

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2020

Mission

To work on behalf of Kentucky's veteran community and their families in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and nation.

Vision

Kentucky veterans, the men and women who served honorably on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces, will receive the highest quality of support and care involving the agency's nursing home services, burial services and honors, federal and state veteran benefits and also includes caring for our homeless and disabled veterans.

Values

Veteran centric, people oriented, forward leaning, commitment to excellence, problem solving, integrity, accountability, and collaborative

Strategic Goals

Deliver quality programs and services efficiently and effectively that meet the needs of the veteran community.

- Provide high quality advocacy for all Kentucky veterans and to increase the percentage of veterans in Kentucky who receive USDVA compensation and benefits the service member has earned.
- High quality, long term health care services are provided to veterans at the least possible cost to the state.
- Provide a dignified burial for veterans and their spouses/underage dependents.
- Reduce veteran homelessness in the state by focusing on veterans who are "at risk" of becoming homeless.
- Assist unemployed veterans with employment opportunities, such as identifying businesses wishing to hire veterans, coordinating job fairs, and providing job retraining programs.
- Providing services and outreach to women veterans acknowledging their service and addressing their unique needs.
- Focus on a strong partnership with the USDVA and participate in outreach activities that benefit Kentucky veterans.
- Satisfy customer needs externally and internally and enhance qualitative outcomes.
- Communicate effectively with the public about KDVA services.
- Maximize the recruitment and retention of a productive workforce.

Executive Summary

In 2017, Kentucky was home to 331,000 veterans. This is a sizeable portion and valued constituency of Kentucky's population. Commissioner Norman E. Arflack and Deputy Commissioner Heather French Henry lead the department. KDVA has 830 employees operating a central office, four long-term care facilities, four cemeteries, a Benefits branch, a homeless veterans program, a women veterans program, and a program focusing on veteran employment. The fifth cemetery in Leslie County, Kentucky is in the final stages of construction. The Kentucky Veterans Cemetery Southeast is expected to be dedicated and fully staffed by March 2018.

Programs

***Commissioner's Office** is dedicated to advancing the mission, implementing the agency's vision and adhering to its values. The Commissioner's Office in Frankfort consists of a Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Director of the State Veterans' Homes, Staff Attorney, Fiscal Manager, Human Resources Manager, Public Information Officer, the Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator, a Women Veterans Program Coordinator, a Division Director each for Cemeteries and Field Operations (Benefits) plus a newly hired Veterans Employment Coordinator. These individuals provide department-wide support.

A full time Veterans Employment Coordinator position was established in 2017. The coordinator maintains a database of employers seeking to hire veterans, veterans seeking employment, and uses a skills-based program to match employers with veterans. An effort to broaden the program, increase the partnerships with entities such as the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and advertise our services to the veteran population are continuing with an official launch campaign slated for November 2017.

***Cemeteries** inter both casketed and cremated remains with a dignified burial service and full military honors of all veterans. Eligible dependents (spouses and dependent children) of veterans and active duty service men and women are also interred at Kentucky's State Veterans Cemeteries. The costs to build the state veteran cemetery are borne by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Maintenance and daily operations costs are absorbed by the state budget. Beginning federal FY 2013, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) contributed \$745 for each veteran interred at the cemeteries. KDVA asks for \$500 for the interment of eligible dependents of veterans or active service members.

KDVA helps provide military funeral honors to all veterans by funding the Burial Honors Program, which gives a small stipend to Veterans Service Organizations for performing honors. The program costs \$160,000 annually to operate. The department also supports an Indigent Veterans Burial Program, providing funds to help cover the cost of funeral arrangements for indigent veterans.

A fifth cemetery is currently under construction and is scheduled to be fully operational in early 2018.

***Field Operations** staff assists veterans and their families throughout the state in obtaining federal and state benefits they have earned. In 2006, the Governor and Kentucky General Assembly set into statute a minimum staffing level of five (5) Veterans Benefits Regional Administrators and twenty (20) Veterans Benefits Field Representatives. Field Representatives are located strategically throughout the Commonwealth to ensure that veterans in every county have the opportunity to meet personally with a representative. These meetings help to ensure that veterans and their families, in Kentucky, receive the compensation and pension they earned for their active duty service and made aware of the federal and state programs for which they qualify, including VA healthcare.

In 2011, Field Operations implemented the eVet Assist case management program which allows the veteran in Kentucky to file his or her service connected claim electronically at the state level rather than through burdensome, repetitive paperwork. As of 2016, the KDVA Benefits Branch is now second in the nation in electronic submission of digital claims. This creates a more efficient and expeditious claim process. In 2017, the branch implemented an Appeals Management position that has been responsible for working on the backlog of appeals at the federal level. The appeals are being evaluated for quality, completeness, accuracy, relevance, and validity. In 2017, KDVA Benefits Branch employees received certification training from the US Department of Veterans Affairs for participation in the new national pilot program, Decision Ready Claim (DRC). This program allows a fully-developed, ready-to-rate claim to be submitted through an online portal, dedicated to the DRC process, in hopes of reducing the review period from four to six months to less than 30 days.

KDVA Benefits Branch also assists Veterans Service Organizations in training their service officers to ensure that veterans who seek help from these organizations receive quality guidance and representation.

***Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers** provide long-term health care for honorably discharged veterans in Wilmore, Hazard, Hanson, and Radcliff. Medicaid/Medicare now covers eligible veterans in the homes. Kentucky is currently allotted 813 beds for USDVA per diem funding. In 2017, the Kentucky Legislature awarded matching funds for the development of a fifth state nursing home for veterans in Bowling Green with a capacity for 90 residents. The project will be funded through a federal matching grant for state home construction with the USDVA providing 65% and the state providing 35% of the total cost of construction. Bowling Green was selected as the area with the greatest level of current and future need for long-term care by an independent feasibility study.

Veteran residents are typically disabled, suffer from dementia, or frail in need of long term care. The veterans' homes provide health and psychosocial services such as nursing, rehabilitative therapies, therapeutic activities, social services, medical and administrative staff. When veterans are cared for in a state veterans' home, they are eligible for USDVA funding. This funding pays about 40% of the cost of care, making OKVC a cost-effective care provider; the same funding would not be available to veterans residing in community nursing homes. The homes also provide electronic health records.

In the past year, the Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers has continued to struggle to recruit and retain medical staff, specifically licensed nurses. The efforts to improve the staffing levels at each facility are continual. We are now able to utilize independent contractors to fulfill our need for licensed nurses, but additional and creative solutions are needed.

In 2017, an amendment to 17 KAR 3:010 was made to established a tiered rate structure for private pay residents within the state veteran homes. The regulation now defines the various types of rooms and accommodations (e.g. semi-private, private, suite) within each of our four nursing homes and establishes a private pay rate accordingly. With the newly established rate structure, the Department will look at ways to reduce the number of semi-private rooms at our older facilities, specifically Thomson Hood, to create a more home-like environment for the residents who desire a private room.

Conclusion

KDVA employees are immensely devoted and firmly committed to serving those who have served our nation. The mission, vision, and values of our organization are clearly reflected within each organizational division. We have worked long and hard to establish ourselves within the communities we serve and to

brand our organization as one of high standards with great expectations of its employees. We are committed to preserving the integrity that we so diligently worked to attain and consistently strive to uphold, and sustain the high level of care and quality of life services that our staff provides and our veterans deserve.