

# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES

**COMMISSIONER'S 2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

**TO**

**GOVERNOR GLENN YOUNGKIN,**

**SECRETARY CRAIG CRENSHAW,**

**AND**

**THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**December 1, 2023**

*Serving those who served*

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- Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services Report
- Report on the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Grant Program
- Report of the Military Spouse Liaison

## Mission, Vision, and Values

### MISSION

*To serve Virginia's veterans, members of the Virginia National Guard, Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves, and their family members by ensuring they receive timely transition, employment and education assistance, benefits, behavioral health care, long-term care, perpetual care and honor, and the recognition they have earned through their service to our country and Commonwealth.*

### VISION

*To be the most veteran-friendly state in the nation by setting the national benchmark for the delivery of results-oriented and cost-effective veterans services.*

### VALUES

**EXCELLENCE:** Provide exemplary service to Virginia's veterans and their families.

**COMMITMENT:** An enduring commitment to helping Virginia's veterans and their families receive all earned federal and state benefits and creating an economic environment that promotes veteran-owned businesses and Virginia companies hiring veterans.

**INNOVATION:** Continually find new methods to reach and serve Virginia's veterans and their families.

## Commissioner's Message

Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) was an extraordinary year for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS). Our activities within DVS are oriented around the Governor's campaign pledge to make Virginia the best place for veterans to "live, work, and raise a family." We want veterans to **STAY**, **WORK**, and **THRIVE** in the Commonwealth. We want Virginia veterans to return to Virginia after their service, we want to keep as many veterans as possible who leave service in Virginia here after that service, we want to help veterans get jobs or grow their businesses, and we want to provide the ancillary services that will assist them in their own thriving.

Two major efforts underpin DVS activities during this FY. First, we conducted a pilot test of a version of the Gold Standard Digital Hub. While this demonstration pilot did not meet our requirements, we learned a great deal and will field an excellent product in FY24. Second, we began the strategic planning required by HB1759; this strategic plan is nearing completion and will make recommendations to the General Assembly and Governor for improvements to veteran care in the Commonwealth. Above all, DVS is focused on **innovation** and **creating a customer-centric culture** that attracts veterans to use our services.

Highlights of additional accomplishments in FY23:

- The Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program grew the number of V3 certified companies from 1,959 to 3,030 during this FY and increased the number of veterans hired to 126,000 since the program's inception in 2013. This program will continue to mature through full integration into the Gold Standard Digital Hub.
- We developed the new VDVS Suicide Prevention Program, increasing partner capacity through a robust grant program and funding a series of research projects to better understand self-harm risk.
- Our benefits team submitted a record number of claims this year and fielded an appointment system that increases our throughput substantially. We also continued to develop the OKR concept to the point that individual benefits Veterans Service Representatives have individual OKRs to track their performance; to our knowledge we are the only state agency with individual OKRs (IOKRs).
- Virginia became the *first state in the nation* to bury a former reserve component service member in a State Cemetery under the new Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act
- The Sitter and Barfoot Veterans Care Center won the coveted award for "best nursing home in Virginia" from Newsweek Magazine, and the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center successfully opened in November.

I consider it a great privilege and honor to work with a team that remains passionate and dedicated to providing outstanding service to veterans and their families.



Daniel M. Gade, PhD.  
Commissioner

## DVS FY23 OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULTS (OKRs)

### AGENCY OBJECTIVES: STAY, WORK AND THRIVE

DVS has an agency objective to grow the number of transitioning service members and families that **STAY** in the Commonwealth, enhance their career opportunities through **WORK** initiatives and maximize services to enable Virginia's veteran and military family population to **THRIVE**.

#### STAY

*DVS Key Result: Increasing the percentage of transitioning service members who STAY in Virginia from 50% to 55% by the end of Governor Youngkin's term<sup>1</sup>.*

Approximately 20,000 service members leave military service in Virginia each year; of those, approximately 50% stay in Virginia. DVS is working with the Department of Defense (DoD), as well as local base commanders to provide and expand opportunities to inform transitioning service members, veterans, and their families of the many benefits of staying in the Commonwealth. Our goal is to increase this percentage each year of Governor Youngkin's term; the tax break on military retirement pay should help in this regard. Other key drivers are the strong economic environment for veterans and excellent programs like the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents' Education Program (VMSDEP).

*DVS Key Result: Integrate into the Federal Transition Assistance Program (TAP) by providing in-person briefings to 100% of TAP participants by the end of Governor Youngkin's term<sup>2</sup>.*

TAP classes include briefings on benefits, work transition, and entrepreneurship opportunities for transitioning veterans. DVS is working with local base commanders and DoD TAP managers to allow DVS to brief in all TAP classes in Virginia, through formal partnerships and agreements. Currently, DVS' goal is to be in every TAP class at every installation as well as all virtual events and to brief 100% of the service members attending TAP.

#### WORK

*DVS Key Result: Increasing the number of V3 certified companies from 1,730 to 6,000 by the end of Governor Youngkin's term.*

Through the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program, DVS fulfills its mission to educate and train employers throughout the Commonwealth on the value of Virginia's veterans, and to help employers connect with these veterans. We are committed to assisting employers recruit, hire, train, and retain veterans. DVS increased the number of V3 certified companies almost 55% this year and will continue to improve the V3 program to increase the ROI to employers.

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<sup>1</sup> This OKR is achievable *but not measurable* without a significant change in DOD and VA data sharing with state governments.

<sup>2</sup> This OKR will be impossible to achieve without a change to the Federal TAP contract: under that contract, there is no space in the program of instruction for DVS employees to brief TSMs. We have a variety of workarounds in place to accomplish this goal without such a change.

*DVS Key Result: Increasing the number of V3 veteran hires to 25,000 per year by the end of Governor Youngkin's term.*

The transition from military service is not complete on the date of discharge. The V3 Program provides transition resources and assistance to veterans who now call Virginia home. V3 assists transitioning veterans in connecting with employment, education, entrepreneurial, and supportive services, and helps educate participating veterans and veteran services providers on available resources and opportunities. Through these initiatives, the number of Veterans assisted increased by over 23,000 this year, with more than 126,000 veterans hired through V3 since program inception in 2012.

### **THRIVE**

*DVS Key Result: Grow the number of veteran-owned businesses from 87,740 to 105,000 by the end of Governor Youngkin's term<sup>3</sup>.*

Virginia is home to over 750,000 businesses. Registered veteran owned businesses comprise more than 11% of businesses in Virginia. Through our V3 entrepreneurial enterprise and partnerships with the Virginia Employment Commission and Small Business Administration, we will continue to introduce veterans to the opportunities to sell in Virginia.

*DVS Key Result: Grow the number of eVA-certified veterans service-disabled veteran owned businesses from 732 to 1050 by the end of Governor Youngkin's term.*

As part of the Virginia Small, Women-owned, and Minority-owned business (SWaM) certification program, DVS works with qualifying service-disabled veterans who are small business owners to obtain a Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) designation in the Virginia SWaM vendor database, affording them an opportunity to sell to Virginia state and local government agencies through the eVA procurement platform. DVS has an established relationship with the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity to verify and certify potential vendors through the SDVOSB program. DVS has a goal to increase the number of SDVOSBs available in eVA from 732 to 1,050. DVS increased the number of SDVOSBs available in eVA to 860 during this fiscal year.

*DVS Key Result: Increasing participation in VMSDEP from 3,185 to 9,000 by the end of Governor Youngkin's term.*

DVS is responsible for certifying eligibility for benefits under the VMSDEP, which provides education benefits to spouses and children of military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who have been rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) as totally and permanently disabled, or at least 90 percent permanently disabled as a result of military service. Through outreach and working with our university partners, DVS enabled over 6,120 surviving dependents to utilize this program. Our goal is to grow to 9,000 by 2025. VMSDEP is also a key driver of the "Stay" OKR, as it is a very strong incentive for qualifying veterans to remain in Virginia. It is crucial that VMSDEP remains a centerpiece of Virginia's offerings to the most deserving veterans and their survivors.

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<sup>3</sup> DVS does not have responsibility or authority to assist veterans with starting businesses.

## DVS Locations – as of December 1, 2023

Full contact information for each office is listed on our website: [www.dvs.virginia.gov](http://www.dvs.virginia.gov)

### State Veterans Offices

#### Benefits + VVFS

- 1 Abingdon
- 2 Arlington
- 3 Big Stone Gap
- 4 Charlottesville
- 5 Danville
- 6 Fairfax
- 7 Fredericksburg
- 8 Front Royal
- 9 Hampton
- 10 Henrico
- 11 Loudoun
- 12 Lynchburg
- 13 Manassas

- 14 Norfolk
- 15 Petersburg, Virginia Community Resource Center
- 16 Salem VA Medical Center
- 17 South Hill
- 18 Springfield
- 19 Staunton
- 20 Virginia Beach - Oceana
- 21 Virginia Beach - Pembroke
- 22 Williamsburg
- 23 Wytheville

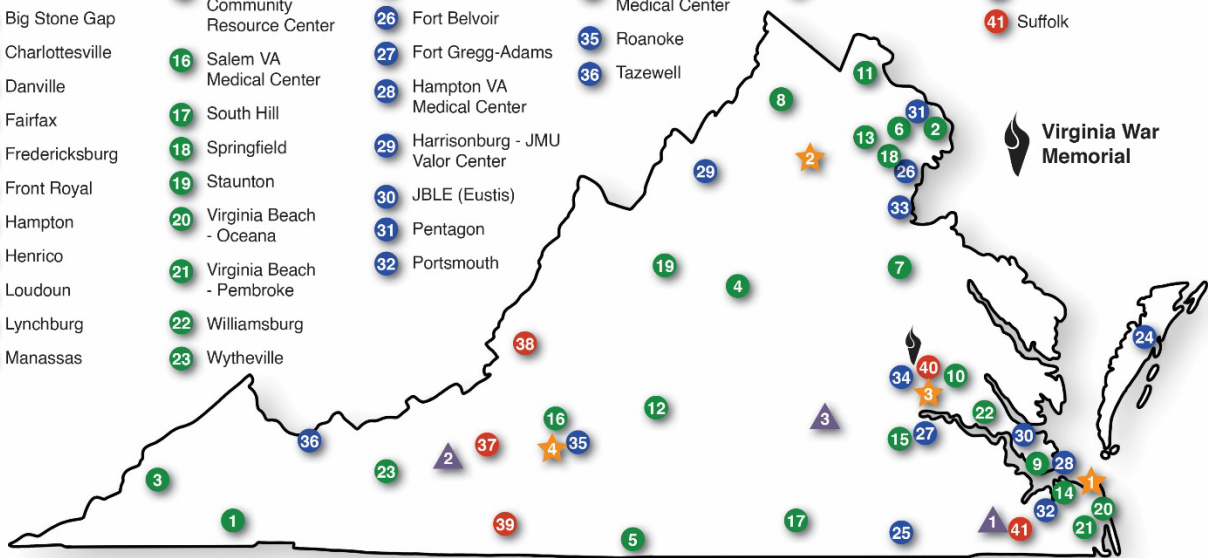
#### Benefits Only

- 24 Accomac
- 25 Emporia
- 26 Fort Belvoir
- 27 Fort Gregg-Adams
- 28 Hampton VA Medical Center
- 29 Harrisonburg - JMU Valor Center
- 30 JBLE (Eustis)
- 31 Pentagon
- 32 Portsmouth

- 33 Quantico
- 34 Richmond VA Medical Center
- 35 Roanoke
- 36 Tazewell

#### Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) Only

- 37 Blacksburg
- 38 Covington
- 39 Martinsville
- 40 Richmond
- 41 Suffolk



### Care Centers

- 1 Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center, Virginia Beach
- 2 Puller Veterans Care Center, Vint Hill\*
- 3 Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center, Richmond
- 4 Virginia Veterans Care Center, Roanoke

\* Facility to open in 2024. Visit [dvs.virginia.gov](http://dvs.virginia.gov) for more information.

### Cemeteries

- 1 Albert G Horton, Jr., Memorial Veterans Cemetery, Suffolk
- 2 Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Dublin
- 3 Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Amelia



## **DVS BY THE NUMBERS**

### **BENEFIT SERVICES**

Benefit Services provides Virginia's veterans and their family members with accurate, timely, and ethical education and assistance in obtaining the federal and state benefits they have earned through their service and sacrifice.

<b>67,648<sup>4</sup></b>	Total claims and supporting documents submitted to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in FY23
<b>22,827</b>	Compensation and Pension claims submitted to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in FY23
<b>145,746</b>	Client contacts in FY23
<b>\$5.66B</b>	Disability Compensation and Pension payments to Virginia veterans and dependents for Federal Fiscal Year 2022 (FFY22) (+\$1B, FFY21)

### **VIRGINIA VETERAN AND FAMILY SUPPORT**

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) Program provides comprehensive coordination of and referrals to behavioral and rehabilitative health care and supportive services to Virginia's veterans, National Guard, Armed Forces Reserves, caregivers, and family members.

<b>2,117</b>	Veterans and family members served in FY23 (-63, FY22)
<b>2,832</b>	Total individual services provided in FY23 (+149, FY22)
<b>316</b>	Total behavioral health services provided in FY23 (-35, FY22)
<b>56</b>	Total rehabilitative/medical services provided in FY23 (+20, FY22)
<b>2,097</b>	Total supportive services provided in FY23 (-200, FY22)
<b>408</b>	Individuals participating in virtual peer support groups provided in FY23 (+76, FY22)
<b>1,408</b>	Individuals trained in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) by VVFS (+718, FY22)
<b>1,521</b>	Individuals trained in Military Cultural Competency Training by VVFS (+285, FY22)
<b>302</b>	Veterans who received Behavioral Health/Financial Assistance through Veterans Services Foundation (+34, FY22)

<sup>4</sup> The Benefits tracking system and methodology was upgraded in FY23, affecting Claims (other than Compensation and Pension), Contacts and Evidence numbers. The lower numbers in FY23 should not be interpreted as a decline in services. Compensation & Pension Claims were unaffected and reflect the current upward trend in veterans served.

### STATE APPROVING AGENCY FOR VETERANS' EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Virginia State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education and Training approves educational courses and programs of instruction provided by Virginia institutions to enable eligible veterans and their dependents to enroll and receive financial assistance (GI Bill benefits) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). Because the SAA relies on federal funding, data is reported by FFY.

<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	Commonwealth's ranking among the states in percentage of Veterans using their GI Bill benefits in FFY22 ( <i>no change from FFY21</i> )
<b>\$678M</b>	Amount of GI Bill benefits paid to Virginia recipients in FFY22 ( <i>-7.4% from FFY21</i> )
<b>939</b>	Instructional institutions in Virginia approved to provide training to Veterans and dependents in FFY22 ( <i>-2.3% from FFY21</i> )

### VIRGINIA MILITARY SURVIVORS AND DEPENDENTS EDUCATION PROGRAM

The VMSDEP provides education benefits to spouses and children of military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who became at least 90 percent disabled as a result of military service. Many VMSDEP beneficiaries also qualify for a stipend of up to \$2,200 per year to offset the cost of room, board, books, and supplies.

<b>4,354</b>	Applied for VMSDEP benefits in FY23 ( <i>-3.48% from FY22</i> )
<b>3,695</b>	Applications approved for VMSDEP benefits in FY23 ( <i>+5.60% from FY22</i> )
<b>3,338</b>	Unique students receiving stipend award for FY23 ( <i>+61.64% from FY22</i> )
<b>4,950,572</b>	Value of stipends awarded for 2022-23 academic year ( <i>+74.70% from FY22</i> )
<b>40</b>	Virginia public colleges and universities that applied VMSDEP benefits to students' accounts in FY23. Students used VMSDEP benefits at all 40 public institutions ( <i>no change from FY22</i> )

### **VIRGINIA VALUES VETERANS (V3) PROGRAM**

The Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program assesses, coordinates, and disseminates opportunities for connecting members of the armed forces and their spouses transitioning from military to civilian life by providing a pathway to employment, education, and entrepreneurship with V3 Certified Organizations. V3 increases employment opportunities and promotes economic development, by training and certifying organizations in veteran's workforce best practices while creating connectivity opportunity and activities.

<b>17,005</b>	Virginia veterans hired by V3 companies in FY23 (-4.7% from 17,846 FY22)
<b>1,225</b>	Companies became V3 Certified in FY23 (+121% from 554 in FY22)
<b>1,470</b>	Referrals of veteran/transitioning service member/spouses to DVS service lines and partner organizations for direct services outside of employment, education, and entrepreneurship. (decrease from 4,408 in FY22)
<b>78</b>	Visits to Virginia military installations to conduct outreach and work with TSMs and their spouses in FY23 (working back to pre-pandemic levels and a 42% increase from FY 22)
<b>1,128</b>	Inquiries fielded and services provided to transitioning service members, Veterans and military spouses by V3T Transition Coordinators. (decrease from 4,010 in FY22)

### **MILITARY MEDICS AND CORPSMEN (MMAC) PROGRAM**

The Military Medics and Corpsmen (MMAC) Program provides pathways to careers and credentialing in civilian healthcare for former service members with healthcare-related training and experience.

<b>98</b>	Applicants for MMAC FY23 (-45% from 179 in FY22)
<b>163</b>	MMAC Hires reported in FY23 (+31.5% from 124 in FY22)
<b>75</b>	No Medics and Corpsmen Left Behind Hires FY23 (+17.2% from 64 in FY22)
<b>26</b>	Leadership Hires FY23 (-21.2 % from 33 in FY22)
<b>17</b>	Military Spouse Hires (+240% from 5 in FY22)

## VIRGINIA VETERANS CEMETERIES

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Virginia's three state veterans cemeteries<sup>5</sup> serve the memorial and perpetual care needs of veterans and eligible dependents. Virginia's veterans cemeteries commemorate the personal sacrifice of those who served and those who stand ready to defend our freedom.

**2,258** Interments conducted at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (Suffolk), the Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia), and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Dublin) in FY23 (-6.4% from FY22)

## VETERANS CARE CENTERS

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Virginia's Veterans Care Centers provide long-term care, Alzheimer's/dementia care, and short-term rehabilitative care to Virginia's veterans. Domiciliary (assisted living) care is provided in Roanoke.

*Sitter & Barfoot Veteran Care Center — Richmond (adjacent to the Richmond VA Medical Center)*

**160** Beds in private rooms providing skilled nursing or post-acute skilled rehabilitative care for veterans transitioning back into the community

**40** Bed in private rooms in a secure Alzheimer's/dementia unit

**55,486** Patient days of nursing and Alzheimer's/dementia care provided in FY23 (75.5% capacity) (+0.5% from FY22)

*Virginia Veterans Care Center — Roanoke (adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center)*

**120** Beds in semi-private rooms providing skilled nursing care

**60** Beds in semi-private rooms in a secure Alzheimer's/dementia unit

**16** Beds in private rooms dedicated to providing post-acute skilled rehabilitative care for veterans transitioning back into the Community

**28** Beds in semi-private rooms providing assisted living/domiciliary care

**56,664** Patient days of nursing and Alzheimer's/dementia care provided in FY23 (79% capacity) (+1% from FY22)

**4,563** Patient days of assisted living care provided in FY23 (45% capacity) (-14% from FY22)

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<sup>5</sup> Cemeteries at Quantico, Culpeper, and Arlington are federal facilities and not under the purview of DVS.

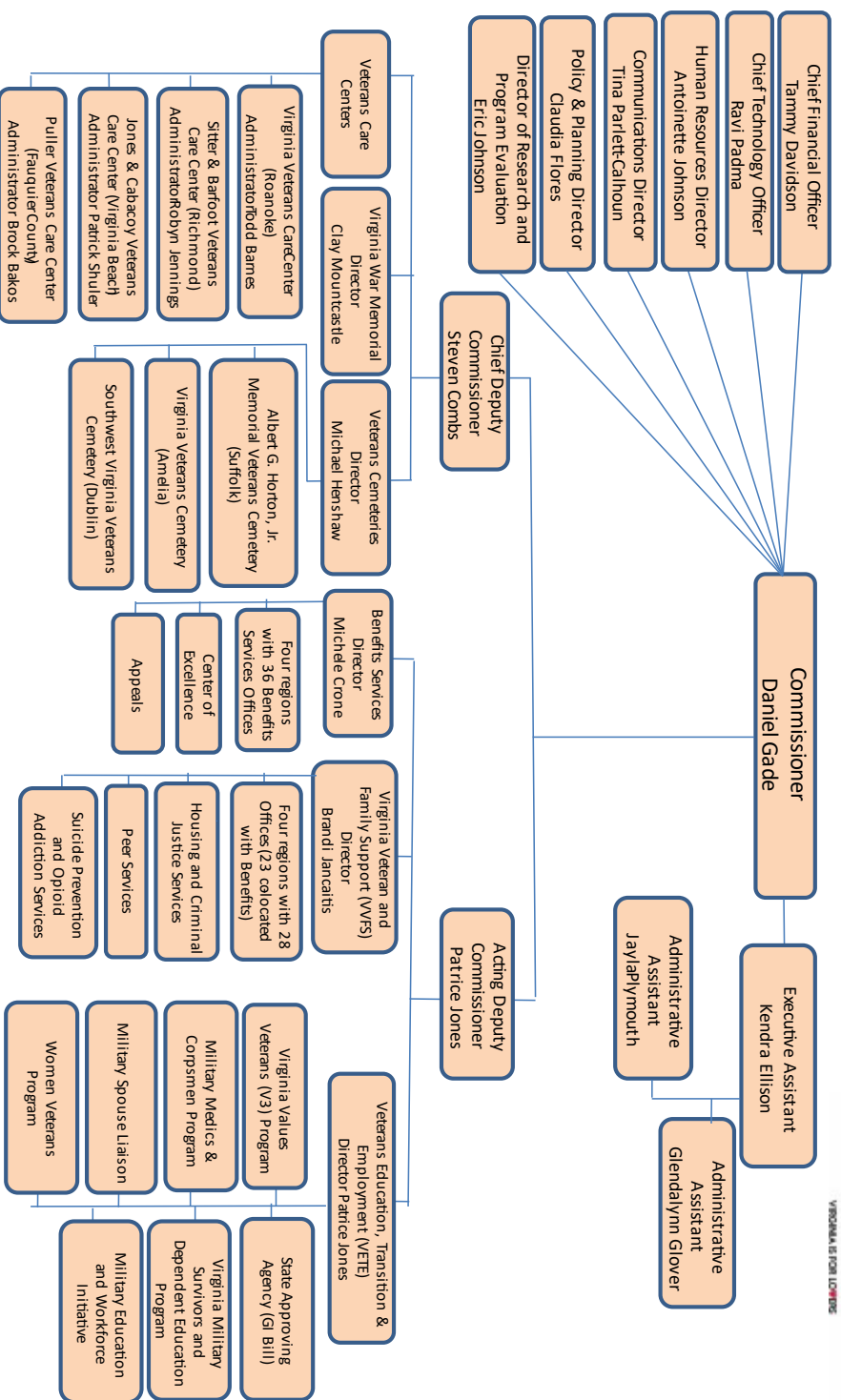
**VIRGINIA WAR MEMORIAL**

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Honor our Veterans, Preserve our History, Educate our Youth, and Inspire Patriotism in All

<b>52,840</b>	Visitors to the Virginia War Memorial (+25% <i>from FY22</i> )
<b>71,785</b>	Viewership of Memorial Patriotic Events (+105% <i>from FY22</i> )
<b>7,730</b>	Engaged Learners both Virtual and Live (-25% <i>from FY22</i> )
<b>100</b>	Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Pins presented (-43% <i>from FY21</i> )
<b>275</b>	Volunteers / Guests for Hill of Heroes (-25% <i>from FY22</i> )

# Department of Veterans Services Organization Chart



As of November 15, 2023

## WHO ARE VIRGINIA’S VETERANS?

### POPULATION

**684,043** Estimated number of **Virginia Veterans** as of September 30, 2023 (Source: USDVA, VetPop2020, Table 6L)

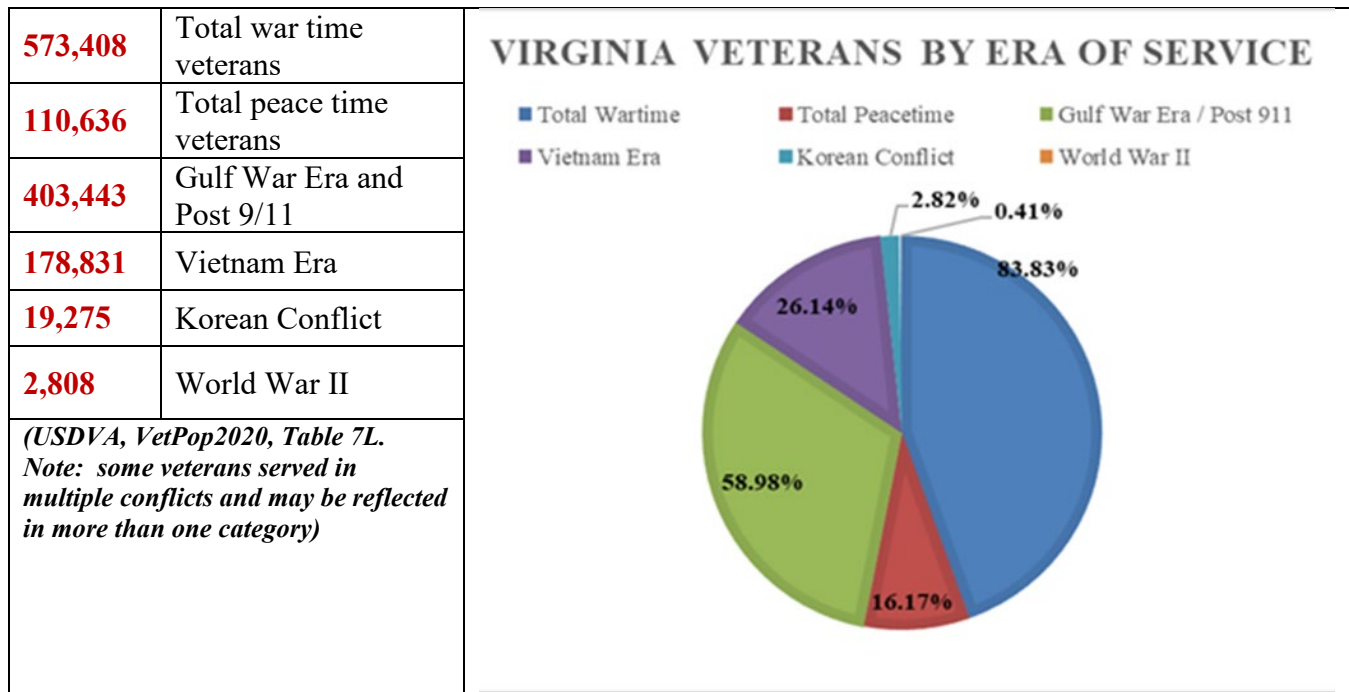
**108,412** Estimated number of **Women Veterans** – **15.85% of our veteran population**. Virginia leads the nation with the highest percentage of women veterans.

**119,382** **Number of Virginia veterans under 40**

**5<sup>th</sup>** **Virginia’s ranking in total veteran population.**

**2<sup>nd</sup>** **Percentage of veterans to total state population:** When factored in as a percentage of total population, we are second in the nation (behind Alaska).

### ERA OF SERVICE (AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2023)



### EDUCATION & TRANSITION

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- 4th** Commonwealth's ranking among the states in terms of veterans using their GI Benefits in FFY22 (*No change from FFY21*).
- \$678M** Total G.I. Bill benefits paid to veterans in Virginia in FFY22 (*-7.4% from FFY21*).
- 939** Instructional institutions in Virginia approved to provide training to veterans and dependents in FFY22 (*-2.4% from FFY21*).
- 131,733** Veterans, transitioning service members (TSMs), and spouses reached through the V3 Transitions Program's outreach efforts in FY22.
- 4,408** Referrals of veterans, transitioning service members (TSMs), and spouses to partner organizations for direct services outside of employment, education, and entrepreneurship in FY22

### DISABLED VETERANS

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- 221,856** Veterans receiving USDVA compensation or pension benefits as of September 30, 2022
- \$5.66B** Compensation and pension payments to Virginia veterans in FFY22 (*up 22% from \$4.63B in FFY21*).

### HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING

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- 386** Estimated number of homeless veterans in Virginia on a single night in January 2023 Pending HUD's final report (*-9, 2022*)
- 102** Estimated number of unsheltered veterans in Virginia on a single night in January 2023 (*+55, 2022*)
- 642** Number of homeless veterans housed statewide in FY23 (*+9, FY22*)
- 237** Veterans experiencing homelessness who received financial assistance through VVFS in FY23 (*+9, 2022*)



## Veterans’ Economic Impact on Virginia

Virginia’s veterans have a significant positive economic impact on the Commonwealth, bringing **\$15.11B in FFY22** in federal funding through compensation and pension payments, construction expenditures, educational and vocational rehabilitation employment expenditures, medical expenditures, and military retiree pay.

### US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPENDITURES IN VIRGINIA DURING FFY22

**\$9.11B** Total USDVA expenditures in Virginia

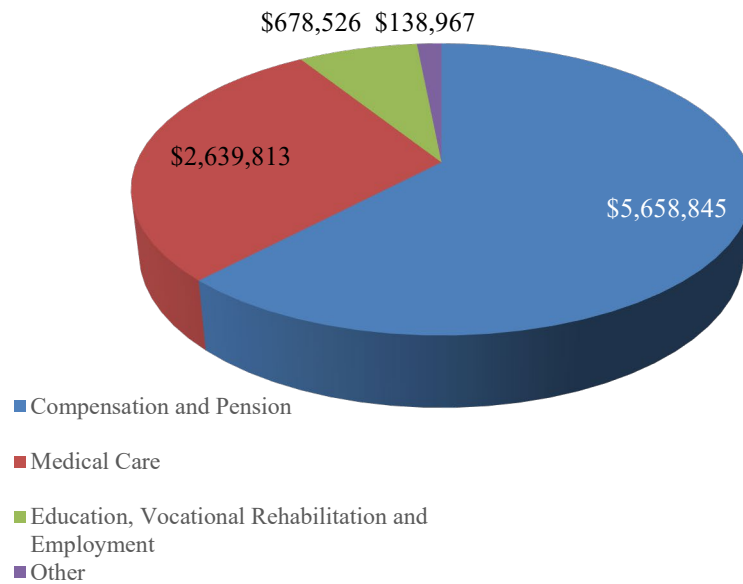
**\$5.66B** Compensation and pension

**\$2.63B** Medical Care

**\$678M** Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and employment

**\$139M** Other General Operating, Insurance & Indemnities, Construction)<sup>6</sup>

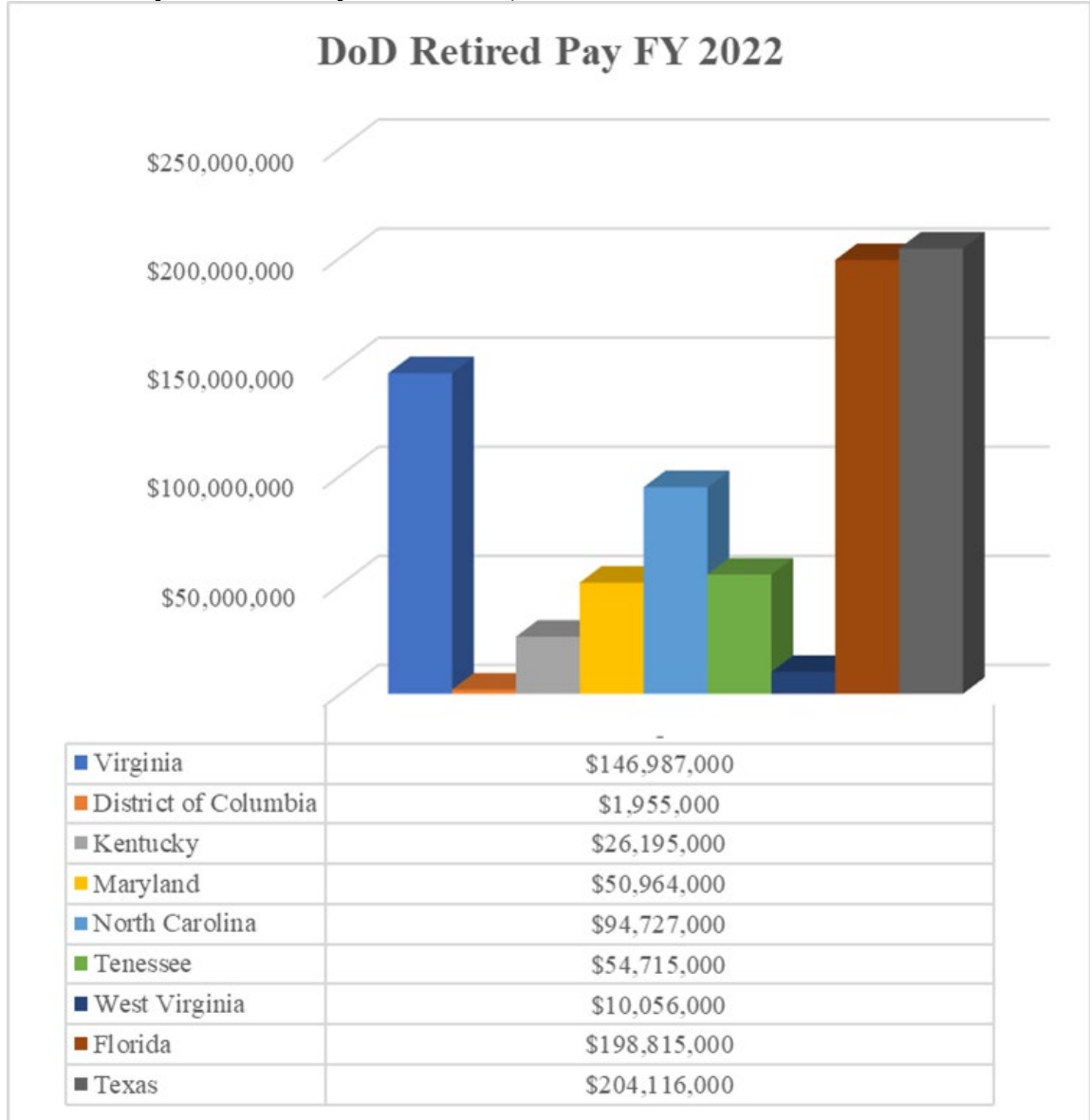
**USDVA Expenditures in Virginia FFY 2022**  
 (in thousands)



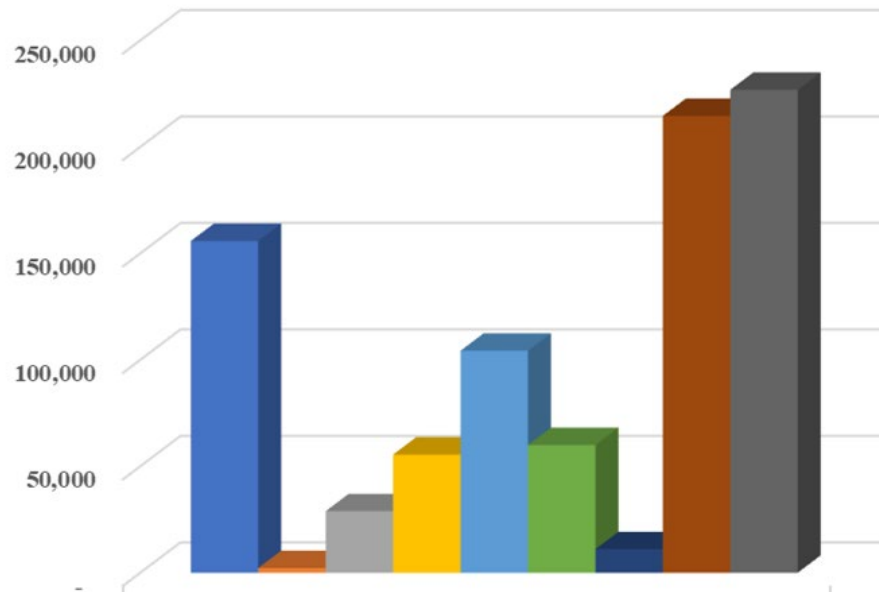
<sup>6</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, FFY22 Summary of Expenditures by State.

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MILITARY RETIREE PAY IN VIRGINIA IN FFY22**

**\$5.99B** Virginia ranks third in the nation for military retirement pay received and number of state's overall veteran retirees. (Department of Defense, Office of the Actuary, Statistical Report on the Military Retirement System, FFY22).



**# of State's Overall Veteran Population that are  
 Military Retirees - As of FY 2022**



	1
■ Virginia	155,832
■ District of Columbia	2,196
■ Kentucky	28,936
■ Maryland	55,508
■ North Carolina	104,290
■ Tennessee	59,976
■ West Virginia	11,095
■ Florida	214,569
■ Texas	226,814

## Benefits Services

### MISSION

*To provide Virginia's veterans and their family members with accurate, timely, and ethical education and assistance in obtaining the federal and state benefits they have earned through their service and sacrifice.*

### ACTIVITIES

Benefits Services assists Virginia's veterans in gaining access to the federal and state benefits. These benefits and services include:

- Compensation for service-connected disabilities or death;
- Income-based pensions;
- Medical care;
- Home purchase assistance;
- Education; and
- Burial benefits.

Team Benefits provided needed services to develop and submit claims to assist veterans and their families in Virginia. The team filed 22,194 disability compensation claims, with a total of 67,648 submissions. The team met and worked with 14,941 new veteran clients during FY23. Outreach to Transitioning Service Members (TSM) increased through briefings on military installations, which ultimately led to 2,444 Benefits Delivered at Discharge claims developed and filed during FY23. Education briefings and claims submissions are instrumental in TSM's decisions to **STAY** and **THRIVE** in Virginia. The Benefits team's efforts contributed to the \$5.66 billion in federal compensation and disability payments to Virginia veterans in FFY 2022. This is a \$1B (22%) increase over FFY21.

Benefits team members also refer veterans to other service lines. The client interview process includes a suicide screening that may result in a referral to the VVFS Program, a community partner, or a VA Medical Center (VAMC). Veterans Services Representatives (VSR) screened 5,099 veterans for suicide risk from January to June, which is 95% of new veterans served during that period. The VSRs and Veterans Services Administrators also refer veterans with a 90% or higher rating to the VMSDEP to determine potential eligibility for the program.

Borrowing best practices from the private sector, the Benefits service line developed and fielded the Veteran Engagement and Scheduling Application (VESA), which provides Virginia's veterans and families the ability to make and manage appointments from a computer or phone. In the first six months of use, 21,800 appointments were made using the system. In FY24, this scheduling application will be available through the to-be-fielded Gold Standard Digital Hub.

The East Region made significant headway in building a partnership with the U.S. Navy's Regional TAP consolidated at the Naval Operating Base, Norfolk. With our VVFS and Virginia Education, Transition & Employment (VETE) teammates, we provide benefits information every week to 250 (on average) transitioning active duty USN/USMC service members and their families. Additionally, Benefits staff have coordinated with the newly commissioned Jones & Cabaco Veterans Care Center in Virginia Beach to

establish an itinerant site at the care center to provide benefits and claims assistance more easily to our veteran residents, outpatients, and visitors.

In the West Region, a new partnership and itinerant site was established at James Madison University's Valor and Resource Center. We secured a full-time office in the Valor Center in July to assist the Harrisonburg veteran community and the JMU veteran and dependent student population. The Wytheville office also established an itinerant site in Hillsville, located in the Carroll County Administrative Office bridging a service area gap between the Danville, Wytheville, and Blacksburg service sites. The West offices have increased its emphasis on responding and liaising with incarcerated veterans and their counselors for assistance with the potential of receiving VA Benefits. Specifically, this has been accomplished by the offices of Lynchburg, Tazewell, and Staunton who service those areas in the proximity of the Dillwyn, Pocohontas, and Augusta Correctional Facilities. The West region offices also played an important role in the deployment of our new appointment tool. The West Region offices that are either co-located with a VAMC or rely on referrals from the local VA Clinic, successfully worked with and helped our partners educate the veterans on how best to receive services from us while promoting VESA. The Benefits office in Abingdon has taken on a significant role as a virtual/overflow office by using VESA and its ability for veterans to seek appointments and assistance from any geographic location.

The North Region expanded its footprint by partnering with the American Legion, Post 139 in Arlington. Post 139 graciously offered DVS office space in their new post, located at 3445 Washington Blvd, Arlington, VA 22201. The Post is co-located in a state-of-the-art building which offers low-cost housing to veterans in Arlington. The Arlington office opened on May 4, 2023 and has been busy expanding DVS service in the area. Dahlgren Navy Base in King George county and the Naval Surface Warfare Center Indian Head in Maryland<sup>7</sup> are new itinerant sites. These itinerant locations are supported by the Quantico Benefits office through the longstanding relationship with Dahlgren Fleet and Family Services office. The office has expanded services from twice a month to once a week.

In the Central Region, new partnerships were forged and expanded. In February 2023, the existing partnership with the City of Hopewell expanded with a new name, *One Hopewell*, moving to a new location and increasing partners to include social services, behavioral health services, and other organizations. In April 2023, the Petersburg Benefits office increased visibility with a relocation (a few offices away) to the Virginia Community Resource Center, part of the Governor's Partnership for Petersburg. This location is staffed by DVS Benefits, VVFS, Virginia State University Public Health, Richmond Urban League, Department of Social Services, DAV, Buffalo Soldiers, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Program, Virginia Career Works, and Brightpoint Community College.

Since May 2023, the Henrico Benefits office has served veterans monthly at a new itinerant location at the Henrico Community Based Outpatient Clinic. This location focuses on supporting veterans on the far west end of Richmond and Henrico.

In our commitment to serve DVS's older veterans and family members, the Richmond VAMC office strengthened our partnership with the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center, working closely with the admissions and activities director to offer claims assistance to resident veterans and family members.

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<sup>7</sup> While this facility is in Maryland, a significant portion of the population serving there are Virginia residents.

Central Region has also expanded our relationship with the social workers from the Richmond VAMC to include the Henrico, Emporia, Charlottesville, and Fredericksburg VA clinics. We have coordinated helping veterans and continued conducting cross-training.

The Benefits Center of Excellence (COE) houses the Benefits service line's quality assurance, statewide performance metrics, and training functions. As part of the quality assurance function, the COE reviews every claim submitted by the VSRs to ensure policies and procedures are consistently met thereby ensuring the maximum opportunity for veterans' claims to be granted by the VA. COE Claims Specialists not only provide a quality review of all submissions but also monitor submission errors to identify trends that may identify opportunities for further training. This year, the COE oversaw the deployment of improved claims submission and tracking software. This new software provides improved tracking and data collection capabilities. In conjunction with that deployment, the COE developed automated tools that eliminate the need for DVS VSRs to manually report accomplishments such as the number of claims submitted to VA or contacts made with veterans. Automating these processes freed up significant hours of non-value-added work thereby allowing VSRs more time to work directly with veterans and their family members.

Training and compliance with VA standards are important components to the continued success of Benefit Services. To streamline training effectiveness and oversight, the Training Team integrated with the Center of Excellence in FY23. The COE Training Team is comprised of a training manager and three training specialists. A week-long Basic Training course is attended by all new personnel at the beginning of their Benefits career followed by a proficiency exam which must be passed before new employees work independently with Veterans. During FY23, the Training Team conducted eight Basic Training Courses, five Proficiency test sessions and delivered 200 hours of training at quarterly and annual training sessions.

Appeals team staff are well-versed in the complex area of veterans' law. Comprised of six Appeals Attorneys, one Appeals Specialist, a Legal Liaison, an Administrative Assistant, and the Director of Appeals, the Appeals Team uses legal expertise to advocate for veterans challenging unfavorable VA decisions. In addition to representing veterans and their families before the VA Regional Office and the Board of Veterans Appeals, the Appeals Team provides direct advisory support to DVS employees. This provides a real-time training opportunity for employees to learn more about the law, while also ensuring a higher quality of appeals filed by state offices.

The Appeals Team is also active outside its role in appellate work. For example, the Legal Liaison assists veterans who desire a military service Discharge Upgrade in which a veteran seeks to change the overall characterization of their service by applying to one of several Department of Defense record correction boards.

During FY23, the Appeals Team conducted 430 hearings at both the VA Regional Office and Board of Veterans Appeals. Of those hearings, 99 percent were conducted virtually, allowing veterans who lack a means of travel to attend their scheduled hearings. The Appeals Team also wrote and filed 687 Informal Hearings Presentations (IHPs), or legal briefs. During FY23, the Appeals Team's advocacy resulted in a total of \$7,428,412 in retroactive benefits for DVS clients.

**OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS**

As other organizations around the Commonwealth return to in-person services, the Benefits Service Line significantly increased engagement and presence with local military commands, other Veteran Services Organizations, and other supportive organizations throughout the Commonwealth. During FY23, Benefits staff spent over 460 hours conducting outreach activities at locations where the military and veteran communities gather such as air shows and Veteran Service Organization posts.

To reach the veteran population in underserved areas, four new itinerant or full-time Benefit offices were established at James Madison University’s Valor Center, Hillsville, Arlington, and Henrico. Itinerant offices are staffed between one and three days per week thereby reducing the need for veterans to drive extended distances to seek assistance.

On August 10, 2022, The *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022*, known as the Honoring our PACT Act of 2022, was signed into law. The PACT Act spends \$797 billion to significantly improve healthcare access and compensation funding for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during military service. Section 804 of the PACT Act contains the Camp Lejeune Justice Act of 2022. Section 804 allows anyone, including military family members, exposed to toxic chemicals at Camp Lejeune to pursue redress against the federal government in federal court.

Benefits Leadership met with VA leadership from the Roanoke Regional office to ensure accurate and timely information was provided to veterans who may be entitled to benefits under the PACT Act.

Benefits continued its partnership with the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) which helps ensure veterans can pursue appealed VA decisions to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC).

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
Compensation & Pension Claims submitted to USDVA	14,368	19,726	22,827
All Claims submitted to USDVA	65,175	86,847	67,648 <sup>8</sup>
Client contacts	226,643	275,915	145,746
Number of offices	34	34	35
Itinerant sites	42	41	43

<sup>8</sup> The Benefits tracking system and methodology was upgraded in FY23, affecting Claims (other than Compensation and Pension), Contacts and Evidence numbers. The lower numbers in FY23 should not be interpreted as a decline in services. Compensation & Pension Claims were unaffected and reflect the current upward trend in veterans served.

## Veterans Education, Transition, & Employment

### VIRGINIA WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM

#### MISSION

*The Virginia Women Veteran Program (VWVP) is a port of entry to provide referrals and ease of access to community resources to educate, unify, and empower Virginia's women veterans who have served in the military in all eras by ensuring they receive timely yet appropriate transition and benefits support, employment and education outreach, and health and community advocacy.*

#### ACTIVITIES

The Virginia Women Veteran Program (VWVP) ensures women veterans have easy access to transition and benefits support, workforce and education services, and health and community advocacy. VWVP is enabling Virginia to become the most women veteran-ready state in the nation.

In FY23, VWVP worked to increase strategic partnerships with local, state, and federal entities, focusing on women-veteran-centric organizations. Through these strategic partnerships, VWVP and DVS attained numerous earned media opportunities, including social media marketing, veteran-centric newsletters, and women veteran-centric magazines. Strategic partnerships extend VWVP's visibility and impact, ensuring more women veterans receive information on and access to local, state, and federal resources.

In partnership with the Virginia Veterans and Family Support (VVFS) Program, VWVP hosted bi-weekly Female Virtual Peer Support Groups. These groups provide a relaxed and confidential environment, facilitated by female veterans, to address the needs of the Veteran, National Guard, and Reservist communities. Participants may share past military and current transitional experiences with other veterans. They strive to foster support for their members by improving self-reliance and self-advocacy by encouraging each veteran to follow their path to behavioral health wellness.

Governor Youngkin designated March as Women's History Month and the Virginia General Assembly designated March 19-23, 2023, as Women Veterans Week. In conjunction with Women Veterans Week, VWVP conducted our sixth annual Virginia Women Veteran Pinning Ceremony. Participating in the pinning event were Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears and First Lady of Virginia Suzanne Youngkin. VWVP facilitated Regional Women Veteran Wednesday Communities Connect events during Women Veterans Week.

The Virginia Department of Veterans Service (DVS) was a Gold Sponsor of the Military Women in Service to America Memorial event, hosted by the Military Women's Memorial. VWVP helped promote the event. It included special events commemorating Operation Iraqi Freedom's 20th Anniversary. The keynote speaker was Ms. Jessica Lynch, Purple Heart recipient and former Prisoner of War.

VWVP assisted with the Army Women's Museum celebrating the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. The 75th Anniversary of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act provided an opportunity to showcase the achievements of women who served.



## **MILITARY SPOUSE SUPPORT INITIATIVE**

### **MISSION**

*Advocate for military spouses across the Commonwealth through legislation and program initiatives by conducting outreach, research, identifying barriers and creating pathways for spouses to find meaningful employment in Virginia.*

### **ACTIVITIES**

The Military Spouse Support Initiative (MilSpouse) collaborates with key stakeholders within federal, state, local government, military installations, and the private sector to develop and implement a resource system to provide access to employment, childcare, licensure, and community resources. The program is responsible for outreach and provides advocacy for military families.

This year, one of the MilSpouse program’s primary objectives was to expand outreach to military spouses across the Commonwealth through partnerships, informing spouses of the services and opportunities Virginia offers. These partners included veteran service organizations, employers, community leaders, military installations, and local, state, and federal agencies.

The second objective for the MilSpouse program is to promote resources, referrals, and information available to military spouses at events, community engagement meetings, and one-on-one interactions. Areas of focus are childcare, licensure reciprocity, employment, and other spouse benefits.

For more information on the 2023 Military Spouse Support Initiative, please see the attached 2023 Military Spouse Liaison Report, required per the Code, section 2.2-2004(18)

<b>Military Spouse Metrics for FY23</b>	
Military Spouse Initiative Outreach <sup>9</sup>	4,807
Military Spouse Inquiries <sup>10</sup>	128
Military Spouse Referrals <sup>11</sup>	127
Outreach/Community Events	73

<sup>9</sup> Military Spouse Initiative Outreach was made through outreach events, bi-monthly newsletter distribution list (600 contacts with a 45% open rating) and speaking engagements about the Military Spouse Initiative.

<sup>10</sup> Military Spouse Inquiries are military spouses seeking services/resources through the VDVS appointment line, email, or phone calls. Contact was made first by phone with follow-up email as necessary.

<sup>11</sup> Some military spouses received multiple referrals to other VDVS service lines.

## **STATE APPROVING AGENCY FOR VETERANS' EDUCATION & TRAINING**

### **MISSION**

*Enable access to post-secondary education opportunities for veterans and eligible family members.*

### **ACTIVITIES**

The State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education and Training, operating under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), reviews, evaluates, and approves post-secondary education and training programs offered by educational institutions, businesses, and industries in Virginia, helping veterans and eligible family members to use their GI Bill® benefits to attain their educational goals.

The SAA provides support and supervision for 939 education and training institutions. While some offer only one program, many offer multiple programs, with each program requiring separate approval. The SAA must approve programs before veterans and eligible family members can enroll and receive financial assistance from the VA through the GI Bill®. In addition, the SAA ensures compliance with federal and state education regulations through on-site visits to active institutions.

The SAA conducts risk-based surveys, awards actions for accuracy, and ensures payments made to eligible veterans are within VA regulations to verify enrollment data. The Virginia SAA FFY23 cooperative agreement required 90% of assigned surveys to be conducted by September 15, 2023. This year, the SAA conducted 100% of the assigned surveys by the end of August. Also, the SAA completed over 400 approvals that expired this fiscal year.

On March 6, the VA rolled out the new Enrollment Manager system. The new system centralizes information for all the schools, SAAs and VA, in addition to having real-time access to information. Public Law 117-328 was approved in December 2022, removing the delimiting date for recipients of Chapter 35 (Dependents Education Assistance) beneficiaries and removing the age limit to receive benefits beyond the age of 26. Additionally, we celebrated the 79<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the GI Bill highlighting our own staff members who used the GI Bill and their families, as well as our partnering education training institutions.

SAA's secondary mission is outreach to veterans and family members, making them aware of all the various education and training programs and eligibility criteria. Outreach is conducted through job fairs, military bases, and veteran's events hosted by DVS around the Commonwealth. Staff conducted one-on-one discussions on military bases with veterans, service members scheduled to retire or be discharged from the military, and family members. The conversations cover VA educational benefits, approved facilities, how to apply, On-the-Job (OJT) and apprenticeship opportunities, instructions to start the Post-9/11 GI Bill® and Transfer of Entitlement benefits for an eligible dependent. This year, we also presented at the Virginia Association of School Certifying Officials Trainings in October 2022 and April 2023, and the Virginia Advisory Council on Military Education Symposium in Virginia Beach at the Virginia Beach Advanced Technology Center.

The SAA team continues to be involved with the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA). Tramaine Carroll-Payne, Deputy Director of Education Programs, was re-elected as Treasurer.

All SAA team members continue to learn and participate in the organization.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FFY21</b>	<b>FFY22</b>	<b>FFY23</b>
Education and training institutions supported	992	962	939
Educational program approval actions	8,960	7405	14,123
Number approved/% approved	8367/93%	6482/88%	13,487/95%
Other approval actions	1588	2178	2381
Number approved/% approved	1433/90%	1967/90%	2293/96%
Educational institution compliance/risk-based visits	61	56	42
% of required compliance/risk-based visits completed	100% <sup>12</sup>	100% <sup>13</sup>	100% <sup>14</sup>
Veteran student population	51,459	49,558	44,045 <sup>15</sup>

Note: Data is reported by the federal fiscal year (FFY) since SAA activity is federally contracted.

<b>SAA OKR's</b>	<b>FFY23</b>
Process 100% of GI Bill approval requests within 30 days of receipt	99% <sup>16</sup>
Complete 100% of Veterans Affairs assigned compliance visits	100%

<sup>12</sup> The VA contract requires the SAA to complete 90% of the 61 assigned compliance visits.

<sup>13</sup> The VA contract requires the SAA to complete 90% of the 56 assigned compliance visits.

<sup>14</sup> The VA contract requires the SAA to complete 90% of the 42 assigned risk-based surveys. This is the first year the SAA was assigned risk-based surveys instead of compliance visits.

<sup>15</sup> Number of Veterans receiving G.I. Bill benefits in Virginia as of April 2023. This does not include Veterans who attended school but have not received GI Bill Benefits payment. The final count for FFY23 should be available in March 2024.

<sup>16</sup> The FY23 cooperative agreement requires 90% of approvals to be processed on time.

## **VIRGINIA MILITARY SURVIVORS AND DEPENDENTS EDUCATION PROGRAM (VMSDEP)**

### **MISSION**

*Provide education benefits to spouses and children of qualified military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who became totally and permanently disabled or at least 90 percent permanently disabled as a result of military service. Military service includes service in the United States Armed Forces, United States Armed Forces Reserves, or the Virginia National Guard.*

### **ACTIVITIES**

The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) waives tuition and required fees at Virginia public colleges and universities for qualified survivors and dependents. Some VMSDEP beneficiaries also receive a stipend to partially offset the cost of room, board, books, and supplies. The dependents must be a spouse or child (between the ages of 16 and 29), of a military service member who, while serving as an active duty member in the U. S. Armed Forces, Armed Forces Reserves, or the Virginia National Guard, during military operations against terrorism, on a peacekeeping mission, as a result of a terrorist act, or in any armed conflict, was killed or is missing in action or is a prisoner of war, or of a veteran who has been rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as totally and permanently disabled or at least 90 percent permanently disabled, and has been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. Domiciliary or physical presence requirements also apply and are detailed in the Code of Virginia.

Eligibility for VMSDEP benefits include dependents of veterans with non-combat service-connected disabilities. Two tiers of benefits now exist: Tier 1 waives tuition and mandatory fees for the dependents of veterans who are rated at least 90% with permanent disabilities, but the beneficiaries do not receive a stipend; Tier 2 beneficiaries are the dependents of the veterans or service members who meet all the previous criteria but are also related to combat-related disabilities. Tier 2 beneficiaries receive the stipend as well as the waiver.

The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Fund (the Fund) provides the Tier 2 stipend funding. The stipend partially offsets room, board, books, and supplies. The stipend amount may vary based on determinations by the Virginia General Assembly, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), and the amount appropriated to the Fund.

Since July 1, 2019, the number of applications submitted has increased by +260%, and the total number of beneficiaries has grown by 512%. Based on the current average cost of tuition and mandatory fees at Virginia's public colleges and universities, each dependent would receive over +\$54,000 in waivers for a 4-year degree.<sup>17</sup>

In FY23, VMSDEP continued to use the application portal to administer the program with support from all DVS staff, SCHEV, applicants and the schools. The portal has allowed schools and students to see benefits

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<sup>17</sup> The +\$54,000 amount is based on the average tuition and all mandatory fees costs for in-state undergraduates listed in the [2022-23 Tuition and Fees Report](#).

usage in real-time, making the approval process more efficient over the last year.

The SAA staff conducted VMSDEP outreach at Fort Gregg-Adams, Joint Base Langley- Eustis, and Fort Belvoir. Staff disseminated information about the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program through multiple communications channels, including:

- DVS website;
- SCHEV website;
- State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training listserv;
- Virginia public college and university websites and catalogs;
- “*Opportunities: Preparing for college guide and workbook*” created by SCHEV and the Educational Credit Management Corporation annually. Printed copies are distributed to students and guidance counselors free of charge, and an electronic version is on the SCHEV website;
- DVS-developed VMSDEP informational brochure; and
- Direct outreach to veterans whose disability rating and period of service would potentially make their dependents eligible for VMSDEP benefits.

Annual Services Provided	FY21	FY22	FY23
Applications Submitted	3,185	4,511	4,354
Applications Approved	3,297	3,499	3,695
Unique students receiving stipend award	1,591	2,346	3,338
Total stipend dollars awarded	\$2,311,960	\$2,833,654	\$4,950,572
Outreach Activities	6	2	14

## **MILITARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE INITIATIVE (MEWI)**

### **MISSION**

*The Military Education and Workforce Initiative (MEWI) assists Veterans and service members with their transition from active duty to the workforce by providing a pathway to education, training, certifications, and the technology needed to achieve their academic endeavors. MEWI enhances employment opportunities for Virginians who have served in the United States Military and their families.*

### **ACTIVITIES**

In 2023, MEWI continued its partnership with the Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) and Tech for Troops to assist two central Virginia community colleges, as well as Virginia Commonwealth University, in providing laptops to veterans and veterans’ spouses who are enrolled as current students. MEWI was able to provide a total of 254 computers to military-affiliated students across the Commonwealth. Additionally, MEWI and the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) formed a new collaborative initiative by providing 89 laptop computers to VMSDEP beneficiaries across the Commonwealth.

In demand, high-paying careers are made possible by industry-leading educational certifications made available to veterans, spouses, and active-duty service members free of charge through the Department of Veteran Services’ partnership with the Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA), Altria Group, and the Veteran Service Foundation. Through these partnerships, MEWI currently offers 11 certifications and credentialing opportunities at no cost to the service member or dependent.

The DoD-approved Department of Veterans Services, Virginia SkillBridge program provides transitioning service members the opportunity to network with Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Certified employers offering 4-to-24-week internships to eligible applicants, with commander approval, up to six months prior to separation. Participation in a fellowship program, while still serving in the military, allows service members the opportunity to gain marketable skills and experience to enhance their civilian career opportunities.

Currently, there are 98 Virginia SkillBridge approved providers, representing a dramatic increase in opportunities for our service members. In 2023, the Virginia SkillBridge program served over 54 active-duty service members. These service members were able to complete internships with some of Virginia’s most sought-after employers whose industries range from cyber security to shipbuilding and construction. These internships have led directly to high-paying careers for many of these service members proving that Virginia is the place for veterans to **STAY, WORK, and THRIVE**.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
Laptop Distribution	100	136	254
Student Veteran/Spouse Certifications	65	117	79 <sup>18</sup>
Hire Vets Now Fellowship SkillBridge Employers	36	60	91

<sup>18</sup> This decrease in Student Veteran/ Spouse Certifications is due to the exhaustion of Altria grant funds in FY23.

## **VIRGINIA VALUES VETERANS (V3) PROGRAM**

### **MISSION**

*The Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program increases employment opportunities and promotes economic development by training and certifying organizations in veteran workforce best practices while creating connectivity opportunities and activities.*

### **ACTIVITIES**

The V3 Program connects transitioning members of the armed forces, spouses, and dependents to Certified V3 Employers who offer pathways to employment, education, and entrepreneurship. After several years of operating independently, the Department of Veterans Services decided to merge transition services with Certified V3 employer operations for better alignment of V3 service offerings to veterans and their dependents.

V3 continues to be a national leader in training employers to recruit, hire, train and retain military job seekers. Since its initial launch as a pilot program, the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program has educated thousands of individuals and certified over 3,000 organizations on why hiring veterans is the best business decision they can make.

Transition from military service is not complete on the date of a service member’s discharge; the process of transition may take years beyond the actual transition date. The V3 program offers a suite of services applicable to each veteran’s and transitioning service member’s unique journey. The V3 team serves as the guide and entry point to all of what the Department of Veterans Services and the Commonwealth have to offer for veterans, Transitioning Service Members (TSMs), and military families.

In FY23, V3 connected with veterans, transitioning military, and spouses through a variety of outreach methods and hired over 126,000 veterans. As a national leader in training employers to recruit, hire, and retain veterans, V3 remains a preferred provider with both the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI). V3 continued its mission to training V3 Certified Organizations by conducted 24 training events in FY23.

V3 and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce Foundation strengthened their partnership by executing Hire Vets Now events. The V3 Program was able to expand employment opportunities for Virginia’s veterans by connecting 17,005 military job seekers to 3,000+ employers. Additionally, the V3 employment grant provides employers with 300 and fewer employees \$1,000 for every veteran hired (on or after July 1, 2014) and retained for one-year full time, within five years of separation of active duty. Employers can receive a total of \$10,000 annually. For FY23, \$94,000 in grant monies were distributed.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
New Employers certified	228	554	1,225
Veterans hired by certified companies	19,477	17,846	17,005
Training events conducted	14	19	24

## **MILITARY MEDICS AND CORPSMEN (MMAC) PROGRAM**

### **MISSION**

*The Military Medics and Corpsmen (MMAC) Program provides pathways to careers and credentials in civilian healthcare for former service members and military spouses with healthcare-related training and experience.*

### **ACTIVITIES**

In FY23, the Military Medics and Corpsmen (MMAC) Program maintained efficient and effective operations, facilitated veteran and military spouse hiring, and expanded partnerships. MMAC addressed veterans' career and credentialing challenges daily by recruiting, reviewing, and referring candidates to healthcare employers statewide.

The unique and measurable aspect of the MMAC Program is that it not only keeps veterans in Virginia, but it draws veterans from across the world to come to live and work in the Commonwealth. The veterans hired in healthcare directly contribute to the state and local tax base, economy, and community. The MMAC Program also fosters a new awareness and appreciation of veterans and what they offer the healthcare workplace.

In 2016, MMAC began with six Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with Partner Healthcare Systems (PHS). In FY23, the total stood at 38 Healthcare Associates statewide with 23 signed MOAs. The MOA allows MMAC-Qualified employees to apply their extensive clinical skills and experience under supervision while they obtain required civilian clinical credentials.

In FY23, new MMAC MOAs were signed with these MMAC Partner Healthcare Systems:

- Panacea Behavioral Health and Wellness
- Poplar Springs
- Talent Gro
- Valley Health
- Operation Warfighter Education and Employment
- Children's Hospital of the King's Daughter
- Davita

MMAC set a goal to reach 700 total hires facilitated through the program since launch and by December 2023, MMAC will reach that goal. At the end of December 2022, MMAC accumulated over 550 total hires within the healthcare field within the Commonwealth of Virginia. That number has continued to grow in FY23.

During FY23, the MMAC team has continued to travel the state to meet with healthcare employers, associations, and strategic partners as well as veterans, transitioning service members, military spouses, and members of the National Guard and Reserves. MMAC conducted 14 in-person, meetings and visits which included Carilion Health System, American Medical Technology, Poplar Springs Behavioral Health, Western State Hospital, Ortho Virginia, Velocity Urgent Care, Kaiser Permanente, and Zeno





Wellness as well as Fort Belvoir, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Fort Gregg-Adama, Oceana in Virginia Beach and Naval Station Norfolk. MMAC has also attended six in-person conferences including the 2022 & 2023 VA Healthcare Summit, the 2022 AMEDD conference, 2022 AMT conference in Louisville, Kentucky, the 2023 South Potomac Community Relations Conference, and the 2023 AMSUS Annual Conference.

MMAC played an active role in Hire Vets Now Networking events that were held in partnership with the Virginia Chamber Foundation on military installation across the Commonwealth. MMAC engaged with over 1,000 transitioning service members and military spouses as they supported 12 networking events across five military installations.

The MMAC program was selected as a winner of the 2023 VCU Douglas L. Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs award for Public/Private partnership. This award celebrates the hard work and dedication provided to our Virginia Veterans and Healthcare Associates around the Commonwealth.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
Program Applicants	171	179	98
Total Hires	95	124	163
MMAC Qualified Hires	34	22	45
No Veteran Left Behind Hires	25	64	75
Leadership	31	33	26
Military Spouses	5	5	17

## **VIRGINIA VETERAN AND FAMILY SUPPORT (VVFS)**

### **MISSION**

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

### **ACTIVITIES**

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) Program is a focused response to improve and expand services to service members, veterans and their family members and caregivers coping with the impact of deployment, military service, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), operational stress, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or other behavioral health concerns. It is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) in cooperation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). VVFS serves transitioning service members, veterans of all eras, members of the Virginia National Guard or Armed Forces Reserves, and their caregivers and family members.

In accordance with Virginia Code 2.2-2001.1, the purpose and priorities of the VVFS program are:

- Build awareness of veterans' service needs and the availability of the program through marketing, outreach, and training for first responders, service providers and others,
- Collaborate with relevant agencies of the Commonwealth, localities, and service providers,
- 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 need such services in the future,
- 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 their needs identified in the coordinated resources plan, and
- Monitor progress toward individually identified goals in accordance with the coordinated resource plan.

VVFS's four Objectives and Key Results (OKR) consist of the following:

1. 90% of all new VVFS clients will have a needs assessment completed within seven days of initial client contact for the purpose of creating a coordinated resource plan (FY23: 95% out of 1,458),

2. 90% of veterans with an identified behavioral health need will be connected to an appropriate resource (FY23: 98% out of 316),
3. 90% of veterans experiencing literal homelessness will be connected to a shelter/housing resource (FY23: 97% out of 249), and
4. DVS field office staff (VVFS and Benefits) will screen 95% of new Service Members, Veterans, and Families for suicide risk per month (FY23: 95% out of 13,574).

In 2023, 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. VVFS provides regular training, such as Military Cultural Competency (MCC) and Crisis Intervention Team (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.

### **Governor's Challenge and Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF**

VVFS continued coordination of the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF<sup>19</sup>. The City of Richmond was one of the first eight cities in the nation to join the Mayor's Challenge, and Virginia was one of the first seven states to participate in the Governor's Challenge. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) sponsor both initiatives.

The Virginia team is implementing the VA's National Strategy for the Prevention of Veteran Suicide,<sup>20</sup> which provides a framework for using a comprehensive public health approach to address the growing challenge among the veteran population.

Governor's Challenge teams focus on three main priorities:

1. To identify SMVF and screen for suicide risk;
2. To promote connectedness and improve care transitions;
3. To increase lethal means safety and safety planning.

Tying into these national priorities, the theme of the Virginia's Governor's Challenge team is the "3C's – *Care, Connect, and Communicate*":

- Care: The provision of accessible and culturally competent behavioral health services.
  - Strategy: Identify, screen, and refer SMVF at risk of suicide in community services.
- Connect: Bringing military/veteran specific resources and community services together; forming systemic partnerships.

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<sup>19</sup> Governor's and mayor's challenges to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families. SAMHSA. (n.d.). R.f. <https://www.samhsa.gov/smvf-ta-center/mayors-governors-challenges>

<sup>20</sup> National strategy for preventing veteran suicide. *U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs*. (n.d.). R.f. [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/docs/Office-of-Mental-Health-and-Suicide-Prevention-National-Strategy-for-Preventing-Veterans-Suicide.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Office-of-Mental-Health-and-Suicide-Prevention-National-Strategy-for-Preventing-Veterans-Suicide.pdf)

- *Strategy*: Increase engagement between Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS), 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 service lines participate in *Virginia’s Identify SMVF, Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services* (VISR) program. The goal of the VISR program is to develop military culture, suicide prevention, and safety planning infrastructure in community agencies (including hospitals, local departments of social services, Community Service Boards (CSBs), Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)).

In DVS, suicide prevention work continues after the initial VISR pilot implementation in 2020. VVFS serves on the Steering Committee for statewide VISR to coordinate best practice training (examples include training in grant writing, suicide risk screening and intervention, and safety planning) for all stakeholders and leads the VSO working group.

The table below shows the total number of SMVF screened for suicide risk between the VVFS and Benefits teams (10,863). A total of 1,355 individuals screened at risk of suicide and the VVFS and Benefits teams linked them to behavioral health resources, VVFS peer support, and other supportive services. This expansion helps ensure that the DVS team is less likely to miss someone that is struggling and can link individuals in need with support to prevent a crisis or suicide.

Suicide Risk Level (C-SSRS)	FY23 (All VVFS and Benefits)
<b>No risk</b>	9,508
<b>Low risk</b>	1,185
<b>Moderate risk</b>	130
<b>High risk</b>	40
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>10,863</i></b>

**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 six areas:

1. Care Coordination and Management
2. Housing and Homeless Services
3. Justice Involved Services program (JIS)
4. Mission: Healthy Relationships Couples Workshop
5. Veteran Peer Support (VPS) Services
6. Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS)

### **CARE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT: REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS**

VVFS consists of 45 direct services staff located in 28 offices across four regions. Supervised by Regional Directors, staff provide resource connections, care coordination, and individual and group peer support to veterans and their family members.

In addition, VVFS implements the following regional capacity-building initiatives:

- **VISR**: VVFS staff continue to train all new DVS Benefits staff in suicide prevention, risk screening, and safety planning. In addition, VVFS staff promote military culture and suicide prevention best practices among community partners such as Veterans Service Organizations, human services providers, employment support and faith-based programs. VVFS has consulted with multiple states on the VISR Pilot including KY, MD, MN, NC, NY, and WI. VISR (2.0) launched in January 2023 and includes 82 State and local agencies. VISR 2.0 offers training certification in military culture and suicide prevention.
- **STEP VA**: VVFS is assisting DBHDS and Community Services Boards (CSBs) with the military and veterans services component of System Transformation Excellence and Performance in Virginia (STEP VA) in the public mental health system. As part of STEP VA, CSBs increased clinical services and suicide prevention among SMVF. VVFS staff provide military culture and resource training to CSB staff, partner on care coordination and peer support services delivery and expansion of suicide prevention initiatives including the Lock and Talk Virginia lethal means safety campaign. VVFS staff work closely with regional SMVF Navigator (and other military/veteran focused) positions in the CSBs.
- **Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training**: VVFS staff provide SMVF crisis intervention team 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 trainings provide 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 streamlines behavioral health and supportive services referral partnerships with Readiness Centers and units statewide.

- **Military Cultural Competency (MCC) training:** VVFS staff continue to provide MCC training to community agencies, state agencies, and other providers serving veterans. VVFS is the lead MCC trainer for the VISR program through the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide. This training builds community provider knowledge in serving SMVF and provides information on key resource connections including Veterans Affairs and DVS services. Staff provided both virtual and in-person MCC to approximately 1,521 community services providers and partners in FY23.

## **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

VVFS supports the Commonwealth in sustaining efforts to ensure that veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Communities continue to use the strategies to prevent and address homelessness by using "by-name" lists, assessment tools, and coordinated entry. The term, "*functional zero for veteran homelessness*" means that the community never has more veterans experiencing homelessness than it has demonstrated it can house in an average month (minimum threshold is three veterans). At this time, the 30-day timeframe is not attainable because of the aftereffects of the pandemic, housing shortages, high eviction rates, and limited bed space at shelters/Veteran transitional housing. So, although Virginia is still operating under functional zero standards, it is under more difficult circumstances for individuals, families, and community services providers.

VVFS continues to be recognized as a national leader. In FY23, the housing duties from the previous VVFS Deputy Director were added to the VVFS Criminal Justice Director's role (now the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director). In addition, VVFS added the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator position. The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator provide technical assistance and housing resources to housing and criminal justice partners. They also provide housing resources and support to the VVFS staff. The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator continue to provide statewide coordination and leadership with federal, state, and community organizations. They also serve on several workgroups including the Virginia Housing Supportive Solutions Advisory Council, Permanent Supportive Housing committee, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) Housing and Justice workgroup.

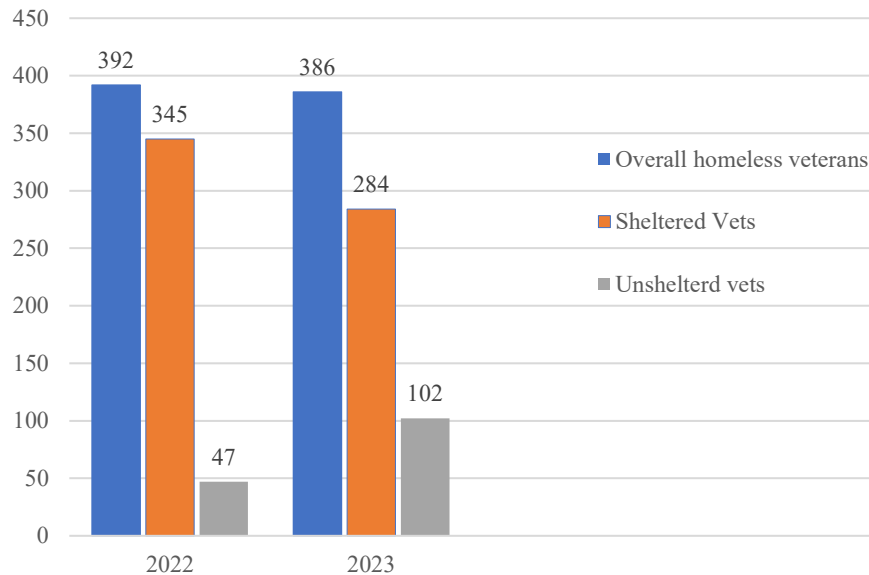
Virginia held the **2023 Point-in-Time Count** on the night of January 2023. Based on the PIT count<sup>21</sup> there were 386 veterans experiencing homelessness (284 sheltered, 102 unsheltered). The unsheltered number of veterans increased from 47 (in 2022) to 102 (2023). The PIT count in January 2022 accounted for 395 total homeless veterans. The 2023 count is 2.3% lower than the 2022 count, but there is a substantial increase in unsheltered veterans this year.

VVFS continues to work with communities in sustaining efforts of reducing veteran homelessness through coordinated entry and targeting of resources. The VVFS team assists communities with resources, technical assistance and support, and information-sharing across agencies.

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<sup>21</sup> This is preliminary data until HUD provides the final data in late 2023.

2022 and 2023 (preliminary) PIT Count Data- Veterans



*The 2023 count is 2.3% lower than the 2022 count, but there is a substantial increase in unsheltered veterans this year (47 in 2022 to 102 in 2023)*

The DVS 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 FY23, VVFS used \$239,256 in VSF and agency funds to assist 237 veterans with moves into permanent housing or homeless prevention.

The Dominion *Veteran EnergyShare* program, administered by VVFS and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) providers across the state, continued in FY23 to provide utility assistance to homeless veterans who move into permanent housing. The *Veteran EnergyShare* program is continuing with \$800,000 for calendar year 2023. This partnership has received national recognition as a best practice and has been vital in sustaining efforts in Virginia. In calendar year 2022, VVFS and SSVF providers utilized 1,524 *Veteran EnergyShare* vouchers for veterans experiencing homelessness or were at-risk. For 2023, the *Veteran EnergyShare* program has provided 1,011 total vouchers as of October 1, 2023.

In addition, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator are a part the Justice and Housing workgroup based on a grant received by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The Justice and Housing workgroup is a national project with a geographic focus area to explore the need and address challenges for justice-involved individuals to secure housing. In FY23, the group created a Learning Collaborative for property managers and

landlords to examine tenant selection plans and help increase housing access for justice-involved individuals.

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

The VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program provides resource connections, care coordination, and support to Virginia's veterans and service members across the criminal justice spectrum, including diversion, incarceration and while on supervision in the communities. The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists (VJS) offer 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.

In FY23, VVFS added an additional VJS position in the North region to help support growing veteran treatment dockets in that region. There are currently five VVFS VJS in the program. The JIS program provides virtual and in-person services for justice-involved veterans.

### **Justice Involved Veterans in Virginia Data:**

#### VADOC data as of September 2023

- Institutions: 1,519 (6.18% of incarcerated VADOC population)
- Community supervision: 2,014 (3.24% of state supervision population)
- Jail (state responsible): 23
- Lack of veteran data from other criminal justice system intercept points (jails, courts, law enforcement/arrests, etc.)

VVFS has been instrumental in providing capacity support to veteran treatment dockets. Below is a list of active veteran treatment dockets:

- Fairfax General District Court
- Fairfax Circuit Court
- Fairfax Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court
- Loudoun County General District Court
- Norfolk Circuit Court
- Prince William County General District Court
- Rappahannock Regional Circuit Court (multi-jurisdictional veteran treatment docket)
- *Pending approval: Chesterfield County, Pulaski County*
- *The Hampton Circuit Court Veteran Treatment Docket closed in January 2023.*

To address the needs of justice-involved veterans (JIVs) with serious medical and mental health conditions, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Justice Outreach program staff led the Justice Involved Veterans with Special Needs discharge planning work group with the VVFS VJS staff and VADOC. In FY23, the group met as needed to coordinate housing placements for veterans releasing from incarceration in need of assisted living facilities and nursing homes.



The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director (HCJD) conducts statewide collaborative quarterly meetings between the VA Veteran Justice Outreach and Healthcare for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) specialist staff and VVFS VJS staff. The group discusses program updates, issues related to the justice-involved veteran population, and training opportunities. The HCJD continues to provide statewide technical assistance and advocacy on addressing the needs of the justice-involved veteran population and serves on the Academic Consortium on Criminal Justice Health (ACCJH) Board of Directors and ACCJH Racial and Social Justice Subcommittee. The goal of the ACCJH is to advance the field of health care for individuals in the criminal justice system. The VVFS HCJD and HCJC serve on the VADOC Veterans Stakeholders group along with the VVFS VJS staff to address the needs of incarcerated veterans and work on streamlining referrals. The group is also focused on strengthening referrals from VADOC Probation and Parole Districts to assist veterans on supervision.

### **MISSION: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

*Mission: Healthy Relationships* (MHR) 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. 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 experienced military transition, deployments, and/or are coping with the effects of operational combat stress, PTSD, TBI or other trauma-related experiences are taught a skills-based approach to relationship strengthening. They are also provided connections to behavioral health, rehabilitative and supportive services to improve the overall health, well-being, and relationship satisfaction of the couples who attend.

In FY23, VVFS held two retreats for 26 service members, veterans, and their partners. At both events, staff encountered service members who were coping with the effects of PTSD, TBI, and other mental health concerns. Following both, VVFS staff had referrals not only for further VVFS services such as peer, caregiver, and spousal support, but also referrals for other DVS service lines such as Benefits and VETE.

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

The VVFS Veteran Peer Support (VPS) program leverages professional peer training and personal experiences to provide support in increasing self-reliance, health, wellness, and quality of life. The program has a specific focus on veterans struggling with behavioral and rehabilitative needs but presently disinterested in clinical treatment. VVFS Peer Specialists link with veterans who share similar military and post-military experiences to build a supportive relationship and connect to services. VVFS currently employs 10 VPS representatives across the state.

The VPS program facilitates veteran support groups that promote personal growth, self-awareness, coping strategies, and the opportunity to interact with other veterans. VVFS facilitates four virtual

groups. VVFS also facilitates a virtual peer support group for women veterans. In addition, the VPS Peer Group Program has resumed in-person groups to facilitate the face-to-face interaction preferred by some veterans. The VPS Peer Group Program has also incorporated storytelling into groups; this has been well received by participants.

The VPS Program continues its work to sustain and grow partnerships with Department of Defense (DoD) and the Virginia National Guard (VaNG) to assist service members who experiencing anxiety, depression and other issues associated with military service. VVFS also provides peer support and resource connection to the Marine Corps' District Injured Support Cell (DISC) and the Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) Programs.

The VPS Program continues outreach efforts to Veterans Affairs and other state and community peer support programs such as DBHDS and DMAS by coordinating with these partners to expand VVFS training and resource opportunities. These partnerships increase the identification of veterans who cannot access VA services due to discharge and/or reluctance to accept services. VVFS continues to provide peer support presentations, webinars, and technical assistance to nonprofit partners such as VOCAL Virginia, Mental Health America, CSBs, Virginia Employment Commission, Virginia Department of Health, and peer specific organizations throughout the Commonwealth. The Peer Support Program recently partnered with Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA) to celebrate the "Year of the Peer". This event, hosted by VVFS in conjunction with RBHA, was held at the Virginia War Memorial. The event brought together various peers from different agencies and was structured to allow 12 different agencies to meet, collaborate and share information gleaned from interaction with veteran peers.

The VPS Program Director continues to collaborate with the Board of Veteran Services (BVS) to initiate a Veteran in the Arts Program. The Veteran in the Arts Program will address the need for alternative methods of therapy for veterans by utilizing various art forms. Veterans in the Arts provides active arts opportunities to veterans to enable connection and improvement in behavioral health and rehabilitation.

The VPS Program has worked to streamline and provide cross referrals to veterans working with Veteran Justice Specialists and Resource Specialists with behavioral health needs and/or suicide risk. The peer team collaborates on these cases to ensure wrap around supports during critical periods.

### **SUICIDE PREVENTION AND OPIOID ADDICTION SERVICES (SOS) PROGRAM**

The General Assembly of Virginia, through the Appropriations Act (Chapter 2, 2022 Acts of Assembly Special Session I, Item 470.F) earmarked general funds of \$5,000,000 for the first year (FY23) and \$5,000,000 the second year (FY24) to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to establish a program for prevention and intervention of suicide and opiate<sup>22</sup> addiction for service members, veterans, and their families throughout the Commonwealth.

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<sup>22</sup> operationalized as 'opioid' which includes natural, semisynthetic, and synthetic opioids

Specifically, DVS is to collaborate with federal, state, local and community organizations, public and private institutions, and other service providers to develop programs to prevent suicide among service members and address opiate/opioid addiction suffered by service members and veterans.

The Appropriations Act directed DVS to coordinate with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), and the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), whenever possible, to promote the use of evidence-based practices in continuity with other suicide and opiate/opioid misuse prevention and intervention programs administered by the Commonwealth.

Dr. Angela Porter joined DVS in September 2022 as the Director of the Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) Program. Initial program development research and partnership formation began in December 2022. The new SOS program provides outreach and training to Federal, State, and local partners and initiated a new community and research grant program to enhance prevention, intervention, and recovery services statewide.

As of November 2023, the SOS program has awarded forty-one community grants totaling almost \$4.1 million and eight research grants awarded as of November 1, 2023, totaling almost \$1,650,000. Grantees will implement, study, and expand best practices in veteran peer support, suicide prevention training, risk screening, and clinical therapies for Service Members, Veterans, and Families across the Commonwealth. The SOS team also hosted a Suicide Prevention Symposium and Recovery Day event to commemorate National Suicide Prevention month and National Recovery month with grantees and regional partners on September 21, 2023.

### **FY23 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.

<b>2,117</b>	Veterans and family members served in FY23 (-63, 2022)
<b>2,832</b>	Total individual services (linkage to mental health, housing, financial assistance etc.) provided in FY23 (+149, 2022)
<b>316</b>	Total behavioral health services provided in FY23 (-35, 2022)
<b>56</b>	Total rehabilitative/medical services provided in FY22 (+20, 2022)
<b>2,097</b>	Total supportive services provided in FY22 (-200, 2022)
<b>408</b>	Individuals participating in virtual peer support groups provided in FY23 (+76, 2022)
<b>52</b>	Veterans and family members served by <i>Mission: Healthy Relationships</i> (MHR) in FY23 (30, 2022)
<b>1,408</b>	Individuals trained in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) by VVFS (+718, 2022)
<b>1,537</b>	Individuals trained in Military Cultural Competency Training by VVFS (+285, 2022)



**302** Veterans who received Behavioral Health/Financial Assistance through Veterans Services Foundation (+34, 2022)

**HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING**

**386** Estimated number of homeless veterans in Virginia on a single night in January 2023 (-9, 2022)

**102** Estimated number of unsheltered veterans in Virginia on a single night in January 2023 (+55, 2022)

**642** Number of homeless veterans housed statewide in FY23 (+9, FY22)

**237** Veterans experiencing homelessness who received financial assistance through VVFS in FY23 (+9, FY22)

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
Individual Services Delivered	2,402	2,683	2,832
Outreach and Training Events	202	408	1,092

## **VETERANS CARE CENTERS**

### **MISSION**

*Provide veteran residents with exceptional care in a home-like environment that enhances their sense of well-being. To achieve this, DVS veterans care centers:*

- 1. Take a “whole person” approach that focuses not just on providing physical health care to residents, but also providing recreational, spiritual, therapeutic, and social opportunities that contribute to overall physical and mental health.*
- 2. Operate the care centers as symbols of the Commonwealth’s commitment to her veterans; and*
- 3. Serve the greatest possible number of veterans by maintaining the highest practical facility census.*

### **OVERVIEW**

Virginia’s veterans care centers provide residential (in-patient) care services to Virginia veterans, including skilled nursing care, Alzheimer’s/memory care, and short-term rehabilitative care. Domiciliary (assisted living) care is also provided at the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VCC) in Roanoke. All 424 beds (224 in Roanoke, 200 in Richmond) are certified for both Medicare and Medicaid. The 128 beds at the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center in Virginia Beach will be certified in early 2024, and the 128 beds at the Puller Veterans Care Center in Fauquier County later in 2024. Revenue sources include: Medicaid, Medicare, per diem payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), VA payments for veterans rated 70-100% service-connected disabled, and private funding sources. Honorably discharged veterans who reside in or entered active duty from Virginia with a need for skilled nursing care are eligible to reside at one of Virginia’s veterans care centers. It is an honor to care for all our Virginia veterans, whether short or long term.

All care centers provide high-quality, on-site physical, occupational and speech therapy, as well as many other ancillary health care services. They offer amenities such as Wi-Fi, a library with computer access, a chapel, solariums on each hallway, wheelchair accessible nature trails and decks, and a no charge on-site barber shop.

All care centers continue to follow strict adherence to all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) infection control and prevention guidelines. With near-universal vaccination of staff and residents across all care centers, operations have returned to normal.

## **New Construction: Jones & Cabacoy VCC<sup>23</sup> and Puller VCC**

The Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center (VCC) in Virginia Beach is named for Medal of Honor recipient Col. William A. Jones, III and SSgt. Christopher Cabacoy, a Virginia Beach native who was killed in action in Afghanistan.

The Puller VCC is named for U.S. Marine Corps Lt. General Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, his son, Marine Corps Lt. Lewis B. Puller, Jr. and Lewis Jr.’s wife, former state Senator Linda (Toddy) Puller. Senator Puller, along with Senators Bryce Reeves and Louise Lucas, and Delegates Kirk Cox, Rich Anderson, and Chris Stolle, among many others, was instrumental in securing funding for the new care centers.

The two new centers are 128-bed facilities with private rooms that provide residential (in-patient) care services (skilled nursing care, Alzheimer’s/memory care, and long/short-term rehabilitative care).

The Puller Veterans Care Center currently has 13 team members on board and will build to 60 before the first resident is admitted. Staffing will increase ahead of increased admissions; the target is for each new care center to be at full occupancy 17-20 months after opening.

## **Virginia Veterans Care Center**

The Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke, adjacent to the Salem VAMC, is a 224-bed facility (196 skilled, 28 assisted living) providing high-quality, short-term rehabilitative and long-term health care. 60 of the 196 beds are dedicated solely to the care of veterans who require a secure environment related to the effects of Alzheimer’s/dementia. A 28-bed unit serves the needs of veterans who require assisted-living/domiciliary care.

In FY23, VVCC provided 56,664 patient days of skilled nursing or Alzheimer’s/memory care, which is 79% occupancy of 196 beds and 4,563 patient days in assisted living, which is 45% capacity. Census has increased by 1% since FY22.

## **ACTIVITIES**

Staff work throughout the year in coordination with veteran’s service organizations (VSOs) and over 120 individual volunteers, on an array of activities that historically includes trips to the D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Salem Red Sox baseball games, the Fishing Rodeo and other community events. On-site activities are planned as well pet therapy, an annual apple festival and entertainments. VVCC staff also help facilitate resident participation with Honor Flight.

VVCC recognizes special events and occasions, such as Military Branch Birthdays, 9/11, Run For the Wall, and Women Veterans Week. VVCC raised over \$2,184 in support of Alzheimer’s Awareness

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<sup>23</sup> The Jones & Cabacoy Center opened on 10 November, 2023; this annual report encompasses DVS activities from 1 July 2022 through 30 June 2023.

month, and \$17,493 for Operation Holiday Spirit (OHS), to support the purchase of individualized holiday gifts for all care center residents.

### **Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center**

The Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC), located on the campus of the Richmond VAMC in Richmond, has 200 skilled nursing care beds in private rooms, of which 40 beds are dedicated to the care of Alzheimer's/memory care.

In 2023, SBVCC provided 55,486 patient days, which is 75.5% occupancy, or an average of 151 beds filled. Along with long-term residents, SBVCC has some veterans on a short-term basis for rehabilitation, as they transition from hospital care back to their homes and families.

### **ACTIVITIES**

SBVCC provides high-quality on-site physical, occupational, and speech therapy, therapeutic recreation, along with social and spiritual activities. Other amenities include on-site pharmacy, fully equipped barber and beauty shop, activity and game rooms, library, resident lounges in each nursing neighborhood, courtyards, and an outdoor walking trail.

While SBVCC has been able to resume a more normal activity schedule, including group activities with guests, outings from the facility, many activities drastically changed with COVID-19. In person visitation has resumed, and staff continue to help veterans keep in touch with their loved ones through social media and FaceTime. SBVCC has been able to hold small gatherings inside and outside (e.g. trivia, music, bingo, ice cream socials, nursing home week, cook-outs), while maintaining infection control practices and following CDC and CMS guidelines.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
<b><i>Virginia Veterans Care Center</i></b>			
Patient Days—Nursing / % of beds occupied	50,614/71%	55,999/78%	56,664/79%
Patient Days—Assisted Living / % of beds occupied	7,822/76%	6,043/59%	4,563/45%
<b><i>Sitter &amp; Barfoot Veterans Care Center</i></b>			
Patient Days—Nursing / % of beds occupied	54,916 / 75%	54,916 / 75%	55,486 / 75.5%

## Veterans Cemeteries

### MISSION

*Provide dignified final resting places in places of honor in perpetuity for Virginia's veterans, members of the Guard and Reserve, and their eligible family members.*

### ACTIVITIES

Cemetery Services maintains Virginia's three state veteran's cemeteries: the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk; the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia; and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Dublin. All three provide final resting places for our veterans, members of the Guard and Reserve, and their eligible family members in places of honor, dignity, respect, and remembrance. All cemeteries accommodate in-ground burial of casketed remains, in-ground interment of cremated remains, and above-ground interment of cremated remains in a columbarium. The Southwest Virginia State Veterans Cemetery also offers a green burial option for cremated remains in its scatter garden.

In FY23, Virginia's three state veteran's cemeteries conducted 2,258 committal services: 1,468 at the Suffolk cemetery, 554 at the Amelia cemetery, and 236 at the Dublin cemetery. This represented a 6.4% decrease in interments compared to FY22, but a 30% increase since FY20.

The VA awarded grants to DVS for phased expansion of the Suffolk (\$7.1M), Amelia (\$2.3M) and Dublin (\$1.1M) cemeteries to add additional columbarium walls. The Suffolk project also includes a second committal shelter and a cortege lane.

Virginia's state veterans cemeteries follow burial eligibility requirements set by the VA. Any member of the U.S. Armed Forces who dies on active duty, retires, or is discharged from military service under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible, as are Commissioned Officers with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and some Merchant Mariners. Veteran's spouses, including widows/widowers are eligible for interment in the same gravesite as the veteran. Additionally, certain dependents, including unmarried sons/daughters under age 21, and when applicable, an unmarried adult son/daughter, who before the age of 21 became permanently incapable of self-support due to physical or mental disability, are also eligible for burial at state veterans cemeteries.

DVS receives a plot allowance from the VA for each veteran buried in a Virginia state veterans cemetery. These VA plot allowance covers a portion of the cemetery operating costs, including burial operations, grounds maintenance, operating equipment replacement and maintenance, and the upkeep of cemetery buildings. The remaining Cemetery Services' budget comes from the General Fund and is used primarily for personnel costs.

In FY23, the fee for the interment of a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran was \$400. This fee was eliminated July 1, 2023 following the passage of legislation by the 2023 General Assembly and funding in the FY24 Appropriation Act.



President Joe Biden signed the *Burial Equity for Guards and Reserves Act* in March 2022, which allowed VA-funded state and tribal cemeteries the option to inter former Guardsmen, Reservists, and current ROTC members without losing future VA grant opportunities. Virginia was the first state in the nation to begin interring these newly eligible individuals.

Because the VA does not provide a plot allowance or government-furnished headstone for these individuals, DVS charged a \$1,700 fee for each cremation and a \$2,000 fee for each casket interred under the state's new Special Category Interment Program (SCIP) in FY23. These fees were also eliminated July 1, 2023 following the passage of legislation by the 2023 General Assembly and funding in the FY24 Appropriation Act.

All three cemeteries held wreath-laying events in December. Live wreaths with red bows, purchased by local non-profit organizations, were placed on each gravesite. In FY23, partner organizations supporting the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Dublin) received donated funds of approximately \$55,000, while partner organizations for the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery (Suffolk) received donated funds totaling over \$62,000. The Virginia State Veterans Cemetery (Amelia) has a relatively new wreath committee, which, in partnership with *Wreaths Across America*, was able to raise enough funds to place a wreath on every gravesite in Amelia.

For those veterans who pass away without family, DVS cemetery staff work with local organizations and civic groups, law enforcement, public health officials, funeral directors, the Virginia Army National Guard Funeral Honors Program, and individual citizens to identify the unclaimed remains of veterans who deserve a dignified final resting place. In FY22 the SWVAVC Volunteers worked with cemetery leadership to develop and implement the Ambassador program, whose mission is to ensure that no veteran is ever buried alone. During FY23 the volunteer Ambassadors were in attendance of 168 veteran funerals at the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery. Local funeral directors were also informed on procedures to request reimbursement for a casket or urn through the VA's Casket and Urn Reimbursement Program. This program provides up to \$1,900 for a wood or metal casket or up to \$145 for the cost of an urn to be used to inter unclaimed veterans in a respectful and dignified manner.

DVS encourages veterans and family members to complete a "pre-application" so that required documentation (discharge documents, marriage certificates, etc.) are on file to expedite scheduling in their time of need. Filing a pre-application is an indication of intent to be buried in a state veterans cemetery, in advance of the veteran's or spouse's death, and helps the families and the cemeteries successfully prepare for interment. Pre-application forms are available for download on the DVS website.

All three cemeteries are open to the public for visitation daily during daylight hours. Cemetery administrative offices are open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In FY22, the Cemeteries service line launched a toll-free telephone number where callers can obtain information about each cemetery, locate a loved-one's gravesite or schedule a burial. The new number was launched in March and is 1-855-4VA-VETS. The staff understands the importance for families to visit on weekends and holidays, so each cemetery is staffed on Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Independence Day, and on all Saturdays. These personnel are able to assist families with locating and

accessing a loved-one's gravesite, as well as ensuring the public restrooms are clean and accessible. Each cemetery hosts various special events and services throughout the year, such as wreath-laying ceremonies, bench and monument dedications, and flag placements each Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
<b><i>Virginia Veterans Cemetery</i></b>			
Interments	572	596	554
Pre-applications on file*	3,661	3,930	4,119
<b><i>Horton Veterans Cemetery</i></b>			
Interments	1,472	1,538	1,468
Pre-applications on file*	8,255	8,979	9,697
<b><i>Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery</i></b>			
Interments	253	279	236
Pre-applications on file <sup>24</sup>	1,905	2,179	2,434

<sup>24</sup> Filing a pre-application is an indication of intent to be buried in a state veterans cemetery, and is a way to submit, in advance of the veteran's death, all necessary documentation to verify eligibility for burial in a state veterans cemetery.

## Virginia War Memorial

### MISSION

*Honor patriotic Virginians who rendered faithful service and sacrifice in the cause of freedom and liberty for the Commonwealth and the nation in time of war, honor all of Virginia's veterans, preserve their history, educate the public, and inspire patriotism in all Virginians.*

### ACTIVITIES

The Virginia War Memorial is the Commonwealth of Virginia's memorial and educational center honoring the memory of all Virginians who demonstrated a willingness to serve and fight in defense of the United States from World War II through today. The Memorial's walls are engraved with the names of nearly 12,000 service members from Virginia who perished in combat during World War II; the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf; and, more recently, those who have lost their lives in the Global War on Terrorism. Through educational outreach, exhibits, documentary films, patriotic programming, staff and volunteers ensure that veterans who live in Virginia will thrive.

Over the past year, in-person access to the Memorial allowed for deeper engagement and collaborations with our partnerships, including the WWII Heritage Alliance, which includes the National D-Day Memorial, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, the MacArthur Memorial, the Virginia Holocaust Museum, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum, and the Military Aviation Museum. The Virginia War Memorial is an active member of the Virginia Association of Museums.

### EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING EXPANDS VIRTUALLY

During FY23, the Virginia War Memorial provided educational programming to meet the needs of the State, with programs being offered virtually and in-person.

The virtual learning initiative "Livestreams: Learning from the Home Front" continues to take place about five times per month, with special programming for important dates and interesting topics that include four specific series:

These presentations were free to the public and reached audiences across the nation and internationally. Over the course of FY23, the Memorial conducted 46 public livestreams with 524 individual participants. Partnering with Streamable Learning, the Lifelong Learning Institute, and the Battle of the Bulge Association, programs were created for specific audiences based on the educational preferences of the groups. Many programs are recorded and are available at [www.vawarmemorial.org](http://www.vawarmemorial.org).

Outreach programming continued as traveling interactive education tables were created for various organizations and events. Presentations were given at nursing homes, veterans posts, historic societies, schools, museums, and special events throughout the state. At schools, informational presentations would be set up and given to hundreds of students throughout the day. The education department would also set up activity stations and informational presentations for field trips coming into the Virginia War Memorial.

The annual Teacher Institutes were held in person this year, with 117 teachers who registered to attend. Over a period of three months, seven Teacher Institutes were held with nine guest speakers. The topics for this year were: Winning the Cold War, the POW Experience, From Headlines to the Front Lines: The US Media's Role in Going to War, Teaching the Unspeakable: Nazi Germany, Mother of Invention: American Wars and New Technologies, Connecting Students to History, and Peace with Honor: An In-Depth Look at the Vietnam War.

### **USS BIRMINGHAM RESEARCH LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES**

During FY23, the Virginia War Memorial Research Library and Archives has expanded its collaboration with community partners and increased the accessibility of its collections.

Forty-Two oral history interviews were conducted with Virginia veterans in and out of the state, representing five branches of the military. Several of these interviews have been made accessible to the public via the Virginia War Memorial Vimeo Page.

This year, over 90 collections, including oral histories, have been used by outside researchers and the VWM Educational and Curatorial departments. Other efforts to increase accessibility include working with the VWM Educational Department to use collections for livestreams, presentations, and other programming.

### **EVENTS**

#### **Commonwealth's Veterans Day Ceremony – November 11, 2022**

The annual ceremony to honor all Americans who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin delivered the keynote address. Other speakers included Major General Timothy Williams, the Adjutant General of Virginia, General Gary M. Brito, the Commanding General of United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, and Virginia Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, Craig Crenshaw. Winners of the Virginia War Memorial's Veterans Day Essay Contest were also recognized at this ceremony. 140 in-person attendees and 37,000 virtual views (TV and livestream).

#### **Commonwealth's Memorial Day Ceremony – May 30, 2023**

Broadcast on CBS-6 TV and livestreamed, the ceremony reached 84,000 virtual viewers across the Commonwealth and 1,200 people attended the ceremony held in the Bruce E. Heilman Amphitheater. Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin delivered the keynote address. Other speakers included Major General Timothy Williams, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and Virginia Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Craig Crenshaw. Winners of the Marocchi Memorial Scholarship were also recognized at this ceremony.

#### **Commonwealth's Patriot Day Ceremony – September 11, 2023**

Partnered with Freedom Flag Foundation for the annual ceremony. The September 2023 Program included keynote speaker Chesterfield County Sheriff Karl Leonard, who was deployed, as a U.S. Coast

Guard Reservist, as “Operation Guarding Liberty (9/11) Ground Zero NY City” after the September 11 attacks. 300 in-person attendees.

**Native American Heritage Month – *Warrior Spirit***

This virtual program included Dr. Hermon Viola telling the story of the largely unknown story of Native American military service.

**Commonwealth’s Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance Ceremony – December 7, 2022**

Honored those killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. 80 in-person attendees.

**.9K-K9 Veterans Day Memorial Walk**

The VWM created the first .9K-K9 Veterans Day memorial walk around the VWM grounds. Honoring 7 K9 Working Dogs and their handlers. 65 in-person attendees.

**Painting with Light: Visible and Infrared – Veterans Art Gallery**

This exhibit featured the photography work of Retired Navy Captain Rich Davis.

**Richmond Philharmonic Orchestra**

The concert was held in the E. Bruce Heilman Amphitheater. It was conducted by Assistant Conductor Will Pattie. 400 people attended.

**Military Signing Day**

In coordination with the Virginia Department of Education, the VWM coordinated a Military Signing Day for graduating high school seniors who enlisted in the military. Over 150 young men and women took the Oath of Service at the Memorial. Major General Simerly, the Commander of Fort Gregg-Adams was the Keynote speaker during the event.

**US Navy Fleet Force Band**

The Fleet Force Band played a concert in Heilman Amphitheatre that was open to the public.

**Fall of Saigon Remembrance**

In partnership with the South Vietnamese community of Virginia, the VWM hosted members of the Vietnam War veterans and South Vietnamese community for the commemoration of the 48<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of Saigon. Former State Senator Dick Black, a Vietnam War Veteran, gave the keynote address.

**Marocchi Memorial Scholarship**

Awarded to Edward Barrett McFall from Newport News and Jenny Calderon from York County, the Marocchi Scholarship is designated to assist Virginian students intending on enrolling in ROTC in college.



**Virginia Voice**

The archives collaborated twice with Virginia Voice. The partnership produced a three-part hour and 50-minute broadcast on Memorial Day that utilized written material from the VWM Archives to honor a few names on our Shrines of Memory.

**Hill of Heroes – 5th Annual Community Event**

Memorial staff and community volunteers totaling over 350 people installed 12,000 American flags on the hillside in honor of each name inscribed on the Shrine of Memory.

***Fifty Years Beyond: A Salute to Vietnam Veterans***

Over half a century has passed since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, marking the beginning of the end of the war in Vietnam. Virginia is home to nearly 200,000 veterans who served during the Vietnam era. For fifty years, these Virginians have lived with the war in the background of their lives. This exhibit offers a glimpse into fifty of those lives, acknowledging that the Vietnam experience remains understudied and misunderstood.

**Vietnam War Commemoration on the National Mall**

The Virginia War Memorial staffed two tents on the National Mall during the Vietnam War Commemoration. Volunteers also honored the 1,759 MIA Vietnam Veterans to include the 44 Virginians to are still missing in action from the Vietnam War.

<b>Annual Services Provided</b>	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>
Visitors	27,497	41,134	52,030

## **DVS Budget and Staffing**

### **DVS FTE LEVEL: FY23**

<b>Staffing by Service Area</b>	<b>FY23 FTEs</b>
Benefits	121
Education, Transition, & Employment	48
Virginia Veteran and Family Support	61
Veterans Care Centers	1,081
Veterans Cemeteries	38
Virginia War Memorial	10
Administration	22
Totals	1,382

**DVS FY23 BUDGET (APPROPRIATION)  
AS APPROVED BY THE 2022 GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SPECIAL SESSION I  
(CHAPTER 2)  
(NOTE: DOES NOT INCLUDE CENTRAL ACCOUNT DISTRIBUTIONS)**

Program	Fund Source				Program Total
	General Fund	Special (fee for service)	Dedicated Special (Donations)	Federal Trust (federal contract)	
Benefit Services	\$12,751,297	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$12,751,297
Virginia Veteran and Family Support	\$11,079,581	\$0	\$0	\$3,282,054	\$14,361,635
Education, Transition, and Employment	\$5,690,021	\$0	\$0	\$1,075,130	\$6,765,151
Care Centers	\$50,000	\$45,732,518	\$0	\$46,505,221	\$92,287,739
Cemeteries	\$1,632,178	\$348,466		\$1,749,636	\$3,730,280
Virginia War Memorial	\$2,263,114	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,263,114
Administration	\$3,276,717	\$375,434	\$0	\$0	\$3,652,151
<b>Non-DVS programs:</b>					
Granting Freedom	\$200,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$200,000
Veterans Services Foundation	\$0	\$0	\$796,500	\$0	\$796,500
<b>DVS Total:</b>	<b>\$36,942,808</b>	<b>\$46,456,418</b>	<b>\$796,500</b>	<b>\$52,612,041</b>	<b>\$136,807,867</b>



## **Boards**

The Department of Veterans Services' work is guided and supported by two boards, comprised of legislators and citizen appointees:

1. Board of Veterans Services
2. Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

Listed below is a short report for each board, which includes:

- Mission statement of the board;
- The board's powers and duties (from the Code of Virginia);
- A message from the board's chairman;
- A list of board members.

## **BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES**

### **MISSION**

*The Board of Veterans Services supports the Department of Veterans Services by providing expertise and insight into best practices in benefits claims services, medical and health care management, and cemetery operations; performance measurements and general management principles; and nonprofit volunteer operations and management. The Board develops reasonable and effective policy recommendations related to the services provided to veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their eligible spouses, orphans, and dependents by the Department of Veterans Services.*

### **§ 2.2-2454. Powers and Duties of the Board**

1. Advise and make recommendations to the Commissioner of Veterans Services upon such matters as may arise in the performance of his duties;
2. Investigate issues related to the provision of care and services to veterans, upon request of the Commissioner of Veterans Services or the Governor;
3. Study all matters affecting the welfare of Virginia citizens who are veterans or dependents or survivors of such veterans, and make recommendations to the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services;
4. Develop recommendations for policies and procedures related to the efficient and effective delivery of the services provided by the Department of Veterans Services;
5. Establish policies related to the coordinated delivery of veterans services, in consultation with those agencies, entities, and organizations, including counties, cities, towns or other political subdivisions of the Commonwealth capable of providing such services;
6. Monitor the administration of all laws concerning veterans and their dependents;
7. Review and advise the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services on the Department's strategic plan;
8. Based on rigorous cost-benefit-value analysis, provide recommendations to the Department of Veterans Services regarding future projects and the acquisition of facilities that may benefit the State's veterans, including but not limited to veterans cemeteries and veterans care centers; and
9. Provide recommendations to the Department of Veterans Services and the Veterans Services Foundation created in § [2.2-2715](#) regarding gifts, grants, and other resources from public and private entities and organizations to support veterans services.

(2003, cc. [657](#), [670](#); 2004, c. [697](#); 2005, c. [758](#); 2008, cc. [467](#), [768](#); 2010, c. [64](#); 2012, cc. [33](#), [162](#); 2015, c. [319](#); 2017, cc. [89](#), [501](#); 2019, cc. [40](#), [204](#).)

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

The Board of Veterans Services (BVS) works with the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to ensure the welfare of Virginia's veterans and advises the DVS in developing policies that enhance the support of veterans throughout the Commonwealth. The BVS is comprised of 26 members, including seven legislative members, 15 non-legislative citizen members, and four *ex officio* members.

In 2023, BVS welcomed new members. Scott Davidson is a retired Army Captain and now serves as the Chief Executive Officer of a consulting group. Robert Eisiminger is a U.S. Army veteran and Founder of Knight Point Systems. Vincent Griffith is a retired Navy Rear Admiral and President of MRO and International Solutions, Noble. Matthew Miller is a Navy veteran, now serving as the Chief of staff for a member of the House of Representatives.

Our members continued to actively advocate for and support veterans and their families across the Commonwealth throughout 2023. As a key stakeholder in the DVS Strategic Plan, several Board members actively participated in the Strategic Plan Working Group to help guide veteran and military related budget and legislation over the next five years in Virginia.

As part of efforts to accomplish its mission, BVS members are assigned to be a "point of contact" (POC) for a DVS program or Service Line. Through regular contact with DVS Service Line Directors, BVS POCs serve as a valuable sounding board for policy development, identifying areas of concern and/or future opportunities, and are a vital link for providing feedback to the DVS on policy decisions and associated initiatives. DVS Service Line POC reports were delivered to Board members at each of the 2023 BVS meetings.

During the September 2023 meeting, the Board voted to approve proposed changes to the BVS ByLaws. Additionally, the Board voted to elect Carl Bedell to serve as the BVS Vice Chairman, replacing Ms. Thurraya Kent who completed her term June 30, 2023.

Additionally, during the September 2023 meeting, Chief Deputy Commissioner Steven Combs delivered a presentation on the Virginia War Memorial Carillon project and explained that the Department of General Services is leading the restoration work. When complete, the plan is for DVS to operate the Carillon as part of the Virginia War memorial to honor the 3,700 Virginians killed in World War I. The Board voted unanimously to send a letter to DVS Commissioner Gade and Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Crenshaw to express the board's support for this project.

The members of the Board also continued to work closely with the JLC, the Veterans Services Foundation, and the Virginia War Memorial Foundation. Additionally, the BVS considers it essential to continue to communicate frequently with General Assembly members on the needs of veterans and the implications of policy decisions affecting the DVS.

The BVS has built and sustained outstanding partnerships focused on veterans support issues throughout the Commonwealth. We look forward to working with our partners to ensure Virginia continues to be the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.

Respectfully,

Michael Dick  
Colonel, USMC (Ret.)  
Chairman

**Board of Veterans Services members – as of December 1, 2023**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Position</b>
Michael Dick	Chairman, Retired Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps College of William & Mary
Carl Bedell	Vice Chair: Attorney, U.S. Army veteran
Victor Angry	A is for Angry, LLC Retired Command Sergeant Major, ARNG
David Ashe	Attorney, Alperin Law Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve
Delegate Jason S. Ballard	General Assembly of Virginia U.S. Army veteran; U.S. Army Reserves
Senator John Bell	General Assembly of Virginia U.S. Air Force veteran
Joe. R. Campa, Jr.	11th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy CEO, Kent, Campa and Kate Incorporated
Delegate Mike Cherry	General Assembly of Virginia U.S. Air Force veteran
Scott Davidson	Captain, U.S. Army (Retired), Chief Executive Officer, The GCO Consulting Group
Robert Eisiminger	Founder Knight Point Systems, U.S. Army Veteran
Mario Flores	United States Army Congressional Defense Fellow U.S. Army veteran
Delegate Hyland (Buddy) Fowler	General Assembly of Virginia
Vincent Griffith	President, MRO and International Solutions, Noble; RADM USN Retired
Joyce Henderson	Retired Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
Carlton Kent	16th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (Retired) President, Kent, Campa and Kate Incorporated
John Lesinski	Executive VP Colliers International Retired Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Senator Mamie Locke	General Assembly of Virginia
Terence E. McKnight	VP Government Relations, CAES - Microelectronics Solutions; Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Matthew Miller	Chief of Staff to Representative Ben Cline; U.S. Navy Veteran
Delegate Kathleen Murphy	General Assembly of Virginia
Senator Bryce Reeves	General Assembly of Virginia, U.S. Army veteran
Melissa Watts	Director of Procurement, Virginia ABC Authority
Daniel Gade (ex officio)	Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services U.S. Army Retired Lieutenant Colonel
Kevin Hoffman (ex officio)	Chair, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
Paul Haughton	Chair, Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees
Kathy Owens	Chair, Virginia War Memorial Foundation Board

## **JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS (JLC)**

### **MISSION**

*The Council provides advice and assistance to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Department of Veterans Services on matters of concern to the veterans community and provides a conduit of information to and from the veterans service organizations on policy and legislation, pending and enacted, as well as information on existing services.*

### **§ 2.2-2682. Powers and Duties of the Council**

A. The Council shall have the following powers and duties:

1. Advise the Department of Veterans Services and the General Assembly regarding (i) methods of providing support for ongoing veterans services and programs, and (ii) addressing veterans issues on an ongoing basis;
2. Recommend issues that may potentially impact veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their eligible spouses, orphans, and dependents;
3. Advise the Department of Veterans Services and the Board of Veterans Services on matters of concern to Virginia-domiciled veterans and their eligible spouses, orphans, and dependents;
4. Promote and support existing veterans services and programs;
5. Recommend and promote implementation of new efficient and effective administrative initiatives that enhance existing veterans services and programs or provide for necessary veterans services and programs not currently provided; and
6. Maintain a nonpartisan approach to maintaining and improving veterans services and programs in the Commonwealth.

B. The chairman shall report to the Commissioner and the Board of Veterans Services the results of its meetings and submit an annual report on or before November 30 of each year.

C. The Council may apply for funds from the Veterans Services Foundation to enable it to better carry out its objectives. The Council shall not impose unreasonable burdens or costs in connection with requests of agencies.

(2003, cc. [657](#), [670](#); 2008, cc. [467](#), [768](#); 2014, c. [809](#).)

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR**

I am honored to pen this note on behalf of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) which is comprised of 24 Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia representing an impressive 250,000 members. The JLC advocates for military retirees, currently serving service members, veterans, and military families.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the tenure of our former Chairwoman, Ms. Denice Williams, who completed her term in June 2023. Her leadership and staunch advocacy for Veterans have left an indelible mark. While her departure leaves big shoes to fill, we are grateful that Ms. Williams will continue as a valuable member of the JLC, representing the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) for another year,

Our commitment to the Commonwealth of Virginia and support for Veterans and their families remain resolute. In 2023, four of our six initiatives successfully passed the General Assembly and were signed into law by Governor Youngkin. Our foremost priority seeks to expand tax relief for surviving spouses of members of the Armed Forces who lost their lives while on active duty. This resolution passed, and we have ensured the identical resolution is adopted for the 2024 General Assembly session to effect this reform through a Virginia Constitutional Amendment. Other achievements from 2023 include increased Virginia National Guard benefits such as free access to State Parks and an improved tax deduction for service. We were also pleased to see the expansion of state cemetery burial eligibility to previously ineligible Reservists and National Guard members.

We are also thrilled to welcome our newest member, the Student Veterans of America, to the Council in 2023. We look forward to working with this organization to advocate on behalf of student veterans throughout the Commonwealth.

We deeply value our partnership with the Department of Veterans Services, Board of Veterans Services, Veterans Services Foundation, Virginia War Memorial Foundation, the Governor, and the General Assembly, as we work together to serve Virginia's Veterans and their families. The Governor and the General Assembly continue to support JLC legislative and budget initiatives.

We are planning our in-person JLC Day on the Hill for January 17, 2024. This will be a full day of engagement with the General Assembly beginning with the General Assembly Military Veterans Caucus. It looks to be a great year in a great new building!

As we reflect on our accomplishments and the journey ahead, we remain committed to our mission of promoting Virginia as the most Veteran-friendly state in the nation.

With deep respect and admiration,

Kevin Hoffman  
Chair, JLC  
Virginia National Guard Association Representative to the JLC

**Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations members – as of December 1, 2023**

<b>Veterans Service Organization</b>	<b>JLC Member</b>	<b>Alternate</b>
Air Force Association	Richard Shook	Marc Boswell
Air Force Sergeants Association	Richard Mansfield	John R. Cooper
American Legion	William Aramony	Bill Feasenmyer
AMVETS	Richard Van Norton Jr.	Matthew Klym
Association of the U.S. Army	Glenn Yarborough	Faye Earley
Disabled American Veterans	Denice Williams	Lisa Gregory
Fifth Baptist Church Veterans Ministry	Thad A. Jones	
Fleet Reserve Association	Sha'ron D. Martin	Christopher J. Murray
Legion of Valor of the U.S., Inc.	Jack Hilgers	Richard Rinaldo
Marine Corps League	John Clickener	David L. Jennings
Military Officers Association of America	Monti Zimmerman	John Down
Military Order of the Purple Heart	Mark Atchison	James Cuthbertson
Military Order of the World Wars	Vernon Peters	
Navy Mutual Aid Association	Michelle Domingue	Meredith Burns
Paralyzed Veterans of America	Preston Curry	
Reserve Organization of America	Terrence Moore	David Sitler
Roanoke Valley Veterans Council	Dan Karnes	Perry Taylor
Student Veterans of America	Katherine Martinez	
Veterans of Foreign Wars	Rick Raskin	Joanne Smith
Vietnam Veterans of America	George Corbett	Charles Montgomery
Va. Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Assn	Carl Holcomb	
Virginia National Guard Association	Kevin Hoffman	Jay L. Marts
Women Marines Association	Ann Crittenden	
Wounded Warrior Project	Jose Ramos	Jeremy Villanueva
Chairman, Board of Veterans Services	Michael Dick	
Chairman, Veterans Services Foundation	Paul Haughton	
Commissioner of Veterans Services	Daniel Gade	

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Benefit Services

Table 1: Claims Submitted to USDVA - Sorted by Office

### Appendix B: Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program

Table 1: Number of Unique Recipients of the VMSDEP Tuition/Fee Waiver and Stipend. Amounts Awarded by Institution

Table 2: Total number of VMSDEP Unique Students

## APPENDIX A: BENEFIT SERVICES

### Table 1: Sorted by Office

### Claims, Evidence and Appeals Submitted to USDVA

Office	Total Claims		
	FY21	FY22	FY23
Abingdon	1,706	1,804	1,220
Accomac	535	754	594
Arlington (opened FY23)	--	--	1
Big Stone Gap	1,722	2,433	1,756
Charlottesville	2,156	2,778	2,629
Chesapeake (closed 2023)	1,960	1,915	928
Danville	1,131	2,399	1,568
Emporia	541	771	638
Fairfax	3,844	3,587	1,784
Fort Belvoir	1,395	2,121	1,087
Fort Gregg-Adams	1,781	2,683	1,980
Fredericksburg	3,596	4,166	2,377
Front Royal (office relocated from Strasburg in FY23. See also Strasburg listing)	--	--	680
Hampton VAMC	640	3,263	1,491
Hampton	2,878	1,691	3,745
Henrico	227	908	1,368
JBLE (Eustis) (opened 2023)	--	--	420



The Virginia Department of Veterans Services  
**COMMISSIONER'S 2023 ANNUAL REPORT**



<b>Loudoun</b>	1,940	1,746	1,763
<b>Lynchburg</b>	1,252	2,060	1,665
<b>Manassas</b>	872	2,128	750
<b>Norfolk</b>	5,657	7,713	5,531
<b>Pentagon</b>	2,323	2,406	1,895
<b>Petersburg</b>	819	1,418	1,970
<b>Portsmouth</b>	906	911	953
<b>Quantico</b>	4,500	5,755	5,345
<b>Richmond VAMC</b>	4,537	6,581	4,742
<b>Roanoke/Salem VAMC</b>	3408	6501	4808
<b>South Hill</b>	464	613	425
<b>Springfield</b>	3,572	2,951	1,685
<b>Staunton</b>	669	2,084	1,616
<b>Strasburg</b>	1,150	1,063	933
<b>Tazewell</b>	1,785	1,726	1,091
<b>Virginia Beach - Oceana</b>	1,296	1,621	2,531
<b>Virginia Beach - Pembroke</b>	1,451	1,470	1,374
<b>Williamsburg</b>	3,834	4,980	2,085
<b>Wytheville</b>	628	1,839	2,091
<b>Appeals (new FY23)</b>	--	--	129
<b>Totals</b>	<b>65,175</b>	<b>86,847</b>	<b>67,648<sup>25</sup></b>

<sup>25</sup> The Benefits tracking system and methodology was upgraded in FY23, affecting Claims (other than Compensation and Pension), Contacts and Evidence numbers. The lower numbers in FY23 should not be interpreted as a decline in services. Compensation & Pension Claims were unaffected and reflect the current upward trend in veterans served.

## Appendix B: Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP)

**Table 1: 2021-2023: Number of VMSDEP Stipend Recipients and Amount Awarded<sup>26</sup>**

	2021-22		2022-23	
	#	Dollars	#	Dollars
<b>Four-Year Publics</b>				
Christopher Newport University	63	91,100	90	149,569
College of William and Mary	58	85,280	120	173,920
George Mason University	218	308,370	356	509,320
James Madison University	138	210,870	229	387,670
Longwood University	48	69,910	91	137,670
Norfolk State University	61	90,070	96	150,190
Old Dominion University	292	432,180	504	725,510
Radford University	49	79,730	87	123,580
University of Mary Washington	56	80,680	76	119,990
University of Virginia	82	119,210	126	209,580
University of Virginia's College at Wise	7	9,240	10	14,490
Virginia Commonwealth University	265	422,614	439	720,913
Virginia Military Institute	22	34,100	31	51,300
Virginia State University	53	80,350	75	117,130
Virginia Tech	167	252,290	309	531,840
<b>Four-Year Public total</b>	<b>1,579</b>	<b>2,365,994</b>	<b>2,639</b>	<b>4,122,672</b>
<b>Two-Year Publics</b>				
Richard Bland College	14	14,270	12	18,770
<b>Two-Year Public total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14,270</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18,770</b>
<b>Community Colleges</b>				
Blue Ridge Community College	4	3,900	4	3,100
Brightpoint Community College (JTCC)	50	47,580	75	84,640
Central Virginia Community College	3	1,950	5	6,180
Danville Community College	1	1,320	2	1,900
Eastern Shore Community College	0	0	0	0
Germanna Community College	45	45,410	91	115,740
Laurel Ridge Community College (LFCC)	7	6,490	14	14,300
Mountain Empire Community College	3	2,960	4	6,910

<sup>26</sup> This table captures the number of unique recipients of the VMSDEP Waiver and stipend.

Mountain Gateway Community College (DSLCC)	3	3,250	3	4,750
New River Community College	5	5,610	5	6,660
Northern Virginia Community College	108	102,700	151	165,430
Patrick & Henry Community College	6	6,240	5	6,450
Paul D. Camp Community College	0	0	7	5,480
Piedmont Virginia Community College	7	8,530	7	10,460
Rappahannock Community College	3	1,350	11	11,660
Reynolds Community College	20	16,220	23	22,310
Southside Virginia Community College	2	1,620	1	1,900
Southwest Virginia Community College	3	2,740	8	9,500
Tidewater Community College	134	136,730	193	226,770
Virginia Highlands Community College	1	1,170	0	0
Virginia Peninsula Community College (TNCC)	54	44,240	56	69,290
Virginia Western Community College	5	4,700	11	15,730
Wytheville Community College	3	2,300	2	3,800
<b>Community College total</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>447,010</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>792,960</b>

<b>Other Publics</b>				
Two-Year Public total	<b>5</b>	<b>6,380</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16,170</b>

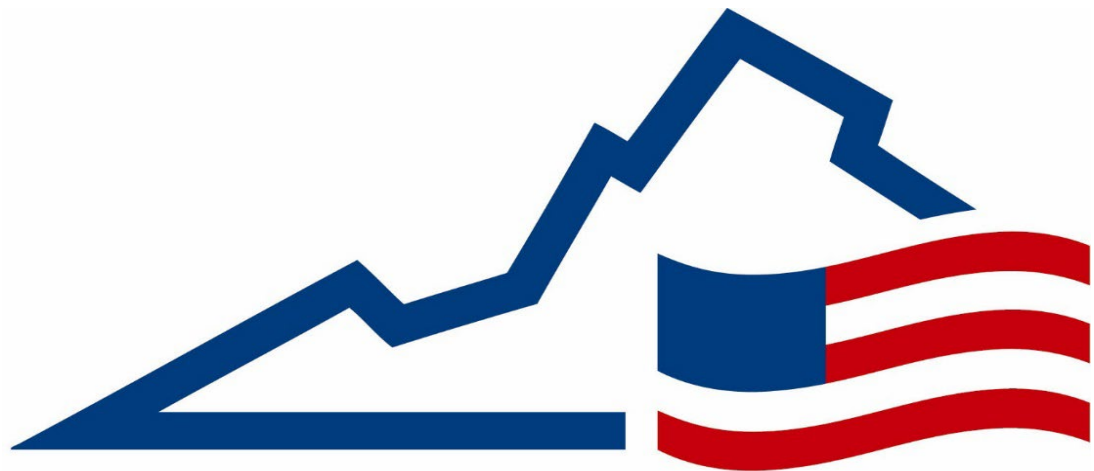
<b>Stipend Grand Total</b>	<b>2,065</b>	<b>2,833,654</b>	<b>3,338</b>	<b>4,950,572</b>
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Source: SCHEV May 2022 and 2023 Reports to the General Assembly

**Table 2: 2021-2023: Total Number of Unique VMSDEP Waiver and Stipend Students**

All VMSDEP students qualify for the waiver of tuition and required fees. Students whose parent's qualifying condition is related to combat service also qualify for the VMSDEP stipend.

	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-23</b>
Waiver #	4,451	6,120
Stipend #	2,065	3,338



**Virginia Department of Veterans Services**



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

Daniel M. Gade, PhD  
Commissioner

Telephone: (804) 786-0220  
Fax: (804) 786-0302

November 1, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin  
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

The Honorable Craig Crenshaw  
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs

The Honorable Barry Knight  
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Janet Howell  
Co-Chair, Senate Finance and  
Appropriations Committee

The Honorable George Barker  
Co-Chair, Senate Finance and  
Appropriations Committee

Mr. Michael Maul  
Director  
Department of Planning & Budget

### ***Delivered via electronic mail***

Re: 2023 Annual Report on the Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services Grant Program

Dear Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Senator Howell, Senator Barker, Delegate Knight, and Director Maul:

Please find attached the 2023 Annual Report on the Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (or SOS) Program, authorized by Chapter 2, 2022 Acts of Assembly Special Session I, Item 470.F.

These funds allowed the Department of Veterans Services to create an entirely new program to promote the use of evidence-based practices in continuity with other suicide and opiate/opioid misuse prevention and intervention programs provided by the Commonwealth. The bulk of the 2023 funding was used to award community providers for capacity building; a portion was used for research grants and administrative overhead.

Please let me know if we may provide additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan. Gade". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "G".

Daniel Gade, PhD.

Cc: Mr. Michael Dick, Chairman, Board of Veterans Services  
Mr. Kevin Hoffman, Chair, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

## **Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) Program**

### **Summary**

The General Assembly of Virginia, through the Appropriations Act (Chapter 2, 2022 Acts of Assembly Special Session I, Item 470.F) allocated general funds of \$5,000,000 for the first year (FY23) and \$5,000,000 the second year (FY24) to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to establish a program for prevention and intervention of suicide and opioid addiction for service members, veterans, and their families throughout the Commonwealth.

Specifically, DVS is to collaborate with federal, state, local and community organizations, public and private institutions, and other service providers to develop programs to prevent suicide among service members and address opiate/opioid addiction suffered by service members and veterans. The new SOS program provides outreach and training to Federal, State, and local partners and initiated a new community and research grant program to enhance prevention, intervention, and recovery services statewide.<sup>1</sup>

The Appropriations Act directed DVS to coordinate with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), and the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), whenever possible, to promote the use of evidence-based practices in continuity with other suicide and opiate/opioid misuse prevention and intervention programs administered by the Commonwealth.

Dr. Angela Porter, PhD, joined DVS in September 2022 as the Director of the **Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (or SOS) Program. Initial program development research and partnership formation began in December 2022.**

### **Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Resource Utilization**

24 grants totaling \$2.35M were awarded to community providers for capacity building. These grant awardees may apply for a second year of funding (that would be awarded in FY24) if they meet SOS program and evaluation performance metrics. The remaining FY23 balance of \$2.4M was reappropriated for FY24 for additional grant awards.

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<sup>1</sup> **Opiate-** An opiate, in classical pharmacology, is a substance derived from opium. In more modern usage, the term opioid is used to designate all substances, both natural and synthetic, that bind to opioid receptors in the brain.

**FY23 Spending Summary**

Appropriation	Grant Spending FY23	Program administration FY23	Total Spending FY23	Carry forward to FY24
\$5,000,000	\$2,350,000 (24 grants)	\$215,655	\$2,565,655	\$2,434,345

**Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Projected Resource Utilization**

Five research grants totaling \$750,000 were awarded to Virginia public universities in FY23, but funding was not disbursed until FY24. \$600,000 was disbursed in July 2023 to four universities, with the remaining \$150,000 from this first tranche to be disbursed to Norfolk State University (NSU) in November following signing of the SOS-NSU Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which is going through the University’s review process.

Eighteen community provider grants totaling \$1,750,000 and three research grants totaling almost \$814,914 will be awarded in November of 2023.

Anticipated FY24 SOS Program expenses are \$817,655. This includes personnel expenses, marketing and outreach, harm reduction items, and other expenses.

The remaining FY24 funds, totaling \$3,476,775, have been reserved for May/June 2024 renewals of the FY23 community provider grants and research grants.

**FY Spending Summary**

Category	Projected FY24 Outlays
Five research grants – awarded FY23, paid July/November 2023	\$750,000
18 community provider grants – awarded November 2023	\$1,750,000
3 research grants – awarded November 2023	\$814,914
Reserved for May/June 2024 renewal of FY23 community provider and research grants	\$3,476,775



Program expenses – FY24	\$817,655
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7,609,344</b>

**Program Structure and Staffing**

The Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) Program is an integral part of the DVS Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) directorate and seamlessly coordinates with VVFS across the service spectrum. DVS and VVFS team members provide procurement and administrative support for the SOS program.

DVS designed the SOS program staff portfolio to include five positions plus Department of Defense (DOD) SkillBridge interns to meet internal and external outreach, training, grant development/monitoring and oversight duties.<sup>2</sup>

**Director of Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (1 position)**

The Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services Director is a senior level role within the Virginia Veteran and Family Support Services (VVFS) section of DVS. The SOS Director serves as the agency’s subject matter expert on suicide prevention, opioid addiction, and behavioral health among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF).

The Director designs, develops, implements, and monitors new programs within DVS and among Federal, State, and local programs and organizations to prevent suicide and address opioid addiction and other behavioral health concerns. The SOS Director focuses on data collection and coordination with DVS partners and grantees related to incidence and prevalence of suicide and lethal means as well as behavioral health challenges and suicide risk factors with the SMVF population.

The Director also provides resources and technical assistance to Constituents, Federal, State, and community partners and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). The SOS Director is the program administrator for the new community and research grants awarded by DVS to enhance prevention, intervention, and recovery services.

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<sup>2</sup> SkillBridge- The DOD SkillBridge program is an opportunity for service members to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of service. DOD SkillBridge connects transitioning service members with industry partners in real-world job experiences.

### Suicide Prevention Coordinator (1 position)

The Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC) coordinates and collaborates on a wide variety of outreach, training and suicide prevention initiatives with various partners, grantees, and VSOs. The SPC coordinates relevant data and outcomes from Federal, State, and local entities to capture and track suicide prevention, outreach, and training programs, resources, and best practices.

The SPC is responsible for the development, organization, and coordination of the SOS program training and outreach initiatives for community and research grantees and broader community partners.

### Grants Administrators (3 positions)

The Grants Administrators (GAs) provide expertise and oversight through the entire life cycle of a grant, from pre-award to post-award to include ongoing monitoring and technical assistance. The Grants Administrators perform duties in support of program procurement, financial assistance, budget management, and maintains a database of monitoring reports and files to capture progress.

SOS Grants Administrators work with both community and research grants and strive to enhance customer service and technical assistance throughout the application and review process.

### Interns and DVS/VVFS support

The SOS team is also exploring a partnership with the Department of Defense SkillBridge program to provide additional capacity with interns.

### **Collaboration in Program Design and Operations:**

Developing this new program was a collective effort with many Federal, State, and local partners. Specifically, the SOS team collaborated with various state agencies including the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), and the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to share informational resources, data, and evidence-based practices and alignment with other suicide and opioid misuse prevention and intervention programs administered by the Commonwealth.

The SOS team collaborates with stakeholders in key working groups such as:

- *“Right Help Right Now”* Initiative (serves on the Support for Substance Use Disorders workstream)

- Community Engagement Partnership Coordinators Working Group (provides connection to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) suicide prevention staff and veteran-focused community coalitions in multiple Federal healthcare service networks including D.C., Maryland, West Virginia, and North Carolina)
- Suicide Prevention and Interagency Group or SPIAG (hosted by DBHDS and VDH and includes members from local suicide prevention and behavioral health services programs statewide)
- Community Services Board (CSB) Service Member, Veteran, and Family SMVF Navigator Working Group (includes veteran-focused staff from CSBs statewide)
- 988 Virginia Campaign (streamlines behavioral health and suicide lifeline support statewide)
- *Virginia Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide (GCPS) among SMVF* (National Call to Action for a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention that started in Virginia in 2018)

Since inception, the SOS team has also worked closely with leaders and stakeholders in the National GCPS, including Federal Sponsors from the USDVA, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and national Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). The team joins monthly working group and Community of Practice meetings with the other 54 States and Territories participating in the Challenge.

For the Virginia GCPS, the SOS team serves on the Steering Committee for *Virginia's Identify, Screen and Refer* (VISR) initiative. The VISR initiative provides training and technical assistance for community services providers in military and veteran culture and resources, suicide prevention, and lethal means safety. The SOS team leads the VSO working group and coordinates best practice training (Examples include training in grant writing, suicide risk screening and intervention, and safety planning) for all VISR stakeholders.

**Successes:**

DVS moved rapidly to build a staff team and brand-new community and research grant program in the first year. The Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) grant program awarded over \$2.4 million dollars to 24 community services agencies and \$750,000 in research grants to public institutions of higher learning in the Commonwealth. SOS grantees cover expansive localities (representing urban, suburban, and rural) around the Commonwealth and diverse suicide prevention, behavioral health treatment and recovery, and opioid addiction services (please refer to the Grantee map and Grantee Table in Appendix I).

SOS grantees are providing critical services to enhance and save lives including community training and education in suicide prevention and harm reduction supports; peer support and service animals to support trauma recovery; and developing, implementing, and/or evaluating clinical therapies for Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

The SOS team has also participated in extensive outreach and education activities including the following events for September Suicide Prevention Awareness and Recovery month at the

Virginia War Memorial. SafeTALK was presented to teach grantees and partners to recognize and engage persons who might be having thoughts of suicide and to connect them with community resources trained in suicide intervention. SafeTALK emphasizes safety while challenging taboos that stifle open dialogue about suicide.

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) was held with community partners, grantees, and DVS staff in attendance. The 2-day training program teaches participants how to identify individuals at risk and intervene with suicide first aid.

A virtual Recovery Day event was held in recognition of September being National Recovery month with presentations from State agencies (including Department of Corrections, DBHDS, VDH) on Veteran substance use (including opioid misuse) and data on overdose hospitalizations and deaths in Virginia.

The SOS team also designed a Suicide Prevention Symposium to provide networking, connection, and technical assistance and training opportunities to new grantees. Twelve grantees presented on their program services and participated in regional working groups to connect with Federal, State, and local partners to promote collaboration and closing gaps in services for SMVF. The Symposium will be held annually moving forward to connect grantees to each other, DVS, and key partners.

The Program Director also spoke about SOS and Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide activities at the National AMVets Convention in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in August 2023, before 5,000 veterans from all over the world, including Taiwan.

To help DVS lead the way for opioid overdose prevention, the SOS Team coordinated agency wide REVIVE training and certification and distribution of opioid overdose prevention/Naloxone kits to DVS staff to equip them to save the lives of veterans and other citizens of the commonwealth of Virginia. The program achieved a 98% training and certification rate among DVS staff.

The SOS Team regularly disseminates harm reduction items such as medication lock boxes, fentanyl test strips, and gun locks as part of harm reductions kits through their Lethal Means Harm Reduction and Outreach Program.

**SOS Outreach and Training Events:**

DATE	HOST	LOCATION	PURPOSE
06/21/2023	The Salem VA Medical Center and Blue Ridge Behavioral Health	The Highlander Hotel and Conference Center, Radford, Virginia.	Joint Service Member, Veteran, and Family Mental Health Summit with resource vendors,

			guest speakers, and a panel.
07/01/2023	The Salem Fair	Salem Fair, High Five Event at the Salem Civic Center, Salem, Virginia.	A 24-hour awareness campaign to spread awareness for the Out of the Darkness Walks.
07/17/2023 -07/18/2023	Mount Rogers Community Service Board	YWCA, NETN and SWVA, Bristol. Virginia.	ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills). We were able to connect with 15 SMVF at this event and train partners.
07/20/2023	Delegate Rob Bloxom	Mary N. Smith Cultural Enrichment Center, Accomac, Virginia.	To educate the local clergy, and community on the dangers of Fentanyl use.
08/08/2023	Roanoke Marine Reserves Center, Marine Corps Reserve Unit	Marine Corps Reserve Unit, Roanoke, Virginia.	Resources for jobs, mental health, education, etc. For Marines and their family from the local area during drill weekend.
08/18/2023	Western Tidewater Community Services Board	Tidewater	SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program (SPGP) Symposium.
08/28/2023 -09/01/2023	DVS-VVFS-SOS	Liberty University, Liberty Mountain Conference Center, Lynchburg, Virginia.	The Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services program coordinated with LivingWorks to host a Train the Trainer ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills) Training for staff and partners.
09/12/2023	DVS-VVFS-SOS	Virginia War Memorial, Richmond.	The SOS program coordinated with LivingWorks to host a SafeTalk training for 16 grantees and partners in how to talk to SMVF about suicide.

09/13/2023 -14/2023	DVS-VVFS-SOS	Virginia War Memorial, Richmond, Virginia.	The SOS program coordinated with LivingWorks to host an Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) for Community Service Boards, Virginia's Identify, Screen, and Refer (VISR) partners, Active Duty Airforce, and SOS.
09/17/2023	American Legion, District 3	American Legion District 3, Post 3, Salem, Virginia.	The set up a resource table with DVS information, and harm reduction items at the meeting.
09/21/2023	DVS-VVFS-SOS	Virginia War Memorial, Richmond, Virginia.	The SOS program hosted a Suicide Prevention Symposium. The event gave SOS grantees a chance to network and present their grant funded services.
09/25/2023	DVS-VVFS-SOS	Virtual	The SOS program hosted a Virtual Recovery Day for September, Recovery Month. Guest speakers from VADOC and FAACT spoke about veteran substance use and treatment best practice.

**Challenges**

During its first year, SOS experienced several challenges particularly around personnel retention. In May and June of 2023, two SOS team members left the agency, which created a major strain on remaining team members. SOS also experienced challenges due to the fast pace of program development as well as the specificity of knowledge and skills necessary for developing, reviewing, and overseeing new grant operations.

The small SOS team is currently managing three cohorts of community grants and two cohorts of research grants. In support, the entire VVFS service line and multiple DVS support functions such as Human Resources, Finance, and Procurement have rallied to help overcome these

challenges. The SOS Director successfully onboarded a new Suicide Prevention Coordinator (May 2023) and Grants Administrator (July 2023) with both individuals excelling in their commitment to suicide prevention and opioid addiction services for SMVF in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

One of the early lessons learned for the SOS team included the need to shift the community grant application process to a web-based grant software portal to improve the customer experience for community agencies and allow the SOS staff to provide more support to grantees. DVS consulted with DCJS and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to participate in demonstrations of their grant software managed by contractor, Dulles Technologies and build a new DVS grant software portal. SOS contracted with Dulles Technologies to develop a grant software -grants.dvs.virginia.gov. Over the past 3 months, SOS staff have been meeting with software designers and developers to create a grant software that will accept open grant solicitations, grant applications, evaluate grant applications, award grantees, and monitor the grant through the grant lifecycle. The new DVS web grants portal successfully launched in September of 2023 (grants.dvs.virginia.gov). The SOS team has started the detailed process of moving all current grant documents and files to the new DVS grant software for ongoing monitoring and support.

The DVS grant software is currently open for external registrants. Once registered in the DVS grant software, they will automatically receive notifications of grant opportunities. SOS is currently managing three cohorts of community grants and 2 cohorts of research grants for a total of over 55 total grants.

### **Opportunities**

The SOS team has utilized creative opportunities to build staff capacity in an economical way. For example, the team is utilizing the Virginia SkillBridge Program (from the DVS Education, Transition and Employment division) to acquire interns for additional grants administration and operations/administration capacity. A SkillBridge Grants Administrator Intern is scheduled to start on November 2, 2023. Recruitment for an Operation/Administrative Intern continues with several prospects.

Our plan is to grow the DVS SOS grant program by utilizing the DVS WebGrants software to manage grants from solicitation through the end of the grant cycle. A leading-edge venture was the development, design, and implementation of the DVS's first WebGrants software upon which the software can be utilized by multiple service lines within DVS. SOS has also been able to use DVS staff and partners as Grant Evaluators for both community and research grants. This pooling of resources allows for a more robust examination of the strengths and weaknesses of each grant application. SOS staff have developed both a DVS Grant Writing training and a Grant Evaluator training to equip potential grantees as well as potential evaluators with the skills and

technical support that is needed to deliver the best possible grant application or grant evaluation.

SOS also has opportunities to offer DVS staff and partners a possibility to be Grant Evaluators for both community and research grants. This is important skill development and a resume building opportunity for DVS (and community stakeholders).

The SOS team seeks to do a deep dive into VDH data related to violent deaths (including suicide decedents) among SMVF in the Commonwealth in partnership with DBHDS. The process is one that will be intensive, but we hope to discover crucial data that will inform our outreach efforts and allow for more directed prevention, intervention, and postvention efforts.

**Successes:**

DVS moved rapidly to build a staff team and brand-new community and research grant program in the first year. The SOS grant program awarded over \$2.4 million dollars to 24 community services agencies and \$750,000 in research grants to public institutions of higher learning in the Commonwealth (please see Appendix 1 with detailed grantee descriptions) in FY23.

SOS grantees are providing diverse services to enhance and save lives including community training and education in suicide prevention and harm reduction supports; peer support and service animals to support trauma recovery; and developing, implementing, and/or evaluating clinical therapies for Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

The SOS team has also participated in extensive outreach and education activities including the following events for September Suicide Prevention Awareness and Recovery month at the Virginia War Memorial.

SafeTALK was presented to teach grantees and partners to recognize and engage persons who might be having thoughts of suicide and to connect them with community resources trained in suicide intervention. SafeTALK emphasizes safety while challenging taboos that stifle open dialogue about suicide.

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) was held with community partners, grantees, and DVS staff in attendance. The 2-day training program teaches participants how to identify individuals at risk and intervene with suicide first aid.

A virtual Recovery Day event was held in recognition of September being National Recovery month with presentations from State agencies (including Department of Corrections, DBHDS, VDH) on Veteran substance use (including opioid misuse) and data on overdose hospitalizations and deaths in Virginia.



The SOS team also designed a Suicide Prevention Symposium to provide networking, connection, and technical assistance and training opportunities to new grantees. Twelve grantees presented on their program services and participated in regional working groups to connect with Federal, State, and local partners to promote collaboration and closing gaps in services for SMVF.

The Program Director also spoke about SOS and Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide activities at the National AMVETS Convention in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in August 2023, before 5,000 veterans from all over the world, including Taiwan.

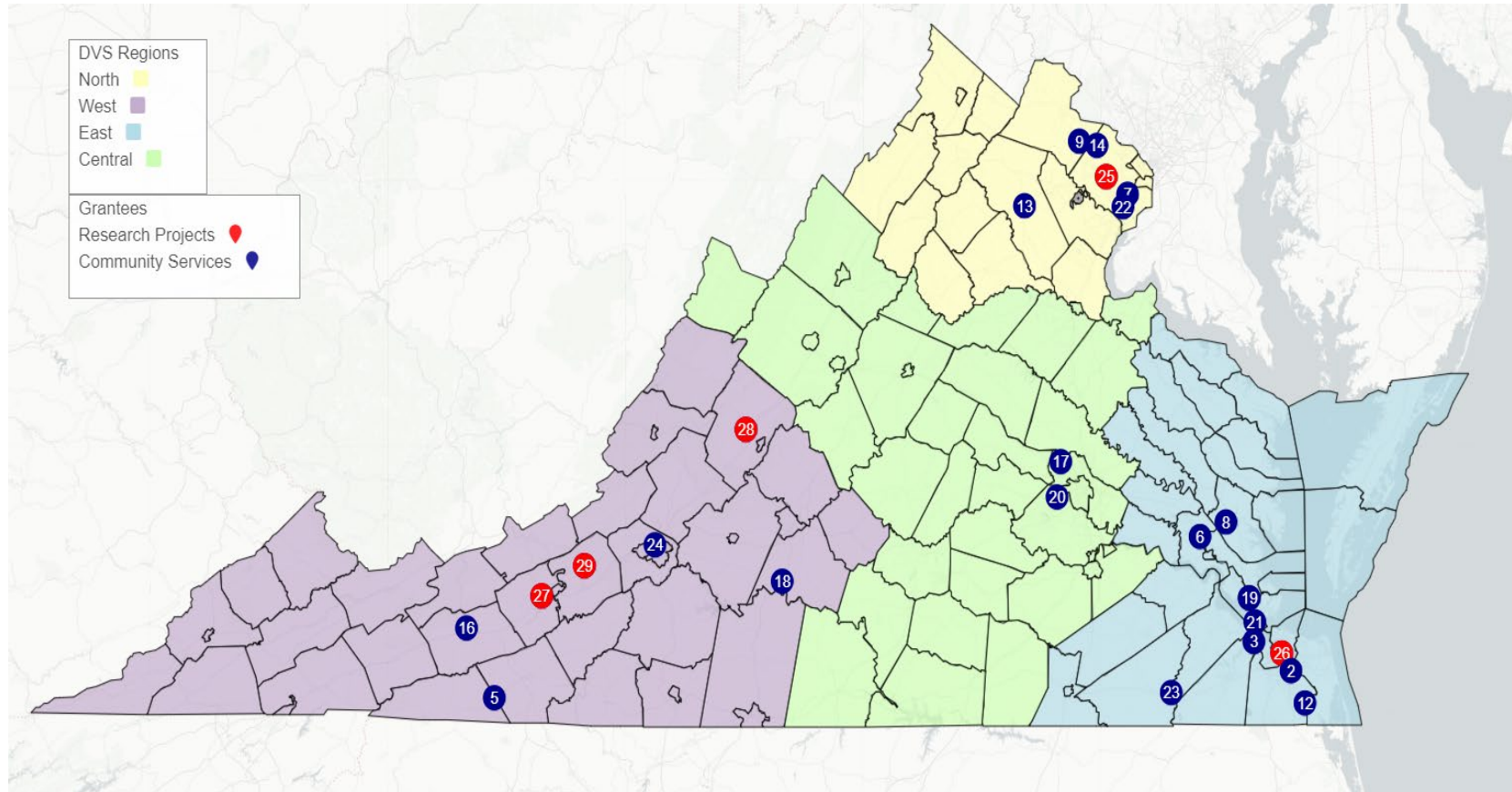
To help DVS lead the way for opioid overdose prevention, the SOS Team coordinated agency wide REVIVE training and certification and distribution of opioid overdose prevention/Naloxone kits to DVS staff to equip them to save the lives of veterans and other citizens of the commonwealth of Virginia. The program was able to get 98% of all DVS staff trained and certified with Naloxone kits in hand within its first 90 days.

The SOS Team regularly disseminates harm reduction items such as medication lock boxes, fentanyl test strips, and gun locks as part of harm reductions kits through their Lethal Means Harm Reduction and Outreach Program.

**SOS Grantee Reports:**

The data that is graphed below was extracted from the first quarterly monitoring reports for community grantees, for a total of 24 reports from September of 2023. 100% of community grantees submitted reports for the first quarterly reporting period. The research grantee reports are due December of 2023. As you can see from data displayed in the graph, approximately 2,095 veterans were assisted by grantees during this reporting period. During the first quarterly reporting period 19 veterans were hired by grantees using SOS grant funds.

# APPENDIX I



## MAP LEGEND

<b>Service Center Name</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Service Center Name</b>	<b>Number</b>
REBOOT Recovery	1	Mount Rogers CSB	16
Edge Clinical Services	2	Master Center for Addiction Medicine (MCAM)	17
Western Tidewater CSB	3	Stone Ridge Foundation	18
LivingWorks	4	Center for Child and Family Services, Inc.	19
Galax Treatment Centers/Acadia Healthcare VA Treatment Centers	5	Movers Development Centers, Inc.	20
Lighthouse Beacon Church/Beacon Institute	6	Recovering By Numbers, Inc.	21
Hope for the Warriors	7	IMend	22
The Hazel Gray Foundation	8	Zeno Wellness Group, LLC	23
Veterans Moving Forward	9	Virginia Treatment Center	24
Warrior Canine Connection	10	George Mason University	25
Objective Zero	11	Norfolk State University (NSU)	26
Trails of Purpose	12	New River Community College (NVCC)	27
Hero's Bridge	13	Virginia Military Institute (VMI)	28
Help Our Wounded (HOW) Foundation	14	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	29
Child and Family Services/The Up Center	15		

## APPENDIX II

### Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services

### FY23 Community / Research Grant Recipients

Award Recipient	Location	Number of SMVF Served	Award Amount	Grant Funded Service
COMMUNITY GRANTS				
REBOOT Recovery	York, Stafford, Prince George, Hampton, Hanover	62	\$75,000	The goal of this program to organize the “largest peer-led response to suicide ever built.” According to their application, REBOOT courses are currently held in 43 states and 11 countries.
Edge Clinical Services	Eastern and Western Regions of VA	8	\$100,000	The goal of this project would be to reduce the incidence of suicide and opioid addiction among SMVF populations in the eastern and western part of Virginia by providing culturally informed and tailored primary prevention-based strategies to homeless and incarcerated Veterans, especially in underserved areas.
Western Tidewater CSB	Eastern VA	0	\$125,000	The goal of this program is to provide screening, assessment, and weekly or biweekly treatment for up to 40 concurrent SMVF in an outpatient setting for substance use treatment. The applicant is utilizing DVS funds to also improve capacity for treatment of substance use disorders in the Eastern Region by up to 50 individuals per year.

LivingWorks	Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Staunton, Norfolk	23	\$100,000	The goal of this program is to strengthen the suicide prevention Network of Safety by training up to 5,560 SMVF members using best practice LivingWorks suicide awareness and intervention skills programs.
Galax Treatment Centers/Acadia Healthcare-VA Treatment Centers	Winchester City, Christiansburg, Cedar Bluff, Galax	15	\$124,968	The goal of this program is to screen and assess patients, develop individualized plans of care, share data at the clinic level and provide regular education for SMVF patients in addition to a Peer Recovery Support Specialist at each of their 4 clinics.
Lighthouse Beacon Church/Beacon Institute	Williamsburg, Hampton Road area	11	\$75,000	The goal of program is to train 48 individuals to become Peer Support specialists which they estimate will serve 432 within the SMVF community over the course of one year.
Hope for the Warriors (HOPE)	Springfield	38	\$100,000	The goal of HOPE seeks to expand its presence in Virginia where, since 2021, it has partnered with the Virginia Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Military Service Members, Veterans, and Families and uses VISR 2.0 to screen veterans throughout the state.
The Hazel Gray Foundation	Eastern VA, Hampton Roads	0	\$100,000	The goal of this program is to provide virtual individual and group psychotherapy for 8 to 12 eligible participants weekly for 90 minutes of intensive trauma recovery treatment with individual sessions scheduled as needed.
Veterans Moving Forward	Statewide	234	\$100,000	With this project, the goal is to acquire and train four additional service dogs, six additional therapy/facility dogs, and one additional emotional support dog.
Warrior Canine Connection	Statewide	9	\$125,000	The organization seeks support to expand its services to more Virginia Veterans through the Rappahannock

				Regional Veterans Docket held at the Spotsylvania Circuit Court, at Fort Belvoir, and in partnership with fellow nonprofit organizations such as Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).
Objective Zero	Statewide	369	\$75,000	Objective Zero's goal is to use DVS grant funds to expand, design, test, and implement a new feature that enables Objective Zero to better serve the SVMF community and enable them to better connect with peer support Pathfinders through an app.
Trails of Purpose	Hampton Roads and Eastern VA	53	\$125,000	Trails of Purpose goal is to (provide Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) that will address Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction by expanding the program's capacity to serve more SMVF and provide a deeper level of engagement with participants.
Hero's Bridge	Fauquier, Culpeper, Tappahannock, Madison	43	\$75,000	Hero's Bridge's goal is to utilize this funding to further expand the organization's virtual Battle Buddy program into the Northern and Central regions of Virginia. Battle Buddy seeks to connect older veterans over the age of 65.
Help Our Wounded (HOW) Foundation	Northern, Piedmont, Eastern, and Central VA	18	\$125,000	HOW's project goal to serve eight veterans impacted by TBI and PTSD with 20 daily 1-hour hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) treatments to decrease suicide ideation in SMVF by helping the brain recover from physical damage resulting from TBIs and PTSD.
Child and Family Services/The Up Center	Eastern Region	198	\$100,000	TUC MFC will use the funds to continue the work with post 9/11 Veterans, active-duty military personnel and families SMVF from all military branches of services who are at risk of suicide in the Hampton Roads region with

				the primary focus in the five cities of South Hampton Roads.
Mount Rogers CSB	Southwest VA	915	\$125,000	Mount Rogers' goal is to provide REVIVE! (Opioid overdose and Naloxone training) to community members, increasing the number of community members trained by 5% each year, with a minimum of 200 newly trained participants, and 2,400 medication deactivation kits to prevent the risk of medication misuse, Lock-and-Talk boxes, and Trigger Locks to SMVF and community stakeholders serving the target population.
Master Center for Addiction Medicine (MCAM)	Eastern and Central Region	40	\$125,000	Master Center will use the funds provided to 1.) Provide specialized care for SMVF in the Eastern and Central regions. They would host a weekly group therapy session specifically catered to member of the SMVF community. 2.) Open new access points in Norfolk and Virginia Beach. 3.) Hire Staff to meet the focused education and increased service needs
Stone Ridge Foundation/National Center for Healthy Vets	Richmond, VA	25	\$106,857	Stone Ridge Foundation will provide (1) virtual programs, (2) Topic-based classes followed by hands on coaching, (3) Counseling overseen by Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), (4) Speaking engagements to very large national training conferences (5) on-site and on-line small group sessions.
Center for Child and Family Services, Inc.	Newport News	7	\$125,000	CCFS will use individual assessments to develop individual treatment goals for each client and they will also use pre and post assessments to measure depression, suicide, and posttraumatic stress symptoms

				throughout the client’s duration of treatment evidence-based trauma treatments to include Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).
Movers Development Centers, Inc.	Richmond/Chesterfield	16	\$100,000	MDC proposes to provide services in four life domains to include: Intensive Program of Education and Guided Groups- 30 to 90 days, Monitored Residential Housing Program- 6 months to 2 years, Individual Therapy, Family Counseling, and reunification, Aftercare Follow-up.
Recovering By Numbers, Inc.	Newport News, Hampton, Chesapeake	7	\$100,000	RBN proposes to provide individual and family counseling for underserved groups within SMVF, specifically: 100 active service members and/or veterans, and at least one additional family member for a minimum of 200 served over 12 months.
IMend	Lorton, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, Arlington, Alexandria	0	\$75,000	IMend intends to use their award to fulfill several objectives including: 200 SMVF: Individual, couples, or family counseling, 50 SMVF: EMDR therapy, 100 SMVF: Training in crisis intervention and suicide prevention strategies, 500 SMVF: Psychoeducation sessions on mental health-related topics.
Zeno Wellness Group, LLC	Franklin, VA and East Region	5	\$100,000	Zeno Wellness Group (ZWG) aims to improve access to peer support services for service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF) and reduce rates of suicide, behavioral health needs, and substance use challenges (including opioid use) in the East region of Virginia.



Virginia Treatment Center	Lynchburg, Roanoke	7	\$100,000	VTC goal is to develop the staff training program specific to SMVF and suicide prevention; have at least one counselor at each facility attend training and receive Addiction Treatment in Military and Veteran Culture Certificate; they will conduct individual and group counseling sessions with SMVF; each clinic will have a case manager/behavioral health assistant designated to provide case management and care coordination services to SMVF.
<b>RESEARCH GRANTS</b>				
George Mason University (GMU)	Fairfax, VA	Report due 12/30/23	\$150,000	The primary purpose of the proposed study is the development and pilot testing of misuse of prescription drugs – demonstrating a clear link with suicide attempts and death by suicide
Norfolk State University (NSU)	Norfolk, VA	Report due 12/30/23	\$150,000	This research project is to examine the impact of belongingness and social support on cessation of suicidal ideation, plans, and behaviors among African American military veterans
New River Community College (NVCC)	Dublin, VA	Report due 12/30/23	\$150,000	This research grant is to develop a database of all veterans attending NRCC and living in the NRCC Region with the purpose of developing a contact list for checking on them and inviting them to events at the college
Virginia Military Institute (VMI)	Lexington, VA	Report due 12/30/23	\$150,000	The proposed research is “Veteran Suicide: Examining the Role of Active Duty and Post-Discharge Experiences,” and our purpose is to investigate key risk and protective factors of veteran suicide that have not been adequately researched to date.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Blacksburg, VA	Report due 12/30/23	\$150,000	This research proposes to gain a better understanding of the obstacles to care, we propose to study both individual factors (including but not limited to demographic variables such as military service history, and disability rating) as well as greater systemic factors (such as access, policies, geography) that may impact veterans' decision to seek mental health care, as well as suicide and substance use risk. Penn State and Yale are collaborators.
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# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

Daniel M. Gade, PhD  
Commissioner

Telephone: (804) 786-0220  
Fax: (804) 786-0302

October 1, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin  
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

The Honorable Craig Crenshaw  
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs

The Honorable Barry Knight  
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Janet Howell  
Co-Chair, Senate Finance and  
Appropriations Committee

The Honorable George Barker  
Co-Chair, Senate Finance and  
Appropriations Committee

### ***Delivered via electronic mail***

Re: 2023 Annual Report on the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Employment Grant Program

Dear Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Delegate Knight, Senator Howell, and Senator Barker:

The Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) creates employment opportunities for Virginia's veterans by educating and training employers to implement nationally-recognized best practices in recruiting, hiring, and retaining veterans. Over 3,000 private and public sector employers participate in the V3 Program, and V3 partners have hired more than 125,000 veterans to date.

The V3 Employment Grant Program was created to incentivize small to medium-sized V3 partners to hire and retain veterans. A V3 Certified employer with 300 or fewer employees can earn \$1,000 per Veteran hired and retained for one year, up to \$10,000 annually per company.

\$100,000 from the General Fund was appropriated in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) to support the grant program. An annual report on the V3 Grant Program is mandated by Chapter 2, 2022 Acts of Assembly Special Session I, Item 470A.4.

October 1, 2023

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In FY23, the V3 Employment Grant Program awarded \$108,000 to small and medium sized V3 Certified Employers; the remaining \$8,000 to cover 8 additional grants came from unspent salary due to staff turnover.

The table below details the number of applications approved, the number of grants awarded, and the total amount of grant funds disbursed in Fiscal Years 2019-2023.

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>Number of new applications approved</b>	92	85	117	75	108
<b>Number of grants awarded</b>	92	85	100	75	108
<b>Number of approved grants that could not be awarded in current FY</b>	0	0	17	0	0
<b>Available funding</b>	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
<b>Amount of grant funds disbursed</b>	\$92,000	\$85,000	\$100,000	\$92,000*	\$108,000
<b>Unspent amount</b>	\$8,000	\$15,000	\$0	\$8,000	\$0

\* Includes 17 grants (\$17,000) from prior FY.

Future initiatives to improve the V3 program are pending, but include integration into the Gold Standard Digital Hub project, including a searchable database to link job seekers with employers.

Please let me know if we may provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Daniel Gade, PhD.



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

Daniel M. Gade, PhD  
Commissioner

Telephone: (804) 786-0220  
Fax: (804) 786-0302

December 1, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin  
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Craig Crenshaw  
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable C. Todd Gilbert  
Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

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

### ***Delivered via electronic mail***

Re: 2023 Overview of the Activities of the Virginia Military Spouse Liaison

Dear Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Delegate Gilbert, and Senator Lucas:

The Code of Virginia, §2.2-2004 (18) directs that DVS provide an overview of the activities of the Military Spouse Liaison (MSL), as outlined in § 2.2-2002.2, including any legislative recommendations, on or before December 1 of each year to the Governor, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, and the General Assembly. Ms. Kayla LaFond serves as the Commonwealth's military spouse advocate in accordance with the Code of Virginia. In this role, the MSL collaborates with key stakeholders within federal, state, local government, military installations, and the private sector to develop and implement a resource system to provide access to employment, childcare, licensure, and community resources. The MSL is also responsible for outreach and provides advocacy for military families. The Military Spouse Liaison gives a voice to military spouses within the Commonwealth to make Virginia the most veteran and military spouse friendly state.

This year, one of the program's primary objectives was to establish partnerships to expand outreach to military spouses across the Commonwealth, informing them of all the services and

opportunities Virginia offers. These partners included veteran service organizations, employers, community leaders, military installations, and local, state, and federal agencies.

The second objective for the Milspouse program was to promote resources, referrals, and information available to military spouses at events, community engagement meetings, and one-on-one interactions. Areas of focus were childcare, licensure reciprocity, employment, and other spouse benefits.

Of the many activities and efforts conducted by the MSL this year, a few are highlighted here:

- The Milspouse program added two part-time Regional Military Spouse Liaisons to the team. Located in the North and Central Regions, the Regional MSLs assist the state MSL with presence at outreach events, identification of common trends and barriers of the spouse community within region, and other tasks as assigned. Due to the added positions, the milspouse team increased outreach by over 3,700 people and significantly increased the number of events attended across the Commonwealth. The Military Spouse newsletter distribution list began in April 2022 with less than 300 contacts and has almost doubled in total contacts with an average open rating of 48% at the end of the FY23.
- Collaborated with the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program and recorded a military spouse hiring webinar specifically for V3 certified employers to learn the importance of why and how to hire military spouses. The webinar has been taken by 42 V3 certified employers. The state MSL is exploring ways to establish a formal partnership between V3 and Hiring Our Heroes' Military Spouse Fellowship Program, which is a paid internship specifically for military spouses seeking full-time employment post-internships.
- The state MSL was a guest speaker at the Community Engagement Council meeting at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Fort Gregg-Adams Spouse Symposium, and the USS George H.W. Bush Family Readiness Group meetings. The Liaison provided an overview of the Military Spouse Initiative and overview of the DVS services and programs as they relate to the military spouse community. The MSL was a panelist for the first Blue Star Families Welcome Week EXPOs in Hampton Roads held at Langley AFB and Norfolk. The panel discussion was focused on employment, connecting to your new community, and other Virginia specific resources. The MSL team also provided a resource table for the 160 military spouses in attendance at the Welcome Week EXPOs.
- Secured a resource table for DVS at the MilspouseFest events in Arlington and Norfolk, which had over 200 military spouses in attendance combined. The team also had resource tables with other DVS service lines at the Norfolk Ombudsman Resource Fair, Ft. Gregg-Adams Transition Resource Fair, Naval Special Warfare Spouse Seminar, Ft. Gregg-Adams Spouse Club Super Sign-up, and Bourbiz DC Networking Event.
- Hosted four military spouse round table discussions with emphasis on military spouses (spouses of those currently serving), veteran spouses, and surviving spouses. Each round

Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Delegate Gilbert, and Senator Lucas  
December 1, 2023

table focused on a different demographic and had almost 100 spouses in attendance. This allowed for open conversation and comradery, along with insight to the barriers and needs of that specific cohort. The MSL also attended and provided resources at the virtual Town Hall with Virginia Delegate Kathy Tran and Military Spouse Roundtable with Chief of Navy Operations (CNO) spouse, Linda Gilday, in person on Naval Station Norfolk.

- Initiated the first cross-state agency “Purple Up Day” with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) on April 19, 2023, for Month of the Military Child. A banner with both logos was created by VDOE and both agencies joined together in the auditorium of the James Monroe Building with their respective Secretaries and First Lady Suzanne Youngkin.
- Participated in three working groups focused on childcare for military families. Two of these working groups are in the Hampton Roads region: Peninsula Military Childcare Working Group and Hampton Roads Military Advisory Council Childcare Subcommittee. The third working group brings together advocates, mostly military spouses, who are focused on improving the childcare situation for all military families regardless of where they are living.
- The MSL presented three legislative suggestions for FY23-24 to DVS leadership to include military spouse preference for state employment, verbiage changes regarding the definition of surviving spouse for the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP), and amendments to the Military Spouse Liaison section of the Code of Virginia. The Military Spouse Liaison also recommended Virginia to join licensure compacts to support the military-affiliated workforce who are not covered by the recent addition to the federal Servicemember Civil Relief Act (SCRA) regarding licensure reciprocity.

Please let me know if we may provide additional information.

Sincerely

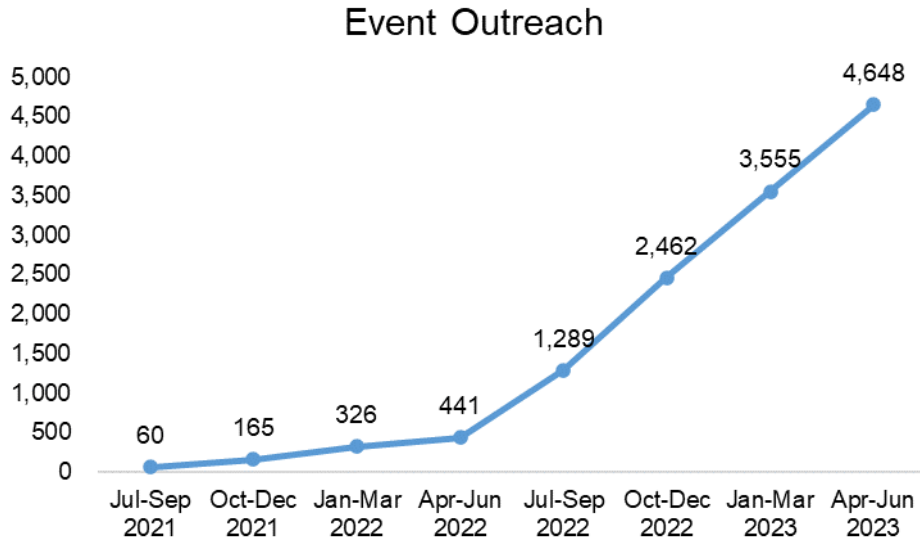


Daniel M. Gade, PhD

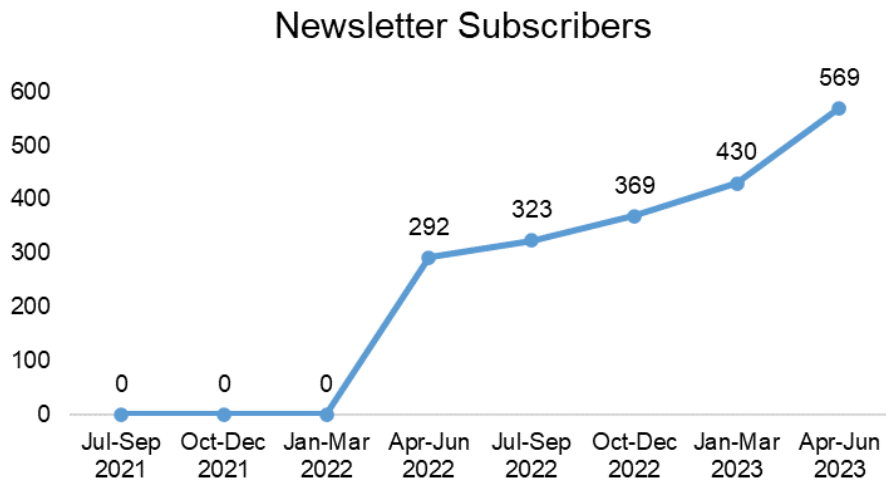
Cc: Mr. Michael Dick, Chairman, Board of Veterans Services  
Mr. Kevin Hoffman, Chair, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

## Appendix 1: Metrics

### Military Spouse Cumulative Metrics



*The first two years have been focused on building the milspouse program, connecting to key stakeholders, and establishing networks with Virginia military spouses.*



*First newsletter publication was sent in April 2022 for Month of the Military Child with a 35% open rating.*