials.

Regarding that region's claim that this effort has a low payoff, we noted that no records are kept on the results of prison visits and no evaluation has been made of this effort. One regional official said he believed that only a small percentage of incarcerated veterans benefited from the outreach. Another stated that many veterans just want to talk with someone or have problems with which VA cannot help.

Our experience in talking with Vet-Reps, analyzing available reports, and accompanying a Vet-Rep on a counseling visit did not substantiate the claim that veterans only wanted to talk to someone. Although few of the persons making prison visits kept detailed records on their activities, one counselor did record each of his visits, the individuals he counseled, and the subjects discussed. Our analysis of a 2-month sample of his records showed that the incarcerated veterans wanted to talk about the following matters:

	<u>Number of inquiries</u>
General information on VA	75
Education	56
Personal problems	38
Discharge upgrading	30
Medical	16
Employment	16
Legal matters	3
Housing	2

According to an official in another regional office, there is little emphasis on serving incarcerated veterans. Many veterans, such as the disabled, required VA assistance. The priority for this group is much higher than

for incarcerated veterans. The VA official stated as an example that, in November 1978, more than 950 veterans came into the veterans' assistance center at the regional office for assistance. He said that, because of this large demand at the regional office, the effort to serve incarcerated veterans will probably become even more limited with any future cuts in the Vet-Rep program.

In contrast, in the third region we visited, all Federal and State prisons had been visited frequently. Some of the Vet-Reps, or other outreach counselors in this region, acted as advocates to convince and help prison officials to obtain approval of courses for VA benefits. However, attention was focused primarily on educational benefits, and contacts were generally with the education officers at prisons, possibly leaving non-education-oriented veterans without VA counseling.

Cuts in the Vet-Rep program have resulted primarily in a reduced frequency of visits in this region. Regional officials told us that, even if the Vet-Rep program were discontinued, outreach would be maintained, although at the time of our visit they had no specific plans on how this would be accomplished.

#### Coordination of outreach efforts

Some incarcerated veterans we interviewed said that, in addition to VA, they had received information on benefits from prison officials, veterans' service organizations, State and local officials, and other organizations. Because there is little coordination among these groups, they may be duplicating each other's work or giving conflicting information.

Of the 10 prisons we visited, 4 were visited by State or private groups to counsel veterans. Each of the three States had a veterans' affairs department, some of which were more active than others. Also, some prisons in regions we did not visit apparently have very active veterans' groups and incarcerated veterans on work-study programs that provide information on VA benefits.

State activities varied in their outreach to incarcerated veterans. The California unit was relatively inactive in this regard due to budgetary constraints. Georgia's Department of Veterans Service has about 59 field offices with over 100 representatives throughout the State. Representatives of

this agency regularly visit the State's largest prison as part of its effort to inform veterans about and assist them in obtaining benefits. VA reported that its representatives visited that prison twice in 1978.

The New York Division of Veterans Affairs is active in each of the State's 57 counties. One of the State counselors visited the State prison in our review every 6 weeks, while the Vet-Rep visited it six times in 1978. The State also provided the only counseling at one of New York's local prisons that we visited. VA does not coordinate its outreach effort with either the Georgia or New York groups.

There is no centralized list of agencies and groups that provide services similar to VA's to incarcerated veterans. Therefore, we could not readily identify all such groups. However, we did learn of one group which received a \$500,000 Department of Labor grant to improve the employability of incarcerated veterans. One of the group's functions is to assist in upgrading discharges. Of the approximately 110 prisons this group intends to visit, VA apparently visited 69 in 1978.

One VA regional office sometimes invited private groups to its briefing sessions. In one instance, the regional office invited a private group to present a briefing on upgrading discharges because this group had recognized expertise in the area. In another instance, an outreach counselor was sometimes accompanied on his prison visits by a representative of a voluntary employment program. However, coordination has generally been minimal.

Having various groups visiting prisons and attempting to assist veterans has led to confusion, according to one prison official. He stated that some veteran inmates see a different person each time they are counseled. Consequently, in some cases duplicate services were provided and veterans' problems were not resolved. Another problem is that literature of some groups contains misleading statements. Specifically, some brochures imply that only veterans with honorable discharges are eligible for VA benefits. Actually, anyone with a discharge under other than dishonorable conditions may be eligible.

CONCLUSIONS

Some veterans incarcerated in Federal, State, and local penal facilities are uninformed about their rights to VA benefits and have not been counseled by VA. VA has increased its efforts to visit penal institutions to counsel veterans. As a group, veterans currently in prison, on probation, and on parole are more aware of and able to use their benefits than those we interviewed in 1974. Both VA's outreach and prison officials' cooperation seem to affect the incarcerated veterans' awareness and use of these benefits. However, these are not the only factors contributing to increased awareness, as the impact of other groups that counsel incarcerated veterans must also be considered.

VA could accomplish more if its program were managed better. The program appears to have a low priority in VA, and supervision is inadequate. Guidelines are generally not being met and do not provide for visiting local prisons and providing informational material and briefings for others performing outreach. The reporting system does not supply information adequate to manage or evaluate the outreach efforts. Also, there is little coordination with other groups providing outreach activities to incarcerated veterans.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

We recommend that the Committee assess VA's outreach program to incarcerated veterans and determine the priority it should receive in relation to VA's other programs.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE ADMINISTRATOR  
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

We recommend that the Administrator direct VA regional offices to:

- Identify the number and location of incarcerated veterans within their jurisdictions and target their efforts to reach the greatest possible number.
- Provide appropriate supervision of VA representatives conducting the outreach effort.

- Identify the various non-VA groups visiting prisons to counsel on veterans' benefits, and coordinate with these groups. To assure that correct information is relayed to veterans, counselors from these groups should be briefed and their literature reviewed by VA.

The Administrator should also direct that:

- Guidelines be revised to provide for briefings to probation and parole officers and appropriate organizations.
- Copies of the VA brochure developed specifically for incarcerated veterans be mailed periodically to every Federal, State, and major local penal facility.
- Reporting on this outreach effort be improved to provide more relevant information and to permit evaluations of the effort at both the regional and national levels.

PENAL INSTITUTIONS VISITED BY GAO

	<u>Visited by VA</u>	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Federal institutions:		
Danbury Federal Correctional Facility, Danbury, Conn.	X	
Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, Atlanta, Ga.	X	
Federal Correctional Institution, Terminal Island, Calif.	X	
State institutions:		
Greenhaven Correctional Facility, Stormville, N.Y.	X	
Stone Mountain Correctional Institution, Stone Mountain, Ga.		X
California Rehabilitation Center, Corona, Calif.	X	
Local institutions:		
Albany County Jail, Albany, N.Y.		X
Schenectady County Jail, Schenectady, N.Y.		X
Carroll County Correctional Institution, Carrollton, Ga.		X
County of Los Angeles, Mira Loma Facility, Lancaster, Calif.	X	

ESTIMATES OF U.S. PENAL INSTITUTION POPULATION

	Federal (note a)		State (note b)		Local (note b)	
TOTAL	26,234 (2/2/79)		277,600 (12/31/78)		158,394 (2/78)	
Male	94%	"	97%	(1/74)	95%	(1972)
Female	6%	"	3%	"	5%	"
White	58.5% (11/21/78)		51%	"	56%	"
Black	39.4%	"	47%	"	42%	"
American Indian	1.6%	"	}	2%	}	2%
Asian	.3%	"				
Other	.2%	"				
Total veteran	19.6% (4/4/79)		27%	(1974)	(c)	

a/Department of Justice--Bureau of Prisons statistics.

b/Department of Justice--Law Enforcement Assistance Administration statistics.

c/Not available.

VA-REPORTED STATISTICS ON PRISON VISITSIN CALENDAR YEAR 1978

	<u>Federal</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Local</u> <u>(note a)</u>
Number of prisons in U.S. (including Puerto Rico)	<u>b/37</u>	406	<u>c/3,500</u>
Visited at least semiannually	24	205	39
Visited only once	7	51	43
Not visited	6	150	-

a/VA guidelines do not require visits to local facilities.

b/An additional 11 Federal facilities were considered not applicable for veteran outreach.

c/Estimate supplied by Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

According to VA officials, five of the six Federal institutions were not visited because they had limited veteran populations, VA was seeking approval to visit, or VA was coordinating with local veterans' service offices. For the other prison, no reason was given.

VA officials gave the following reasons for not visiting the 150 State penal institutions:

--No visits were requested by prison officials for 69 prisons for whom VA was on call.

--Prison officials at 29 institutions in one State advised VA that almost all veterans pass through other State facilities where VA counseling was available.

--Fifteen institutions had few or no veterans.

--For 11 institutions, prisoners' lengths of stay were short and VA staff and funds were lacking.

--Officials at 10 institutions did not believe visits were desirable or necessary.

--Five institutions in one State were relatively small.

--Officials at three institutions preferred working through veterans' affairs offices at the local level.

--For the remaining eight institutions, other reasons were given.

FEDERAL EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND  
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS FOR OFFENDERS

Federal agencies provide financial support for education and training programs to a disadvantaged target population. Correctional institutions are generally eligible to receive financial support for education and training programs since offenders are classified as disadvantaged. Currently, there is no comprehensive list of all federally funded education and training programs for offenders. Three Departments--Justice; Labor; and Health, Education, and Welfare--provide most of the Federal funds for correctional education and training programs. The following sections outline the nature of programs funded by these agencies.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

The Department of Justice provides funds for the education and training of Federal law violators committed to the custody of the Attorney General. Funding for these programs is part of the operating budget of the Bureau of Prisons.

The Bureau of Prisons offers a full range of academic programs and a wide range of occupational programs at its institutions. The academic programs include adult basic and secondary education and various postsecondary education courses. Adult basic and secondary education programs are generally taught by Bureau personnel, while postsecondary education is provided through arrangements with neighboring colleges. The occupational training programs include exploratory and on-the-job training. Occupational training is generally taught by Bureau personnel at the institution. During fiscal year 1977, the Bureau spent about \$10.6 million for educating and training offenders, of which about \$4 million was provided by Federal Prison Industries, Inc.

The Bureau has issued a policy statement directing prison officials to make thorough reviews of possible sources of tuition support for inmates interested in college-level courses. Among the possible sources of support suggested by the Bureau is VA.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The Department of Labor's programs provide assistance in several ways--comprehensive manpower services, public employment programs, programs for special target groups, the Job Corps, emergency jobs and employment assistance,

national on-the-job training, apprenticeship outreach and training, and employment consultation and placement services. Some of these programs may provide education, training, and job assistance to offenders in institutions, while others provide these services to persons released to the community.

Most of Labor's financial support for State correctional institutions is supplied under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. Section 301 of the act specifically covers offenders. This section provides for establishing procedures to insure that offenders are given manpower training and related services, such as basic education, drug addiction or dependency rehabilitation, health care, and other services that will enable them to secure meaningful employment. Funds appropriated under the act have been used by State correctional agencies to provide occupational training and related services to offenders.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare provides financial assistance to State and local education agencies for improving and strengthening educational opportunities for the handicapped and disadvantaged. Legislation that assists in the education and training of offenders includes (1) the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, (2) the Adult Education Act of 1966, (3) the Library Services and Construction Act, and (4) the Vocational Education Act of 1963, as amended.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 authorizes Federal funds to colleges and universities for (1) strengthening community service programs, (2) expanding library resources and training programs in librarianship, and (3) improving training and retraining programs for teachers, teacher aides, and other educational personnel. This act also provides financial assistance for students to attend college through the Basic Educational Opportunity and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant programs. State correctional agencies have used the act to provide college programs and sponsor teacher interns within the correctional facilities. Offenders in Federal and State correctional institutions have obtained tuition assistance for college programs through the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant program.

The Adult Education Act of 1966 expanded the educational opportunities of adults. It encouraged them to obtain at least secondary education and training to enable them to become more employable, productive, and responsible citizens. Under the act, funds are generally awarded directly to the States, which reallocate the money to local education agencies. State correctional agencies have used these funds to provide adult basic and secondary education programs for offenders.

The Library Services and Construction Act permits Federal funds to be used for improving public library services for physically handicapped, institutionalized, and disadvantaged persons. The act specifically authorizes that books, library materials, and library services may be provided to offenders in correctional institutions. Under the act, funds are awarded to a State agency, which is responsible for reallocating them to individual library projects. These funds have been used to expand library services for offenders in State correctional institutions.

The Vocational Education Act of 1963, as amended, authorizes that Federal funds be spent to improve vocational education and to expand vocational education opportunities. Grants are generally provided to State education agencies to help them maintain and extend existing programs and in developing new vocational education programs. Special target groups have been identified for particular emphasis in the delivery of these services. These groups include youths; persons of limited English-speaking ability; handicapped persons; and nonhandicapped persons with academic, socioeconomic, or other problems that prevent them from succeeding in a regular vocational education program. Offenders are eligible for services under this act because they are members of a disadvantaged group. State correctional administrators have used funds appropriated under the act to provide occupational training programs for offenders.