



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Veterans' Affairs

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September 15, 2020

The Honorable Kate Brown  
Governor of Oregon  
State Capitol Building  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Brown,

On behalf of the ODVA Advisory Committee, we are pleased to present the attached FY 2020 Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Advisory Committee Annual Report, which provides an overview of ODVA's programs and accomplishments in FY 20.

While maintaining core internal operations and existing programs, FY 20 was marked by the creation of new programs funded by Measure 96 Lottery Funding and meeting veterans' needs as they confronted the unprecedented world health crisis caused by COVID-19 and budget reductions. Sadly, our Lebanon Veterans' Home was the first state veterans' home in the nation to experience COVID-19. Through the hard work and dedication of staff at the homes and at ODVA the infection and transmission rates at our two veterans' homes was lower than that experienced by other skilled nursing facilities, and both facilities have been COVID-free since early April 2020. We were also able to share lessons learned with state veterans' homes across the country as they confronted the virus. The ODVA home loan program was one of the first home lenders to offer financial relief to borrowers experiencing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. ODVA staff have developed innovative approaches to remotely providing claims assistance to veterans and training to county and tribal veteran services officers. Finally, to help connect veterans affected by COVID-19, ODVA created a Veterans Resource Navigator, a comprehensive online resource benefit guide.

As a network of veterans helping veterans, we are privileged to play a role in caring for those who served in the military and their families. Although much has changed since our founding in 1945, our commitment to those who served and sacrificed for our state and nation has never wavered. The work we have accomplished this past year and throughout our history is important, but it is also more critical than ever.

We thank you for your continued leadership and strong support of our state's veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

Kelly Fitzpatrick  
Director

John Howard  
Advisory Committee Chair

**FY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT**  
**Advisory Committee to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs**

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*September 2020*





# FY 2019-20 ANNUAL REPORT

Advisory Committee to the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

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## **OUR VISION**

Veterans and their families thrive in Oregon

## **OUR MISSION**

To serve and honor veterans  
through our leadership, advocacy and strong partnerships

## **OUR VALUES**

Respect, Integrity, Stewardship and Excellence

## THOSE WE SERVE

### OREGON VETERAN LANDSCAPE

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For 75 years, the ODVA has witnessed generations of service members returning home and then deploying their hard-earned leadership, skills and experience to significantly contribute to our state's communities and economy. These men and women are proud, proven, trained, committed, and patriotic citizens.

It is estimated that nearly seven percent of the state's population has served in the United States Armed Forces. At just over 300,000 veterans in Oregon, this population has experienced a continuous decline over the past half-century. This decline is consistent with the drop in people serving on active duty; from 3.5 million in 1968 during the draft era, to 1.3 million (less than 1% of all U.S. adults) in today's all-volunteer force. Federal VA projections further suggest the number of veterans will continue to decline in the coming decades. By 2045, the department estimates there will be approximately 12 million veterans, a roughly 40% decrease from current numbers.

Today, ODVA assists veterans who served their nation across five war eras – brave men and women who stormed the beaches of Normandy in WWII to our most recent returning service members who continue to deploy to conflicts in the Middle East. The vast and shifting veteran demographics now being experienced across the nation, and the broader recognition of the impact service has on our veterans, has led to changes in the complexity and type of services being offered. Veterans' services are shifting to a system of integrated and partnered services that not only treat the complexity of health challenges, but also offer benefits that support the successful reintegration of today's veteran into the community.

More than 75% of Oregon veterans served during wartime. Many of these veterans experience various forms of trauma and disability. Because of advances in technology and medicine, more of our service members are surviving injuries incurred in war that would have previously been fatal. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), often called the signature wound of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (OIF/OEF), occurs when a sudden trauma or head injury disrupts the function of the brain. Research on OIF/OEF veterans suggests that 10% to 18% of these troops are likely to have PTSD after they return. In addition to PTSD, OEF/OIF service members are at risk for other mental health problems. Although studies vary widely in terms of methods used, estimates of depression in returning troops range from 3% to 25%. These wounds are often invisible, the treatment complex, and the effects far-reaching. Left untreated, trauma and disability can contribute to a veteran cascading into further crises such as substance abuse, homelessness and suicidal ideation or attempts.

As of September 2019, there were only an estimated 6,900 living veterans of World War II and 19,800 living veterans of the Korea War remaining in Oregon. As World War II and Korean War veterans have continued to die at an accelerated rate, services focusing on the changing needs of our older veterans have expanded. Collectively, the number of veterans aged 65 and older make up more than 50% of this aging veteran population and this percentage is forecasted to continue into the next decade. ODVA continues to strategize and execute extended outreach to these aging veterans to ensure they have appropriate assistance to access their earned veteran benefits when they need it most. Benefits such as health care, long-term care, burial benefits and dependent benefits become even more vital to veterans and their families as they age.

Vietnam War era veterans are the largest demographic of veterans in the state, and comprise 37% of the population. Forty-five years following the end of the Vietnam War, the agency has seen an increase in disability claims filed on behalf of Vietnam vets due to triggered responses to the current wars and the manifestation of acute diseases brought on by exposure to Agent Orange. In June 2019, the Blue Water Navy Act was signed into law, and the VA began accepting claims in January 2020. This act allows, for the first time, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps veterans who served in deep ocean-going vessels that went within twelve nautical miles of the shoreline to receive benefits from disabilities associated with Agent Orange. This act alone has already increased engagement with Vietnam veterans. As of June 2020, there have been approximately 1,500 disability claims filed on behalf of Oregon Vietnam veterans or dependents, and \$12.9 million awarded in monthly awards and retroactive recoveries.

Nationally, Gulf War-era veterans now account for the largest share of all U.S. veterans, surpassing Vietnam-era veterans in 2016, according to Veterans Affairs' 2019 population model estimates. Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East since 2003 have steadily increased the number of Gulf War era veterans to a third of Oregon's veteran population. Post 9/11 Gulf War veterans now represent 19 percent of the veteran population. Many of the veterans of this era have endured multiple deployments, introducing new challenges to transitioning back into civilian life. Over the last 15 years, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, Oregon experienced the largest and only federal activation of National Guard service members since WWII. These veterans often left families and careers when activated, further underscoring the need for resources that fully support successful reintegration back into civilian life.

The demographic profile of veterans nationally and within Oregon is expected to continue to change over the next few decades. Currently, 91% of veterans are men while 9% are women. With more women now serving in roles historically reserved for men, the percentage of women veterans is expected to continue to increase to nearly 12% by 2029. Yet, too often that service goes unrecognized. Although great strides have been made in recent years, many women veterans still do not utilize VA for their health care needs. Lack of communication about care services that meet their health needs and harassment and discrimination at the centers from other veterans and staff continue to create an environment where women veterans do not feel welcome.

As with trends in the U.S. population overall, the veteran population is predicted to become more racially and ethnically diverse as well. Minority veterans in Oregon comprise 13.1 percent of the population, 1.6% of Oregon veterans are black or African American 4.2% are Hispanic or Latino, 1.1% are American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.8% are Asian American or Pacific Islander and 4.4% of veterans identify as a different race or as mixed race. Over the next ten years Oregon will experience a slight increase in the overall diversity of the veteran population, increasing to an estimated 15.2%.

Social issues have long-impacted veterans. Veterans who served during times of systemically unjust policies are often adversely affected in their military careers or during their transition out of the service due to receiving a less than honorable discharge from the military. Today, Oregon leads the nation in correcting injustices and providing advocacy on behalf of those veterans who were treated inequitably during their service and after.

While in military service, veterans from all walks of life have often risked their lives to oppose the repression of basic human rights around the globe. Many have worked to right wrongs experienced within the military by veterans of color, women, and LGBTQ individuals who simply wanted to serve our country and yet encountered injustice in the ranks.

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

## SETTING A FIRM FOUNDATION

### INVIGORATING CORE OPERATIONS

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ODVA's core operations form the foundation upon which the agency is able to provide Oregon's veterans and their families the programs and services they have earned. With a reputation for wise stewardship of the funds it receives, ODVA places the utmost importance on transparency and accountability.

Focusing on creating an environment where veterans and their families thrive, in FY 2020 ODVA invigorated core operations while integrating diversity, equity and inclusion into the delivery of its programs and services. Among its accomplishments in FY 2020 ODVA:

- Streamlined its recruitment procedures to fill critical shortages;
- Improved internal financial reporting enabling managers to make better informed decisions;
- Linked veterans to information, programs, and services through the regular publication of Vets News and creation of a COVID-19 Veteran Resource Navigator.
- Completed an audit risk assessment, and with ODVA's new internal auditor, launched the department's first internal auditing function in over a decade;
- Created and applied an equity framework when administering grants and developing legislative concepts; and
- Maintained continuity of operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with the rapid enabling of remote working for 85% of ODVA's workforce.

Although FY2020 presented the agency with unique and significant challenges, through innovative solutions and greater efficiencies, ODVA's dedicated staff was able to build a better, stronger, and more resilient department for future generations.

## AGENCY PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### FY20 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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#### **Veteran Appeals**

In order to best support veterans and their families in Oregon, ODVA has invested in an appeals team that focuses on representing claims in front of the USDVA Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA). This focused team prepares legal arguments and presents them to federally appointed judges on behalf of veterans and their families free of charge. In 2019 and 2020, the appeals team represented 1,325 veterans and their families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the BVA implemented a new remote appeals process called Virtual Tele-Hearings. Ensuring that appeals are still being completed during this period continues to be a top priority for ODVA. During the 4th quarter of 2020, the ODVA appeals team conducted a total of 106 virtual tele-hearings. This has led them to be recognized as one of the top

performing offices in the nation. The appeals team's high-quality work has been recognized by the BVA on more than one occasion, and a video that the team made has been used as a nationwide model to encourage other states to embrace the new Virtual Tele-Hearings.

These appeals are a significant contributing factor to the retroactive awards that are received because the effective date of the claim can be contended. Retroactive awards for individuals represented by ODVA exceeded \$54 million dollars in 2020.

### **Specialty Claims**

In June 2019, the Blue Water Navy Act was signed into law, and the VA began accepting claims in January 2020. This act allows, for the first time, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps veterans who served in deep ocean-going vessels that went within twelve nautical miles of the shoreline to receive benefits from disabilities associated with Agent Orange. This act was a focal point and driver for State, County, and Tribal Veteran Service Officers engagement with Vietnam veterans. As of June 2020, there have been approximately 1,500 disability claims filed, and \$12.9 million dollars awarded in monthly awards and retroactive recoveries in Oregon that are all affiliated with this law.

### **Education**

In September 2019, ODVA entered into a contract with the USDVA to assume the role of State Approving Agency (SAA) for the state of Oregon. The SAA is responsible for the review, evaluation, approval, and oversight of schools and training facilities to ensure state and federal quality criteria are met for veterans using their G.I. Bill® funds. In this role ODVA conducts on-site compliance visits at educational institutions and training organizations with approved programs of study, provides technical assistance with applications for approval, provides information about training and education opportunities to veterans, military base personnel, employers, and labor groups, and also serves as the liaison between Oregon veterans and the USDVA. ODVA hired two staff to perform the SAA functions and fulfill the USDVA contract requirements. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAA team has transitioned to performing remote compliance surveys.

In the 2019 Regular Session, legislation was passed to establish the Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant Program. The purpose of this program is to provide financial assistance to veterans who are unable to complete a degree program within the expected completion period due to the timing of course offerings. The legislature allocated \$300,000 in grant funding and funded a full-time program coordinator to develop, implement and monitor the grant program. The maximum grant award is \$5,000 for veterans pursuing a degree or certificate and enrolled in an approved course of study qualifying for USDVA educational benefits. As of June 30, 2020, \$60,600 in grants had been awarded. Due largely to COVID 19-related disruptions to GI Bill® funded education programs across the state, student veteran applications to ODVA increased significantly, resulting in a total distribution of \$174,000 to 36 student veterans as of early August 2020.

### **On the Job Training Assistance**

In 2017 ODVA partnered with the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) to link first responders with direct information on utilizing federal GI Bill® benefits in an On the Job Training (OJT) function. Since 2017, 66 sites have been approved as accredited OJT sites, and ODVA has assisted over 100 veterans in using their education benefits for this program.

## Special Advocacy

**Women Veterans** - ODVA provided service to hundreds of Oregon's women through our Women Veterans Coordinator. The coordinator provided training and education to non-profits and government organizations, assistance to women veterans experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness, and engaged in expansive program development both statewide and nationally. The coordinator assisted the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCADSV) cohort project in training providers to recognize veterans and in trauma-informed care specific to veterans. As liaison to federal, state, local and non-profit providers of healthcare and behavioral healthcare for women veterans our coordinator advocated for improved and increased access for women, including those who are victims of military sexual trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. The I Am Not Invisible Campaign (IANI), a photo exhibit featuring 22 Oregon women veterans, continued to increase awareness of issues specific to women veterans, and amplified the message that many veterans are women. The campaign has traveled across Oregon and to Washington D.C., and has been replicated by numerous other states' veterans' agencies across the nation, including the federal VA. In June, the coordinator resigned from ODVA to take a position with USDVA Center for Women Veterans. Since her departure, ODVA has been working to recruit to fill this important position.

**LGBTQ Veterans** - ODVA continued to provide direct Veteran Service Officer support to LGBTQ veterans and their families. Through advocacy, ODVA's LGBTQ Coordinator has helped more than 100 veterans upgrade dishonorable or disqualifying discharge statuses that were the result of their LGBTQ identity. This advocacy has allowed these individuals to become eligible for USDVA benefits, provided basic resource assistance and referrals, helped in correction of military records and helped in the process of filing service-connected claims and appeals that provided direct payments to veterans. ODVA participated in all Pride celebrations across Oregon in 2019, successfully connecting with over 300 veterans. Additionally, this program conducts an ongoing veteran support group and listening sessions where veterans are able to discuss issues they are facing, challenges with casework, discharge upgrades, and gender-affirming changes to veteran discharge paperwork.

**Incarcerated Veterans** - The Incarcerated Veterans Program continued its primary goal of assisting veterans and their families to minimize the negative outcomes of veteran incarceration. ODVA's two coordinators successfully collaborated with the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) to meet with approximately 1,500 individuals transitioning through the prison system in order to determine veteran status and aid as needed, including assisting with apportionments of VA benefits. Transitioning veterans were also connected with the USDVA re-entry social worker to access their earned benefits and other resources to work towards a successful transition to the community and to reduce recidivism rates. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic DOC facilities were closed to visitors and partners. This required the team to conduct meetings with veterans over the phone and correspond via the U.S. Postal service. In August, the Coordinators and ODVA's Appeals team worked with DOC to conduct the first-ever remote VBA hearing within the Oregon State Penitentiary.

**Campus Veterans** - In April 2020, ODVA hired a Campus Veteran Coordinator to establish a network, and provide support for Campus Veteran Resource programs, centers and coordinators located within Oregon's community colleges and universities. The emphasis of these programs is to assist veterans with successful transition from military service to student life and higher education, and help them succeed in college to complete their educational goals and transition back into the community and workforce.

### **Veteran Volunteer Program**

The Veteran Volunteer Program, started in 2018, was created to train and coordinate volunteer activity around the state. The goal of the program is to identify aging veterans who are not yet receiving benefits and connect them with County Veteran Service Offices, other agencies, and community partners to educate them about their potential state and federal earned benefits. After connecting them to their local Veteran Service Office, volunteers follow up to ensure that they have been in contact with their Veteran Service Officer. In addition to educating veterans about their earned benefits, volunteers provide vital information about other state resources such as food stamps, Medicaid, and housing programs for which veterans may qualify. Volunteers help to guide veterans to the offices where they can receive assistance. Unfortunately, this program has been on hold due to health and safety concerns during COVID-19. Alternate methods of assisting seniors during this time are being developed such as contacting veterans through the Meals on Wheels Program and Senior Centers across the state.

In FY 2019-20, ODVA's Volunteer Coordinator worked to organize the program by creating the training materials, presentation materials, researching volunteer management technology, and presenting at several events, including:

- Speaking with target groups of 3-60 plus attendees per meeting at:
  - 26 Long-Term Care Facilities in 3 different counties
  - 12 senior centers
  - 8 foster homes visited
- Visiting with 108 individuals to discuss potential veteran benefits and services
- Veteran Volunteer Pilot Project Total Hours: 1635 (roughly equivalent to one full time VSO)
- Volunteer Activities: 1499 veterans and their family members served
  - 779 veterans served
  - 517 veteran family members served
  - 203 veteran friends served
- Nine volunteer trainings resulting in 36 certified ODVA volunteers
- The Volunteer Coordinator organized, attended, and/or presented to 45 different groups.
- Examples of two unique events:
  - Grande Ronde Pow-Wow for Native American Veterans
  - Willamette University Master Choir Veteran Concert
    - Disseminated information and spoke about the program to an audience of over 400 attendees each night of the concert

### **Aging Veteran Outreach**

ODVA works with county, state, and federal agencies, as well as community partners across Oregon to educate staff, locate veterans who may need assistance, and complete claims for USDVA benefits for veterans currently in the Conservatorship or Representative Payee programs. The Aging Veteran Outreach Coordinator establishes and coordinates services directed at aging veterans residing in their homes or in care facilities around the state. The position is an integral part of the agency mission to ensure aging and vulnerable veterans receive the highest quality representation from veteran service officers. The outreach coordinator works with the Department of Human Services and other agencies on aging in conjunction with the Federal VA to ensure each aging veteran has applied for benefits and is receiving all entitlements through USDVA and other government and nonprofit entities.

The Aging Veteran Outreach Coordinator is responsible for educating and coordinating with partners (care facilities, CVSOs, Department Human Services (DHS), agencies on aging, and others regarding challenges and benefits, and has presented information at events to educate both veterans and community partners about aging veteran issues.

In 2019-20 the Outreach Coordinator:

- Gave 67 presentations in 21 counties;
- Disseminated information to veterans and community partners in all 36 counties;
- Completed 105 claims; and
- Visited with over 1350 individual veterans to discuss potential benefits and services.

### **Conservatorship and Representative Payee Programs**

These programs provide professional fiduciary services to manage income and assets of incompetent veterans and their families.

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

Total amounts managed annually by the conservatorship program:

- Cash assets (for Conservatorship/Representative payee combined): \$22.26 million
- Other assets (real property, vehicles, investments, etc.): \$8,179,770.63
- Income: \$6,666,772.73 (total number of transactions 4,325)
- Disbursements: \$5,730,389.53 (total number of transactions 12,450)
- Fees Charged: \$360,576.44

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

Total amount managed annually:

- Income: \$3,893,373.57 (total number of transactions 2,860)
- Disbursements: \$3,265,586.71 (total number of transactions 6,722)
- Fees Charged: \$102,103.58

### **Oregon Veterans' Homes**

The Oregon Veterans' Homes are certified long-term and memory care health facilities in The Dalles and

Lebanon. The Homes provide the state's most vulnerable veterans and their families skilled nursing, dementia and rehabilitative care in an environment that understands the unique needs of the men and women who served our country in uniform. Oregon currently has two veterans' homes, one in The Dalles and the other in Lebanon. The Oregon Veterans' Home program is a self-sustaining program that offers award winning superior care at a lower cost to veterans and their families.

**Awards and Recognition** - In 2019 the Lebanon Veterans' Home received the Silver Quality Award from the American Health Care Association. Only 10 long-term care facilities in Oregon were awarded this prestigious award. These awards are progressive and show the facility's commitment to quality. Both The Dalles and Lebanon were named one of the best nursing homes in the nation by U.S. News and World Report magazine in 2019. The data used to evaluate the homes come from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and include metrics of registered nurse staffing, adherence to best practices in preventive care and resident safety, and minimizing the need for and use of anti-anxiety or hypnotic medications. Residents and families polled in independent surveys performed by Pinnacle, an authorized Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) survey administrator, are asked about their satisfaction in a number of categories including nursing care, quality of food and being treated with dignity and respect. The Lebanon Home surveys indicated 100% satisfaction.

**COVID-19** - Both Oregon Veterans' Homes have had positive cases of COVID-19 in the buildings. OVHL was the first state veterans' home in the nation to have active COVID-19 cases. When the infection team from Oregon Health Authority went into LVH to review the practices and policies in place regarding COVID-19 they were very impressed with the quality of care the veterans were receiving.

In total, the Veterans' Homes saw 21 positive resident cases with 8 deaths attributed to COVID-19 in Lebanon, and 1 positive resident case and no deaths in The Dalles. There have been no new cases of COVID-19 in either building since April 2020.

The current pandemic gave rise to a number of challenges for the homes. For those staff and residents at the homes, this pandemic has significantly impacted their daily lives. Residents have not been able to have visits with family and friends in person. At times, residents have been restricted to their rooms and group activities have been cancelled in an effort to prevent the spread of the virus. The staff have received additional training on infection prevention and wearing of certain PPE is now the normal practice.

In addition to the impact for those at the homes, there has been a great budgetary impact. Significant resources have been spent in order to obtain the appropriate and necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to protect residents and staff. Both homes have also experienced a substantial decline in resident numbers due to holds on admissions, which contributes to budgetary concerns. Fortunately, the homes have received CARES Act funding in the amount of \$1.7 million to help cover a portion of COVID-19 related expenses and lost revenues.

**Roseburg Veterans' Home** - The Legislature directed the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) to establish a third Veterans' Home in Roseburg under Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 408.385.

During fiscal year 2020, in the absence of the 35% state/local matching funds required for Oregon to be considered for the 65% USDVA grant funding, ODVA nonetheless continued to work on the planning and preparation of a third Veterans' Home. Progress was made in the procurement and selection of an

architectural firm, completion of pro-forma financial statements, and architectural development of a preliminary schematic design and potential site layout. CB|Two Architects, who was the architect for the Lebanon Veterans' Home, was the architectural firm chosen for the third Veterans' Home.

Since selection of the architectural firm, ODVA has been working collaboratively with the USDVA Roseburg VA Health Care System (RVAHCS) to finalize a site plan that will coordinate the placement of the proposed new Veterans' Home with the planned development of a new USDVA hospital on the Roseburg VAHCS grounds. The facilities management office at Roseburg VAHCS has exchanged site designs with ODVA and CB|Two on the final site layout.

Discussions are ongoing between ODVA and Roseburg VAHCS on the number of acres needed and available, along with placement of the Veterans' Home buildings on the site. Roseburg VAHCS has suggested that acreage adjoining their property, belonging to the USDVA National Cemetery Administration, could be an option for additional property ODVA has determined is needed, based on lessons learned from the Lebanon Veterans' Home. ODVA has been in touch with National Cemetery Administration officials to explore whether this property is both available and feasible for the Veterans' Home.

Next steps for the project include: (1) development and finalization of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the site size, location and timing of potential land transfer; (2) continued work by CB|2 on schematic design and site layout; (3) development and execution of a MOA with Roseburg/Douglas County addressing system development charges, permits, utility connections, and other related items; and (4) finalization of a construction budget.

Once those steps are completed, ODVA will request Legislative approval to resubmit its construction grant request to the USDVA State Home Construction Group. If the grant is approved, USDVA would pay 65% of the construction costs. However, prior to being eligible for USDVA construction grant funding, the state must have the additional 35% construction costs in hand.

### **Oregon Veteran Home Loans**

Oregon Citizens voted in 1945 to create a Veterans' Home Loan Program to serve the home purchase financing needs of veterans' returning from WWII. Since that time, the OrVet Home Loan program has provided more than \$8 billion of low-interest loans to more than 350,000 Oregon veterans. Oregon has the distinction of being one of only 5 states offering a specific home loan program to its state's Veterans exclusive of the Federal VA loan program.

The ODVA sources their loan volume by using Third Party Originators from around the state. This provides the ability to reach areas of the State that might otherwise be underserved by a retail origination force. ODVA underwrites and funds loans originated by approved mortgage brokers, or purchased closed loans from approved mortgage lenders. Loans closed or purchased by ODVA are serviced within the ODVA itself. This provides a close continued relationship with our Veteran borrowers during the course of their home loan experience.

Sources of funding for the home loan program comes from a periodic sale of Qualified Veteran Mortgage Bonds, or QVMBs. The sale of such bonds provides a tax preference for the bond purchasers, but such preferences place certain restrictions on the use of these bonds for lending purposes. The primary restrictions are:

- Can only be used for purchase transactions. QVMB bonds cannot be used for a veteran to refinance their existing mortgage, whether it be an ODVA loan or outside our portfolio.
- Only for use by veterans that are discharged within the past 25 years. Veterans discharged beyond 25 years are subject to use of a previous portfolio of funds, generally at a higher interest rate. These funds are limited in availability and ODVA is unable to replenish this type of bond, and at some point, will no longer be available.

Further, because our loan interest rates are set in relation to the price of the bond sales, the OrVet Home Loan program's rates do not change as often as regular, private sector interest rates change. The OrVet home loan program is not as sensitive to the interest rate environment as the private sector. This can create a prohibitive pricing offering when regular mortgage rates, including the Federal VA loan program, has a significant reduction in rates, as we have experienced through much of the 2019-2020 fiscal year. Mortgage rates in the private sector showed significant reductions while ODVA rates remained at rates commensurate with previous bond sale pricing.

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, the ODVA OrVet Home Loan program production was the lowest total for the past 7 years. The ODVA OrVet Home Loan program closed \$47,442,011 in production. This represented a 38% reduction in closed loan volume over the previous fiscal year.

Because ODVA is unable to provide a refinance loan product, when interest rates in the private sector reduce dramatically, the home loan servicing portfolio is at risk for runoff. Consequently, the servicing portfolio experienced a runoff during the 2019 – 2020 fiscal year of just over \$20 million, representing a reduction of 5.5% to the servicing portfolio. Currently, rates are sitting at all-time lows, with some speculation they can fall further. Low rates create volatility in the marketplace, and places the ODVA servicing portfolio at risk.

Home loan production is material to the long-term viability of ODVA bringing home financing opportunities to Oregon veterans. Housing market demand remains high. The housing inventory remains low and home values showing marked increases. Interest rates are showing near or at all-time lows. Fortunately, the most recent ODVA QVMB bond sale has reset our competitiveness in the marketplace and we anticipate increased mortgage loan product through the next fiscal year.

## **MOBILIZING PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT VETERANS IN OREGON**

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### **Expansion of Veteran Service Officers (VSO's)**

VSO's provide free benefit assistance and services to veterans and their eligible dependents. Today there is at least one Veteran Service Officer supporting every county in Oregon. ODVA assists these offices through training and funding.

### **Addition of Tribal Veteran Servicer Officers (TVSO)**

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

agreements with three Oregon tribes, two of which had hired a TVSO as of July 2020. ODVA was also authorized to hire a Tribal Veteran Coordinator. However, despite extensive efforts, ODVA has not yet identified a qualified candidate to fill this important role.

### **Increased Pass through funding to NSOs, and new funds to TVSOs**

In 2019-2021 biennium, increased pass-through funding was made available to the chartered National Service Organizations, including the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, National Association of Black Veterans, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars increased. This investment strengthens and enhances these organizations ability to provide claims assistance for veterans and their families in Oregon.

### **Training and Certification**

VSO's are certified trained professionals and are subject matter experts in federal Title 38 law. To ensure that these VSO's are trained and certified (leading to USDVA accreditation), ODVA has a robust and in-depth training program. This program involves both the monitoring and quality control of submitted casework, and provides semi-annual regional in-person trainings, quarterly webinars, and an annual training conference. The training and certification program is responsible for the shadowing, testing, and certification of VSO's. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the training team's quick ability to move to the online platform successfully allowed continuous full functionality without interruption. Since moving online, the team has continued with all scheduled trainings, accreditation testing, and support for VSO's.

The training and certification team also provides in-depth advocacy support to elected officials around constituent inquiries, as well as outreach support for events such as Oregon National Guard Yellow Ribbon events, and VA Board of Veterans Appeals hearings. The team has also produced video trainings for activities such as claims, appeals and education benefits, that are posted to ODVA's website.

### **Housing Insecurity and Homelessness**

In partnership with Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS), ODVA co-hosted statewide Homeless Veteran Convening two-day workshops. These events brought together community partners working on veteran homelessness in their communities to teach, learn, and collaborate on the best ways to serve Oregon homeless veterans. Community partners identified successes, barriers, best practices, and recommendations to help address veteran homelessness. In response to COVID-19, the 2020 Convening was held remotely and focused on regional challenges impacting service providers.

### **Veteran Housing (YMCA)**

During the 2019 Legislative Session, the legislature authorized \$1 million of Measure 96 Lottery Funds for a one-time grant to the YMCA of Marion and Polk Counties to construct veterans' affordable housing in Salem. An additional \$4 million of lottery bond proceeds were also approved for a total grant to the YMCA of \$5 million. During the past year, the Department executed a pre-development grant agreement with the YMCA (related to the \$1 million of Measure 96 funds) for expenses incurred for architectural, engineering, and other pre-development costs. Additionally, the YMCA acquired the land adjacent to the current YMCA downtown location for the future veterans' affordable housing site. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and resulting economic impact, the lottery bond sale that the State had scheduled (which included the \$4 million for the YMCA veterans' affordable housing project) was cancelled. Since the cancellation of the bond sale, the YMCA has indicated that they are exploring funding alternatives, including potentially applying for Oregon Housing and Community Services affordable housing grant funding and private foundation grants.

### **Oregon Veterans Emergency Financial Assistance Grants**

The ODVA Oregon Veterans' Emergency Financial Assistance Program (OVEFAP) provides emergency financial assistance for Oregon veterans and program eligible family members. Financial assistance is typically used for temporary housing and related housing expenses; emergency medical or dental expenses; and emergency transportation expenses. Between July 2019-June 2020, ODVA received 120 applications. Of these applications, 35 grants were awarded totaling \$53,865 of funds dispersed to veterans or family members in need. The relatively low number of grants awarded is due to limited funds available for these grants. Since March 2020, applications have increasingly mentioned COVID-19 as a component of an applicant's financial hardship. During this period, ODVA has begun to work with Oregon Housing and Community Services to link both awarded and unawarded applicants, and if applicable, their caseworkers/county veteran service officers to services provided by Oregon Community Action Agencies. The legislature has allocated Federal CARES Act funding to OHCS and these agencies to aid individuals experiencing financial hardships due to COVID-19.

### **Behavioral Health/Veteran Suicide**

**Charitable Checkoff funds for Veteran Suicide Prevention & Awareness** - In 2013, the Veteran Suicide Awareness and Prevention Charitable Checkoff Fund was established when the Oregon Legislature created a public information campaign to raise awareness and prevent veteran death by suicide in Oregon. The awareness effort partnered Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) with the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles and the Oregon Charitable Checkoff Commission to fund awareness and prevention outreach. Since 2013, over \$392,000 has been donated to help support suicide awareness and prevention for veterans.

In 2019, ODVA distributed \$78,568 of Veteran Suicide Awareness and Prevention Charitable Checkoff funds to 24 counties, two tribes, and funds to support the Lines for Life 2019 Fall Veteran Suicide Prevention Conference.

**Contract with Lines for Life** - In 2015, the Oregon Legislature provided funds to support a veteran's suicide crisis line for active duty service members, veterans, and their family members. ODVA contracted Lines for Life to operate a crisis line to impact the emotional well-being of Oregon's at-risk veterans and their families. Services include a 24-hour, 7 day a week, bilingual and TTY serviced crisis line. Lines for Life also currently supports the national USDVA Veteran Crisis Line. Staff provide screenings, assessments, informal online counseling, and referrals to community mental health providers, law enforcement, and other appropriate resources.

Between June 2019-March 2020:

- Lines for Life received 757 calls from 11 distinct counties
- Caller wait time was 23 seconds, on average
- Duration of the call was 16 minutes, on average
- Referrals were made on 22% of calls. Referrals were made for mental health appointments, drug/alcohol treatment, and assistance with the VA. (Referrals are not typically given on calls in which the caller is a repeat/frequent caller, under current mental health provider care, or if caller refuses referrals).

It is important to note that from November 2019 to June 2020, call volume to Lines for Life increased by 58%. COVID-19 has been mentioned frequently in recent crisis intervention calls. In response, Lines for Life has expanded its resource list to include Oregon COVID-19 resources.

**2019 OHA/ODVA sponsored study on Veterans' Access to Behavioral Healthcare** The 2017 Legislature allocated \$1.5M in Veterans' Lottery funds to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to improve behavioral health outcomes for veterans. OHA, in collaboration with ODVA, (1) implemented a pilot program for enhanced peer-to-peer behavioral health programs to increase outreach and support, (2) contracted for a study to identify best practice behavioral health treatments and study gaps in access and utilization of identified treatments, (the 2019 Veterans' Access to Behavioral Healthcare study) and (3) contracted for the development of a veteran suicide prevention program through enhanced training for clinical providers.

In the summer of 2019, ODVA again partnered with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and traveled to 17 locations across the state to communicate the findings and recommendations contained in the 2019 Veterans' Access to Behavioral Healthcare study and to conduct listening sessions. ODVA and OHA gained valuable information that can be used to inform new legislation, including recommendations to increase access to veteran healthcare and improvements that can be made to improve access to behavioral health services across the state.

### **Transportation to Healthcare and Behavioral Healthcare**

**Federal Highly Rural Transportation Grant** - ODVA has received \$500,000 in federal funds annually since 20xx for the Veterans' Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG). ODVA administers the grant to Oregon's 10 highly rural counties to help address barriers to access to care for veterans residing in highly rural communities. This program funds innovative approaches to transporting veterans in highly rural areas who typically have longer commute times to USDVA medical centers. Between July 2019 and June 2020 over 8,000 hours were spent transporting approximately 200+ unique veterans on 3,073 trips. During these trips, 267,550 miles were accumulated transporting veterans, free of charge.

The COVID-19 crisis created a substantial barrier in county transportation services and spending. From April to June 2020 the 10 county grantees experienced a significant reduction (a 61% trip decrease in total) in transportation services funded through the Highly Rural Transportation Grant.

**State Veterans' Rural Healthcare Transportation Grant (ODOT)** - The 2019 Legislature approved funding for up to \$500,000 for a Rural Veterans' Healthcare Transportation Grant (RVHTG) program. The purpose of these grants is to provide free transportation to veterans in rural areas seeking healthcare (physical or mental) at USDVA facilities, VA-authorized health centers, and other healthcare facilities. In order to leverage Oregon Department of Transportation's Public Transportation Division's mobility expertise and existing partnerships, ODVA invited ODOT to develop and implement the RVHTG program. In July 2020, ODOT awarded the first grants to seven rural transportation providers, including one federally recognized tribe, and anticipates a second round of awards in late 2020.

### **Grants to Partners**

**Veteran Services Grants** - The 2019 Legislature approved up to \$1 million to fund the Veteran Services Grant program. The purpose of this program is to provide services to Oregon veterans by expanding outreach and services directly to veterans. Grants may be awarded to non-profits, tribal, city and county governments, and transportation districts. Veteran services grants are being used to expand services to veterans in the areas of transportation, legal services, education and training, housing security and homelessness, employment opportunities, and physical and mental health. These grants allow ODVA to leverage resources with partner organizations who are deeply committed to serving veterans in their communities.

**Campus Resource Center Grants** - The Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant Program, established in 2017, was made permanent during the 2019 Regular Session. The program provides funds to expand campus veteran resource centers at Oregon community colleges and public universities. The Legislature also approved up to \$1 million to fund the program. In August 2020, ODVA awarded \$900,000 in grants to 14 community colleges and public universities to help veterans transition from military service to college life, succeed in college, and complete the transition from college to the workforce and community.

**Grants Coordinator** - To support the development, administration and monitoring of large, competitive grants, ODVA hired an experienced grants coordinator in February 2020. In addition to prior grants experience, the coordinator has incorporated lessons learned from ODVA's prior grants and the recommendations from an internal audit into the development, administration and monitoring of the Campus Veteran Resource Center Grant Program and the Veteran Services Grant Program.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

### IMPACT OF FEDERAL VETERAN BENEFITS IN OREGON

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The core services that ODVA provides result in benefits and resources for Oregon veterans and have an enormous impact on the state's overall economy. In 2019, the VA benefit expenditure in Oregon totaled \$3.18 billion. Disability compensation, pension payments, education and health care benefits are earned through honorable military service. These benefits provide income to veterans to pay for living expenses, reduce dependency on state resources, contribute to the health of Oregon's citizens, and increase the state's trained and educated workforce.

In 2019, ODVA's work helped draw down more than \$3.1 billion in federal veteran benefit dollars into the state. More than \$1.5 billion of these funds were a direct result of our core work and awarded as disability and pension payments to veterans and their families. These federal dollars positively impact our veterans and are an economic force multiplier in both our urban and rural communities.

#### Disability Compensation and Pension

Disability compensation and pension payments assist veterans in after their honorable service has caused a disability. More than \$110 million per month in disability compensation and pension payments were made to 83,000 Oregon veterans in 2019.

Disability compensation is the cornerstone benefit with which ODVA's Statewide Veteran Services division and the Veteran Service Officer network are seeking to connect veterans. Disability compensation provides veterans with a monthly, tax-free benefit, and is provided as a result of injuries or disabilities incurred as a result of active duty service, or in the line of duty.

Pension is a needs-based benefit that is designed to assist aging, disabled, and extremely low-income war-era veterans. Pension support is another key focus for ODVA and Statewide Veteran Services as it helps keep individuals in self-sustainment and offsets state Medicaid dollars.

In the last five years, under ODVA's accreditation, Veteran Service Officers have filed over 60,000 Disability Compensation and Pension claims. At the end of Federal Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19), federal disability compensation and pension dollars being received by Oregon veterans exceeded 1.5 billion dollars. This amount represents an overall increase of 16% since Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15).

## Healthcare

The federal VA operates the largest integrated health care delivery system in the United States. Currently 103,569 Oregon veterans are enrolled in VA healthcare and more than \$1.4 billion was spent in Oregon providing that care in 2019.

Connecting veterans with these federal resources is a primary driver of veteran engagement. Benefits such as free hearing aids and eye glasses, along with free or extremely low prescription copays provide substantial savings to veterans and their families. Awareness efforts by County and Tribal Veteran Service Officers and ODVA have led to an increase in federal spending of approximately 20% since FY15.

Veteran Service Officers also regularly assist veterans with utilization and navigation of private and community health care options that are funded by the VA through a program called Community Care. Through Community Care and the VSO network, billing and resources are supported for such things as mental health care, ambulance and life-flight transportation, prosthetics, and emergency room visits.

## Education

More than \$160 million in federal veteran education benefit dollars were invested in 9,085 Oregon veterans who used their veteran education benefits in 2019. These dollars flow directly into the state's trades, community college and university system as GI Bill® tuition payments and provide a monthly housing payment benefit to veterans while attending school.

ODVA and the Veteran Service Officer network understands that linking veterans to these education benefits, and promoting awareness of them is crucial for access to education and retraining Oregon veterans in Vocational Rehabilitation.

## MARCHING ONWARD!

### STRATEGIC PLANNING

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In the fall of 2020, ODVA will begin new strategic planning sessions to advance and build on the foundational 2014-19 strategic framework. ODVA's strategic plan for 2020-2025 will ultimately take the skills and talents of a small but hardworking and dedicated workforce and reshape the agency to better enable it to focus on serving Oregon veterans and their families for future generations, while continuing to honor the agency's proud history.

ODVA, in alignment with the Governor's equity framework, will deepen its commitment to serving all veterans through an agency-wide, action-oriented focus on equity, diversity and inclusion. Examples of intended outcomes include having more Veterans Advisory Committee members representing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, and increasingly deliberate outreach to BIPOC communities by ODVA's veteran coordinators who advocate for traditionally underserved veterans.

The 2020-2025 strategic plan will incorporate outcomes from new Lottery funded programs; integrate operational lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis; and, take a veteran-centric, data-driven approach, to further leverage the new programs and partnerships that ODVA has implemented over the last five years to build a roadmap for the next five years.

While no single agency or organization can wholly address the needs of veterans, ODVA is well-positioned continue to work with our partners to help veterans access resources and earned VA

benefits. As the expert on veterans' issues in Oregon, ODVA leads initiatives to maximize the current veteran benefits that federal, state, local governments and nonprofits provide.

The restrictions COVID-19 has placed on our day-to-day lives and systems remind us of the importance of the service we as an agency provide. Veterans, as a group, are proud, resilient survivors, as they should be. The debt of gratitude we owe to them must not be hindered by interruptions. As we learn and implement new ways to communicate, provide outreach, and connect services for our state's most honored citizens, we must ensure that we do so always with the needs of the veteran as the focal point of our mission.

To that mission, ODVA's core operations will continue to provide the solid foundation needed to support the delivery of programs and services to Oregon's veterans and their families. ODVA's Statewide Veteran Services division will continue to provide exemplary training to Veterans' Service Officers to ensure the continued increase of Oregon veteran's receiving the benefits they earned with their service, and to robustly represent veterans appealing USDVA decisions that negatively affect their earned benefits. ODVA's Aging Veterans Services division will continue to provide award-winning care to our veterans in the two Oregon Veterans' Homes, while securing the safety and livelihood of the most vulnerable veterans through conservatorship and representative payee services, and our Home Loans program will continue to help veterans achieve the American dream of home ownership. In the future, ODVA's services may begin to look different, and be held in different forums, or on different platforms, but we must and will adapt to serve each of our five eras of veteran populations with the insight and attention to their unique needs that only ODVA, dedicated to their honor, can provide.