



REPORT TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

For the regularly scheduled quarterly in-person meeting on September 13, 2023.

Mt. Vernon Community Hall | 640 Ingle Street, Mt. Vernon, OR 97865

This report can be downloaded at: www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Advisory-Committee.aspx

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On the Cover: Taken at the 2023 Oregon Women Veterans' Conference hosted by the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs in May, two Oregon women veterans stopped by ODVA's photo booth to capture the moment for social media. More than 400 women attended the biannual event that featured nearly 100 vendors and partner organizations along with dynamic speakers and learning opportunities about veteran benefits and issues impacting women who have served this nation. First established 25 years ago in 1993, this conference is one of the many special outreach efforts ODVA conducts to reach historically underserved veteran populations.



ADVISORY COMMITTEE INFORMATION

Since the Advisory Committee was established in 1945, it has held a distinct and fundamental role in advising the Director and staff of ODVA. Advisory Committee members are military veterans who are appointed by the Governor and act as advocates for veteran issues and represent veteran concerns across Oregon. The Advisory Committee is fortunate to have volunteer members who bring diverse talents and experiences to the table from every generation of veterans and communities across this state. As an Advisory Committee, they are informed by the broader veterans' community that they serve. As such, all Oregon veterans, their families, and our partners are invited to attend and participate in the quarterly meetings held across the state.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS *See member bios [here](#)*

James Gardner, Chair, USA	Eugene
Christine Gittins, Vice Chair, USA.....	Redmond
Robert “Bob” Van Voorhis, Secretary, USA.....	John Day
John Howard, USN.....	Medford
Reynold “Reyn” Leno, USMC.....	Grand Ronde
Nell Stamper, USCG.....	Astoria
Christina Wood, USAF.....	Portland
Christopher Waine, USA.....	Hermiston
Vacant Position.....	

COMMITTEE INFO AND CONTACT ONLINE

Learn more about the committee, meetings, or learn how to apply to be appointed by the Governor to serve as a Veterans Advisory Committee Member:

Webpage: www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Advisory-Committee.aspx

Email: odva_vaac@odva.oregon.gov



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS LEADERSHIP

Kelly Fitzpatrick, USADirector
Dr. Nakeia Daniels, USA.....Deputy Director
VacantSpecial Assistant to the Director
Jay DeFillipo, USA.....Legislative Director
Nicole Hoeft.....Strategic Communications Division Director
Donna Haole-Valenzuela.....Chief Financial Officer
Derek Simmons.....Controller
Cody Cox.....Veteran's Home Loan Program Manager
Troy Croff.....Facilities and Construction Manager
David Kampff, USAF.....Chief Information Officer
Barb Maras..... Acting Human Resources Director
Kelly Breshears..... Acting Aging Veteran Services Division Director
Helen Ireland..... Conservatorship Manager
Sheronne Blasi, USN..... Strategic Partnerships Director
Joseph Glover, USN..... Appeals & Special Advocacy Director
Martin Ornelas, USCG.....ODVA Portland Manager
Vacant..... Internal Auditor

CONTACT ODVA ONLINE

Learn more about agency programs, access a staff directory, or learn about federal and state veteran benefits using the links below:

Website: www.oregon.gov/odva

Blog: www.oregondva.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/odvavet

Subscribe: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/ORDVA/subscriber/new>

Order Veteran Benefit Magazines for your organization or self:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VeteransBenefitMagazine>



ADVISORY COMMITTEE QUARTERLY MEETING AGENDA

Wednesday, September 13, 2023 | 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Mt. Vernon Community Hall | 640 Ingle Street, Mt. Vernon, OR 97865

BUSINESS MEETING AGENDA

I. WELCOME AND ADMINISTRATION

- Call to Order – Chair James Gardner
- Pledge of Allegiance – Chair James Gardner
- Moment of Silence – Chair James Gardner
- Meeting Rules – Vice Chair Christine Gittins
- Committee Member Introductions

II. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- Election of Officers – Chair James Gardner
- Installation of Officers – Kelly Fitzpatrick, Director

III. ODVA DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Kelly Fitzpatrick, Director

IV. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

- FY 2022 VAC Annual Report to the Governor, Kelly Fitzpatrick
- Legislative Review and Budget Update: Jay DeFillipo, ODVA Legislative Director
- Briefing by Dan Ashley, Boise Vet Center
- Briefing by Thad Labhart, Community Counseling Service (CCS)
- Briefing by ODVA Tribal Veteran Coordinator Jon Taylor

V. OLD BUSINESS ITEMS

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- Next Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting:
Date: December 6, 2023 | Time: 9:30 – Noon
Location: Virtual

VII. BUSINESS MEETING ADJOURNED

VETERAN TOWN HALL

Following every quarterly business meeting, the VAC holds a Town Hall which the public is invited to ask questions or share information with the committee and director. This time is set aside for individuals to bring up broader veteran community issues. Members of the community are also invited to submit written public comments to the committee by emailing odva_vaac@odva.oregon.gov.

REPORT TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 13, 2023

MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR KELLY FITZPATRICK

Retirement Announcement and Transition

After much reflection and consideration, I have decided that it is time for me to retire from my role as the Director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. My last day with the department will be October 1. It has been an incredible privilege to serve our state's veterans and their families for the past five years. I am deeply proud of the progress we have made together, from expanding vital services to enhancing the well-being of our veteran community through partnerships and new program investments. While I am excited about the opportunity to embark on new adventures, please know that my commitment to our veterans will remain steadfast. I am confident that the department will continue to thrive under new leadership, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside all of you in support of Oregon's veterans. Thank you for your dedication and partnership over the years.

Additionally, I want to assure you that the transition to new leadership is carefully planned to ensure the continued success of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. Following my departure, Deputy Director Dr. Nakia Daniels will step in as the acting director. Her dedication and expertise will undoubtedly guide the department seamlessly during this period. I am also pleased to share that the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) is actively leading the recruitment efforts for a new director, and I am confident that they will identify a visionary leader who will continue to advance the mission of supporting our veterans and their families. Your unwavering commitment to our veterans is truly commendable, and I have full faith that this transition will further strengthen the department's impact on the lives of those we serve.

2023-25 ODVA LAB Budget and End of Session

With the close of Oregon's long legislative session, ODVA's legislative director Jay Defillipo and I have had the opportunity to discuss and work on many issues of importance to veterans, especially ODVA's 2023-25 Governor Budget and a number of bills that impact veterans. Jay will provide a verbal update during the in-person Advisory Committee meeting but I wanted to highlight some of the higher level outcomes of this biennium's budget for veterans.

- Maintained or increased funding across all veteran benefit programs including the Oregon Veterans' Homes and the Oregon Home Loan Programs.
- More than \$10.8 million in General and Lottery funding will continue support of county, tribal and national service organization veteran service offices across Oregon.

- Lottery and General fund support \$2.7 million in grant opportunities for veterans and veteran service providers providing resources across education, houselessness, emergency services, legal aid and more.
- Medical transportation for veterans in rural and highly rural locations received \$1.7 million in Federal and Lottery funding.
- This budget sustains \$2.1 million in General and Lottery funding for special advocacy programs serving historically underserved veterans including LGBTQ+, women, tribal, houseless, student, aging and incarcerated veterans

National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA)

ODVA Deputy Director Dr. Nakia Daniels, Legislative Director Jay DeFillipo and I attended the NASDVA Annual Training Conference in Buffalo, New York in August. This annual training brings together state directors of Veterans Affairs representing all fifty states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands to focus on veteran programs, benefits and legislative issues impacting veterans across the nation.

PACT Act Claims Clinics and Communications

ODVA, VBA's Portland Regional Office and the Portland VA Healthcare System continued to partner to operate VA claims clinics in locations across the state to amplify messaging about the need for veterans who have been exposed to toxins during their military service to take advantage of the VA's free medical screening and file a disability claim under the PACT Act passed by Congress and enacted in August 2022. The Act is a historic expansion of eligibility for veterans exposed to Agent Orange, burn pits, and other toxic environments. ODVA has collaborated with Portland VA since late 2022 on town halls and claims clinics including a clinic held on tribal land in Warm Springs, and at the Powwow hosted by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde in early July. ODVA's Strategic Communications team supported continuous messaging encouraging veterans to make PACT Act appointments to get a screening and file a claim. ODVA also helped amplify important messaging about the August deadline to file a PACT Act claim that would make claimants eligible to receive retroactive payment backdated to the passage of the law in August 2022. When the VA's system was overwhelmed with PACT Act Claims at deadline, preventing some from filing, ODVA helped communicate the VA's decision to extend the filing deadline to Aug. 14th. For those impacted by toxic exposures, this information and extension was critical and potentially life-altering. ODVA will continue to message the importance of filing claims related to toxic exposure even though veterans who do so now will not be eligible for the retroactive payment. **Also, a new deadline is fast approaching. Between now and September 30, 2023, Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between September 11, 2001 and October 1, 2013 are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care –without first applying for VA benefits.** Veterans can [apply online](#) or in person at their [local VA facility](#) until 11:59pm local time on September 30, 2023.

Willamette National Cemetery Interment of LGBTQ+ Veteran Martin Cerezo

This summer ODVA was honored to finally attend the interment of Oregon veteran Martin Cerezo at Willamette National Cemetery. The heartbreaking story of Martin Cerezo, a U.S. Navy sailor who was discharged in 1990 under the military policy prohibiting gays from serving. Tragically, Martin died not knowing whether his final wish — to be buried with military honors in a national cemetery — would be granted. When the National Cemetery Administration said her son still could not be buried at Willamette

because he hadn't served the minimum requirement of 24 months, Cheryle enlisted the help of Oregon's two U.S. senators, Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden. And on the advice of ODVA's Ian Michael, LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator, Cheryle asked Matthew Quinn at the Department of Veteran Affairs for an exemption on the minimum-service requirement. ODVA's advice worked and the exception was granted, allowing Martin to finally be laid to rest with honor, just as was his final wish, in June, which also happens to be Pride Month.

Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant

The 2023 Oregon Legislature approved up to \$1 million for the 2023-25 Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant Program and on July 31, ODVA announced the opening of grant applications for the Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant, which helps Oregon veterans succeed in their educational and vocational pursuits by expanding and enhancing Campus Veteran Resource Centers on Oregon college campuses. Oregon's 17 community colleges and seven public universities (excluding Oregon Health & Science University) are eligible to apply for these grant funds. The deadline for submitting grant applications was September 4, 2023. Next step: The program is actively recruiting evaluators for this grant cycle and the awards will be publicly announced in the fall.

Event Highlights

ODVA participated in more than 40 outreach events that supported our diverse veteran community and partners across the state this quarter. I was proud to attend Pride events where our outreach team enhanced their outreach efforts this year by creating a Veteran Village concept that brought all veteran service providers into one physical and virtual location at all Pride events. You can visit a virtual veteran village to find a list of providers that participated in this year's Eugene Pride event:

<https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Resources/Pages/EUG-LGBTQ-Veteran-Village.aspx>

In July I was honored to attend and participate in an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice Agreement at the Korean War Memorial in Wilsonville. Consul General Eunji Seo, Governor Tina Kotek, Senator James I. Manning Jr., Korean Society of Oregon President Heon Soo Kim, Korean War veteran Chuck Lusardi and many other veterans and family members were among the dignitaries and honored guests in attendance to honor our Korean War veterans.

In August I joined Senator Ron Wyden, former Senate President Peter Courtney and other officials, dignitaries, veterans and honored guests in celebrating the grand opening of the YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties' new Courtney Place Veteran Affordable Housing Project in downtown Salem. This 34-unit permanent supportive housing project for veterans and residents living at 60% or below the poverty line. ODVA was proud to assist our YMCA community partners, Senator Courtney and others in realizing this critical project, which will help save and transform the lives of veterans and their families in Salem and beyond.

These events are just a few highlights of the many activities that ODVA has been engaged in to serve and honor Oregon veterans. The reports from ODVA's programmatic divisions provide more detailed insight

into some of the day-to-day work that ODVA staff has done, in many cases leading to life-transforming outcomes. We have a lot to be proud of as an agency.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

Nicole Hoeft, Strategic Communications Division Director

This quarter Strategic Communications supported and planned numerous events and communication efforts including continued promotion of the PACT Act and Claims Clinics developed to assist veterans through the PACT Act claims and toxic exposure screening process.

Through outreach engagements in Q3 2023, ODVA reached nearly 19,000 people across the state with 27% of engagements being held virtually or hybrid, enabling veterans from across the state to participate while 21% of engagements were located in the Central, Coastal, Eastern, Southern, or Gorge regions.

ODVA supported and participated in numerous communication and outreach initiatives aimed at engaging with veterans and partners to increase agency program awareness, and drive veterans to services in Q3 2023.

Veteran Programs and Partner Communications

- PACT Act Communication including deadline and extension communication
- PACT Act Claims Clinics in Oregon
- Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant Opening communication
- Veteran Volunteer Program Reaches 1,000 Hour Milestone
- Annual Tribal Veteran Advocate Conference
- Home Loan Program Mortgage Rates

ODVA in the Media

- [ODVA Veteran Bill Digest \(June 2 – June 30 | Every Friday\)](#)
- [Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Celebrates 78th Anniversary Of Formation \(June 16\)](#)
- [A Mother's Fight for Her Gay Son's Military Honors \(June 26\)](#)
- [Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs opens grant applications for campus resource program \(July 31\)](#)

Major ODVA and Partner Engagements: June-August 2023

- **Pride Events**
LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator conducted outreach at Pride events across the state through August 2023.
- **June: VA PACT Act Claims Clinics**
ODVA outreach teams joined the VA to continue holding VA PACT Act Claims Clinics across the state where veterans were able to be screened for toxic exposure, enroll in VA health care and file a PACT Act claim.

- **June 8: 75th Anniversary of the Women in Armed Services Integration Act**
Director Fitzpatrick spoke at this event hosted by the Washington County Veteran Service Office. Women Veteran Coordinator Jessica Bradley will also be in attendance.
- **June 9: Pre-Deployment Brief – 2-641 AVN**
ODVA's Training, Certification and Outreach team will table the pre-deployment event to educate about veteran benefits and services.
- **June 28: LGBTQ+ Veteran Hiring Round Table Event**
Director Fitzpatrick and LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator Ian Michaels spoke at the Portland and Anchorage VR&E Celebrate Pride Month LGBTQ+ Veteran Hiring Round Table Event.
- **June 29: LGBTQ+ Military History and Veteran Advocacy**
LGBTQ+ Veteran Coordinator Ian Michaels will speak at Returning Veterans Project event about LGBTQ+ Military History and Veteran Advocacy.
- **July 7: Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Veteran PowWow**
Deputy Director Dr. Nakia Daniels, Strategic Partnerships Division Director and ODVA Tribal Veteran Coordinator Jon Taylor were honored to participate and speak at this year's Veteran PowWow.
- **July 15: Edward Johann – Navy and Pearl Harbor Veteran Turns 100 Years Old**
Director Fitzpatrick was honored to present a framed letter from Governor Kotek to Navy veteran and Pearl Harbor survivor Ed Johann who turned 100 years old this past July.
- **July 29: 70th Anniversary Event of the Korean War Armistice**
At the invitation of the Consul General of the Republic of Korea in Seattle, Director Fitzpatrick spoke at the 70th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice event being held at the Oregon Korean War Memorial.
- **Aug 8: Annual Tribal Veteran Advocate Conference**
ODVA in partnership with the VA's Office of Tribal Government once again hosted the Annual Tribal Veteran Conference which brings together community and government organizations who provide services and advocate for tribal veterans to learn about veteran services and benefits.
- **August 10: YMCA Veteran Transitional Housing Project Grand Opening**
Director Fitzpatrick spoke at the grand opening of Courtney Place, a new veteran transitional housing unit located in Salem.

Scheduled ODVA and Partner Engagements: Sept-Dec 2023

- **Sept 7: Portland Stand Down; Sept 14: Albany Stand Down**
ODVA houseless outreach teams will participate in Oregon Stand Downs this Fall.
- **Sept 11: 9/11 Commemoration Service**
Director Fitzpatrick was invited to speak at this event, hosted by American Legion Post 10 in Albany.
- **Sept 12-13: Campus Veteran Resource Coordinator Summit**
ODVA will host the annual Campus Veteran Resource Coordinator Summit for universities and community college campus resource coordinators.

- **Sept 15: POW/MIA Day VA Event**

ODVA will partner with the Portland VAMC at an event where Director Fitzpatrick will present the Oregon POW/MIA Proclamation and a letter from the Governor to a 102 year old former POW veteran receiving his Purple Heart.

- **Sept 26: Oregon State Hospital Cremains Event**

ODVA will help honor the removal and identification of cremains held by Oregon State Hospital and ODVA's part in identifying those cremains of veterans and their families.

- **Nov 3: Hillsboro Stand Down**

ODVA houseless outreach teams will participate in Oregon Stand Downs this Fall.

- **Nov 11: Statewide Veterans Day Ceremony**

ODVA's annual Veterans Day Event held in downtown Salem and broadcast live on Facebook.

- **Dec. 16: Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying**

ODVA joins the nation to lay the state Wreaths Across America Wreath.

Upcoming Honor and Remember Communications and Engagements

- Patriots Day (9/11) – Sept 11
- National POW/MIA Day – Sept 15
- Air Force Birthday – Sept 18
- Repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell – Sept 20
- Gold Star Family Day – Sept 25
- Hispanic Heritage Month – Sept 15- Oct 15
- Marine Corp Birthday – Nov 10
- Veteran Day – Nov 11
- Native American Heritage Month – Nov 1-30
- National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day – Dec 7
- National Guard Birthday – Dec. 13
- Space Force Birthday – Dec 20

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Jay DeFillipo, Legislative Director

The 2023 Legislative session came to a close with Sine Die on June 25, 2023. The 160-day session was marked by an historic six-week Senate Republican walkout that blocked progress on hundreds of bills and the sounds of construction equipment as the Capitol continued its \$138 million reconstruction. The session was off to a quick start with over 2800 bills introduced in the first weeks. I tracked over 200 bills that had implications for veterans or the Agency. Of those 200 bills about 30 that had a high priority impact to veterans were at the top of the list. By the end of session two thirds of the originally introduced bills didn't make it past the committees. The Senate Republican walkout that lasted six weeks added additional hurdles to bills as the legislative process came to a halt. Many additional bills languished without time to finish the march to success. In the end less than a dozen of the originally tracked veterans bills made it to the Governor's desk for signature. Several bills did make it through and were finally signed by the Governor in the days after the end of session. One of the top bills ODVA tracked was its own budget bill. The final bill reflects work done by the Joint Ways and Means Committee to add funding to our existing grants while also increasing grants that have a lot of impact on our veterans across the state. Increased funding for our Veterans Campus Grant and the Veterans Educational Bridge Grant highlighted the committee's support of our veterans. Additionally, the budget bill for ODVA continues investments in agency programs that address many of the challenges facing today's veterans across a broad spectrum of needs. The most urgent needs are veteran houselessness and behavioral health, followed closely by access to veteran education. The budget also includes sustained funding for key grant programs, special advocacy services for historically underserved veterans, and pass-through funds to ensure veterans have access to free assistance with claims representation in all 36 Oregon counties and on some tribal lands. A complete copy of ODVA's Legislatively Adopted Budget is available for further review [on the ODVA website](#).

Veteran-related bills that passed this session included:

- HB 2147 directs the governing body of each county to designate a person to ensure the dignified interment of unclaimed cremated remains of veteran or survivor of veteran. This bill was originally introduced in the February 2022 short session but there was insufficient time to work the bill. However, in the long session, with many discussions with key stakeholders and some compromise, the bill was amended and passed this session.
- HB 2271 expands the eligibility for the Veterans Educational Bridge Grant and provides additional resources for Oregon's student veterans.
- HB 2146 designates a portion of U.S. Highway 30 to be known as Gold Star Highway. An accompanying bill HB 3001 also passed. This bill waives license plate fees for Gold Star families and provides resources for additional highway signage.
- HB 5583 was ODVA's budget bill and as earlier discussed was a major win for ODVA and our veterans.

Now as the end of session is in the past, my focus as a Legislative Director has turned to rulemaking. Rulemaking is the process of taking the brief language of legislation and developing plain language guidelines for implementing bills. HB 2147 (Cremains Bill) and HB 2271 (Veterans Educational Bridge

Grant) requires some rulemaking in time for the bills to become law on 1 January 2024. I have already begun working on the rulemaking for the Cremains bill with the establishment of a Rules Advisory Committee. This work will continue over the next few weeks as we file rules for these new bills and update current rules. I am also preparing for the upcoming Legislative Days session scheduled for 27-29 September, and the 2024 short legislative session is right around the corner.

AGING VETERAN SERVICES DIVISION

Kelly Breshears, Acting Aging Veteran Services Director

Protecting Vulnerable Veterans – Conservatorship and Representative Payee Program

ODVA is committed to prioritizing resources and services for aging veterans who currently represent about fifty three percent of Oregon's veteran population. These programs enable court-appointed ODVA conservators and appointed rep-payees to deliver critical services to the state's most vulnerable veterans. The programs provide stability and increased quality of life while helping decrease potential evictions, criminal activity and homelessness for the veterans we serve. An additional benefit of the program is that it reduces the risk of these vulnerable veterans being targeted for financial fraud.

The second oldest program at ODVA is the Conservatorship Program created during the 1964 legislative session. Since that date more than 56 years ago, ODVA has continuously served more than 1,690 veterans, their dependents, and survivors with all their financial management needs.

The role of conservators involves having extensive knowledge of and participation in our clients' lives. As conservators, ODVA staff manage all financial aspects of the veteran or protected person's life. This includes establishing a budget, paying all bills, managing real property (including the purchase/sale real property), managing all assets (including making sure all assets are properly insured), assisting our clients with housing needs, addressing billing issues for medical care, arrange vacations, applying for benefits, etc. There are some circumstances that necessitate our staff set up either an income cap trust or a special needs trust. This is done through the court in order for our clients to qualify for a public assistance program.

The Conservatorship Program currently has an active caseload of approximately 94 cases and manages 19 real properties and approximately \$25 million in assets being handled by five full-time employees.

Total amount managed annually for Conservatorship Clients-

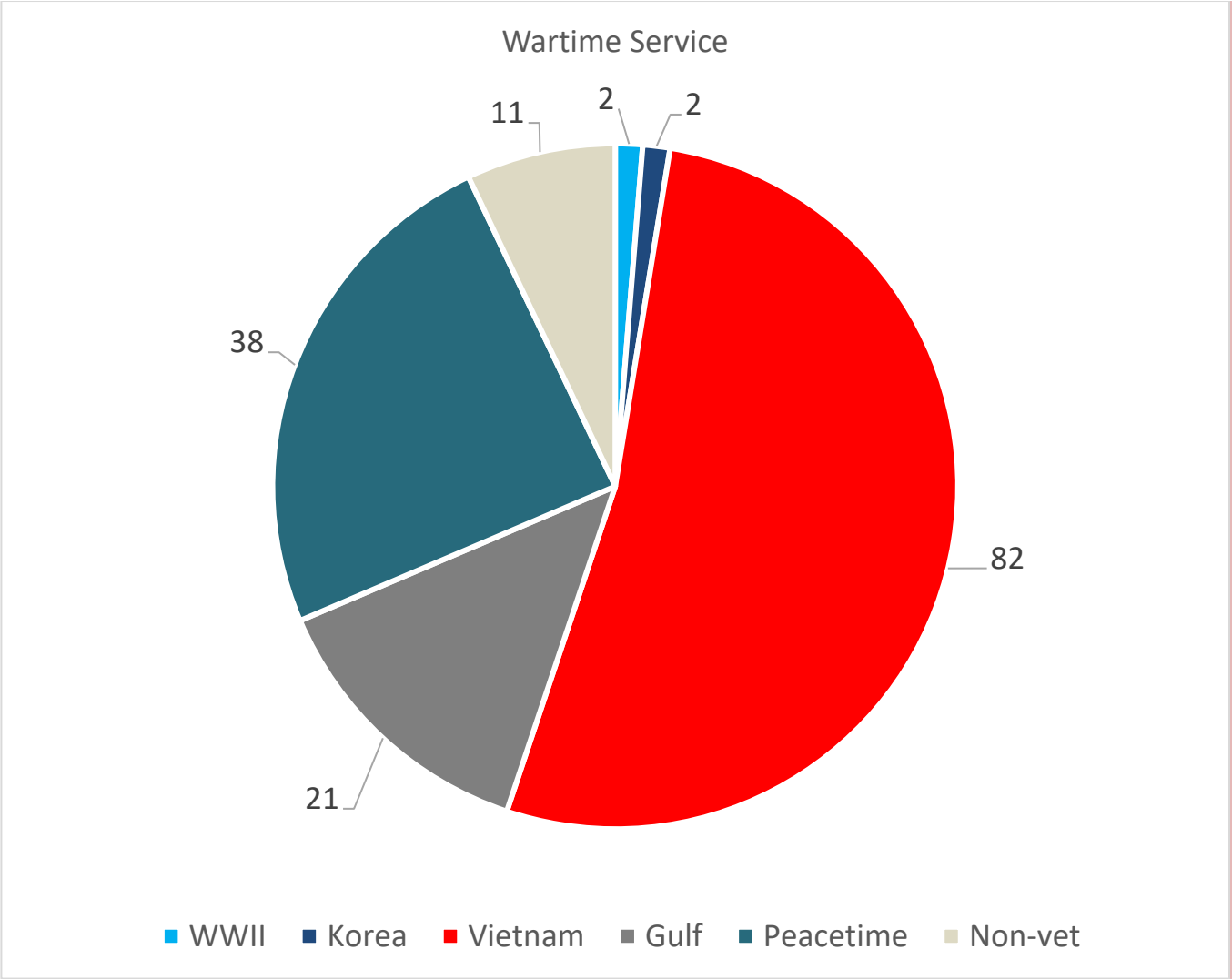
- Cash assets (for Conservatorship/Representative payee combined)- over \$22 million.
- Other assets (real property, vehicles, investments, etc.) - \$3,572,527

The Representative Payee Program was established in 2013 and is currently serving 64 veterans deemed incompetent by the USDVA and/or the Social Security Administration by acting in a limited capacity to manage the veteran's monthly income provided. This includes applying for benefits, establishing budgets, arranging payment for care and other bills for services for the client. The Representative Payee works with the USDVA, Social Security Administration, guardians, family members, social workers, and

other responsible individuals in the community to ensure the veterans’ financial needs are met within their ability to pay.

Both programs have recently experienced a large turnover in staff. Since December 1, 2022, three new staff members have joined the unit and there are currently two open positions, a Representative Payee, and a Trust Officer Assistant. We are in the recruitment process for both positions. The turnover is due to several factors including promotions within the unit, retirement, and promotional opportunities outside of the department.

Note: Some veterans may have more than one period of service in chart below.



APPEALS AND SPECIAL ADVOCACY DIVISION

Joe Glover, Appeals and Special Advocacy Division Director

Training, Certification, and Outreach Team - The Training, Certification and Outreach (TCO) team is a team of three subject-matter experts in Title 38 law, the federal laws that provide support for veterans and their families. Their primary role is to support the network of over 100 Veterans Service Officers (VSO) across all 36 of Oregon's counties and three Tribal Nations. As subject matter experts these TCO team members provide training, extensive research support, and claim casework assistance to VSOs, as well as provide direct service support to help legislative inquiries.

Training VSOs is a continuous and ongoing effort. Once a month the TCO team provides training to newly hired VSOs and Administrative Support staff. This training is a week-long and provides a comprehensive deep dive into the full spectrum of veterans and survivor benefits.

The TCO team also provides new VSOs and those offices with only one VSO with a bi-weekly "cohort training meeting" where the team provides these VSOs with claim and casework information, in addition to the opportunity to discuss difficult cases or trends that they may be experiencing.

Another key component to this program team is the advocacy work in supporting offices with in-depth research on precedent setting opinions and other potentially complicated pathways for claim and casework development. The difficult cases may be because the VSO wishes to identify where the Veterans Benefits Administration may have either misapplied the law or overlooked key evidence in the file at the original time of the filing. Alternatively, if a claim has been denied, the TCO team will assist by doing an in-depth dive as to the reason and the background behind it, and then ultimately help aid the claimant with identifying "new and relevant evidence" which is crucial to a successful claim outcome.

During the fourth quarter of 2023, the TCO team conducted over 15 separate training events to include training women veterans at the 2023 Women Veteran Conference, as well as 14 new Veterans Service Officers and Administrative Support Staff in the five-day training courses.

Training, Certification, and Outreach Team Success Story: During this quarter, ODVA partnered with the Veterans Benefits Administration to help provide information to veterans and their families about the new federal legislation known as, "The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act". This PACT Act legislation was one of the largest pieces of legislation affecting veterans in history.

To help ensure that veterans and families were aware of new expanded benefits and opportunities available to them, the TCO team, along with the new Tribal Veteran Coordinator, deployed across the state to hold briefings and help link eligible individuals with their county or tribal offices.

During this quarter, the TCO team helped support six PACT Act events:

- The Portland VA Medical Center
- The La Grande Community Center for Human Development
- The Mill Event Center on the Coquille Indian Tribal land in Coos Bay
- The Powwow on the grounds of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Reservation
- The VA Medical Center in White City
- The Bear Hotel in Grants Pass

All total, these efforts were able to provide direct engagement with over 300 veterans and their families, numerous referrals for claims, and ODVA saw a 37% increase in claims filed comparing FY22 Q4 and FY23 Q4. It is certain that this new legislation and the agency outreach efforts helped drive this increase.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS DIVISION

Sheronne Blasi, Strategic Partnerships Division Director

ODVA Veteran Services Grant (VSG), Summary of 2021-23 Awards and Outcomes

The Veteran Services Grant (VSG) is a competitive grant which funds eligible proposals that provide direct services to veterans that help improve outcomes in areas such as health or behavioral health care, housing security and houselessness, employment opportunities or stability, education and training opportunities, transportation accessibility and availability, or other critical services within a community.

Eligibility requirements to apply for the Veteran Service:

- Tribal, regional, or local governments; or other state agencies programs established under state or federal law;
- Oregon quasi-public agencies;
- Oregon intergovernmental agencies formed under ORS 190;
- Private nonprofit organizations designated as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization; and
- Private Veterans organizations designated as a 501(c)(19) or 501(c)(23) tax exempt organization;
 - Demonstrate proof of current (active) business registration with Oregon Secretary of State Corporation Division;
 - Demonstrate proof of registration with the Charitable Activities Section of the Oregon Department of Justice, if the organization is a 501(c)(3), 501(c)(19) or 501(c)(23) and the most recent Oregon Form CT-12 report filed with the Department of Justice; and
 - Demonstrate proof of at least a one-year operational history.

For the **2021-2023 grant cycle**, the Legislature authorized \$938,118, and ODVA received a total of \$3,369,878 in funding requests. ODVA awarded the funds to 21 organizations across Oregon. Awards ranged from \$9,000 to \$99,000.

Of the awarded applicants, 9 of the 21 grantees were funded for projects that directly address veteran housing stability. Services included:

- Assistance with rental payments, deposits, rental arrears, application fees, moving costs, utilities, and supply kits for homeless or newly housed veterans;
- Funding for case management, behavioral health specialist positions;
- Funding for street outreach activities;
- Housing barrier removal for veterans participating in Veterans Treatment court.

An additional 4 grantees provided indirect support for veterans with housing instability:

- Donated food boxes to low income and unhoused veterans;
- Funded Veteran Employment Specialist positions;
- Provided veterans served with referrals to rapid re-housing HUD/VASH & SSVF and Emergency Housing programs.

The remaining eight (8) grantees provided services that focused on health or behavioral health care, peer support, education and training opportunities, transportation accessibility and availability, and legal assistance. Each of these areas is also vital to maintaining and obtaining stable housing.

Reporting Requirements

Beginning with the first calendar quarter of the grant cycle and continuing each quarter thereafter, grantees submit a quarterly report to ODVA within 30-days after the close of the quarter. Grantees report on the amount of funds spent, number of veterans served, steps toward meeting their specific goals in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, program milestones and opportunities for improvement, and updates on the grantee's specific outcomes as outlined by their proposal.

In addition to quarterly reporting, ODVA conducts an annual site visit with each grantee to review grant funded activity and expenses. Awards are reimbursed to grantees, data related to spending is collected recurrently in order to reimburse for grant activity.

At the conclusion of the grant cycle, the Grantees must submit a final report to the Agency within 60-days after the close of the performance period containing the final data on measurable outcomes as stated in Grantee's proposal, as well as any other narrative or data requested.

ODVA is currently collecting final reports from the 2021-23 Grantees, but preliminary data shows: Grantees reported 8,495 veteran engagements; 32% of these veteran engagements were served by Grantees that provide direct housing stability services to veterans; 56% of these veteran engagements were served by grantees that provided indirect support for veterans with housing instability; 12% provided services that focused on veteran needs unrelated to housing stability.

2023-25 Veteran Services Grant Update:

ODVA was awarded \$947,556 (Lottery Funds) by the 2023 Legislature for the upcoming **2023-25** Veteran Services Grant cycle. We anticipate releasing this competitive grant opportunity in mid-September and are seeking individuals to serve on ODVA's grant evaluation committee. Below is the estimated timeline, for your consideration to participate:

VS Grant Evaluation Training:

- Tuesday, 10/17 from 10:00 am **OR**
- Thursday, 10/26 from 2:00 pm

Evaluation:

Proposals will be sent out to evaluators 10/27. Evaluators will then have two weeks to complete the evaluations.

- Friday 11/10: Evaluations will be due back to me by 11:59 pm.

Award Recommendation Meeting(s):

During the week of 11/13: Committee Members will take part in separate remote session(s) to meet with the other evaluators to discuss the proposals. Each session will be 1-1 ½ hours.

- **The 1st session:** will be to address the commonalities in the scores of the proposals your team evaluated, and the differences. There will be time to discuss your evaluation and funding recommendations. A "Team Leader" will be selected to participate in the second session and represent the evaluations of your group. Meeting schedule will be scheduled when proposals are sent to evaluators, and will be selected by team member availability.
- **The 2nd session: Scheduled Monday 11/20 at 2:00 pm.** Attended by "Team Leaders" will be to develop a funding recommendation for the ODVA Director. Members will discuss the amount of funding being requested in light of the proposal score and the total funds available.

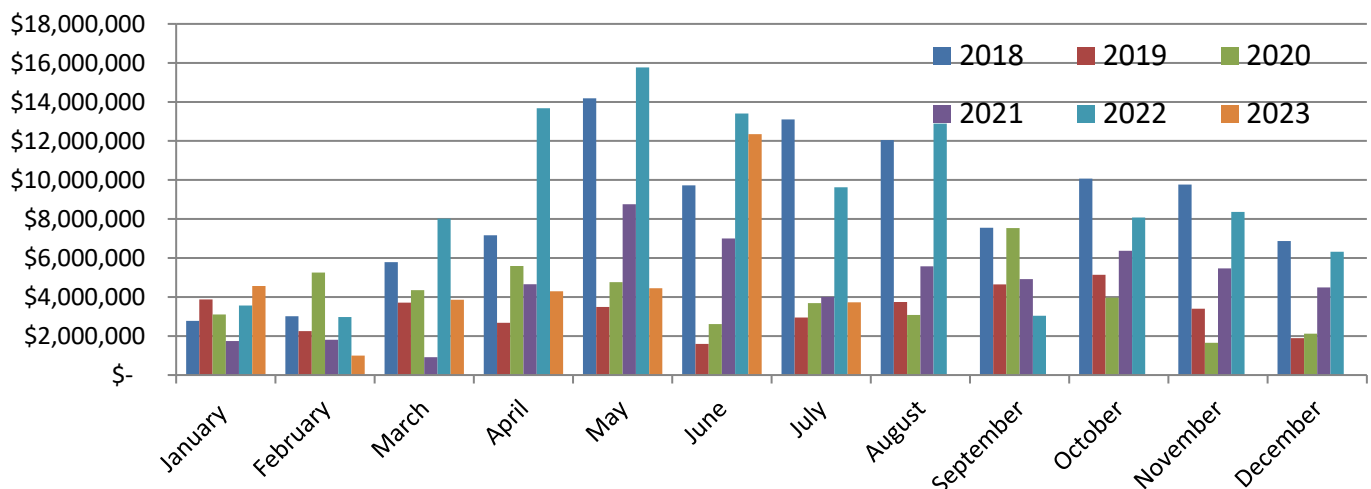
Thank you for considering participating on the grant application evaluation committee.

HOME LOAN PROGRAM REPORT

Cody Cox, Home Loan Program Manager

Home Loan Production Review

- The interest rate environment for the Home Loan Program for calendar year 2023 continued to be challenging through the 2nd Quarter of 2023 as the Fed continued their aggressive rate increases in an attempt to curb inflation. However, due to a robust funding month in June, production levels for the 2nd Quarter 2023 was at 52 loans for \$21,088,248. For the same period in 2022, production volume was 100 loans for \$42,854,804. 2022 was a record year in production for the Home Loan program going back 25 years.
- This period also represents the 2023 Fiscal Year End. Production for this 12-month period was 204 new loans, with \$78,814,364 in new loan production. This fiscal year represents the 4th largest production FY for 25 years.
- The chart below shows a 2018 - 2023 YTD monthly production comparison of dollar volume funded for the OrVet Home Loan program.



- At the end of the 2nd Quarter 2023, ODVA has a total of 1,448 loans in portfolio, with a total dollar amount under servicing of \$338,253,373. Of these, 1,376 loans and \$333,999,905 are 'new' loans. 'Old' loans were at 72 units totaling \$4,253,468. At the end of the 2nd Quarter 2022, the ODVA had a total of 1,376 for \$298,710,851 under servicing. Year over year, our servicing portfolio increased by \$39,542,522, which represents an increase of 13.24%.

Loan Delinquency Review

- For the reporting period of 06/30/2023, there were no State-Owned Properties/Real Estate Owned (SOP/REO) in inventory. ODVA has not had any foreclosures for the past 3 – 4 years.
- At the end of 2nd Quarter 2023, there are no loans in a Foreclosure status. Our servicing portfolio has remained strong as the country has emerged from the pandemic.
- At the end of 2nd Quarter 2023, ODVA has no loans in a bankruptcy status.
- The total of all loans reporting in the 90-day or greater delinquency position was at 7 units, expressed as 0.5% in unit delinquency on a portfolio of 1,465

- ODVA portfolio performance shows a continued reduced delinquency rate as compared to other Government Residential Loan Programs. The Mortgage Bankers Association publishes a quarterly National Delinquency Survey and the following represents Oregon specific comparative data from the most recently available Second Quarter 2023 report. The delinquency rate expressed as a percentage of total loans (units) past due for the Federal Veterans Affairs home loan program in Oregon was 2.95%. FHA home loans in Oregon were at 7.09%. Conventional Prime home loans Oregon were at 1.48%. For this reporting period, the total delinquency for the ODVA home loan program was 1.00% at 15 units

Quarterly Staffing News

During the 2nd Quarter 2023. ODVA saw the retirement of a 40+ year employee. Cecil Baird retired from ODVA in April, 2023. He tells me now he has never been busier with a honey do list and enjoying his grandchildren.

To fill that position, ODVA hired Jill Boyles as our Customer Service Representative. Jill comes from the private sector with a long history of being in the mortgage industry.

-END OF REPORT-



OREGON DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS

REPORT TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 13, 2023

MEETING PRESENTATIONS APPENDIX

- Advisory Committee Annual Report
- Tribal Veterans Update



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

Director's Office

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Salem, Oregon 97301

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August 31, 2023

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 present the attached agency FY 2023 Annual Report in accordance with ORS 406.220, which provides an overview of agency programs and FY23 accomplishments.

Along with long-standing core agency programs that serve all veterans, FY23 was marked by the continued implementation and expansion of numerous services, special advocacy and partnerships created to address the challenging needs of today's veterans. ODVA provides special advocacy services and grant programs that invest in partners to deliver improved outcomes for historically underserved veterans by removing barriers to gain access to all their earned veteran benefits and other services. ODVA is committed to serving and advocating for every veteran, especially those who have experienced barriers to accessing veteran benefits because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or housing status.

As a network of veterans helping veterans, we are privileged to play a role in caring for those who served in the military and their families. Although much has changed since our founding in 1945, our commitment to those who served and sacrificed for our state and nation has never wavered.

We thank you for your mission focused leadership in tackling the critical issues facing far too many vulnerable Oregonians at this time. We look forward to demonstrating how ODVA's services align with your priorities of reducing homelessness, improving access to behavioral health and addiction services, and investing in education on behalf of our state's veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

Kelly Fitzpatrick
Director

James Gardner
Advisory Committee Chair



FY 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Advisory Committee to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

August 2023



OREGON DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS

FY 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Advisory Committee to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

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OREGON DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS



MISSION

To honor and serve all Oregon veterans and their families by aligning and delivering earned benefits and services that enhance and improve their lives in recognition of their service to our nation.



VISION

All veterans and their families thrive in Oregon.



VALUES

Stewardship
Excellence
Respect
Vision
Inclusivity
Commitment
Equity

THOSE WE SERVE

Oregon Veteran Landscape

Since 1945, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs has assisted generations of service members returning home from active-duty military service and then deploying their hard-earned leadership skills and experience to significantly contribute to our state's communities and economy. Veterans are proud, proven, trained, and service-oriented Oregon citizens who benefit from federal, state, and local programs designed to assist them in their transition back to civilian life.

As of September 2022, it is estimated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs that 6.4 percent of the state's population has served in the United States Armed Forces. Oregon's total veteran population decreased slightly by 2% from 277,405 to 271,871 veterans in FY22. With an estimated nearly quarter million veterans in Oregon, this population has experienced a continuous decline over the past half-century. This decline is consistent with the drop in Americans serving on active duty today; from 3.5 million in 1968 during the draft era, to 1.3 million which is less than 1% of all U.S. adults in today's all-volunteer force. Federal VA projections further suggest the number of veterans will continue to decline in the coming decades. By 2045, USDVA estimates there will be approximately 12 million veterans nationally, a roughly 40% decrease from current numbers.

Today, ODVA assists all veterans who served their nation across five major eras including peacetime – brave individuals who stormed the beaches of Normandy in WWII to our most recent returning service members who deployed to conflicts in the Middle East. The vast and shifting veteran demographics now being experienced across the nation, and the broader recognition of the impact service has on our veterans, has led to changes in the complexity and type of services being offered both by the federal VA and the State.

Seventy-five percent of Oregon veterans served during wartime. Many of these veterans have or are currently experiencing various forms of trauma and disability because of their military service. Because of advances in technology and medicine, more service members are surviving injuries incurred in war that would have been fatal in prior wars. Although studies vary widely in terms of methods used, estimates of depression in returning troops range from 3% to 25%. These wounds are often invisible, the treatment complex, and the effects far-reaching. Left untreated, trauma and disability can contribute to a veteran cascading into further crises such as substance abuse, homelessness and suicidal ideation or attempts.

As of September 2022, there were only an estimated 2,769 living veterans of World War II and 16,343 living veterans of the Korean War remaining in Oregon. Combined, these two eras of veterans have declined more than 2 percent in FY 22 reinforcing the need for aging veteran services as World War II and Korean War veterans have continued to pass at an accelerated rate due to aging and complications of service-related health issues. Collectively, the number of veterans aged 65 and older make up 50% of this aging veteran population and this estimate is forecasted to continue into the next decade. ODVA continues to strategize and execute extended outreach to these aging veterans to ensure they have appropriate assistance to access their earned veteran benefits when they need it most. Benefits such as health care, long-term care, caregiver support, transportation, burial in a national cemetery, and survivor benefits become even more vital to veterans and their families as they age.

Vietnam War era veterans are the largest demographic of veterans in the state, and comprise nearly 35% of the population, making up a large portion of the aging veteran demographic. Nearly fifty years following the end of the Vietnam War, the agency has seen an increase in disability claims filed on behalf of Vietnam vets due to triggered responses to the current conflicts and the manifestation of acute diseases brought on by toxic exposure such as Agent Orange. In August 2022, the PACT Act was signed into law, expanding benefits and healthcare to veterans who served in newly identified locations presumed to have exposed service members to toxic substances during service. This new Act is one of the greatest expansions of benefits in the VA's history and will positively impact Vietnam veterans who have been denied benefits in the past.

Collectively, Gulf War era veterans (Gulf I and Post 9/11) now account for a large portion of all U.S. veterans. In Oregon, Gulf I veterans represent 13.9 percent of the total veteran population according to USDVA 2022 population estimates. Recently ended conflicts in the Middle East have steadily increased the number of Post 9/11 Gulf War veterans who now represent 20.6 percent of the veteran population. Many of the veterans of this era have endured multiple deployments, introducing new challenges to transitioning back into civilian life. Over the last 20 years, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, Oregon experienced its only federal activation of National Guard service members since WWII. These veterans often left families and careers when activated, further underscoring the need for resources that fully support successful reintegration back into civilian life.

The demographic profile of veterans nationally and within Oregon is expected to continue to change over the next few decades. Currently, 90 percent of veterans are men and 10 percent are women. With more women serving in roles historically reserved for men, the percentage of women veterans is expected to increase to nearly 13% by 2032. Yet too often the service of women in the military goes unrecognized. Although great strides have been made in recent years, many women veterans still do not utilize the federal VA health care system for their health care needs. Lack of communication about care services that meet their health needs and discrimination at the centers from other veterans and staff continue to create an environment where women veterans do not always feel welcomed.

As with trends in the U.S. population overall, the veteran population is predicted to become more racially and ethnically diverse. Veterans of color in Oregon comprise 13.5 percent of the population. Disaggregating that total percentage, 1.6 percent of Oregon veterans are black or African American, 4.5 percent are Hispanic or Latinx, 1 percent are American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.2 percent are Asian American, 0.3 percent are Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 4.7 percent of veterans identify as a different race or as mixed race. Over the next ten years Oregon will experience a slight increase in the overall diversity of the veteran population to an estimated 16.6 percent by 2032. It is imperative that ODVA and our partners make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) central to every program and service provided to veterans and families.

Social issues have long impacted veterans. Homelessness among veterans has been a concern for many decades. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported in its 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report that 1,460 veterans are currently houseless in Oregon. Veterans who served during times of systemically unjust policies are often adversely affected in their military careers or during their transition out of the service due to receiving a less than honorable discharge from the military. Today, Oregon leads the nation in correcting injustices and providing advocacy on behalf of those veterans who were treated inequitably during their service and after.

While in military service, veterans from all demographics, and socioeconomic circumstances have often risked their lives to oppose the repression of basic human rights around the globe. Many have worked to right wrongs experienced within the military by racially and ethnically diverse veterans, women, and LGBTQ individuals who served their country yet encountered injustice within the ranks. The US Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 2.5 percent of Oregon veterans identify as LGBTQ+.

ODVA is committed to serving and advocating for every veteran, especially those who have experienced systemic injustice because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or housing status. The demographics of those we serve encompass individuals from every walk of life. We are committed to meeting a veteran where they are and working to honor their service in all we do.

SETTING A FIRM FOUNDATION

ODVA's FY 2023-2028 Strategic Plan

ODVA's core operations, veteran programs and benefits, and partnerships with federal, state, county, and local municipalities, form the foundation upon which the agency provides Oregon's veterans and their families the benefits and services they have earned through their honorable military service. Focusing on creating an environment where veterans and their families thrive, in FY 2022 ODVA completed its FY2023-2028 Strategic Plan while working to integrate diversity, equity and inclusion into the delivery of its programs and services.

This 5-year rolling plan is the dynamic blueprint for the continued evolution of the agency. The focus of this plan is to help ODVA become more agile operationally and therefore better able to respond to emerging needs of the veterans and families we serve. ODVA's strategic plan will increase the speed and depth we are able to achieve results and will be renewed annual with a five-year horizon.

We approached this plan through the lens of the Balanced Scorecard, working to ensure that we consider the four primary aspects of our duties. First, our focus is to serve our veterans. Second, we strive to provide our employees with the best processes, technology, and equipment we can. Third, we invest in our employees to help them continually sharpen their skills. Fourth, we are good stewards of the public's trust, agency resources, and budget.

In this strategy, ODVA builds upon the agency's 2014-19 Strategic Framework to dive further into the needs of the diverse veteran community, to remove barriers that exist to accessing earned veteran benefits and invest in the core operational transformation needed to drive ODVA's strategy forward.

Our mission is to honor and serve all Oregon veterans and their families by aligning and delivering earned benefits and services that enhance and improve their lives in recognition of their service to our nation. Our vision is that all veterans and their families thrive in Oregon. Our values are of SERVICE -- Stewardship, Excellence, Respect, Vision, Inclusivity, Commitment, and Equity -- to guide our work in service to Oregon veterans and their families as intended at our founding.

We also developed the strategic plan centering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) . Agency managers participated in training and discussions on DEI as we developed the foundation for this plan, and we began the work of challenging old norms as we strive to become a culture with an affirming and

welcoming environment for everyone. To keep this plan most effective in our ever-changing world, each year we will reflect on what we have accomplished the previous year, strengthen our intentions for the next four years, develop goals for a new fifth year, and select specific actions to hold ourselves accountable for the coming year.

Among its strategic and operational accomplishments in FY 2023 ODVA:

- Rebalanced agency operational and programmatic divisions to better align functions and improve processes and partnerships that support program delivery to veterans.
- Implemented procurement policies and procedures to improve tracking, compliance, documentation, and required DAS Contract Administrator Training and Certification.
- Continued efforts to modernize core program IT systems, with the first system implementation on track to be functional for ODVA's Home Loan servicing function and veteran borrowers in 2023.
- Streamlined recruitment procedures to continue filling critical staff positions with hiring practices that ensure the average time to fill positions does not exceed more than 50 days. ODVA completed 10 recruitments between January-June 2023 with an average hiring time of 45 days.
- Improved internal financial processes and reporting enabling managers to make informed financial decisions.
- Continued DEI training for manager and the application of an equity framework when administering grants and developing legislative concepts.
- Supported and hosted more than 200 hundred outreach engagements and communication campaigns in FY 2023, reaching an estimated 56,600 veterans, their families, and partners during virtual and in-person engagements across Oregon. Outreach included dozens of PACT Act Claims Clinics and outreach, Stand Downs, Yellow Ribbon events, special advocacy outreach and events to honor and remember veterans and their contributions to our nation.
- Joined United States Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough during his Oregon tour for discussions with VA leadership to address issues of shared concern, and a listening session with student veterans at Portland State University to discussed issues ranging from accessing VA benefits for toxic exposure, employment assistance post-graduation, and the need for improved military/veteran cultural competency of university staff and faculty.

Although FY2023 continued to present the agency with unique and significant operational changes, through innovative solutions and greater efficiencies, ODVA's dedicated staff is building a better, stronger, and more resilient department for future generations.

AGENCY PROGRAM OVERVIEW: SERVE, ADVOCATE, AND PARTNER

FY23 Key Accomplishments

TO SERVE VETERANS

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). This specialized team prepares legal arguments and presents them to federally appointed judges on behalf of veterans and their families free of charge. In FY 2023, 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 23 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 36-48 months to 12-24 months.

During FY23, 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. This program involves both the monitoring and quality control of submitted casework, and provides semi-annual regional in-person trainings, quarterly webinars, and an annual training conference. The training and certification program is responsible for the shadowing, testing, and certification of VSO's.

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 23, TCO conducted 15 VSO trainings where 21 state, county and tribal VSO's received certification from the state for VA accreditation. TCO also trained 10 new VSO administrative staff who help support veteran clients.

During FY23, 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

Established in 1965, ODVA's Conservatorship Program provides professional fiduciary services to manage income and assets of incompetent veterans and their families deemed incompetent by the federal VA to manage their federal resources.

The conservatorship program assists veterans and eligible dependents in managing their financial affairs and property. Conservatorship helps to ease the burdens often associated with paying bills, collecting funds on debts owed to the veteran, corresponding with creditors, and buying or selling real-estate, or other investments. The professional fiduciaries work closely with family members and other interested parties, such as guardians, in planning for the welfare and best interests of the veteran.

Representative Payees serve veterans deemed incompetent by managing the veteran's monthly income provided by the USDVA and/or the Social Security Administration. The Representative Payee applies for benefits, establishes budgets, arranges payment for care and other bills for services for the client. The Representative Payee works with the USDVA, Social Security Administration, guardians, family members, social workers, and other responsible individuals in the community to ensure the veterans' financial needs are met within their ability to pay.

Currently there are 190 clients being 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 as a result of the stability provided by ODVA's fiduciary program.

This fiduciary program prudently managed over \$28 million in assets, including 24 properties, for its 190 clients.

Oregon Veterans' Homes

The Oregon Veterans' Homes are state certified skilled nursing and memory care facilities. The Homes

provide the state's most vulnerable veterans and their families skilled nursing, dementia and rehabilitative care in an environment that understands the unique needs of those who served our country in uniform. 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 23, both state veterans' homes were rated higher than the national average in customer satisfaction surveys performed by Pinnacle, a private and neutral third-party entity resulting in better quality of life for veterans and their families living in the Homes.

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.

Oregon Veteran Home Loans

Oregon citizens voted in 1945 to create a Veterans' Home Loan Program to serve the home purchase financing needs of veterans' returning from WWII. Since that time, the OrVet Home Loan 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 5 states offering a veteran home loan program to its state's veterans, separate and distinct from the Federal VA Home Loan Guarantee.

Sources of funding for the home loan program comes from the sale of Qualified Veteran Mortgage Bonds (QVMBs). The use of QVMB's restricts how these funds can be used for lending purposes. The primary restrictions of QVMB's are:

- Can only be used for purchase only transactions. QVMB bonds cannot be used to refinance, whether it be an OrVet loan or another lender
- Only for use by veterans discharged within the past 25 years

Because loan interest rates are set in relation to the price of bond sales, the OrVet Home Loan program's rates do not change as often as private sector interest rates. The OrVet home loan program is less sensitive to the interest rate environment as the private sector. Mortgage rates in the private sector continued significant increases into FY23 while ODVA rates remained lower than private sector due to previous bond sale pricing.

For FY23, the ODVA Home Loan program lent 191 veterans \$73.9 million in mortgage loans, experiencing the fourth highest dollar amount funded to veterans in 25 years. Further, the loan servicing portfolio also continued to experience the reversal of a more than decade long downward trend in the servicing portfolio with 1,448 loans totaling \$338.3 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.

Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant Program

In 2019, legislation established the Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant Program. The purpose of this program is 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. In 2019, the legislature allocated \$475,000 in grant funding directed at student veterans and continued to fund a full-time program coordinator to develop, implement and monitor the grant program since then. The maximum grant award is \$5,000 for veterans pursuing a degree or certificate and enrolled in an approved course of study qualifying for USDVA educational benefits. As FY2023, ODVA has awarded 60 Bridge Grants, totaling \$270,809 to student veterans.

There has been a steep decline in applications for the Bridge grant since the end of CY2020, due to the return of student veterans to classes and other educational programs after the COVID 19 pandemic. The legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill based on ODVA's legislative concept which expands the eligibility criteria for this grant so that grant funds can address more of the needs that student veterans experience.

ADVOCATE FOR VETERANS

Aging Veteran Outreach

The Aging Veteran 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 an ODVA veteran service officer. The outreach coordinator works with the Department of Human Services and other agencies on aging in conjunction with the Federal VA to ensure each aging veteran has applied for benefits and is receiving all entitlements through USDVA and other government and nonprofit entities.

The Aging Veteran 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 veteran benefits or had their case file reviewed for possible additional benefits or disability rating increases as new health conditions have arisen. In FY 23 the Aging Veteran Outreach Coordinator provided claims assistance or benefits counseling to approximately 236 veterans or eligible dependents resulting in approximately \$66,838 in retroactive benefits payments and approximately \$36,541 in VA debt being waived.

To reach these veterans, this program conducted outreach to aging veterans at 19 events including Veteran Stand Downs and one specific to suicide prevention.

Campus Veteran Coordinator

ODVA's Campus Veteran 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 network. The 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 September 2023, ODVA will host the third annual Campus Veteran Coordinator Summit, which provides additional supports, training, and networking opportunities for Veteran Resource Center Coordinators at Oregon universities and community colleges. ODVA has also visited 24 schools in support of these Campus Veteran Resource Center Coordinators and student veterans.

Houseless Veterans

ODVA began the Houseless Veteran Program by hiring its first Houseless Veteran Coordinator in June 2021. The Houseless Veteran Coordinator collaborates with federal, state, county, Veteran Service Officers, and community homeless service providers to meet the urgent and unique needs of Oregon's diverse veteran communities. In addition to advocating for Oregon veterans experiencing, or at risk of being houseless, the program provides direct service to veterans and their families seeking federal and state veteran's benefits, including access to VA health care and monetary compensation, documentation of service, as well as other available state benefits, and local homeless services organizations and low-income assistance programs.

In FY23, 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 Veteran 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 continued its primary goal of assisting veterans and their families to minimize the negative impacts of being incarcerated. For example, ODVA coordinators work with veterans to discontinue or apportion any VA monetary benefits, so that veterans do not end up in an overpaid status upon release. ODVA also works closely with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) re-entry social worker to help veterans access their earned benefits and other resources prior to release and transition back into the community and reduce recidivism. ODVA continues efforts to improve coordination between ODVA, USDVA and Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) to ensure veterans receive required compensation examinations while still incarcerated.

Coordinators met with approximately 575 individuals at Oregon Department of Corrections' intake facility to determine their veteran status, potential eligibility for benefits and need for transition assistance. The program was also able to increase incarcerated veteran and family member eligibility for monetary benefits while the veteran is incarcerated. Coordinators filed 265 claims with the USDVA on behalf of incarcerated veterans and their family members.

LGBTQ+ Veterans

ODVA continued to provide direct claims and advocacy services to LGBTQ+ veterans and their families in Oregon. Through advocacy, ODVA's LGBTQ+ 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 23, 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 FY23 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, US 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, 2023, 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 2023, coinciding with Pride Month.

Tribal Veterans

ODVA provides assistance to Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes regarding federal and state veteran benefits, programs and services available for Native American 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 Veteran Coordinator, hired in April 2023, 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, developed 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 Veteran Service Offices to learn about potential state and federal earned benefits. Once a veteran has been referred to a local Veteran Service 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 FY23, 85 ODVA volunteers have volunteered a total of 982 hours and have connected with over 4,400 individuals regarding veteran benefits across the state.

Women Veterans

The Women Veterans Coordinator position was developed in 2016 to improve outcomes for Oregon women veterans in five specific areas: outreach, advocacy, data, research, and policy. Focused outreach and advocacy is 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.

The program provides training and education to non-profits and government organizations, assistance to women veterans experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness, and engages in expansive program development both statewide and nationally.

In FY 23, 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 FY23, the biennial 2023 Women Veteran Conference was hosted at the Salem Convention Center and for the first time since the end of COVID restrictions. The biennial event provided more than 400 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. Casework was performed during the two-day event and following the event nearly 50 additional women veterans reached out to inquire about other veteran benefits and programs.

Created in 2017, the '*I Am Not Invisible*' Campaign (IANI), 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 FY23 'I Am Not invisible' exhibited with 18 showings across Oregon.

PARTNER TO SUPPORT VETERANS

ACCESS TO VETERAN SERVICES AND BENEFITS

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

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.

VETERAN EDUCATION

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

EMERGENCY SUPPORTS AND HOUSING STABILITY

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
\$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 Center	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.

TRANSPORTATION

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.

SUICIDE PREVENTION AND CRISIS SUPPORT

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.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Impact Of Federal Veteran Benefits in Oregon

The core services that ODVA provides result in monetary benefits and resources for Oregon veterans and have an enormous impact on the state's overall economy. In FY 22, federal VA expenditures in Oregon totaled more than \$3.9 billion in federal veteran benefits such as disability compensation, pension payments, education and health care benefits that are earned through honorable military service. These benefits provide monthly, tax-free income to veterans, reduce dependency on state health and stability resources, contribute to the economic health of Oregon's veterans, and increase the state's trained and educated workforce.

DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND PENSION

More than \$1.9 billion of the more than \$3.9 billion in federal veteran benefits expenditures were a direct result of ODVA's core work and awarded as disability and pension payments to veterans and their families. These federal dollars positively impact Oregon veterans and are an economic multiplier in both urban and rural communities alike.

Disability compensation and pension payments assist veterans in after their honorable service has caused a disability. Nearly \$161 million per month in disability compensation and pension payments were made to nearly 84,000 Oregon veterans in FY22.

Disability compensation is the cornerstone benefit that ODVA and the Veteran Service Officer network strive to help veterans access. Disability compensation provides veterans with a monthly, tax-free benefit, and is provided as a result of injuries or disabilities incurred as a result of active-duty service, or in the line of duty.

Pension is a needs-based benefit that is designed to assist aging, disabled, and extremely low-income war-era veterans. Pension support is another key focus for ODVA and VSOs as it helps keep individuals financially stable and can offset state Medicaid dollars.

HEALTHCARE

The federal VA operates the largest integrated health care delivery system in the United States. Currently 98,257 Oregon veterans are enrolled in VA healthcare and nearly \$1.8 billion was spent in Oregon providing that care in FY22.

Connecting veterans with these federal resources is a primary driver of veteran engagement. Benefits such as free hearing aids and eyeglasses, along with free or extremely low prescription copays provide substantial savings to veterans in health care costs.

Veteran Service Officers also often assist veterans to navigate the USDVA-coordinated health care options that are funded by the VA through a program called Community Care. Through Community Care and the VSO network, billing and resources are supported for such things as mental health care, ambulance and life-flight transportation, prosthetics, and emergency room visits.

EDUCATION

USDVA invested more than \$119 million in federal veteran education benefit dollars in 6,459 Oregon veterans who used their veteran education benefits in 2022. These dollars flow directly into the state's trades, community colleges and universities as GI Bill® tuition payments and provide a monthly housing stipend directly to veterans while attending school.

ODVA and the Veteran Service Officer network understand that linking veterans to these education benefits, and promoting awareness of them is crucial for access to education and retraining Oregon veterans through Veteran Readiness and Employment services.

LOOKING FORWARD

Strategic Action

As ODVA begins implementation of the new strategic plan to advance and build on the agency's foundational framework, the agency also introduced an organizational realignment in 2022. ODVA's strategic plan for 2023-2028 will ultimately take the skills and talents of a small but hardworking and dedicated workforce and reshape the agency to better enable it to focus on serving Oregon veterans and their families for future generations, while continuing to honor the agency's proud history.

The 2023-2028 strategic plan incorporates outcomes from new Lottery funded programs; integrates operational lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis; and takes a veteran-centric, data-driven approach, to further leverage the new programs and partnerships that ODVA has implemented over the last five years to build a roadmap for the next five years.

While no single agency or organization can wholly address the needs of veterans, ODVA is well-positioned continue to work with our partners to help veterans access resources and earned VA benefits. As the expert on veterans' issues in Oregon, ODVA leads initiatives to maximize the current veteran benefits that federal, state, local governments and nonprofits provide.

ODVA, in alignment with the Governor's priorities and expectations, will deepen its commitment to serving all veterans through programs that ensure access to monetary and health related services and benefits that ensure a thriving veteran community in Oregon.

To that mission, ODVA's core operations will continue to improve the foundation needed to support the delivery of programs and services to Oregon's veterans and their families into the year to come. In the future, ODVA's services may begin to look different, and be held in different forums, or on different platforms, but we must and will adapt to serve each of our five eras of veterans with the insight and attention to their specific needs that ODVA is uniquely positioned to provide.



Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Tribal Veterans Update

Jon Taylor, Tribal Veteran Coordinator
September 13, 2023



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History of Native American Service

- Historically, Native Americans have participated with distinction in United States military
- An estimated 3,856 of Oregon Veterans are American Indian
- Native American service data has been historically imprecise
 - During the Vietnam War, more than 42,000 Native Americans served
 - Only 40 percent, of Native Veterans, reported they had been enlisted as American Indian

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ODVA Advocacy for Oregon Tribal Veterans

- Established a Tribal Veteran Coordinator position
 - work closely with the Tribal Veteran Service Officers (TVSOs) or Tribal Advocates
 - work with the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations
- Build relationships with Tribal VSOs, Tribal Advocates, and Tribal Veterans
- Participation in Govt-to-Govt meetings and outreach programs
- Working toward my USDVA Veteran Service Officer (VSO) accreditation

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Tribal Veteran Service Officers (TVSO)

- ODVA pass-through funding available to tribes for TVSO services
 - Annual financial support to expand & enhance tribal veteran services
- Tribal Veteran Service Officers (TVSOs)
 - ODVA has MOU with 3 Oregon Tribes for TVSO services
 - Accredited to file VA claims & appeals
 - Different than Tribal Veteran Advocate
- TVSOs assist Tribal Veterans and their families access to services and resources, in a culturally appropriate and timely manner

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2023 Tribal Veteran Advocate Conference

- ODVA Annual Tribal Veteran Advocate Conference since 2015
 - In partnership with USDVA Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR)
 - Attended by those who work with and/or advocate for Tribal Veterans
 - Information on state and federal veteran's benefits
 - Culturally specific training and information

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2023 Tribal Veteran Advocate Conference

- The Mill Casino Hotel & RV Park in Coos Bay, OR
- The Coquille Indian Tribe was the host Nation
 - Veteran's Honor Guard
 - Invocation
 - Welcoming remarks
- Previous conference feedback
- Share personal experiences
- Network Opportunities

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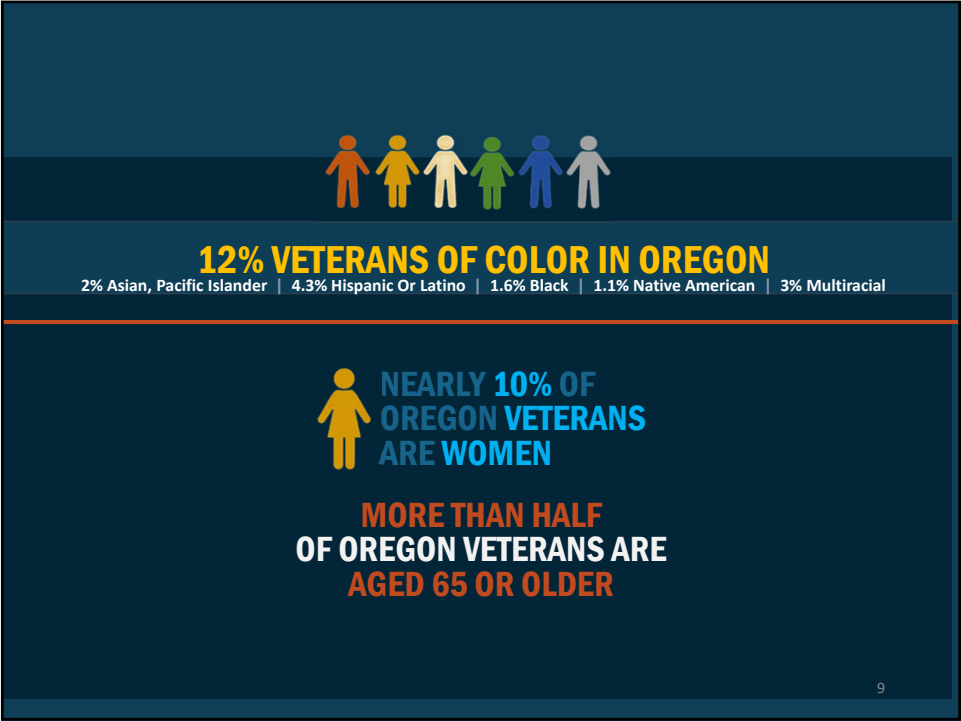
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QUESTIONS

 **OREGON DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS' AFFAIRS**
Proudly serving veterans since 1945

*Jon R. Taylor,
Tribal Veteran Coordinator
Email: Jon.R.Taylor@odva.oregon.gov*

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History of Native American Service Con't

- Over 44,000 Native Americans served between 1941 and 1945. The entire population of Native Americans in the United States was less than 350,000 at the time.
- Approximately 10,000 Native Americans served in the military during the Korean War.
- During the Vietnam War, more than 42,000 Native Americans served in the military, and over 90 percent of these Servicemembers were volunteers.

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