

Department of Veterans Affairs

At a Glance

Commissioner: THOMAS J. SAADI

Established: 1986

Statutory authority: C.G.S. Chapter 506 Sec: 27-103-27-37

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

Number of full-time employees: 194

Recurring operating expenses 2017-2018: \$25,513,582

Agency generated revenue 2018-2019: \$26,339,808

[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.

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

The Healthcare Center provides continuous professional comprehensive healthcare to Veteran Patients requiring twenty four hour nursing care. 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. In addition, the focus is on patient centered care whereby the Veteran's preferences are honored and reflected in the plan of care.

Healthcare Center Program Descriptions:

The Veterans' Health Care program is a major element of the Department's operations. The program offers progressive care including social, recreational and rehabilitative services dedicated to professional excellence. The Health Care Center 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 Healthcare Center is licensed by the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health as a 125 bed Chronic and Convalescent Nursing Home. The Center opened its doors to the growing Veteran Patient community in October, 2008. Under the direction of the Healthcare Services Administrator, the medical, nursing, spiritual and rehabilitation professionals provide ongoing patient centered care to the Veterans.

The Center offers twenty-four hour quality health care to Veteran Patients with chronic and disabling medical conditions whose needs require specialized care. We treat a wide array of diagnosis including, 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, 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.

The Rehabilitation Program offers physical, speech, and occupational therapy where Veterans can increase strengthening and physical function under the supervision of professionals. The rehab program also contributes to increased quality in their overall mental health and well-being. The gym is well equipped and features large windows and a beautiful view of the picturesque campus.

The 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.

To be eligible for admittance, a Veteran requesting care at the John L. Levitow Healthcare Center must be a resident of the State of Connecticut and have served honorably. Applications for admission are required in advance and contain both a financial and medical component. Applicants are screened in accordance with state and federal guidelines as well as DVA policies.

Residential Facility

The Residential Facility is available to veterans seeking assistance to improve their overall quality of life after having suffered from the grave effects of being homeless, unemployed and challenged with addiction, medical and mental health problems. Veteran Residents have the opportunity to utilize a

continuum of rehabilitation services which include shelter, food, an initial issuance of basic clothing and essential personal products, social work, clinic services, recreation, compensated work therapy program, vocational training, 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 have access to treatment also provided by (DMHAS) through a Memorandum of Understanding. Collaboration with our Federal and State partners, as well as local non-profits ensures Veteran Residents have access to any and all benefits and services they are eligible for. Individualized goals are established with regular follow up to ensure the greatest success possible in preparing Veteran Residents to return to independent living. For the 2018/2019 fiscal year, 36 Veteran Residents were admitted and 26 Veteran Residents successfully discharged back into the community. The average daily census for 2018-2019 was 124.64 veterans.

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 12,884 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 1980.

Public Service

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) is responsible for assisting veterans and their families in accessing federal, state and local benefits and entitlements. Veterans Service Officers, accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, assist veterans and their families with documentation and filing of claims for disability, compensation and/or pension. Staff offices are located in each of the five Congressional Districts (Bridgeport, Waterbury, Milford, Newington and Norwich) and include bilingual staff and a woman's veterans' services coordinator. Additional advocacy work is performed throughout the state on a staff available, rotating basis at satellite office locations and through numerous outreach events (Job/Senior and Health Fairs throughout the state). Veterans Service Officers also conduct interviews in skilled nursing facilities throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted and ascertain which benefits these veterans are currently receiving and/or entitled to receive.

This year OA&A serviced 2,880 walk-in veterans and/or dependents; answered over 33,229 telephone inquiries; acquired 1101 new clients and filed 1344 new claims and reopened hundreds of existing claims. Special outreach included 89 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 \$2.9 million in new income and benefits to Connecticut veterans and their families.

In Fiscal Year 2018-2019, the Office of Advocacy and Assistance also reviewed the eligibility status of more than 1000 veterans and/or dependents of veterans in the state’s 344 skilled nursing homes and assisted living facilities. These benefits have provided a direct savings to the state where the clients are Medicaid recipients and in other cases served to delay the time when clients may be forced to rely on state funded services.

OA&A also manages the Connecticut Wartime Service Medals and Registry program and this year awarded over 1,305 additional medals – bringing the total number of Wartime Service Medals awarded to eligible veterans since 2006 to over 40,000 recipients. The agency has helped coordinate and support over 30 award ceremonies across the state enabling veterans to be presented their medals in person. Currently there are over 300,000 veterans registered with the Connecticut Veterans electronic registry.

OA&A manages the Veterans Identity on the CT Driver’s License Program. The office is responsible for verifying the service of the CT Veteran and transmitting that information to the CT-Dept. of Motor Vehicles with 1,619 applications processed during this period. Since the inception of the program in January 2013, more than 12,000 applications have been processed by this office.

OA&A provides training for all town, city and municipal veterans representatives. This program provides a single source point of contact in the veteran’s hometown to act as a liaison for veteran’s benefits and services. To date, more than 130 towns have appointed a veteran’s representative and nearly 200 volunteers have completed a benefits training seminar since the training was first offered in Oct 2012.

The Connecticut Veterans INFO line (1-866-9CT-VETS) continues to receive an average of 30 calls per day. This popular number provides veterans an easy access to general benefit information, assistance with requesting military records, referrals to other state agencies, and helpful information on the location and availability of the Congressional District Office.

Residential Facility Programs/Services:

New or Revised Policies

Code of Conduct for Department of Veterans Affairs Main Dining Room Revised – January 30, 2019. The purpose is to maintain decorum in the Main Dining Room for Veteran Residents admitted to the Residential Facility. The policy outlines proper attire, hygiene and behavior in the main dining room.

New or Revised Policies

An MOA with Easter Seals was signed to provide those VVTP Participants who would like to obtain community employment with assistance. Those VVTP Participants interested in utilizing these services will be referred to Easter Seals by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Coordinator.

A review and update of the Veteran Vocational & Therapeutic (VVTP) was completed and a new policy was introduced on November 24, 2018. The new policy is scheduled to become effective on

January 3, 2019. Much of the policy remained the same with changes in the following section:

Section 4. TIME LIMITS:

- a. Veteran Residents participating in the VVTP will have a maximum of twenty four (24) months participation.
 1. If at the end of a twelve (12) month period, a Veteran Participant has not found outside employment and wishes to continue with the VVTP, the Veteran Participant must provide the following:
 - i. Documentation of a “good faith effort” in the pursuit of finding outside employment at regular intervals;
 - ii. Documented attendance at employment skills classes, such as resume writing or computer training;
 - iii. Be compliant with either IEP or IAP;
 - iv. Be compliant with any other recommended courses of action as directed by the Residential Facility Director or designee; and
 - v. Be compliant with monthly Residential Facility program fees.
 2. After twelve months VVTP Participants who are in compliance with the above can apply for an additional twelve (12) months of program participation. An initial extension request shall be subject to review and approval by the Residential Facility Director or designee.

Section 5. EXTENDED PROGRAM PARTICIPATION:

- a. In circumstances where a Veteran Participant has been unable to secure lasting and sustainable community based employment at the end of their twenty four (24) months of participation, due to circumstances beyond Resident Veteran’s control including, but not limited to:
 - 1.Past criminal convictions;
 - 2.Age limitations;
 - 3.Medical, Mental Health or Physical limitations, and wishes to continue with the VVTP, the Resident Participant may request consideration for Extended Program Participation (EPP).
- b. Veteran Participant may be eligible for Extended Program Participation (EPP). The EPP allows the Veteran Resident to continue to perform basic moderate vocational activities, to improve their economic situation and to continue to engage in purposeful activity for social and therapeutic purposes.
- c. The request for EPP participation will be reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Treatment Team which will make a recommendation to the Residential Facility Director. The Residential Facility Director will take the recommendation to the Commissioner or designee thereof, for review. The Commissioner or designee may waive the 24 month period and allow the Veteran Participant to continue under the EPP.
- d. Continued Extended Program Participation will be reviewed quarterly by the Interdisciplinary Treatment Team to determine continued participation.

Section 6. HOURS OF PARTICIPATION:

- a. The maximum number of hours bi-weekly for participants under the VVTP is set at sixty (60) hours with no more than six (6) hours per day.

- b. The maximum number of hours bi-weekly for participants under the Extended Program Participation is set at forty (40) hours with no more than four (4) hours per day.

As part of the implementation of the new program policy Commissioner Saadi placed a moratorium on the 24 month cap on participation for current Veteran Participants seeking EPP eligibility. The moratorium is good through May 1, 2019 allowing current participants to be evaluated for potential Extend Participation in the program. The Vocational Coordinator has begun meeting with all VVTP Participants to review their goals and objectives, review progress made and to determine who may request consideration for extend participation.

Vocational & Educational Services:

- **7** Veterans Residents from the Residential Facility obtained community gainful employment
- **1** Veterans from the Patriots' Landing Program obtained community gainful employment)
- **5** Veteran Residents from the Residential Facility attended college degree programs
- **1** Veteran Resident attended a technical school training program

Chrysalis Services:

- 1 CPR/First Aid Certification - Funded by Chrysalis Center, Inc. – September 2018
- 1 Completed Guard Card Training-Funded by Chrysalis Center, Inc. – April 2019

Substance Abuse Treatment/Recovery Support

Through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs 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 Outpatient programming and various outpatient services to DVA Veterans as well as to CT Veterans and National Guard members in the community. The program is staffed by a Clinical Psychologist, one Substance Abuse Counselor, and one Secretary. In FY2018-2019 a total of 47 individuals participated in the program, to include 33 DVA Veteran Residents and 14 National Guard Members. If you need additional information let me know.

Patriots' Landing Temporary Housing Program (Veteran Families)

The Patriots' Landing Program has been in operation since 2014. This program offers temporary housing to veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk for homelessness. The Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs provides physical housing for up to five veteran families. All five houses are fully furnished and maintenance and utilities are covered by the agency. 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 FY2018-2019, we had two discharges to independent living and two admissions to the program with the average occupancy rate for Patriots' Landing during this period of 93.76.

Cemetery and Memorial Services Office

The State Veterans' Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 11,500 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 1980.

From July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019, 687 interments were performed at Connecticut State Veterans Cemeteries.

Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2018-2019

DVA-Wide 2018-2019

- In the Residential Facility completed the renovation of living space in C Wing of the East Residential Building. This project created 24 semi private independent living spaces. Previously this area housed up to four residents for a total of 48 residents. This project was wholly funded by donated funds. This project program is known as DVA Quality of Life Improvements This project serves as a template for additional renovations of the residential rooms in other wings of the Residential Facility.
- In order to enhance safety and quality of life the DVA opened bids on January 30, 2019 to upgrade the residential buildings 2, 3 and 4 consistent with the American With Disability Act (ADA). This project utilizes more than \$1,617,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.
- As part of the continued effort to improve safety campus wide the Agency moved forward into construction phase for a campus wide fire alarm upgrade project and sprinkler installation in the Residential Facility Main Dining Room. This project was made possible through more than \$2,000,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.
- At the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown the Agency made great progress with the construction phase on two major projects which will raise, realign, and clean existing headstones and expand the cemetery burial capacity within current boundaries to preserve burial options for Veterans for the next decade or more. These projects totaling \$8,628,989 are 100% federally funded by the U.S. Veterans Administration National Cemetery Administration.
- Also for the DVA Cemetery Services Program a comprehensive master plan was completed in March of 2019 which focused on the capacity of current cemeteries in Middletown and Rock Hill. This study revealed a window of 10-12 years of burial services availability. If burial services increase this window will certainly close sooner possibly 8 – 10 years. The CT DVA will now look at options disclosed in this master plan to insure burial options for Connecticut's more than 185,000 Veterans and eligible spouses remain at a state operating and federally supported Veterans Cemetery.

Office of Advocacy and Assistance 2018 – 2019

- More than 1,125 Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medals were pinned on Veterans this year

totaling more than 40,000 medals awarded since 2006.

- OA&A conducted the annual Municipal Veterans Representative Training (Vet Reps) on May 3rd and over 180 Vet Reps were trained to assist veterans. This training was in partnership with CT Department of Labor and the Small Business Administration to highlight other veteran services outside of this agency.

Veterans Burial Services/Cemetery System 2018 – 2019

- Burial Services Office answered more than 8,000 inquiries and saved Veterans' families more than \$2,160,000 by utilizing DVA burial services.
- Burial Services Office collected \$366,649 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 2018 – 2019

- CT State Police mock active shooter training scenario on DVA grounds with role players from CT. State College.
- CT State Police train DVA Managers on Active Shooter scenarios on Run, Hide, Fight.
- Conducted Millstone Transportation Staging Area Drill.
- Partnered with State agencies and hosted several meetings and workshops on DVA grounds.
- Supported contractors and agency needs for daily operations during Chiller replacement.
- Supported agency needs for daily operations during power shut down for generator replacement.
- Conducted several fire drills throughout the agency.
- Conducted In-Service training for all employees.
- Supported Middletown cemetery for multiple events such as Wreaths Across American and Memorial Day events by assisting with parking detail.

Projects and Operations Management 2018 – 2019

Projects and Operations brings together the following Agency operations: facilities maintenance, planning, information technology, and project management with the collective responsibility for three state veteran cemeteries and a 92 acre campus with more than 600,000 square feet of facilities. Projects and Operations functions in coordinated direction to support the Agency's mission, core functions, and customer satisfaction. Many of the DVA wide projects reported in herein above are also set forth in this Projects and Operations report. Directorate of Projects and Operations 2018 - 2019

Facilities Operations / Management / Planning Accomplishments for 2018 – 2019

- Completed the replacement of a 200 ton chiller for the Sgt John L. Levitow Healthcare Center.
- Completed the Connecticut Department of Veteran Affairs Cemetery Services Master Plan. This seminal project studied the current capacity of the Department's two active cemeteries and determined, looking out as far as 60 years, when a significant expansion or new state veteran's cemetery is necessary for Connecticut's Veterans. The Middletown State Veterans Cemetery began interment services in 1985 and is experiencing an upgrade now to lengthen its availability for only an estimated 15 years.
- Moved to construction phase of a renovation project titled Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Improvements to Residential Facilities. This project utilizes more than \$ 1,600,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.

- Began construction of a campus wide fire alarm upgrade and sprinkler installation in the main dining room. This project utilizes more than \$2,000,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program. The project will be complete in Fall 2019.
- Continued construction phase on two break-thru projects at Middletown State Veterans Cemetery with a combined total of \$ 8,628,989 in federal funds from 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 15 years.
- Supported numerous veteran support activities at the main campus in Rocky Hill and at our three cemeteries; Wreaths Across America, 2nd Annual AT&T Veterans 3 Miler, and a small business seminar in conjunction with the Federal Small Business Administration's National Veterans Small Business Week for Veterans opening or growing a small business
- Provided transportation services for resident Veterans and outside Veterans using the Federal VA system to medical appointments, activities, etc.
- Worked with local volunteers who support maintenance and upkeep at the Darien State Veterans Cemetery, the original Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery
- Worked with several volunteer organizations on maintenance and upkeep support at the DVA main campus
- Assisted with the licensing transition of the Sgt John L. Levitow Healthcare Center from a Chronic Disease Hospital to Skilled Nursing Facility.
- Completed installation of a new water main for domestic water supply to Patriots Landing Veteran's Homes and Dinosaur State Park
- Completed renovation/upgrade of 24 semi private residential rooms in B Wing of Building 4
- Completed two level I energy audits of the DVA Main Campus utility services and utilized utility funding to initiate energy efficiency measures
- Serve on the Governor's Senior Steering Committee and serve as the Project Team Lead for establishing best acceptable practices for state agencies to achieve energy goals

Information Technology Accomplishments for 2018 – 2019

- Maintained the electronic medical records system to improve clinical service delivery to residents
- Continued improvements and updating of the DVA website to better inform Veterans and their families
- Continued improving one of the best Veterans "Apps" which provides fingertip access to vital services for Veterans and those wanting to support Veterans
- Continued to support the CT DVA cyber training environment with monthly trainings for staff

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.portal.ct.gov/DVA.

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

Fiscal Office continues working with Agency departments to prioritize expenditures in order to achieve reductions as required by the Governor and OPM in FY18. The DVA's FY18 Operating Expenses (OE) was reduced 3% and the Personal Services (PS) was reduced 11.4% comparing to FY17 expenditures.

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 and to meet our core mission of "serve those who served".

Special Events

Stand Down - Our signature event, Stand Down brings together more than 75 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 2018, 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 23rd at 4:00 p.m. to be considered for the honor.

"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.

Vietnam & Korean Veteran Ceremonies – The DVA in conjunction with the Lieutenant Governor's

office have been traveling the state honoring Vietnam & Korean Veterans weekly. Vietnam Veterans are presented with the Vietnam Veteran Pin and Korean Veterans are presented with the “Korea Reborn” commemoration book. These events will continue throughout the next fiscal year as well.

Volunteer Services

Volunteers continue to log in 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 2018: 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 75 state, federal and private agencies attended and provided assistance and resource information to Veterans in need. In addition, there were over 300 Volunteers supporting the event along with numerous monetary and in-kind donations. Stand Down 2019 is scheduled for Friday, September 20, 2019.

Community Partnerships

Saluting Branches – September 20, 2018 - Arborists from around the east coast spent the day at the Middletown Veterans Cemetery providing approximately \$100,000.00 worth of in-kind services from cutting down trees, grinding and removing tree stumps, trimming trees and hedges, planting new trees, etc. They will be providing these same services again on September 13, 2019.

C-Wing Quality of Life Improvement Project – June 2019 volunteers and donors from: Bob’s Discount Furniture, VFW Post 146 Lyme-Old Lyme, ROTO FRANK America, CT CPCU Society Chapter, CT Judicial Branch CSSD Training Academy & Community Services, Cigna Corp. and Aspen RE provided approximately \$50,000.00 worth of funding and volunteer services to create a wing of semi-private living quarters for veterans utilizing residential services on campus. B-Wing Quality of Life Improvement Project scheduled for completion September 2019 with similar community partnerships.

Campus Cross-Walk Lighted Signage – In May 2019, the State of CT VFW donated cross-walk lighted signage campus-wide to provide additional safety measures for Veterans, staff and visitors on campus. This project totaled \$40,000.00.

Giving Days - Companies and Organizations from across CT consistently providing a day of service on the grounds of DVA and at the Middletown and Rocky Hill Veteran Cemeteries. This service consists of grounds work, weeding, planting flowers, trimming grass & hedges, cleaning up fallen debris, painting and assisting with basic administrative duties such as filing, storing old document, purging documents to be sent to storage or destroyed. In 2018-2019 Cigna, Medtronics, Aspen RE and several other organizations participated in Giving Days. These services are priceless and enhance the quality of life and appearance of our grounds for Veterans on the DVA campus and those utilizing the State Veterans Cemeteries.