

Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

Meeting Agenda

January 06, 2022, at 1000 AM

Location: Arrowheads Community Club

1000	Call to Order	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Moment of Silence	Vice-Chair David Eisele
	Pledge of Allegiance	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Introduction of Commission Members	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Oath of Office:	MG Mark Schindler
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ms. Constance Snavelly KWVA	
	Chairman's Open Remarks	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	TAG's Opening Remarks and Comments	MG Mark Schindler
	Approval of 02 December 2022 Meeting Minutes	Requires Vote
	Reading of Official and Other Communications	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	DAG-VA Opening Remarks and Report	BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">PPL, BVH, PIROPrograms Report	
	VISN 4	Requires Vote Mr. Timothy Liezert
	Committee Reports	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">VSO GrantRETXLegislativePensions/Relief/Grave MarkingsWomen VeteransVeterans' HealthGovernance CommitteePAWVC Update	Mr. Matthew Hollenbeck Mr. David Eisele Mr. Charles Jackson Mr. Larry Googins Ms. Lisa Kaye Mr. Mark Baylis Mr. Michael Brooker President Mr. Bernard McDonald
	Unfinished Business	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	New Business	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Good of the Order	SVC Commissioners
	Agenda Items for Next Meeting	SVC Commissioners
	Closing Remarks	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Next Meeting	
	February 03, 2023, 10AM	
	Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville	
	Retiring of the Colors	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Adjournment	Chairman Nicholas Taylor

State Veterans' Commission Meeting Minutes

December 2, 2022

10:00 AM to 12:20 PM

Arrowheads Community Center, Fort Indiantown Gap

Call to Order	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
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The Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

The moment of silence was dedicated to the Remembrance of Pearl Harbor presented by Vice-Chairman Mr. David Eisele.

Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commission Introductions

MG Mark Schindler	The Adjutant General
BG (PA) Maureen Weigl	DAG DMVA-OVA
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	SVC Chairman; Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Henry Manella	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Bernard McDonald	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. Gerald Hawk	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Ms. Terri Lynn	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. David Gui	Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. David Eisele	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Robert Heister	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Larry Googins	President, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Chris Fidler	Director, Keystone Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. David Brady	Commandant, Marine Corps League
Mr. Craig Wilhelm	Commander, The American Legion
Ms. Lisa Kaye	Member-at-Large
Mr. Mark Baylis	Member-at-Large
Mr. Michael Brooker	Member-at-Large
Mr. David Cowgill (on phone)	VISN-4

Members Absent

Mr. Charles Jackson	Member-at-Large
Mr. James Hogan	Adjutant, The American Legion
Mr. Richard Fine	Jewish War Veterans
Mr. William Albert	Commander, Blind Veterans of America

Others Present

Brig Gen Michael Regan	PANG-Air
CSM Jon Worley	PANG-Army
Mr. Marc Ferraro	Executive Deputy Secretary-DMVA
Ms. Taylor Dippery	Secretary to DAG-VA
Mr. Nate Silcox	Office of State Senator Patrick Stefano

Mr. Rich Hamp	Special Assistant to DAG-VA
Mr. Joel Mutschler	Director DMVA-PIRO
Mr. Travis Davis	Director DMVA-BVH
Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Chip Gilliland	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Elizabeth Pettis	DMVA-Chief Counsel
Mr. Sam Estrada	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Michael Woody	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Jeffery King	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Joan Nissley	DMVA-Public Affairs
Mr. Tom Cherry	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Justin Slep	PASACDVA-Franklin County
Ms. Jennifer Hagaman	PASACDVA-Clinton County
Mr. Jesiah Schrader	PASACDVA-Wayne County
Ms. Constance Snaveley	VFW
Mr. Leonard M. Johnson (on phone)	DAV
Mr. Kim Carson	AMVETS. 2 nd Vice-Commander
Mr. Craig Wilbeck	TAL
Mr. Matthew Hollenbeck	TAL
Ms. Mary Cavata	SVC Women Veterans Committee
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	VVA
Mr. Carl Curtis	VVA/TAL
Ms. Rosie Bruner	Guest
Mr. Michael Rang	CWV
Mr. Richardson (on phone)	Penn State Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness

Oath of Office	MG Schindler
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General Schindler administered the oath of office to new SVC members: Ms. Terri Lynn DAV and Mr. David Gui DAV

Recognition	MG Schindler and Chairman Taylor
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General Schindler and Chairman Taylor presented Mr. Slep PASACDVA and Mr. Brian Natali DMVA-PIRO with the PA Commendation Medal for their outstanding and dedicated work with PA Veterans.

Chairman's Opening Remarks	Chairman Taylor
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Chairman Taylor welcomed all the SVC members and DMVA staff to the meeting, and again congratulated Mr. Slep and Mr. Natali on receiving their awards from the magnificent work they did. The chairman welcomed the two new SVC members who had taken the oath of office to the commission. He also informed the members that Mr. Anthony Ficarri who had been listed on the agenda as a new member to be sworn in had fallen ill and was unable to attend the meeting. The chairman briefed the members on fellow member Mr. Charles "Chuck" Jackson suffering an injury to his knee and will be unable to attend. The chairman offered his thoughts and prayers for a speedy recovery to Mr. Ficarri and to Mr. Jackson.

The chairman said he was looking forward working with each SVC member and continuing his close collaborative relationship with the DMVA to build upon what the commission had started last year; and working closely with recently elected Vice-Chairman Mr. David Eisele.

The chairman informed the members he was very honored as the guest speaker at the Veterans Day ceremony held in the FIG National cemetery and expressed how well the FIG National Cemetery is maintained and the staff who worked so diligently to make it a wonderful event for our Veterans. He also mentioned his Catholic

War Veterans Post which held its 75th anniversary; and welcomed DAG-VA Weigl as a new Catholic War Veterans member.

The chairman introduced Mr. Matthew Hollenbeck TAL as the new VSO Grant Committee chairperson; and noted he intends to present past chairperson Mr. Bruce Foster with an award for his dedicated service later.

The chairman outlined how he would like to navigate the SVC in 2023: The chairman called on the members to prepare themselves to have input into how the SVC can move legislation forward and assist in creating new legislation to assist Veterans. The chairman would like the SVC to target certain Veteran centric issues; for example: suicides, women issues, and transportation to medical facilities for appointments. He informed members that beginning with the January meeting at least one of these target issues will be on the agenda for the members to discuss, evaluate and propose a course of action, such as new legislation or unblocking current legislation or proposing a new program while working in tandem with DMVA. As well as taking advantage of opportunities to present testimony to the incoming PA State Administration and House.

The chairman closed by saying how grateful and proud he is to be a member of the SVC, excited for what the new year can bring as a robust body working for PA Veterans. He thanked TAG, DAG-VA Weigl and Mr. Ferraro for their professional support to the SVC and him. He then invited everyone to enjoy lunch, a beverage of choice on his behalf and camaraderie after the meeting.

Questions/Discussion

None.

TAG's Opening Remarks

MG Schindler

TAG thanked the SVC members, their organizations and those who support those organizations for their commitment to Veterans. He expressed how grateful he is for their dedication and support and wished all a Happy Holiday and to enjoy their families.

TAG said November is a very busy month for Veterans breakfasts and events. Both he and DAG-VA Weigl attended as many as they could by splitting up. He noted that the PA Commonwealth employs a lot of Veterans and attended four recognition events honoring the dedication of Commonwealth Veteran employees serving our citizens. He also attended funding events for the Wounded Warriors Project to help insure its continued support to Veterans in need.

TAG briefed on his visit to the White House on Monday November 28, 2022, and his meeting with Mrs. Biden where he was able to discuss Veterans, and PA National Guard members concerns and needs. He said Mrs. Biden was very engaged. TAG informed members about the Lithuanian Military visiting FIG and a tour were provided to Lieutenant General Valdemaras Rupšys and staff. TAG also had a meeting with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley. They discussed the State Guard Partnerships and the PA National Guard.

TAG informed the members that he intended to visit each state Veteran homes during the holidays and directed the members to the homes holiday schedule. He also invited members and attendees to the Wreaths Across America event at FIG on December 17, 2022.

TAG informed the members there has not been any change in the number of PANG deployed overseas since February 2022. Deployment stands at 1003. He requested all attending to keep the soldiers/airmen and families in their thoughts and prayers.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Approval of the October 7, 2022, Meeting Minutes

Motion: Mr. David Eisele, made a motion to approve the minutes.

Second: Mr. Robert Heister, seconded the motion.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. David Brady advised of a misspelling in the October 7 minutes (page 17). The word copper should have been spelled kopper. Vote taken after correction noted.

The body agreed; motion carried. Minutes approved.

Reading of Official and Other Communications

Chairman Taylor

The chairman noted he had one official communication in the form of an email. It was based on the question from Mr. Johnson DAV asked to VISN 4 at the October 7, 2022, SVC meeting. The chairman stated he wasn't satisfied with the response from VISN 4 and would like the SVC to take the lead on the presumptive diseases question even on a national level if so required.

Below is Mr. Johnson's Question, VISN 4 response and Mr. Hudzinski's comment.

“Mr. Johnson, DAV: We spoke earlier, and I mentioned the presumptive diseases from Vietnam, Gulf War, 9/11. And on 9/11, it has melanoma as a presumptive. Vietnam Veterans are also suffering from that disease. It's been deadly to us. If you can investigate that for us, why that's not on there? Thank you.

Mr. Liezert, VISN-4: Thank you. I'll take that back and try to find out more.”

VISN 4 response

Answer: PACT Act allows VA to improve the decision-making process for determining what medical conditions will be considered for presumptive status. This will allow us to make more timely decisions regarding disabilities.

If a Veteran has a cancer or illness that's not on our list of presumptive conditions, but he/she believes it was caused by Agent Orange exposure, the Veteran can still file a claim for VA disability benefits. Veterans are encouraged to file a claim for any condition that they believe is linked to serving in the military, whether from an injury or illness that was incurred in service or a disability that didn't appear until after service. If the illness was not diagnosed in service, a medical link between the disability and conditions of service is also needed.

What evidence will I need to submit with my claim?

You'll need to submit these records:

- A medical record that shows you have an Agent Orange-related health condition, **and**
- Military records to show how you were exposed to Agent Orange during your service

If your condition isn't on the list of presumptive conditions, you'll also need to provide at least one of these types of evidence:

- Evidence that shows the problem started during—or got worse because of—your military service, **or**
- Scientific or medical evidence stating that the condition you have is caused by Agent Orange. Scientific proof may include an article from a medical journal or a published research study.

For information about eligibility specific to exposure to Agent Orange, please visit: [Agent Orange Exposure And VA Disability Compensation | Veterans Affairs](#)

Mr. Hudzinski's comment

Mr. Hudzinski: “This is not directly answer Leonard's query in my opinion. We all should know by now to apply for a condition we believe relates to military service. This response is entering upon the nuts and bolts on

how to do that.

What Len asked is why a condition so prevalent among Vietnam era Veterans does not have presumptive status; why the Congress could not find its way on this matter officially, since they have acknowledged it for some succeeding generations. Specifically, because of the PACT Act, it is a post-9/11 and Gulf War presumptive condition related to Burn Pit exposures.

Therefore, the response calls for follow-up. In fairness to Mr. Liezert, this is a question beyond him to answer as he is a public official in the "works section" of the VA, specifically healthcare operations, and this matter is also related to the VBA side of the house and at national policy levels even then. He seems not to have relayed the question upstairs (?) or the question was not voiced correctly.

Indeed the matter rises to Washington levels, because the VA and working in conjunction with the NASEM (although one may doubt this in the future based on the current Secretaries actions on another matter: birth defects among Veterans' children related to exposures) provides guidance to the Congress. In fact, the Congress could be queried at this time as one must suspect the issue was probably raised in the queer deliberations on the "All-Sorts" PACT Act.

Consequently, I suggest you use your Executive Secretary to have OVA answer this question after inquiry. May be an issue which requires diligence on behalf of our Veterans by this state and other states if there is no proper answer. Who knows at this point?"

Deputy Adjutant General-VA Remarks

BG (PA) Weigl

DAG-VA greeted the commissioners and wished them a very Happy Holiday. She encouraged the commissioners to view the BVH Holiday schedule because there are many events taking place, and the Veterans would enjoy their participation. She said the holiday events will span from December 12 to 21, 2022, and encouraged commissioners to participate; as well as with Wreaths Across America on December 17, 2022. DAG-VA then demurred to BVH Director Mr. Travis Davis and reserved further comment until after the brief.

- See DAG-VA comments at conclusion of Mr. Davis briefing.

DMVA Bureau of Veterans Homes

Mr. Travis Davis

Mr. Davis informed the commissioners that BVH had many Veterans Day celebrations throughout the BVH structures which were very successful and participation centric. He thanked all those that participated, and their organizations helping to make the event so successful.

Mr. Davis briefed on the COVID-19 situation: there was a slight increase in cases at Gino Merli and the Erie Soldiers and Sailors Home but should be back in the green shortly. The other homes were in a COVID-19 stabilization status. He said there were 18 staff members that had tested positive for COVID-19 BVH wide since his last update to the commission.

Mr. Davis reported that currently BVH's patient capacity stands at 955 which is a 64% occupancy rate. He noted this is down a little due to COVID-19 having a direct impact on their abilities to bring Veterans into the homes. He said there are approximately 370 Veterans awaiting admissions.

Mr. Davis reported on the Medicare/Medicaid rating of BVH: the Delaware Veterans Center and Eire Soldiers and Sailors Home were given a 5-star rating. Gino Merli, Southeastern Veterans Center, and the Southwestern Veterans Center received a 4-star rating; and the Hollidaysburg Veterans Home received a 3-star rating. Mr. Davis further informed the commissioners that three of BVH's homes were listed by Newsweek magazine as being in the top 25 homes in the PA, and News and World Report magazine listed Hollidaysburg Home as one of the best.

Mr. Davis said the construction at the Erie Soldiers and Sailors Home is more than 90% completed on the campus and the expectations are to have approval for opening the renovated areas by December 6, 2022. The

construction at the Hollidaysburg Home is on continuing and on track. He noted the survey in the Delaware Veterans Center will be completed by mid-December regarding skilled nursing.90

Mr. Davis briefed commission on a new hiring initiative: Walk-In Wednesdays. The initiative was designed to assist with helping to address the hiring shortage by streamlining the process. The candidates can come into the homes, file an application, take a tour, and have an interview all in the same day. Mr. Davis reported the Walk-In Wednesday program received some good media coverage by a local TV news company- FOX news.

DAG-VA Weigl requested that the commissioners share the Walk-In Wednesdays with their service organizations. She explained that BVH is short-staffed nurses and CNAs which is having an impact on BVH's ability to fill beds which is a high priority. She said the Veterans awaiting admissions are spending a lot of money until they can be admitted to one of our homes.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski: What type of advertising are you conducting?

DAG-VA: All available media outlets that DMVA uses, all social media platforms including local media.

Mr. Hudzinski: Do you have a budget to advertise in the local newspapers?

DAG-VA: Yes, we had a budget last year and we'll do the same thing this year.

Mr. Getz: If you give us (VFW) the information we will push it out to all our posts.

DAG-VA: You'll have it before the end of today.

DMVA PIRO

Mr. Brian Natali

Mr. Natali reported that the read ahead contained a lot of information regarding the operations of DMVA-PIRO. Mr. Natali then called for a vote to approve the report. Chairman called for a motion. (See below)

He reported to the commissioners the number of legislative requests directed to improve the lives of our Veterans. The hiring of more RPOCs to address the needs of our Veterans, improving the VETConnect website and improving the claims processes all to deliver better services.

Mr. Natali briefed the commissioners on Title 51 consolidated statues section 8904 requiring an adjustment to the RETX presumptive amount every two years based on the inflation rate as reported in the consumer price index. The presumptive amount is calculated on the inflation rate per consumer price index which was 13.4%; therefore, the presumptive amount would move from \$95,279.00 to \$108,046.00 beginning on January 1, 2023, if SVC approves. Chairman called for a motion. (See below).

Approval of State Veterans' Programs Reports

Motion: Mr. Bernard MacDonald, AMVETS, made a motion to approve the programs report.

Second: Mr. David Eisele, PASACDVA, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried. Programs reports approved.

Approval of RETX Presumptive Amount

Motion: Mr. David Brady, MCL, made a motion to approve raising the presumptive amount per law.

Second: Ms. Terri Lynn, DAV, seconded the motion

The body agreed, motion carried. New Presumption Amount increased to \$108,046.00 starting 01JAN23

Mr. King informed the commission the Regulatory Review Action Plan which produced the proposed amendments was the culmination of two years of work consisting of a 25-person working group formed from SVC members and DMVA staff.

Mr. King briefed on the following: Title 43 PA Code Chapter 5 is proposed to be retitled from “Bureau for Veterans’ Affairs” (which no longer exists) to “State Veterans’ Programs to provide consistency with Chapter 7, “State Veterans’ Home.” Chapter 5 was last reviewed/amended in 1991, some 31 years ago. The statutory amendments have changed the organization of the department and important aspects of several of our programs over that time. The various interpretations and adjudication guidance have been issued in policy over that time which are now best addressed in regulation. We also find it advisable to structure the rules consistently: definitions, application, adjudication, appeal, and administration.

In subchapter A, Veterans’ Temporary Assistance when the Veterans’ Emergency Assistance program was ended and turned into the Veterans’ Temporary Assistance program in 2016, the regulations were never updated. Our proposed amendments codify the “VTA Guidelines” that we have been using since 2016, bringing the regulations current and in line with statute. We should offer more detailed adjudication procedures, particularly with respect to determinations of need. We should extend the reconsideration period from 10 to 30 days and discuss the role of the VTA Fund Committee at DMVA.

In subchapter B, Educational Gratuity we need to address dual application and payment for students attending two or more educational institutions, as well as application procedures for students transferring between educational institutions. We should describe approved educational institutions and proposed rules on full-time attendance. Create reasonable annual expense allowances in the financial need assessment for students residing off-campus and clarify Chapter 35 benefits are not precondition to EG but are counted in the financial need assessment.

In subchapter C, Disabled Veterans’ Real Estate Tax Exemption we should redefine “income” in the financial need assessment, limiting it to reportable income and specifically exempting Veterans’ benefits. Explain eligibility based on “blind,” “paraplegic,” and “loss of two or more limbs.” Ties these definitions more closely to those applied in Blind and Amputee & Paralyzed Pensions programs. Create a rationale behind the cost-of-living allowance, tying it to amounts in the federal Maximum Thrifty Food Plan and Consumer Expenditure Survey; adjusted for inflation every two years. Provide a comprehensive list of acceptable expenses to eliminate ambiguity in the income/expense assessment. Add a definition of qualifying dependent tied to IRS rules. Return adjudication of eligibility back to the county, consistent with state law, along with clear guidance. (Assessment of financial need remains with DMVA, consistent with state law.) Appeal procedures more clearly address eligibility issues and issues concerning administration of the exemption that are properly appealed to the county boards of revision of taxes or assessment appeals.

In subchapter D-E, Blind and Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans’ Pensions allow for application by spouse, legal guardian, or person exercising general power of attorney on behalf of a Veteran unable to apply due to medical condition. Add clarity to the list of required supporting documentation and hold DMVA to a 30-day adjudication timeframe after receipt of a fully developed application. Clarify that pensions are not retroactive to effective date of VA disability ratings; they are effective on date of application to DMVA. Require timely notification of changes (i.e., a move or death) and provide procedure on reimbursement of debts.

Lastly, the Military Family Relief Assistance Programs Guidelines: The authorizing statute for MFRAP specifically disallows formal rulemaking in favor of the publication of guidelines. These proposed amendments may be published as a simple notice (without the full formal rulemaking process) in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*. There is a two-level approval process for MFRAP grants. The MFRAP VSS in the Programs office has authority to approve grants up to \$1,500.00. An MFRAP Committee within DMVA can approve grants up to

\$3,500.00. The work group proposed adjusting the VSS's authority up to \$1,600.00 to align with VTA approval authority.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski: Why don't we just use the same definitions in the need assessment that the VA applies for its pensions?

Mr. King: The need assessment for the RETX program is a straight income-expense assessment. So the only thing we take into account are annual income and allowable expenses tied to the household. The VA applies a full resource assessment, basically an assessment of the entire estate for the Veterans' and Survivors' Pensions. It's a very different assessment.

Mr. Brooker: Asked about the VA pension excluding war time service and would ask DMVA so the same. Also, thought a look back over financials like the VA does would be a good idea.

Mr. King: Good recommendation and working with counties on doing that with a look back.

Ms. Pettis: Said it was the opinion of the Office of Chief Counsel that only those Veterans that are 100% permanent and total disabled are entitled to RETX.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion to adopt the proposals and recommendations. (see below)

Adoption of Proposals and Recommendations

Motion: Mr. David Eisele, PASACDVA, made motion to adopt the proposals and recommends

Seconded: Mr. Mark Baylis, Member-at-Large, seconded the motion

Body agreed, motion carried, proposals and recommendations adopted

VISN-4

Mr. David Cowgill

Good Morning Everyone

You have our VISN 4 updates and slides in your read ahead material. I just wanted to highlight a couple topics and provide some additional information on the upcoming PACT Act Awareness events and Outreach opportunities.

Medical Center Leadership Update: I want to provide a Medical Center leadership update:

Ken Mortimer, Associate Director at the VA Medical Center in Huntington, West Virginia continues to be detailed to the Altoona Director position as we recruit for a new leader for Altoona.

Derek Coughenour, Associate Director at the Altoona VA continues to be detailed to the position of Acting Associate Director at the Philadelphia, VAMC. and

Carl Parrish, Chief Financial Officer at the Altoona VA is currently detailed to the position of Acting Associate Director at Altoona.

Robert Kling, the CFO at the VA Pittsburgh continues to serve as their acting Associate Director.

PACT Act Awareness Events: I wanted to provide an update on the upcoming PACT Act Awareness events.

VA will be hosting over 90 PACT Act awareness events the week of December 10-17, 2022. Each in person event will be hosted by a local VA Medical Center and will be open to the media and livestreamed if possible. Veterans, Veterans families, caregivers, survivors and advocates will be encouraged to participate. The local media and Congressional offices will also be invited to attend.

In VISN 4 we are hosting 3 events: In Pennsylvania, **Pittsburgh VA Medical Center** is hosting a PACT Act awareness week event on Wednesday, December 14 at 2 p.m. that will include a speaking engagement and enrollment opportunities. They will have a separate VBA claims clinic on Friday, December 16.

Our Philadelphia VA Medical Center will also be hosting an event for the Eastern site of our State on Monday, December 12 from Noon-1pm that will include a speaking engagement and Eligibility & Enrollment opportunities.

In Delaware, **Wilmington** will be hosting their event on Friday, December 16 from 11:30a-2:00p at the local National Guard/Reserve Conference center. Their event will include a speaking engagement, Health Care Eligibility and Enrollment; Benefits & Claims Assistance; Toxic Exposure Screening, Vaccination Clinic; and Patient Advocate Assistance.

DMVA

I also wanted everyone to have awareness I have been working with Richard Hamp to look for ways VISN 4 can continue to partner with the DMVA to encourage enrollment in VA Healthcare and raise awareness of both federal and PA state benefits. Specifically, VISN 4 wants to help promote PA Vet Connect as well as other benefits PA Veterans may be eligible for at the State level.

Joel Mutschler is scheduled to give a capability briefing on the **PA VETConnect** program at our next VISN 4 Outreach committee meeting the first week of January. Joel will also be incorporating a State Benefits briefing. We look forward to this continued collaboration with the State to enhance our Outreach to Pennsylvania Veterans.

That concludes my update. Please let me know if anyone has any questions.

Questions/Discussion

Chairman Taylor: said he noticed that only in certain areas the webinars, seminars presented by the VA and VISN 4 can be live streamed from any location. He asked why all of them can't be live streamed for Veterans; especially now that the PACT Act is in effect.

Mr. Cowgill: said he will reach out and determine if they are planning on doing that; and if they, are he will send the capabilities links to Mr. Holler to forward to members/organizations.

Chairman Taylor: asked if they have the technology to do that to please make it a standard.

Committee Reports

VSO Grant Committee

Mr. Matthew Hollenbeck

SVC Chairman introduced Mr. Michael Hollenbeck as the new chairman of the VSO Grant committee. Mr. Hollenbeck accepted.

Mr. Hollenbeck said the Grant guidelines have been sent out and he will work with the committee members to move forward on that in anticipation of securing more VSOs which are needed due to the PACT Act.

Questions/Discussion

None

RETX Committee

Mr. David Eisele

SVC Chairman introduced Mr. Eisele as the new chairman of the RETX committee. Mr. Eisele accepted and said he will continue the work of his predecessor Mr. Justin Slep.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Legislative Committee

Mr. Richard Hudzinski

Mr. Hudzinski reported the following:

A New Approach to Establishing Legislative Goals

The chairman has been meeting with members through emails and zoom. A tentative list of goals based upon Pa War Veterans Council input primarily was produced. But the meetings and discussion have also led us to formulate

a different approach towards developing goals to propose to the Commissioners -- all to improve our functioning and the commission as a whole. Let me explain. ... I will quickly review what was written to the Chairman:

What

1. Our commissioners need to be integrally involved in the development of goals which they themselves believe, if accomplished, will truly benefit the Veterans of the Commonwealth. Therefore, the Commissioners need to be canvassed to determine their current views of what the SVC's goals should be. Indeed, they may raise issues needing addressing that the committee process would not.

2. Goals must have objectives to accomplish them. Those objectives must be measurable and recorded. While principally the responsibility of a committee to develop, the commissioners need to review them and ensure they are comprehensive enough; and that any goal to be adopted will ultimately have objectives.

How

What then would this require process-wise?

1. Use of committees to get the ball rolling. As part of the canvassing process, committee chairs would be requested to present the goals of their committees which they think should be adopted and the objectives they deem necessary to accomplish them.

2. Obtaining formal commitment from the commissioners. We must acknowledge that most commissioners, per statute, come to the table representing an organization, *de facto*. That implies, when they vote aye, that they are committing themselves and their organization to doing work to achieve an adopted goal. We need them to engage their organizations for us to be more effective. Because some commissioners apparently need formal support from their organizations before making any decision on a goal, adopting a goal will not always be a quick process.

3. Reviewing the goals of the PWVC. The Legislative Committee, as would the other committee chairs, will routinely examine the PWVC's issues and goals for the current year, because of its statewide reach, to determine their applicability for the SVC consideration. While we think both organizations can have the same goal pertaining to an issue, but our objectives may and should in some cases be very different from the objectives of the PWVC. Remember that we are working within the administration. The PWVC has no such constraint.

Questions/Discussions

None.

Pensions/Relief/Grave Marking/State Military Cemetery Committee

Mr. Larry Googins

Mr. Googins had no Official Report.

Mr. Googins requested permission to use his committee to research all the acronyms used by the DMVA and VA system and provide a guiding chart for Veterans.

The Chairman agreed and offered his assistance.

Questions/Discussions

None

Women Veterans Committee

Ms. Lisa Kaye

Ms. Kaye had no official report

Ms. Kaye did note that PA is the eighth largest state of women Veterans and will move her committee forward along with the GAC-VA to in a partnership in the coming year.

Questions/Discussions

None

Veteran Health Committee

Mr. Mark Baylis

Mr. Baylis had no official report, nor an update on his position with the Long-Term Care Council- not meeting. Briefed on the PTSD test, it appeared to be inaccurate and will work with company to fix.

Mr. Baylis briefed the members on the drug mefloquine that's being prescribed and the side effects, i.e., suicidal ideation. He brought some papers and provided copies to the chairman. He would like to work with legislative committee to address Veteran suicide problem.

Questions/Discussions

None

Governance Committee

Mr. Michael Booker

Mr. Brooker had not official report.

Mr. Brooker said he hoped to have Bylaws by next meeting for commission review along with operation procedures for the DMVA.

Questions/Discussions

None.

PA War Veterans Council Update

Mr. Bernard McDonald

Mr. McDonald brief members on the CDL change to have only Veterans sitting on the advisory councils. It was changed in the PWVCA Bylaws and will have a copy to members at the next meeting.

Questions/Discussions

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None

Good of the Order

None

Items for Next Meeting

Chairman Taylor said that in the future he will have a Veteran issue pre-populated into the read ahead for members to review and discuss at the meeting; the Veteran issues he exemplified were suicide ho, transportation and homeless. He noted this will give members a chance to digest and review with their organizations.

Closing Remarks

Invitation to lunch hosted by Chairman Taylor.

Next Meeting

Friday, January 6, 2022, 10:00 AM
Forum: Arrowheads Community Center, FIG

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
Deputy Adjutant General
Veterans Affairs



STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING
JANUARY 6, 2023



DMVA MILITARY UPDATE

CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



PAARNG Current Deployments						
MDATE	MSAD	UNIT	OPN	PAX	MISSION	Projected Return Date
01 JUN 22	01 JUN 22	1955 CCD	OSS	2	T10, 12302	11 MAR 23
02 JUN 22	04 JUN 22	252 QM	OSS	205	T10, 12304B	29 MAR 23
28 JUN 22	03 JUL 22	192FFT	APO	7	T10, 12304B	24 APR 23
08 OCT 22	10 OCT 22	28 ID HQ	OSS	544	T10, 12302	04 AUG 23
07 OCT 22	10 OCT 22	55 MEB	SWB	97	T10, 12302	03 AUG 23
ARNG Soldiers at MOB/DEMOB Sites				208	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Various Individual MOB Soldiers				1	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Total PAARNG Deployed: 1064						

PAANG Current Deployments		
Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	OFS-OIR-OSS, Other	8/1
111 ATKW	IPR (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS, TS	36/6/40
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS	37
Total PAANG Deployed		128

Total PANG Deployed 806

PVH Current Licensure Status



SVH	Regulatory Agency	Survey Reason/Type	Survey Date(s)	Status/comments
DVVH	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	04/26/22 - 04/29/22	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	05/10/22	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	06/07/22 - 06/10/22	CAP accepted, full certification
GMVC	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	10/11/22 - 10/14/22	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	10/18/22	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaints, Follow-Ups	09/22/22	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	08/17/22	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	02/07/22 - 02/10/22	CAP accepted, full certification
HVH	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	08/22/22 - 08/26/22	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaints	11/29/22	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	08/30/22 - 08/31/22	Cleared
	DHS	Annual Recertification	08/16/22 - 08/17/22	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	06/06/22 - 06/10/22	CAP accepted, full certification
PSSH	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	05/17/22 - 05/20/22	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	05/24/22	Cleared
	DHS	Annual Recertification	09/21/21 - 09/22/21	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	01/31/22 - 02/04/22	CAP accepted, full certification
SEVC	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	08/23/22 - 08/26/22	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Event	12/14/22	Pending
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	08/30/22	Cleared
	DHS	Annual Recertification	09/07/22	Deficiency-Free
	VA	Annual Recertification	01/31/22 - 02/04/22	CAP accepted, full certification
SWVC	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	07/11/22 - 07/15/22	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint, Incident	08/18/22	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	07/20/22 - 07/21/22	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	08/02/22 - 08/05/22	CAP accepted, full certification

Each DMVA Pennsylvania Veterans' Home is currently licensed by the PA Department of Health, PA Department of Human Services and certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. HVH, PSSH and SEVC have a Personal Care program.

Last updated: 12-14-2022

BUREAU OF VETERANS' HOMES



Resident COVID-19 Update

Residents		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	09	10
Home	Data Date	# of Residents with S/S of COVID-19	# of Residents Currently Positive in Facility	# of Residents Waiting Test Results	# of Residents in Hospital for COVID-19 Reasons	# of Total Residents Tested	General Resident Population Testing, Enter round # and S-Started C-Complete	# of Residents Positive for COVID-19 Cumulative	# of Residents Recovered	# of Residents That Expired with a Positive COVID-19 Status.
DVVH	12/14/2022	1	1	0	0	7771	56-S	169	146	22
GMVC	12/14/2022	0	0	0	0	14354	108-C	212	179	33
HVH	12/14/2022	6	10	0	0	19614	106-C	285	234	32
PSSH	12/14/2022	0	0	0	0	14556	192-C	210	170	22
SEVC	12/14/2022	4	0	4	1	16649	139-C	200	140	46
SWVC	12/14/2022	1	1	0	0	18423	55-C	173	164	8
Total:		12	12	4	1	91367		1249	1033	163

As of 14 Dec 2022

> community > commonwealth

> country

BUREAU OF VETERANS' HOMES



Staff COVID-19 Update

Staff		01	02	03	04	06	07
Home	Data Date	# of Staff Currently Out for COVID-19 Reasons	# of Staff Currently Positive	# of Staff Waiting Test Results	# of Total Staff Tested	# of Staff Tested Positive for COVID-19 Cumulative	# of Staff Returned to Work Cumulative
DV VH	12/14/2022	1	1	0	13765	230	270
GM VC	12/14/2022	0	0	0	25545	237	227
HV H	12/14/2022	19	13	4	59631	682	2221
PSSH	12/14/2022	2	2	0	28254	296	599
SEVC	12/14/2022	0	0	0	24720	360	606
SWVC	12/14/2022	0	0	0	33207	294	523
Total:		22	16	4	185122	2099	4446

As of 14 Dec 2022

> community > commonwealth

> country

COVID-19 Vaccination Update

Vaccinations (All Homes)

ResidentsBy Home	Vaccinations - Residents					
		Census	Fully Vaccinated	% Fully Vaccinated	Partially Vaccinated	Not Vaccinated
DVH	Residents	128	126	98%	0	0
GMVC	Residents	125	125	100%	0	0
HVH	Residents	238	224	94%	0	14
PSSH	Residents	130	129	99%	0	1
SEVC	Residents	191	189	99%	0	2
SWVC	Residents	129	126	98%	1	2
Total		941	919	98%	1	19

Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

COVID-19 links for information related to the Veterans Homes and skilled nursing facilities.

- <https://www.dmva.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/LTCF-Data.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Monitoring-Dashboard.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/SNF-Guidance.aspx>
- <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19MpLoPxayE1MDwQJJYCZxISN64V4FJSJPGzfvVBb5Mw/edit#gid=1511961664>



New 2023-2024 Co-Sponsorship Memos

(HCO = House Co-Sponsorship Memo) (SCO = Senate Co-Sponsorship Memo)

HCO 15 (Harkins, Patrick) - Expands the list of free hunting licenses available to disabled veterans to include antlerless deer, bear archery, muzzle loader, migratory game bird, elk and special wild turkey licenses.

HCO 29 (Ciresi, Joseph) - Considers exempting injured and decorated veterans from vehicle registration fees.

HCO 52 (Staats, Craig) - Requires licensed funeral directors, funeral entities, or cemetery companies to notify the county veteran affairs director of a deceased serviceperson having legal residence in the county so they can assist the family.

HCO 55 (Tomlinson) - Establishes the Family Care Act, a statewide Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program, which requires up to 2 weeks of paid sick leave if an eligible employee is quarantined or experiencing Covid-19 symptoms.

HCO 109 (Evans, Carol) - Establishes a recent veteran property tax and rent rebate program.

HCO 124 (Nielson, Ed) - Creates a specific license exemption for participants in organized therapeutic fishing activities.

HCO 136 (Sappey, Christina) - Constitutional amendment extending full property tax exemption to disabled veterans regardless of wartime service.

HCO 182 (Evans, Carol) - Provides DMVA and PA Housing Agency shall collaborate to provide assistance to veterans who are homeless or are at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

HCO 196 (McNiell, Jeanne) - Reduces residency requirements for veterans and their families applying for the state educational gratuity program to one year.

HCO 221 (Ciresi, Joseph) - Requires all public schools to mark Veterans Day as a school holiday to continue to show respect for veterans.

HCO 245 (Deasy, Daniel) - Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs) to require the establishment of a Combat to College Program.

House and Senate Session for the 2023-2024 Legislative Session begin Jan. 3, 2023. All bills not enacted last session will need to be reintroduced.



New 2023-2024 Co-Sponsorship Memos

(HCO = House Co-Sponsorship Memo) (SCO = Senate Co-Sponsorship Memo)

HCO 254 (Deasy, Daniel) - Provides for limits to fees cemeteries can charge for markers commemorating deceased veterans.

HCO 357 (Kenyatta, Malcolm) - Provides emergency relief to those who previously received support through the General Assistance program.

SCO 19 (Brewster, Jim) - Exempts the cost of fishing licenses for veterans and other individuals taking steps toward physical or mental recovery as part of therapeutic recreation events or programs.

SCO 124 (Mastriano, Doug) - Exempts disabled veterans benefit payment from income calculations of any commonwealth program or benefit.

SCO 161 (Fontana, Wayne) - Implements a Green Alert system to warn the public if an at-risk veteran is missing.

SCO 201 (Mastriano, Doug) - Allows the Pennsylvania Squadron of the Navy Club to the United States full membership on the State Veterans Commission.

SCO 238 (Mastriano, Doug) - Created a loan guarantee program in support of veteran owned businesses. Loans would be limited to \$250,000 for any one loan.

SCO 274 (Mastriano, Doug) - Establishes the Veterans Home Advisory Board within the Office of Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs

SCO 307 (Brooks, Michelle) - Provides that VFWs and American Legions are tax exempt.

House and Senate Session for the 2023-2024 Legislative Session begin Jan. 3, 2023. All bills not enacted last session will need to be reintroduced.

Bureau Activities



- We serve over 700,000 veterans and approximately 18,000 members of the Pennsylvania National Guard. We are here for them, their families, and the nearly 2,500 active and over 10,000 reserve component military members and families that call PA home. **We are a community of over 2 million Pennsylvanians strong.**
- **Top issues facing our veterans' community** across the commonwealth are Homelessness, Transportation, Employment, Mental Wellness, and veterans benefit awareness.
- Since **PA VETConnect** launched, we have made more than 16,500 connections with federal, state, and local government officials, non-profit organizations, and community leaders to build relationships and enhance our network capabilities with over 1,900 resources.
- **PACT Act** - Veterans can visit www.va.gov/PACT to get the latest information and updates or connect with a Veteran Service Officer for assistance. Since the PACT was enacted, the federal VA has seen an increase of over **175,000 claims nationwide**.
- **Veterans Trust Fund (VTF)**- Since the grant program began in 2013, a total of \$6,700,590 has been awarded to organizations that serve PA veterans to include \$1.4 million last year. 2023-24 Applications are due 19 Jan 23. More information may be found at www.dmva.pa.gov/veterans and then click on Grants.
- **2023-24 Grants to Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Programs** – Notice of Grant Announcement and Guidelines published on 15 Nov 22. Applications are due by 15 Jan 22. Questions may be directed to the VSO Grant Program Manager. More information may be found at www.dmva.pa.gov/veterans and then click on Grants.
- **Title 43 Regulatory Update Project** – We conducted a regulatory review of the application and adjudication procedures for our state veterans' benefits programs codified in 43 Pa. Code. The review follows a detailed process governed by the Regulatory Review Act and overseen by the Independent Regulatory Review Commission. Members from the SVC have been included on the associated working groups. An Exposure Draft was provided to key stakeholders, and we will close the informal comment period on 19 Jan 23.
- **Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services** – met on November 2, 2022. The Governor attended for a year-end review. More information to include past meeting minutes and presentations may be found at www.dmva.pa.gov/veterans and then click on Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services. The next meeting will be February 1, 2023.

OVA / VSO Grant Program Summary



FY 21 - 22 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Monthly Content Count	Monthly Content Gross Amount Value
113,201	\$190,946,237.00
Year to Date Content Count	Year to Date Content Gross Amount Value
450,065	\$756,761,066.00

Note: Data is derived from monthly Federal Veterans Affairs reports. Content Count is the number the of recipients receiving VA compensation and pension. Content Gross is the dollar amount associated with compensation and pension payments.

Reintegration and Outreach Events Overview



Outreach Statistics					
	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	Year to Date
Outreach Events Supported	61	37			98
Mobile Outreach Van Events	13	4			17
Veteran Interactions	1,196	634			1,830
Claim referrals to County Directors and Service Organizations	452	204			656
Claim referrals to other state, county and local organizations assisting Veterans	225	165			390
Health Care Enrollment Referrals	162	60			222
Number of Veterans Registry Cards distributed	119	108			227
County Directors Office Attended	32	11			43
Legislative attended events	32	15			47

VETERANS' TRUST FUND



Source	VTF Report					
	Week	Month to Date	Fiscal Year Total		Total	# HOV Sold
Appropriation Transfer to VTF	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$1,700,000.00	
HOV License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,084.00	72	\$54,686.00	3,646
PA Monuments LP	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
HOV Motorcycle License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	\$3,479.00	232
HOV Women's License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$75.00	5	\$1,635.00	109
Checkoff & Donations	\$18,813.00	\$18,813.00	\$598,248.04		\$13,619,915.03	
Veterans Trust Fund Online Donations	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$325.00		\$6,453.00	
SECA Donations	\$337.38	\$337.38	\$1,588.36		\$16,293.58	
County Juror Donations	\$471.38	\$471.38	\$10,594.23		\$63,380.44	
Interest	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$21,427.12		\$203,915.09	
VSO	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$700,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 21-22)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,346,311.60		\$1,346,423.10	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 20-21)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$782,833.48	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 19-20)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$800,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 18-19)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$780,137.46	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 17-18)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$763,749.14	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$641,329.75	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$502,126.03	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$472,473.67	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$442,020.00	
Veteran Programs Training	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$8,700.00	
Veterans Assistance	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$22,901.34	
VTA	\$8,559.00	\$8,559.00	\$323,085.00		5,705,199.32	
Working Balance	\$11,362.76	\$11,362.76	-\$1,036,054.85		\$1,925,863.85	3,987

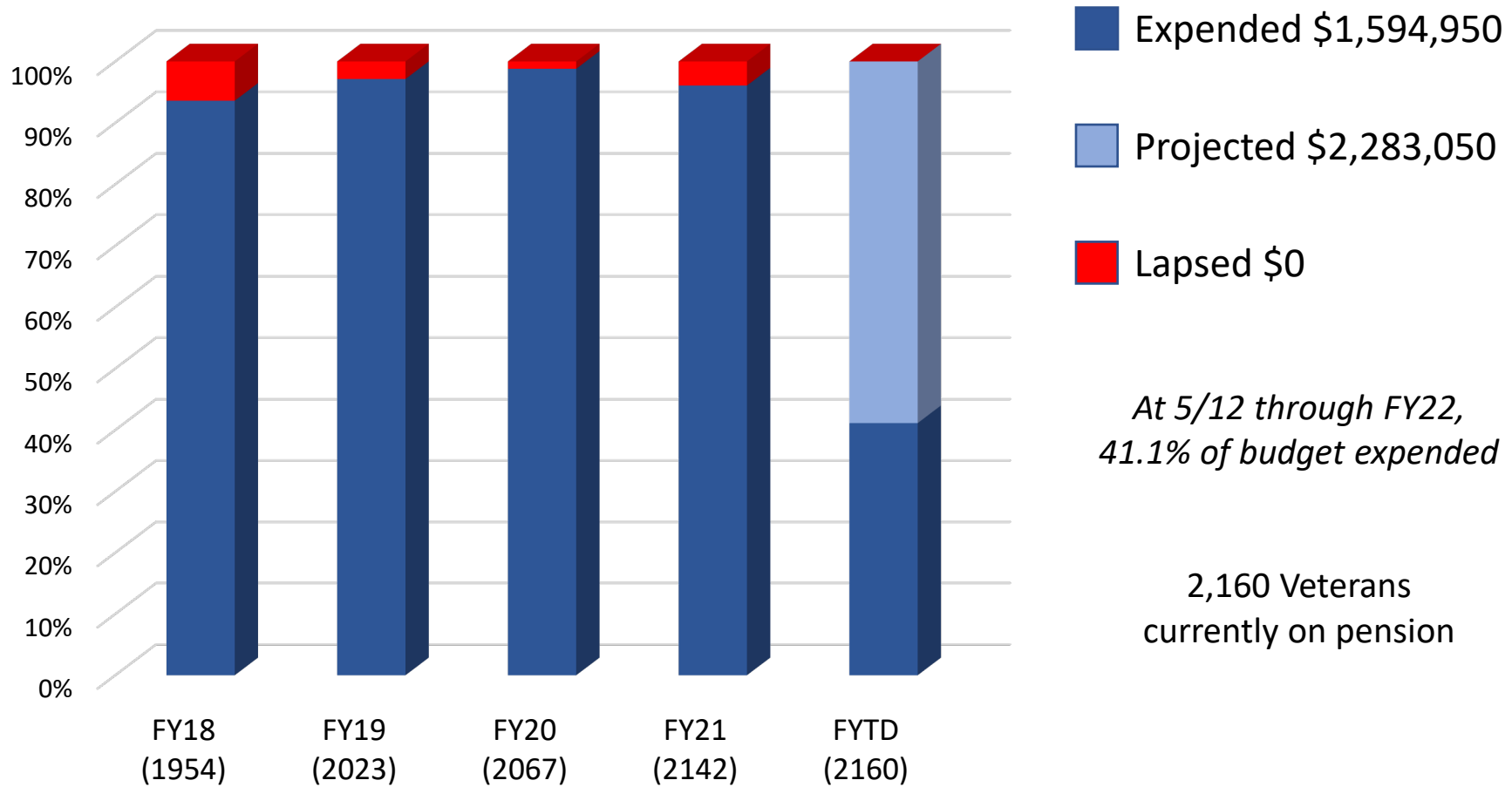
As of 7 December 2022

> community > commonwealth > country

AMPUTEE & PARALYZED VETERANS' PENSION



\$3,878,000



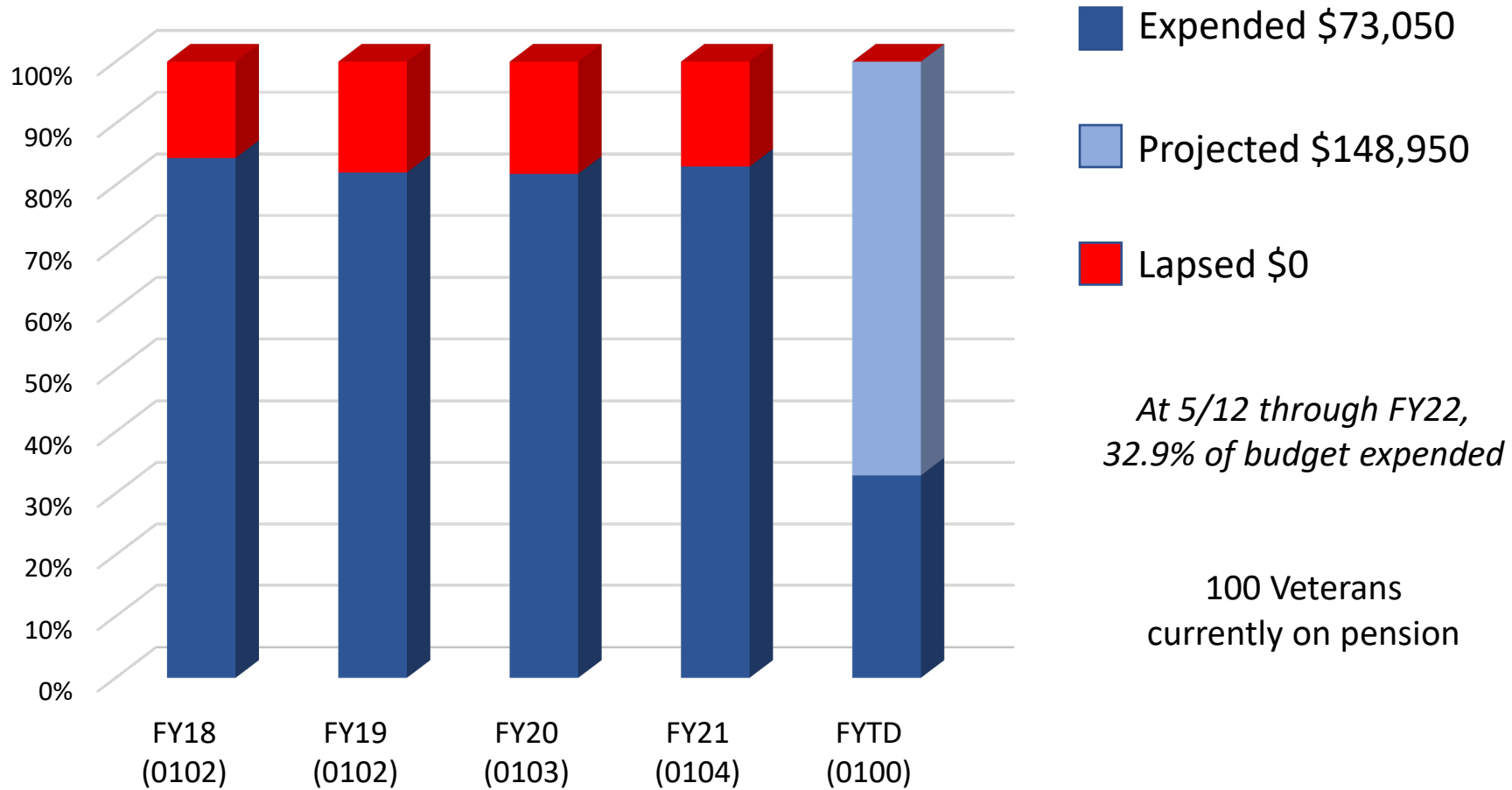
*At 5/12 through FY22,
41.1% of budget expended*

2,160 Veterans
currently on pension

BLIND VETERANS' PENSION



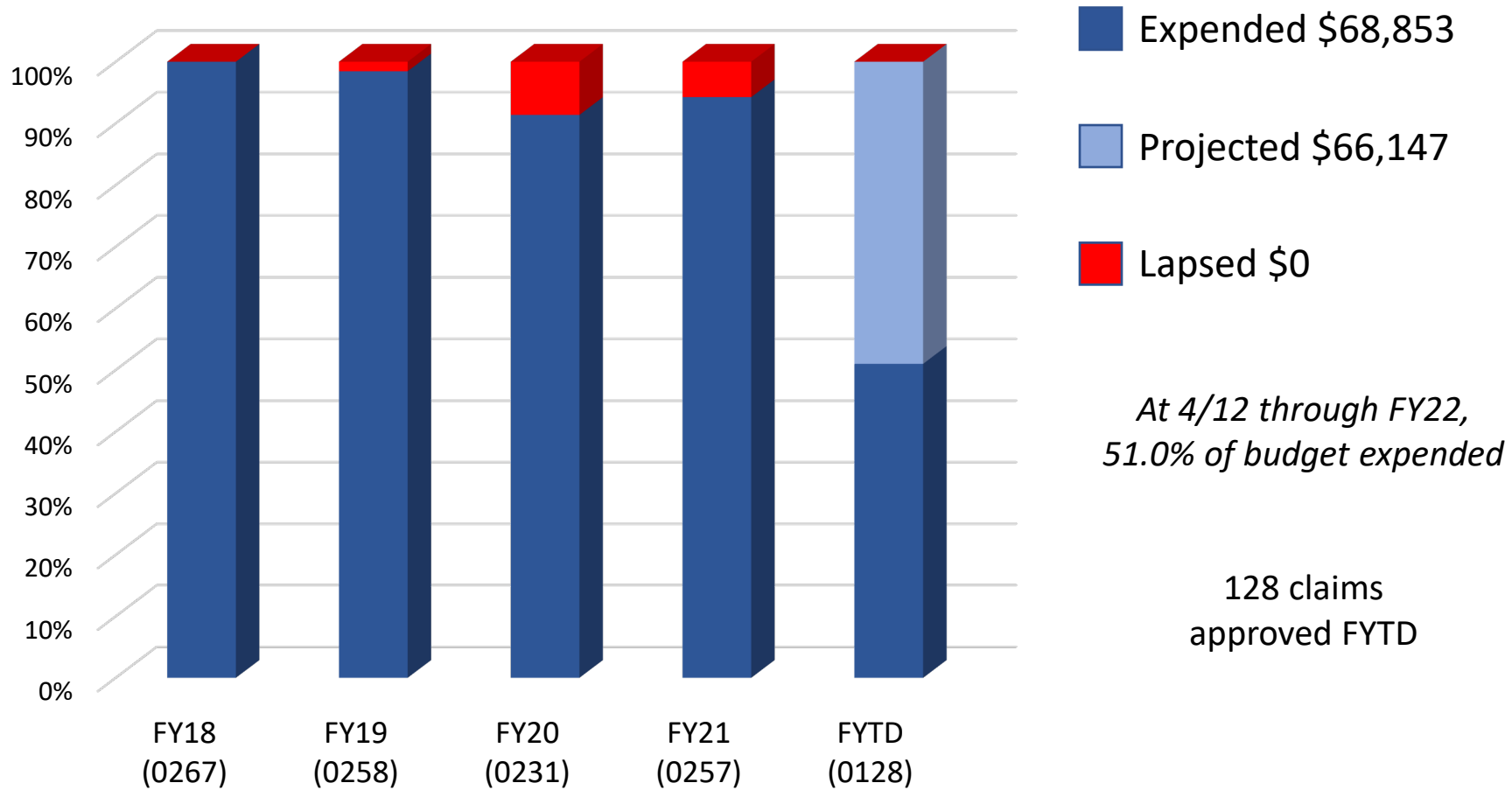
\$222,000



EDUCATIONAL GRATUITY



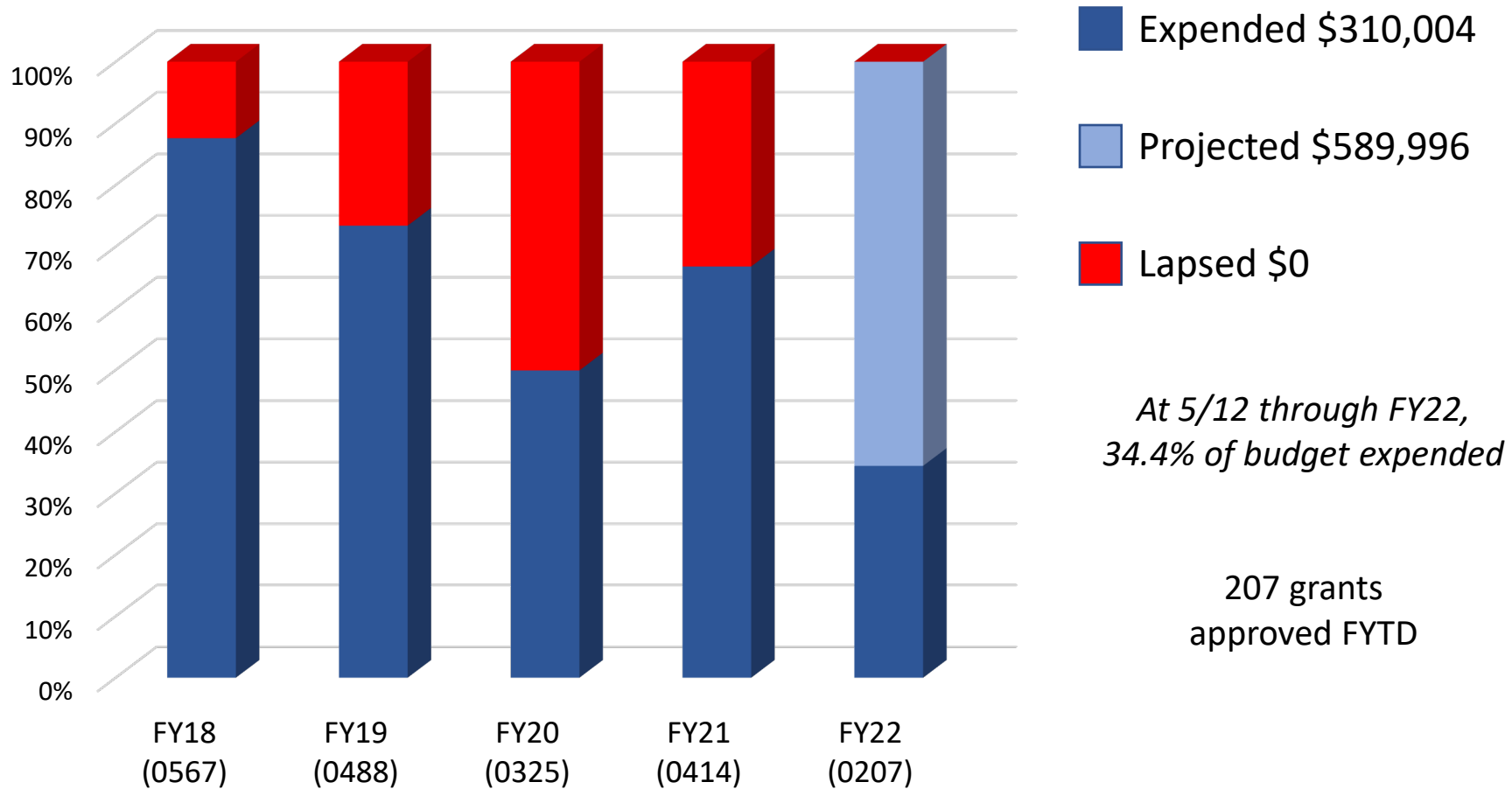
\$135,000



VETERANS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE



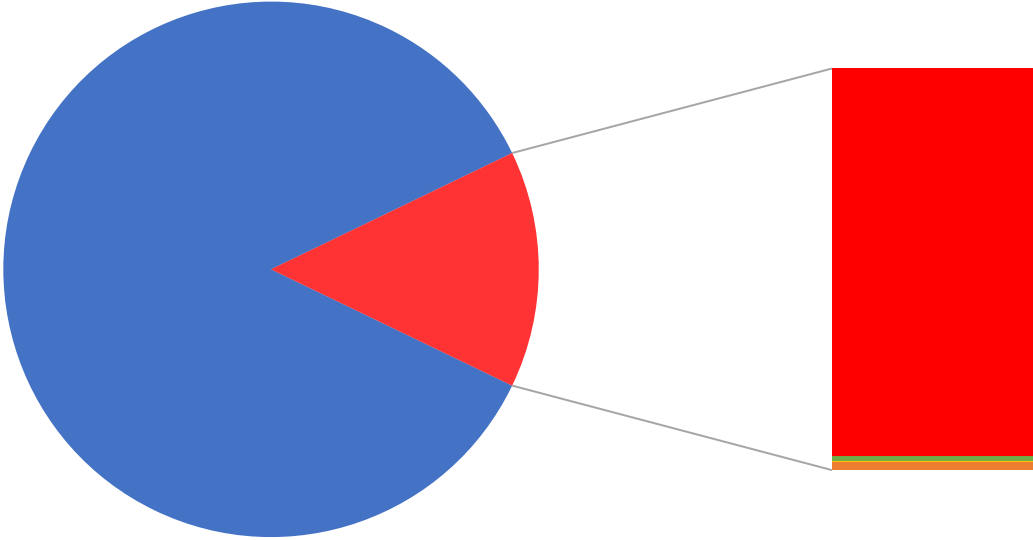
\$900,000



MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Total All Contributions FY2005-22 \$2,174,250.77



- Personal Income Tax Donations
- Personal/Corp/Org Donations
- Cash Donations
- Online Donations
- Other Dept of Revenue Transfers

Total Grants FYTD 2022

(\$ 22,500.00)

Total Grants FY 2005-22

(\$ 944,421.86)

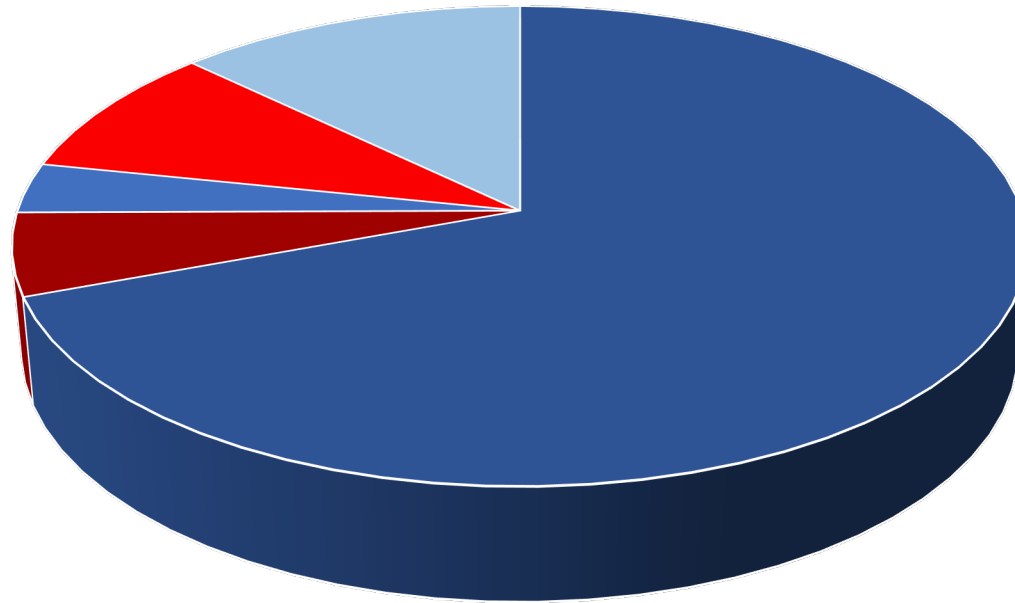
MFRAP Account Balance

\$ 1,229,828.91

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



415 Total Adjudications
Between 18 Nov and 16 Dec 2022



- 287 Approved (69%)
- 23 Denied: Financial Need
- 14 Denied: Ineligible*
- 37 Removed: No Response
- 53 Removed: Eligibility Change

*** 14 Applications Ineligible by Reason:**

- 2 – Veteran did not have a total or 100% permanent disability during lifetime.
- 5 – Property change or not owned solely by veteran or jointly/entirety with spouse
- 6 – Veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.
- 1 – Veteran has future exam, therefore not rated as total or permanent

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



As of 16 Dec 2022

[> community](#) [> commonwealth](#) [> country](#)

VISN 4 Access – Fiscal Year 2023 Wait Times



Clinics FY23 thru Dec. 11	Number of Appointments	Average Wait
Mental Health	62,710	5.0
Primary Care	108,416	4.8
Specialty Care	179,139	10.2
Other	129,003	6.0
ALL	479,268	7.2

FY23 data updated 12/13/2022 with appointment info as of 12/11/2022.

VISN 4 Access – Current Average Wait Times



VISN 4 Facility	Primary Care	
	New Patients	Returning Patients
James E. Van Zandt VAMC	12	2
Abie Abraham HCC	25	1
Coatesville VAMC	13	4
Erie VAMC	19	3
Lebanon VAMC	14	5
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	23	6
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (University Drive)	29	14
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (H.J. Heinz)	26	17
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	20	3
Wilmington VAMC	11	12

FY23 data updated 12/13/2022 with wait times as of 12/12/2022 for the last 30 days.

www.accesstocare.va.gov

January 2023 Update

> community > commonwealth > country

Improvements to the Access to Care website

Average wait times for all VHA medical centers and clinics are now calculated to include additional steps in the appointment process that had not been captured in the past.

- For **new patient** appointments, average wait time is calculated from the earliest time a request for care is consistently recorded in the scheduling system to the date the appointment is completed – or the date it is scheduled to occur if not yet completed.
- For **established patient** appointments, average wait times are measured from the date agreed upon between a Veteran and provider for future care and ends on the date care is received, or the date that care is scheduled to occur if it has not yet occurred.

The upgraded calculation makes the website more reflective of the complete process of requesting and receiving care. Averages are representative of general performance and may not represent individual experience. Average wait times are never used to determine eligibility for community care.

VISN 4 Care in the Community



	Care in the Community Consults (Scheduled and Completed)	Non-VA Unique Patients*
FY 18	87,704	62,425
FY 19	101,068	70,376
FY 20	153,506	87,040
FY 21	155,823	85,443
FY 22	167,806	90,585
FY 23 (as of 12/12/22)	33,150	34,954

*Number of unique enrolled Veterans who receive community care at VA expense

FY23 data updated 12/13/2022 with consult info as of 12/12/2022.

NEXT MEETING



**Friday February 3, 2023
at 10:00AM**

**Arrowheads Community Club
Fort Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003**

VISIT PA STATE VETERANS COMMISSION-PA DMVA FOR SVC INFO



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare–VISN 4

VISN 4 Update

January 6, 2023

Leadership Update

Ken Mortimer, Associate Director at the Hershel “Woody” William VA Medical Center in Huntington, West Virginia continues to be detailed to the Altoona Director position as we recruit for a new leader for Altoona.

Derek Coughenour, Associate Director at the James E. Van Zandt VAMC, Altoona, PA continues to be detailed to the position of Acting Associate Director at the Philadelphia, VAMC.

Carl Parrish, Chief Financial Officer at the James E. Van Zandt VAMC, Altoona, PA is currently detailed to the position of Acting Associate Director at Altoona. The detail was effective starting October 23, 2022.

Robert Kling, the CFO at the VA Pittsburgh continues to serve as acting Associate Director in Pittsburgh during the recruitment process.

VA App Store

The VA App Store provides a central location to download all available VA mobile apps. It is organized by categories including featured apps, top Veterans apps, top provider apps, and top mental health apps. A link to the VA App store is included in the read ahead material. <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore>

COVID 19 Update

The updated [“bivalent” COVID boosters](#) protect against both the original COVID-19 virus and the latest variants BA.5, BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 ([majority of new cases](#)). COVID booster shots and flu vaccines can be administered [during the same visit](#).

Communications about the COVID virus are changing as the virus keeps evolving and new treatments are developed. Check out www.VA.gov with the latest information and guidance for Veterans. Also, please check the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) for local community and transmission levels.

<https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>

Flu Shots

The annual flu vaccine is available at many VA facilities as well as community clinics and pharmacies. A link for more information and where eligible Veterans can receive their flu shots is included in the read ahead material.

<https://www.prevention.va.gov/flu/>

PACT Act Awareness Events

VA medical centers across the country hosted more than 90 PACT Act awareness events during the week of December 10-17. Every state was required to have at least one in-person event and provide a livestream if possible.

Veterans and their families, caregivers, survivors, and advocates were encouraged to participate. Congressional staffers, VSOs, community partners, and local media were also invited to attend.

In VISN 4 we hosted 3 events in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Wilmington, Delaware. All three PACT Act awareness events were well attended by Veterans and viewed by several hundred virtually. We were honored to have both the President of the United States and Secretary of Veterans Affairs attend in person and speak at our event hosted by the Wilmington VA.

Patient Experience Update

Nationally, VA's trust score over the last 90 days was just over 90%. In VISN 4, our trust score was 93% which is the second highest VISN in the nation. 73.5% of the comments in VISN 4 were compliments, higher than any other VISN. The top compliment themes were quality of care, cleanliness of facility, satisfaction with specialty care, interactions with staff, and quality of care from student and resident staff.

Caregiver Support Update

Resources for Caregivers

- VA's Caregiver Support Program (CSP) celebrated National Family Caregivers Month in November. Each facility across VISN 4 hosted events for caregivers including trainings on problem solving and self-care, 'grab and go' resource fairs at several facilities and CBOCS, tea and cookie event, laughter therapy event, as well as appreciation gifts, activity packets, and thank you cards.

Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregiver (PCAFC)

- VA is reviewing and examining the current Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC), including a thorough review of the eligibility criteria, and improving the overall Veteran and caregiver experience.
- VA announced it is extending the amount of time that Legacy Participants, Legacy Applicants, and their Family Caregivers within the PCAFC will remain eligible for the program. This will include all services, supports and benefits until September 30, 2025.
- VA has suspended annual reassessments during a review of current eligibility criteria for all those enrolled in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). VA will continue to initiate reassessments for Veterans and family caregivers who request to be considered for an increase in stipend level or if there is evidence of an increased need for personal care services. During this time, VA will not remove anyone from the program or decrease any support based on the annual reassessments.
- As part of the VA MISSION Act, Phase II of program expansion occurred October 2022, expanding the program to include family caregivers of eligible Veterans from *all eras* who were seriously injured in the line of duty.
- New applications continue to be received. These are processed in a timely manner.
- In addition to the VHA Clinical Review Process, there are additional appeal options for Veterans and caregivers. The Caregiver Support Line (CSL) (1-855-260-3274) can assist Veterans and caregivers with navigating these additional options and with providing information about filing a review or appeal.

Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS)

- Facilities are continuing to develop, implement, and enhance services and education for caregivers.
- Caregiver Support Program staff, VA providers and professionals have received training in the Campaign for Inclusive Care, which engages caregivers as part of the Veteran's care team.
- Family caregivers of Veterans who aren't eligible for PCAFC can still receive support and resources through PGCSS.

Connected Care Update

My VA Images

Patients can now use the My VA Images app to share photos and videos with their providers to assist with their care. My VA Images allows providers to request photos and videos directly from their patients. The app will guide patients through taking the required photos and/or videos and remind them when the images are due.

My VA Images is a secure web-application that protects patient information from upload through submission. The application can be used when providers want to see a picture of a new rash or want to evaluate the use of equipment sent to a home to support rehabilitation. Patients can use a smartphone or personal computer to avoid travel and wait times while receiving expert health care from anywhere, anytime. Patients should talk to their VA care team if they are interested in using this application.

Secure Messaging

Secure Messaging through My HealthVet provides Veterans access to care by allowing them to securely exchange messages online with members of their VA care teams. Veterans can send messages to:

- Ask non-urgent, non-emergent health questions
- Update their VA care team on their health and wellness
- Schedule, reschedule, or cancel VA appointments
- Ask routine administrative questions
- Request VA medication renewals or ask a question about their VA medication

To access Secure Messaging, Veterans should sign into their My HealthVet Premium Account and select Messages from the homepage. Their VA care team should respond to messages within three business days (Monday-Friday, not including Federal holidays).

Veterans wishing to access My HealthVet and Secure Messaging can register at www.myhealth.va.gov. Veterans who need to upgrade their My HealthVet Account to Premium or who have questions should contact their local My HealthVet Coordinator listed at www.visn4.va.gov/myhealthvet.asp.

Delaware Valley Veterans' Home, Philadelphia PA - Peter Ojeda - Commandant											
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Available Beds [Auth Beds Less Pending Cert.]	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Pending VA Certification	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	141	100	100	0	41	100%	4	0	2	46	15
Memory Care	30	30	30	0	0	100%	0	0	0	20	9
Total	171	130	130	0	41	100%	4	0	2	66	24
Non-Veteran Census Percent						5%					
Gino J. Merli Veterans' Center, Scranton PA - Vito Ruggiero - Commandant											
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Available Beds Equal Auth. Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Infrastructure Beds on Hold	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	156	156	100	56	0	64%	6	1	7	14	18
Memory Care	40	40	26	14	0	65%	0	0	1	3	6
Total	196	196	126	70	0	64%	6	1	8	17	24
Non-Veteran Census Percent						12%					
Holidaysburg Veterans' Home, Holidaysburg PA - Sam Dunkle - Commandant											
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Available Beds Equal Auth. Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Infrastructure Beds on Hold	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	231	231	144	87	0	62%	7	0	2	13	3
Memory Care	26	26	20	6	0	77%	0	1	0	1	0
Personal Care	167	167	78	89	0	47%	0	0	0	1	1
Total	424	424	242	182	0	57%	7	1	2	15	4
Non-Veteran Census Percent						18%					
Pennsylvania Soldiers' & Sailors' Home, Erie PA - Cheri Spacht - Commandant											
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Available Beds Equal Auth. Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Infrastructure Beds on Hold	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	75	75	60	15	0	80%	0	0	3	21	10
Memory Care	32	32	15	17	0	47%	0	0	0	7	4
Personal Care	100	100	56	44	0	56%	0	0	1	3	2
Total	207	207	131	76	0	63%	0	0	4	31	16
Non-Veteran Census Percent						11%					
Southeastern Veterans' Center, Spring City PA - Brian Gula - Commandant											
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Available Beds Equal Auth. Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Infrastructure Beds on Hold	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	208	208	125	83	0	60%	3	0	1	29	13
Memory Care	30	30	28	2	0	93%	1	0	1	35	6
Personal Care	54	54	37	17	0	69%	0	1	1	12	3
Total	292	292	190	102	0	65%	4	1	3	76	22
Non-Veteran Census Percent						8%					
Southwestern Veterans' Center, Pittsburgh PA - Richard Adams - Commandant											
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Available Beds Equal Auth. Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Infrastructure Beds on Hold	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	196	196	99	97	0	51%	3	3	2	14	11
Memory Care	40	40	29	11	0	73%	0	0	1	0	4
Total	236	236	128	108	0	54%	3	3	3	14	15
Non-Veteran Census Percent						14%					
Summary / Pennsylvania Bureau of Veterans' Homes											
Veteran Census/Events	Auth Beds	Available Beds [Auth Beds Less Pending Cert.]	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Pending VA Certification	Percentage Filled	Admissions	Discharges	Expirations	Waiting List Veteran/Placing	Waiting List Non-Veteran/Placing
Nursing Care	1007	966	628	338	41	65%	23	4	17	137	70
Memory Care	198	198	148	50	0	75%	1	1	3	66	29
Personal Care	321	321	171	150	0	53%	0	1	2	16	6
Totals	1,526	1,485	947	538	41	64%	24	6	22	219	105
Veteran Status: Non-Veteran/Veteran	Total Non-Vets (f)	Male Non-Vet	% Non Vets (f)	Total Vets (f)	% Vets (f)	Male Vets	Total Male (f)	Female Non-Vets	Female Vets	Total Female (f)	VH Totals (f)
DVVH	7	0	5%	123	95%	122	7	7	1	8	130
GJMVC	15	2	12%	111	88%	107	109	13	4	17	126
HVH	44	2	18%	198	82%	187	189	42	11	53	242
PSSH	14	2	11%	117	89%	109	111	12	8	20	131
SEVC	15	1	8%	175	92%	164	165	14	11	25	190
SWVC	18	2	14%	110	86%	106	108	16	4	20	128
Totals	113	9	12%	834	88%	795	804	104	39	143	947

RETX Exempt Listmvfigsqlprod01
12/16/2022
rep_VADC_RETX_Exempt_List_New**Summary of Current Applications (Exempt)**

Count	No Activity	Review Process Started	Review App Received	New Apps Pending
16504	15944	505	55	180

Summary of Activity from 11/18/2022 to 12/16/2022

Apps Created: 304	
New	194
Review	110
Apps Approved: 288	
New	159
Review	129
Apps Denied (Financial Need)	23
Apps Denied (Ineligible)	14
Apps Removed from Exempt List (No Response)	37
Apps Removed from Exempt List (Eligibility Change)	53

Summary of Ineligible Reasons

Reason	Count
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not have a total and/or 100% permanent disability during their lifetime.	2
The property for which you claim exemption is not owned solely by you, or as an estate by the entirety with your spouse.	5
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.	6
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs stated that you have a future exam, therefore, your disability has not been rated as total or 100% permanent.	1

Summary of Activity from 11/18/2022 to 12/16/2022

APPLICATIONS APPROVED	288
New	159
Review	129

APPLICATIONS DENIED	127
Financial Need	23
Ineligible	14
No Response	37
Change of Eligibility	53

OVER INCOME	36
New	29
Review	7

13%
18%
5%

APPLICATIONS CREATED	304
TOTAL ADJUDICATED	415