

STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS – AGENCY NO. 074

ORIGINATION DATE: OCTOBER 2016/REVISION DATE: SEPTEMBER 2018

Goal 1: 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.

Objective: Improve the percentage of Fully Developed Claims (FDC) to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (USDVA) to a rate of at least 30% in FY18.

Update: With the advent of the new VetraSpec case management system in January of 2018, continued monthly training, and new Benefits Branch schedules in the field, KDVA has increased productivity of filing claims, documents, and reports to 34%, up from the previous year.

Goal 2: To provide first class, high quality, long term health care services to veteran residents of KDVA nursing facilities in a manner that is judicious of state supported funds.

Objective: Increase mental health services for veteran residents receiving long term care at KDVA homes. Medicaid program has been implemented at the homes as of July 1, 2014, progress from the previous strategic progress plan report. Electronic health records have also become a reality in KDVA veteran homes, which should improve the delivery of care due to the integration and legibility of a resident's medical records. Anticipation date opening fourth nursing home in Radcliffe will be September 2015.

Update: All State Veterans Centers have contracts for mental health services. Thomson-Hood Veterans Center is piloting a program by hiring an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) with a mental health background. This reduces travel for the veteran and allows for expanded on site services. Western Kentucky Veterans Centers is in the process of entering into a shared services agreement with the VA for tele-mental health services in the Community Based Outpatient Clinic located in the facility. Full implementation of the Electronic Health Record (EHR) is nearing completion (2019) the basic modules were implemented in 2014/2015 but due to infrastructure issues, full implementation was delayed. The fourth State Veterans Home opened in March of 2017 and is in the process of admitting veterans. An application for a fifth facility, a 90-bed facility in Bowling Green Kentucky is pending approval by the VA. All facilities have developed a Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement system that provides tools and consistent methodology to identify opportunities for performance improvement in the facility. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) currently rates two facilities as five star facilities (highest rating) and one is rated as a four star facility. The scale is from one to five stars. Due to its recent opening, the fourth facility is not yet eligible to receive a rating.

Goal 3: Provide a dignified burial for veterans, their spouses, and dependent children.

Objective: KDVA provide quality services by maintaining the utmost care of the veterans' cemeteries and working with families during a time of duress to facilitate the loss of a loved one.

Update: In FY18, there were 1,339 veteran/dependent burials in our Veteran Cemeteries. This is an increase from FY16, in which there were 1,252 veteran/dependent burials. Federal VA per diem for veteran burial is presently capped at \$762, a slight increase from \$747 in FY2016.

The KY Veteran Cemetery Southeast officially opened in April of FY2018, providing burial spaces for veterans in Southeastern Kentucky.

Goal 4: Reduce veteran homelessness in the state by focusing on veterans who are “at risk” of becoming homeless.

Objective: Assist “at risk” veterans with a once in a lifetime small donation for assistance with rent, essential utilities (electricity, gas, water), or security deposits. Assists veterans with substance, alcohol, or mental health issues or addictions to find suitable programming for rehabilitation and transitional living.

Update: In 2018 the homeless veteran count (according to the K-count by KY Housing Corporation) was 369; down from 489 reported in 2017. In FY2018 the Homeless Veteran/Outreach Program assisted 338 veterans with in the total amount of \$74,162.61. KDVA partnered with several other organizations in a major city to focus on renovating at least one abandoned home per year to benefit a homeless veteran family. One such home was completed in the fall of 2017 and another began in the summer of 2018. KDVA implemented a program to provide outreach to all newly discharged veterans in the state to inform them of programs and departments to contact for assistance. This initiative assists the veterans with a seamless transition to civilian life to prevent homelessness and/or financial hardship in the future. The Homeless Veteran Coordinator mailed over 3,400 packets to newly discharged veterans in FY2018.

Goal 5: Assist unemployed veterans with employment opportunities, identify businesses wishing to hire veterans, coordinate job fairs, and provide job retraining programs.

Objective: Establish a full time Veterans Employment Coordinator position to assist Kentucky’s unemployed veterans with employment opportunities, identify businesses wishing to hire veterans, coordinate job fairs, and provide job retraining programs.

Update: In 2017, a full time Veterans Employment Coordinator position was established. 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. In November 2017, KDVA officially launched Kentucky Veterans Employment, Training, and Support (KyVETS) program to provide resources and support to assist veterans across the commonwealth in gainful employment and training services. The KyVETS program director maintains a database of Kentucky veterans seeking employment. This database includes only those Kentucky veterans who have volunteered their information to KDVA. The information in this database is strictly confidential. The database is used to match employment-seeking veterans with veteran-seeking employers. In 2017, KDVA also partnered with the Kentucky National Guard in the creation of the HireKy App. This app allows job seekers to register, upload their contact information, allows them to look for a job and request other services. Businesses are also able to register and join the list of businesses using the HireKY app to post job openings. The HireKY app is available from the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store. Through this app and in partnership with the Kentucky National Guard, we offer free services to Veterans and Service Members in which we help link them up with potential employers.

Goal 6: Providing services and outreach to women veterans acknowledging their service and addressing their unique needs

Objective: Create a strong network of women veterans in Kentucky and ensure Kentucky's women veterans have equitable access to federal and state veterans' services and benefits.

Update: The KDVA Women Veterans Coordinator successfully completed 1 of 4 planned Women Veterans lunch and learns. She also planned and executed a special project for recognition of women veterans at the 2018 KY Oaks and Derby. KDVA also partnered with Lauren Pachel-Newburg VAMC Women Health Coordinator to assist with military gear demonstrations as well as discussed the post-deployment care for OEF/OIF/OND women Veterans. On 10 November 2018, a female Navy Veteran was welcomed to her newly renovated home in Louisville, KY. A coalition of dozens of unions, community groups, companies, state and local agencies and volunteers renovated the house. The KDVA Outreach Coordinator recommended this female veteran for the project.

Goal 7: Focus on a strong partnership with the USDVA and participate in outreach activities that benefit Kentucky veterans.

Objective: Build and foster a relationship with VISN-9, VA Lexington and Louisville hospitals mental health team. This partnership is designed to improve mental health services overall for veterans in Kentucky. For example, expanding USDVA tele-mental health access in rural areas by using state facilities. KDVA also works closely with the VARO Louisville office, which helps to expedite certain claims. Finally, VA has agreed to collaborate with the state veteran nursing homes to improve mental health services for veteran residents.

Update: Benefits Branch represented KDVA at the 2018 Kentucky State Fair from 16-26 August 2018. Provided information, assistance and recently updated brochures with new information regarding claims, appeals, and other programs within the KDVA. Those programs include, Women Veteran Programming, Homeless Veteran programming, Veteran Treatment Center information and Veteran State Cemetery information.

During the summer of 2018, Veterans Benefits Field Representatives conducted numerous community outreach events at seasonal local events throughout the state, to include festivals and fairs to reach out to veterans and families. This also included interaction with local civic leaders as well. The Benefits Branch also prepared for upcoming local Homeless Veterans Stand Downs in Louisville, Cold Springs, and Richmond, KY. The Branch's leadership met monthly with the Federal VA Regional Office managers and VA RO director to review updates on new programming, policy, procedures and to enhance working relationships between the two organizations.

Goal 8: Satisfy customer needs and enhance qualitative outcomes.

Objective: Implement process improvements to increase productivity, veteran benefits outcomes, and customer experience.

Update: The use of the digital case management system ensures quick processing of veterans claims into the Federal level system. KDVA has one of the highest successful digital claims filing percentages in the nation. According to the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA), the KDVA was number 2 in the nation in FY18.

Goal 9: Communicate effectively with the public about KDVA services.

Objective: Improve public knowledge of KDVA's services and programs.

Update: In FY18, the KDVA Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, and Veterans Benefits Field Representatives attended scores of public events and activates highlighting KDVA's services and programs.

In the first half of the FY, the KDVA Public Information Officer composed, edited, and posted 60 articles, blogs, and notices of events on KDVA's Face Book page and completed an update and publication of the department's Benefits Booklet and Brochure. And, in the last 2 months of the FY, she composed, edited, and distributed no less than 27 public releases of information via the KDVA email List Server. In addition, KDVA completed a comprehensive update of the department's website.

Goal 10: Maximize the recruitment and retention of a productive workforce.

Objective: Attract, screen, and select qualified people for a positions within KDVA. Reduce turnover and improve retention of employees.

Update: At the end of FY18, KDVA experienced a significant shortfall in skilled nursing staff in the Radcliff Veterans Center in Wilmore, KY and in the Thompson-Hood Veterans Center in Radcliff, KY. These shortages are the result of noncompetitive pay as compared to the Louisville and Lexington hospitals and health care facilities.