



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

John Maxwell  
Commissioner

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October 1, 2020

### **Delivered via electronic mail**

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam  
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia  
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Carlos Hopkins  
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs  
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Eileen D. Filler-Corn  
Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas  
President Pro Tempore, Senate of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: Annual report on the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) - Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) Program

Dear Governor Northam, Secretary Hopkins, Delegate Filler-Corn, and Senator Lucas:

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) – Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) program provides outreach, connection, and support to veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserves, and their families. VVFS addresses the challenges of military and post-military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries.

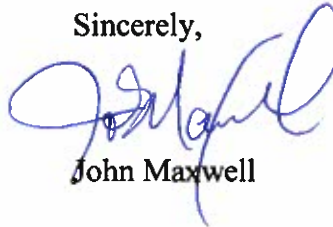
VDVS operates VVFS in coordination with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). Other state agencies, such as the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), the Department of Social Services (DSS), and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), are vital partners, as are the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Virginia's Community Services Boards (CSBs), homeless Continuum of Care (CoC), and organizations such as the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA).

The Code of Virginia, §2.2-2001.1(D) directs that VDVS report annually program results to the Governor, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, and the General Assembly. The attached pages provide that information for your review.

Governor Northam, Secretary Hopkins, Delegate Filler-Corn, and Senator Lucas  
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VDVS is grateful for your support and we look forward to addressing any questions and concerns.

Sincerely,



John Maxwell

Attachment: VVFS 2020 Annual Report

Cc: Ms. Alison G. Land, Commissioner, DBHDS  
Ms. Kathryn A. Hayfield, Commissioner, DARS  
Mr. Michael Dick, Chairman, Board of Veterans Services  
Mr. William Ashton, Chairman, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

# **VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES**

**2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

**On the**

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES**

**VIRGINIA VETERAN AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM**

**To**

**GOVERNOR RALPH S. NORTHAM,**

**SECRETARY CARLOS HOPKINS,**

**And**

**THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**October 1, 2020**

# THE VIRGINIA VETERAN AND FAMILY SUPPORT (VVFS) PROGRAM

## MISSION

*To monitor and provide resource connections and care coordination for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and other related supportive services to Virginia veterans, National Guard, Armed Forces Reserves, caregivers and families.*

## ACTIVITIES

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) program is a focused response to the growing need to improve and expand services to our Nation's veterans and their family members coping with the impact of deployment, military service, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and operational stress and/or traumatic brain injury (TBI). It is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) in cooperation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). VVFS serves veterans of all eras who are Virginia residents, members of the Virginia National Guard or Armed Forces Reserves (not in active federal service), and their family members.

The purpose and priorities of the VVFS program are:

- Work with veterans to develop a coordinated resources plan that identifies appropriate service providers to meet the veteran's service needs;
- Refer veterans to appropriate and available providers on the basis of needs identified in the coordinated resources plan;
- Monitor progress toward individually identified goals in accordance with the coordinated resource plan.
- Collaborate with relevant agencies of the Commonwealth, localities, and service providers;
- Build awareness of veterans service needs and the availability of the program through marketing, outreach, and training for first responders, service providers and others;
- Develop and implement a consistent method of determining how many veterans in the Commonwealth are currently in need of mental health, physical rehabilitation, or other services, or may be in need of such services in the future.

In 2020, VVFS continued to expand and sustain partnerships with Federal, state, and community partners in connecting service members, veterans and their families (SMVF) to resources and services. After COVID-19, VVFS shifted services to provide increased virtual care coordination to SMVF in need of resources. Through the Governor's Challenge and the Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families in Virginia, VVFS expanded virtual trainings, such as Military Culture Competency (MCC) and Crisis Intervention

Training (CIT), to state agencies and community partners to enhance knowledge and resource connections.

Creating a continuum of care for SMVF for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services is a continual priority to ensure there is no wrong door and SMVF can quickly access services when needed. VVFS is continuing its partnership with Headstrong in Northern Virginia for mental health clinicians and an innovative art therapy program with Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS). The public-private partnership between VVFS and the VDVS Benefits Services (Benefits) division, George Mason University's Center for Psychological Services, and Dominion Energy is also continuing to provide behavioral health assessments at no cost to veterans.

VVFS continues its partnership with the Department of Social Services and Virginia 2-1-1 to enhance the statewide 2-1-1 system. With additional call specialists, increased training on military and veteran competency, and increased collection of data, the 2-1-1 system is better able to connect veterans 24/7 to community, state, and federal resources. The system connected 5,361 veterans, active duty military, and their family members to services in FY20. The majority of referral needs were for utility and housing assistance, social services, and job-related services.

### **Governor's Challenge and Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families**

VVFS continued its efforts as part of the [Governor's Challenge and the Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families](#). The City of Richmond was one of the first eight cities in the Nation to join the Mayor's Challenge, and Virginia is one of now eight states to participate in the Governor's Challenge. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) sponsor both of these initiatives.

The Virginia team is implementing the VA's [National Strategy for the Prevention of Veteran Suicide](#), which provides a framework for using a comprehensive public health approach to address the growing public health challenge among the veteran population. Secretary Daniel Carey, Health and Human Resources, and Secretary Carlos Hopkins, Veterans and Defense Affairs, co-lead the Governor's Challenge team in Virginia. The theme of the Virginia's Governor's Challenge is the "3C's – Care, Connect, and Communicate":

- **Care:** The provision of accessible and culturally competent behavioral health services.
  - **Strategy:** Identify and support SMVF at risk of suicide through "Asking the Question – Have you or a family member served in the military?" and suicide risk screening in community services.
- **Connect:** Bringing military/veteran specific and community services together; forming systemic partnerships.
  - **Strategy:** Increase engagement between Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS), and partner organizations for SMVF referrals.
- **Communicate:** Educating the SMVF population on resources and behavioral health providers on military culture and suicide prevention best practices

- *Strategy*: Expand lethal means safety (particularly firearm safety) training to community stakeholders

As part of the Governor's Challenge, VVFS and Benefits joined the *Virginia's Identify SMVF, Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services (VISR) Pilot*. The goal of the VISR pilot is to develop military culture, suicide prevention, and safety planning infrastructure in community agencies including hospitals, local departments of social services, CSBs, and the Up Center Cohen Veterans Network Clinic. Starting in July 2019, VVFS has been screening all veterans and family members accessing services for suicide risk, developing safety plans, and providing resource referrals when appropriate.

As part of the VISR initiative, VVFS continues to lead the effort to train state and community agencies in Military Cultural Competency and Transition Awareness Training. After holding in-person summits in the summer of 2019 that trained 525 service providers, VVFS shifted to virtual trainings in response to COVID-19 and trained over 1,450 from March – September 2020. VVFS has also continued to distribute VDVS/VA resource business cards that list the VA Suicide Crisis Hotline on one side and VVFS contact information for non-crisis services on the other. VVFS, DBHDS, and the VA disseminated the cards to State Police, local police departments, first responders, and other service providers across the Commonwealth.

In March 2020, VVFS joined the Virginia Law Enforcement Assistance Program to co-host Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) training to VVFS staff, emergency responders, and the Virginia Army National Guard. The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) CISM training included two courses focused on peer training – *Basic Group Crisis Intervention* and *Assisting Individuals in Crisis*. Designed to present a comprehensive and systematic crisis intervention curriculum, it prepared staff to utilize a wide range of crisis intervention services and tools to provide group crisis interventions. In addition, it trained staff in Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD).

### **SUPPORTIVE SERVICES**

VVFS provides hands-on assistance navigating behavioral health, rehabilitative, and other supportive services, including peer and family support services to the most vulnerable veterans. This includes justice-involved veterans and those at risk for, or experiencing homelessness.

VVFS focuses supportive services in five areas:

1. **Case coordination and management;**
2. **Housing and Homeless Services;**
3. **Justice Involved Services program (JIS);**
4. **Mission: Healthy Relationships and Mission: Healthy Families (MHR, MHF);**
5. **Veteran Peer Support (VPS) Services**

## **CASE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT**

VVFS consists of four regions, which provide the core services of resource connections, care coordination, peer and group support to veterans and their family members.

### **Capacity Building Initiatives**

- **Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training:** VVFS staff provide SMVF crisis intervention training to partner agencies, law enforcement, and first responders. This training builds capacity in communities and solidifies partnerships throughout the regions for referral resources and care coordination. CIT training provides the program with referrals at vital intercept points to connect veterans experiencing crises to care treatment and other related supportive services.
- **Virginia National Guard:** VVFS staff continue to support ongoing planning and training with the Virginia National Guard. Through the Commander's Ready and Resilient Council (CR2C) and with the Risk Reduction, Readiness and Suicide Prevention (R3SP) office, VVFS has developed and delivered (through the Senior Veteran Peer Specialist) training that increases the capacity of the National Guard to provide peer support. Peer support is an evidence-based practice that increases engagement to treatment and other supportive services. VVFS staff have further proposed geographically placed collaborative groups that address individual referrals on a case-by-case basis, sharing resources and information to maximize unified support for that SMVF's specific needs.
- **International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF):** In early March 2020, staff attended (ICISF) peer facilitation training in Charlottesville. The three-day training concentrates on techniques for peer engagement and support in a professional environment that may itself be the source of immense stress or trauma exposure (or causes the professional to revisit past experiences). In addition to increasing VVFS peer support capacity, the training equips VVFS staff to support National Guard units or other groups/individuals who have experienced suicides or related traumas in the workplace. Further, the training provides a unique networking opportunity between VVFS, Virginia National Guard R3SP support staff, and local law enforcement.
- **Military Cultural Competency (MCC) Training:** VVFS staff continue to provide MCC training to community agencies, state agencies, and other providers serving veterans. In FY20, VVFS was the lead MCC trainer for the VISR pilot through the Governor's Challenge for Suicide Prevention. This training builds provider knowledge in serving SMVF and provides information on key resource connections including outreaching VVFS services.

### **COVID-19**

At the onset of COVID-19, VVFS adjusted its in-person services to virtual services, eventually developing a hybrid posture to coordinate with community partners and meet different needs

while prioritizing safety. In addition to ongoing care coordination, staff invested significant effort in maintaining real-time awareness on service partner and resource operational posture, adjusting referrals and client advocacy. Staff observed a decrease in new clients, but an increase in returning clients and the length of time working with these clients. Despite an initial decrease in services provided, by June client referrals had increased noticeably, though lengths of interaction remain longer than pre-COVID. VVFS staff identified a small number of key barriers (relating largely to paper documents and internet access), but most have been resolved. While operations have continued, provision of services that require face-to-face interactions still present challenges in this environment.

### **Regional highlights**

**VVFS North Region** serves approximately 218,200 veterans and their families in 14 counties and six independent cities in Northern Virginia.

The North Region team is comprised of ten members: a Regional Director, Senior Resource Specialist, Veteran Justice Specialist, Veteran Peer Specialist, five full time Resource Specialists, and one part time resource specialist, strategically located across the Metropolitan area in six VDVS offices: Springfield, Fairfax City, Manassas, Ashburn, Fredericksburg, and Strasburg.

Due to the close proximity to 21 active duty military bases, the Pentagon, and Washington D.C, there is a high demand for assistance for veterans and family members particularly with mental health needs and related supportive services. In response, the region provides a high level of peer support, including groups, and care coordination for mental health. VVFS connects veterans and family members to licensed mental health clinicians who have experience working with veterans with PTSD and TBI. When veterans have barriers to accessing mental health treatment at the VA, staff are able to coordinate referrals to clinicians typically within a week. The region leverages the Veteran Services Foundation to coordinate assessments and treatment for veterans who cannot access the VA and have financial barriers.

In the past year, two staff transitioned from a contracted location in Oakton into VDVS offices. All North Region staff are now co-located with VDVS Benefits staff. Co-locating with Benefits staff has benefited both service lines. In FY20, the region received 40% of their referrals from Benefits staff. VVFS is also able to coordinate appointments with Benefits staff and able to support Benefit clients with additional supportive serves as needed.

Regional staff continue to coordinate with six local homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) and the Washington D.C. and Martinsburg VA Medical Center (VAMC) homeless services teams to connect veterans experiencing homelessness to permanent housing. Staff are active in meetings of Unite-Us Serving Together Collaborative and Homeless Veterans By-Name Housing to assist in care coordination with Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and other CoC partners.

Staff are part of the treatment teams for both the Fairfax County Veteran's Docket and Prince William County's Veteran Docket, working directly with judges, attorneys, probation/parole personnel, and a VA Justice Coordinator. VVFS, in collaboration with Veteran Mentors, assist



justice involved veterans in accessing mental health and/or substance abuse treatment, as well as employment/vocational and education services to comply with the docket and successfully graduate from the program.

**VVFS West Region** serves approximately 99,500 veterans and their families in Southwest Virginia, which includes 32 counties and 13 independent cities.

The West Region team is comprised of 11 members including: a Regional Director, Senior Resource Specialist, Veteran Justice Specialist, Veteran Peer Specialist, and seven Resource Specialists, strategically located across the 32 counties in five VDVS offices: Big Stone Gap, Abingdon, Wytheville, Danville and Lynchburg, and three CSB offices: New River Valley, Piedmont, and Alleghany Highlands. The region also provides services at satellite offices across the region and monthly itinerates in the community.

The West Region collaborates with DBHDS, VAMCs, CSBs and other key stakeholders. In FY20, the region co-hosted a two-day Southwest Virginia Crisis Intercept Mapping (CIM) for Suicide Prevention among SMVF in November 2019 with DBHDS. The SWVA CIM collaborative partnerships include VAMC's, state hospitals, CSB's, local universities and the Virginia Army National Guard who worked to solidify consistent and systematic screening of the SMVF population, safety planning for SMVF identified customers, lethal means safety planning, and bridge gaps for resource and referral contacts throughout the region.

In addition, staff provide training in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Trauma Informed Care/Adverse Childhood Experiences (TIC/ACEs), Talk Saves Lives and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).

The region is involved in Secretary Hopkins' Southwest Virginia Coalition meetings and continues to participate in strong collaborations with key stakeholders across the region. This includes several suicide prevention committees and coalitions that address barriers to services specific to SWVA. This has also bolstered partnerships with the three VAMCs that serve veterans living in western and southwestern Virginia, including Beckley, West Virginia; James H. Quillen (Mountain Home), Tennessee, and Salem. Within these partnerships, VVFS West Region has worked closely with Salem VAMC and New River Valley Community Services to bridge partnerships in implementing the Salem VAMC telehealth program.

The Salem VAMC has established a mobile telehealth program and currently has an active relationship with the New River Valley Community Services Board. They provide the service the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month and currently offers Primary Care Services with the goal to expand to mental health services. Veterans can report to a designated site, where they meet with a registered nurse who assists with connecting them to primary care provider at the Salem VA using peripheral devices (BP cuff, thermometer, pulse ox, stethoscope, and scales) and an iPad. This process allows for decreased travel time on the part of the Veteran for simple follow-up exams for veterans with no access to broadband. VVFS is in the process of arranging similar services with the Galax Virginia Employment Commission.

Together With Veterans (TWV) is an exciting opportunity for Southwest Virginia (SWVA) proposed through the Governor's Challenge. TWV is a national best practice from the VA's Veterans Health Administration designed to bolster grass roots, veteran-led, suicide prevention in rural communities. TWV is a community-engaged process for identifying, selecting, and implementing a variety of evidence-based, promising practices for the reduction of suicide and promotion of wellness among veterans living in rural communities.

In October 2019, SWVA TWV members attended the TWV Implementation Academy in Colorado. The SWVA TWV team returned and completed an in depth Community Assessment and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis that complements the SWVA CIM sessions. The SWVA TWV program is currently in Phase 3 and Phase 4 of the five phases of the community development process. SWVA TWV and the Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) completed the PARTNER Tool Survey. This process surveys key stakeholders from across SWVA to measure collaboration among people and organizations in our communities.

**VVFS Central Region** serves approximately 158,500 veterans and their family members in Central Virginia, encompassing 29 counties and nine independent cities.

The Central Region team is composed of twelve members: a Regional Director, a Senior Resource Specialist, the VVFS Senior Veteran Specialist, five Resource Specialists, one Justice Resource Specialist, and three Veteran Peer Specialists, strategically located in six VDVS offices: Petersburg, Chesterfield, Henrico, Charlottesville, Staunton and Fredericksburg, and two CSB offices: Richmond and Fluvanna. Three of these positions are new as of FY19, reflecting the region's increase in client numbers, case complexity and added outreach, training, and capacity building opportunities.

As part of the Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Veteran Suicide, regional staff are participating in ongoing outreach and messaging opportunities. This includes public service announcements on available resources for veterans who are struggling (or in immediate crisis) as well as short video vignettes of front-line staff describing their work and their personal connection to the veterans they are serving/supporting. The primary aim of these short videos is to humanize the programs and staff a veteran may contact, and share greater detail on the resources and support available.

**VVFS East Region:** The East Region serves approximately 248,800 veterans and their families in the Greater Hampton Roads area, which includes 21 counties and 11 independent cities.

The East Region is comprised of eight members: Regional Director, Senior Resource Specialist-Operations, Veteran Justice Specialist, Veteran Peer Specialist, and four Resource Specialists. Three East Region staff are strategically located in three VDVS offices: Norfolk, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff no longer work from offices at the CSBs: Colonial Behavioral Health and Western Tidewater.

The East Region has also developed a new partnership with the Steven A. Cohen Clinic as they provide confidential, client-centered therapy to post-9/11 veterans and their families, regardless of discharge status or combat experience. These services are free and offer transportation or

telehealth options. East Region has successfully connected veterans to the Steven A. Cohen Clinic along with receiving referrals from the clinic.

In FY20, East Region provided support and outreach at important events including the Second Annual Re-Entry Summit of the Northern Neck Re-entry and Collaborative Council, 2019 Navy Region Mid-Atlantic Annual Retiree Summit and Career Fair, 2019 Hampton VAMC Stand Down, Haynesville Correctional Center Resource Fair, Customs and Border Protection Resource Event, Eastern Shore Resource Fair & Homeless Count, and the Alliance for Veterans Health Fair. Some of these virtual outreach/presentations include participating in Nexus meetings, the Virtual Hampton VA Medical Center Suicide Prevention Resource Fair, the Annual Caregiver Summit, and the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans Conference.

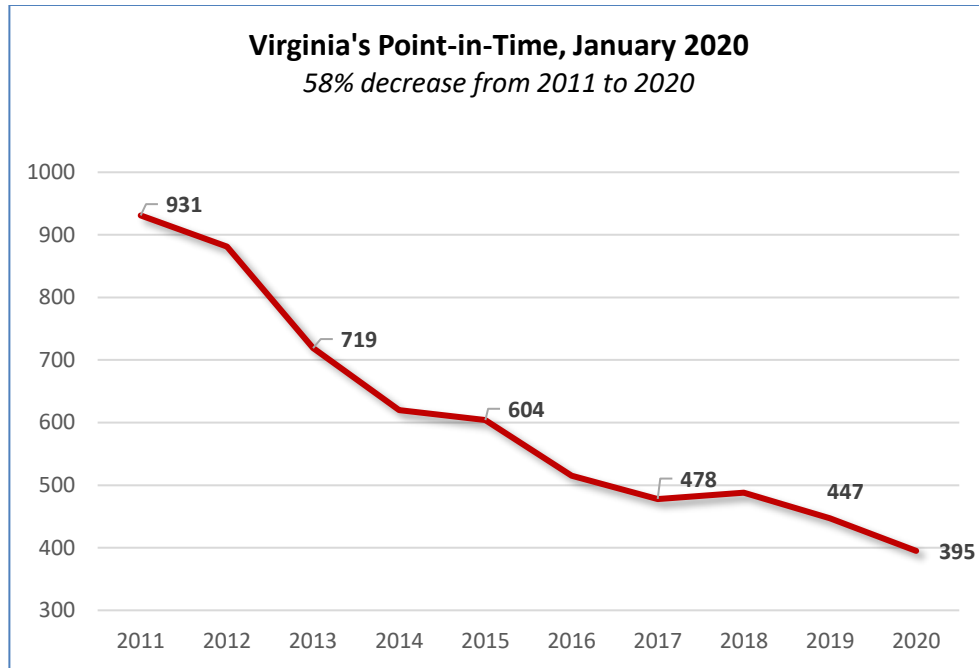
East Region also collaborates with the Hampton VA Medical Center's Homeless Services team and Suicide Prevention team to assist homeless and at-risk veterans and their families. Lastly, the East Region collaborates with the Hampton VAMC Clay Hunt Act Community Outreach Team (COT), which is part of five VAMC networks across the U.S. aiding transitioning service members seeking access to veteran health services at VA healthcare facilities and/or community healthcare services.

### **HOUSING AND HOMELESS SERVICES**

VVFS continues to be a leader in supporting the Commonwealth in sustaining efforts to ensure that veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. The VVFS Deputy Director, who also serves as the VVFS Housing Director, continues to provide statewide coordination and leadership with federal, state, and community organizations and serves on the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans' Executive Board.

The Governor's Coordinating Council on Homelessness (GCCH), chaired by the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, continues to maintain the goal of the reduction and elimination of veteran homelessness as a key priority. As chair of the GCCH Veterans Committee, the VVFS Housing Director collaborates with three federal agencies, seven state agencies, and local homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) partners to recommend strategies to the GCCH. In addition, the committee aligns priorities and works together to fill gaps and remove barriers in housing homeless veterans. In coordination with partners statewide, 947 previously homeless veterans entered permanent housing in FY20.

CoC held the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count the last week of January 2020. This year's count showed a continued decrease in veterans experiencing homelessness: 395 veterans – 325 sheltered; 72 unsheltered. This was a 12% decrease from the 2019 count of 447, and overall reduction of 58% since 2011. Women veterans experiencing homelessness had a 32% decrease from 2019, dropping from 57 to 39. VVFS continues to work with communities in sustaining efforts of reducing veteran homelessness through coordinated entry and targeting of resources.



The VDVS Homeless Fund continues leveraging Veterans Service Foundation (VSF) funds, coordinating with SSVF partners across the state, to fill gaps in housing veterans experiencing homelessness, and provides prevention funds for previously chronically homeless veterans. Allowable expenses include rental deposits/arrears, utility assistance, beds, and other one-time expenses that may prevent a veteran from being housed. In FY20, VVFS used \$160,423 in VSF funds to assist 194 veterans with moves into permanent housing or homeless prevention.

The Dominion *Veteran EnergyShare* program, in conjunction with the VDVS Homeless Fund, and administered by VVFS and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) providers across the state, continued in FY20 to provide utility assistance to homeless veterans who move into permanent housing. As in 2019, the *Veteran EnergyShare* program has \$800,000 set aside for calendar year 2020. This partnership has received national recognition as a best practice and has been vital in sustaining efforts in Virginia. In calendar year 2019, VVFS and SSVF providers utilized 1,552 *Veteran EnergyShare* vouchers for veterans experiencing homelessness or were at-risk.

In response to COVID-19, there has been an increase in homeless funding through SSVF for veterans through the CARES Act. This funding has prioritized higher risk veterans and utilizing motel/hotel as emergency shelter while quickly moving veterans into permanent housing when possible. VVFS is also coordinating with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Rent and Mortgage Relief Program (RMRP) to prevent evictions and foreclosures for veterans financially affected due to COVID.

Other housing priorities that VVFS is coordinating with through the GCCH is expanding permanent supportive housing and supports through the Permanent Supportive Housing Steering Committee. These efforts include participating in Advancing Housing-Related Supports for

Individuals with Substance Use Disorders State Medicaid Learning Collaborative" with the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS). This will provide technical assistance and support to states regarding the development and expansion of innovative state strategies to provide housing-related activities and supports and care coordination under Medicaid to individuals with substance use disorders. These efforts will enhance the ability to serve veterans in need of housing and supports that may be ineligible for VA homeless resources.

### **VVFS JUSTICE INVOLVED SERVICES PROGRAM (JIS)**

In FY20, the Criminal Justice Director (CJD) continued to promote the creation of Veteran Treatment Dockets in Virginia in collaboration with the Supreme Court of Virginia, and provided technical assistance to various jurisdictions, including Loudoun County. There are seven Veteran Treatment Dockets in Virginia: Fairfax County General District Court, Fairfax County Circuit Court, Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Hampton Circuit Court, Norfolk Circuit Court, Prince William General District Court, and Rappahannock (Spotsylvania) Circuit Court. VVFS Veteran Justice Specialist (VJS) regional staff are active members of the veteran docket team and connect veterans to resources in the community. The VJS staff continued to work with veteran dockets during the pandemic via virtual meetings and videoconferencing.

Virginia is one of five states to receive the Veterans Treatment Court Statewide Strategic Planning Technical Assistance award from the Center for Court Innovation (CCI). The CJD serves on the Veterans Docket Statewide Strategic Planning team. The goal of the team is to assist in the creation of veteran dockets in Virginia. As part of the team, the CJD will be assisting with statewide efforts to increase veteran identification in the criminal justice system at multiple intercept points, to include identifying veterans in Virginia local and regional jails. VDVS also provided a letter of support to the Virginia Supreme Court, Office of the Executive Secretary's application for the Bureau of Justice Assistance grant for veteran treatment docket statewide funding.

In addition, the CJD continued to collaborate with the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) and the VA for the Compensation and Pension (C&P) examination process for incarcerated veterans. VDVS created a C&P mailbox to receive C&P exam requests for incarcerated veterans, as the CJD is the statewide contact for the VA and VA-contracted vendors to request C&P exams for incarcerated veterans. The CJD monitors the C&P mailbox and coordinates C&P exams for incarcerated veterans with the VADOC statewide representative. Due to the pandemic, in-person C&P exams for incarcerated veterans are suspended; however, the CJD and VADOC collaborated with one of the VA-contracted vendors to conduct C&P behavioral health exams via telehealth. The CJD monitors and tracks pending exams and will assist in processing those exams once in-person visits resume at VADOC correctional facilities.

The CJD collaborates with other key partners that include the Virginia Regional Jail Association, the Virginia Sheriffs' Association (VSA), the Attorney General's office, and other community partners. VDVS provided a collaborative partner letter to VADOC to support their Bureau of Justice Assistance application for the *Collaborative Mental Health and Anti-Recidivism Initiative* project grant. The goal of this project is to establish a comprehensive service delivery plan to justice-involved individuals with mental health needs from intake through post-release

supervision. If VADOC receives the grant, the CJD will serve on the advisory committee for the project.

In FY20, the CJD continues to manage the VVFS Justice Involved Services program (JIS), which offers resource connections, care coordination, and support to Virginia's veterans and service members across the criminal justice spectrum, including diversion, incarceration and in-community supervision. JIS offers direct assistance to veterans and service members of any era, regardless of discharge status. The program provides services to veterans in treatment dockets, in local jails and state prisons, and on probation and/or parole supervision. JIS includes a formalized referral process, an electronic mailbox for justice-involved referrals (VVFS Justice mailbox-[justice.vvfs@VDVS.virginia.gov](mailto:justice.vvfs@VDVS.virginia.gov)), and VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists (VJS) in each region to work with justice-involved veterans pre- and post-release. The CJD monitors the VVFS Justice mailbox and oversees the referral process.

JIS's comprehensive needs assessment (pre-release) identifies areas of need the veteran may experience related to behavioral healthcare, rehabilitative support, employment, education, benefits, peer support, or housing. The assigned VJS provides direct support and assistance to the veteran/service member with linkage to resources designed to address those needs in the community. The VJS now provide intakes for incarcerated veterans and other justice-involved veterans virtually via phone due to the pandemic in addition to in-person service by appointment only. The CJD is monitoring the early release process in VADOC and the local jails due to the pandemic. It receives updates on veteran releases and early releases from the VADOC Veteran Program Manager and other VADOC staff. The CJD conducts statewide conference calls with the VVFS VJS quarterly to discuss cases, provide updates, and deliver technical assistance and training.

CJD teammates collaborate with the VA's Veteran Justice Outreach Specialists (VJOs) and VA Prison Re-entry Coordinator to promote the usage of the VA's *Veterans Re-entry Search Service (VRSS)* in order to improve identification of incarcerated veterans in jails and prisons. VADOC has signed on to VRSS and is using this system to assist in identifying veterans in the VADOC correctional facilities across Virginia. There are also seven local jails using VRSS. As part of the Virginia Treatment Court Statewide Collaborative team and in partnership with the VA Justice Outreach staff, the CJD is developing a statewide VRSS training team and training curriculum to assist in providing training to local jails on using VRSS. This team will also market VRSS to local and regional jails across the State. The goal of accurate veteran identification in local and regional jails is to potentially increase veteran dockets in Virginia and connect justice-involved veterans to treatment and support.

### **MISSION: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS & MISSION: HEALTHY FAMILIES**

*Mission: Healthy Relationships* (MHR) and *Mission: Healthy Families* (MHF) are retreats held at various locations in Virginia and focus on effective communication skills through the provision of individualized and group support in a workshop format.

*Mission: Healthy Relationships* is a program focused on relationship enhancement and effective communication skills for couples. It is designed for committed couples who have experienced

deployment, transition or other military stressors and are coping with the effects of operational combat stress, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI). The goal of the workshop is to improve overall health and well-being, and relationship satisfaction. MHR was adapted from “8 Hours to a Lifetime of Relationship Satisfaction,” a workshop designed by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Couples who participate in the weekend-long workshop are taught using a skills-based approach to relationship strengthening, enhancing relationship communication and resiliency skills, and are provided connections to behavioral health, rehabilitative and supportive services. In FY20, VVFS held workshops in Richmond and Williamsburg, with 38 couples attending. VVFS postponed the workshop planned for April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Mission: Healthy Families*** (MHF) retreats enhance family well-being for veteran families by allowing the families to step away from daily stressors and support one another as a unit. The retreats allow adults and children to engage in activities, which help strengthen skill building, resiliency and communication skills within the family unit. The weekend provides time for families to engage in directed and non-directed activities that focus on strengthening relationships and the health and welfare of each member of the family.

In FY20, VVFS hosted one workshop at Smith Mountain Lake, with veterans and family members from 17 families in attendance, with 78 total participants. MHF provides indoor and outdoor family-bonding time. VVFS postponed the planned June 2020 MHF event due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **VETERAN PEER SUPPORT (VPS) SERVICES**

The Veteran Peer Support (VPS) program leverages professional peer training and personal experiences to develop peer-to-peer relationships with veterans to support increasing self-reliance, health, wellness, and quality of life. Specifically focusing on veterans struggling with behavioral and rehabilitative needs affected by military service but presently disinterested in clinical treatment, VVFS Peer Specialists link with veterans who share similar military and post-military experiences.

The VPS program facilitates veteran support groups, providing structure to promote personal growth, self-awareness, coping strategies, and the opportunity to interact with other veterans. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VVFS has adapted these groups to a virtual setting to facilitate connection and mutual support. The growth of these virtual meetings helps to meet the need of veterans to avoid isolation within their communities.

VVFS has provided support to the Virginia National Guard (VANG) as they work towards implementing its first wave of peer support training to select soldiers and family members. The training, intended to better familiarize soldiers and their families with the benefits and availability of peer support, will provide in-depth instruction on how to initiate and maintain a peer-level conversation with a person seeking help, how to engage with similar lived experience (where appropriate), and how to best connect that person to VVFS or other Veteran Peer Supports. This training along with the creation of future regional groups will assist in identifying National Guard

personnel who may be experiencing behavioral health barriers. Additionally, VVFS has provided assistance to the VANG Suicide Prevention Coordinator.

### **SNAPSHOT OF VVFS SERVICES**

Provides resource referrals, comprehensive behavioral and rehabilitative health care coordination, and supportive services to Virginia’s Veterans, National Guard, Armed Forces Reserves, caregivers and family members.

- 1,770** Veterans and family members served in FY20
- 2,852** Total individual services provided in FY20
- 381** Total behavioral health services provided in FY20
- 40** Total rehabilitative/medical services provided in FY20
- 2,431** Total supportive services provided in FY19
- 423** Total group services provided in FY20
- 114** Veterans and family members served by *Mission: Healthy Relationships* and *Mission: Healthy Families* in FY20
- 1,159** Individuals trained in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) by VVFS
- 2,337** Individuals trained in Military Cultural Competency Training by VVFS
- 156** Veterans who received Behavioral Health Assistance through Veterans Services Foundation

### **HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING**

- 395** Estimated number of homeless veterans in Virginia on a single night in January 2020
- 72** Estimated number of unsheltered veterans in Virginia on a single night in January 2020
- 947** Number of homeless veterans housed statewide in FY20
- 194** Veterans experiencing homelessness who received financial assistance through VVFS in FY20

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY18</b>	<b>FY19</b>	<b>FY20</b>
Individual Services Delivered	5,714*	3,196*	2,852**
Outreach and Training Events	NA*	729	507**

\*VVFS shifted to a new data system in the middle of FY18 and changed how service data is collected. Previously, individual service contacts were counted separately, but starting in March 2018, all service contacts are collected under one individual service type within the Individualized Service Plan.

\*\*Services and events decreased due to COVID-19