



# Annual Report

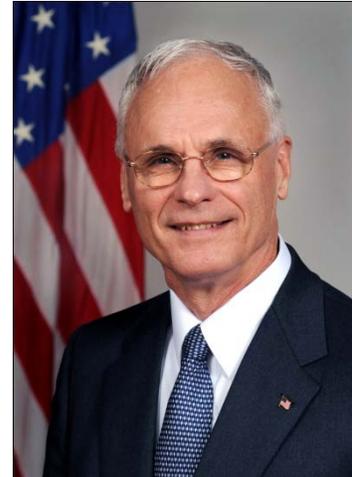
Fiscal Year 2011

August 1, 2011

Governor Kasich and Secretary Husted,

I am honored to lead the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, and to present to you this Annual Report which chronicles our responsibilities and the actions we are undertaking on behalf of Ohio's veterans.

Our state has always been a leader in answering the call for our nation's defense. The more than 890,000 veterans who live in Ohio are a testament to that legacy. More are joining their ranks each day as Ohioans return home from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan or from a term of active military service. We believe we have a sacred trust to do our utmost for those who have guaranteed our freedoms.



The department's mission is "To actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans & their families." Our goal is to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits they have earned from both the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the State of Ohio. In turn, this is a great economic engine for our state – for example, the VA spent over \$5.2 billion in Ohio in 2010, with nearly \$1.4 billion of that total going to direct compensation to veterans.

This Annual Report will give you a clear picture of how we are accomplishing this vital mission. I look forward enthusiastically to working together to maintain Ohio as a place that veterans of all eras and their families are proud to call home.

Sincerely,



Thomas N. Moe

Director

Ohio Department of Veterans Services



## INTRODUCTION

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) was created as a Cabinet-level agency on August 21, 2008, by Senate Bill 289 of the 127<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly.

The mission of the ODVS is to actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans and their families. Senate Bill 289 defined the mission and gave the department the responsibility to work directly with the county veterans service officers (CVSOs) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as well as with the various veterans service organizations and other concerned associations.

## HISTORY

The department grew out of the 1990s-era Governor's Office of Veterans Affairs (GOVA). This organization, working with Ohio legislators, formulated basic changes to laws which began the process of standardizing the operations of the 88 CVSOs, entities which were created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to care for Civil War veterans.

In 2006, a study published by the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) provided a major impetus toward the department's formation. The study said that Ohio was 50<sup>th</sup> in terms of the per capita dollar amount that veterans in the state received in compensation from the VA. Shortly after, Gov. Ted Strickland convened a study commission of veterans organizations that unanimously recommended the formation of the department. A bill sponsored by Sen. Robert Spada passed with bipartisan support, and the department was born.

Former state legislator and Korean War-era veteran Bill Hartnett was named by Governor Strickland as the first director of ODVS. In January 2011, Governor John Kasich selected Tom Moe, a retired Air Force Colonel who was held five years as a POW in North Vietnam, to be the second ODVS Director.



When the department was created in August 2008, it assumed responsibility for the Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH). The homes provide direct nursing home care at facilities in Sandusky and Georgetown, as well as domiciliary living to qualified veterans in Sandusky. The Sandusky home opened in 1888 to care for veterans of the Civil War. The home in Georgetown is much newer, having opened in 2003.

Both homes and the domiciliary are open to honorably discharged veterans of periods of armed conflicts who are or were Ohio residents for at least one year during their lifetime. These veterans must also be infirm or disabled and incapable of earning a living. Each home offers standard nursing home care as well as special care for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. There are a total of 767 beds maintained between the two homes. The Sandusky home provides 427 nursing home beds and an additional 293 domiciliary or "DOM" beds, while Georgetown offers 147 nursing home beds, including 21 dedicated hospice beds. An Ohio Department of Aging survey early in 2011 ranked both homes in the top 15 percent of 1,000 nursing homes in Ohio in terms of family member satisfaction for the care their loved ones receive. Both homes were also recognized in 2010 for their high level of care by both the Ohio Department of Health and the VA.

It has long been recognized that education is vital for significant employment, and the department assumed responsibility for veterans' education when it gained Cabinet-level status. The department serves as the Ohio agent for the federally-funded Troops to Teachers and State Approving Agency programs. Troops to Teachers assists veterans in obtaining teaching certificates and provides counseling and mentoring to place them in high-needs schools, not only to teach, but to serve as positive role models. The role of the State Approving Agency is to evaluate and approve institutions and academic programs to educate veterans through the Montgomery GI Bill and Post-9/11 GI Bill programs. In 2010, the VA spent over \$211 million combined in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation, employment and education. This represents an increase of \$100 million from 2009 spending.



## EXECUTION

The department carries out its mission by the following major priorities and programs:

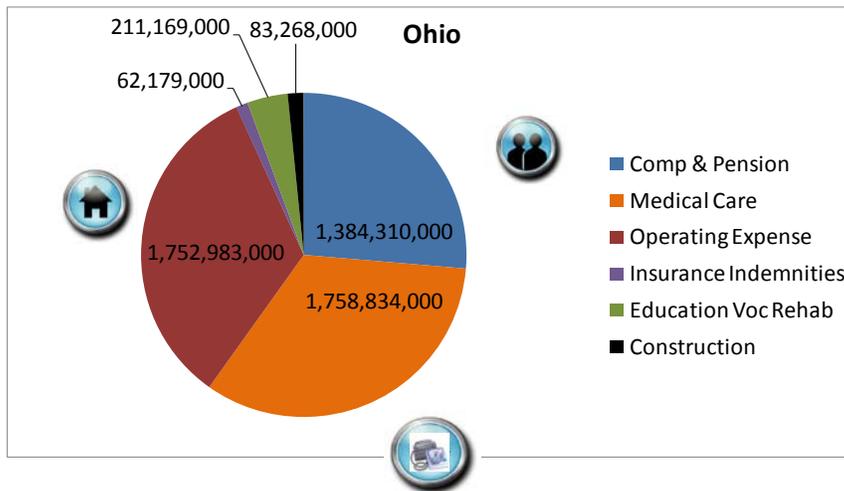
- Conducts outreach to veterans and provides training and oversight to the 88 CVSOs.
- Coordinates programs and operations with the VA, which provides benefits to Ohio veterans.
- Works with the Ohio General Assembly and Congressional representatives to craft legislation in support of veterans and their families at the state and federal levels.
- Administers the Ohio Veterans Bonus for veterans of the Persian Gulf War era and post-9/11 era conflicts, a program which is funded by bonds approved by Ohio voters.
- Operates the Ohio Veterans Homes in Sandusky and Georgetown which are open to Ohio-resident veterans who served in periods of armed conflicts.
- Manages two federal education-related programs: Troops to Teachers and the State Approving Agency.
- Hosts several veterans' ceremonies each year including the Governor's wreath-laying ceremony for Ohio's killed in action and the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame.
- Maintains custodianship of over 1.9 million veterans' records dating back to World War II.

## ECONOMIC PROFILE

The success of ODVS in accomplishing its mission directly impacts the economic health of Ohio. Most of the benefits received by veterans originate at the federal level with the VA. These benefits are comprised of compensation for injuries, health care, educational assistance, home loans and many other programs provided by the VA. In 2010, the VA spent over \$5.2 billion in Ohio, an increase of \$875 million from the previous year. These dollars directly benefited not only Ohio veterans but the state's local communities and colleges as well.

The composition of VA funds brought to Ohio is shown in the chart below:

## What Makes Up The 5.2 Billion

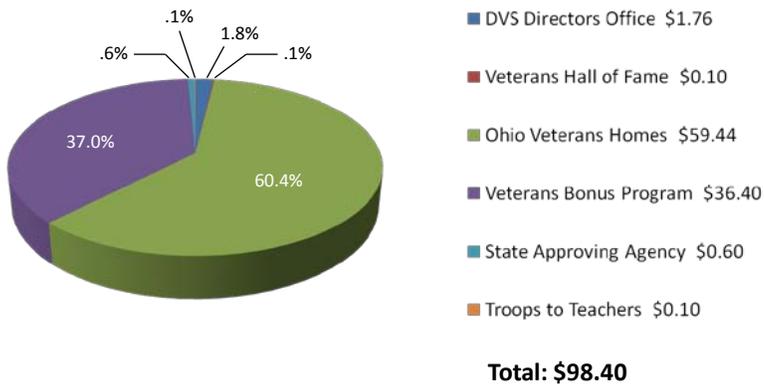


\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDG) Report 2010

The department spent a total of \$98.4 million in fiscal year 2011 on all programs with funding from four major sources, as shown in the charts on the following page:

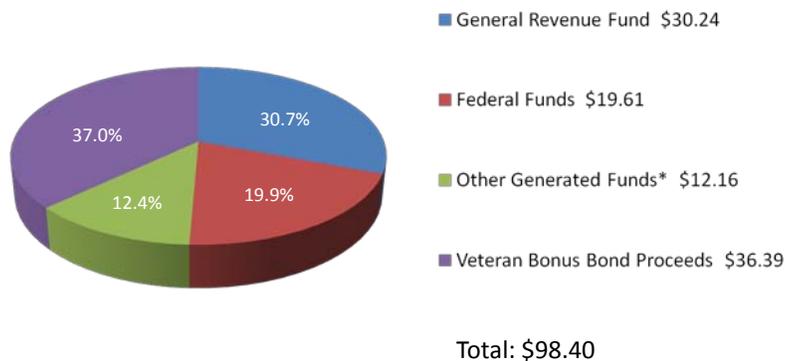
## Expenditures by Program

(figures in millions)



## Expenditures by Funding Source

(figures in millions)



\* Includes OVH resident assessments, hospice care reimbursements, and rental income.



ODVS was not immune from the belt-tightening necessary in state government. A number of positions in the Columbus main office were consolidated or not filled and the marketing budget was scaled back by a third, positioning the department to enter fiscal year 2012 in a position of strength to capitalize on the gains made during the previous 12 months.

A program administered directly by the department that provides a tangible benefit to veterans and their families and communities is the Ohio Veterans Bonus. Ohio voters overwhelmingly approved the bonus in November 2009, and in August 2010 the department launched the program statewide. The bonus is funded by the sale of bonds and provides direct payments to Ohio resident veterans of the periods of the Persian Gulf War and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. A rule change recommended by the department in June 2011 protects the privacy of bonus applications and supporting documents.

The Ohio Veterans Bonus continues a tradition of awarding bonuses to Ohio veterans that dates back to the Civil War. The payment is \$100 a month to veterans who served during the eligible periods in the Persian Gulf theater, or in the Iraq or Afghanistan theaters, up to a maximum of \$1,000. For veterans who served in other parts of the world during these times, the payment is \$50 a month up to a \$500 maximum. Veterans medically discharged as a result of combat service can receive \$1,000, regardless of how much time they spent in theater, plus up to \$500 for months of service elsewhere. Family members of those killed in action or who died from disease as a result of their in-theater service can receive a bonus of \$5,000 plus whatever the service member was eligible for, up to a total of \$6,500.



By the end of the fiscal year, the program had paid over \$35 million to more than 43,000 Ohio veterans and families. The bonus statistics as of June 30, 2011 are shown below:

| Ohio Veterans Bonus, FY 2011 |                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Total applications received  | 49,531              |
| Total approved payments      | 43,135              |
| Total amount paid            | <b>\$35,047,997</b> |

Throughout the fiscal year, the Ohio Veterans Homes continued providing a nationally-recognized quality of care for veterans, at a reasonable cost to both them and their families as well as to taxpayers. The table below measures the principal workload of the OVH in fiscal year 2011:

| Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH), FY 2011, Residents Served |          |            |              |
|--|----------|------------|--------------|
|  | Sandusky | Georgetown | Total        |
| Nursing home (standard and special care)             | 677      | 184        | 861          |
| Hospice unit   |          | 13         | 13           |
| Domiciliary  | 185      |            | 232          |
|  |          |            | <b>1,106</b> |



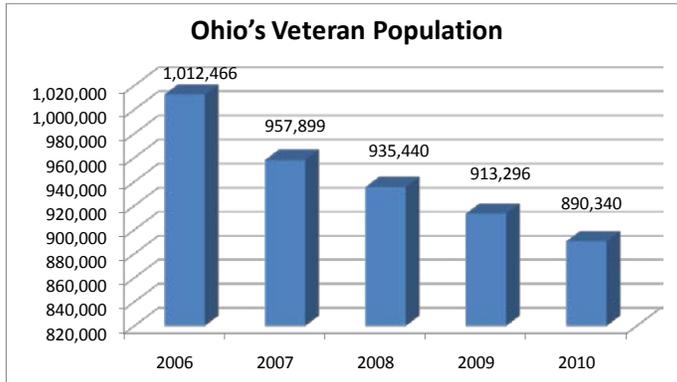
The OVH have also helped stretch state dollars by pioneering several cost-saving strategies. As examples:

- The state Rehabilitation Services Commission became a tenant at the Sandusky facility in April; this arrangement saves the commission and more than \$50,000 a year and keeps state dollars in-house.
- Also in April, OVH entered into a three-year discounted power agreement with American Electric Power in Sandusky that is projected to save \$150,000 each year.
- DVS also worked with the Department of Administrative Services to purchase from federal VA procurement contracts rather than state contracts, saving additional dollars.

The most significant cost-savings activity, however, took place in January with the opening of a hospice wing at Georgetown through a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership with Stein Hospice, a non-profit service provider. Three of four wings at Georgetown were occupied soon after it opened. The fourth and final wing opened in January as a hospice unit that consists of 21 individual rooms and beds – and at no additional cost in General Revenue Funds. Stein is able to provide the care in this wing by drawing from Medicare and philanthropic funds that their non-profit status qualifies them for. The hospice wing is also providing new jobs in the Georgetown area.

## **PROFILE OF VETERANS IN OHIO**

The VA estimates the veteran population in Ohio, as of 2010, to be over 890,000, the sixth-largest in the country. A graphic of the state's population is shown below. The overall number of veterans will likely continue to decrease as veterans from World War II and Korea pass away, but there is a sizable community of Vietnam veterans in the state and the current generation of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans continues to grow.



\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2006 -2010

## THE DEPARTMENT'S MAIN CHALLENGE

The mission of finding and connecting our veterans to their benefits is made particularly challenging since veterans of all eras often don't realize they might qualify for benefits. For example, a veteran who injured his shoulder on an airborne jump 40 years ago and has since healed, could be eligible for compensation today if the injury developed into arthritis. Often we have trouble even identifying where our veterans live or even who they are.

Once veterans are identified, the place to connect them to their benefits is the veterans service office in each county. This is a local entity controlled by the county veterans service commission whose members are nominated by veterans service organizations and appointed by a county common pleas judge. The department trains and then certifies these commissioners and can decertify them.

The county veterans service offices help veterans apply for the benefits they've earned and also provide them with direct financial assistance when necessary. Historically, veterans receive about 40 percent more of the federal benefits they've earned when they have help applying for them.



From the time ODVS was created in 2008, it has maintained a continual focus on its principal mission of finding veterans and getting them connected to benefits they have earned. Since the 2006 IDA study ranked Ohio 50<sup>th</sup> in terms of the per capita dollar amount that veterans in the state received in compensation from the VA, the state has climbed seven places to be ranked 43<sup>rd</sup>.

All members of the department realize that there is still a long way to go before Ohio's veterans are truly connected commensurate with the size of their population's contribution to the nation. In all actions, ODVS is guided by the words spoken by Abraham Lincoln and enshrined in the rotunda of the Ohio State House – "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and his widow and his orphan."

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Fiscal Year 2011 saw the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) make significant strides forward in its principal mission to actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans and their families while also consolidating itself as a state agency and implementing significant savings in its operations.

The department had to first fundamentally update and greatly improve its communication and outreach for veterans to connect to the place in their community where they can apply for benefits--their local county veterans service office (CVSO).

ODVS established a toll-free number, 1-877-OHIO-VET, that provides numbers for each county once the first four letters of the county are entered. The department's web site, [dvs.ohio.gov](http://dvs.ohio.gov), also gives contact information and links to the CVSO web sites. We discovered that 47 CVSOs had no web presence at all. This resulted with a project in February to provide a generic contact page for those county offices on the ODVS web site and provide a unique page that can be integrated into the main county site. To date all but 12 CVSOs now have an effective web presence.



Outreach efforts were aimed at creating brand recognition, through posters and table tents distributed to counties and a presence at targeted events, for the toll-free number and the slogan, "Your service may be worth more than you think." Outreach efforts were then expanded in April to include a statewide radio campaign to make veterans aware of the benefits they've earned and later, to specifically promote the Ohio Veterans Bonus for Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq-era veterans.

Because of the popularity of social media among younger and even many older veterans, in April the department launched a Facebook page linked to a Twitter account as well as Flickr photo and You Tube video sites. Included with this package was an e-mail registration for veterans to receive a monthly newsletter of the most significant items of information that veterans need to know. Further outreach occurred with the employment of online advertising on Yahoo and the Military Times web sites.

ODVS also established a partnership with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to gather names and addresses of persons who self-identify as veterans when asked by a deputy registrar at the time they renew their driver's license. The department continues to explore a number of options to most effectively market to the persons in this data base at the most reasonable cost.

The goal of all marketing efforts was to drive veterans to their local CVSOs where they could learn about, and apply, for all the federal and state benefits they're qualified for. It is thus vitally important that the county veterans service officers are properly trained to provide this assistance.

ODVS, in conjunction with the Ohio Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, offers training and certification to county veterans service officers, and also trains and certifies the county veterans service commissioners who supervise the county offices. The department meets quarterly with all veterans service officers and conducts annual refresher training on a small-group level, by region or district. This annual training includes any federal or state benefit changes,



so that the county officers are prepared to answer questions and properly prepare claims applications. A major milestone was passed in March when the department implemented a five-year recertification testing for all of the county veterans service officers.

The five largest veterans service organizations (VSOs) in Ohio, most recently the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) in March, have all certified the training offered by the department. This is an important broadening of service to veterans. The DAV and other VSOs have representatives at the Cleveland VA Regional Office, where claims generated in Ohio are submitted. These VSO representatives receive claims filed by the county veterans service officers in which individual veterans have designated the VSO to advocate the claim on their (the veterans) behalf. This enables ODVS, and the county veterans service officers the department has trained, to become advocates for claims filed through the VSO's. Accredited county veterans service officers can now view and track these claims on both the VA's online and telephone systems and provide more efficient claims service to veterans.

The department undertook a major initiative at the beginning of the fiscal year to strengthen the lines of communications with the VA to improve the quality of service to veterans by assigning a liaison officer to the Cleveland VA Regional Office. This person monitors claims and identifies problems. We then work to resolve these problems by directly coordinating with the CVSOs who originated the claims and the VSOs who are advocating for the claims, which to date has allowed for the expediting of numerous claims. The liaison officer also provides helpful feedback on operational changes to the VA system, which helps ODVS develop the best practices to more effectively serve veterans and maximize the benefits they receive.

## **LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY**

In the policy arena, ODVS was active in working with sponsors to assist in crafting a number of laws that benefit veterans in the state. Chief among these was House Bill 121,

concerning military parents and child custody, which Governor Kasich signed into law in June.

The bill:

- directs that courts may no longer find that past, present, or possible future active military service is considered a change in circumstances that justifies modifying existing custody orders;
- allows military parents to delegate their visitation rights to a relative or other person with a substantial relationship with the child;
- requires the other parent to facilitate contact between the child and the military parent; and mandates that the military parent who seeks temporary parenting time to notify the other parent and apply to the court as soon as reasonably possible.

The department was also successful in inserting an amendment to House Bill 153, the biennial budget bill enacted in June, that protects veterans preference on civil service exams. The amendment explicitly states that veterans are “entitled” to preference on the exams and removed the provision that would have unfairly singled out veterans by listing their passing score and extra credit separately.

The sacrifice of veterans was remembered in House Bill 65, enacted in June, which names portions of highways for 25 fallen service members and three Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. ODVS also assisted in the creation of a special license plate in January to honor surviving Congressional Medal of Honor recipients.

The department initiated a bill (Senate Bill 176) sponsored by State Senator Frank LaRose to correct an impediment in the law in regard to the organization of CVSOs. Work continues to move this bill forward.

Lastly, ODVS is conducting a thorough review of Title 59 R. C. which defines the department to insure that it addresses the realities and needs of Ohio’s veterans in the current era.



## CONCLUSION

Each member of the department has a sacred duty to honor the service of all Ohio veterans and remember those who have been lost defending our liberties. This is accomplished every year by planning and conducting a number of ceremonies. This includes the induction ceremony for the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame the day prior to Veterans Day, to recognize veterans who made significant contributions to their communities in their post-military service lives. The Friday before Memorial Day is set aside for the Governor's Wreath Laying Ceremony, which honors Ohioans killed in action during the previous year. The department also hosts the biennial Women Veterans Conference, and in March 2011 sponsored a Women's Month Veteran's Event at the State House.

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services proved during fiscal year 2011 that it can and will perform each task set before it to the high standards set by its leadership. At the same time, it will provide veterans with the best service possible at a maximum value to taxpayers.

**“To care for him  
who shall have  
borne the battle,  
and his widow  
and his orphan.”**

**– Abraham Lincoln**