



ANNUAL REPORT 2015





Department of Veterans Services

John R. Kasich, Governor
Timothy C. Gorrell, Director

Annual Report 2015

August 1, 2015

Governor Kasich,

Ohio is home to nearly 870,000 veterans – the sixth largest population of veterans in the U.S. The Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) is committed to connecting our veterans with the services, support and economic opportunity they have earned by virtue of their service to our country.

Today, we are connecting more Ohio veterans and military families to their benefits and resources than at any time since launching the department. The education and employment reforms established in House Bills 488 and 98 are making it easier for employers to hire veterans and veterans to jump start their careers or receive free college credit for their military experience.

ODVS works together with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and Ohio's workforce system including the Department of Job and Family Services, Ohio Higher Education and the Adjutant General to prioritize the number of military servicemembers and their families living and working in Ohio. The new www.OhioMeansVeteransJobs.com gives veterans the tools and connections they need to transition quickly and easily into the civilian job market.

ODVS, Ohio's 88 County Veteran Service Offices and the veterans' organizations work together to reach veterans and to link them with federal, state and local benefits. Ohio veterans received a 21.6 percent increase in compensation and pension payments in federal fiscal year 2014 when compared to FY 2013, according to the recently released 2014 Geographic Distribution of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Expenditures report.

Military families appreciate the supportive community and quality of care we provide Ohio's war-time veterans in the state veterans' homes in Sandusky and Georgetown. We will continue to reach out, support and lift up the veterans who are in the shadows because of injuries or conditions related to their military service.

Ohio values veterans. Our vision is an Ohio that is the best place for veterans, servicemembers and their families to live, work, thrive and call home.

Sincerely,

Timothy C. Gorrell





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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 127th Ohio General Assembly. Senate Bill 289 gave the department the responsibility to work directly with the County Veterans' Service Offices (CVSOs) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as well as with the various veterans service organizations.

Mission: "Empowering the veteran and military community through services, support, and economic opportunity."

This mission supports the department's vision of "An Ohio that is the best place for veterans, servicemembers, and their families to live, work, thrive and call home."



Execution of Mission

The department conducts its mission through the following initiatives:

- Engages employers and public and private stakeholders to encourage employment of veterans.
- Communicates with other state and local agencies concerning veterans' programs and coordinates support to veterans.
- Conducts outreach to veterans.
- Provides training and certification to commissioners and service officers within the 88 County Veterans Service Offices to help veterans filing VA claims and to ensure veterans are connected to resources at the state, local and federal level.
- Operates the Ohio Veterans Homes in Sandusky and Georgetown which are open to Ohio-resident veterans who served in periods of armed conflicts.
- Administers the Ohio Veterans Bonus for veterans of the Persian Gulf War era and post-9/11 era conflicts, a program funded by bonds approved by Ohio voters.
- Manages two federal education-related programs: Troops to Teachers and the State Approving Agency for GI Bill training.
- Hosts several veterans' ceremonies each year including the Governor's Wreath-Laying Ceremony to honor Ohio's killed in action and the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame induction ceremony.
- Maintains Ohio veterans' roster books/records dating back to the War of 1812.

Profile of Veterans in Ohio

The VA estimates state veteran populations and compiles funding statistics. In federal Fiscal Year 2014 (Oct. 1, 2013 - Sept. 30, 2014), Ohio's veteran population was estimated to be nearly 870,000. This represents the sixth-largest veteran population in the country.

A breakdown of the state's population is highlighted in the graph below. The overall number of veterans will likely continue to decrease as veterans from World War II and the Korean War pass away. However, there remains a sizable community of Vietnam veterans in the state and a growing population of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans.

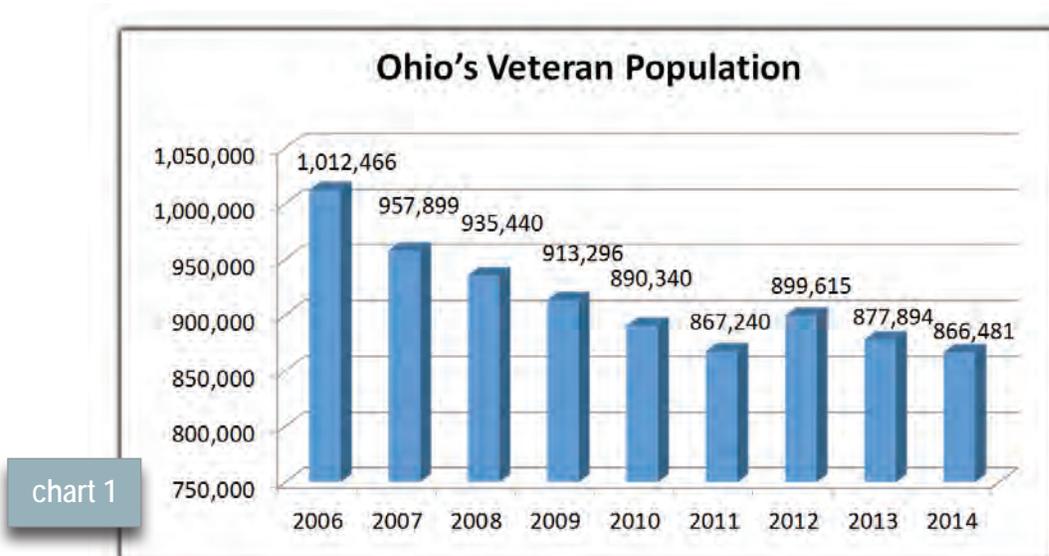


chart 1

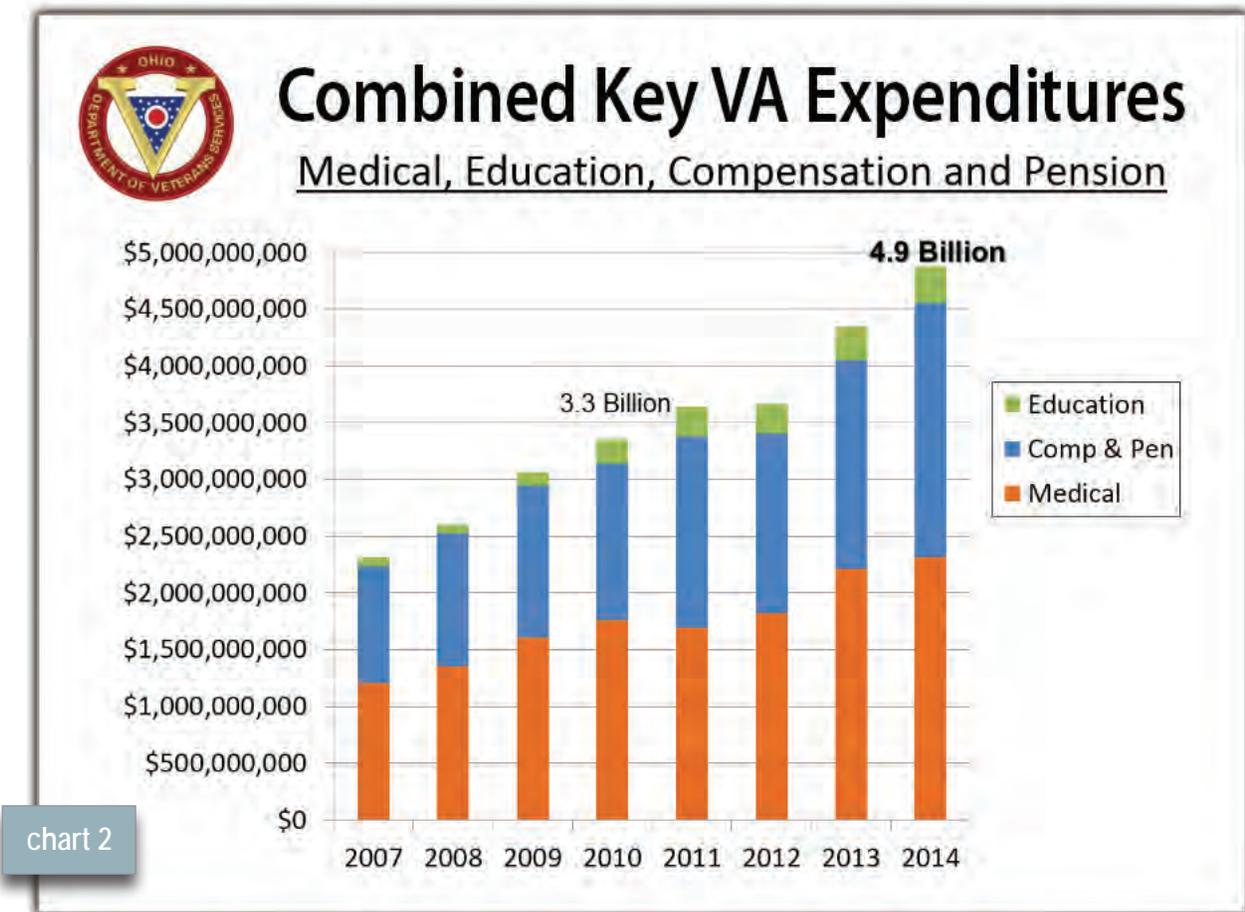
★ Ohio Currently has the 6th Largest Veterans Population in the Nation.

*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2006 - 2014

Economic Impact

The success of ODVS in accomplishing its mission directly impacts the economic health of Ohio. Ohio veterans received a 21.6 percent increase in compensation and pension payments in Federal Fiscal Year 2014 when compared to FFY 2013, according to the 2014 Geographic Distribution of U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) Expenditures (GDX) report. The GDX also shows the number of Ohio veterans connected to VA disability compensation rose 7.7 percent. Ohio's good track record in providing veterans education opportunities is demonstrated by VA education expenditures continuing to rise in Ohio. These dollars directly benefited Ohio veterans as well as the state's local communities and colleges.

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



*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2014

Highlighted below, ODVS invested a total of \$83.97 million in all programs in FY 2015. Funding came from four major sources, including \$37.79 million in state general revenue funds as shown in chart 4.

Expenditures by Program

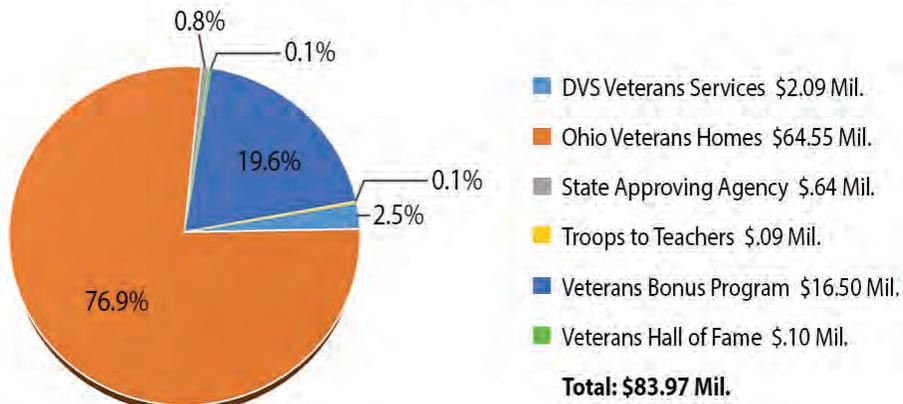


chart 3

*Source - Ohio Administrative Knowledge System Business Intelligence

Expenditures by Funding Source

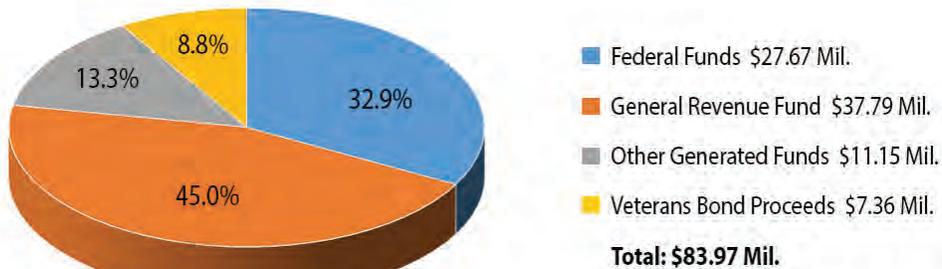


chart 4

*Source - Ohio Administrative Knowledge System Business Intelligence

Serving and Supporting

Fulfilling the mission of empowering veterans brings with it the challenge of identifying veterans. The department and its partners work each day to serve veterans and make them aware of the benefits they have earned. Veterans of all eras often don't realize they might qualify for benefits.

For example, a veteran who injured his leg jumping from the back of a truck during peacetime service 30 years ago – and whose injury healed at the time – could be eligible for compensation today if the injury developed into arthritis.

Identifying and contacting veterans continues to be a priority mission for ODVS. Once veterans are identified, the process to connect them to their benefits through their local County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) begins. The CVSO works for a County Veterans Service Commission (CVSC) whose members are nominated by veterans service organizations and appointed by a county common pleas judge.

ODVS is responsible for training and certifying service officers and commissioners within the 88 County Veterans Service Offices to help veterans filing VA claims and to ensure veterans are connected to resources at the state, local and federal level. The CVSOs help veterans apply for benefits, offer free transportation to medical appointments and provide direct financial assistance when necessary. Historically, veterans in all states obtain about 40 percent more of the federal benefits they have earned when they receive assistance from a service officer when applying for them.



Ohio Military and Veteran Policy Initiatives

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services, Office of Military and Veterans Policy (MVP) advocates for the development and implementation of programs, policies, regulations, and legislation to benefit veterans, servicemembers and their families. This is accomplished through collaboration with the Governor’s Office, the General Assembly, and other state agencies as well as coordination with federal, local, and private partners. During FY 2015, MVP continued its work in support of initiatives across a number of diverse areas such as employment, education, veteran justice outreach, homelessness, military family support, veteran-owned business, behavioral health, and substance abuse.



Veteran Workforce and Economic Opportunity

In 2011, MVP first proposed a number of reforms to how Ohio’s employment and education systems operate for veterans and their families. Initial efforts included the “Battlefront to Home front” initiative to better connect returning Ohio National Guard members to employment

support through the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) and assessments of veteran services available at University System of Ohio institutions. Taking experience and knowledge gained from those efforts, MVP forged ahead with partners from the Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT) and Ohio Higher Education (OHE) to better leverage the renewed focus on aligning employment and education systems to the benefit of the veteran and military community.



Aligning Employment and Education Systems to Benefit Veterans and Military Members

“Four Key Strategies” guide the Ohio Veterans Workforce Initiative to assist veterans who are entering the workforce:

- 1) Workforce support for transitioning veterans and current veteran residents;
- 2) Credit for military training and experience through Ohio’s universities, colleges and licensing authorities;
- 3) Linking employers to veterans;
- 4) Attracting and retaining veterans from across the country to Ohio.

ODVS Military Veteran Policy section supports these strategies through the following activities:

- Partnering to propose, draft, and implement Governor’s Executive Order 2013-05K, issued in June 2013, that directed the development of recommendations to better support veterans, servicemembers, and spouses in pursuing their college degrees and professional licenses in the State of Ohio through improved credit for military experience, prioritization of service, and improved outreach efforts.



- Working with the Ohio General Assembly and the Governor’s Office to support passage and implementation of House Bill 98 and House Bill 488 that codifies the recommendations developed through Executive Order 2013-05K. The Military Strategic Implementation Team (MSIT), made up of college and university staff as well as representatives from DVS, Higher Education and the Adjutant General, ensures that the higher education provisions

of House Bill 488 are fully implemented. MSIT also provides ongoing technical support to colleges as they develop systems for better serving their veteran students and families.

- Partnering with OWT, OHE, ODJFS, and the Ohio National Guard for improved coordination of state agency support for employers hiring veterans and veterans looking for work through innovative systems such as OhioMeansVeteransJobs, the Veteran Business Support Center, and collaboration with the Governor’s Executive Workforce Board. These efforts have helped build an effective single point of entry for all veteran education, licensing, workforce, and benefits information through the OhioMeansVeteransJobs.com website.



- Working with the Ohio National Guard to engage public and private employers on their hiring and retention methods to identify best practices and share those efforts with all employers interested in establishing veteran employee resource groups, on-boarding, or mentoring programs. This coordination extends to recruiting assistance for State of Ohio agencies and support for the Ohio National Guard Employer Advisory Council which was developed to provide military-friendly employers with useful resources and guidance for success in military retention and recruitment initiatives. The council consists of over 60 organizations throughout Ohio.



- Identifying and supporting industry-led workforce consortiums and regional employment initiatives to further discussions on the future needs of industry sectors and local employment markets across Ohio. Successful collaborations include contributions to the veteran outreach segments of Insuring Ohio Futures (Insurance Industry), AgrAbility (Farming), the Ohio Energy Workforce Consortium (Energy/Utilities), Get Skills to Work (Manufacturing) and partnerships with private non-profit organizations.

Federal, State and Local Agency Collaboration

MVP continued to provide ODVS representation and operational support to important multi-agency organizations and initiatives promoting various veterans services throughout federal, state and local government. In all of these initiatives, MVP also works to identify and engage relevant veteran and military community partners, such as the VA or CVSOs, to assist in these efforts. Those efforts include:

- Collaborating with the Ohio Development Services Agency to better promote veteran-owned business services provided by the United States Small Business Administration and made available through a statewide system of 28 Small Business Development Centers and Procurement Technical Assistance Centers.
- Participating in several multi-agency committees addressing behavioral health, substance abuse and traumatic brain injury issues that affect the Ohio military and veteran community such as the Ohio National Guard-led OHIOCARES Committee. During FY2015 MVP worked with federal, state, local, higher education, and private partners on the Star Behavioral Health Program initiative to provide military culture and deployment information training to nearly 300 non-VA behavioral health professionals around the state. This ongoing initiative will create an easily accessible online registry at www.starproviders.org to ensure improved access to behavioral health, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury resources for servicemembers, veterans, and their families.
- Participating in statewide efforts to reduce veteran homelessness through initiatives led by the VA, Ohio Interagency Collaborative on Homelessness and Affordable Housing and regional efforts such as the Northwest Ohio Veterans Homelessness Summit. During the past fiscal year, the VA distributed \$18.5 million in veteran homelessness grants to Ohio public housing agencies and provided 400 new federal housing vouchers directly to veterans who were homeless or at-risk for homelessness.
- Actively engaging in the Project VETS Statewide Advisory Committee led by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, collaborating with federal, state, and local agencies, non-profits, law enforcement, courts and the legal community to provide diversionary services for veterans who enter the justice system through the use of specialized dockets.



- Contributing to the Ohio Department of Education's State Commission on Education for Military Children, a multi-state Compact that commits Ohio to ensuring that children of servicemembers receive fair treatment in Ohio's K-12 education system.
- Coordinating the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship Board, ensuring educational opportunities to the children of Ohio's fallen and injured military veterans, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Higher Education. In FY2015 the Board provided \$5.3 million in scholarships to more than 900 children of deceased and injured veterans.

Military Liaison



The Military Liaison continued to build mutually beneficial relationships with U.S. Department of Defense entities inside and outside of Ohio in support of the broader ODVS mission. A special emphasis has been placed on active duty recruiters and Federal Reserve components that do not have strong connections to Ohio's community support efforts. Progress has been made with every branch of the military. Noteworthy advancements include:

- Expanding ODVS outreach to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, to include regular bi-weekly briefings to new incoming USAF personnel and participation in their Community Partnership initiative.
- Developing a relationship with the Navy Office of Community Outreach to facilitate the dissemination of information to personnel in Ohio. Similar relationships are continually being developed with other federal military entities, such as the Marine Corps Individual Ready Reserve Muster, and outreach is being conducted through unit-level briefings, resource fairs and reintegration events.
- Identifying and establishing relationships with military professional associations such as the Air Force Sergeants' Association, National Guard Association, and Association of the United States Army that bring together currently serving members and veterans of the Armed Forces.
- Participating in Ohio National Guard Inter-Services Family Assistance Committee (ISFAC) and leveraging National Guard communication networks to help ensure the broadest dissemination of information for all members of the Armed Forces and their families throughout Ohio.

Ohio's reputation as a national leader in supporting the military and veterans continues to grow. Ohio hosted two meetings with the federal Chairman's Office of Reintegration, an initiative of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff highlighting Ohio's many initiatives to support veteran and military education and employment.

Supporting Justice-Involved Veterans

Ensuring that veterans in the justice system not only receive appropriate justice, but also that they are given the resources to succeed afterwards is a priority for ODVS.

This past year saw a continuation of Ohio's growth as a leader in the Veterans Treatment Court movement, as the 16th and 17th specialty dockets were created in Ohio courts. Veterans' Courts are under consideration in at least three other locations and some courts that don't have the resources or veteran population to support a regular court are incorporating the principles and procedures into their regular case management when the defendant identifies as a veteran. ODVS has established effective working relationships with these courts in order to provide guidance and assistance on issues like sustainable funding and obtaining certification from the Ohio Supreme Court.



The department also continues to work closely with the Ohio Ex-Offender Re-entry Coalition to identify and assist veterans leaving the criminal justice system. The objective of this relationship is to ensure that veterans are identified and linked with additional resources that will help prevent recidivism. These efforts will be boosted by the state budget, which now requires courts to consider military service and experiences when determining whether a defendant receives a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE). The CQE will allow a licensing or regulatory board to consider lifting collateral sanctions that sometimes attach to criminal convictions. This change is aimed at helping more veterans return to full employment after their involvement in the justice system.

ODVS refers veterans to Operation Legal Help Ohio, which provides free legal representation to veterans in civil matters like foreclosure, credit card collections and domestic relations/child custody matters. Volunteer lawyers will also provide representation in dissolutions and child support matters. The program ODVS helped launch as a pilot located in Central Ohio, saw continued growth and now has commitments from more than 300 lawyers in 80 of Ohio's 88 counties. Full statewide participation remains the program's ultimate goal.

Training and Standards

ODVS, in conjunction with the Ohio Association of County Veterans Service Officers (OSACVSO), Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Commissioners (OSACVSC), and the VA, provides training and certification to CVSOs and CVSCs. Training opportunities occur throughout the year and offer veterans service officers and veterans service commissioners the ability to stay cognizant of changes in federal and state benefits, and their impact on the operations of the veterans service commission. ODVS also conducts annual refresher training by region and district to update CVSOs and CVSCs on changes to the Ohio Revised Code.



CVSO training is a vital investment in serving the state's veterans because of continuing changes in VA compensation, pension and other benefits claims processes. To develop and present training, ODVS works cooperatively with the OSACVSO, which has trained service officers on the national level and is recognized as one of the premier associations in the

United States. Such training enhances the CVSO's ability to assemble what the VA refers to as a "fully-developed claim" with all available documentation present. In an era in which the backlog of veterans' claims with the VA is gradually being addressed, one of the best tools

to further reduce the backlog is to submit fully-developed claims that in turn are “ready to rate.” Quick decisions can be made on these claims, so that veterans will begin receiving the benefits that they have earned.

Throughout the fiscal year, ODVS continued training the new and reappointed CVSCs on their duties and responsibilities concerning veterans under Ohio Revised Code Title 59, the Sunshine Laws, and the ethical standards for a commissioner. The department’s goal is to improve their technical knowledge and help them improve the efficiency of their operations wherever possible.

Ohio’s five largest veterans’ service organizations (VSOs) – American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, American Veterans (AMVETS), and Vietnam Veterans of America – have certified the training offered by ODVS in partnership with the state service officer association. These veterans’ organizations have extended their organizational accreditation to Ohio CVSOs. This enables ODVS and the CVSOs to work together as frontline advocates for veterans and their families at the Cleveland Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO).

The department also forged ahead with the Strategic Planning Initiative. Department staff members meet regularly with representatives from the OSACVSCs and OSACVSOs. The goal of these sessions is to improve operations and develop recommendations to improve service delivery to veterans in all counties. A major product of this effort is the publication of the County Veterans Service Office Handbook, and Legal Precedents & Attorney General Opinions.

ODVS Veterans Affairs Liaison Office

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services established a liaison office to the Cleveland Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) in 2011. The liaison office maintains direct communication with all the organizations and stakeholders that touch veterans’ lives in order to find ways to improve claims processing, promote and support information technology, and assist in special case management. ODVS’s liaison role allows for quality assurance of claims work and assistance with claims that need immediate attention or special management.

The success of the liaison office depends on open and trusted relations with the VARO and the National Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), as well as with the CVSOs. This relationship is consistent with a “One Team - One Fight” focus to ensure our nation’s veterans and their families receive the benefits that they are entitled to with timely quality service, advocacy, and proper adjudication.

One of the greatest benefits of ODVS’s liaison with the VARO is a partnership to assist the CVSOs by providing information and status of claims filed. The VARO extends computer systems access to qualified and trained CVSOs. This access allows CVSOs to ensure claims are received, monitor the process and view rating decisions accordingly.

Ohio Veterans Homes



A major part of the department’s mission is operating the Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH), a responsibility assumed when the department was created in August 2008. The homes provide direct nursing home care at facilities in Sandusky and Georgetown, as well as a domiciliary (similar to independent living) to qualified veterans in Sandusky. The Sandusky home opened in 1888 to care for veterans of the Civil War. The home in Georgetown 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 infirmed 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.

The Georgetown offers 168 nursing home beds. The Sandusky home provides 427 nursing home beds and an additional 293 domiciliary or “DOM” beds. The DOM total includes an 84-bed domiciliary plus (DOM+) unit. The DOM+ is open to veterans who can mostly live independently, but require some additional supervision and prompting for issues such as medication and meal times.



The homes continue providing quality care at a cost about one-third that of private nursing homes. Per-resident per diem funding by the VA, combined with a sliding scale resident assessment based on ability to pay, provides a long-term care value for veterans and their families as well as taxpayers.

The Ohio Veterans Homes continue to decrease their reliance on GRF funds from FY 2004 when GRF comprised 61percent of the homes budget to 38.6 percent in FY2015. VA per diem funding,

meanwhile, increased from 28 percent to 38.5 percent of OVH's budget.

The OVH facilities have made the most of the funds allocated to them by engaging in several cost-saving strategies. Among those during FY 2015 the Sandusky facility moved and automated their pharmacy, making the operations more efficient in dispensing pharmaceuticals.



The parking lot and road lighting is being upgraded to energy efficient LED's. Other projects include the upgrade of the domestic water system in Sandusky, improvements to the heating ventilating and air conditioning systems in the nursing home, and upgrading the electrical system.

Cost Saving strategies at the Ohio Veterans Homes include:

- Using VA contracts for purchasing, which leverages VA purchasing power to the homes' advantage.
- Purchasing utilities in the open market via competitive bidding.
- Using VA construction grants on capital projects when possible. This provides up to 65 percent Federal funding for the projects.

Ohio Veterans Bonus

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 servicemember was eligible for, up to \$6,500.



Dec. 31, 2013 was the deadline for Ohio veterans to apply for a bonus for active duty service during the Persian Gulf War period from Aug. 3, 1990 to March 3, 1991. The application deadline for veterans who served in Iraq between March 19, 2003 and Dec. 31, 2011 was Dec. 31, 2014. Similar to the Persian Gulf conflict eligibility deadline, the department conducted outreach to make veterans aware of the benefit and deadline. The efforts during fiscal year 2015 included a major post card mailing to thousands of possible veterans of the era accompanied by a statewide media push.

The Bonus will remain in effect for veterans who served in Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world, from Oct. 7, 2001 until the President declares an end to our involvement in Afghanistan. Eligible applicants will have three years after the President declares an end to our involvement in Afghanistan to apply.

The Ohio Veterans Bonus program paid more than \$72.6 million to more than 88,937 Ohio veterans and military families by the end of FY 2015.

Veterans Educational Programs

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services is the Ohio agent for the federally-funded Veterans Educational Programs (VEP) Office, which oversees the Troops to Teachers (TTT) and State Approving Agency (SAA) programs.



TTT assists veterans in obtaining teaching certificates and provides counseling and mentoring to place veterans in high-needs schools, not only to teach, but to serve as positive role models in their schools and local communities.

In this way, the experience of veterans is passed on to help shape the future leaders of Ohio. The principal role of the SAA is to function as

an extension of the VA's educational programs. The Ohio SAA has approved more than 780 institutions where veterans and their beneficiaries are able to use education benefits. The SAA performs compliance reviews at 15 to 20 percent of these institutions annually to ensure they are in compliance with federal policies and are providing student veterans with their entitled benefits. In federal FY 2014, the VA spent more than \$324.9 million in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation, employment and education. This amount represents an increase of roughly \$28.5 million from FY 2013 and an overall increase of \$213 million from 2009 spending. Ohio ranks 14th in the nation in receiving these types of VA benefits, which during FY 2014 served more than 26,000 student veterans and eligible dependents.

Public Ceremonies and Events

Each year, ODVS plans and conducts a number of official events to honor Ohio veterans.

The **Governor's Wreath-Laying Ceremony** is held each year the week prior to Memorial Day to honor the men and women of Ohio who were killed during the previous year in service to our nation. In 2015, six fallen servicemembers were honored. Preceding the ceremony, each gold star family met privately with Governor Kasich and Lieutenant Governor Taylor where they presented them with an Ohio flag flown over the Statehouse in their loved one's honor. The Ohio General Assembly held a Joint Session to award the next-of-kin of the fallen the Ohio Medal of Distinction in their loved one's behalf.



The **Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony** is held every November, near Veterans Day. The Hall of Fame was established in 1992 to honor Ohioans for their post-military contributions to the community. At the most recent induction in November 2014, 20 new Ohioans joined the distinguished veterans who are enshrined in the Hall. The Hall includes astronauts, government officials, police officers, community leaders, and veterans' advocates.



Veterans Advisory Committees

ODVS Advisory Committee

The ODVS Advisory Committee advises and assists ODVS in its duties as per Ohio Revised Code section 5902.02 (j & k). The committee meets at least once per quarter. The committee includes a representative of the: American Legion; AMVETS; Army and Navy Union; Catholic War Veterans; Disabled American Veterans; Jewish War Veterans; Korean War Veterans Association; Marine Corps League; Military Officers Association of America; Military Order of the Purple Heart; National Guard Association; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Vietnam Veterans of America; County Commissioners Association of Ohio; Advisory Committee on Women Veterans; a labor organization; Office of the Attorney General; three representatives of the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Commissioners and three representatives of the State Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

Women Veterans' Advisory Committee

Women now comprise more than 14 percent of the active military, therefore ODVS maintains a Women Veterans' Advisory Committee. Every other year, ODVS and the Women Veterans' Advisory Committee host a conference to highlight women veterans' issues. Ohio currently holds the record for the largest Women Veterans' conference in the U.S., attracting more than 700 women veterans. Planning is underway for the next conference on September 12, 2015.

Veterans Records

Ohio was nationally recognized by the VA with a Pillar of Excellence Award for its work with the Defense Personnel Records Information System (DPRIS). Access to electronic records has now been duplicated in all 50 states.

ODVS was the first state veteran department to be granted access to military records through the electronic portal of the Defense Personnel Records Information System (DPRIS). As a result of the successful pilot of the system at the department level, Ohio was the first state to be granted permission to allow each of the 88 CVSOs to access these military records through DPRIS. Eighty of the 88 counties



have now activated their access to the DPRIS system. In counties with multiple offices, additional access permission was requested and granted for a total of 122 county veteran service officers who have obtained access.

This access allows service officers who are assembling a claim for VA benefits, such as medical care, disability compensation, and pension, to access the records and documents needed to complete the claim in a timely manner. This permits a claim to be prepared in what the VA considers “fully-developed” status, which in turn allows it to be completed faster.

ODVS maintains 16,767,252 Military Separation Documents in the electronic OnBase system. Additionally, the department has rosters of veterans’ records dating back to the War of 1812. These older documents are in book form—five books for the War of 1812, twelve books of Civil War rosters, one book for the Spanish-American War and 23 volumes of WWI.

Reaching Ohio’s Veterans and Military Families

ODVS and its partners work continuously to reach Ohio’s 870,000 veterans and their families and make them aware of the resources they have earned with their service to our nation. The department uses both traditional and innovative methods to reach Ohio’s military families.

Mobile App

More than 10,000 people now use the ODVS mobile phone application that contains a summary of veterans’ benefits, links to employment information, contact information for CVSOs and the VA, and interactive maps and directions to get there.



Benefits Resource Guides

About 120,000 pocket-sized *Benefits Resource Guides* were distributed to veterans by the end of calendar year 2014.

The guide contains descriptions for every veteran-specific federal and state benefit available to Ohio veterans, a brief explanation of how to access these benefits by applying through County Veterans Service Offices, and contact information for all CVSOs and VA facilities.



OhioMeansVeteransJobs.com

ODVS staff contributed to the content and implementation to the new www.OhioMeansVeteransJobs.com website that provides veterans with online access to career resources and benefits; education and professional licensing and employment information. The site includes a military skills translator; military occupation search; access to military-friendly employers; information on college credit for military experience; the benefits resource guide and much more.

Social Media

ODVS maintains an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. Video capabilities on YouTube and now Twitter allow us to share success stories in our own words.

Take time to watch the ODVS YouTube video [Ohio Veteran Licensing and College Credit](#) featuring Governor Kasich and veterans giving testimonials on how Ohio's professional licensing and education reforms helped them succeed with jobs and education.

The ODVS website records more than 25,000 visits each month. The department uses an e-mail listserv for issuing monthly newsletters as well as periodic news releases and other items of interest to the veterans' community.

Toll Free Phone Numbers

1-877-OHIOVET, allows veterans to be directly connected to their county veterans' service office or to the Ohio Veterans Bonus team. Calls to this number during the first six months of calendar year 2015 averaged roughly 1,308 per month. A separate toll-free number is provided to Ohioans and family members calling the Ohio Veterans Homes.

Connecting with Ohio Veterans at the BMV

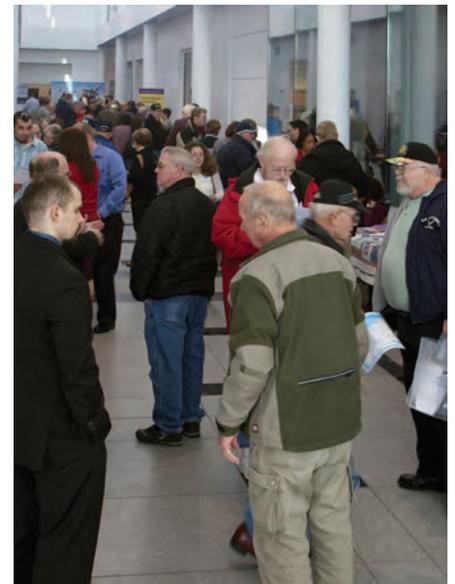
Through a partnership with the Ohio Department of Public Safety, ODVS contacts Ohioans who self-identify as veterans when they renew their driver's license. This list was used to contact veterans who were most likely eligible to receive money through the Ohio Veterans Bonus for Persian Gulf War and Afghanistan service. Twenty-two CVSOs have agreements with the ODVS to use this data to share information with veterans in their local counties.

Radio and TV Advertising

Statewide radio and TV advertising on both general veterans' benefits and the Ohio Veterans Bonus was done in a six-week package through the Ohio Association of Broadcasters.

Outreach Events

ODVS staff coordinated and participated in direct outreach at veterans-themed events, such as job and resource fairs, unit re-integration briefings, partnership events with the VA, and veterans' days at various venues, including the Ohio State Fair. The highlight of fiscal year 2015 was the Wilmington Job Fair. ODVS joined forces with the Ohio National Guard and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to host a Veterans Resource Fair at the Wilmington Air Park on February 24th. More than 500 veterans and guests attended the fair, where they had an opportunity to meet with 44 exhibitors, including 18 employers. Veterans were able to connect with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, ODVS' Ohio Veterans Homes and the Ohio Veterans Bonus, the Ohio National Guard, OhioMeansJobs and the Clinton County Veterans Service Commission, to name a few.



*From healthcare to benefits, bonuses, education and jobs, the Ohio Department of Veterans Services is here to make sure that every generation of Ohio Veterans are connected to the resources and benefits they have earned.
Visit www.ohiovet.gov for more information.*

“The true soldier fights
not because he hates
what is in front of him,
but because he loves
what is behind him.”

- G. K. Chesterton

