

**Vol.3, No.4**  
**April 2024**

# **Serving Those Who Served**

**The Official Newsletter of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs**



**KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT  
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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## Commissioner's Corner

### Commissioner's Corner

Greetings teammates,

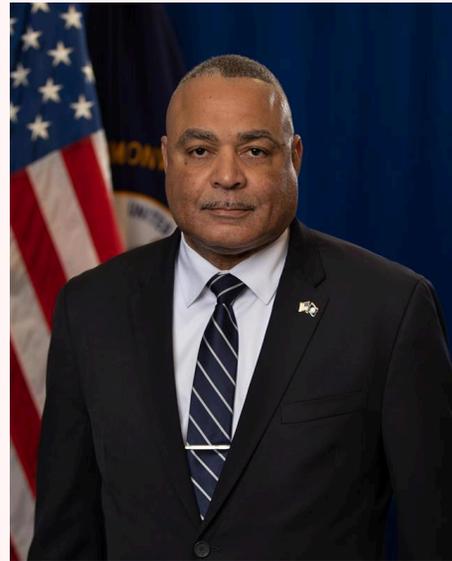
It's April already! Month of the Military Child. We've had some great events this year already including the Women Veterans event at the beginning of March and the Faith Based partner event at the end of February to name a couple.

This month we've got some big news coming out of Kentucky Veteran Cemetery South East in Hyden, KY. They are receiving the National Cemetery Administration's Stewardship Award following superior performance results from the NCA-led compliance review. This is a huge deal for us, as South East is the newest of our cemeteries. Congratulations to Eric Berger and his team. We look forward to everyone joining us on April 15th for the award ceremony in Hyden, KY.

Looking forward we've got Memorial Day Ceremonies and Events in May, and our Annual Women Veterans State Conference in June before the end of the fiscal year. We'll share more in the coming days.

HOOAH!!!!,

**Commissioner Whitney P. Allen, Jr.**  
*Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs*



## Latest VA News

### VA announces steps to increase life-saving screening, access to benefits for Veterans with cancer

As a part of the Biden Cancer Moonshot, VA announced several critical new steps to expand preventive services, health care, and benefits for Veterans with cancer:

- 1. VA is making urethral cancers presumptive for service connection for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans.** This means that Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and the entire [Southwest Asia theater of operations](#) will not need to prove that their service caused their urethral cancer to receive benefits for it; instead, VA will automatically assume service connection for the disease and provide benefits accordingly to Veterans who have submitted claims. In the next 90 days, urethral cancers will be added to the list of 300+ conditions considered presumptive under the PACT Act, along with [many other cancers](#).
- 2. VA is beginning the process to formally evaluate urinary bladder and ureteral cancers for presumptions of service connection for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans.** Over the coming months, VA will evaluate whether there is a relationship between urinary bladder and ureteral cancers and toxic exposures for Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and the entire [Southwest Asia theater of operations](#). VA will then determine whether these conditions become presumptive conditions for Veterans who served in those locations and time periods.
- 3. VA is expanding access to genetic, lung, and colorectal cancer screening for Veterans.** By the end of this year, VA will offer genetic testing to every Veteran who may need it, which will help VA understand, treat, and ultimately cure some patients with cancer by reading the code locked in their DNA. VA will also bring a lung cancer screening program to every VA medical facility, which will help save the lives of the nearly 5,000 Veterans who die from lung cancer every year, and VA will expand screening for colorectal cancer – the second leading cause of cancer death

in America – by providing more than 1 million Veterans nationwide with convenient, safe, and effective tests that can be completed in the comfort of their homes.

4. **VA continues to expand the reach of smoking cessation services to Veterans across the nation.** As the 1-855-QUIT-VET tobacco quitline and the SmokefreeVET text message program pass their 10-year anniversaries of service, VA will add at least six additional sites to the Quit VET eReferral program by the end of 2024. This will expand capacity to offer Veteran-specific, tailored tobacco-use treatment to Veterans. Additionally, VA recently launched a new pilot program to integrate smoking cessation services into lung cancer screening in recognition of the inherent connection between smoking and lung cancer risk – and VA plans to add at least five additional sites between 2024-2025. These programs have supported tens of thousands of Veterans with high-quality tobacco cessation resources in English and Spanish: Quit VET has provided over 62,000 calls to Veterans, and more than 48,000 Veterans have made a quit attempt with the SmokefreeVET text program. In 2023, more than 5,100 Veterans enrolled in the SmokefreeVET text program and Quit VET recorded its highest volume of incoming calls yet, with counselors answering 23% more calls than the prior year. Direct referrals from VA facilities grew 34% over the same time period and by the end of 2023, 40 VA programs were implementing a patient referral program.

This work is a part of fulfilling President Biden’s Unity Agenda and [Cancer Moonshot](#) and VA’s aggressive efforts to provide world-class care for over one million Veterans on the cancer care continuum, from screening to survivorship.

“Cancer impacts far too many Veterans every year, and under President Biden’s leadership of the Cancer Moonshot, we are fighting to end cancer as we know it,” **said VA Secretary Denis McDonough.** “These steps will help us save lives and provide the world-class care and benefits that Veterans with cancer so rightly deserve.”

“VA is planting the seeds for the future of cancer care,” **said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D.** “By investing in screenings, expanding access, and embracing cutting-edge technologies, VA is revolutionizing cancer care delivery, providing the best care possible to our nation’s heroes.”

This effort builds on VA and the Biden-Harris Administration’s comprehensive efforts to care for Veterans with cancer. Last July, VA [expanded cancer risk assessments and mammograms \(as clinically appropriate\)](#) to Veterans under 40, regardless of age, symptoms, family history, or whether they are enrolled in VA health care. Last September, VA and the National Cancer Institute announced a historic data-sharing collaboration to better understand and treat cancer among Veterans. VA has also [prioritized claims processing](#) for Veterans with cancer — delivering [nearly \\$516 million](#) in PACT Act benefits to Veterans with cancer between August 10, 2022 and March 3, 2024. And VA has [screened more than 5 million](#) Veterans for toxic exposures under the PACT Act — a critical step to detecting, understanding, and treating potentially life-threatening health conditions like cancer.

Moving forward, through advancements in cancer care and forward-thinking research endeavors, VA aims to save even more lives and significantly improve the long-term health outcomes in Veterans for generations to come. For more information about VA cancer care, visit [cancer.va.gov](https://cancer.va.gov).

## VA launches new financial resource website to help promote financial wellness and prevent Veteran suicide

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced a [new website](#) to help Veterans manage financial stressors that can affect their mental health and wellbeing. Developed by the National Veterans Financial Resource Center (FINVET), the website aims to boost protective factors that promote mental health and reduce suicide risk by helping Veterans learn about and manage their finances.

Economic and financial uncertainty can increase the risk of suicide. FINVET helps mitigate that risk by connecting Veterans to trustworthy financial tools, information, videos, calculators, and worksheets – serving as a one-stop website for Veterans to learn a variety of essential information to help meet their financial goals. Using simple navigation, FINVET empowers Veterans to learn about financial goals such as meeting basic needs, saving or earning more money, lowering bills and debt, and protecting their assets. The website pulls together resources from across more than 25 government agencies, including the Department of Labor, Federal Trade Commission, National Park Service, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Ending Veteran suicide is [VA's top clinical priority](#) and a key part of President Biden's [Unity Agenda](#). Moving forward, VA and the [Biden-Harris Administration](#) will continue to work urgently to reduce Veteran suicide through a [public health approach](#) that combines both community-based and clinically based strategies to save lives.

“We know that financial issues are linked to increased suicide risk in Veterans, as well as increased risk of homelessness,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “With this new website, our mission is to empower every Veteran to take advantage of financial tools and resources so they can earn more, save more, and avoid financial distress that can lead to suicidal ideation.”

In recent years, VA has worked aggressively to expand support for Veterans in crisis, including [beginning to offer no-cost emergency suicide prevention care](#) for eligible Veterans and certain former service members, [launching the 988 \(then press 1\)](#) to help Veterans connect more quickly with caring, qualified responders through the Veterans Crisis Line; [collaborating with community-based suicide prevention organizations](#) to

provide Veterans with on-the-ground support; expanding [firearm suicide prevention efforts](#); and encouraging Veterans to reach out for help through a [national Veteran suicide prevention awareness campaign](#).

The National Veterans Financial Resource Center was created by VA's Office of Suicide Prevention in alignment with the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#) and the [President's National Strategy for Reducing Military and Veteran Suicide](#). For more information about VA's efforts, visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov).

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## Upcoming Events

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# Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families

## SUICIDE AWARENESS AND LETHAL MEANS SAFETY

### 2024 REGIONAL SUMMITS

*all taking place from 9am-3pm local time*

March 28th, 2024

Western Kentucky

8000 Cairo Rd West Paducah, KY 42086

or

April 18th, 2024

Northern Kentucky

860 Dolwick Drive Erlanger, KY 41018

#### TARGET AUDIENCE

Family and friends of SMVF individuals, Community Leaders, Healthcare Professionals and Paraprofessionals

#### OUR VISION

##### Discussions and Insights

- Host a Lethal Means Summit
- Train providers on military, cultural competency, and counseling on access to lethal means

#### THE AGENDA

8:45a-9:00a  
Arrival and Check-In

9:00a-9:10a  
Welcome and Introductions

9:10a-10:00 a  
Military Culture

10:10a-10:50a  
Suicide Risk and Protective Factors

11:00a-11:50a  
Lethal Means Safety Counseling

11:50a-1:15p  
Lunch (on your own)

1:15p-1:30p  
Welcome Back and Overview

1:35p-2:45p  
Community Conversations (EKU)  
Application of what we learned

2:45p-3:00p  
Closure and Evaluations



Register by Scanning QR Code  
or Clicking [HERE](#)



To register, please use the QR Code in the flier or use the button below. If you are having trouble registering with either click the link [here](#) instead.

[Register Here](#)



This is an opportunity for veterans and families to file claims for veterans disability compensation, non-service connected pensions, survivor benefits, healthcare, and educational benefits.

**April 25th, 2024**  
**9:00 AM to 6:00PM**

Relevant Church Gymnasium  
2505 Highland Ave  
Carrollton, KY 41008

**PLEASE BRING**

**DD214**

**MEDICAL  
RECORDS**

**MARRIAGE  
LICENSE**

**SOCIAL SECURITY  
NUMBERS**



**What's New at KDVA?**

# 3rd Quarter Veterans Program Trust Fund Results



On March 20, 2024, the VPTF awarded over \$392K in grants to nine organizations. The largest quarterly by the fund in recent years.

The Veterans Program Trust Fund with KDVA provides funds to veteran programs and initiatives across the Commonwealth of Kentucky that are unable to get funds elsewhere.

The trust fund is overseen by a Board of Directors I've appointed and receives its funds through the Veteran License Plate purchases and renewals.

Following March 20th's Trust Fund Meeting, the Boards approved and awarded...

- A grant in the amount of \$105,000 was awarded to the Honor Flight Bluegrass which provides flights for veterans to visit their War Memorials built in their honor in Washington D.C.
- The Clark County Veterans Council, Inc. was awarded \$100,000 to build a public monument to honor the sacrifices of 101 Clark County residents who gave their lives in World War II and Korea.
- Honor Flight Kentucky Inc. was awarded \$75,000 to fly KY Veterans to Washington D.C. to tour war memorials and lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
- Lady Veterans Connect was awarded \$14, 746 to host a weekend retreat for Kentucky women veterans at Cumberland Falls State Park.

- Louisville Armed Forces Committee was awarded \$5,000 to recognize and honor KY veterans at the Louisville Armed Forces Day Dinner, May 17, 2024.
- Rowan County Veterans Foundation was awarded \$500 to build a simulated “hooch” in the Rowan County Veteran Museum on the north wall of the Vietnam room and display memorabilia from the Civil War to present Wars.
- The Kentucky Veterans Hall of Fame was awarded \$30,000 to recognize and honor KY veterans in the KY Veterans Hall of Fame.
- Operation Odyssey Outdoors was awarded \$10,000 to sponsor a trip to Florida for 20 wounded heroes. Operation Odyssey Outdoors is a non-profit entity that exists to serve Kentucky’s current or former members of the United States Armed Forces.
- Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Veterans Program was awarded \$50,000 to prevent eviction and utility disconnection for veterans and their families.

The total funds granted: \$392,746.

The next Trust Fund Meeting is **June 12, 2024**. Check KDVA’s website under the Trust Fund for dates and information on the program, how to donate and more. Visit “[veterans.ky.gov](http://veterans.ky.gov)”

## KDVA "She is a Veteran" Event





On Saturday March 2, 2024, KDVA held the "She is a Veteran" women veterans event at the American Legion Hardin Post 113 in Elizabethtown, KY. The event had guest speakers and interactive discussions on issues women veterans face. The event ended with a "Sip and Paint" activity and throughout the day allowed women veterans to network and connect with one another.

With more details to come, the next event is our Women Veterans State Conference which will be June 25. Follow our page for updates and or join the private Facebook group pinned on our page if you're a woman veteran.

## **Robert E. Spiller Bowling Green Veteran Center Construction Progress**



Construction progress pictures March 20, 2024 of the Robert E. Spiller Bowling Green Veteran Center.

## Coffee with the Kentucky First Lady



KDVA's Legal Counsel, Tamara Reid-McIntosh, Esq., Wounded & Disabled Administrator, Kimberly Hillard, and Women Veterans Coordinator, Dina Parrott were in attendance at the Kentucky Historical Center on March 21, 2024, for coffee and a tour of "Our Stories our Service" Women Veterans Exhibit.

The event was in support of Women's History Month and was sponsored by the Kentucky National Guard. Lt. Colonel Carla Raisler, Director of Public Affairs, Army National Guard, served as Mistress of Ceremony, while the keynote speakers were 1st Lady of the Commonwealth, Britainy Beshear, and Mrs. Karen Lamberton, wife of Maj. Gen. Haldane B. Lamberton, the Adjutant General of Kentucky.

The event was a wonderful opportunity for Kentucky's female service members and veterans to celebrate the contributions of women to the Commonwealth.

## **KDVA/Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 003 PTSD and Suicide Awareness Event, Elizabethtown, KY**



This was a joint event with DAV to educate veterans' family members on PTSD in Elizabethtown, KY, March 20, 2024. KDVA/DAV presented a film entitled "Here is Better," a powerful feature-length documentary which offers a uniquely hopeful and impactful perspective on the rising mental health crisis in America, followed by a question-and-answer session with trained professionals. The movie was well received by the audience.

The following is news link covering the event:

[https://www.thenewsenterprise.com/news/local/movie-assists-veterans-coping-with-ptsd/article\\_9d2b472e-9386-5623-a7ed-be5249ca0c9c.html](https://www.thenewsenterprise.com/news/local/movie-assists-veterans-coping-with-ptsd/article_9d2b472e-9386-5623-a7ed-be5249ca0c9c.html)

# Habitat for Humanity of Metro Louisville and KDVA



On March 16, 2024, Habitat for Humanity of Metro Louisville hosted a Welcome Home Program for Army Veteran and first-time homeowner Ms. Lorretta Biggs.

In the past several years the Kentucky Veterans Program Trust Fund in support of Kentucky Habitat for Humanity has sponsored multiple home builds for veterans.

## GAB visits Willett Distillery



Robbin Higgins and David Best, Chair and Vice Chair (respectively) of the Governor's Advisory Board for Veterans' Affairs (GABVA), were given a first class, one-of-a-kind tour by Brittany Allison, the Willett Distillery Vision Manager. Founded in Kentucky in 1792 by William Willett, Jr., Willett Distillery is a small family owned, family operated bourbon distillery nestled in the picturesque hills of Bardstown. Throughout our visit, it was evident that Willett is committed to employing veterans and military spouses. Britt Kulsveen,

President and Chief Whiskey Officer, herself a veteran spouse, is a driving force behind the passion for supporting veterans and their families. As testimony, there are currently seven veterans and spouses training and working at Willett, which is roughly 10% of the employee population.

## **AMVET Post 61 Riders donates \$5K to KDVA Homeless Veterans Program.**



## **Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award 2024**

The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs has been awarded the 2024 Department of Veterans Affairs Abraham

Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award for the Veterans Red-Carpet Welcome Home Program innovative state program. This program is in place to give veterans arriving to become residents at our veteran centers a warm welcome and a means of integrating them to their new community at the center.

VA Secretary McDonough presented Commissioner Allen the award at the 2024 National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs Mid Winter Conference in Arlington, VA.



## KY Veterans Higher Education Interest Survey

KDVA and the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) are interested in helping our veteran community understand their educational benefits. Research has shown that a workforce certificate or college degree can significantly increase your annual wages. Additionally, there are a number of programs to help veterans gain these types of certifications and degree programs. Your input will help us assist veterans across the state. Your feedback is very important.

Click on the button below or click [here](#) to participate in the brief survey.

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Veteran\\_Survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Veteran_Survey)

Survey

## I Support Veterans License Plates



### Who is eligible

Any owner of a noncommercial motor vehicle required to be registered for use on Kentucky Highways.

### Steps Requirement

Application must be made at your local County Clerk's office. Upon receipt of this plate, your regular (special) issue license plate must be turned in or issued to another vehicle.

### Decal Expires Customer's Birth Month

\$10.00 of the initial and \$5.00 of the renewal registration fee goes to the Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs. For more information, please visit <http://veterans.ky.gov> . This plate is available for personalization with an additional \$25.00 fee annually. Personalization is limited to a maximum of 5 characters.

Relevant KRS [186.162](#)

# Military Women's Memorial "Tell Her Story"



The Military Women's Memorial (MWM) is the only major national memorial honoring all servicewomen – past, present and future. The MWM honors more than 3 million women who served and continue to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces since the American Revolution.

Women's military service should be no less recognized than men's but historically the focus of history and preservation has been on men.

## Why it's Important to Register?

EVERY STORY is important, EVERY STORY deserves to be told. Yet we have lost most of our WWI women veterans and our WWII women are fast coming to their final chapter. What history we have not recorded will be lost with them. We absolutely CANNOT let another generation go by without ensuring that our collective contributions are captured and remembered.

Please REGISTER HERE : [www.womensmemorial.org](http://www.womensmemorial.org)

There is no cost to register! You can register any woman you know who is in or has served in the military. Let's keep "HER-Story alive!"

## Useful VA Links

- **VA Housing Assistance Page** - Information about home loans, eligibility, interest rates reductions and other related topics: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/>
- **National Center for PTSD** - Provides information and resources to veterans, care providers and organizations relating PTSD: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- **Covid-19 Vaccine Updates** - Latest updates on Covid-19 guidance and vaccinations: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>
- **VA Life Insurance (VALife)** - <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp>

- **Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E)** - job training, education, employment coaching, etc.: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp>

## Upcoming Veterans Dates and Events

- Month of the Military Child (**April**)
- Military Saves Month (**April**)
- Gold Star Spouses Day (**April 5**)
- National Former POW Recognition Day (**April 9**)
- Air Force Reserve Birthday (**April 14**)
- Purple Up! For Military Kids (**April 15**)
- Army Reserve Birthday (**April 23**)
- Silver Star Service Banner Day (**April 29**)
- National Military Brats Day (**April 30**)

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