

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS STRATEGIC PLAN

2012-2016

Mission

To work on behalf of Kentucky's veteran community and their families in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and nation and to aptly serve their needs in an honorable and dignified manner.

Vision

That veterans of this Commonwealth, the men and women who served honorably on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces, will receive the highest level of quality support, skilled nursing, and long-term care within our nursing homes, burial honors and respectful services within the confines of the state's veterans cemeteries, and deserved federal and state veteran benefits, including proper care for our homeless and disabled veterans.

Values

The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA) is made up of a veteran centric, people oriented, forward leaning employee base with a high level of integrity and accountability, collaborative problem solving skills, and a commitment to excellence.

Strategic Goals

Provide quality programs and delivery of services in an efficient and effective manner that will meet the needs and exceed the expectations of our veteran community.

- To provide premium advocacy for veterans and increase the percentage of service members in Kentucky receiving VA compensation and benefits earned.
- To provide first-class long term care services to veteran residents of our nursing home facilities in a manner that is both cost-effective and mindful of state supported funds.
- To provide a final resting place and dignified burial services for veterans and their spouses/dependents.
- To focus on veterans who are "at risk" of becoming homeless in order to reduce veteran homelessness in the state.
- To assist unemployed veterans with employment opportunities through job fairs and job retraining programs and by furthered support of veteran preference legislation.
- To focus on a strong partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) and participate in outreach activities that benefit and promote Kentucky veterans.
- To satisfy internal and external customer needs and enhance qualitative outcomes.
- To communicate in a timely and effective manner with the public about KDVA services.

- To capitalize on opportunities and maximize efforts toward recruitment and retention of a quality, productive workforce.

Executive Summary

Kentucky is home to more than 335,000 veterans. This is a sizeable portion and valued constituency of the Commonwealth's population. In FY12, the Department's budget is projected to be \$46,726,800. The budget will comprise \$16,531,300 in general fund dollars and \$30,195,500 in restricted fund dollars. Commissioner Ken Lucas, Major, Retired (USAF), heads the Department staffed by 771 employees to operate the Commissioner's office, three long term care facilities, four cemeteries, a veterans benefits branch, and homeless veterans program.

Programs

***Commissioner's Office** is dedicated to advancing the mission, implementing the agency's vision and strategic goals, adhering to its values, and supporting Department workforce needs. The Commissioner's Office in Frankfort consists of a Commissioner, a Deputy Commissioner, Executive Secretary, a Staff Attorney, a Fiscal Manager, a Public Information Officer, an IT Manager, Human Resources Branch employees, a Division Director for Cemeteries and a Division Director for Benefits and Field Operations.

A full time dedicated women veterans' program coordinator would be a significant addition to the staff; however, budget cuts have not allowed KDVA to hire for that position. Thus, the women veteran's program duties are a collateral assignment to a woman veteran working for the agency; however, the importance of women veterans to the mission of the military is unmistakable. The Department is committed to addressing the mental and physical health needs unique to our women veterans.

***Cemeteries** once fully in place will meet the federal VA's goal to ensure that 90% of Kentucky's veterans live within 75 miles of a veteran's cemetery. The cemeteries inter both casketed and cremated remains involving a dignified burial service with full military honors for all veterans. Eligible dependents (spouses and dependent children) of veterans and active duty service men and women are also interred at Kentucky's State Veterans Cemeteries. While the costs to build the state veteran cemetery are borne by the USDVA, maintenance and daily operational costs are absorbed by the state. In federal FY 2012, the USDVA will contribute \$700 for each veteran interred at the cemeteries - payment of \$300 is requested from the family as an interment fee.

In FY 2011, \$1000.00 was appropriated for the Indigent Veterans Burial Program, providing funds to help cover the cost of funeral arrangements for indigent veterans. KDVA helps provide military funeral honors to all veterans by funding the Burial Honors Program, which gives a small stipend to Veterans Service Organizations for performing honors. The program costs \$130,000 annually to operate.

A major challenge for the Cemeteries Branch is finding suitable land for the fifth and last planned veteran's cemetery to be located in the southeast corner of the state. The federal government does not

fund land acquisition, therefore \$200,000 has been appropriated for land purchase for the southeast cemetery. The other four cemeteries had land donated or funds appropriated for the purchase of land.

***Field Operations** staff assists veterans throughout the state in obtaining federal and state benefits they have earned. In 2006, the Governor and Kentucky General Assembly enacted legislation requiring a minimum staffing level of five (5) Veterans Benefits Regional Administrators and twenty (20) Veterans Benefits Field Representatives. Field Representatives are located strategically throughout the Commonwealth to ensure accessibility in that veterans in every Kentucky county have the opportunity to personally meet with a representative. These meetings help to ensure that veterans receive the compensation and pension earned for their active duty service, and they are made aware of the federal and state programs for which they qualify, including VA healthcare.

In 2011, Field Operations implemented the EVet Assist program which allows a veteran in Kentucky to file a claim electronically rather than through burdensome, repetitive paperwork. Implementation of the EVet Assist program was financially supported by the Kentucky Veteran Trust Fund. KDVA also assists veterans' service organizations in training their service officers to ensure that veterans who seek help from these organizations receive quality guidance and representation.

KDVA employs a Homeless Veterans coordinator with a doctoral degree in Psychology and certification in drug and alcohol abuse counseling. This coordinator oversees the Homeless Veterans Transition Facility in Lexington run by the Volunteers of America (VOA) and funded in part by the Department. Further, the coordinator administers the Homeless Veterans Trust Fund, which makes small, one-time payments to veterans and their dependents to keep them in their home or to provide assistance that might help keep them off of the streets.

The coordinator stays abreast of opportunities to help homeless veterans throughout the state. In addition, the coordinator works with government and governmental agencies to improve services and linkages for veterans and their families. The coordinator works with committees and boards to ensure appropriate visibility of veterans needs and to address gaps in service that may contribute to homelessness or conversely prevent homelessness.

***Office of Kentucky Veterans Centers (OKVC)** provides long term skilled care for Kentucky residents who are honorably discharged veterans. Three state veteran homes are strategically located throughout the Commonwealth. The Thomson Hood Veterans Center (THVC) is located in central Kentucky in Wilmore, the Paul E. Patton Eastern Kentucky Veterans Center (EKVC) is located in Hazard, and the Joseph E. Ballard Western Kentucky Veterans Center (WKVC) is located in Hanson. The homes currently operate 525 beds for the veterans of Kentucky. A thirty-six (36) bed expansion is currently under construction at WKVC. The completion of the expansion is scheduled for late 2011/early 2012 with the opening anticipated in the spring of 2012. A fourth home is designated to be built in Radcliff, adjacent to the Fort Knox Army Base within the next two (2) years to three (3) years. This newest facility is planned to house one hundred and twenty (120) veterans. The project will be funded through a federal matching grant for state home construction with the USDVA providing 65% and the state to

provide 35% of the total cost of construction. The projected cost of the project is \$40 million dollars. Kentucky is currently allotted 813 beds for USDVA per diem funding.

Veteran nursing home residents are typically disabled, indigent or imminently indigent. The veterans' homes provide health and psychosocial services such as nursing, rehabilitative therapies, therapeutic activities, social services, medical and administrative staff. When veterans are cared for in a state veterans' home, they are eligible for USDVA funding. This funding pays about 40% of the cost of care, making the facility a cost-effective care provider as the same funding is not available to veterans residing in community nursing homes. At this time, the veterans' homes are not Medicare and Medicaid certified.

OKVC relies on funding from three primary sources: federal, state General Fund, and private pay by the veteran resident at the home. In FY 11, the average cost of care per day was \$250.00. This cost will increase as health care costs in general consistently escalate. The federal VA increased its per diem per veteran to \$95.82 for FY 2012. Additional staffing and maintenance operational costs will be associated with the expansion at WKVC expected to open in 2012.

Long term care plans are to complete the thirty-six (36) bed expansion at WKVC in 2012, build a fourth nursing home in Radcliff, and institute electronic medical records in order to improve the quality of healthcare to the veteran – all medical records should be computerized. The Department participates with the Kentucky Health Information Exchange, yet this program is in its infancy stages. Participation in this exchange allows the veterans' homes to access a medical record from a hospital provider other than a VA hospital where a veteran was medically treated.

Conclusion

KDVA employees are immensely devoted and firmly committed to serving those who have served our nation. The mission, vision, and values of our organization are clearly reflected within each organizational entity. We have worked long and hard to establish ourselves within the communities we serve and to brand our organization as one of high standards with great expectations of its employees. We are committed to preserving the integrity that we so diligently worked to attain and consistently strive to uphold, and sustain the high level of care and quality of life services that our staff provides and our veterans deserve.