

FY 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

AUGUST 2024



OREGON DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Director Dr. Nakeia Council Daniels



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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August 31, 2024

The Honorable Tina Kotek
Governor of Oregon
State Capitol Building
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Kotek,

On behalf of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Advisory Committee, we are pleased to submit the FY 2024 Annual Report in accordance with ORS 406.220, highlighting our agency's programs and key initiatives over the past year.

In FY24, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) advanced several key initiatives to enhance veteran services across the state. These include securing support and funding for the construction of a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg, developing a statewide suicide prevention media campaign to connect veterans and their families with community, activity and essential mental health resources, and undertaking a comprehensive recruitment effort to strengthen the Veteran Advisory Committee (VAC) by filling key vacancies with diverse veteran candidates. These efforts reflect ODVA's commitment to expanding its impact and ensuring that every veteran receive the care and support they deserve.

Our focus on partnerships led to expanded services for veterans on tribal lands and strengthened collaboration with key stakeholders to address critical issues such as homelessness and behavioral health access among veterans. Through these initiatives, ODVA is committed to breaking down barriers and ensuring that all veterans, especially those from historically underserved communities, receive the support they have earned.

As a network of veterans serving veterans, it is our privilege to contribute to the well-being of those who have served our country. Our commitment to Oregon's veterans remains as strong as ever, and we appreciate your leadership in addressing the critical issues facing vulnerable Oregonians. We look forward to continuing our work in alignment with your priorities, particularly in reducing homelessness, improving access to behavioral health services, and investing in the education and well-being of our veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nakeia Council Daniels
Director

Robert VanVoorhis
Vice Chair, Veteran Advisory Committee

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Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

SERVING OREGON VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES SINCE 1945

Since its founding in 1945, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) has been a steadfast advocate for generations of service members returning from active-duty military service. These veterans, equipped with leadership skills and a commitment to service, have significantly contributed to Oregon's communities and economy. Veterans in Oregon are proud, proven, and service-oriented citizens who benefit from a wide range of federal, state, and local programs designed to assist them in their transition back to civilian life.

Alongside ODVA, the Veterans' Advisory Committee (VAC) was also established in 1945 and has played a fundamental role in advising the Director of ODVA. Composed of military veterans appointed by the Governor, the VAC acts as a voice for veteran issues and concerns across Oregon. The committee's volunteer members, representing every generation of veterans and communities throughout the state, bring diverse talents and experiences to their advocacy. The VAC ensures that the needs and perspectives of all Oregon veterans are heard, and invites veterans, their families, and community partners to participate in its quarterly meetings held across the state.

Today, ODVA remains committed to providing every veteran with comprehensive services and benefits that support them throughout their life journey, ensuring that no single veteran is left behind. The agency proudly upholds its nearly 80-year history of excellent stewardship through foundational programs like the Oregon Veteran Home Loan and the development and administration of Oregon Veterans' Homes. With the passage of Measure 96 in 2016, which constitutionally dedicates 1.5% of net Lottery proceeds to veteran services, ODVA has expanded its reach through implementation or expansion of 13 programs and grants aimed at addressing critical gaps in services, including housing stability, behavioral health access, and support for student veterans.

ODVA's initiatives, such as doubling funding to county veteran service offices and expanding services to veterans on tribal lands, reflect its ongoing commitment to enhancing the quality of life for Oregon's veterans. Through strong partnerships and innovative programs, ODVA and the VAC continue to honor the service of Oregon's veterans, ensuring they receive the services and support they have earned through their military service to this nation.





Those We Serve

OREGON VETERAN POPULATION AND LANDSCAPE

As of September 2023, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that 6.3% of Oregon’s population had served in the United States Armed Forces. The total veteran population in Oregon decreased by nearly 2%, from 271,871 to 266,690 in FY23. This decline reflects a broader national trend of decreasing numbers of veterans who served during WWII and Korea, consistent with the significant reduction in the size of the U.S. military since the draft era. In 1968, during the Vietnam War, 3.5 million Americans were on active duty, compared to just 1.3 million today, representing less than 1% of the adult population. Federal VA projections indicate that the veteran population will continue to decline, with an estimated 12 million veterans nationwide by 2045, a decrease of approximately 40% from current numbers.

Housing Stability and Homelessness Challenges Facing Oregon Veterans

Homelessness among veterans remains a critical issue in Oregon, which continues to rank among the top five states with the highest percentage of veterans experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Currently, an estimated 1,460 veterans are unsheltered, representing approximately 7.82% of the total homeless population in the state. Veterans face an elevated risk of homelessness, particularly when released from incarceration without the necessary supportive services to assist in their reintegration into civilian life. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring that all veterans have access to stable housing and the resources they need to thrive.

Veteran Suicide in Oregon

Oregon faces a deeply concerning trend in veteran suicides, with rates that exceed both the national veteran average and the non-veteran population. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) Oregon Veteran Suicide Data Sheet (2021), after adjusting for age differences, the suicide rate among Oregon veterans is significantly higher than both the national veteran suicide rate and the national non-veteran suicide rate.

The USDVA 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report highlights several groups at increased risk, including veterans aged 25 to 44, Native American veterans, Asian and Pacific Islander veterans, and those suffering from traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Women veterans also face a higher suicide rate compared to non-veteran women.

Veterans are at risk of suicide for many of the same reasons as non-veterans, such as homelessness, financial insecurity, mental health and substance abuse challenges, social isolation, and other societal issues. However, veterans may also be at increased risk due to the unique nature and effects of their military service.

The USDVA 2020 report also revealed that between 2017 and 2018, the suicide rate among veterans who recently used Veterans Health Administration (VHA) services decreased by 2.4%, while the rate among veterans who did not use VHA services increased by 2.5%. This data highlights the vital importance of connecting veterans to their earned benefits, including healthcare and behavioral health services, as a key component of suicide prevention efforts in Oregon and across the nation.

Aging Veterans

Oregon's veteran population is aging rapidly, with veterans aged 65 and older making up 50% of the state's veteran population. This trend is expected to continue into the next decade. As of September 2023, only 1,933 World War II veterans and 12,098 Korean War veterans remained in Oregon, with these groups declining at an accelerated rate due to age and service-related health issues. Vietnam War veterans, who now comprise nearly 35% of Oregon's veteran population, are also part of this aging demographic. Most Vietnam veterans are now over the age of 65, facing many of the same challenges as their predecessors.

ODVA has observed an increase in disability claims from Vietnam veterans, many of whom are experiencing the long-term effects of toxic exposures such as Agent Orange. The passage of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, known as "the PACT Act" in August 2022, which expanded benefits and healthcare for veterans exposed to toxic substances, is expected to have a significant positive impact on this population.

ODVA remains committed to providing comprehensive support to all aging veterans, including healthcare, long-term care options such as the construction of additional state veterans' homes, caregiver support, transportation, burial in a national cemetery, and survivor benefits. The agency's focus on these services is crucial to ensuring that Oregon's aging veterans receive the care and recognition they deserve for their service.

Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veterans

Gulf War era veterans, including those who served in the first Gulf War and the Post-9/11 conflicts, now make up a significant portion of Oregon's veteran population. Gulf I veterans represent 14.2% of the state's veterans, while Post-9/11 veterans account for 22.1%. These veterans have faced unique challenges, particularly due to the frequency of multiple deployments in conflict zones like Iraq and Afghanistan. This has resulted in a higher per capita rate of disability among Gulf War and Post-9/11 veterans compared to those from other eras of service.

The intensity of these deployments has led to increased instances of physical injuries, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health conditions. Advances in battlefield medicine and protective equipment have significantly improved survival rates, but this also means that more veterans are returning home with severe and complex disabilities requiring ongoing care.

In addition to combat injuries, many Gulf War and Post-9/11 veterans have been exposed to environmental hazards such as burn pits and chemical agents, leading to chronic health conditions.

The recent passage of the PACT Act, which expands benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, is expected to positively impact these veterans by addressing some of the long-term health effects associated with their service.

Diversity Among Oregon Veterans

The demographic profile of Oregon’s veterans is expected to continue to diversify over the next few decades. Currently, it is estimated that 90% of veterans in Oregon are men and 10% are women. The percentage of women veterans is projected to increase to over 13% by 2033, as more women serve in roles traditionally reserved for men. Despite these changes, many women veterans still face barriers to accessing VA healthcare, including lack of awareness about available services and discrimination within the VA system.

Veterans of color represent 13.8% of Oregon’s veteran population, with the largest groups being Hispanic or Latinx (4.6%), Black or African American (1.6%), Asian (1.3%), American Indian and Alaska Native (1%), and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.3%). Nearly 5% of Oregon veterans are one or more races. Over the next decade, the diversity of Oregon’s veteran population is expected to increase, with veterans of color projected to make up 16.9% of the population by 2032.

LGBTQ+ veterans also face unique challenges. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 2.5% of Oregon veterans identify as LGBTQ+. ODVA is dedicated to advocating for all veterans, particularly those who have experienced systemic injustice due to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or housing status. The agency is committed to meeting veterans where they are and honoring their service in every aspect of its work.

The landscape of Oregon’s veteran population is diverse and dynamic, with significant challenges that require tailored approaches and innovative solutions. ODVA is committed to making Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) central to every program and service provided to veterans and their families and remains steadfast in its mission to serve and support all veterans, ensuring they receive the benefits and care they have earned through their service.



Oregon's Return On Investment

IMPACT OF VETERAN SERVICE OFFICES ON FEDERAL VETERAN BENEFITS EXPENDITURES IN OREGON

The partnership between the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) plays a crucial role in bringing substantial monetary benefits and resources to Oregon veterans, significantly contributing to the state's economy. In FY 23 alone, federal VA expenditures in Oregon exceeded \$3.9 billion, investing in benefits such as disability compensation, pension payments, education, and healthcare. These benefits, earned through honorable military service, not only provide veterans with financial stability but also reduce reliance on state resources, contribute to Oregon's economic health, and enhance the state's trained and educated workforce.

Disability Compensation and Pension

A significant portion of these federal benefits—over \$1.9 billion—was awarded to Oregon veterans and their families as a direct result of ODVA's efforts and partnerships with Veteran Service Offices (VSO), primarily through disability compensation and pension payments. These federal dollars act as an economic multiplier, directly benefiting both urban and rural communities across the state.

Disability compensation is a cornerstone benefit that ODVA and the states counties, tribal nations and national service organizations diligently work to secure for veterans. In FY 23, \$165 million per month was distributed in disability compensation and pension payments, benefiting approximately 32% of Oregon's veterans. This monthly, tax-free income is provided to veterans who have incurred injuries or disabilities during their active-duty service, offering them critical financial compensation.

Pension payments, another key focus for ODVA and VSOs, are needs-based benefits designed to assist aging, disabled, and low-income war-era veterans and widows. By helping veterans access these benefits, ODVA not only supports their financial stability but also helps offset state safety net costs, thereby reducing the burden on state-funded health and stability resources.

Healthcare

The federal VA operates the largest integrated healthcare delivery system in the United States, and in Oregon, this translated to more than \$1.8 billion spent on healthcare for veterans in FY 23. Currently, 96,430 Oregon veterans are enrolled in VA healthcare, benefiting from services that

include free hearing aids, eyeglasses, and low-cost prescription medications—substantial savings that enhance veterans' quality of life.

ODVA, through the VSO network, plays a pivotal role in connecting veterans with these federal healthcare resources. They assist veterans in navigating the USDVA-coordinated healthcare options funded by the VA's Community Care program, which covers mental health services, emergency care, prosthetics, and other essential medical needs. By facilitating access to these resources, ODVA ensures that veterans receive the comprehensive care they deserve.

Education

In FY 23, nearly \$129 million in federal veteran education benefits were invested in Oregon, supporting 6,970 veterans who used their G.I. Bill® benefits. These funds directly benefit Oregon's educational institutions—trades, community colleges, and universities—through tuition payments, while also providing veterans with a monthly housing stipend during their studies. By facilitating access to these education benefits, ODVA not only empowers veterans to pursue higher education but also contributes to the development of a skilled workforce in Oregon.

Through these efforts, ODVA ensures that the federal dollars invested in Oregon's veterans translate into tangible benefits for both veterans and the broader community. The impact of these benefits extends beyond individual veterans, fostering economic growth, enhancing public health, and strengthening the state's educational institutions.



Agency Initiatives

HONOR AND IMPROVE EVERY VETERANS JOURNEY

ODVA Leadership and Operations

Over the past few years, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) has experienced significant leadership transitions, most recently the Senate confirmed Governor's appointment of Dr. Nakeia Council Daniels to the directorship. Changes under this new leadership has been pivotal in guiding ODVA through a period of growth and transformation as we continue to expand our services and take on new initiatives.

ODVA has embarked on an ambitious agenda to better serve every veteran across the state. This period has seen the development of several critical programs, including securing support and funding for the construction of a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg and the creation of a statewide suicide prevention media campaign aimed at directing veterans and their families to resources and activities that improve mental health needs of Oregon veterans. These initiatives, along with the increase of new veteran programs and grants since 2017, have significantly increased the scope and impact of our work, necessitating a reevaluation of our organizational structure to ensure we are equipped to meet these new challenges.

To align our resources with the expanding mission of ODVA, we have undertaken a comprehensive restructuring effort. This process has included reviewing our leadership structure, seeking to enhance our support role staffing levels, and realigning roles and responsibilities to better serve Oregon's veterans. Our goal is to create a more agile and responsive organization that can effectively manage the growing portfolio of initiatives we have undertaken since the investment of Lottery funding for veteran services in Oregon.

One of the key focuses of this restructuring has been to ensure that we have appropriate levels of staffing across all divisions. The expansion of our services has required us to bring on additional staff with the expertise needed to support new programs and initiatives, as well as to strengthen our existing capabilities. This includes not only front-line staff who work directly with veterans but also administrative and support staff who play a crucial role in maintaining the smooth operation of ODVA.

The leadership changes within ODVA have also been instrumental in guiding this restructuring process. Under the guidance of new leadership, we have been able to prioritize initiatives that directly impact veterans' lives, such as improving access to direct services for veterans experiencing housing instability and homelessness, and awareness of suicide prevention resources messaging and services, including access to behavioral health services. Our leaders have brought fresh perspectives and innovative approaches to these challenges, ensuring that ODVA remains at the forefront of veteran advocacy and support in Oregon.

As we continue to move forward, the ongoing restructuring efforts and leadership transitions at ODVA are focused on one clear objective: enhancing our ability to serve Oregon's veterans with the highest level of care, compassion, and efficiency. We are committed to building an organization that is not only responsive to the needs of veterans today but is also prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

VAC Transitions: This year the Veteran Advisory Committee (VAC) faced challenges due to the expiration of terms and unforeseen resignations of five of the nine committee members. To address this, in February, ODVA launched a comprehensive recruitment campaign to fill these current and future roles. This effort was designed to attract a diverse pool of candidates who could bring a wide range of experiences, perspectives, and skills to the committee. Recognizing the importance of continuity and strong leadership, ODVA has been working closely with the Governor's Executive Appointments Office to fill current or anticipated vacancies on the committee.

These efforts are part of a broader strategy to ensure that the VAC remains a robust and effective body, capable of advising on the diverse issues facing Oregon's veteran community. By proactively seeking candidates who are not only committed to veteran advocacy but also represent the various generations and communities of veterans across the state, ODVA aims to strengthen the committee's capacity to fulfill its vital role.

Supporting Governor Kotek's Priorities: In alignment with Governor Kotek's policy priorities, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) is actively engaged in addressing the pressing issues of homelessness and behavioral health access among veterans. These initiatives are part of a comprehensive approach to improving the lives of Oregon's veterans, with a focus on ensuring stability, safety, and well-being for those who have served our country.

To support the Governor's efforts to reduce homelessness, ODVA serves on the Governor's Interagency Housing Council, which focuses on finding sustainable housing solutions for Oregon's most vulnerable populations, including veterans. Out of this work, ODVA develop two key budget packages aimed at reducing homelessness among veterans as they exit incarceration. These initiatives emphasize providing critical support to veterans transitioning out of incarceration into stable housing, reducing recidivism and the likelihood of then falling into chronic homelessness after their release.

ODVA's work on homelessness aligns with the Governor's larger vision of addressing the statewide housing crisis and ensuring that veterans receive the tailored support they need during this critical transition period. By coordinating with state agencies, community organizations like the YMCA, and veteran service providers like Tanner House, ODVA is working to implement strategies and tangible



housing resources that improve housing access and reduce barriers that disproportionately impact veterans in Oregon.

In addition to tackling homelessness, ODVA is advancing the Governor's priority of expanding access to behavioral health services. A key element of this effort has been ODVA's leadership in suicide prevention, particularly through participation in the USDVA/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families. Oregon began participating in this national initiative in 2023, and ODVA, alongside the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), has taken on a central role in co-leading this effort.

The Governor's Challenge focuses on postvention, offering support to families, friends, and communities impacted by the suicide of a service member or veteran. These postvention efforts are designed to provide critical resources to the bereaved, who are at increased risk of suicide themselves, as well as to reduce stigma and improve access to mental health services.

In January 2024, ODVA selected Wicked Bionic, a media agency, to develop a statewide suicide prevention and awareness campaign aimed at reaching diverse, multi-generational, and multi-cultural audiences. This campaign, funded by Charitable Checkoff contributions, will promote awareness of suicide prevention resources for veterans, connecting them to vital support networks and services. Expected to launch in Fall 2024, this comprehensive campaign will utilize various media channels, including billboards, radio, print and digital ads, and social media, to ensure that Oregon's veterans know about and has access to mental health resources, and other activities that promote wellbeing when they need them most.

The campaign website URL will be BeyondTheMilitaryUniform.com.

Roseburg Veterans Home: Establishing a veteran's home in Roseburg remains a top priority for ODVA and securing state matching funds during this year's legislative session was a crucial step forward. We have taken several actions to advance this initiative with support from Governor Kotek and the Oregon Legislature to successfully garner the 35% state funds necessary to receive 65% matching grant funds from the USDVA to build the Roseburg Veterans Home. Testifying before the House in January and providing planned updates to the House and Senate veterans committees following are integral in informing stakeholders of ODVA's progress since the allocation of state matching funds.

Following the allocation of state funds, ODVA submitted updated documentation to the USDVA State Veterans Homes Construction Grant in April 2024, positioning Oregon to be moved to the Priority 1 list for federal grant funding consideration. ODVA continues to meet and work with the Roseburg VA Medical Center development team to finalize the MOU agreement that will ultimately transfer approximately 13 acres of federal land on the Roseburg VAMC campus to ODVA to build the state's third veterans' home.

Technology Modernization: Additionally, the agency is overseeing the completion of a major IT project for the Home Loan Servicing Department system replacement, currently underway with a tentative completion date of December 2024. We successfully lobbied for two new positions to support this significant IT replacement project, which is the first system replacement project that that agency has engaged in since the original system was implemented more than 20 years ago.



Agency Strategic Planning and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Engagement

ODVA Executive Staff began strategic planning work in summer of 2024 to update the agency's current plan. To keep these strategies effective for the Oregon veteran community, each year we reflect on what we have accomplished the previous year, adjust and strengthen our intentions for the next years, and select specific actions to hold ourselves accountable for the coming year.

This spring, we contracted with a DEI consulting company to work with us on foundational DEI priorities that will help us meet agency goals of embedding strategies in the plan to address evolving barriers to ODVA services for Oregon's veterans. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Racial Equity are at the core of ODVA's vision of ensuring that every veteran and their families thrive in Oregon. Centering DEI allows us to address barriers to accessing veteran services in Oregon. Our goal is to ensure that agency programs and systems are designed to reach and align with every veteran's evolving needs across their lifespan. This includes the veterans and members of their families who serve veterans as employees of ODVA.

Partnerships

ODVA has prioritized strengthening partnerships, hosting meetings with partners, and maintaining ongoing dialogue with legislative and congressional representatives to advance current initiatives, including the construction of a third veterans' home in Roseburg.

This work includes a concerted effort to strengthen partnerships with key veteran stakeholders, such as executive branch agencies, the County Veterans Service Officer Association, the federal VA, national service organizations, and other service providers and non-profits that deliver services within the veteran community. We are actively engaged with all facets of our organization, our veteran community, and our partners to ensure that we are meeting the evolving and diverse needs of our veterans.

United States Department of Veterans Affairs: This past fiscal year, Veterans Affairs leadership from Washington D.C. made multiple visits to Oregon to meet ODVA leadership and tour programs and facilities across the state. In October 2023, ODVA invited VA Deputy Assistant Secretary Zaneta Adams to meet with ODVA Executive leadership to learn about ODVA programs and tour Oregon veteran housing investments, including Courtney Place and Tanner Project, both veteran transitional housing developed in part using Measure 96 Lottery funding.

Following, Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher visited Oregon to tour the White City VA Rehabilitation Center and the Roseburg Medical Center campus. The visit toured and held discussions with facility leadership to hear from veterans firsthand about the on-the-ground implementation of VA's electronic health record system. In May 2024, Deputy Secretary visited Oregon once again to meet with the Roseburg VAMC staff and hold panel discussions with student veterans at both Oregon State University and University of Oregon.

Legislative and Congressional Partnerships: In February 2024, Governor Kotek submitted a letter to the Legislature, advocating for the allocation of the 35% in state or local matching funds required for the Roseburg Veterans' Home grant application to gain placement on the USDVA's State Veterans' Home Construction Grant Priority 1 list.

As priority, ODVA also continues to meet with numerous Oregon Congressional members and Oregon Legislators to express the needs to address issues facing a diverse spectrum of veteran issues. Most notably, the 2024 Regular Session concluded with strong support and a significant investment in constructing a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg.

Veteran Organizations and Service Providers: Oregon has a robust and diverse veteran community of organizations and providers, all aimed at the same goal of helping veterans across a diverse array of concerns and services. Beyond the programmatic partnerships established through service provider grants and other longstanding partners, ongoing engagement with broad partners allow us to stay informed on local, state and national issues and best practices, bring awareness to existing barriers to services. ODVA meets regularly with major partners to address these identify and address barriers for veterans to include:

- **National Veteran Service Organizations:** The United Veterans Groups of Oregon (UVGO) is a vital partner, comprised of Oregon’s major nationally recognized veteran service organizations such as the American Legion, National Association of Black Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Korean War Association and more.
- **County Partnerships:** Veteran Services in Oregon are delivered through a long-standing state and county partnership to provide free and expert assistance preparing and filing claims for veterans and their eligible dependents in every Oregon county. To ensure a well-coordinated veteran services system in Oregon, we regularly engage in regular quarterly meetings with the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) and the County Veterans Service Officer Association. This network of services and leadership allows a collaborative and partnered approach to veteran services in Oregon.
- **Tribal Nations:** Partnered with Cow Creek Ribs of Umpqua Indians to sign the forth Memorandum of Understanding between ODVA and tribal nations to provide Veteran Service Offices on their land. ODVA trains and accredits Tribal VSO’s to provide these services.
- **National Associations:** National Association of Directors of Veterans Affairs and the National Association of State Veterans Homes are primary associations ODVA is active in to remain current on federal policy and programs impacting our state’s veterans and programs.
- **Boards, Commissions and Local Associations:** ODVA has regular engagement with various boards and commissions, such as Oregon Community Foundation (OCF), to integrate veteran needs into broader state policies and programs. Other work includes engaging with local associations and groups that represent populations that have been systemically marginalized and can reach their veteran communities.





Agency Program Overview: Serve, Advocate, And Partner

FY24 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In FY24, the agency made significant strides in its mission to serve, advocate for, and partner with Oregon's veteran community. This section highlights agency program outcomes and key accomplishments focused on expanding critical services, enhancing advocacy, and building strategic partnerships to address the evolving needs of veterans. Notable achievements include securing funding for the construction of a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg, launching a statewide suicide prevention media campaign, and doubling support for county veteran service offices. ODVA also strengthened collaboration with tribal nations and other veteran service providers, ensuring a more inclusive and comprehensive support network for all veterans across the state.

Portland Appeals Office

To best support veterans and their families in Oregon, ODVA has invested in a dedicated appeals team that is co-located with the USDVA's regional Veterans Benefits Administration Office in Portland. The Appeals Team focuses on representing denied claims in front of the USDVA Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA).

In FY 2024, the appeals team conducted 226 federal VA appeals on behalf of veterans and their families. These appeals are a contributing factor to the significant retroactive payments awarded to veterans on Oregon. Retroactive awards for individuals represented by ODVA in FY 2024 exceeded \$53 million.

There were 9,491 new veteran claimants represented by ODVA's Powers of Attorney and 8,461 new disability claims awarded totaling more than \$13.4 million in service-connected or disability compensation or pension payments to those veterans and their families. Powers of Attorney executed by Oregon veterans and their families allows state and county veterans service officers throughout the state to represent veterans or survivors in claims.

The Appeals team also completed a backlog of legacy claims, which were claims that existed prior to the federal Appeals Modernization Act in 2019. This completion has positioned Oregon as one of only three states that have eliminated this backlog. Due to these efforts, the time that a claimant

must wait to have an appeal hearing has decreased from approximately 36 to 48 months to 12 to 24 months.

During FY 2024, ODVA entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to move from a paper process to digital documents for casework. This switchover to the new digital model has improved access to needed documents within 10 working days. To complete the processing improvement, the Quality Control, Submittals, and Information Processing team scanned and uploaded 63,950 paper files. In total, 139,616 documents were uploaded for digital use.

Training, Certification and Outreach (TCO)

Veterans service officers (VSOs) are certified trained professionals and are subject matter experts in federal Title 38 law which allows them to represent veterans in filing disability and pension claims to the federal VA. ODVA's Training, Certification and Outreach (TCO) team ensures that all Oregon VSOs are trained and certified (leading to USDVA accreditation), ODVA has a robust and in-depth training program.

TCO continued to expand and enhance the regional trainings for county, tribal and ODVA VSOs to include multiple options for virtual trainings and testing when in-person access is not available or offered. In FY 2024, TCO conducted 15 VSO trainings where 21 state, county and Tribal VSOs received certification from the state for VA accreditation. TCO also trained 10 new VSO administrative staff who help support veteran clients.

During FY 2024, in addition to training and certifying VSOs, TCO handled 197 veteran and survivor cases needing expert guidance. The TCO team also participated in six statewide outreach events including supporting PACT ACT Claims Clinics to assist veterans who may have been exposed to toxins during military service, and Yellow Ribbon Events. Yellow Ribbon events are designed as pre- and post-deployment events for members of the Oregon National Guard and Oregon Air National Guard who were activated on Title 10 (federal) orders. By attending these events, ODVA provides direct support to Guard members whose eligibility for veteran benefits may have just started for the first time, and to those who are already receiving VA benefits that must be paused during deployment or resumed after deployment.

Conservatorship and Representative Payee Programs

In fiscal year 2024, 167 clients were served by ODVA's Conservatorship and Representative Payee Programs. The individuals assisted in this program are unable to manage their finances well enough to provide adequate care for themselves due to mental illness or deficiency, physical disability, chronic use of drugs or controlled substances. These programs also allow these veterans to have stable housing, food, clothing, and access to transportation to medical/mental health services, which enables a higher quality of life.

Some of the younger veterans served through these programs have been able to attend college courses because of the stability provided by ODVA's fiduciary program. This fiduciary program prudently managed over \$25 million in assets, including 18 properties, for veterans and their family members in FY 2024.



Oregon Veterans' Homes

The Oregon Veterans' Homes are state-certified skilled-nursing and memory care facilities serving veterans, veterans' spouses and Gold Star parents. Oregon currently has two veterans' homes, one in The Dalles and the other in Lebanon. The Oregon Veterans' Home program is a self-sustaining program that offers award-winning, superior care at a lower cost to veterans and their families.

In FY 2024, both state veterans' homes received the Pinnacle Customer Experience Award from Pinnacle Quality Insights, a private third-party customer satisfaction firm. The Dalles received the award for all 16 categories and Lebanon received the award for 14 of the 16 categories. Both Homes received numerous other industry and association awards in recognition of their excellent care.

The Homes also implemented ongoing required COVID-19 precautions at both Homes, thereby successfully passing several state infection prevention focused surveys geared toward ensuring the health and welfare of residents. The Homes' staff also completed active-shooter training. Veteran residents received PACT Act screening by the federal VA through a partnership with the National Association of State Veterans Homes.

Both Homes utilized trust fund dollars for various outings, including beach trips, fishing and camping excursions, magic shows, concerts, military displays, Veterans Day ceremonies and events, family events, cultural events and concerts.

Also in FY 2024, the Oregon Legislature, at the urging of Governor Tina Kotek, allocated \$35 million in state general fund dollars toward the construction of a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg. These required state matching funds enabled ODVA to complete the federal grant application documents necessary to be placed on the federal VA's Priority 1 funding list for state veterans' homes in 2025.

Oregon Veteran Home Loans

Oregon citizens voted in 1945 to create a Veteran Home Loan Program to serve the home purchase financing needs of veterans returning from World War II. Since that time, the ODVA Home Loan Program has provided more than \$8 billion of low-interest loans to more than 350,000 Oregon veterans. Oregon has the distinction of being one of only five states offering a veteran home loan program to its state's veterans, separate and distinct from the Federal VA Home Loan Guarantee.

For FY 2024, the ODVA Home Loan program closed 206 loans for \$82,186,071 in new production, putting 191 veteran clients into new homes. This represents the second-highest fiscal year production levels going back to 1998. Further, the loan servicing portfolio also continued to experience the reversal of a more than decade long downward trend in the servicing portfolio with 1,560 loans totaling \$390.6 million in the servicing portfolio.

ODVA also maintained a low borrower delinquency rate with only 15 loans in any status of delinquency, representing just 1% of the total portfolio. Mortgage rates in the private sector continued significant increases into FY 2024 while ODVA rates remained lower than private sector due to previous bond sale pricing.

Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant Program

In 2019, the Oregon Legislature established the Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant Program (VEBG). The purpose of this program since its inception has been to provide financial assistance to veterans



who are unable to complete a degree program within the expected completion period due to the timing of course offerings.

With the passage of House Bill 2271 in 2024, the Legislature expanded the program's eligibility to include veterans not eligible to receive federal GI Bill® benefits, meaning any veteran who is an Oregon resident and meets the definition of "veteran" as defined in ORS 408.225, may now qualify for financial assistance using the Veteran Educational Bridge Grant.

The Legislature expanded grant eligibility to veterans enrolled in any career school licensed by the Oregon Higher Education and Coordinating Commission (HECC), any apprenticeship registered with BOLI, and any On-The-Job Training (OTJ) program offered by a public employer. Previously, VEBG could only be awarded to veterans enrolled in programs approved to administer the GI Bill®.

House Bill 2271 also made it so veterans can use Bridge Grant funds to pay off debt on a student account that is preventing them from registering for future terms. The legislation also made the VEBG permanent, which allowed ODVA to hire a Bridge Grant Coordinator to help increase outreach efforts to ensure eligible veterans know about and can access the program.

Aging Veteran Outreach

The Aging Veterans Outreach Coordinator establishes and coordinates services directed at aging veterans residing in their homes or in care facilities around the state. The position is an integral part of the agency mission to ensure aging veterans receive the highest quality and priority representation from a veterans service officer.

The Aging Veterans Outreach Coordinator educates and coordinates with partners like long-term health care facilities, VSOs, the Department Human Services (DHS), and other providers about the challenges facing veterans as they age and the state and federal benefits that help improve outcomes for them and their families.

Many aging veterans have never filed for veterans' benefits or had their case file reviewed for possible additional benefits or disability rating increases as new health conditions have arisen. In FY 2024, the Aging Veteran Outreach Coordinator provided claims assistance or benefits counseling to approximately 186 veterans or eligible dependents, resulting in approximately \$256,266 in retroactive benefits payments, \$29,490 in new monthly benefits to veterans, and \$629,145 in privately paid nursing home expenses being returned to veterans.

To reach these veterans, this program conducted outreach to aging veterans at 31 outreach events or presentations, including stand downs and one specific to suicide prevention, speaking to approximately 7,450 individuals. These events included engagements in Lane, Marion, Benton, Multnomah, Josephine, Klamath, Malheur, Deschutes, Washington, Linn, Lincoln, Clackamas, Polk and Crook counties.

Campus Veteran Coordinator

ODVA's Campus Veterans Coordinator has worked to build a supportive community for campus veteran Resource Coordinators at Oregon's public universities and community colleges through outreach, networking, and training for these higher education professionals. Campus veteran resource centers provide a place for veterans to get assistance and support, connect with other veterans, study, and socialize. ODVA's Campus Veterans Coordinator has been a central point of



contact to assist campus veteran resource coordinators with student veteran support by providing referrals to veteran service partners in their local areas.

In August 2024, ODVA hosted the annual Campus Veteran Coordinator Summit, which provides additional supports, training, and networking opportunities for veteran resource center coordinators at Oregon universities and community colleges.

Houseless Veterans

ODVA began the Houseless Veterans Program by hiring its first Houseless Veterans Coordinator in June 2021. The Houseless Veterans Coordinator collaborates with federal, state, county, veterans service officers and community homeless service providers to meet the urgent and unique needs of Oregon's diverse veteran communities.

In FY 2024, this program handled 75 houseless veteran cases, made 25 medical and behavioral health referrals, and assisted 5 veterans to obtain ODVA's Veteran Emergency Financial Assistance Grant. The coordinator also conducted 15 partner trainings, attended 38 partner network events and 15 outreach activities.

The following demonstrates the advocacy work being conducted by this program:

The Houseless Veterans Coordinator recently received a case from a veteran who had applied for the ODVA Emergency Grant. The nature of the grant was to help pay for three months of back rent that was owed, and a 72-hour eviction notice. Unfortunately, due to the brief amount of time served on active duty, the veteran was not eligible for the grant per statute. The coordinator tapped into local resources and was able to prevent the eviction from happening by finding resources for the veteran to cover the back three months of owed rent, plus rent coverage for three months moving forward.

Incarcerated Veterans

The Incarcerated Veterans Program was established in 2016 to assist incarcerated veterans transitioning into Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) custody and then again as they transition back to their communities. The program coordinators verify the veteran status of those taken into custody so benefit eligibility can be assessed. Coordinators also focus on mitigating the negative outcomes of incarceration for veterans and family members. This includes ensuring timely notification to the USDVA of the veteran's incarceration to prevent overpayments, addressing overpayments by establishing manageable payment plans, and transferring withheld monetary benefits to family members if financial need can be established. A targeted outcome of determining benefit eligibility is to help incarcerated veterans access resources upon release, ultimately decreasing likelihood of recidivism and minimizing homelessness among veterans.

Even though one of ODVA's two Incarcerated Veterans Coordinator positions was vacant for most of the fiscal year, with collaboration from ODOC staff our program Coordinators were able to make over 990 contacts with incarcerated veterans. Contact was also made with over 400 veterans during group meetings in prisons across the state. In addition to informing veterans of their earned state and federal benefits, over 400 documents were submitted to the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs as part of the 162 claims submitted for these veterans.



LGBTQ+ Veterans

ODVA continued to provide direct claims and advocacy services to LGBTQ+ veterans and their families in Oregon. Through advocacy, ODVA's LGBTQ+ Veterans Coordinator has assisted 13 veterans to upgrade dishonorable or disqualifying discharge statuses that were the result of their LGBTQ identity. This advocacy has allowed these veterans to now access USDVA veteran benefits and helped correct their official military records. The coordinator also provides expert claims assistance to file for service-connected disability which provides direct compensation payments to these veterans. In FY 2024, the coordinator filed disability claims on behalf of 48 LGBTQ+ veterans, handled 82 cases, housed 4 veterans, and assisted 5 transgender veterans with name changes on formal military records.

ODVA participated in several partner trainings, provided outreach at multiple Pride celebrations, and conducted screenings of "Breaking the Silence" across Oregon to connect with hundreds of veterans, family members, and partners from the LGBTQ+ community. In FY 2024, the LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator provided outreach at 59 Pride and 'Breaking the Silence' showings and conducted 21 trainings.

The following demonstrates the advocacy work being conducted by this program:

In 1990, an Oregon veteran was discharged for being gay under the military's discriminatory policy that predated Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and he received an Other Than Honorable Discharge which was a barrier to federal and state veteran benefits.

After a multi-year fight, the veteran's discharge was successfully upgraded to honorable, however, unfortunately the veteran was still not able to access veteran benefits because he was discharged before serving 24 months of active-duty service time.

Sadly, the veteran passed away in January 2021 and was initially denied burial eligibility at Willamette National Cemetery. However, ODVA, U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley's office, and Multnomah County Veteran Services teamed up with the veteran's mother to continue to exhaust all available options to have his burial eligibility established.

Success from these efforts came on January 19, 2024, when the Board of Correction of Naval Records issued a determination that credited this veteran with 24 months of honorable active-duty service clearing the way for his burial at the Willamette National Cemetery in June 2024, coinciding with Pride Month.

Tribal Veterans

ODVA aids Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes regarding federal and state veterans' benefits, programs and services available for Tribal veterans. The program also supports efforts of the federal VA's Office of General Counsel of supporting accreditation of tribal veteran representatives in Oregon. The Tribal Veterans Coordinator, hired in April 2024, has connected with each of Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes to continue strengthening ODVA's relationship and partnerships with the Tribes, and support Tribal veterans and their families.



Veteran Volunteer Program

The Veteran Volunteer Program, established in 2018, was created to train and coordinate volunteer activity around the state to identify aging veterans who are not yet receiving veteran benefits and connect them with county veterans service officers to learn about potential state and federal earned benefits. Once a veteran has been referred to a local veteran services office, volunteers provide follow up to ensure that they have access to any services or benefits needed. In addition to educating veterans about their earned benefits, volunteers provide vital information about other state resources such as food stamps, Medicaid, and housing programs for which veterans may qualify. Volunteers help to guide veterans to the offices where they can receive assistance.

In FY 2024, 85 ODVA volunteers volunteered a total of 982 hours and connected with more than 4,400 individuals regarding veterans' benefits across the state. Volunteers engaged with veterans and family members at a wide variety of community events, including the Canby First Thursday Market, Lebanon Business Expo, Central Oregon Sportsman's Show, Elks Lodge Convention, Corvallis Kiwanis Club Breakfast, Pacific Northwest PGA Golf Tournament in Bend and the La Pine Rhubarb Festival, as well as ongoing tabling efforts at the Portland VA Medical Center and Three Rivers VFW.

Women Veterans

The Women Veterans Coordinator position was established in 2016 to improve outcomes for Oregon women veterans in five specific areas: outreach, advocacy, data, research, and policy. Focused outreach and advocacy are achieved via listening sessions and ongoing outreach to women veterans around Oregon, to increase awareness of women veterans and their unique experiences, issues, and needs as well as to assist in claims filing, especially related to difficult or challenging claims.

In FY 2024, the program engaged with 422 new women veterans, conducted nine partner trainings, provided case work for 51 women veterans, made 38 VA medical or behavioral health referrals, and assisted 6 women veterans with emergency assistance using ODVA's Emergency Financial Assistance Grant.

Two key outreach efforts for this program are the Women Veterans Conference and the "I Am Not Invisible" campaign and exhibit.

In FY 2024, the biennial Women Veteran Conference was hosted at the Salem Convention Center and for the first time since the end of COVID-19 restrictions. The biennial event provided more than 200 Oregon women veterans access to veteran benefits, information and resources along with exposure to nearly 100 vendors and exhibitors, including many state and federal partners. Case work was performed during the two-day event and nearly 50 additional women veterans reached out to inquire about other veteran benefits and programs.

Launched in 2017, the "I Am Not Invisible" campaign, a photo exhibit featuring 22 Oregon women veterans, was developed by ODVA to increase awareness of issues specific to women veterans. The successful campaign continues to exhibit throughout Oregon and nationally, traveling as far as Washington D.C. for an exhibit at the United States Capitol in 2017, and has been replicated by numerous states' veterans' agencies, including the USDVA. USDVA and the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs awarded this exhibit the Pillars of Excellence Award in 2021. In FY 2024, "I Am Not invisible" exhibited with 18 showings across Oregon.

Pass-through funding to Counties, Tribes and National Service Orgs

ODVA administered \$5.13 million in pass through funding to counties, tribes, and national services organizations, to expand and enhance veteran services in Oregon in FY23. These state funds together with funding provided by counties, tribes, and National Service Organizations, are used to pay for veteran service offices operational and staffing costs associated with providing veteran services in their county, on tribal land or national service organization office. Funding can also be used to support outreach work. These offices work directly with veterans and their families to file U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims and appeals and apply for other veteran benefits they may be entitled to.

Tribal Veterans Service Officers (TVSO)

ODVA continued to work with the USDVA Office of Tribal Government Relations to provide Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes enhanced representation for USDVA claims and appeals. In the 2019 session the legislature provided, for the first time, pass-through funds to support Tribal Veterans Service Offices for tribes that have an agreement with ODVA and have employed a Tribal Veterans Service Officer (TVSO). This program, like the County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO) program, assists veterans and their eligible dependents in obtaining earned state and federal veterans' benefits. Currently, ODVA has agreements with three of Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes to provide financial assistance and training in support of their Tribal Veteran Service advocacy.

State Approving Agency (SAA)

The State Approving Agency (SAA) reviews, evaluates, and approves quality programs of education and training institutions to ensure state and federal quality criteria are met for veterans and eligible dependents using G.I. Bill® benefits. In this role, the SAA conducts compliance actions at approved facilities, provides technical assistance with applications for facilities seeking approval, completes course catalog technical reviews, and serves as the liaison between Oregon veterans and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The SAA engages in outreach activities to encourage wider use of the GI Bill® by veterans, other beneficiaries, schools, and employers. Through these partnerships the SAA facilitates even greater and more diverse educational opportunities for Oregon's veterans and family members. Every year since its assumption of the SAA contract from VA in September 2019, the Oregon SAA has received the highest rating possible for SAA evaluations and continues to expand outreach and training to Oregon's educational and training facilities.

In FY23, the SAA completed 35 site visits, 89 facility approvals, assisted with 347 issues and participated in 14 outreach activities.

Campus Resource Center Grants

The Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant Program, established in 2017, was made permanent during the 2019 Regular Session. The program provides funds to expand Campus Veteran Resource Centers at Oregon community colleges and public universities. The grants are intended to augment existing campus programs that help veterans successfully transition from military service to college life, succeed in college/complete educational goals, and transition from college to the workforce and the community. In the 21-23 biennium, 15 public universities and community colleges applied for and received funding to expand campus veteran resource centers on campuses. During this grant cycle, the grantees have served 20,246 veterans.



The total amount awarded in this grant cycle was \$600,000 and awards ranged from \$11,040 - \$81,079. Below are the Oregon universities and community colleges that were awarded a Campus Resource Center Grant in the 21-23 biennium:

Campus Veteran Resource Center (CVRC) Grant Awardees	Award Amount
Blue Mountain Community College	\$44,476
Central Oregon Community College	\$41,029
Chemeketa Community College	\$57,416
Clackamas Community College	\$11,040
Klamath Community College	\$15,340
Lane Community College	\$58,500
Linn-Benton Community College	\$26,400
Mt. Hood Community College	\$45,774
Oregon State University	\$22,750
Portland State University	\$44,435
Rogue Community College	\$33,260
Southern Oregon University	\$58,163
Southwestern Oregon Community College	\$32,182
University of Oregon	\$50,600
Western Oregon University	\$58,635

Veteran Services Grants

The purpose of this program is to provide state resources in the form of grant funding to non-profits, tribal, city and county governments, quasi-governments, and transportation districts so that they can in turn perform outreach and provide direct services to veterans and families. Veteran services grants are being used to expand services to veterans in the areas of transportation, legal services, education and training, housing security and homelessness, employment opportunities, physical and mental health, and other critical services for veterans. These grants allow ODVA to leverage resources with partner organizations who are deeply committed to serving veterans in their communities.

In the 2021-23 biennium, ODVA awarded 21 grants totaling \$938,118 to help Oregon veterans by granting funds to veteran service organizations that provide critical services for veterans within a community, region, or statewide basis. Organizations reported serving 8,441 veterans in their local communities through this funding. ODVA received 31 grant applications totaling \$3,369,878. Below are the organizations who were awarded Veteran Service Grants in the 21-23 biennium:

Amount	Veteran Service Grant Awardee	County
\$64,389	American Military Encouragement Network (AMEN)	Clackamas
\$43,677	Chadwick Clubhouse	Douglas
\$74,871	Clackamas County Children Family & Community Connections Workforce Programs	Clackamas
\$7,500	Community Counseling Solutions	Grant, Morrow, Wheeler, Gilliam, Umatilla
\$32,340	Crossroads Communities	Linn, Polk, Marion, Clackamas, Washington
\$99,000	Easterseals Oregon	Multnomah, Douglas, Lane, Jackson, Josephine, Yamhill
\$35,000	Fort Kennedy	Clackamas, Multnomah, Washington



(Continued)

Amount	Veteran Service Grant Awardee	County
\$11,000	Linn County Veteran Services	Linn
\$50,000	Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency	Marion
\$45,000	National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)	Multnomah, Multnomah
\$34,650	NeighborWorks Umpqua	Douglas
\$16,000	Northwest Outward Bound School (NWOBS)	Multnomah
\$72,000	NW Veterans in Technology	Multnomah
\$67,509	Operation Rebuild Hope	Coos
\$61,124	Project ABLE	Marion
\$58,254	Solid Ground Equine Assisted Activities & Therapy Ctr	Klamath
\$14,024	Southwest Oregon Veterans Outreach Inc.	Coos
\$63,390	St. Andrew Legal Clinic	Multnomah
\$17,500	St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County Inc.	Lane
\$39,600	Washington County Disability, Aging and Veteran Services	Washington
\$30,720	Yamhill County Health & Human Services	Yamhill

Oregon Veterans Emergency Financial Assistance Grants

The OVEFAP provides emergency financial assistance for needs such as temporary housing supports, past due rent or mortgage assistance, utilities assistance, emergency medical or dental expenses, and emergency transportation expenses. Applications are provided online as well through county and tribal Veteran Service Offices.

In FY23, ODVA distributed \$116,984 to 73 veterans or eligible family members through the Oregon Veterans Emergency Financial Assistance Program (OVEFAP).

During this period, 187 veterans applied for the program requesting \$889,701 in financial assistance. Funding was available to address only 39% of the needs. The average amount requested was \$4,758 and the average award amount was \$1,603.

Upon receipt of an application, ODVA also connects applicants to additional resources and services provided by Veteran Service Offices, Oregon Community Action Agencies, National Service Organizations, and other state and local community service providers.

Veteran Housing: Courtney Place - Veterans Affordable Housing in Salem

During the 2019 Legislative Session, the legislature authorized \$1 million of Measure 96 Lottery Funds for a one-time grant to the YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties to construct veterans' affordable housing in Salem. An additional \$6 million of lottery bond proceeds were also approved for a total grant to the YMCA of \$7 million. US Senators Merkley and Widen secured another \$2 million in federal funds for the project. The project broke ground on June 15, 2022, and is now scheduled to open August 2023. This new veteran housing complex will have 34 units and the facility will provide wrap-around services to further support long-term stability and access to supportive resources for veteran tenants.

Federal Highly Rural Transportation Grant

ODVA was awarded its ninth consecutive Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) \$500,000 in FY23 from the federal VA. This grant is administered by ODVA in partnership with Oregon's 10 highly rural



counties (Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa, Wheeler). HRTG helps address barriers to access VA healthcare for veterans residing in highly rural communities by providing door-to-door pick-up and drop-off in ADA-compliant vehicles, with assistance in loading or unloading, at no cost to the veteran. This program funds innovative approaches to transporting veterans in highly rural areas who typically must travel hundreds of miles to access health and behavioral health care at VA medical centers and facilities.

In FY23 more nearly 6,000 hours were spent transporting 143 unique veterans on 2,453 trips. During these rides, 168,259 miles were accumulated transporting veterans to VA or VA-authorized regional medical centers and dental clinics. During this grant cycle, the 10 highly rural transportation providers achieved the milestone of logging more than 2 million miles of rides for Oregon's highly rural veterans since the original grant award in 2014.

Counties work in collaboration with Transportation Coordinators in the VA Medical Centers (VAMC's), so that no federal funds in the form of transportation reimbursements are disbursed to veterans for these HRTG trips. Counties continue to partner with County Veteran Service Offices for HRTG program promotion, and to encourage veteran referrals to the HRTG program.

Oregon Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant

First approved in 2019, the 2021 Oregon Legislature approved \$650,000 for the state Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant (RVHTG) program. The purpose of the grants is to provide free transportation to veterans in rural areas seeking healthcare (physical or mental) and related services at U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA) facilities, VA authorized health centers, and other healthcare facilities.

The goal of the RVHTG program is to overcome transit-based barriers between veterans living in rural areas and the healthcare services they have earned and expand access to transportation for veterans living in rural areas of Oregon that may not be covered by the federal VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grant. To leverage Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Public Transportation Division's mobility expertise, ODVA entered into an Interagency Agreement with ODOT to develop and implement the RVHTG program.

Eighteen (18) transportation providers currently provide free rides for veterans to VA facilities, non-VA health/behavioral health appointments, pharmacies, and other health-related services in numerous rural and highly rural counties across Oregon.

Charitable Checkoff Funds for Veteran Suicide Prevention & Awareness

In 2013, the Veteran Suicide Awareness and Prevention Charitable Checkoff Fund was established to raise awareness and prevent veteran death by suicide in Oregon. The awareness effort partnered Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) with the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles and the Oregon Charitable Checkoff Commission to fund awareness and prevention outreach.

ODVA distributed funding to counties and tribes as a grant to promote local Suicide Prevention and Awareness efforts. ODVA awarded \$69,000 to 18 grantees for Veteran Suicide and Prevention. 12% of funding was awarded to Oregon tribal communities and 13% of funding was awarded to Oregon public universities and community colleges. Awards between \$3,000-\$4,000 per recipient.

Contract with Lines for Life

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature provided funds to support a veteran’s suicide crisis line for active-duty service members, veterans, and their family members. ODVA contracted Lines for Life to operate a crisis line for Oregon’s at-risk veterans and their families. Services include a 24-hour, 7 day a week, bilingual crisis phone line, text, and chat. Staff provide screenings, assessments, informal online counseling, and referrals to community mental health providers, law enforcement, and other appropriate resources.

In fiscal year 2022, Lines for Life had 9,055 communications through the Oregon Military Helpline. Thirteen percent (13%) of those people received resources during those contacts.





Reaffirming Our Commitment

REFLECTING ON A YEAR OF GROWTH AND INNOVATION

As the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) reflects on another year of dedicated service, we reaffirm our commitment to the nearly quarter million veterans who call Oregon home. Our efforts to expand programs, secure funding, and enhance services underscore our mission to honor and support every veteran in our state. From the groundbreaking work on the third Veterans' Home in Roseburg to our leadership in statewide suicide prevention initiatives, ODVA continues to evolve in response to the ever-changing needs of our veteran community. These achievements are not just milestones; they are the foundation for the ongoing improvement of services that support veterans' well-being.

The past year has also been a period of significant transition and growth for ODVA. Under the new leadership of Dr. Nakeia Council Daniels, we have embarked on a comprehensive restructuring effort designed to better align our resources with the expanding scope of our mission. This restructuring is crucial as we continue to implement innovative programs and partnerships that address the critical issues facing veterans, such as housing instability, behavioral health access, and the unique challenges of transitioning from military to civilian life. The involvement of the Veterans' Advisory Committee (VAC) remains pivotal in ensuring that the voices of veterans from all generations and communities are heard and that their needs are met.

Looking ahead, ODVA is committed to building on this momentum. We are focused on enhancing our organizational agility and responsiveness to ensure that we can effectively manage the growing portfolio of initiatives and challenges. As we continue to strengthen our partnerships and refine our strategies, we are dedicated to delivering the highest level of care, compassion, and support to Oregon's veterans. With the continued support of our partners, the Governor's Office, and the Legislature, we are confident that ODVA will remain a leader in veteran advocacy, setting the standard for excellence in serving those who have served our nation.