

Six Essential Questions for VHA Tier 1 Background Investigation/Foreign National Vetting

What is changing?

The background screening conducted by the Defense Counterintelligence & Security Agency will be required for all United States citizens and non-United States citizens living in the U.S. for more than three years who will have access to VA information technology systems and physical sites.

An alternate vetting system will be applied for non-United States citizens living in the U.S. for less than three years who will have access to VA information technology systems and physical sites.

Why is it changing?

The upcoming updates reflect a broader commitment to universal federal information security best practices and ensure compliance with legal requirements mandated by the [Federal Information Systems Modernization Act \(FISMA\)](#). VA is proud to be in step with these important guidelines.

To align with the [Federal Zero Trust Architecture \(ZTA\) strategy](#) for security and compliance, it is necessary to meet the USAccess Personal Identity Verification (PIV) system requirements, as well as the VA's transition to Trusted Workforce 2.0 and Continuous Vetting, as outlined in VA directives and policy.

VHA is committed to remaining proactive in reducing risk to Veterans, visitors, employees, and any other person in the VA system. This proactive approach is a key part of our commitment to safety and security.

Who is it impacting?

The changes to the background investigation process will impact all employees newly engaged with VA, existing individuals not meeting revised screening requirements, and individuals in paid, non-paid, or without compensation status. This change is driven by required enhancements to the suitability checks of health professions trainees and other affiliates to be consistent with the requirements in place for employees and contractors. Policies are still being established, and those who require additional action will be notified.

Individuals who will be engaged with VA for less than 180 days may require a different level of investigation.

What is not changing?

VA remains committed to providing timely and appropriate access to those who need it. There will be no additional actions for those who already have the required level of background screening. The expectation is that anyone completing a Background Investigation will be completely honest about their background, reinforcing our commitment to transparency and trust.

What are the risks of not changing?

Inadequate screening creates an increased potential for inappropriate access to VA information systems and physical sites, including all VA-protected information, Veteran health records, and employee records, along with insufficient screening for access to secure areas, materials, or physical resources.

What are the benefits of the change?

These enhancements will align with government-wide standards and significantly reduce risks to VA's systems, facilities, and stakeholders, including Veterans, employees, health professions trainees, volunteers, visitors, and contractors. Additionally, for those transitioning to full-time roles, the streamlined process will facilitate a smoother transition from trainee to staff and between different sites or agencies, fostering increased confidence and trust in VA.