



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

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Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) Operations Update for the Board of Veterans Services

Since July 1, 2022, Benefits has an increase in overall Compensation and Pension claims submitted to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). 2,244 claims were submitted during the month of August- this is the most C&P claims submitted since pre-pandemic. Submissions are up from 1,644 in August 2021. The Benefits team serviced 1,414 new veterans in August, which is an increase from July. Benefits continue to work with military installation transition offices to increase VDVS awareness for transitioning service members. The Veteran Service Representatives (VSR) developed and submitted 293 Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) Claims in August, which is slightly below the 300 monthly target. Benefits continues to focus on outreach and training. Benefits is experiencing an increase in VSR vacancies in the North Region. We are beginning to fill newly funded VSR positions in high demand offices (McGuire, Fort Lee, Quantico, and Norfolk). Benefits is growing and serving more Virginia veterans by referring to sister service lines and community partners.

The 2022 Virginia Veterans and Military Affairs Conference & V3 Awards Summit was held on September 14, marking the first in person event since 2019. The conference and summit brought together nearly 600 military, community, and business leaders to connect and discuss developing the Commonwealth's workforce and how to welcome and integrate veterans, Transitioning Service Members and military families into the workforce and business community.

VDVS Military Spouse Liaison Ms. Kayla LaFond will support the Blue Star Families Welcome Week (BSWW) with a kickoff event at the Virginia War Memorial on September 21, 2022. This event marks the beginning of the statewide BSWW initiative. Virginia is the first state to do so outside of the Blue Star Families Chapters. VDVS Commissioner Gade, Secretary Crenshaw, and Blue Star Families CEO Kathy Roth-Douquet are scheduled to speak. Governor Youngkin is scheduled to provide video remarks.

The Military Education & Workforce Initiative (MEWI) continues to partner with the Veterans Services Foundation, the Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA), and the Altria Group to provide free certifications and credentialing opportunities to service members, veterans, and/or their spouses. Since January 1st, 2022, 32 certifications/ credentials have been earned and have been paid for through grant funds. On August 25, MEWI issued an additional 50 laptops to Virginia Commonwealth

University for a total of 100 computers this year. These laptops are for distribution to service members, veterans, and their spouses to assist them in their academic and employment endeavors.

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support team will gain new leadership capacity in suicide prevention and housing and criminal justice services. The new Suicide Prevention Director and Housing and Criminal Justice Services Coordinator positions will start this month. VVFS program staff continue to expand in-person outreach and community training opportunities to reach Service Members, Veterans, and families in need of behavioral health, rehabilitative and supportive services. In August 2022, staff assisted 108 new clients compared to 91 new clients in August 2021. This was an 18% decrease from August 2022. The total number of clients (including new and existing clients) served was slightly lower in August 2022 (385) compared to July 2022 (387) but significantly higher than August 2021 (293). VVFS has seen an increase in complex cases particularly impacted by rising rents and inflation.

VVFS and Benefits staff screened 1,119 service members, veterans and family members (SMVF) for suicide risk. Among those screened, 110 individuals screened at low/medium risk and 4 at high risk for suicide and received critical behavioral health support. Since January 2022, a total of 8,348 SMVF have been screened for suicide risk.

The Commonwealth's Patriot Day Ceremony was held September 12, 2022 at the Virginia War Memorial to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Northern Virginia and the downing of the jet aircraft in Shanksville, Pennsylvania that occurred on September 11, 2001. Patriot Day is the National Day of Mourning to honor and remember the 2,997 men and women and more than 6,000 who were injured on that day in 2001. The keynote speaker for the 2022 ceremony was former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore, who was the Commonwealth's Chief Executive on September 11, 2001.

The Commonwealth's Veterans Day Ceremony will be held on November 11, 2022 at 11 a.m. at the Virginia War Memorial. All members are invited to attend in-person, to watch the live broadcast on CBS TV-6 Richmond, or to watch the livestream on the CBS TV-6 Facebook page, the DVS Facebook page, or the Virginia War Memorial Facebook page.

The Virginia War Memorial continues to host in-person and on-line education programs, including virtual programs in September for the birthday of the U.S. Air Force and in honor of National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Visit <https://vawarmemorial.org/events/> to learn more.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), National Cemetery Administration, Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (VCGP) awards grants to state and tribal governments for the phased expansion of existing state/tribal veterans cemeteries and the establishment of new state/tribal veterans cemeteries. USDVA VCGP has pushed almost all planned Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022 grants into FFY2023. This will delay the start of phased expansion projects at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia) and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Dublin) to add additional columbarium niches for the above-ground inurnment of cremated remains. Because of the delay, the Amelia cemetery may run out of above-ground niches before additional ones are constructed. If this happens, DVS will work with veterans, families, and funeral homes on other options, which could include the veteran/family electing an in-ground cremated burial, or delaying the memorial service until additional niches are available. DVS will notify veterans, families, and funeral homes if this happens, and will post updates on the DVS website.

DVS has submitted a grant application to VCGP to add additional columbarium niches at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Cemetery in Suffolk and make other improvement. We'll learn later this year or early next year if the project will be funded in FFY2023.

The state veterans cemeteries in Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk will display the Avenue of Flags on Veterans Day 2022. Cemetery team members will be on hand to greet visitors and help guide them to gravesites, but the cemetery offices will not be open on November 11.

Wreath ceremonies will be held on December 17 at all three cemeteries in conjunction with local partners. Information will be posted on the DVS website and shared with DVS partners on the cemeteries webpage (<https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/cemeteries>) and in the DVS eNews.

COVID-19 continues to impact operations at the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC) in Richmond and the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke. Both care centers have seen spikes in resident and staff positives that track community outbreaks (ex. – for a new variant). Both centers are fully open for visitation, but visitors are highly encouraged to take a COVID test prior to visitation and to wear masks while in the facility.

Mirroring the health care industry at large, staffing continues to be a challenge at both care centers, with several vacancies in the nursing department (registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and certified nursing assistants). Care centers positions are a mix of full-time and wage (hourly) state positions with competitive salaries/wages and excellent benefits. If you know of anyone looking for a nursing position caring for those who served us, please encourage them to visit the state jobs website at <http://jobs.virginia.gov/>. Other DVS positions are also advertised here.

As with many sectors of our economy, supply chain issues are impacting our veterans care centers, especially the completion of the new care centers in Virginia Beach and Fauquier County. Unfortunately, this means that "Month 1" (first residents admitted) is pushed back to January 2023 for the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center (Virginia Beach) and to May 2023 for the Puller Veterans Care Center (Fauquier County). We regret these delays. We'll post updates on our care centers page at <https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/veterans-care-centers>.

In addition to the construction of the two new veterans care centers, we continue with phased renovation projects at the Richmond and Roanoke centers. The USDVA State Veterans Homes Grants Program (SVHGP) awards grants to states for the renovation of existing state veterans homes (aka veterans care centers) and the construction of new or replacement SVHs. USDVA SVHGP has awarded federal grants for two projects at each center, matched by state construction bond funds. All four projects are in the design stage.

U.S. Navy Veteran William (Bill) Hewitt joined the VDVS leadership team as Director of Research, Evaluation, and Partnerships. Expect to hear much from Bill in the months ahead as we work with you and your organizations on collaborative efforts to serve our veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



Daniel Gade, PhD.