

SURVEY OF VETERANS' SATISFACTION WITH THE VA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

EVALUATION AND PLANNING PHASE

2002 Results

National Summary



Surveys and Research Staff
Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity
Veterans Benefits Administration

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Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements.....3
- Executive Summary
 - A: Survey Objectives.....5
 - B: Survey Development.....7
 - C: Sample Selection.....8
 - D: Report Highlights.....9
 - E: Significant Results in Trend Analysis: 2002 vs. 2001.....11
- Respondent Characteristics.....13
- Survey Findings
 - A: Applying for VR&E Benefits.....15
 - B: Evaluation and Testing.....29
 - C: Developing a Plan.....46
 - D: Access to the VR&E Program.....57
 - E: Current Status in the VR&E Program.....61
- Overall Program Impressions66
- Appendices
 - A: Questionnaire and Mailing Materials.....72
 - B: Survey Methodology.....89

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<http://www.vba.va.gov/surveys/>

Executive Summary

- To measure veterans' satisfaction with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program at the national level.
- To identify areas of the VR&E program which are most satisfying to veterans, areas of the VR&E program which are least satisfying to veterans, and areas of the VR&E program which are in greatest need of improvement.
- To determine where improvements to the VR&E program will have the greatest impact on veterans' satisfaction.
- To determine program variations that affect veterans' satisfaction.
- To create performance measures, including measures of customer service, through a strategic planning process, as required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) passed and signed into law in August of 1993.
- To establish an explicit goal for the quality of service that is "equal to the best in business" as described in Executive Order 12862, Setting Customer Service Standards, issued in September 1993. This order was aimed at "ensuring that the Federal Government provides the highest quality of service possible to the American people."

Survey Objectives (continued)

- To provide data for the purpose of monitoring VBA's performance against its customer service standards and driving improvements in customer service.
- To provide much-needed customer measures for evaluating VR&E's ongoing business process reengineering (BPR), case management, and related initiatives. Information from this survey will also be used to populate VR&E's balanced scorecard.

- As part of this project, VBA's Surveys and Research Staff held a series of focus groups with veterans and front-line employees to gather information relevant to customer satisfaction issues.
- From the focus group data, three surveys were developed to assess customer satisfaction at three phases of the program: evaluation and planning, training and education (rehabilitation services), and job ready.
- The original VR&E surveys, designed by the VBA, were pretested from June to August 1999. Pretest reports for the three phases of the program were developed to summarize the pretest findings, to examine the skip patterns, and to analyze the verbatim responses.
- Using the information provided in the pretest reports, the VBA Surveys and Research Staff and Caliber Associates modified the three questionnaires, which were used during the first full administration in 1999. Results from the 1999 administration were provided in a national report and reports for each SDN in March of 2000. The second full administration of the survey occurred in 2000 with results provided in a national report and reports for each SDN in March of 2001. The third full administration occurred in 2001 with final SDN and national reports provided in April of 2002.
- This report presents data on the fourth full administration of the VR&E surveys. Because SDNs were eliminated prior to this survey administration, the 2002 sample was taken at the national level.
- Prior to gathering data for this administration, the surveys were reviewed to determine the need for modification by VBA Surveys and Research Staff and Caliber Associates. There were no changes to the Evaluation and Planning survey for the 2002 administration. The final Evaluation and Planning questionnaire and mailing materials appear in Appendix A.
- Data for this report were collected during December 2002 and January 2003 by Caliber Associates. The Office of Management and Budget approval was obtained for each survey by the Veterans Benefits Administration. The date on the reports is December 2002, which reflects the midpoint of the data collection period.

- A random sample of approximately 6,000 veterans were sent the Evaluation and Planning questionnaire. A Spanish language version of the survey was provided to veterans residing in Puerto Rico.
- The sample of respondents who received the Evaluation and Planning questionnaire were either in the application phase, evaluation and planning phase, or in the beginning stages of their rehabilitation phase of their program (within past four months). This included those who interrupted or discontinued the program at any time between the period the sample was drawn and data collection was complete. A total of 30,499 persons were in the phase when the sample was drawn.
- Veterans who were selected into both the 2001 sample and the 2002 sample, and were listed in the same phase for both years, were removed from the 2002 sample. However, veterans who were selected into both the 2001 sample and the 2002 sample, but had moved to another phase from 2001 to 2002 were included in the sample, since they would receive a different questionnaire in the 2002 administration.
- A total of 6,000 questionnaires were distributed. The sample was not designed to yield data for any one regional office, only for the national total.
- A total of 3,022 respondents completed the **Evaluation and Planning** questionnaire for a response rate of 50.4 percent.
- A more detailed discussion of the survey methodology appears in Appendix B.

- **Demographics:**

- Most respondents were male (83.5 percent), averaging 44 years of age.

- **Applying for Benefits:**

- The most common methods by which respondents first learned of the program were pre-discharge briefings (28.3 percent) and letter from VA awarding Service-Connected Disability (20.5 percent).
- The most common reported length of time between program application and receipt of notification about setting up an appointment with an individual counselor was 4 weeks. 70 percent of respondents reported the length of time was very or somewhat reasonable.

- **Evaluation and Testing:**

- 60.7 percent of respondents indicated a VA staff counselor and 26.8 percent of respondents indicated a counselor under contract with the VA was their primary counselor during the initial evaluation.
- 60.1 percent of respondents indicated the initial evaluation either completely or mostly matched their particular skills and abilities.
- 74.7 percent of respondents indicated that they were very or somewhat satisfied with the way the vocational rehabilitation evaluation process was handled.

■ Developing a Plan

- 71.9 percent of respondents indicated a VA staff counselor and 17.6 percent of respondents indicated a counselor under contract with the VA was their primary counselor during the planning phase of their program.
- 81.7 percent of respondents indicated the time scheduled for developing the plan and 74.6 percent indicated the location where the plan was developed was either very or somewhat convenient.
- 82.4 percent of respondents indicated that they were very or somewhat satisfied with the way the vocational rehabilitation plan of services was developed.

■ Access to the Program

- 68.7 percent of respondents indicated it was very or somewhat easy to obtain information from the program.

■ Current Status in the Program

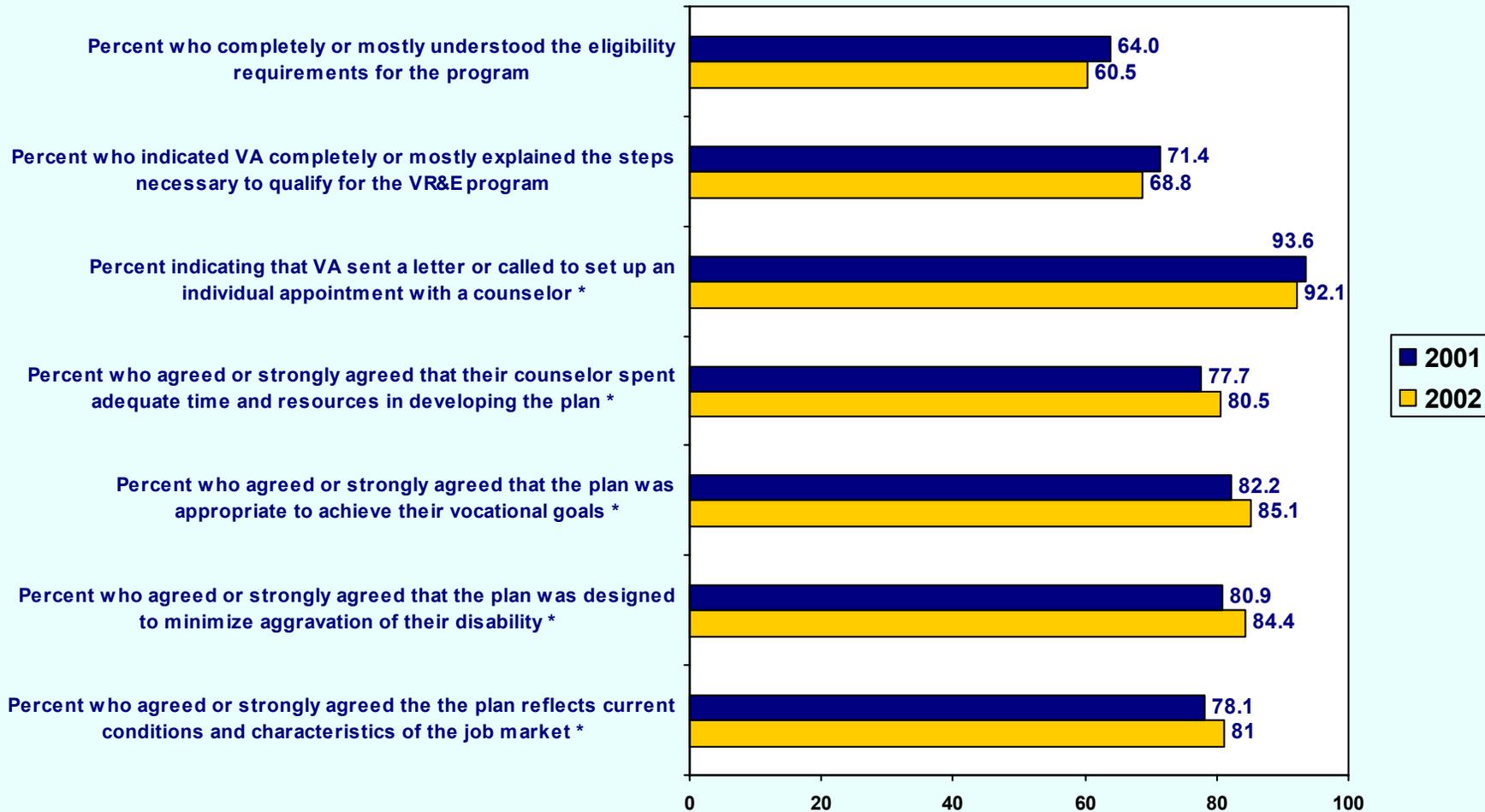
- 75.6 percent of respondents were currently pursuing the program. Voluntarily, 5.7 percent withdrew from the program and 8.9 percent interrupted their program. At the request of the VA, 5.0 percent withdrew from the program and 4.8 percent interrupted their program.

■ Overall Program Impressions:

- 44.4 percent of respondents reported the overall program was either much better or better than they expected.
- 57.7 percent of respondents felt there was adequate focus on their future employment during the Evaluation and Planning phase of the program.
- 44.2 percent of respondents indicated their career goals were raised and 53.6 percent indicated that their career goals were more realistic as a result of the program.
- 80.2 percent of respondents would recommend this program to other disabled veterans.

Significant Results in Trend Analysis: 2001 vs. 2002

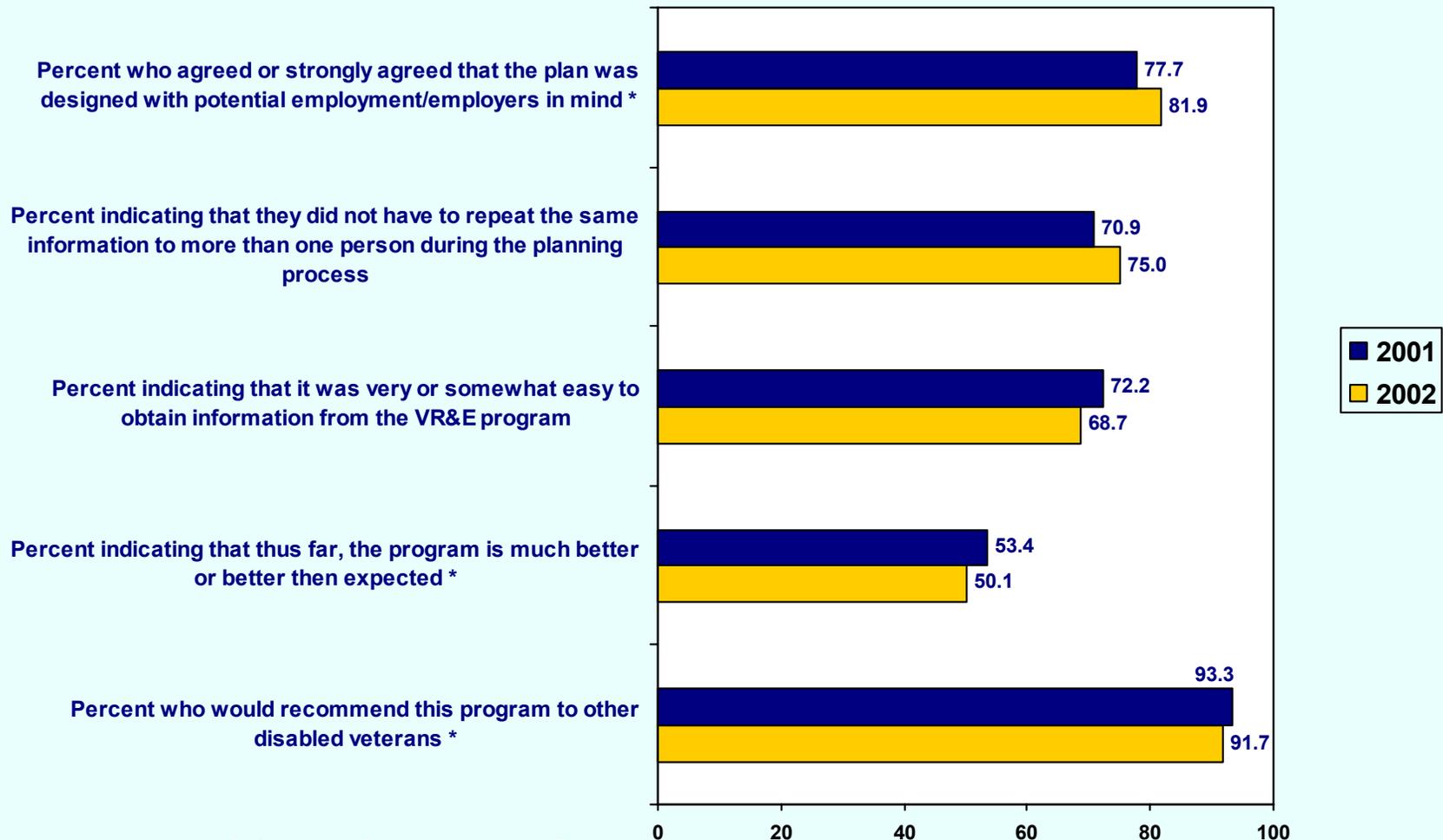
The items shown here reflect true differences in performance over time. If an item does not appear, then performance did not significantly change between the years.



* Excludes responses of "Don't know" or "Not applicable"

Significant Results in Trend Analysis: 2001 vs. 2002

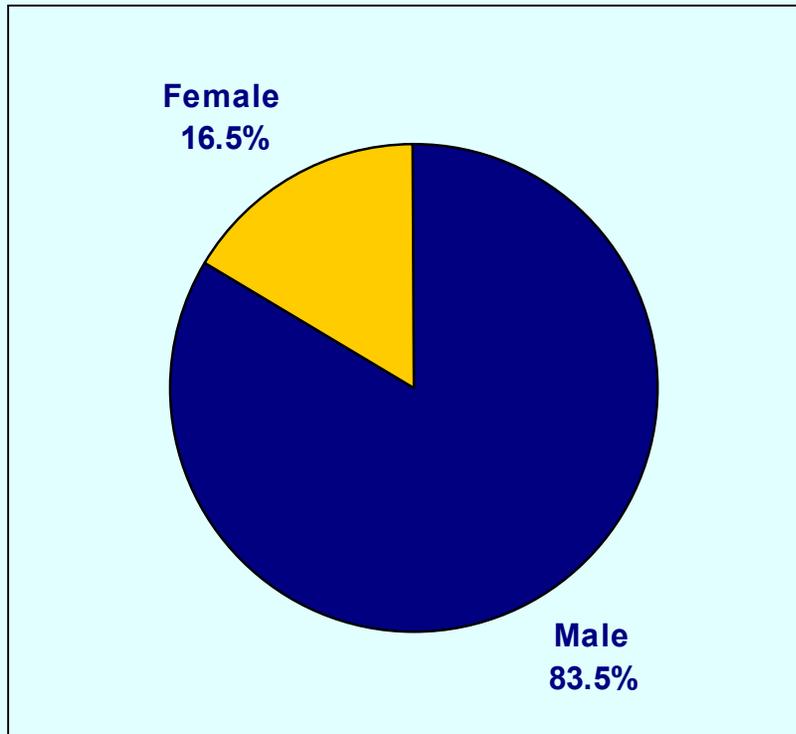
The items shown here reflect true differences in performance over time. If an item does not appear, then performance did not significantly change between the years.



* Excludes responses of "Don't know" or "Not applicable"

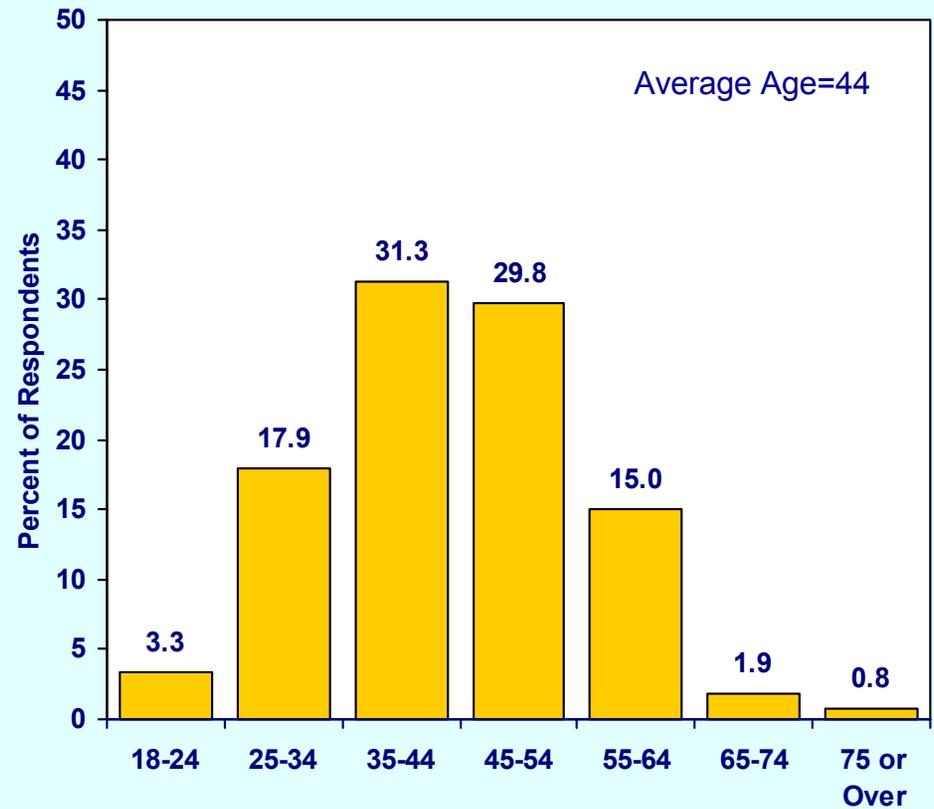
Respondent Characteristics

Gender Distribution



Valid n=2828

Age Distribution (in years)

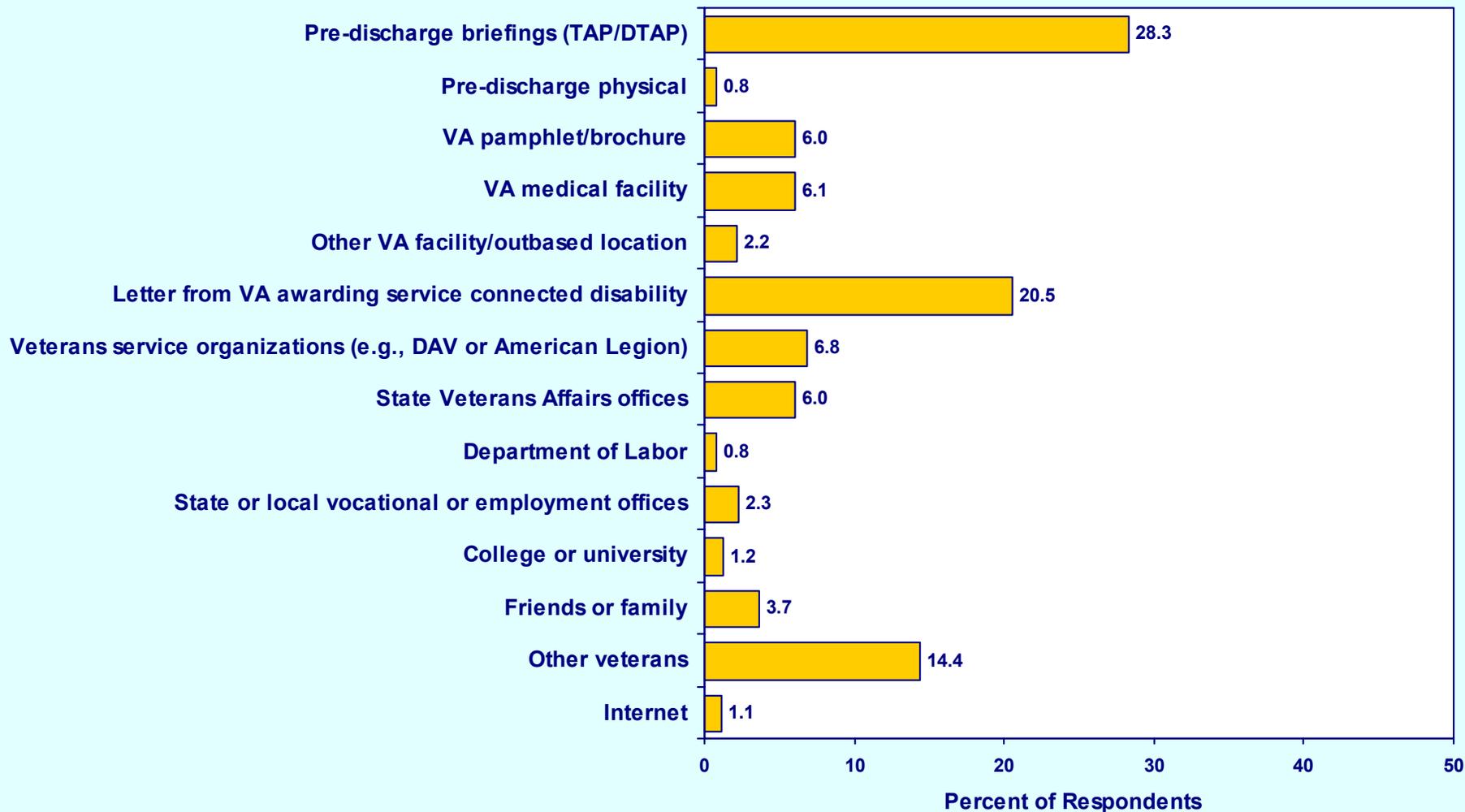


Valid n=2827

**Survey Findings:
Applying for VR&E Benefits**

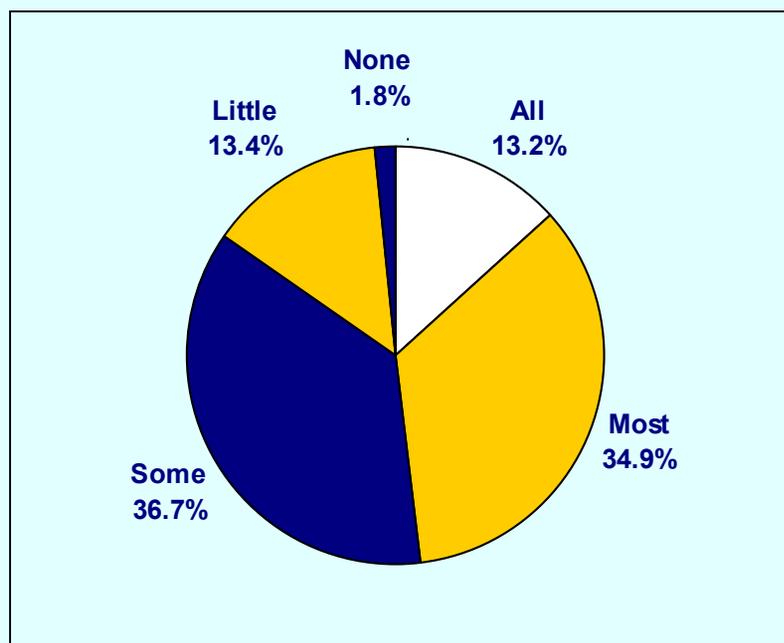
Question 1:

How did you FIRST learn about VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program?



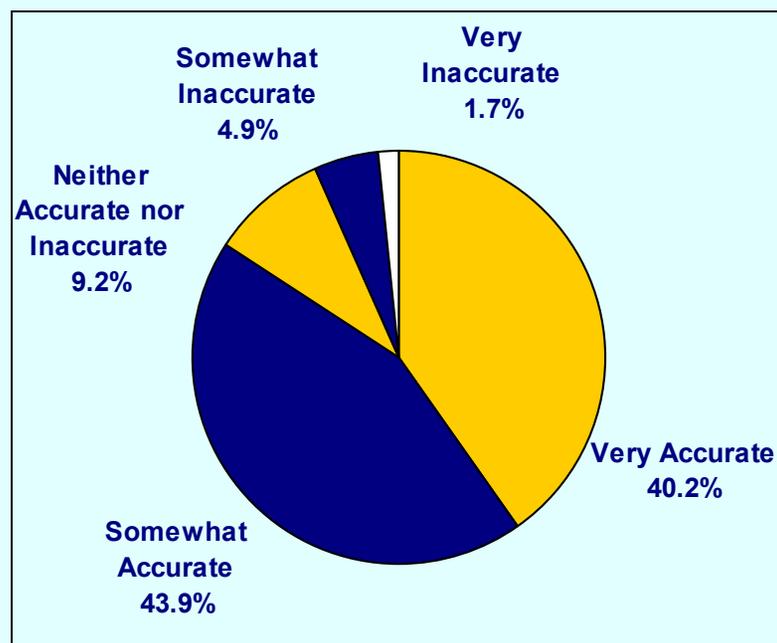
Valid n=2749

Question 2:
Looking back, how much of what you **NEEDED TO KNOW** did you get from this source?



Valid n=2806

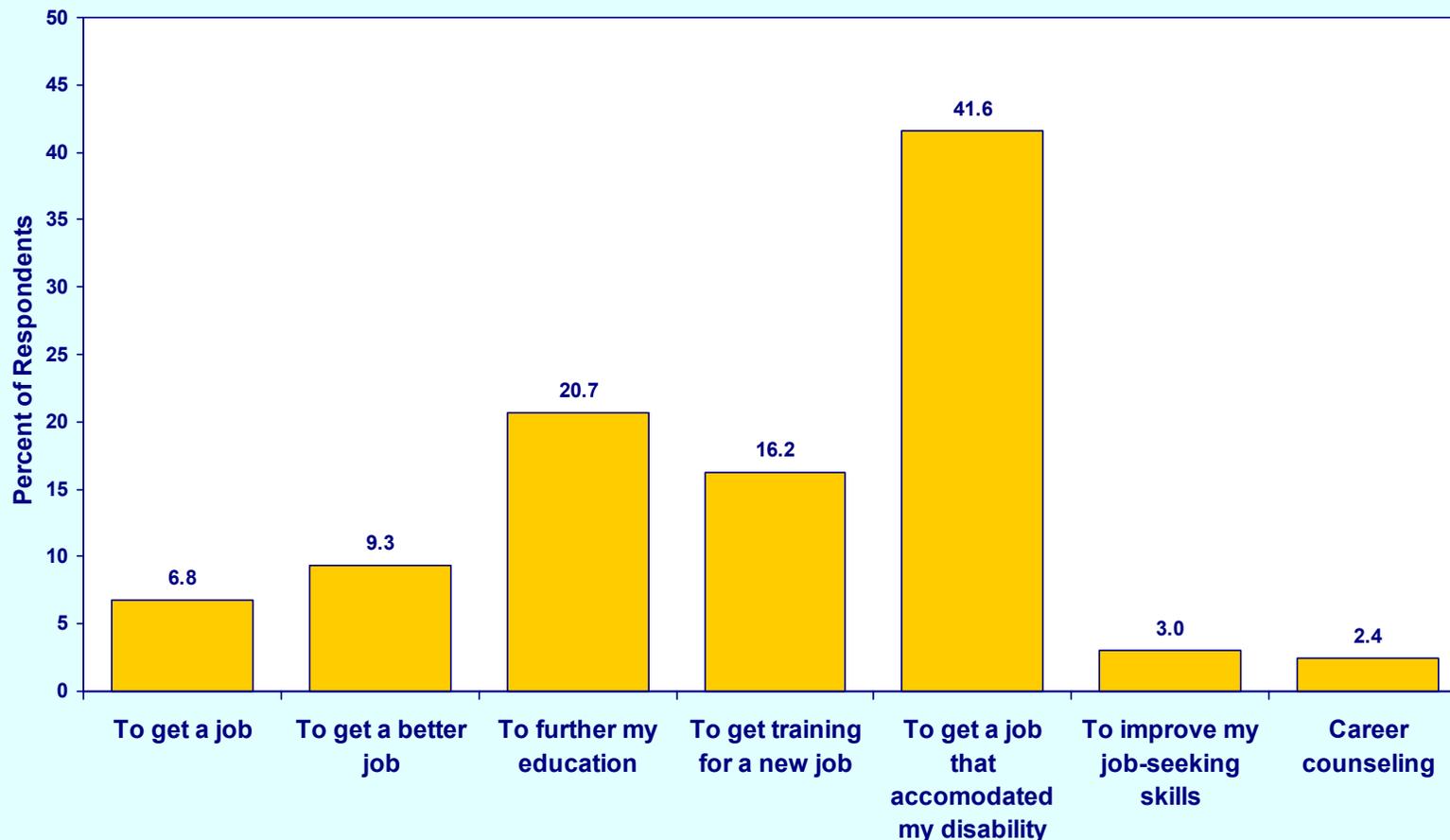
Question 3:
How accurate was the information you received?



Valid n=2797

Question 4:

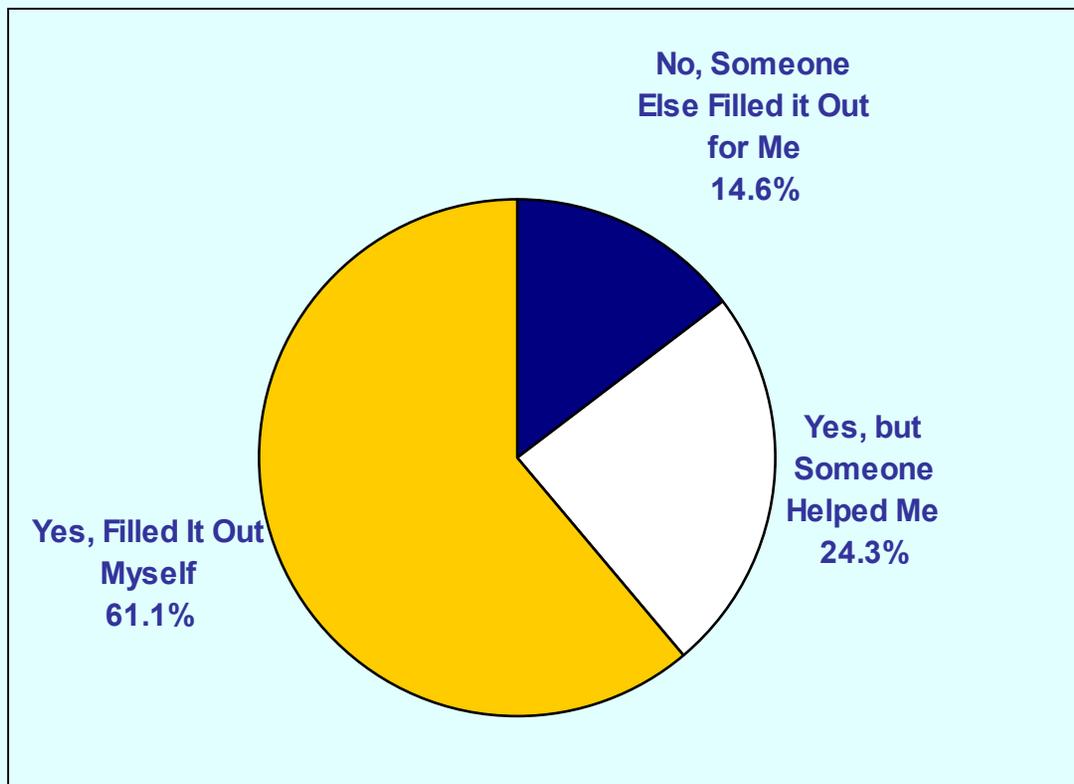
What is the MOST IMPORTANT reason you applied for the VR&E program?



Valid n=2736

Question 5:

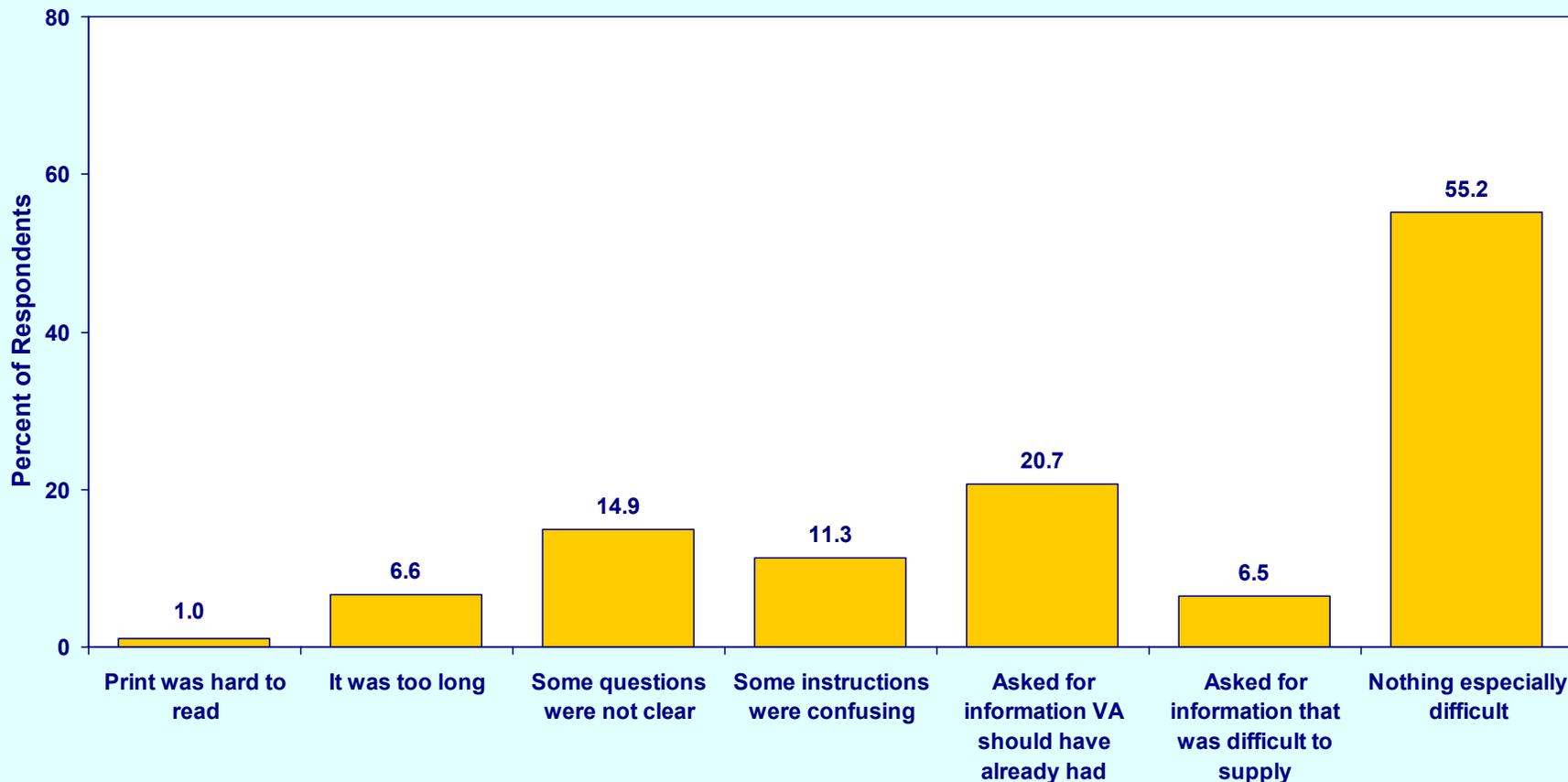
Did you fill out the VR&E (Chapter 31) application form yourself?



Valid n=2771

Question 6:

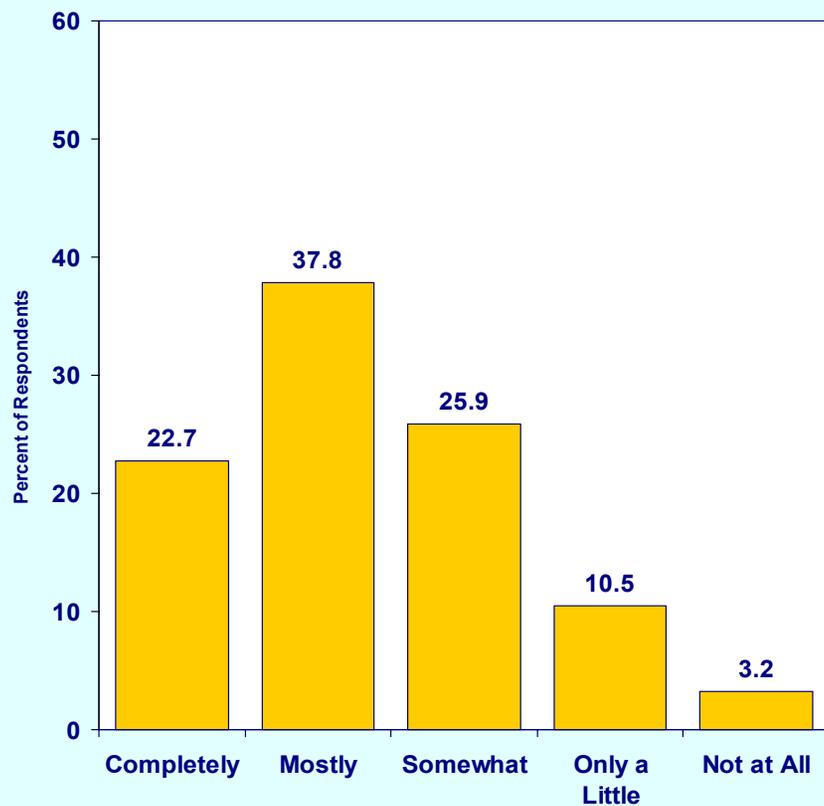
What, if anything, did you find to be difficult about the application form?



Note: As respondents could mark all responses that apply, the percentages do not add to 100%.

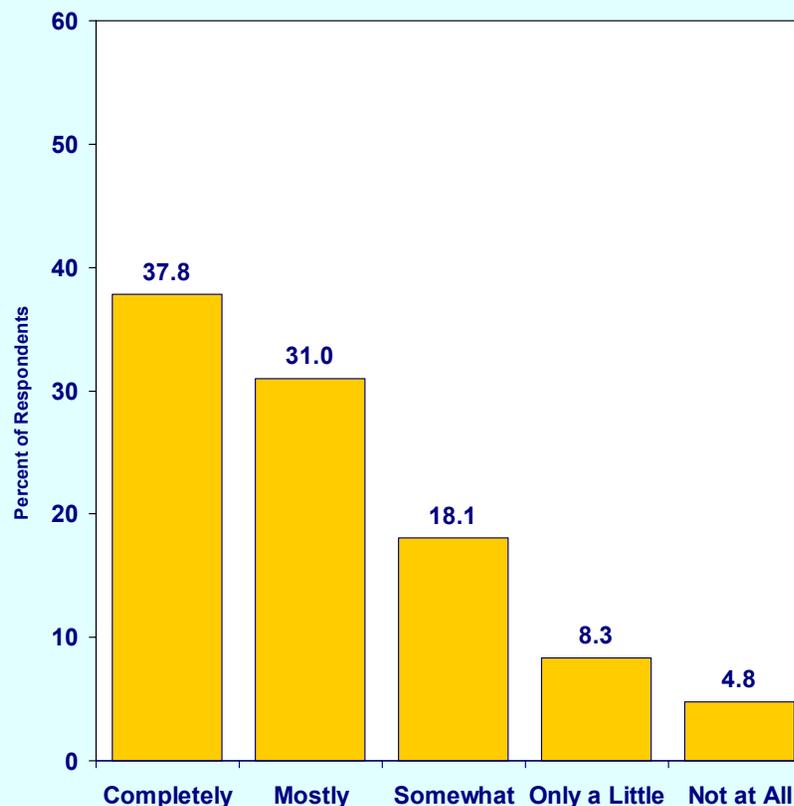
Valid n=2346

Question 7:
When you submitted your application, how completely did you understand the eligibility requirements for the program?



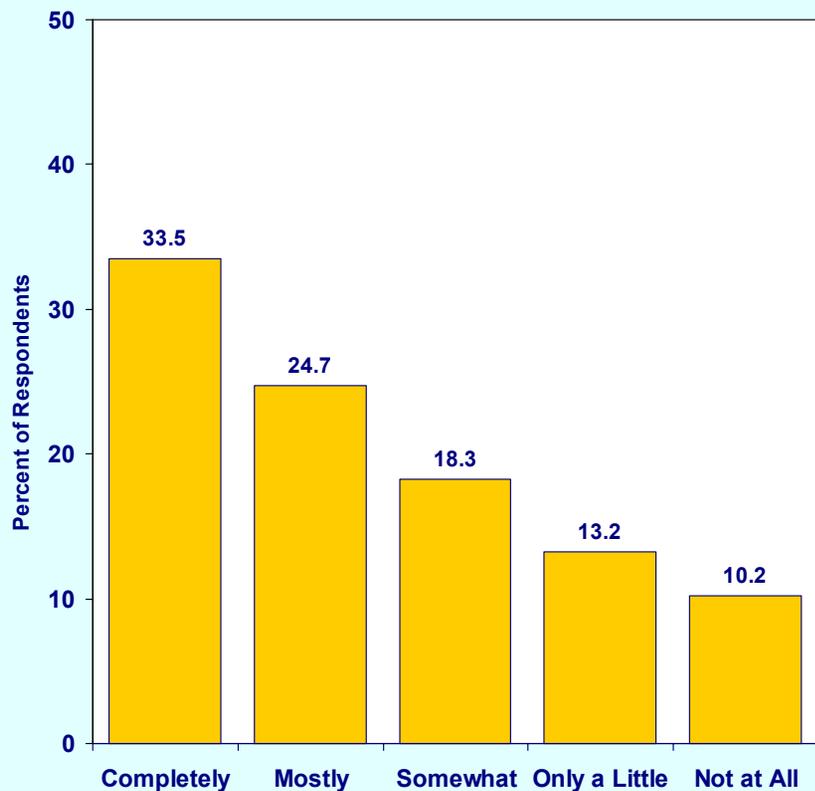
Valid n=2789

Question 8:
When you submitted your application, how completely did VA explain the steps necessary to qualify for the VR&E program?



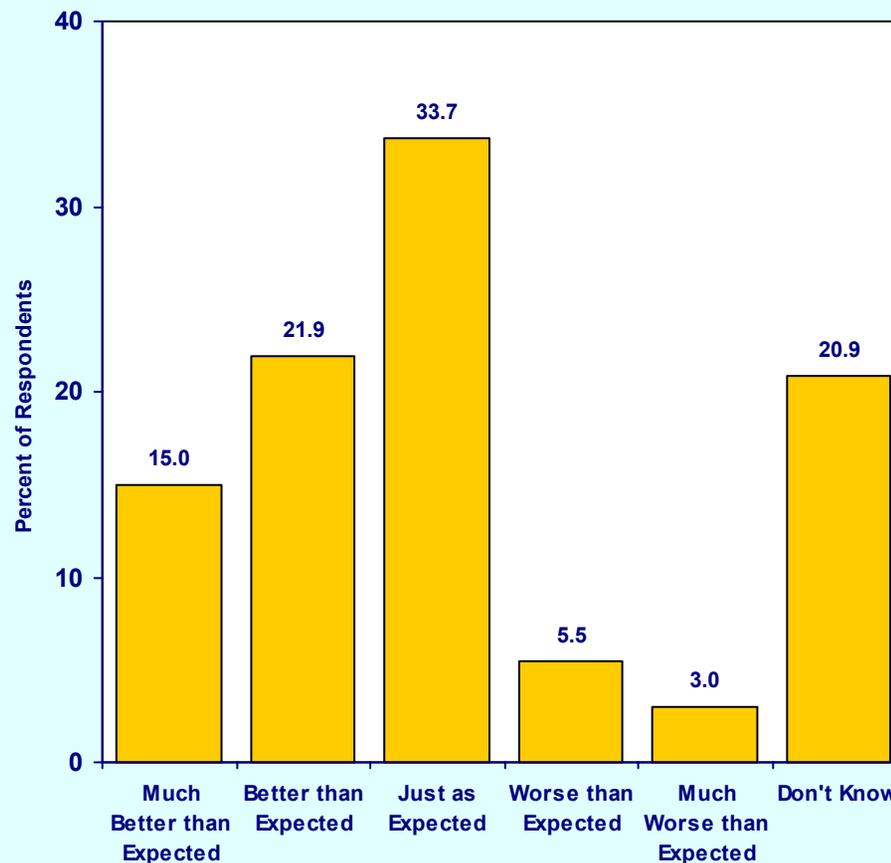
Valid n=2805

Question 9:
 How completely did VA keep you informed of the status of your application?



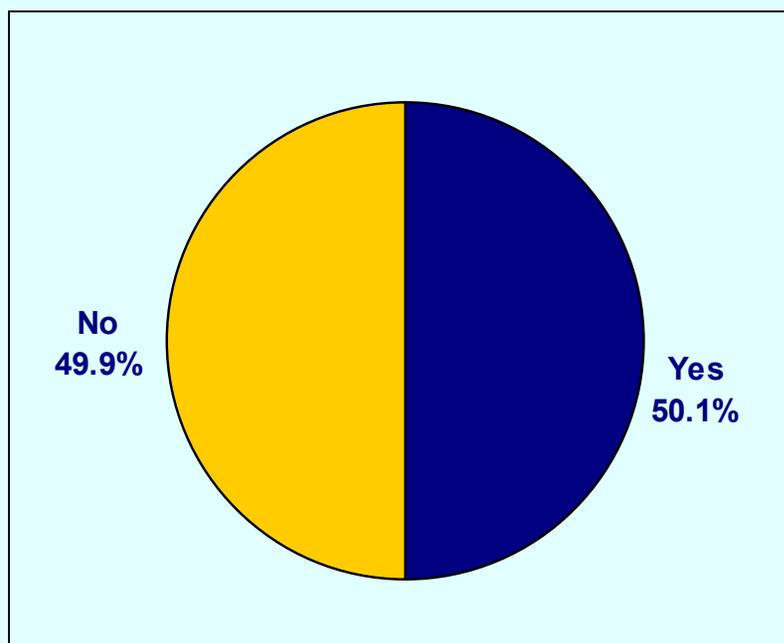
Valid n=2797

Question 10:
 How well was the VR&E staff able to obtain information about your military service, medical records, or disability rating from other parts of VA or the military?



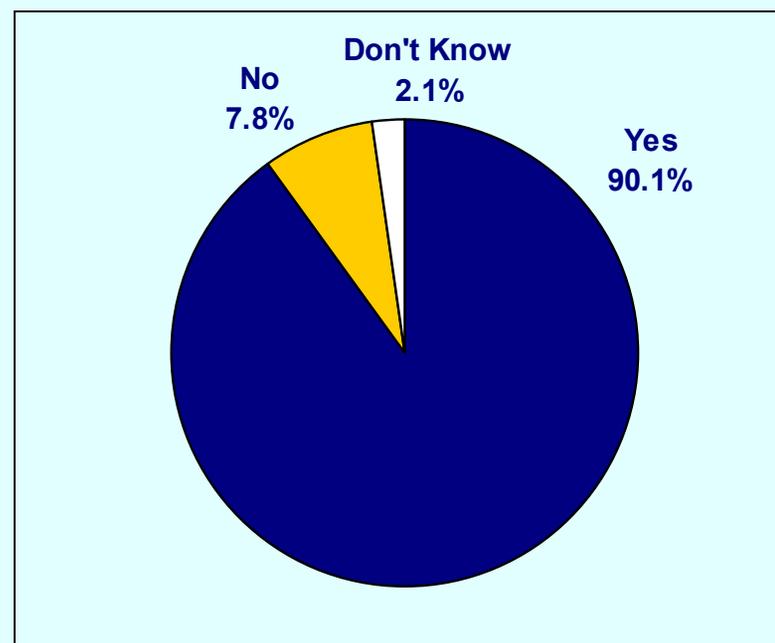
Valid n=2783

Question 11:
After you applied, did you attend a group orientation meeting with Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment staff?



Valid n=2773

Question 12:
Did VA send a letter or call you to set up an individual appointment with a counselor?

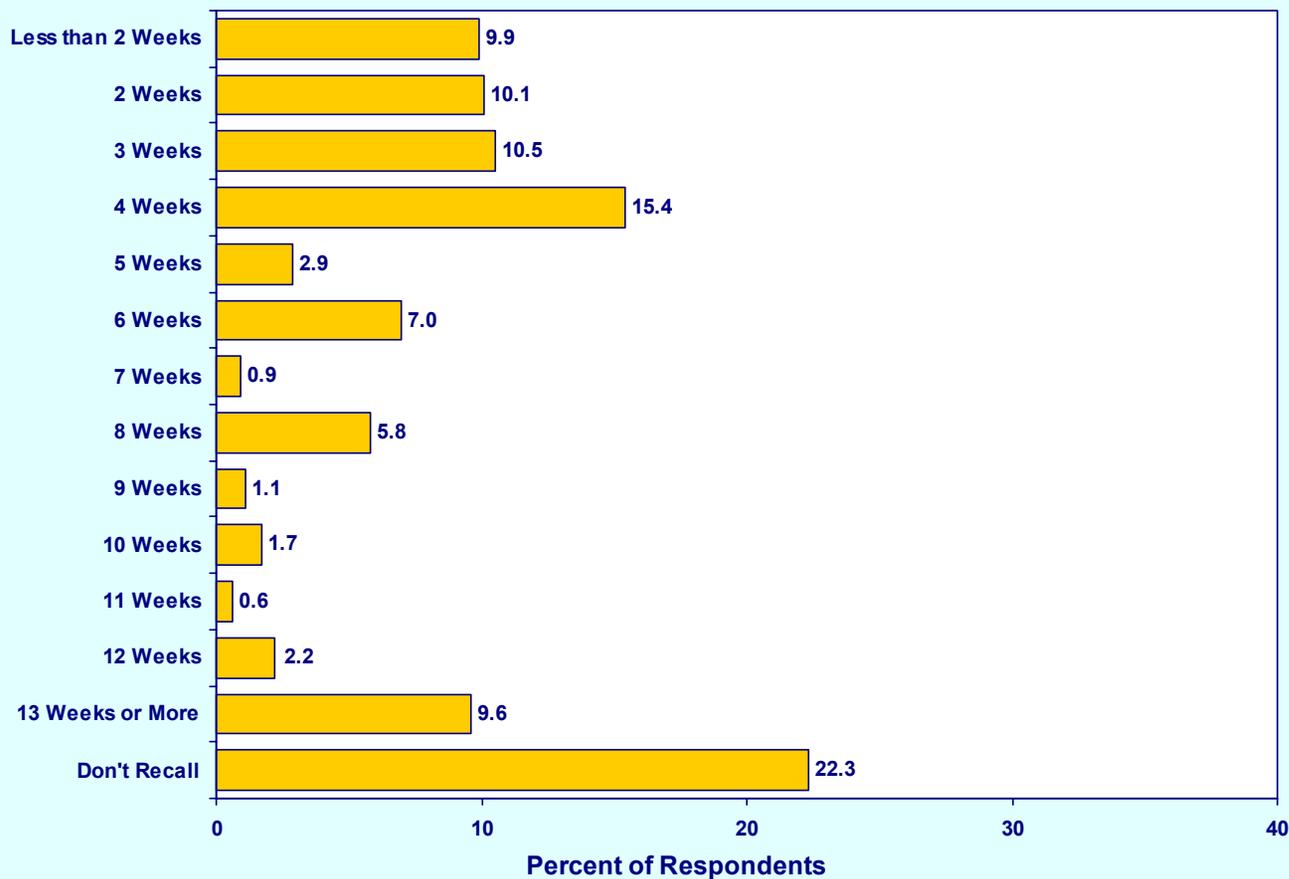


Valid n=2781

Question 13:

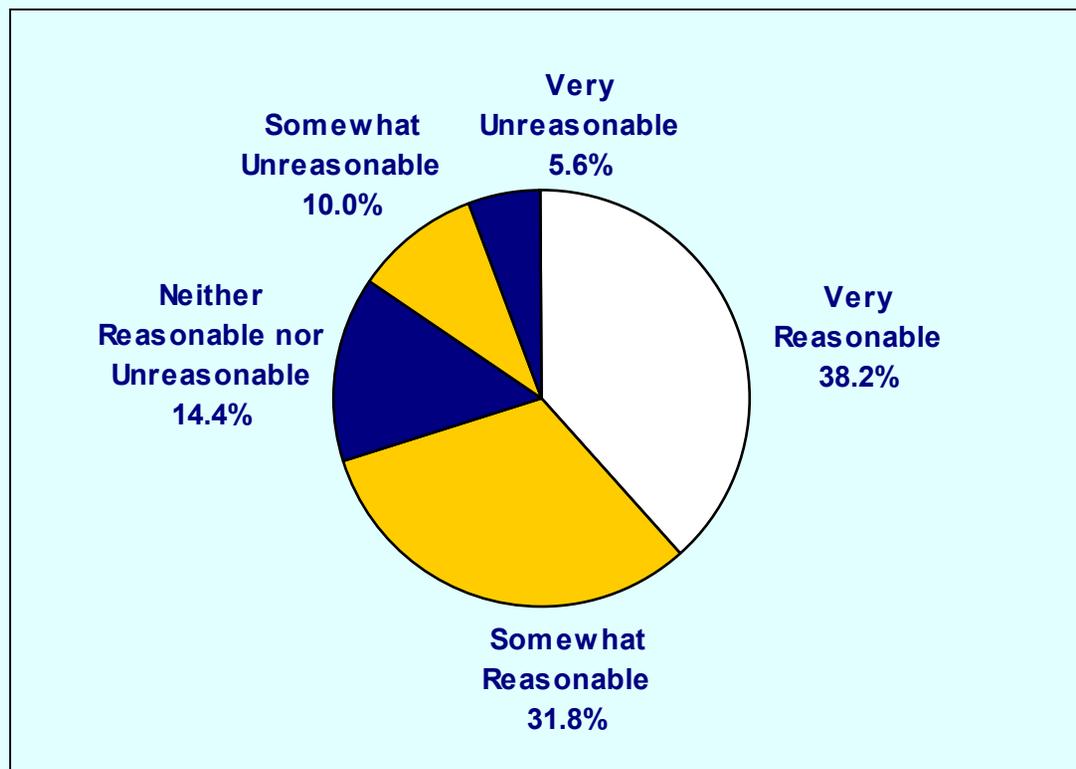
How long did it take from the time you applied to the time you were notified about this individual appointment?

Average Number of Weeks=5.4



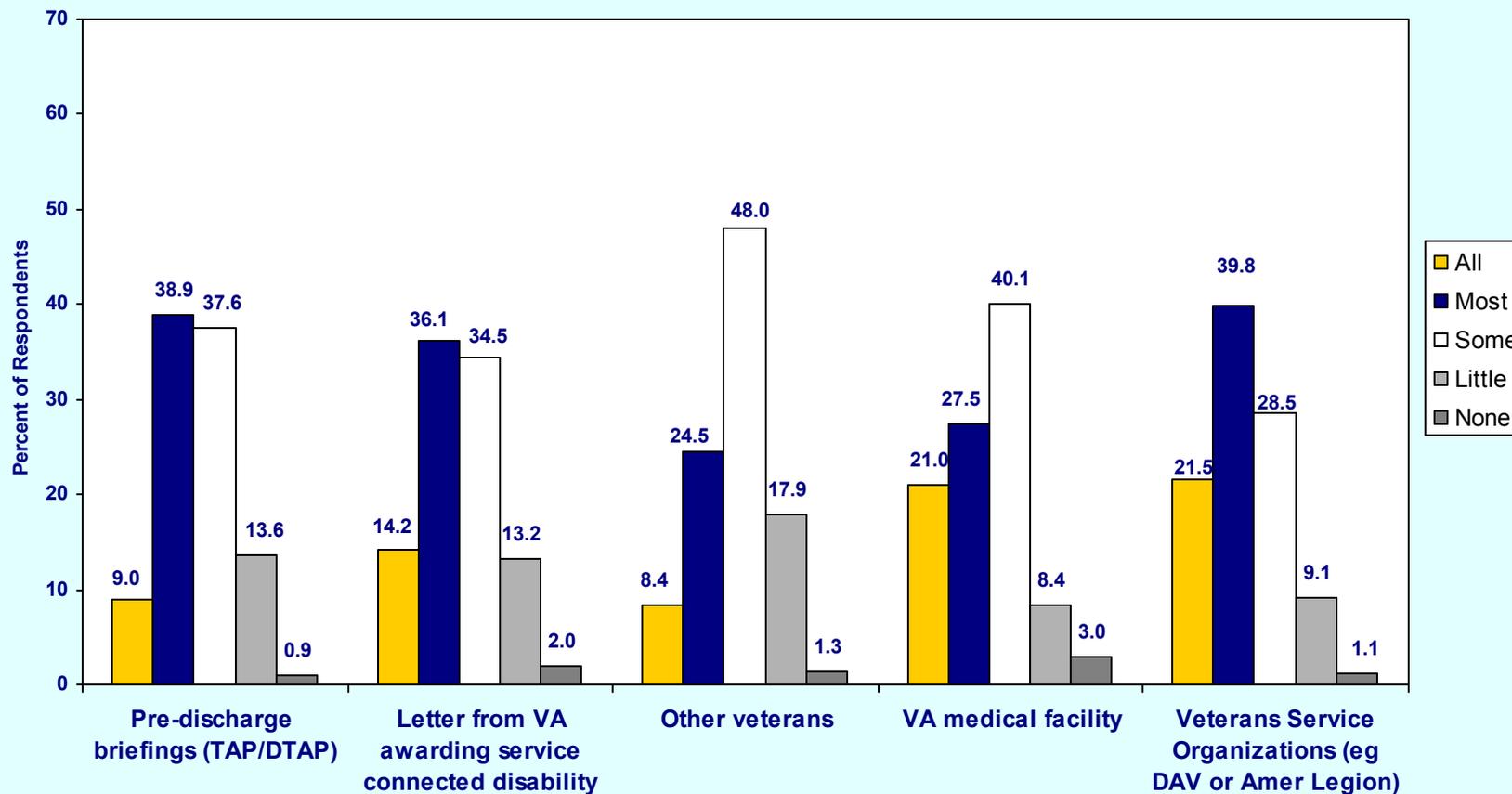
Valid n=2469

Question 14:
How REASONABLE was the length of time it took VA to notify you about this individual appointment?



Valid n=2481

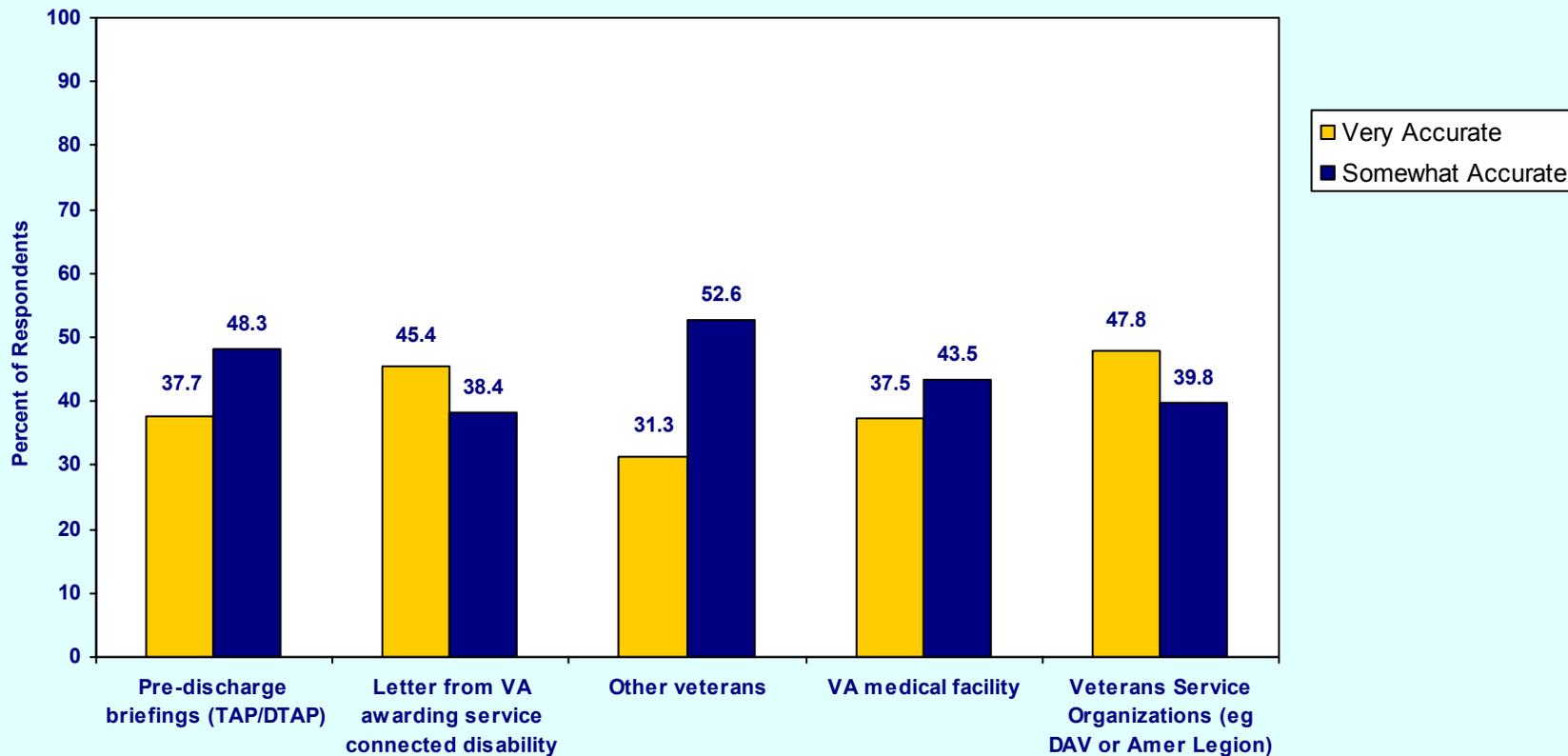
Question 1 by Question 2: Amount of needed information obtained by source of information.



Note: The chart presents data on the 5 most frequently reported sources of information.

Valid n=2738

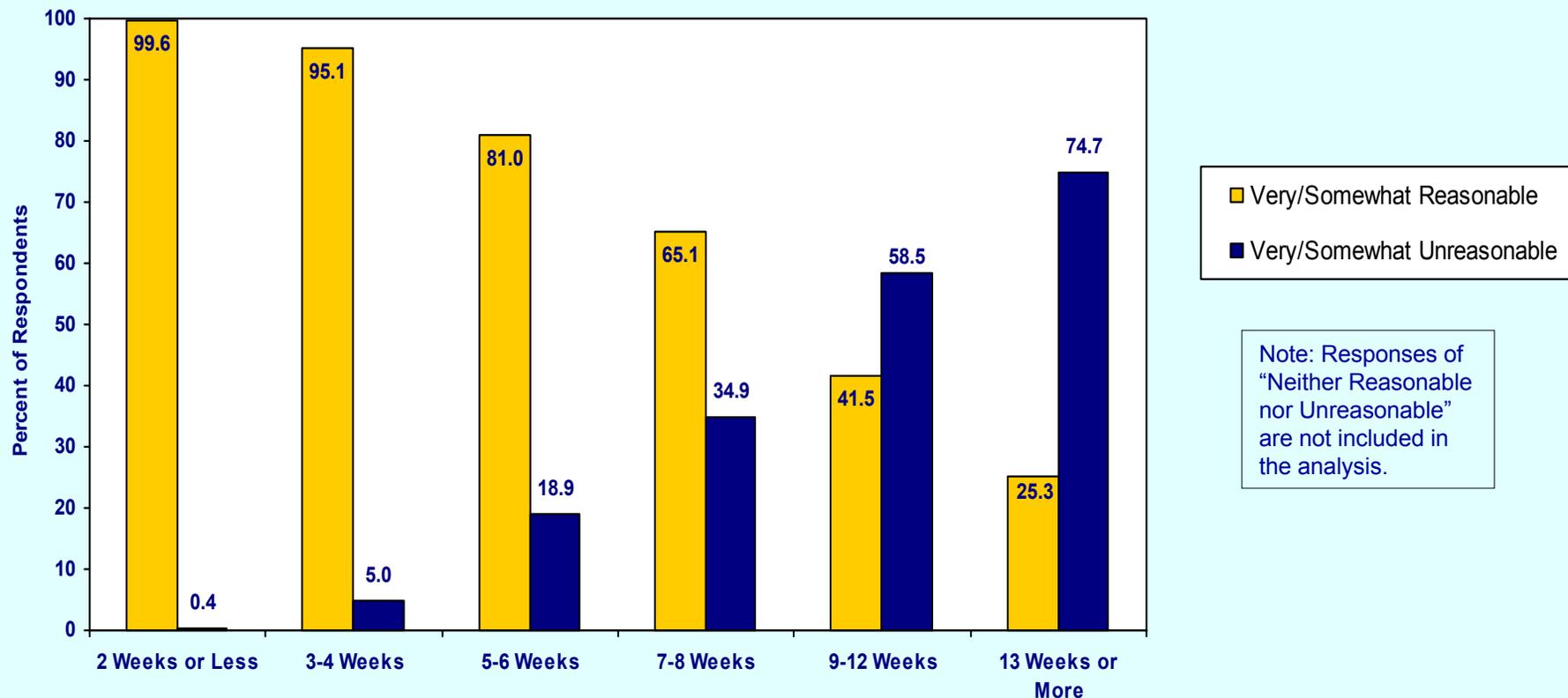
Question 1 by Question 3: Accuracy of information received by source of information.



Note: The chart presents data on the 5 most frequently reported sources of information.

Valid n=2730

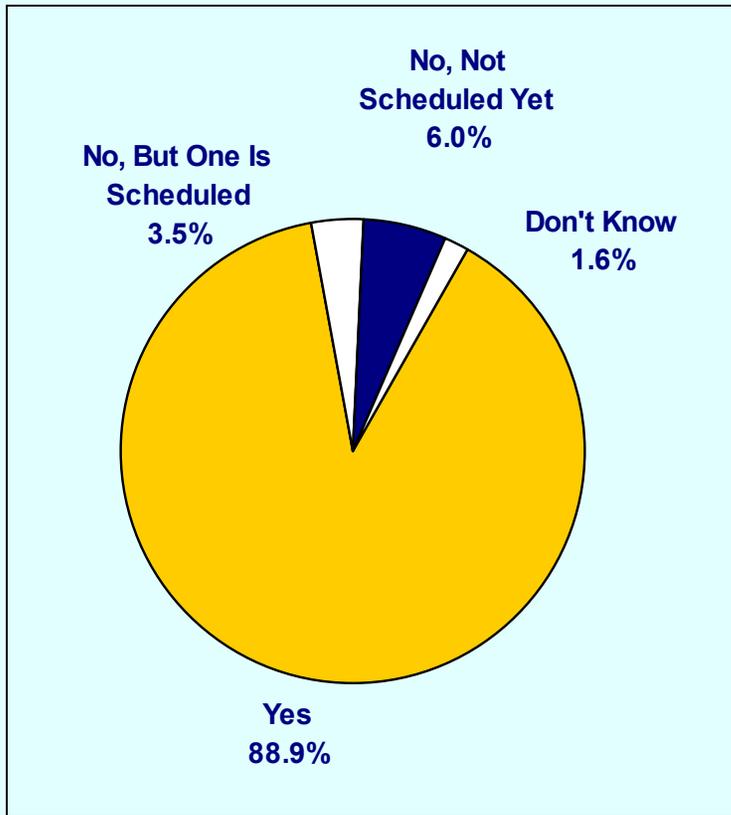
Question 13 by Question 14:
Reasonableness of the wait for an appointment by the length of time waited.



Valid n=1681

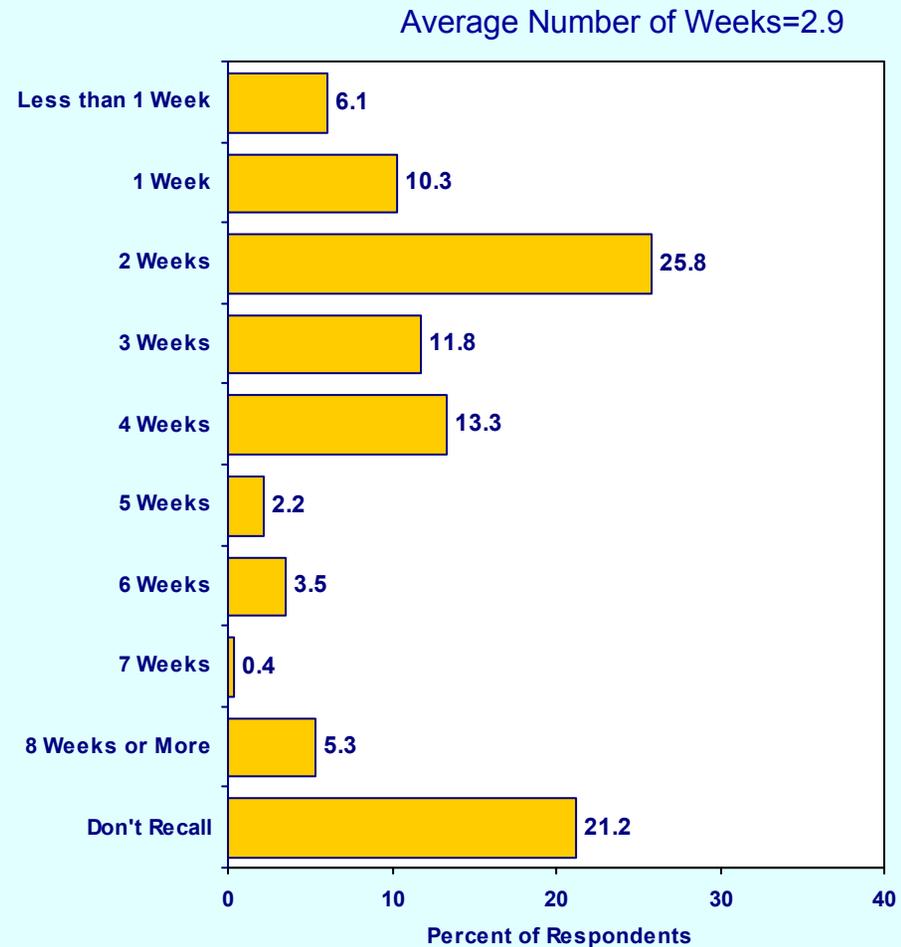
**Survey Findings:
Evaluation and Testing**

Question 15: Have you had your first individual meeting with a counselor to evaluate whether you are entitled to VR&E services?



Valid n=2764

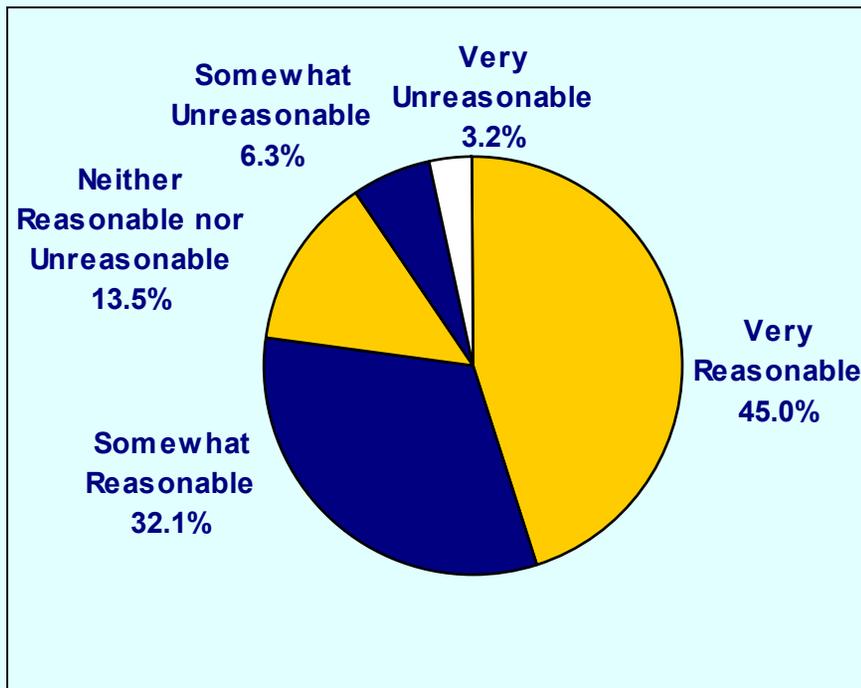
Question 16: How long did it take from the time VA NOTIFIED you about the appointment until you had your initial MEETING?



Valid n=2457

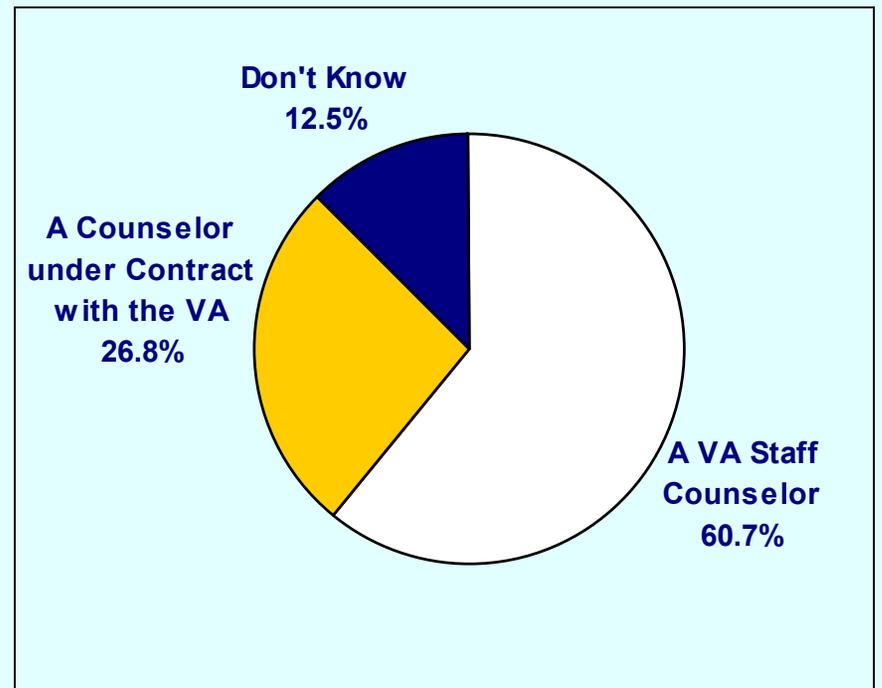
Evaluation and Testing

Question 17:
How **REASONABLE** was the length of time it took to have this initial meeting once VA notified you about the appointment?



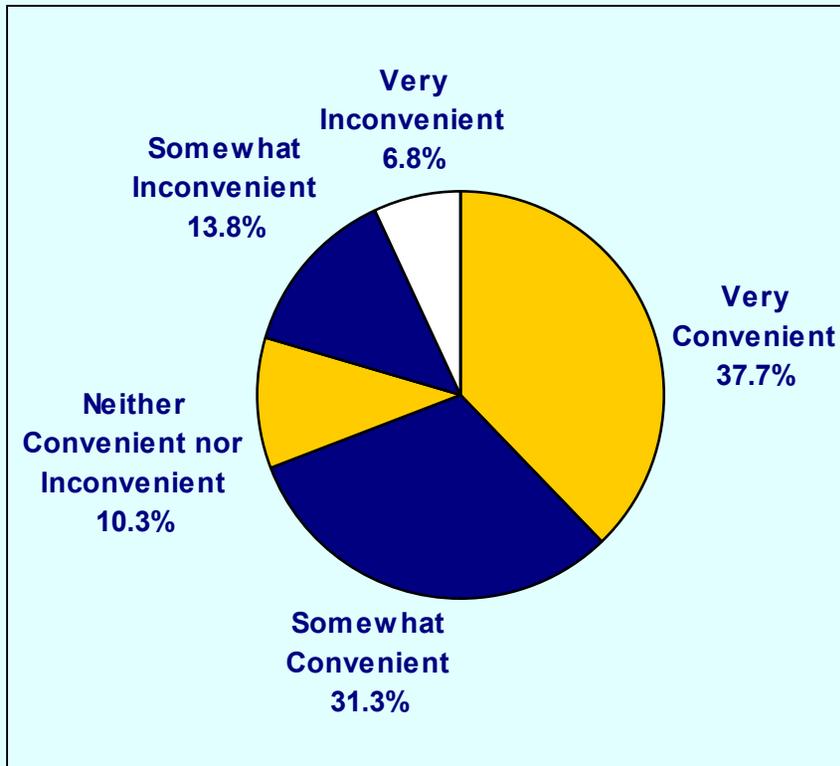
Valid n=2468

Question 18:
Who was your primary counselor during the initial evaluation?



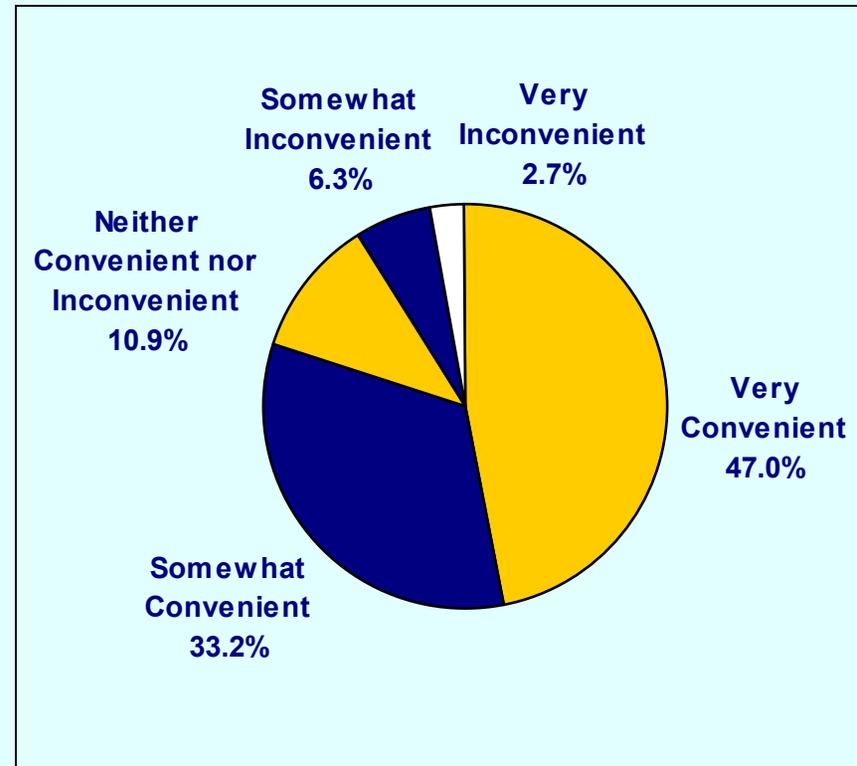
Valid n=2473

Question 19:
In general, how convenient was the **LOCATION** of this evaluation?



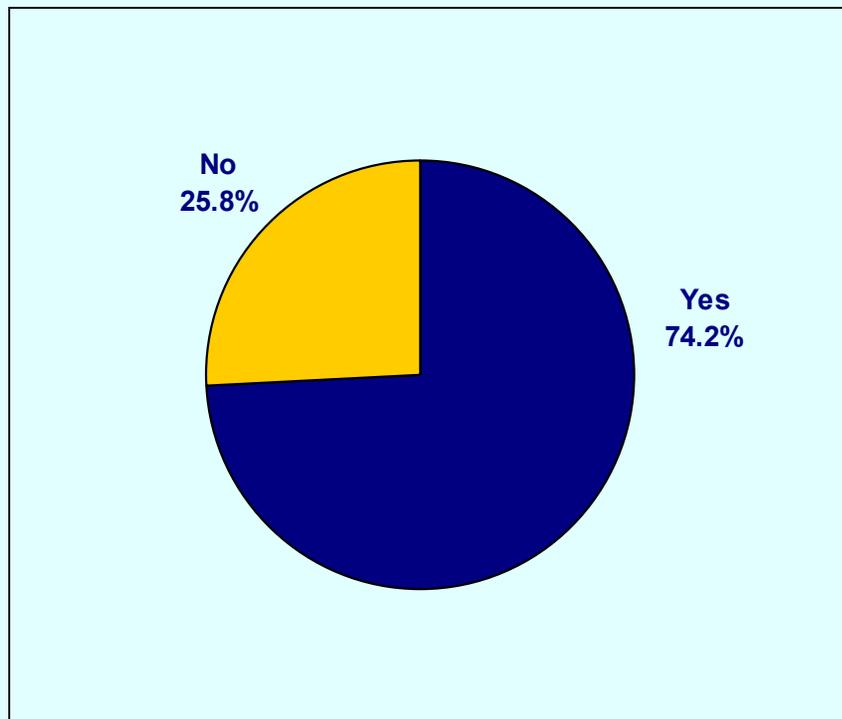
Valid n=2484

Question 20:
In general, how convenient was the **TIME** scheduled for this evaluation?



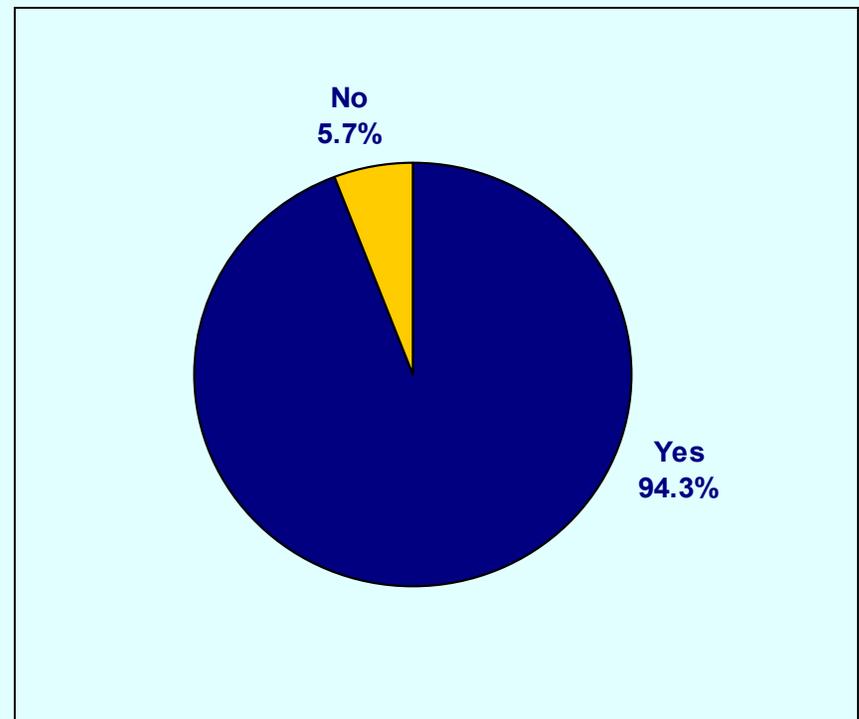
Valid n=2479

Question 21:
Did you take any tests as part of your evaluation?



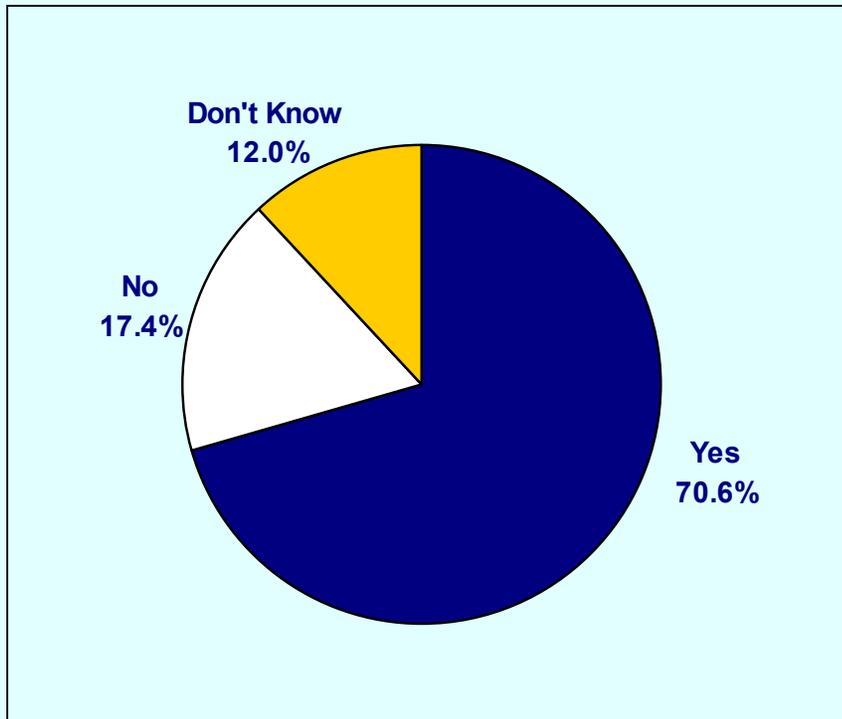
Valid n=2480

Question 22:
Did the counselor explain the purpose of these tests?



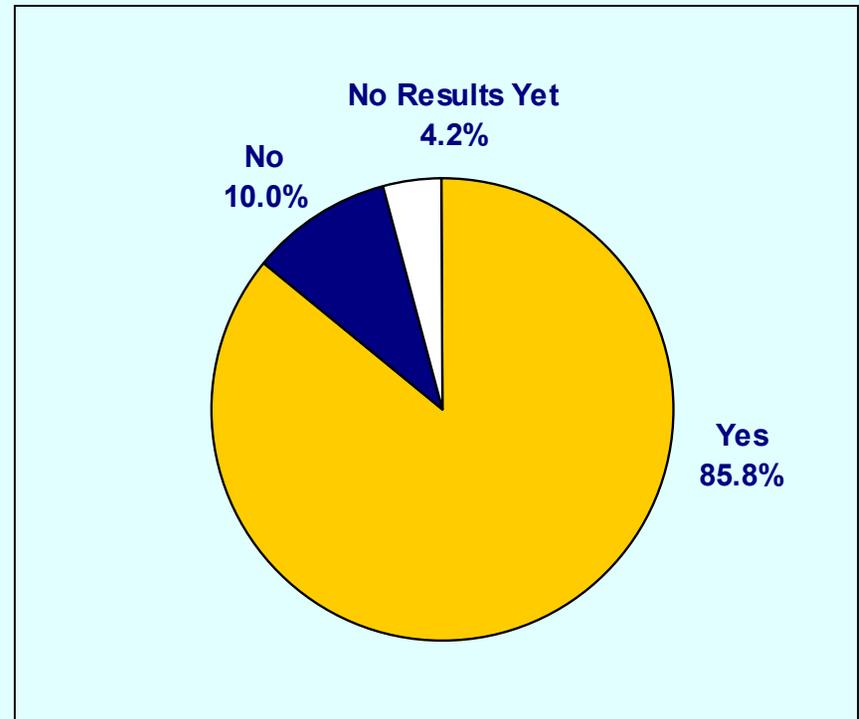
Valid n=1803

Question 23:
Did the tests seem appropriate to you for your evaluation?



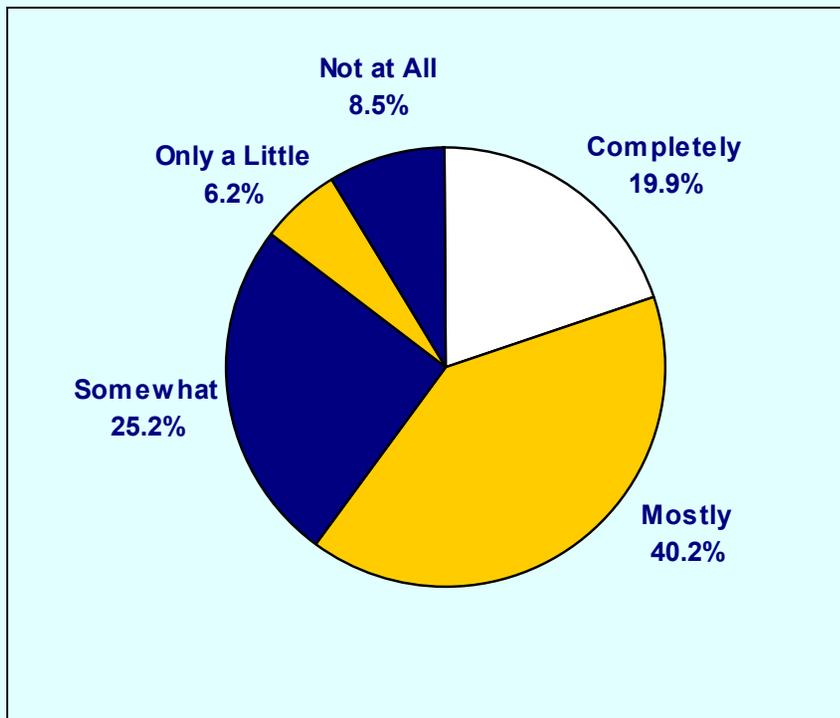
Valid n=1804

Question 24:
Did the counselor explain the test results in a way you could understand?



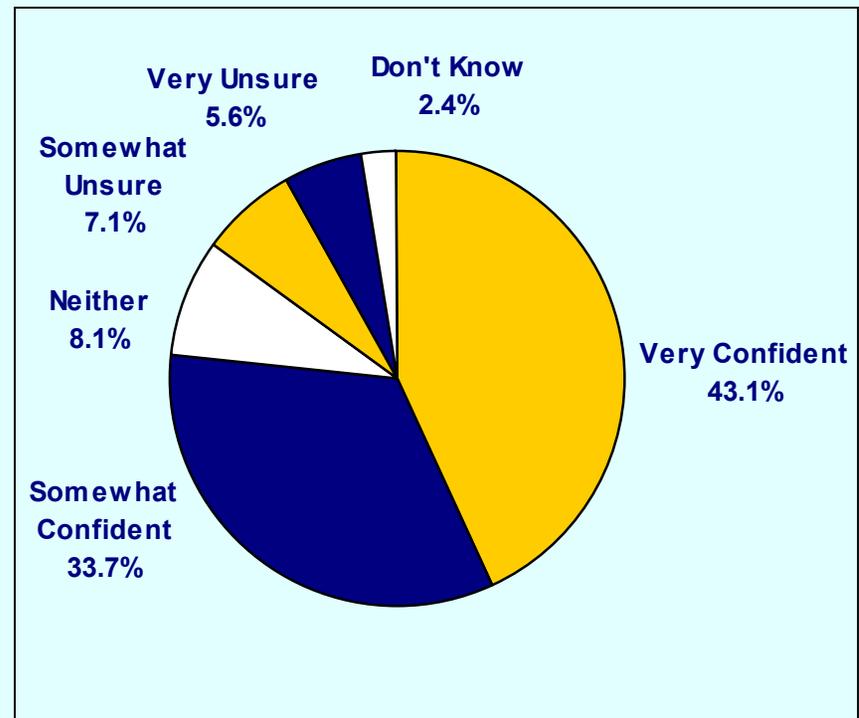
Valid n=1804

Question 25:
How completely did the results of the initial evaluation match your particular skills and abilities?



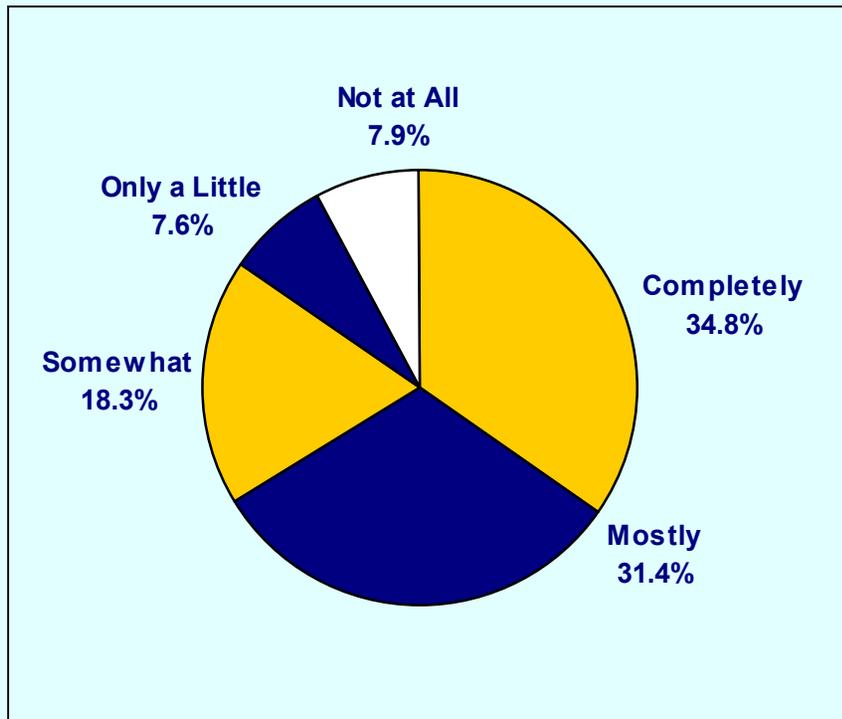
Valid n=2340

Question 26:
During the evaluation, how confident or sure were you that your counselor gave you good information and advice?



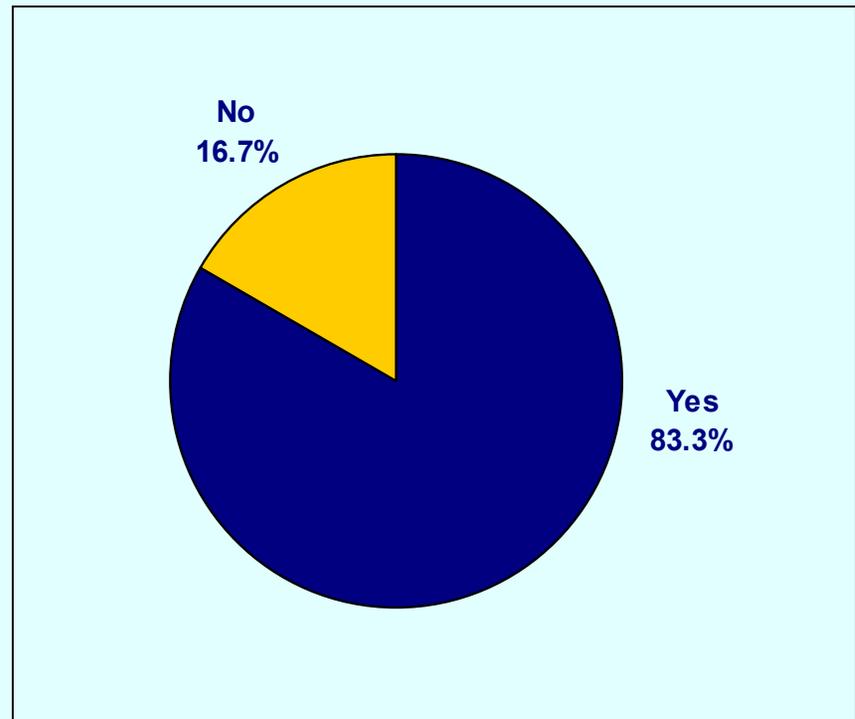
Valid n=2473

Question 27:
During the evaluation, how well did you feel your counselor understood your feelings and concerns?



Valid n=2476

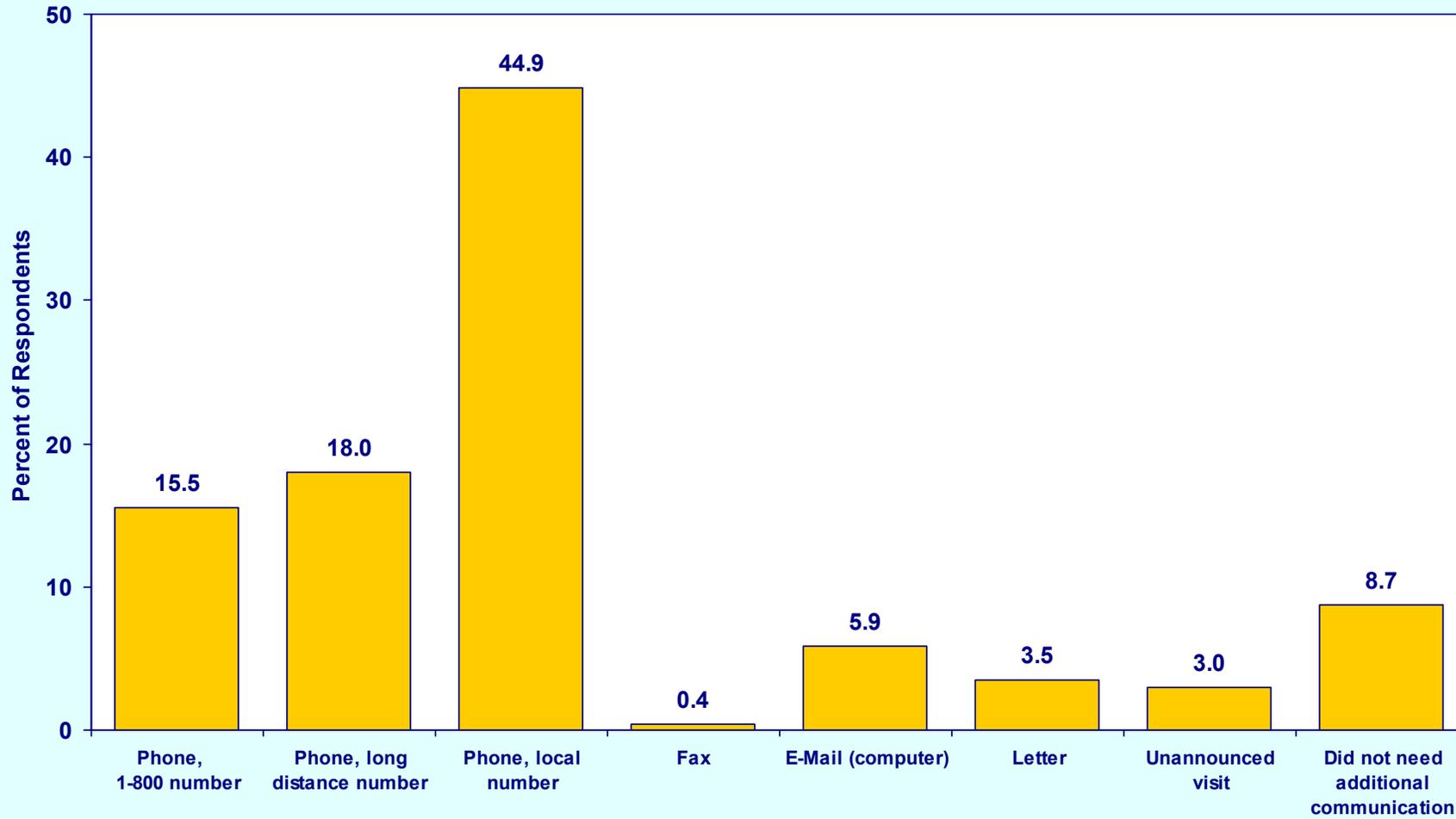
Question 28:
Overall, did the EVALUATION process reflect the courtesy, compassion, and respect you would expect as a veteran of the United States?



Valid n=2471

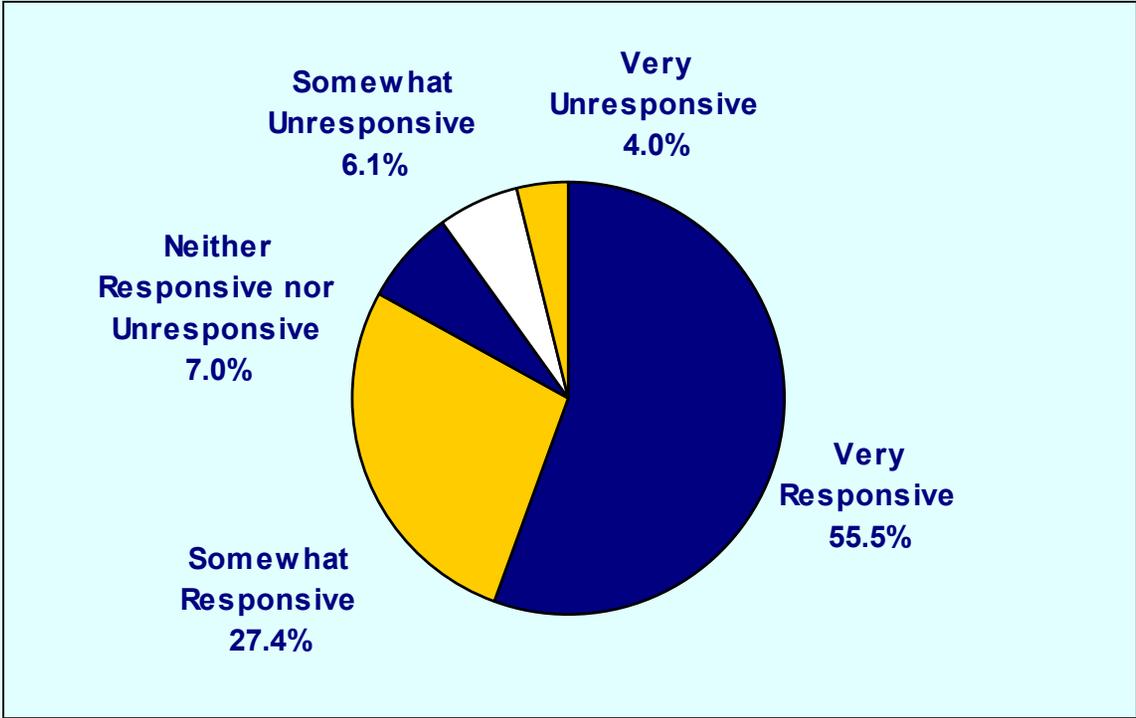
Question 29:

Aside from scheduled visits, what was the PRIMARY method you used to contact your evaluation counselor?



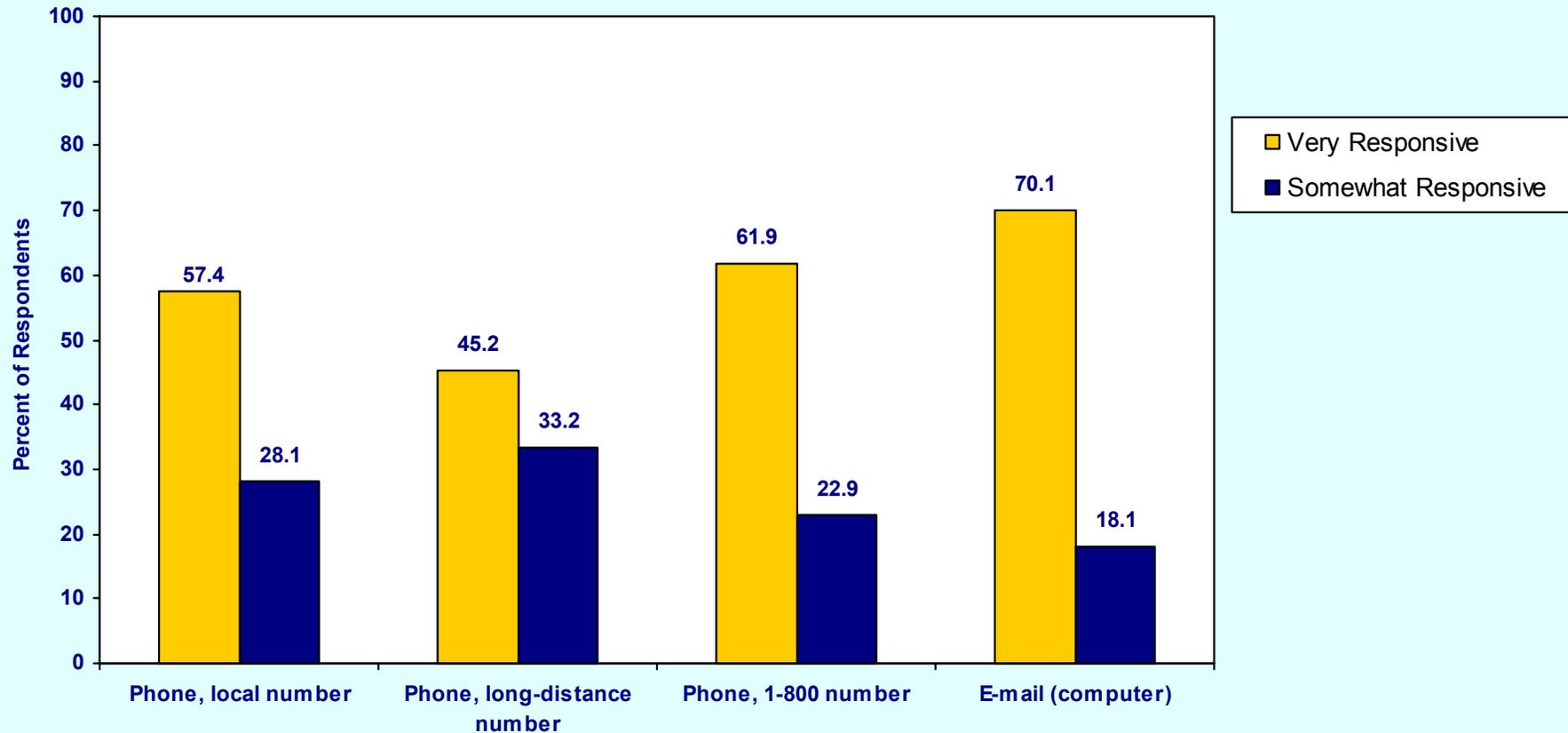
Valid n=2423

Question 30:
How responsive was the counselor to your contact through this method?



Valid n=2252

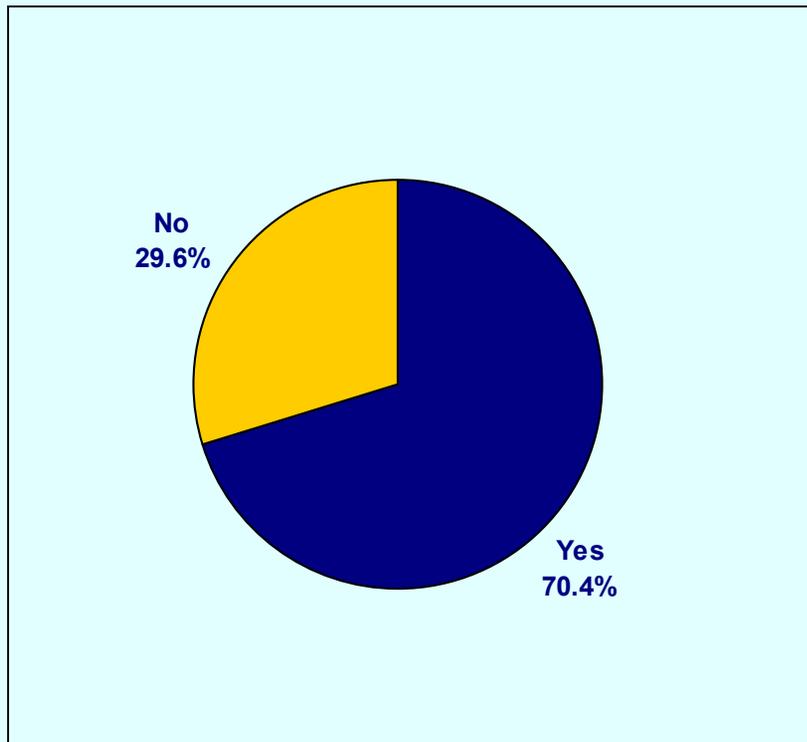
**Question 30 by Question 29:
Responsiveness of counselor by primary method of contact, aside from scheduled visits.**



Note: The chart presents data on the 4 most frequently reported methods of contact, aside from scheduled visits.

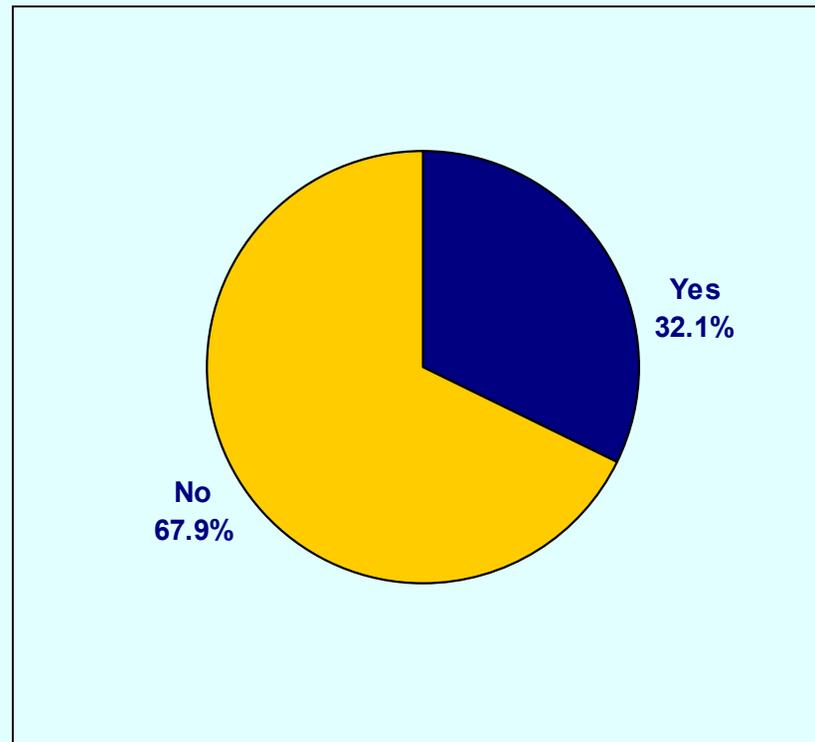
Valid n=2200

Question 31:
Were you generally able to get the information you needed on the first call or contact?



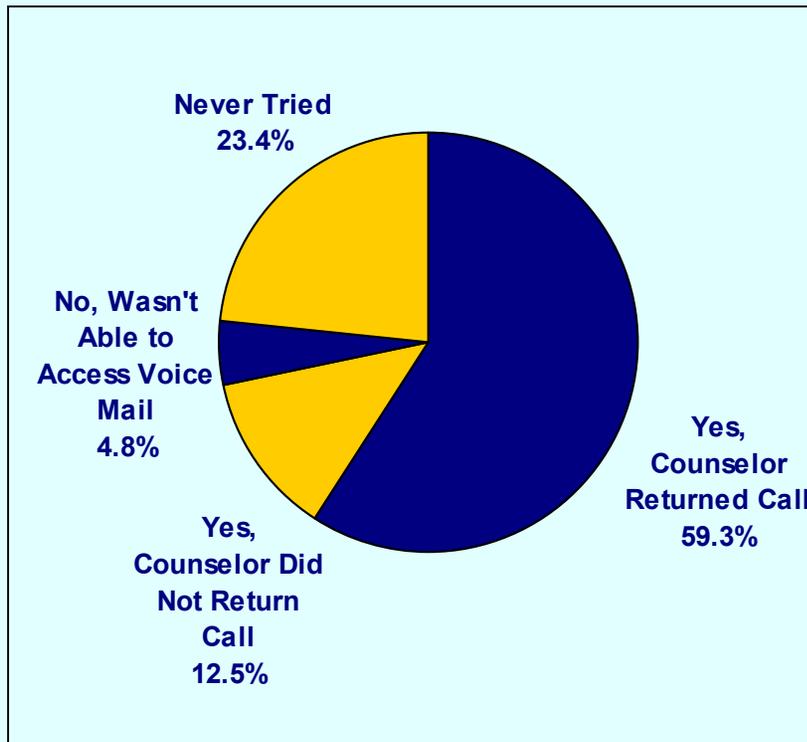
Valid n=2250

Question 32:
Did you have to repeat the same information to more than one person during the evaluation process?



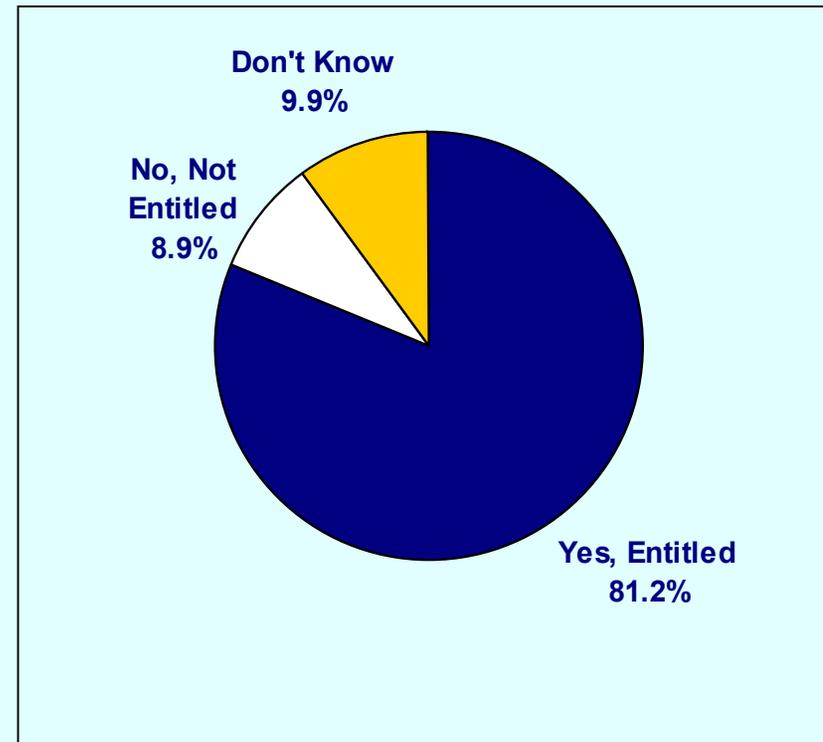
Valid n=2246

Question 33:
Were you able to access voice mail in order to leave your counselor a message?



Valid n=2268

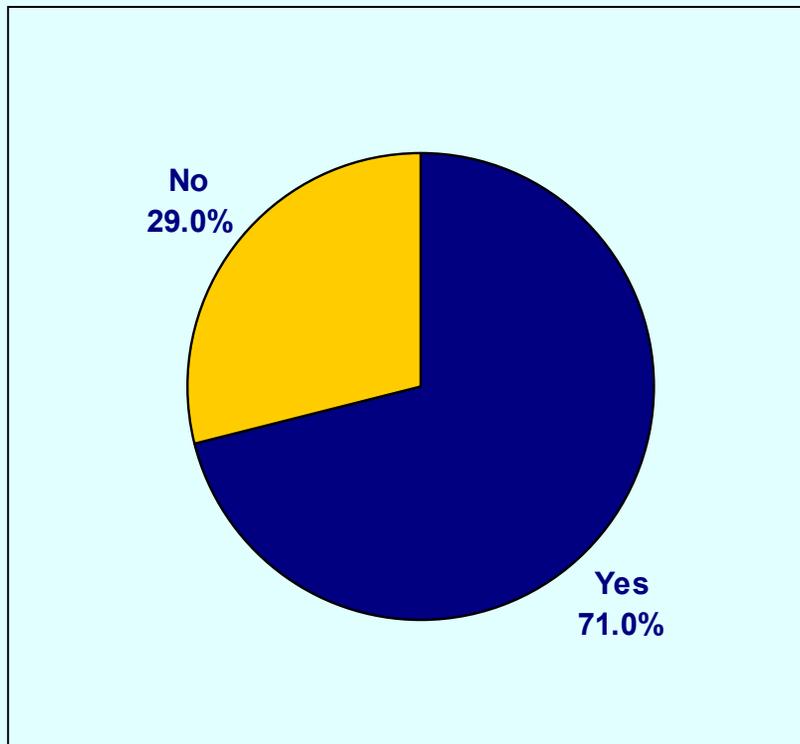
Question 34:
After the initial evaluation, did VA notify you that you were entitled to VR&E services?



Valid n=2476

Question 35:

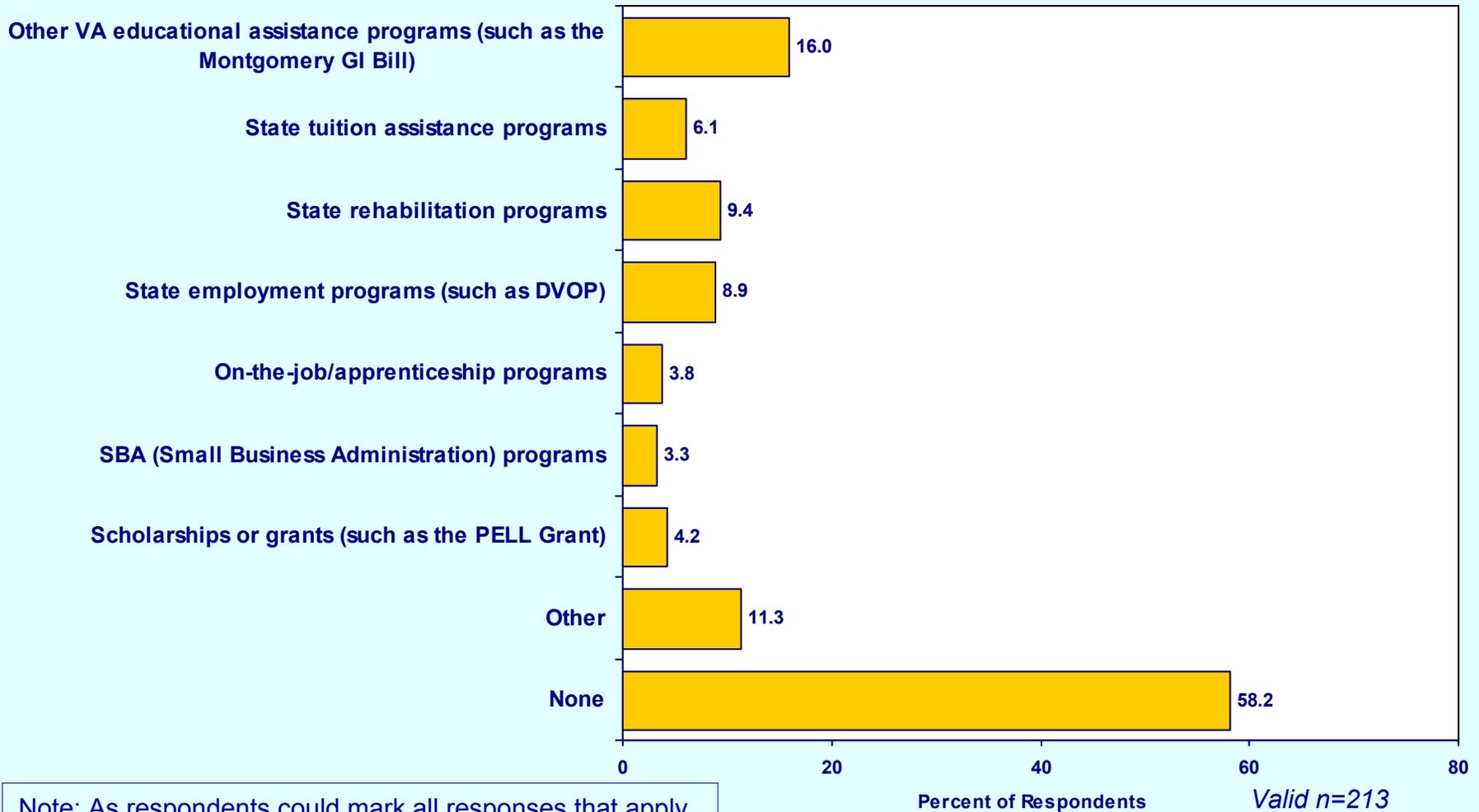
Did the VA explain why you were NOT entitled to VR&E services?



Valid n=224

Question 36:

When you were found NOT ENTITLED, which (if any) of the following resources or programs did VA inform you of?



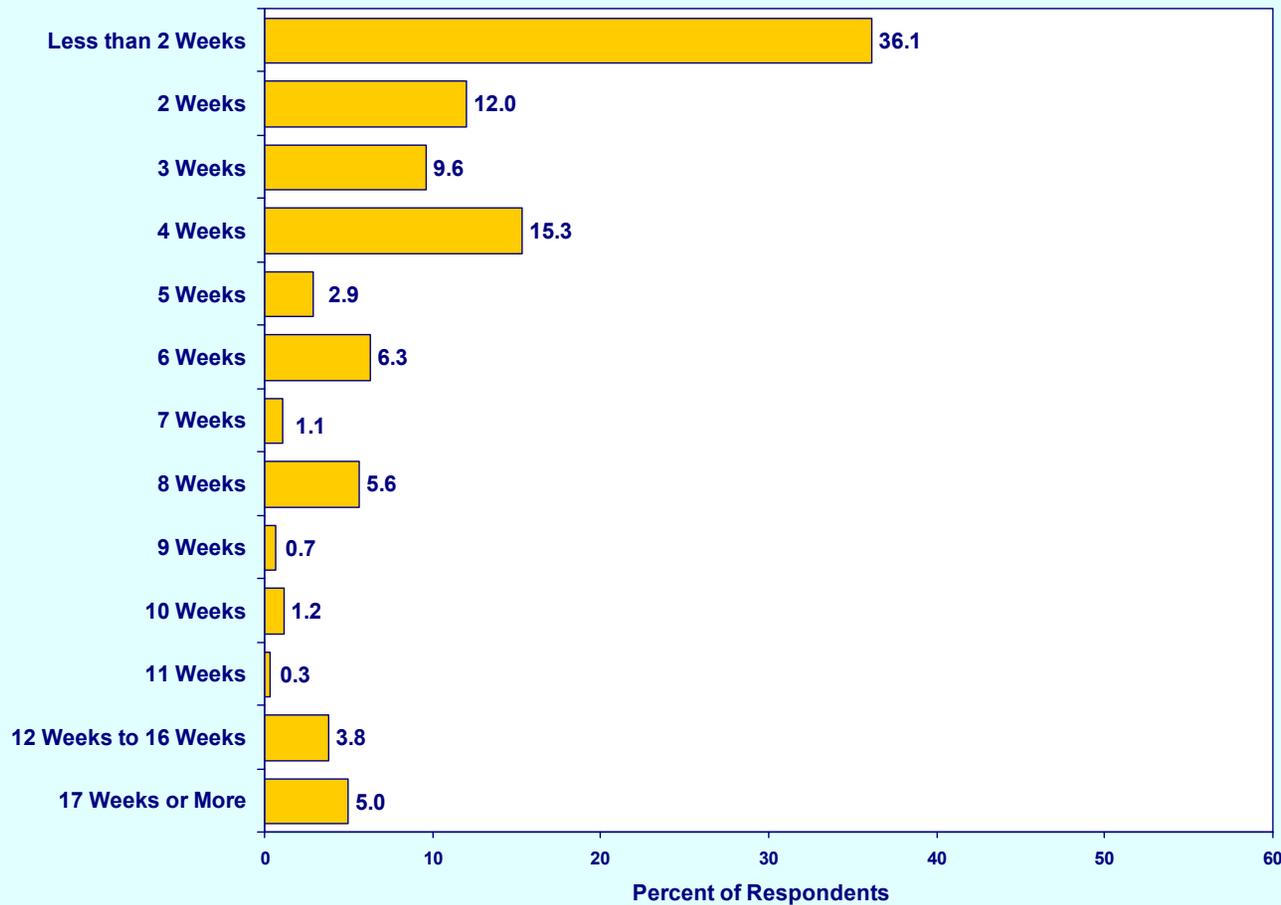
Note: As respondents could mark all responses that apply, the percentages do not add to 100%.

Evaluation and Testing

Question 37:

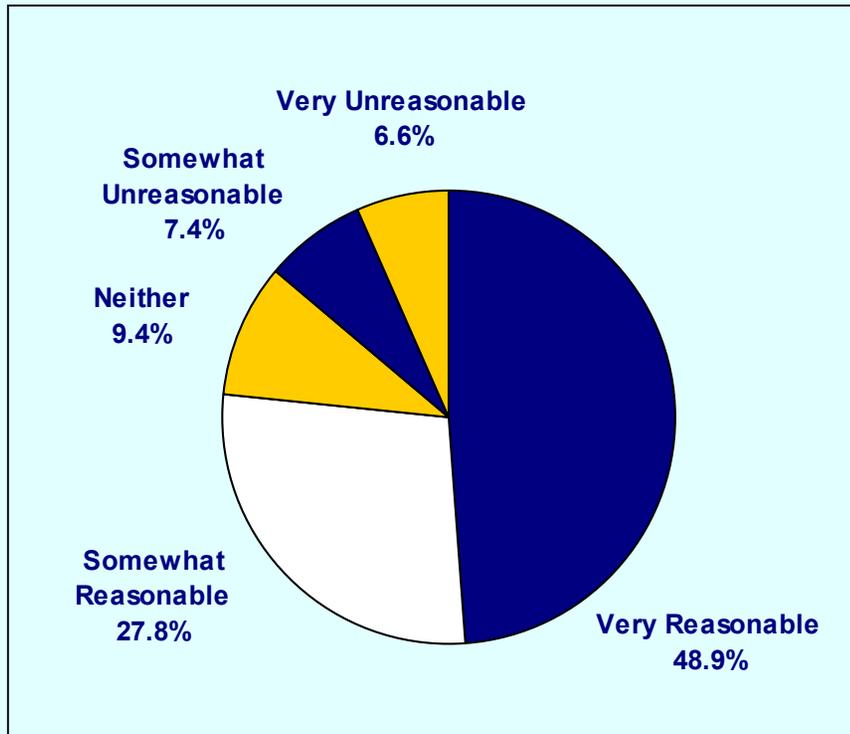
Once you had your initial meeting with a counselor, how long did it take for VA to determine whether you were entitled to VR&E services?

Average Number of Weeks=3.9



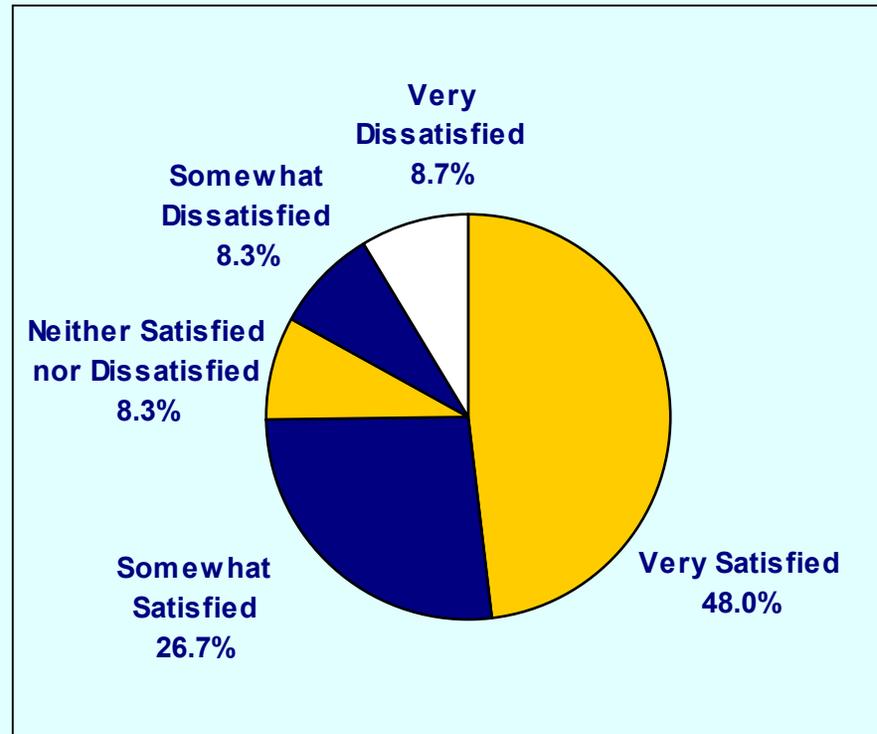
Valid n=2164

Question 38:
How **REASONABLE** was the length of time it took VA to determine whether you were entitled to VR&E services, once you had the initial meeting with your counselor?



Valid n=2223

Question 39:
Overall, how satisfied are you with the way the vocational rehabilitation **EVALUATION** process was handled?

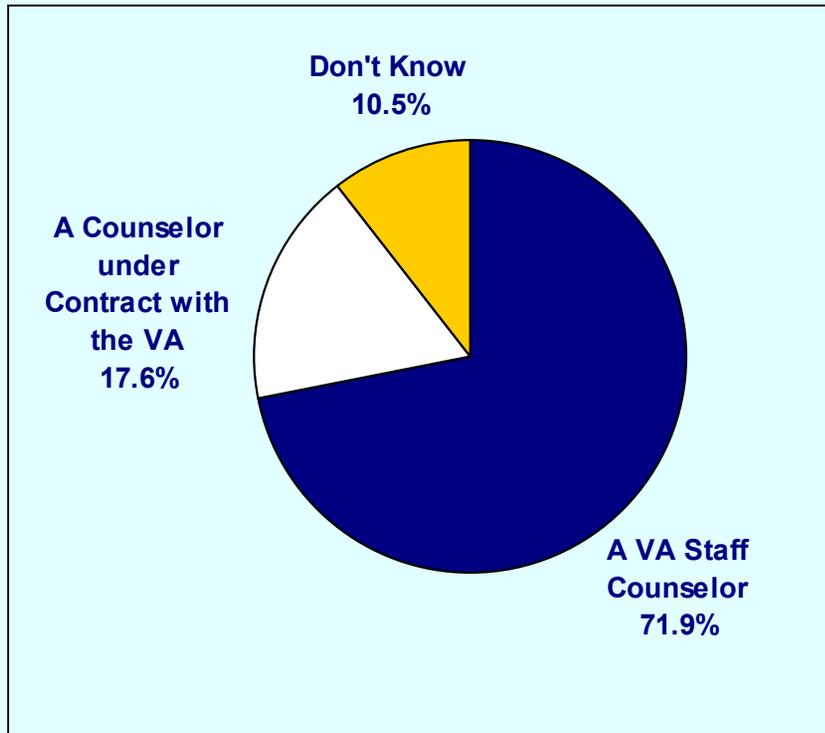


Valid n=2229

Survey Findings: Developing a Plan

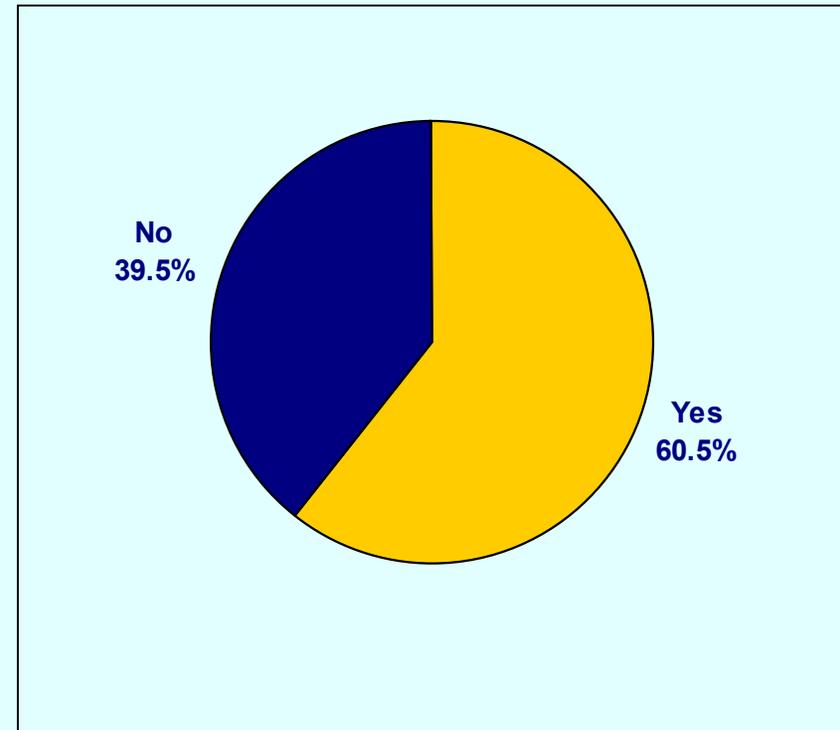
Developing a Plan

Question 40:
Who was/is your primary counselor during the planning phase of your program?



Valid n=2017

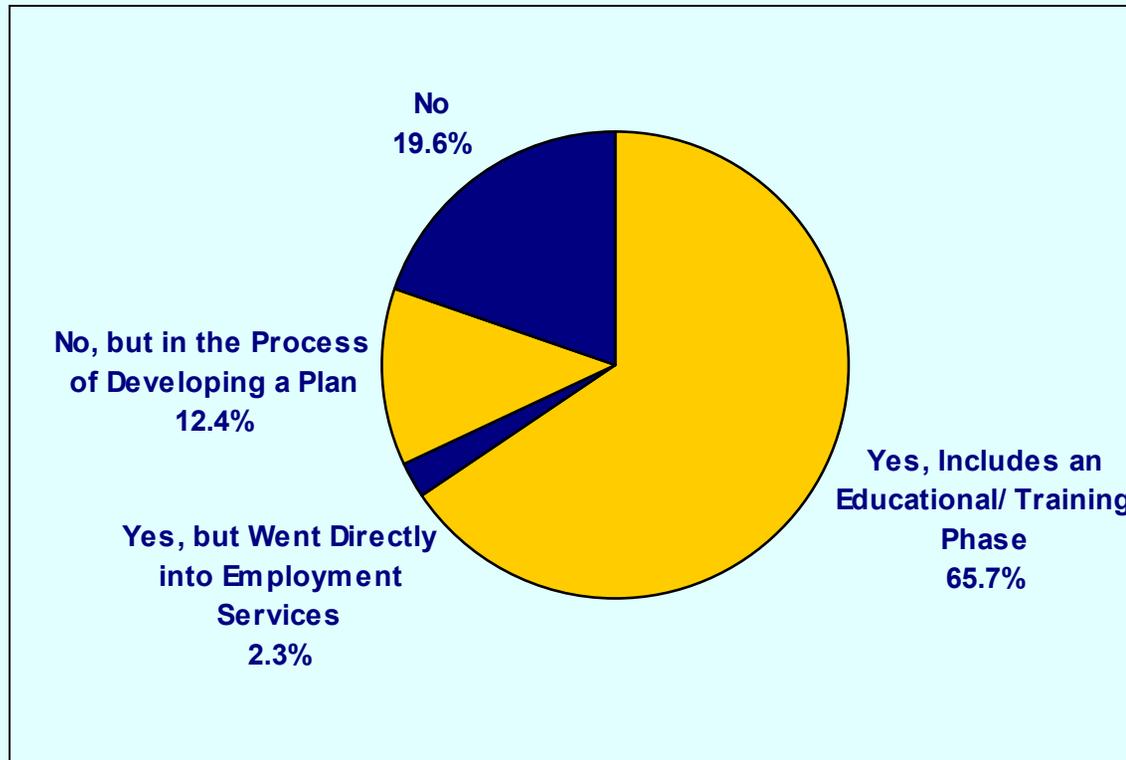
Question 41:
Is this the same counselor who conducted your initial evaluation?



Valid n=2003

Question 42:

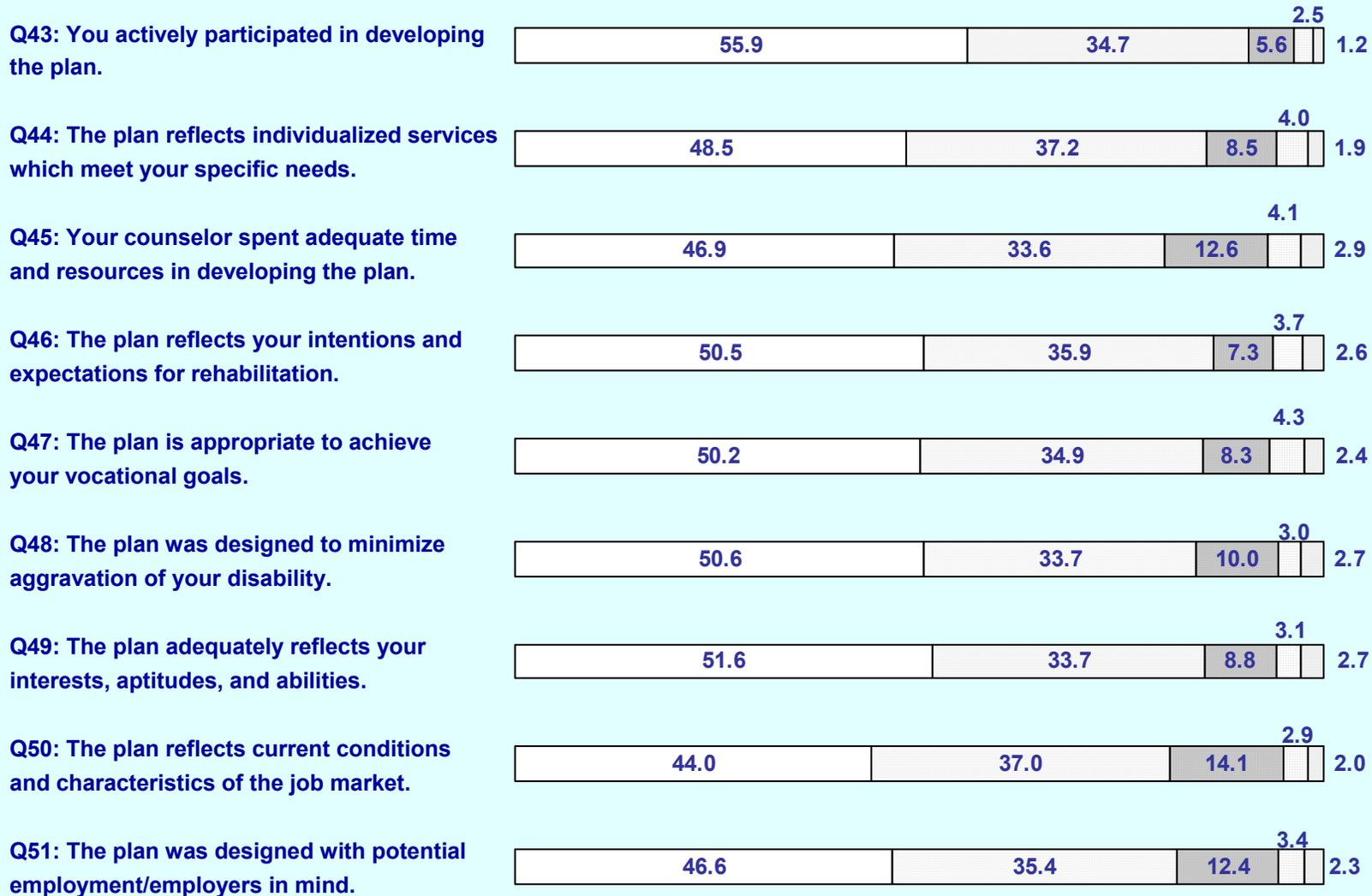
Have you and your counselor developed a plan of services for your rehabilitation?



Valid n=2250

Questions 43-51:

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neither
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

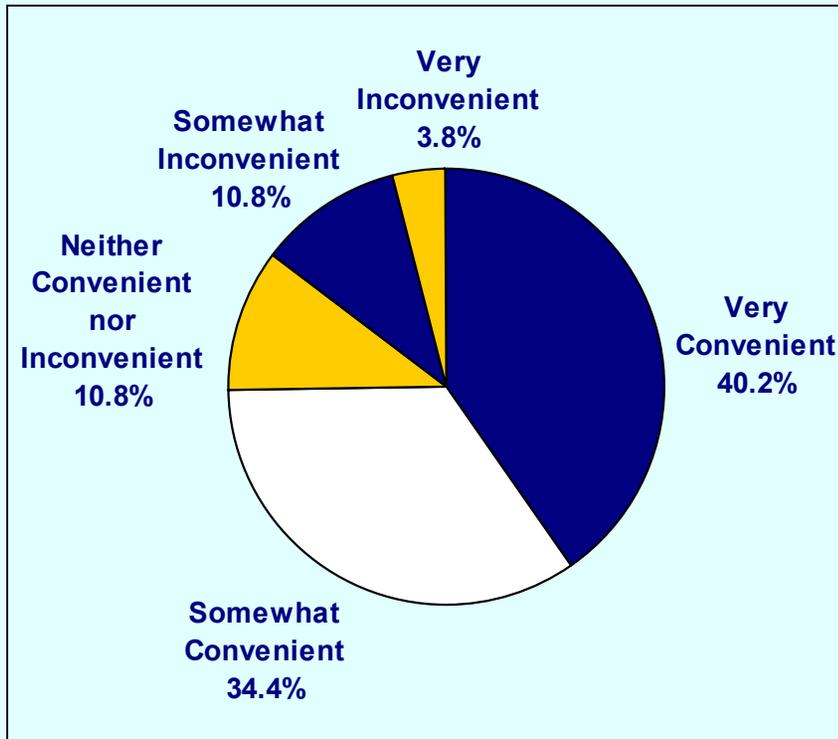


Note: Responses of "Not Applicable" are not included in the analysis.

Percent of Respondents

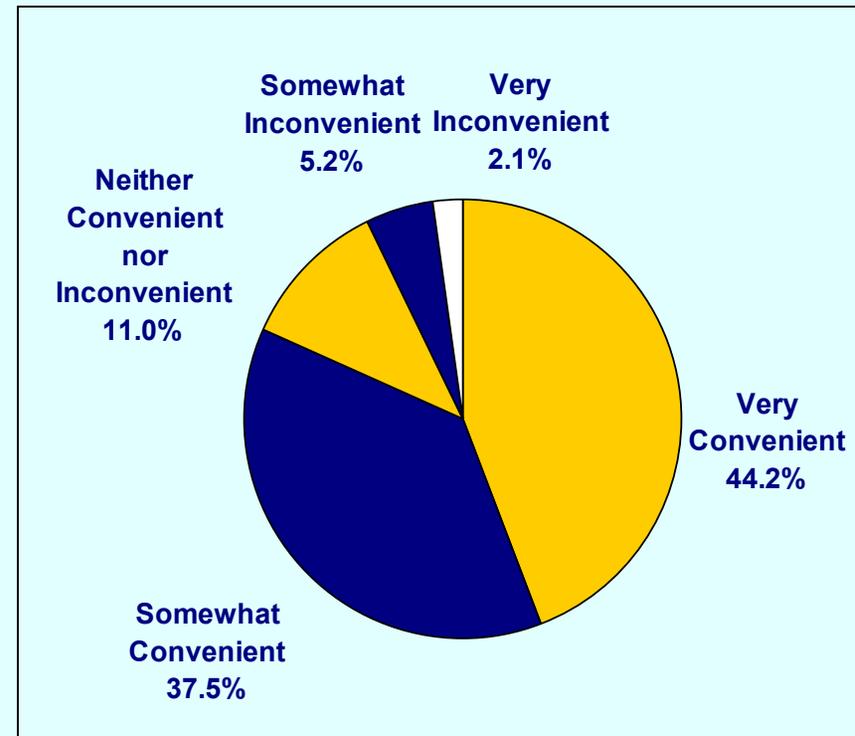
Developing a Plan

Question 52:
In general, how convenient was the **LOCATION** where this **PLAN** was developed or is being developed?



Valid n=1810

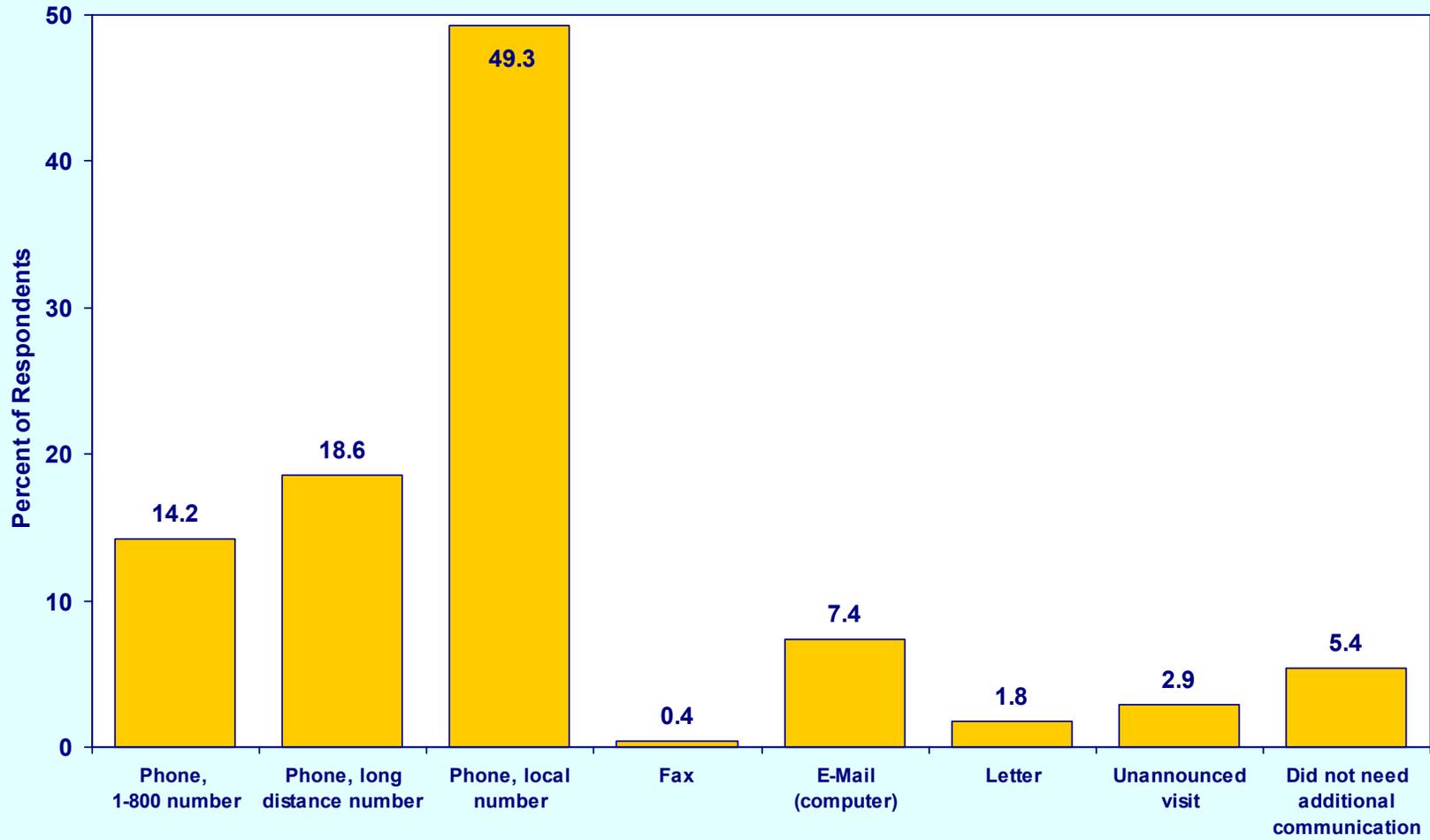
Question 53:
In general, how convenient was the **TIME** scheduled for developing this **PLAN**?



Valid n=1805

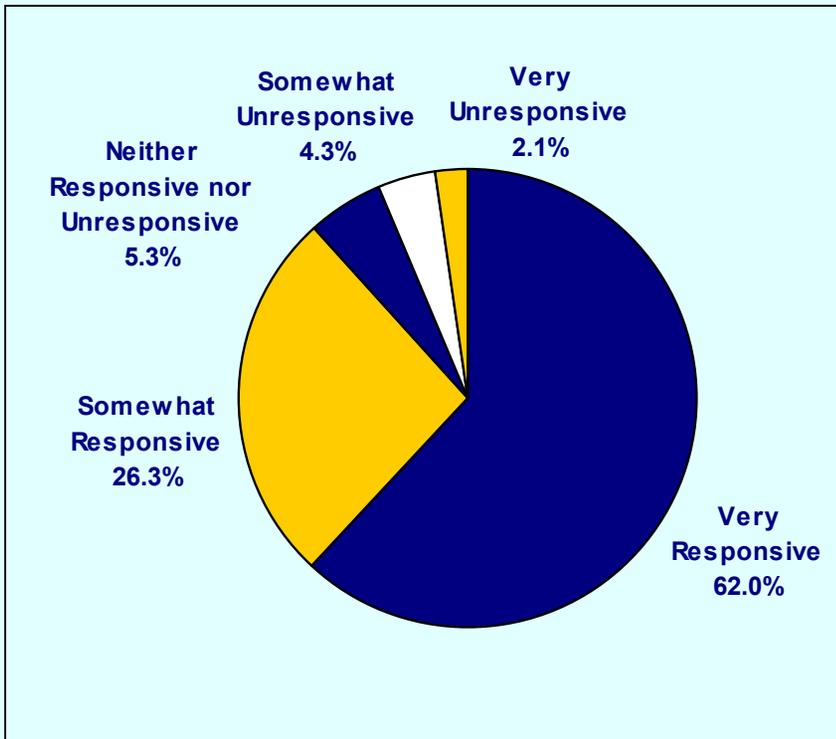
Developing a Plan

Question 54:
Aside from scheduled visits, what was the PRIMARY method you used to contact your planning counselor?



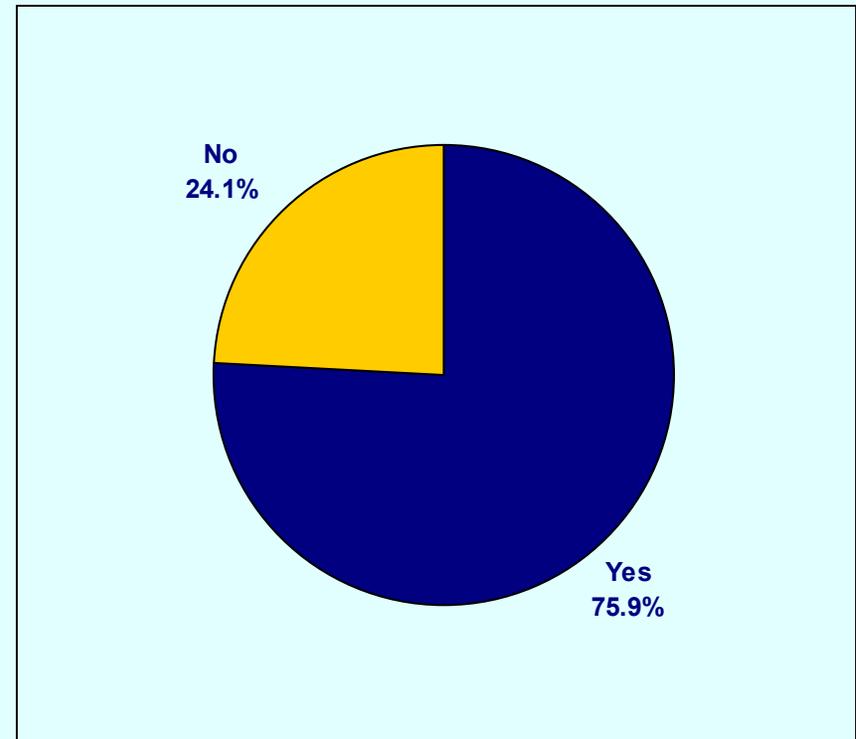
Valid n=1749

Question 55:
How responsive was the counselor to your contact through this method?



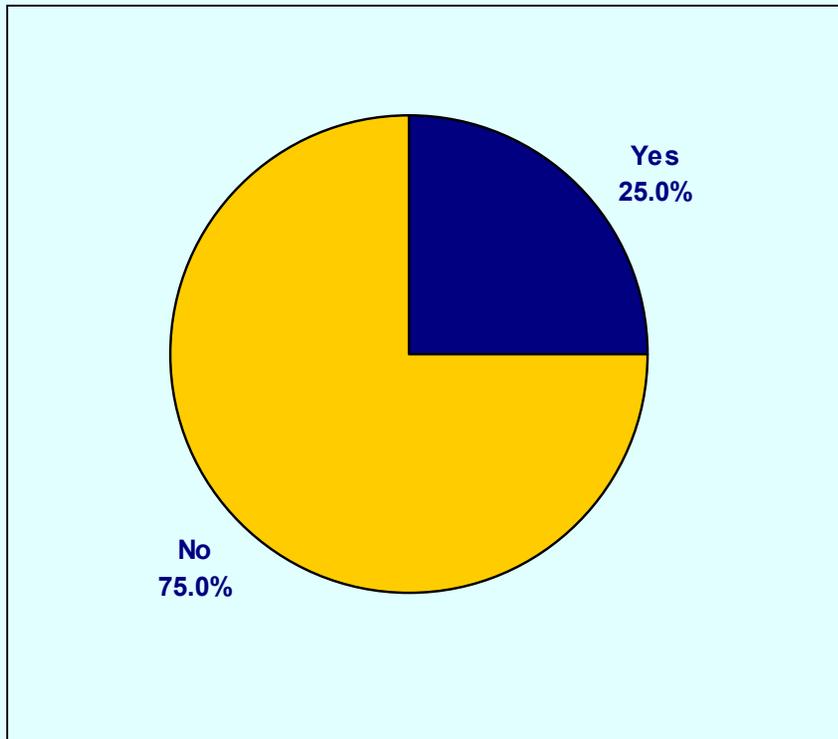
Valid n=1706

Question 56:
Were you generally able to get the information you needed on the first call or contact?



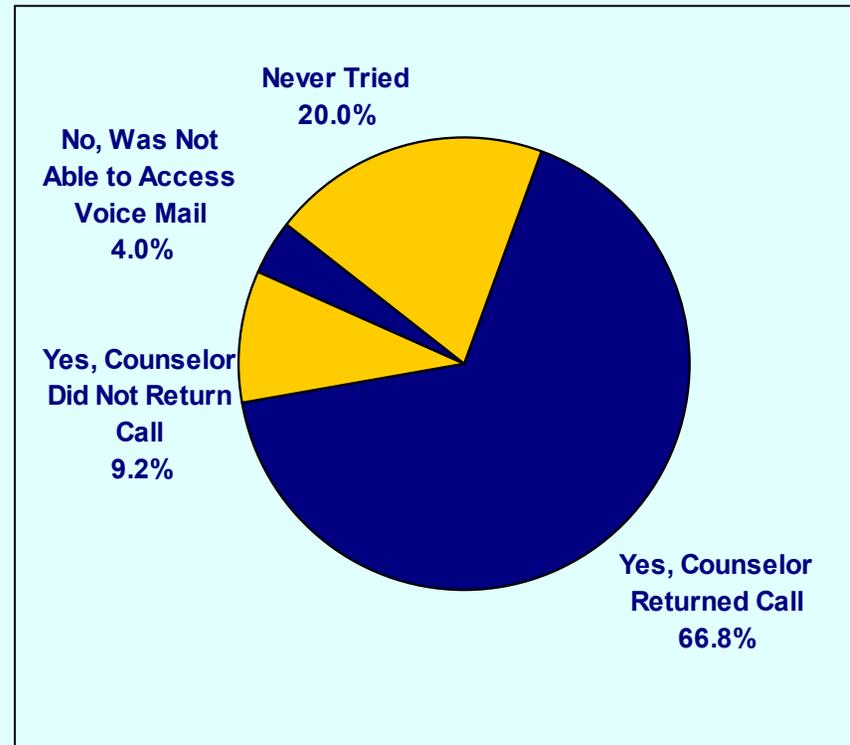
Valid n=1707

Question 57:
Did you have to repeat the same information to more than one person during the planning process?



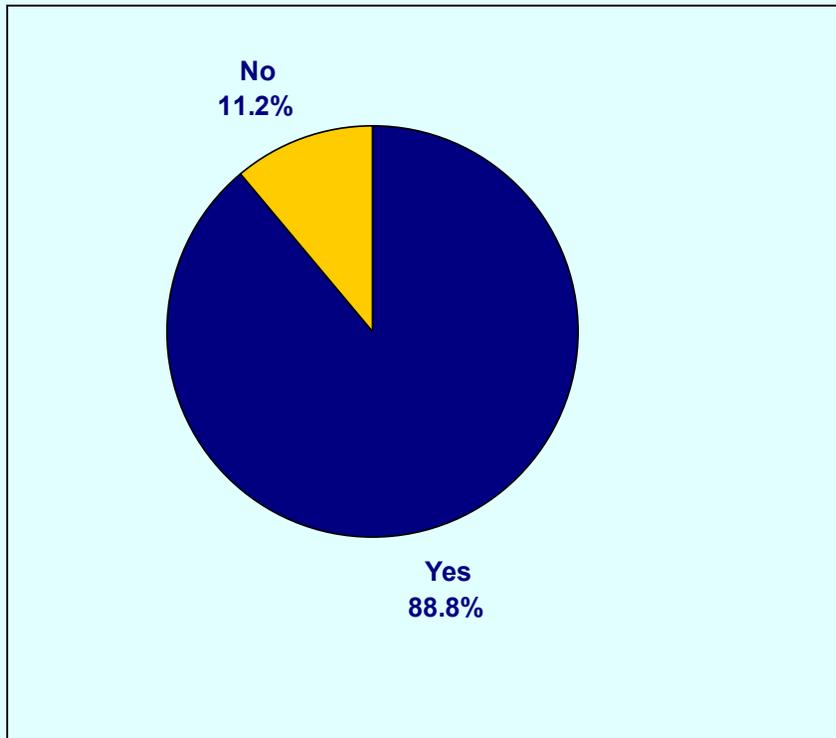
Valid n=1703

Question 58:
Were you able to access voice mail in order to leave your counselor a message?



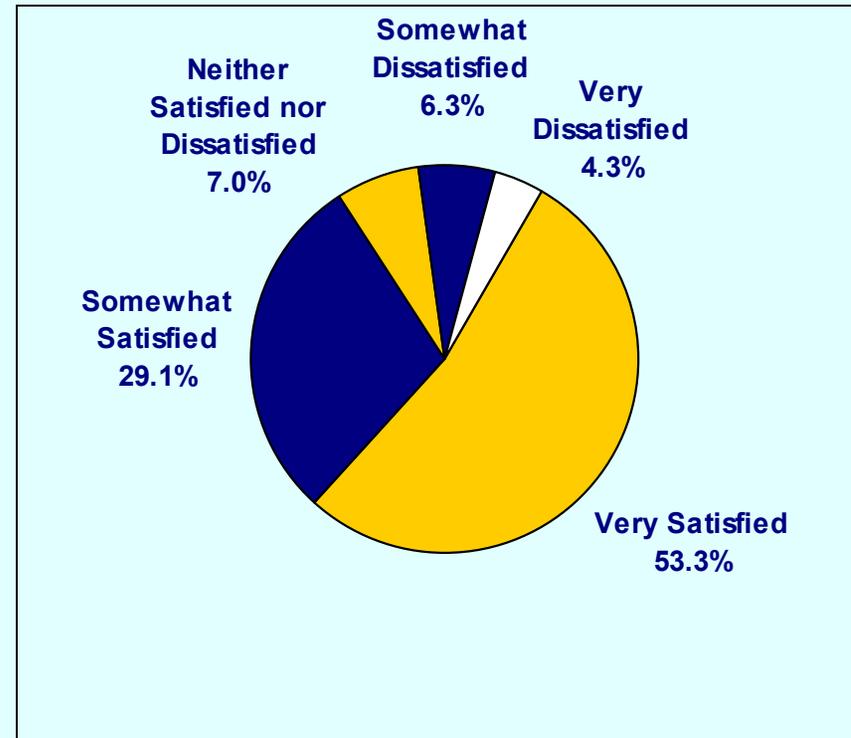
Valid n=1707

Question 59:
Overall, did the PLANNING process reflect the courtesy, compassion, and respect you would expect as a veteran of the United States?



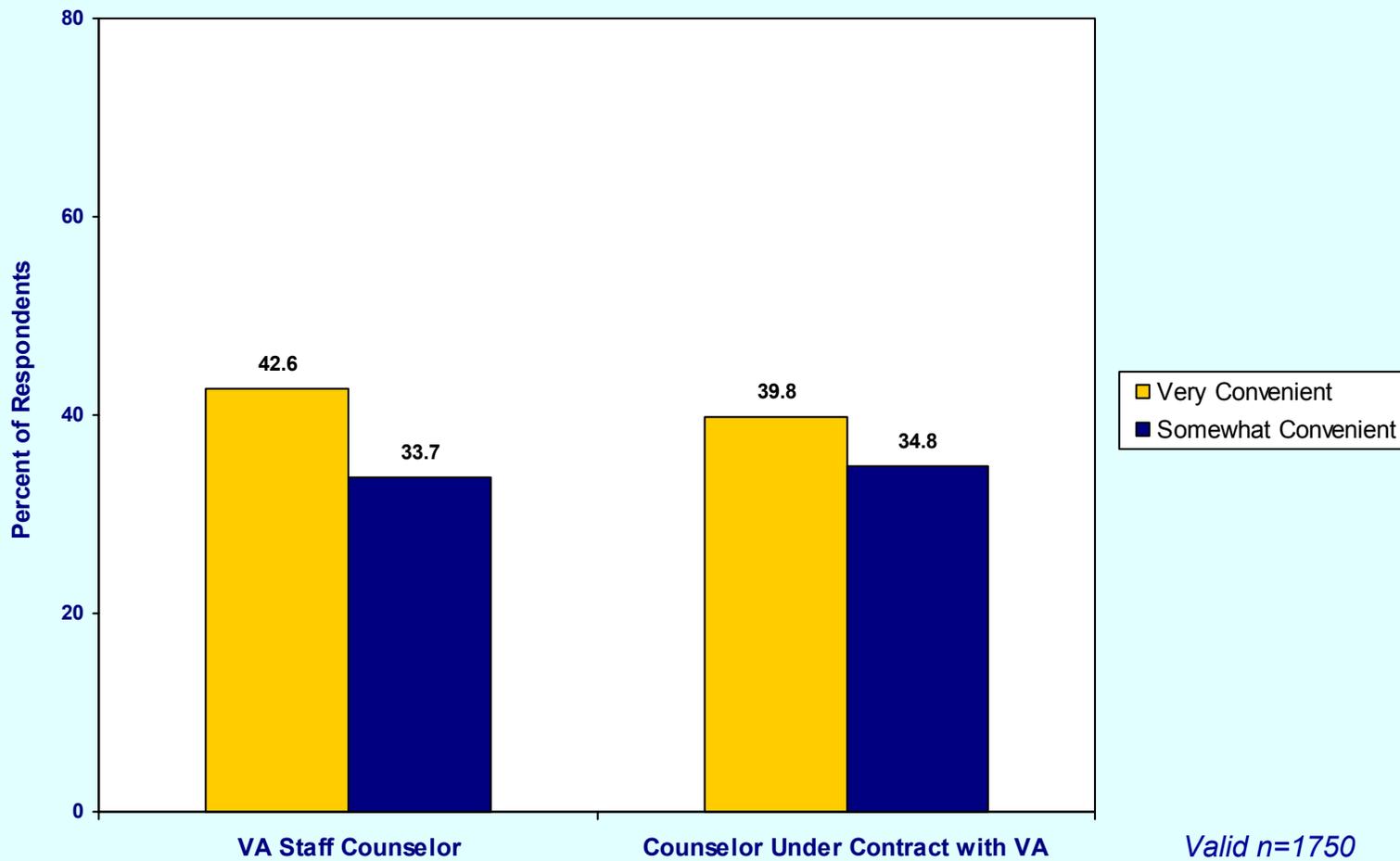
Valid n=1798

Question 60:
Overall, how satisfied are you with the way your vocational rehabilitation PLAN of services was developed or is being developed?

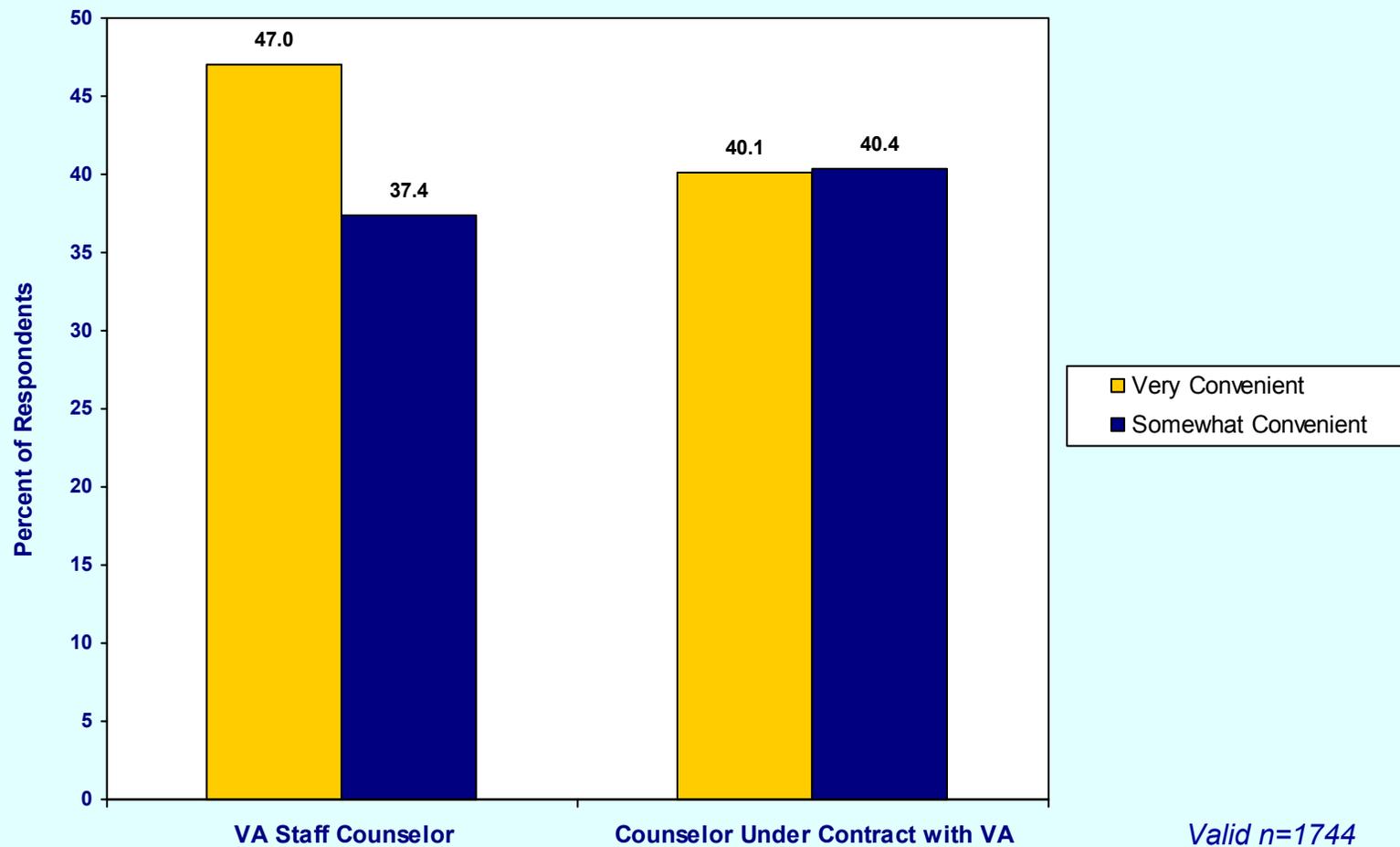


Valid n=1805

Question 40 by Question 52:
Convenience of location where plan was developed by type of counselor during this phase of program.



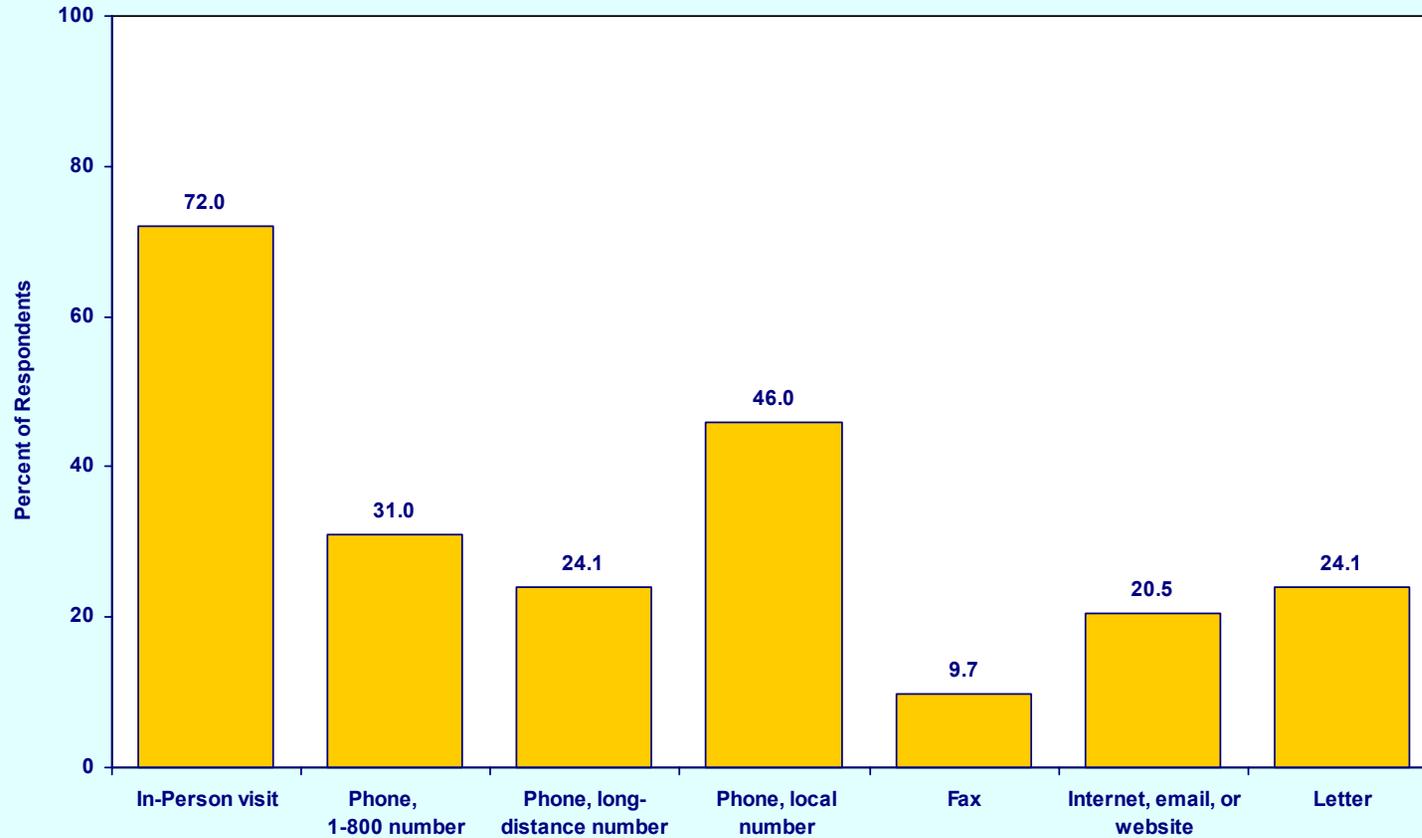
Question 40 by Question 53:
Convenience of time scheduled for developing plan by type of counselor during this phase of program.



**Survey Findings:
Access to the VR&E Program**

Access to the VR&E Program

Question 61:
Looking back to your contacts with the VR&E program thus far, which methods of contact did you EVER use?

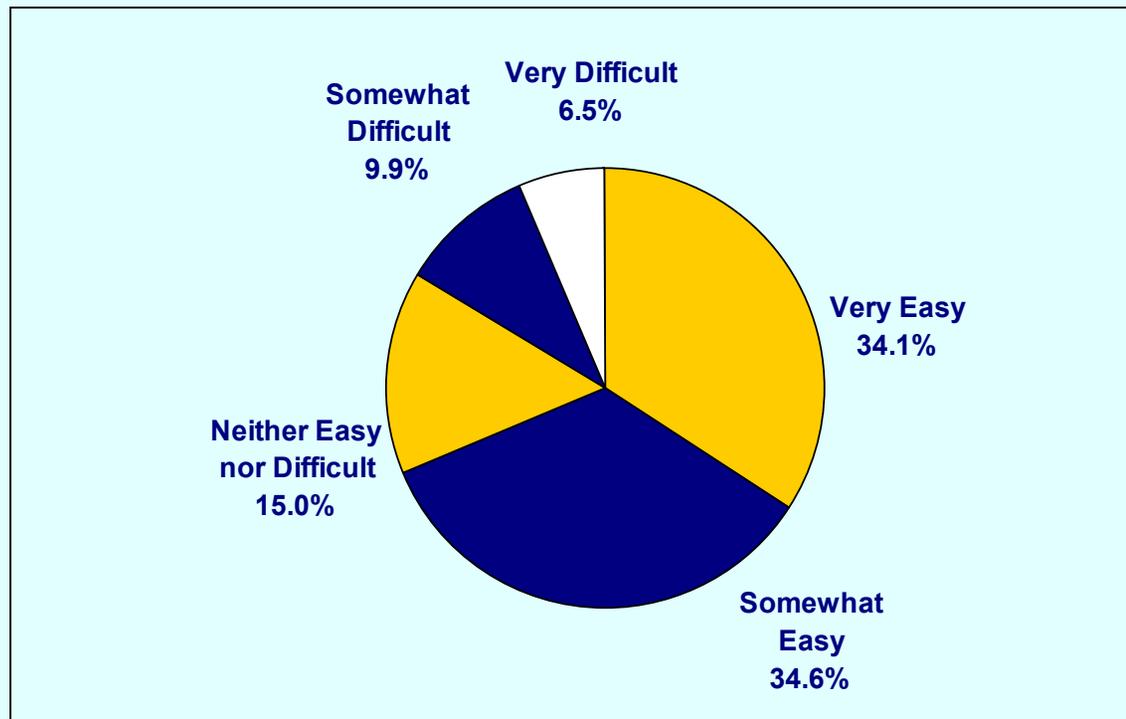


Note: As respondents could mark all responses that apply, the percentages do not add to 100%.

Valid n=2747

Question 62:

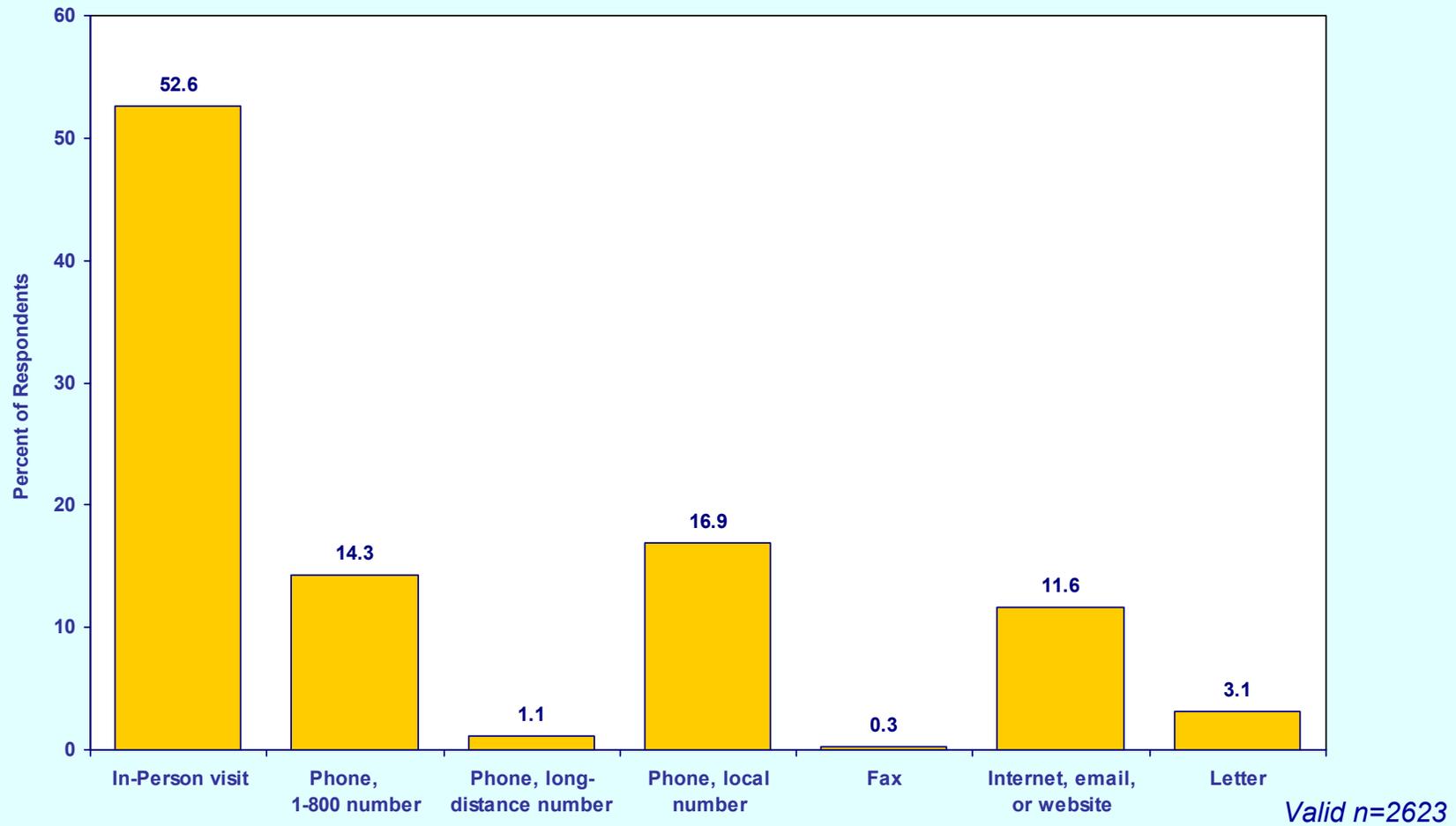
In general, how easy was it for you to obtain information from the VR&E program?



Valid n=2749

Access to the VR&E Program

Question 63:
Which method of contact with the VR&E program would you prefer, if you could get the same degree of service?

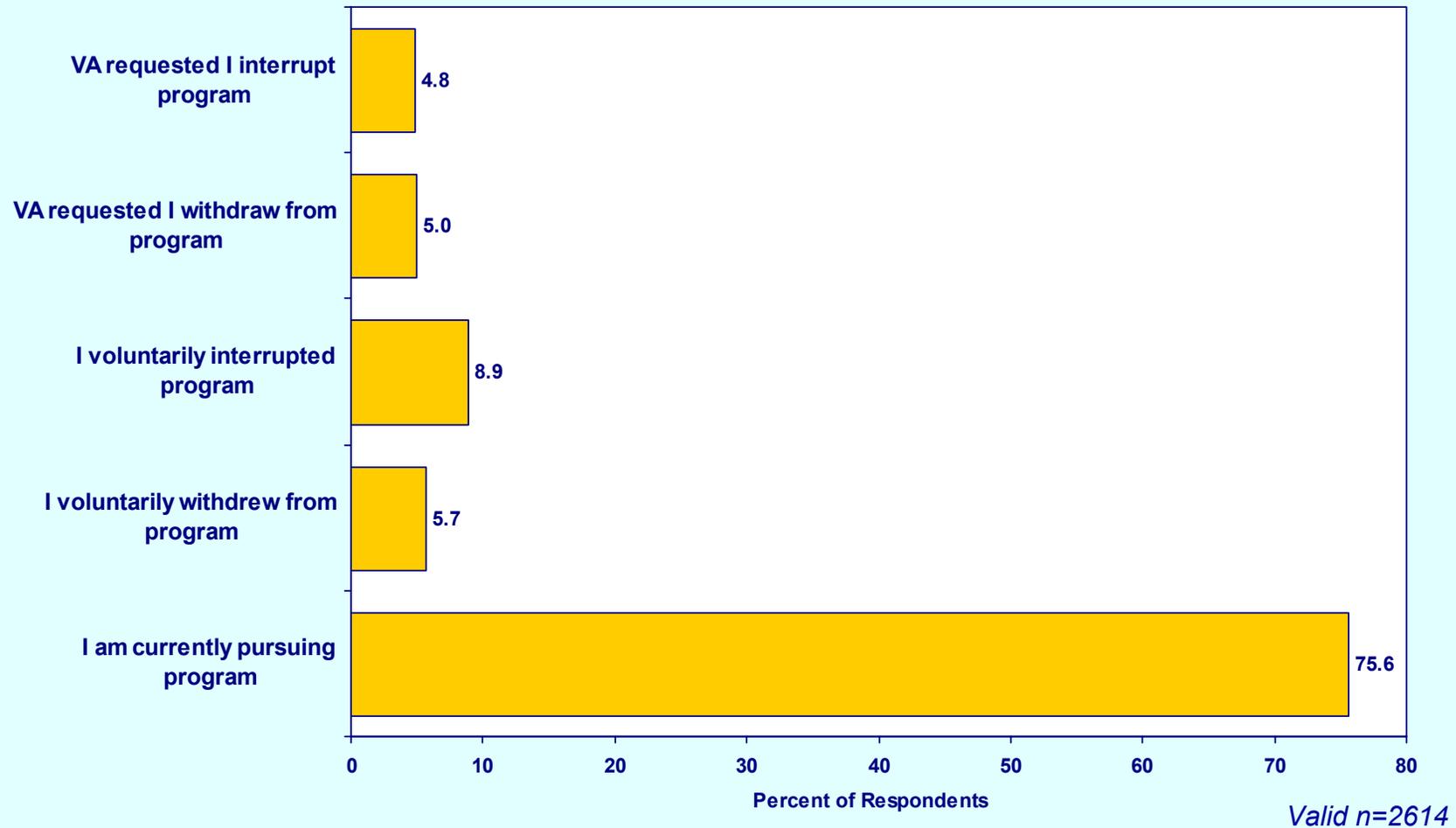


**Survey Findings:
Current Status in the VR&E Program**

Current Status in the VR&E Program

Question 64:

How would you best describe your CURRENT status with regard to the VA VR&E program?

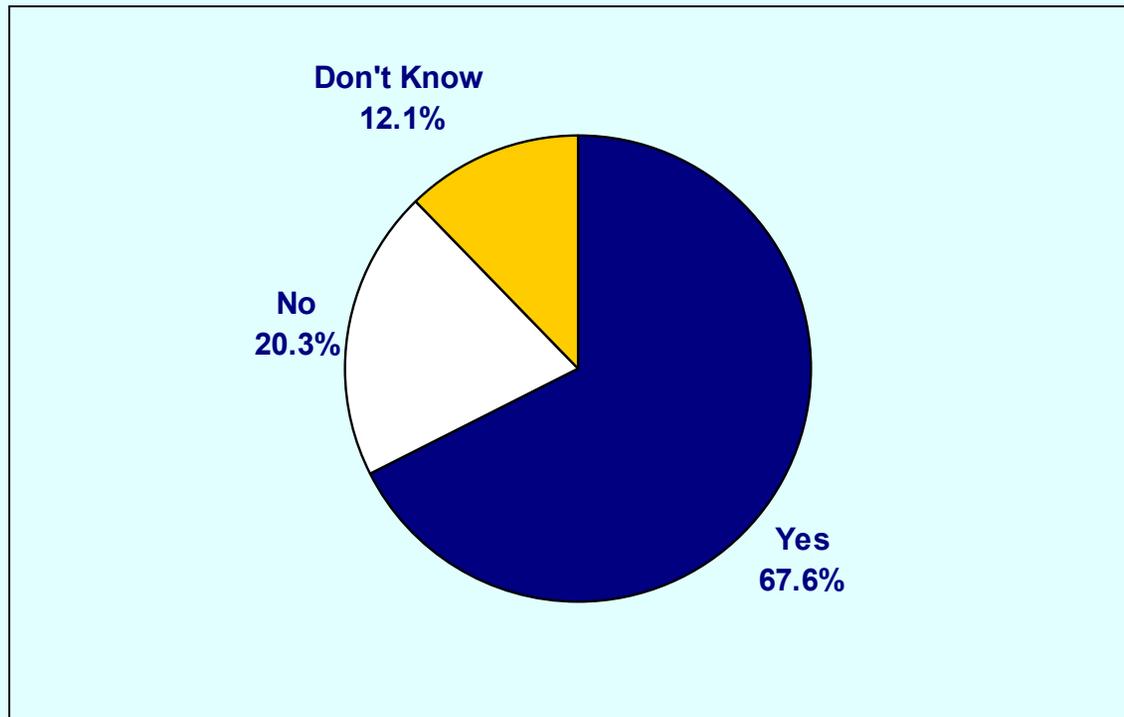


Current Status in the VR&E Program

63

Question 65:

Did VA tell you the reasons why you were interrupted or withdrawn from the program?

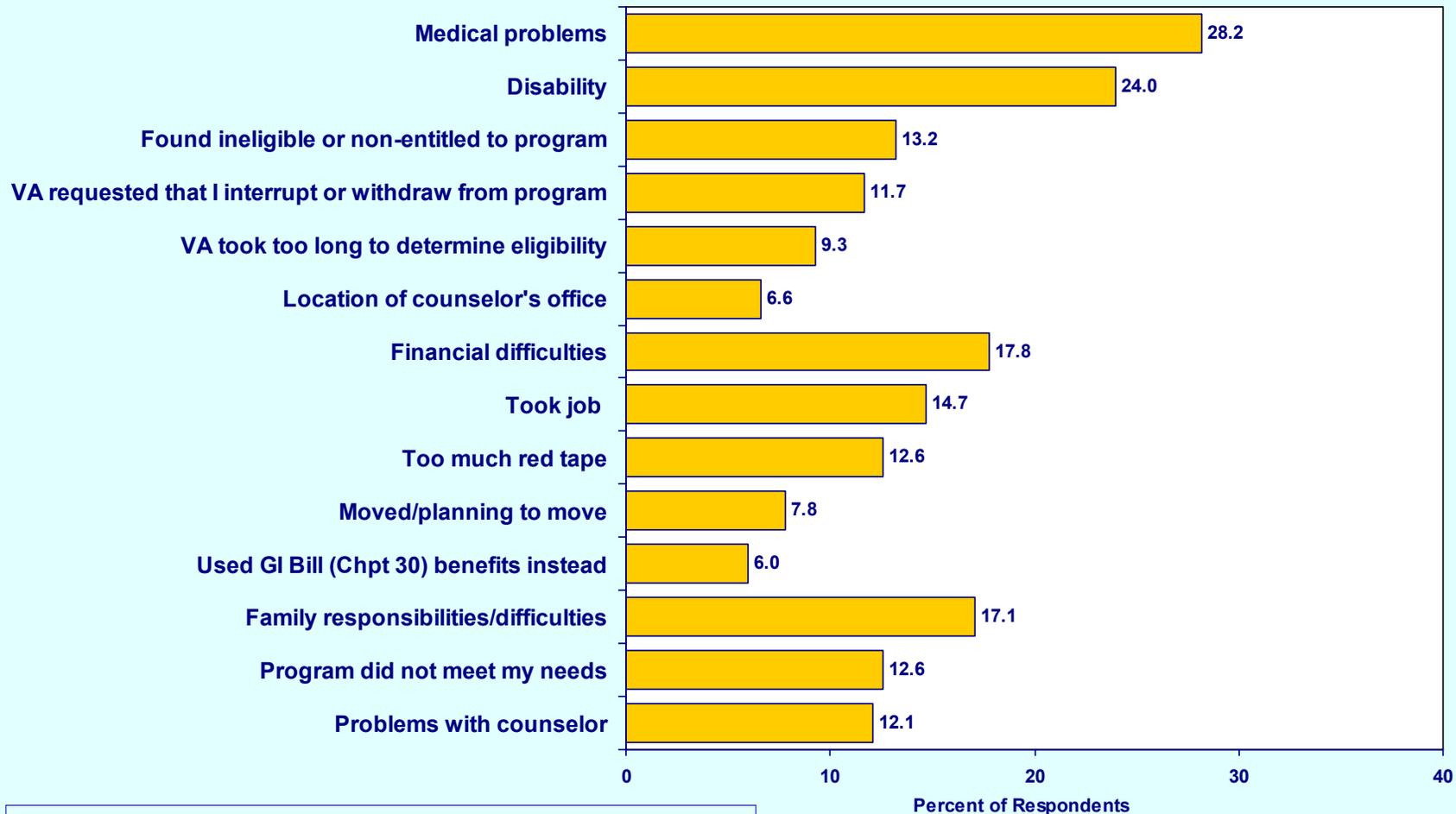


Valid n=306

Current Status in the VR&E Program

Question 66:

Why did you interrupt or withdraw from the VA VR&E program?



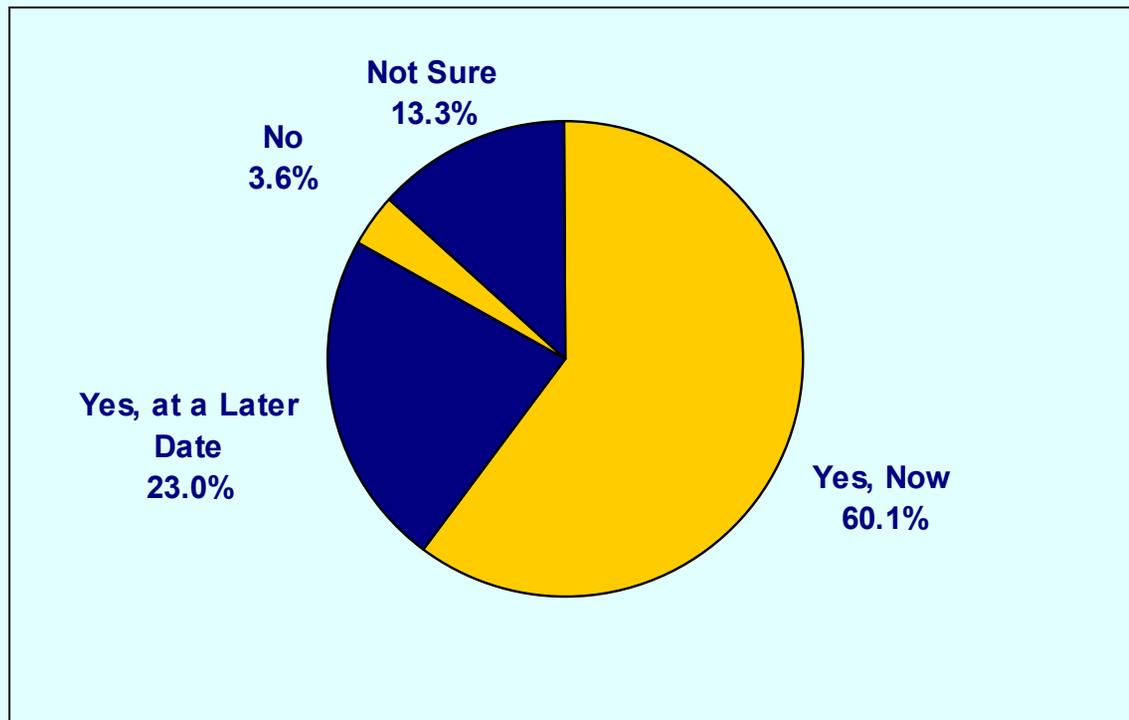
Note: As respondents could mark all responses that apply, the percentages do not add to 100%.

Valid n=667

Current Status in the VR&E Program

Question 67:

Do you plan to complete your rehabilitation program now or at some later date?



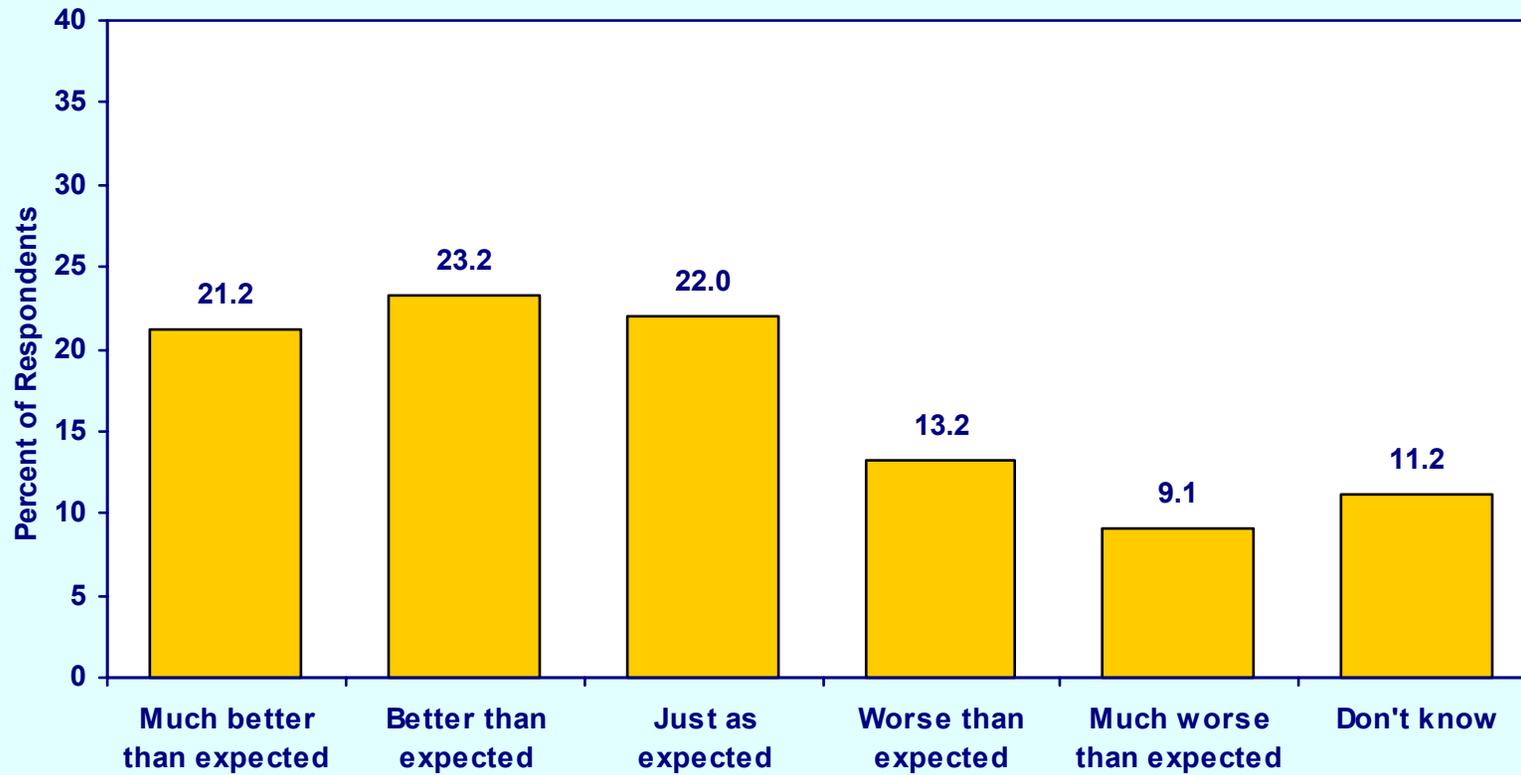
Valid n=2649

Overall Program Impressions

Overall Program Impressions

Question 68:

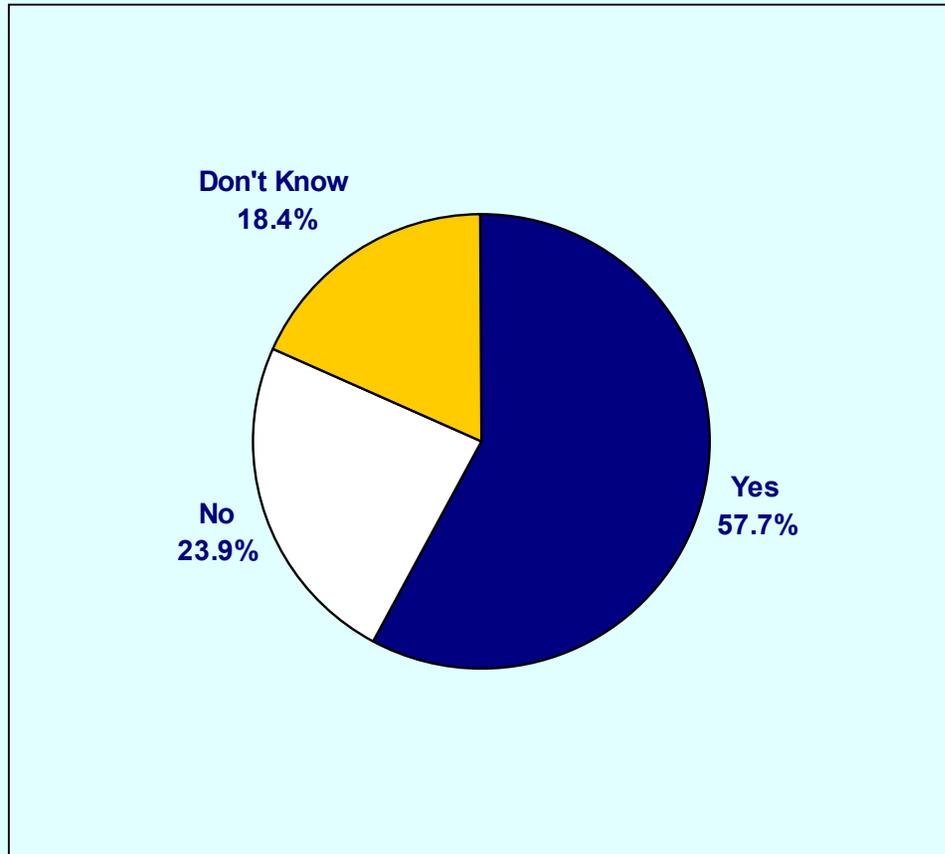
Thus far, how well has the program met your expectations?



Valid n=2749

Overall Program Impressions

Question 69:
During the Evaluation and Planning phase, do you feel that there was sufficient focus on your future employment?

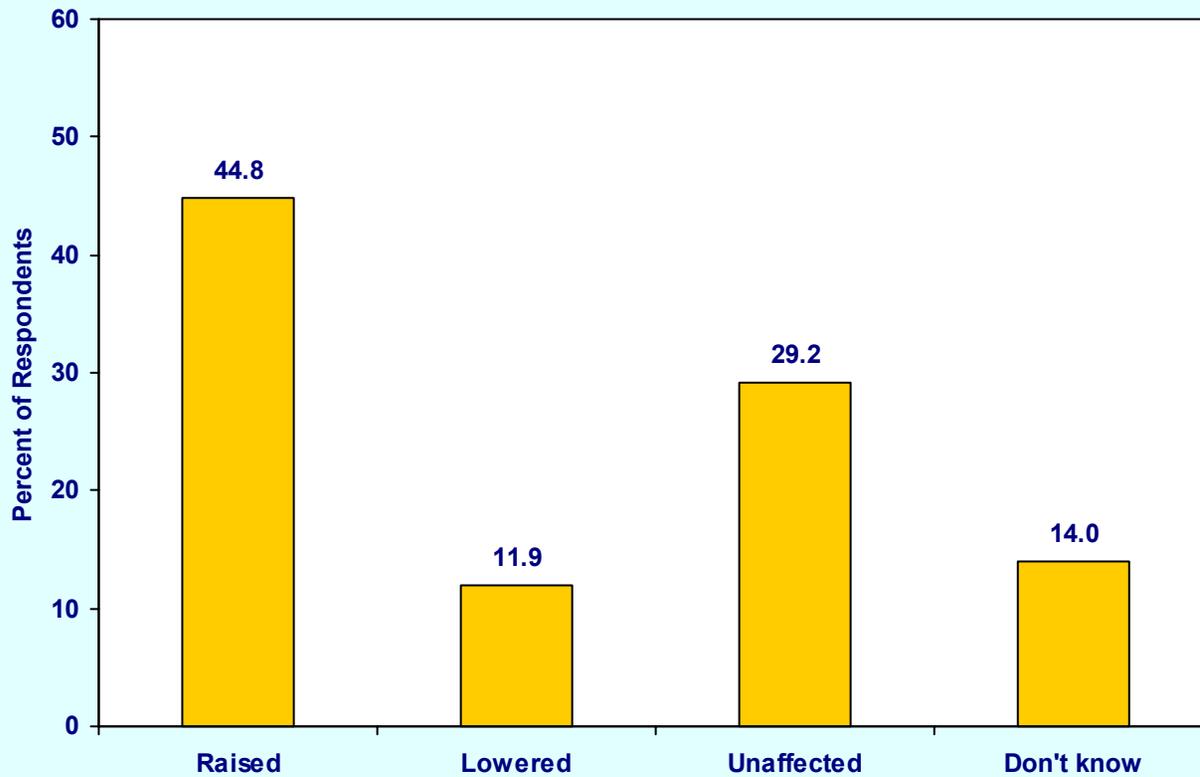


Valid n=2734

Overall Program Impressions

Question 70:

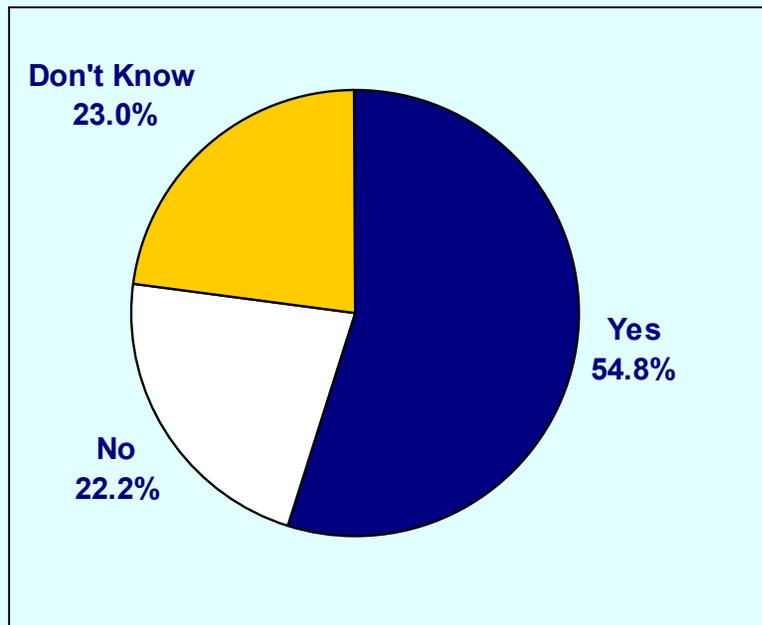
Have your EDUCATIONAL goals been raised, lowered, or unaffected as a result of your interaction with the VR&E program?



Valid n=2732

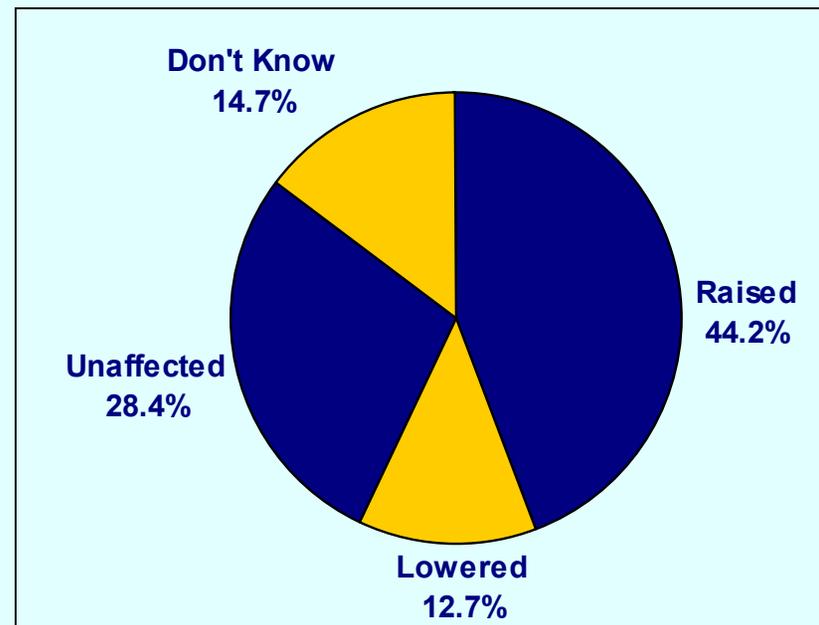
Overall Program Impressions

Question 71:
Are your educational goals more realistic as a result of the program?



Valid n=2725

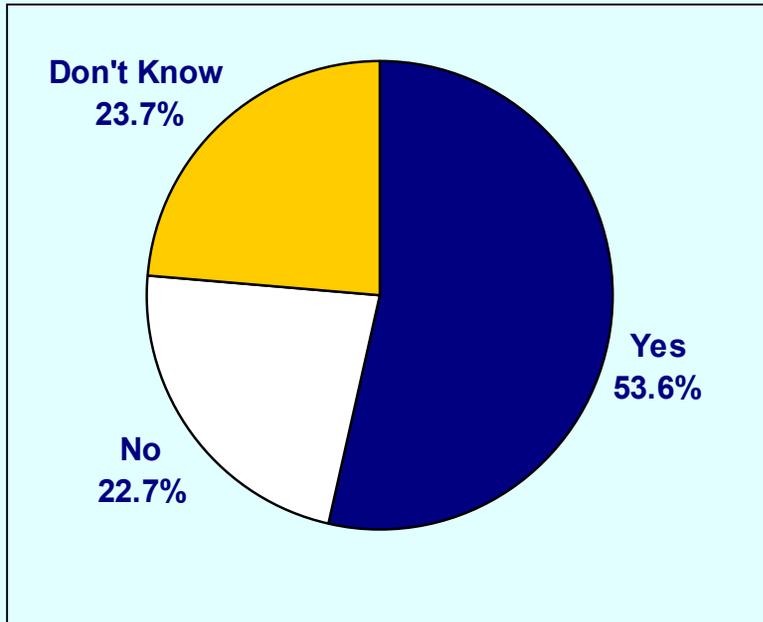
Question 72:
Have your CAREER goals been raised, lowered, or unaffected as a result of your interaction with the VR&E program?



Valid n=2718

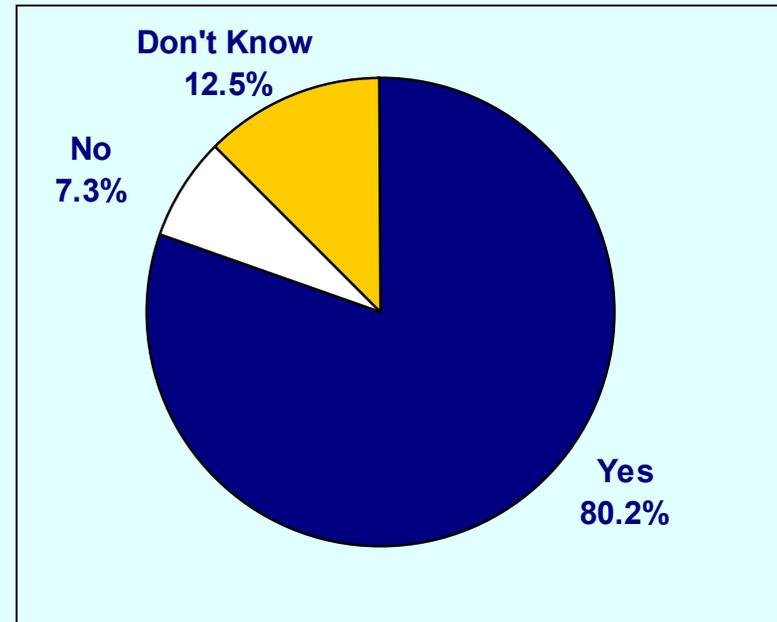
Overall Program Impressions

Question 73:
Are your career goals more realistic as a result of the program?



Valid n=2710

Question 74:
Would you recommend this program to other disabled veterans?



Valid n=2742

Appendix B: Survey Methodology

Mailing Protocol

- A total of 6,000 surveys were distributed to veterans in the Evaluation and Planning Phase.
- The survey mailing protocol consisted of five mailings to veterans randomly selected into the survey sample. These five mailings included: 1) a prenotification letter informing selected participants that they should expect to receive a mailed survey questionnaire; 2) the questionnaire, including a cover letter and standard return envelope; 3) a reminder/thank-you postcard; 4) a second questionnaire mailed to those who had not yet responded, along with a cover letter and standard return envelope; 5) a second reminder/thank-you postcard. Examples of these materials appear in Appendix B.
- All mailing materials were sent bearing the VBA seal, and the cover and prenotification letters included a signature from the VBA Under Secretary for Benefits. Each questionnaire mailout contained the cover letter on VBA letterhead, a questionnaire, and a pre-posted envelope. Toll-free numbers for both Caliber Associates and VBA were included on the cover letters to assist respondents with questions regarding the survey.
- The mailings took place on the dates indicated in the table below.

Mail Survey Schedule	
Prenotification Letter	December 4, 2002
First Questionnaire	December 11, 2002
First Reminder Postcard	December 18, 2002
Second Questionnaire	January 8, 2003
Second Reminder Postcard	January 15, 2003
Fieldwork Completed	January 30, 2003

Response Rates

- The Evaluation and Planning survey yielded 3,022 completed questionnaires, resulting in a 50.4% response rate.
- The response rate is calculated by dividing the number of completed questionnaires by the number of eligible questionnaires. Generally, a response rate of 70 percent or more is considered excellent, 60 to 69 percent is considered very good, 50 to 59 percent is considered good, 40 to 49 percent is considered fair, and any response rate less than 40 percent is considered poor. Without further information, data derived from a survey with a response rate of less than 50 percent should be interpreted with caution.
- Eligible questionnaires are those which were returned completed, those which were not returned, or those which were returned blank or incomplete.
- Ineligible questionnaires are those which were returned undeliverable or those which were returned with an indication that the recipient was deceased or unable to complete the questionnaire.