

Board of Veterans Services Benefits Group Report

1. **Date of Report:** August 25, 2022
2. **BVS POC(s):** Carl Bedell and David Ashe
3. **Service Area/Program:** Benefits Services
4. **DVS Director/Program Manager:** Donna Williams
5. **Mission of service area/program (i.e., what does it do?):**
Advocate for Virginia veterans and their families by connecting them to the benefits and services they have earned by providing accurate, timely and ethical education and assistance. Primarily develop claims to be submitted to the Department of Veteran Affairs.
6. **Who does the service area/program serve (i.e., who are the customers)?** Virginia Veterans and their family members who are seeking federal, state or local benefits and services.
7. **What are the service line's primary objectives?**
 - a. Increase veteran population served by 20% over a one-year period
 - b. 100% Transition Assistance Program participation on all Military Installations (Veteran Service Representatives and V3 team) - Provide service to transitioning service members
 - c. Submit 20,000 Compensation and Pension Claims to the VA - increase from 18,000-20,000 this FY.
8. **What are the key results that support the objective(s)?**
 - a. Contact 1,200 new Veterans per month; Identify four target locations to establish new presence; Create four Facebook pages (one per Region); increased outreach
 - b. Increase Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) claims filed by DVS from 1600 to 2000 annually; Refer 100% to VDVS Services
 - c. Submit 1,667 C&P claims on a monthly basis
9. **What specific objectives (end of FY2022, end of FY2025) has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objective(s).**
 - a. As of the end of FY22, Benefits served 13,360 **new** veterans. This established a baseline of 1,200 new veterans served per month. The annual target will be 18,000 (increase of 20%+); Created four separate Facebook pages beginning in July - have not captured results yet; Established new itinerant sites at the Farmville American Legion, Hopewell American Legion and City of Hopewell
 - b. Filed 1,722 BDD claims since 12/1/2021. Established a baseline with a goal of 2,000 annually. Will adjust to the average of 300 monthly to 3,600 annually; Benefits refer to other VDVS service lines as well as other state and partner agencies. Currently track referrals to VVFS, VMSDEP and Suicide prevention screening, which we screen an average of 95% of all veteran clients in FY22.

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- c. Although Benefits offices were hybrid until January, the FY22 total claims submitted was 19,726. The stretch goal was 2,000. Benefits could meet a calendar year goal now that we are back in the offices 100%.

10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?

- a. 86,847 total submittals to the VA in FY22, which is an increase from 65,175 in FY21
- b. 'In-person' contacts in the 34 offices totaled 36,439 in FY22, in contrast to 13,893 in FY21. We were slowly returning to an "in-person" posture.

11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?

- a. Benefits partnered with the Veterans Administration in Veteran Experience Action Center Community (VEAC) Event. 22 VSRs were the focal point ensuring this event was a tremendous success for our Virginia Veterans. During this three-day event we served 587 veterans with immediate responses from the VA and community partners. This is the most of the eight states participating in this event thus far! We also served 29.1% women veterans. This is "by far" the largest number of women veterans served by population in any other participating state. DVS set many "firsts" in this event. We have 204 new veteran clients as a result of this partnership.
- b. Yellow Ribbon Events - met with returning service members to educate on benefits available
- c. Nursing Home information sessions - VSRs brief and assist with applying for benefits
- d. Partnership - VSR set up an outreach table to educate attendees at DAV Convention in Roanoke
- e. DVS awareness in the community - Central Region Director attended the Richmond, Crater Community Engagement Board planning meeting and the North Region Director attended the CVEB at Shenandoah University
- f. Partnered with the Attorney Generals (AG) Office – Wills Clinic in the East Region- Benefits Attorneys worked closely with the AG's team to plan and schedule the event. Scheduled appointments with Veterans to complete Wills, Power of Attorneys and Advance Directives were completed successfully. Veteran Service Representatives were on hand to assist as well as provide claims development assistance and referral to other services.

12. What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?

- a. Technology: Created a QR Code for customer service survey- once a veteran and VSR have completed the appointment, the veteran is asked to scan the QR code and answer the short survey. This information is gathered from the survey monkey tool-Review comments and scores. This is the first month-no report at this time.
- b. Technology: QR Code posted in a variety of locations (office doors, website, local Veteran Service Organizations) to scan for an online appointment
- c. Increased awareness on Military installations: Fort Lee- Partnering with V3 to facilitate an all DVS day once per month as a tap participant- Provide transitioning service members with a DVS overview, detailed VA disability briefing, Resume writing instruction followed by V3 employers visiting to discuss their company and hiring

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practices. Dahlgreen- Increased visits from twice a month to every Thursday with a result of increased BDD claims and TAP participation.

13. **What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?**

a. The transition from the current Claims Development Software (VetraSpec) to a new, more modern platform, Tyler Veteran Benefits program. This program enables us to have more advanced reporting. Customized reporting is available. To name a few enhancements:

1. Drop down menu to capture referrals to internal and external partners
2. Claims success rates
3. Access to VA program within the system

Challenge: Training hours required for the new program result in office closure and down time from completing claims. Prepping the system for the migration to minimize loss of files and duplicate tracking during the migration are time consuming. All is going well as we have begun training and customizing reports. Migration scheduled for October 1st pending contractual obligations and preparation completion.

b. Change Management—As DVS move forward with more advanced technology, leadership must ensure clear and concise directions and explanations are provided to the team. As Benefits is a large service line that is geographically separated, it is important that supervision monitors and solicit feedback. Communication is the key element to successful changes in an organization.

14. **How does delivering the service/program help Virginia’s veterans?**

Financially and emotionally

15. **By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?**

With Benefits assistance, transitioning service members will obtain the information needed to decide to “stay” in Virginia - While briefing during TAP sessions and being a part of presentations and events in and around military installations, transitioning service members learn valuable information about Virginia and the benefits offered. In completing a successful claim with our VSRs, the service member will know the financial impact before or shortly after separation. Working with them early and often increases the chance of them staying in Virginia because they will know and understand what Virginia has to offer. Once veterans receive the disability rating and monetary monthly payment, they will spend the new income in Virginia, which will in-turn help the Commonwealth’s economy. The Veteran will ‘thrive’ in Virginia.

16. **What strategic opportunities are there for the future?**

17. **What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?**

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- a. The FY23/24 budget increase (approximately \$2,488,149) will be a tremendous help to increase VSRs and supporting staff to reach more veterans and provide much needed training. It will allow
 1. Benefits will be hiring a total of 13 VSR positions, 2 Appeals Attorneys and 3 VSA positions. 8 of the VSR positions will be additions to high demand offices, which are high traffic offices -Ft. Lee, Quantico, Ft Eustis, Norfolk, McGuire, Salem, and Hampton.
 2. Funding for an in-person training conference
 3. Funding for increased technology- Gold Standard Digital Hub
 4. NOVA salary differential (COLA).
 5. Funding to support rent increase in Petersburg, Chesapeake, Front Royal, Virginia Beach and Danville