

Department of Veterans Affairs



At a Glance

SEAN M. CONNOLLY, Commissioner

Thomas J. Saadi, Chief of Staff & General Counsel

Established - 1986

Statutory authority - C.G.S. Chapter 506 Sec: 27-103-27-137

Central office - 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Number of full-time employees - 205

Recurring operating expenses 2016-17 - \$28,542,392

Agency generated revenue 2016-17: \$33,701,011

Organizational structure

History

Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs is the Nation's first and longest operating state Veterans home.

Connecticut has the distinction of being the first state in the Nation to have a home dedicated to Veterans. Benjamin Fitch, a wealthy Connecticut businessman, promised Soldiers serving in the Civil War a place to call home when they returned from battle. A man of his word, the Fitch's Home for Soldiers and their Orphans was opened in 1864 and is currently incorporated into the Connecticut General Assembly.

In 1940, the home was moved to its current location in Rocky Hill and with each succeeding period of war, new generations of Veterans presented unique needs and hardships, which required the development of a comprehensive system of health care and social and rehabilitative services. In order to better serve these and future generations of Veterans, the Connecticut General Assembly created the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in 1987. Today the DVA provides Connecticut's nearly 200,000 Veterans with four core services: (1) Long-term and Chronic disease Healthcare Center, (2) Residential Facility with Rehabilitative Programs and Services, (3) Cemetery and memorial services with cemeteries in Darien, Rocky Hill, and the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown; and (4) Office of Advocacy and Assistance with Veteran Service Officers located in each Congressional District to help Veterans navigate services and benefits they have earned.

Mission

“Serving Those Who Served”

Enhance the lives of Connecticut’s Veterans by providing:

Advocacy and assistance to Veterans, their spouses or eligible dependents in obtaining benefits to which they may be entitled to under federal, state, and local laws; long-term and chronic disease healthcare; and cemetery and memorial services for Veterans and eligible dependents.

Collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies, Veteran service organizations, community partners, volunteers, and Veteran supporters.

Cultivate a work environment of compassion, teamwork, professional development, and employee engagement.

Vision

Provide Connecticut’s Veterans and their dependents proactive, world-class, and values-based service excellence.

Statutory Responsibility

Office of the Commissioner

The Commissioner is appointed by the Governor and is responsible for the administration of the Department. The Commissioner is specifically tasked with assisting Veterans, their spouses, eligible dependents and family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits accruing to them under federal, state and local laws, disseminating information and assisting eligible individuals to access these services and programs which include but are not limited to: educational, training, employment and reemployment programs; health care and rehabilitation programs; housing services, home loans, and burial benefits.

The Commissioner is also responsible for outreach to Veterans and community agencies; liaisons with legislature, statutory and legislative authorities and Veteran service organizations; assessment of the efficiency of programs and evaluation and development of new initiatives to better serve the more than 200,000 Connecticut Veterans and their families.

The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs also oversees development of an agency-wide long range plan; the review of all appeals and final decisions made by Veterans regarding adverse decisions affecting benefits to Veterans participating in state programs; the enforcement of all regulations and procedures enacted in accordance with the provisions of General Statutes Chapters 54 and 506.

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) assists Veterans and their families in accessing federal, state and local benefits and entitlements. Veterans Service Officers (VSO) are accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and assist Veterans and their families with documentation and

filing of claims for disability, compensation and/or pension. OA&A offices are located in each of the five Congressional Districts with offices in Bridgeport, Waterbury, Milford, Newington and Norwich and include bilingual staff and woman VSOs.

Additionally, advocacy work is performed throughout the state on a staff available, rotating basis at satellite office locations and through numerous job, senior and health fairs throughout the state. DVA VSOs also conduct interviews in skilled nursing facilities and Stand Down events and in response to referrals throughout the state and ascertain the type and level of assistance and representation those Veterans need in order to apply for an obtain the benefits to which they are entitled.

The Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

The Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center (HCC) provides continuous comprehensive long-term chronic disease healthcare to Veterans across the age continuum. To be eligible for admittance, a Veteran requesting care at the HCC must be a resident of Connecticut and have served honorably on Active duty beyond active duty for initial training. Applications for admission are required to be submitted in advance. A total of 99 Veterans were admitted to the HCC in 2016-2017. That number included 19 new long term admissions, 24 Respite Care, 35 re-admissions, 21 Veterans admitted from the Residential Facility, and 22 Veterans were transferred to the HCC from the Residential Facility for observational care. The average Veteran Patient census in the HCC during that time was 116.

Residential Programs & Services

The Residential Program includes the Residential Facility which is available to Veterans who are homeless, at risk of being homeless or unable to function in a community setting. The Residential Program provides comprehensive wraparound services to assist Veteran Residents with improving their overall quality and working to achieve their goals and objectives including transitioning to permanent community based housing. Many Veteran Residents suffer from the grave effects of being homeless, unemployed and challenged with addiction, medical and mental health problems. Veteran Residents have the opportunity to utilize the continuum of rehabilitation services which include quasi communal living, meals, an initial issuance of clothing and personal hygienic and other basic products, social work support, myriad clinic services, recreational opportunities, compensated vocational therapeutic program, education counseling, and job search assistance.

Additional case management services are available to Veteran Residents through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Veteran Residents requiring support with substance abuse addiction also have access to treatment also provided by (DMHAS) through a Memorandum of Understanding.

Collaboration with Federal and State partners, as well as local non-profits provides increased access for Veteran Residents to a range of benefits, services and programmatic support. Working with DVA Social Workers Veteran Residents set individualized goals with regular follow up meetings to ensure the greatest success possible in preparing Veteran Residents to return to independent living. For the 2016-2017 fiscal year, 38 Veteran Residents were admitted and 62 Veteran Residents successfully discharged back into the community.

Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services

The Department operates a full-time Cemetery and Memorial Services Office at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus operates three state Veterans cemeteries.

The Cemetery and Memorial Services is responsible for coordinating burial benefits and assistance to thousands of Veteran families with burial plot coordination, ordering the Veteran headstone and foot markers, consultation on available benefits, assistance with interment ceremonies, processing of federal reimbursement payments and coordination of memorial ceremonies.

The DVA Veteran Cemetery System consists of three state cemeteries: the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery, located in Middletown; Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery, located in Rocky Hill; and Spring Grove Cemetery, located in Darien. The DVA is responsible for the care, maintenance and development of all three cemeteries and installs all headstones. The State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 11,531 remains of Connecticut Veterans. The Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery is reserved for the burials of Veterans residing at the State Veterans Residential Facility and HCC. The Spring Grove Cemetery closed for interments in 1964.

Public Service

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance

This year OA&A serviced 1,474 walk-in Veterans and/or dependents; answered over 7,350 telephone inquiries; acquired 650 new clients and filed 2203 new claims and reopened hundreds of existing claims. OA&A attended more than 52 community outreach events including benefit fairs, seminars, and numerous "Yellow Ribbon" briefings for Connecticut National Guard and Reserve Units prior to, and immediately upon returning from deployment. These advocacy efforts resulted in over \$3.5 million in new income and benefits to Connecticut Veterans and their families.

OA&A manages the Connecticut Veteran Wartime Service Medals and Connecticut Veterans Electronic Registry. This year, more than 3,042 medals were awarded bringing the total number of Wartime Service Medals for eligible Veterans to 37,670 since 2006. The Agency has also helped coordinate and support close to 10 award ceremonies across the state to include the Vietnam 50th Commemoration Welcome Home event at the DVA campus in October 2016 where more than 300 Veterans received their medal.

The office is also responsible for the management of the Veterans Identity on the CT Driver's License Program by verifying the service of the Veteran and transmitting that information to the CT Department of Motor Vehicles. This year, the department has processed 1,562 applications, totaling more than 12,000 applications since the inception of the program in January 2013.

OA&A provides training for all town, city and municipal Veteran representatives. This program provides a single source point of contact in the Veteran's hometown to act as a liaison for benefits and services a Veteran has earned. To date, more than 130 towns have appointed a Municipal Veterans Service Contact Liaison and nearly 200 such representatives have completed a benefits training seminar since the training was first offered in October 2012.

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

The HCC is licensed by the State Department of Public Health as a Chronic Disease Hospital and provides 24-hour care in the 125 bed facility which opened in October, 2008. Under the direction of the Healthcare Services Administrator, the HCC medical staff and nursing department provide ongoing comprehensive specialized medical and rehabilitation to Veteran Patients with chronic and disabling medical conditions in order to improve the health and overall quality of life for each Veteran Patient served.

The HCC provides continuous professional comprehensive healthcare to Veteran Patients across the age continuum diagnosed with chronic disease illnesses. An individual Plan of Care is developed and continually updated throughout the Veteran Patient's stay to ensure that quality health care services are provided to assist the Veteran Patient reach his/her maximum potential.

The HCC has adopted a Rehabilitative Model of Care based on the definition of care developed by the noted nurse theorist, Virginia Henderson (Army School of Nursing). "To assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery or to a peaceful death that they would perform unaided if they had the strength, the will or knowledge. And, to do so in such a way as to help them gain independence as rapidly as possible."

The available programs in place are there to treat veterans suffering from, but not limited to; Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), End Stage Renal Disease, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Accident (CVA), Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, End of Life and Palliative care, and Pain Management. The Healthcare Center's medical team consists of Board Certified Physicians and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses who specialize in caring for Veterans who present with multiple complex conditions. The medical team provides health care management and primary care clinics for all Veterans at the Healthcare Center as well as those residing in the Residential Facility.

Additional services offered at the HCC include general medical care, Alzheimer's and related dementia care, End of Life care, palliative care, long term care, rehabilitation, respite care, pastoral care, mental health and psychological counseling. The HCC also operates specialty areas including Physical, Occupational and Speech therapy, as well as Recreational Therapy, Laboratory, Pharmacy, Social Work, Cardiopulmonary, and contracted Dental and Radiology services.

The Department offers a Respite Care Program at no charge designed to provide occasional periods of relief to the family member or caregiver of Veterans living in the community. Veterans are eligible for 28 days of respite care per 12 month period.

End of Life program provides special medical, psychological and spiritual care to the terminally ill. Pain management, special nursing visits, alternative therapies and volunteer companions are provided to comfort the Veteran Patient at end of life. A wide range of support and counseling services are available for Veteran Patients and their loved ones. These services include individual grief counseling, spiritual counseling, resource planning and assistance with end-of-life issues as needed.

Residential Facility

The average daily census for 2016-2017 was 184.80 veterans.

Substance Abuse Treatment/Recovery Support

Through a Memorandum of Understanding between the DVA and The Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS), substance abuse treatment and recovery support has continued to be provided to Veteran Residents residing at the Connecticut Department of Affairs by the Veteran's Recovery Center. The program provides Intensive Outpatient programming and various outpatient services. The program is staffed by a Clinical Psychologist, two Substance Abuse Counselors, and one Secretary. In FY2016-2017 a total of 56 individuals participated in the program, to include 45 DVA Veteran Residents, 10 National Guard Members, and one community Veteran (a former DVA resident who continued outpatient services).

Patriots' Landing Temporary Housing Program (Veteran Families)

The Patriots' Landing Program has been in operation since 2014. This program provides five single family homes as temporary housing to Veterans with families who are homeless or at risk for homelessness. All five houses are fully furnished and maintenance and all utilities are paid for by the DVA. Residential Facility staff work collaboratively with a Program and Case Manager provided through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Case management services ensure that each Veteran Family obtains the necessary benefits and services needed to successfully transition to permanent housing. For FY2016-2017, the average occupancy rate for Patriots' Landing was 93%.

Cemetery and Memorial Services Office

The State Veterans' Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 11,531 remains of Connecticut Veterans. The Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery has 1,550 Veterans interred on its grounds. The Spring Grove Cemetery closed for interments in 1964.

From July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017, 866 interments were performed at Connecticut State Veterans Cemeteries.

Projects and Operations Division

The following functions are teamed together: Safety and Security, Facilities Management, Information Technology and Project Planning into a division which is responsible for the physical maintenance of the three state veteran cemeteries and the DVA 92 acre campus in Rocky Hill. Projects and Operations brings together the operational support functions in an efficient, reliable, and coordinated manner focused on supporting the Agency's: mission, core functions, and customer satisfaction.

Improvements/Achievements 2016-2017

DVA-Wide 2016-2017

- Ribbon cutting for the 3,000 niche columbarium project at the State Veterans Cemetery in

Middletown to increase interment options for Connecticut Veterans. The improvement project was full funded by a \$3.4 million grant from the Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration.

- In early October, two Purple Heart parking spaces were dedicated for combat wounded Veterans. In total, four spaces were added to the campus to honor service members who have received the Purple Heart Medal.
- More than 1,000 Vietnam Veterans and their families attended the Vietnam 50th Commemoration Welcome Home event at the DVA campus in October 2016 where Veterans were awarded the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal.
- In November 2016, one Sailor and one Airman, whose cremated remains had been left unclaimed, were laid to rest with full military honors at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.
- We launched the Veteran Small Business Series: Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 with resources from local, state and federal organizations for Veterans looking to start or grow their own business.
- Partnered with Braveminds to begin offering their meal preparation program *Caregivers Kitchen* for Veterans and their spouses at the Commandant's House on the DVA's campus.
- Collaboration with Veteran Service Organizations throughout the state with quarterly meetings held at the DVA.
- Earlier this year, we celebrated 100 years of women in the service at the U.S. Veterans Affairs Connecticut locations in West Haven and Newington.

Office of Advocacy and Assistance 2016 – 2017

- Veteran Service Officer (VSO) training with the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC) continues by helping to improve service to Veterans.
- More than 3,000 Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medals were pinned on Veterans this year totaling more than 37,000 medals awarded since 2006.
- Municipal Veterans Representative training with 70 towns and cities represented. The next Municipal Veterans Representative training is scheduled for Thursday, September 14, 2017.

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center 2016 – 2017

- The Electronic Medical Records implementation continues to progress to eliminate paper records for Veteran Residents at the campus
- Medication Distribution System will fully deploy in August 2017

Residential Programs 2016 – 2017

- **Identification (ID) Card and Authorized Absence Procedure** – Signed April 4, 2016. The purpose is to maintain accountability for Veteran Residents admitted to the Residential Facility when not on the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Campus to ensure an accurate daily census for Federal per diem payment and to protect the general welfare and safety of Veteran Residents.
- **Veteran Residents' Personal Property** – Signed August 2, 2016. The Personal Property Policy outlines the guidelines for the following sections: Issued Items, Permitted Personal Items, Responsibilities and Prohibitions, and Discharge, Death, Claiming Property, and Abandon Property.
- **Veteran Resident Polices Replacing Repealed Regulations of State Agencies Sections 27-102l(d)-170 through 185 and Section 27-102l(d)-187** – Signed November 7, 2016. Updates were completed on the following sections for the Residential Facility: Veteran Handbook, Activities of Daily Living and Continued Residency, Motor Vehicles on DVA Campus, Inspection of Motor Vehicles, Packages and Containers, Residential Living Inspections, Accountability while in Residence, Resident Bed Assignment and Living Area, Pets and Animals, Prohibited Financial

Transactions, Off-Limits and Restricted Areas, Visitors, Possession and Consumption of Alcohol, and Medical Care.

- **Veteran Vocational & Therapeutic Program (VVTP)** – Signed December 15, 2016. The VVTP is designed to address the needs of the diverse Veteran Resident Population residing at the DVA Residential Facility. The vocational component is designed to assess a Veteran Resident's ability to return to gainful employment, improve basic work skills and to assist them in transitioning to independent living in the community. The Therapeutic component is intended to assist Veteran Residents not planning to return to gainful employment, an opportunity to engage in purposeful activity for social and therapeutic purposes as they plan to return to independent living. Participation is for a maximum of nine (9) months with two (2) possible extensions of three (3) month increments up to a total of fifteen (15) months.
- **Residential Program Fee Update** – Signed January 31, 2017. This policy update increases the number of months to four in which the Connecticut Veterans coming to participate in the DVA's Residential Program at no cost and modernizes the Program Fee for those Connecticut Veterans choosing to stay long-term to be income-based at thirty percent.
- **Veteran Transportation Services** –Signed February 6, 2017. Provides increased access and removes barriers to educational and employment opportunities for Veteran Residents who obtain full or part-time community-based employment or enroll in a degree or certificate program at an accredited institution of higher education and for other rehabilitation requirements by assuring transportation assistance to attend and be successful with these goals.

Vocational & Educational Services:

- 13 Veterans Residents from the Residential Facility obtained community gainful employment
- 2 Veterans from the Patriots' Landing Program obtained community gainful employment
- 3 Veteran Residents from the Residential Facility attended college degree programs
- 1 Veteran Resident attended a technical school training program
- 13 Completed Guard Card Training-Funded by Chrysalis Center, Inc.
- 1 Completed Fork Lift Operation Training-Funded by Chrysalis Center, Inc.
- 1 Completed Homemaker/Companion Training-Funded by Chrysalis Center, Inc.

Veterans Burial Services/Cemetery System 2016 – 2017

- Burial Services Office answered more than 16,000 inquiries and saved Veterans' families more than \$2,400,000 by utilizing DVA burial services.
- Burial Services Office collected \$371,910 in federal reimbursement burial allowances for the General Fund. Also, installation payments for 2,522 federal Veteran headstones/foot markers were processed totaling \$249,910.
- Burial Services continued to support dignified burial services six days a week at our State's two active Veteran's cemeteries

Safety and Security 2016 – 2017

- Conducted the Millstone Transportation Staging Area Drill on Sept 15, 2016. The agency received no deficiencies. The agency performed so well the Federal Emergency Management Agency uses a video of the drill as a nationwide training tool.
- Supported multiple local, state and federal agency security and safety training and exercises
- Hosted multiple local, state and federal agency meetings, trainings, and exercises. From January to April 2017, the agency hosted more than 400 persons at our facilities
- Conducted multiple fire alarm drills throughout the campus

- Conducted numerous inspections for safety and security concerns reported by users of the facilities
- Officers supported daily operations 24 hours a day and 7 days week with on average 5 critical responses daily for assistance, fire/security alarms, special transportation requests, missing persons, etc.

Facilities Management 2016 – 2017

- Completed a major ceiling space upgrade to the Main Dining Room – Ceiling, lighting, and fan replacement to increase energy efficiency and position the area for installation of automatic sprinklers at a later date
- Completed the upgrade of a computer and recreation focused room known as the “Veterans Entertainment and Technology Connection” or “VET Connection.” This room is critical to Veteran access to computerized healthcare information. This project utilized nearly 100% donated funds.
- Continued design phase of a campus wide fire alarm upgrade and sprinkler installation in the main dining room. This project will utilize \$3,100,630 federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.
- Began construction phase the replacement of an almost 50 year old 500 kw generator with a 1000kw generator meeting current electrical and fire codes for a health care environment. This project utilizes \$ 630,500 in Federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.
- Began construction phase on two break- thru projects at Middletown State Veterans Cemetery with a combined total of \$ 8,628,989. These projects are 100% federally funded by the U.S. Veterans Administration National Cemetery Administration. These projects will raise, realign, and clean existing headstones and expand the cemetery within current boundaries to preserve burial options for Veterans for the next seven to ten years.
- Provided transportation services for resident Veterans to medical appointments, activities, etc.

Information Technology 2016 – 2017

- Continued working the Electronic Medical Records scheduled for completion December 2017
- Completed the automation of pharmaceutical dispensing
- Completed the first phase of agency form automation.
- Began working projects to upgrade the agency’s website, start a mobile application and upgrade the Wifi platforms and fiber networks.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

Veterans requesting care from the DVA must be residents of the State of Connecticut at the time of application. A Veteran must have been discharged with other than a dishonorable discharge and be a current resident of the State of Connecticut. Application for admission may be requested in advance. Fact sheets detailing admission requirements are available along with a general information booklet, or consult our website at www.ct.gov/ctva.

Human Resources

The Human Resources department provides support and assistance to employees. This includes recruitment, staffing and personnel transactions such as position vacancies, employee leaves, retirement, Family and Medical Leave Act, Workers Compensation and management of all position actions in

CORE- CT. The Human Resources department also oversees all labor relation activities including collective bargaining, discipline, investigations as well as providing guidance to managers and supervisors regarding employee relation issues.

Affirmative Action

The DVA's Affirmative Action Plan is filed biennially and is in compliance with the requirements of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, pursuant to the Regulations for Affirmative Action by State Government, Sections 46a-68-31 to 46a-68-74. The DVA is strongly committed to equal employment. Affirmative action and equal employment are immediate and priority objectives and they play an important and necessary role in all stages of the employment process. The DVA continues to monitor and improve its practices in employment and contracting, giving special consideration to affirmative action goal attainment.

Fiscal Updates

The Fiscal Office continues working with Agency departments to achieve reductions as required by the Governor and OPM in FY17. The DVA's FY17 Operating Expenses (OE) was reduced 29% and the Personal Services (PS) was reduced 5% comparing to FY16 appropriations.

The DVA continues to be innovative applying a fiscally strategic service model to meet the challenges of budget constraints by employing a fiscally conservative approach to managing our bottom line. The Agency closed FY17 with a balanced budget across all appropriated fund categories.

Special Events

Stand Down - Our signature event, Stand Down brings together more than 70 agencies and social service organizations for Veterans for services such as medical and dental screenings, employment and educational assistance, legal and motor vehicle help, state and federal Veterans Affairs benefits information, and housing referrals. Transportation is also provided through the Connecticut Department of Transportation. In 2016, more than 900 Veterans attended Stand Down.

Veterans Hall of Fame - Since its inception in 2005, we have received over 100 nominations annually for this award that recognizes Veterans who no longer wear the uniform but continue their selfless service to their communities. Nomination packets must be submitted to the DVA by September 29th at 4:00 p.m. to be considered for the honor. Visit our site for an application and for nomination qualifications: www.ct.gov/ctva.

“Heroes for Hire” – The DVA continues to partner with the Department of Labor in organizing and supporting Veteran job fairs around the state in an effort to match qualified Veterans with businesses and organizations interested in hiring them.

Veterans Day Ceremony - The DVA held a ceremony on campus for Veterans residing on the campus that brought state and local officials out to celebrate Veterans.

Volunteer Services

Volunteers logged over 4,000 hours in support of Veterans Home activities. Volunteers are comprised of individuals who volunteer their time with Veterans on campus, as well as community

groups who come in to complete specific projects on the grounds of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Stand Down 2016: A state-wide outreach held at the Department providing services to homeless and needy veterans, was another success. More than 900 veterans attended the event which was held on the grounds of the Veterans' Home in Rocky Hill. Over 50 state, federal and private agencies attended and provided assistance and resource information to Veterans in need. In addition, there were over 250 Volunteers supporting the event along with numerous monetary and in-kind donations. Stand Down 2017 is scheduled for Friday, September 22, 2017.