Department of Veterans’ Affairs

AGENCY dESCRIPTION

The mission of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) is to serve Connecticut’s veterans by advocating for veterans’ interests and assisting them in obtaining entitlements and benefits through the Office of Advocacy and Assistance. In addition, the agency provides direct health, social and rehabilitative services through the Veterans’ Health Care Facility, residential facility and rehabilitative services programs. These services are provided on the campus of the Veterans’ Home and Hospital in Rocky Hill.

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

## Statutory Reference

C.G.S. Sections 27-102l through 27-137.

## Statement of Need and Program Objectives

To guide the development of agency policy as well as provide administrative direction and support. To ensure compliance with laws, rules and regulations governing the operations of the department through the establishment, revision and distribution of agency policies and by reviewing the procedures used to implement those policies.

## Program Description

The Office of the Commissioner is tasked with administrative authority for the department; outreach to veterans and community agencies; liaisons with legislature, statutory and legislative authorities and veterans service organizations; assessment of the efficiency of programs and evaluation and development of new initiatives to better serve 280,000 Connecticut veterans and their families. The Office of the Commissioner also provides overall administrative support to all agency programs through human resource activities, fiscal/administrative services and information technology services.

In addition, the Office of the Commissioner provides comprehensive short and long-term planning services, ensures compliance with regulations and is responsible for safety compliance and security.

Office of Advocacy and Assistance

## Statutory Reference

C.G.S. Sections 27-102l through 27-137.

## Statement of Need and Program Objectives

To provide comprehensive assistance and formal representation to veterans, their spouses and/or eligible dependents in obtaining rights, benefits and privileges to which they may be entitled under federal, state and local laws.

## Program Description

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OAA) operates five regional offices staffed with Veterans’ Service Officers (VSOs) who provide advice, assistance and formal representation to the state's veterans - administering the process of obtaining comprehensive rights, benefits and privileges to which they are entitled under law. OAA VSOs have assisted thousands of veterans in preparing and presenting benefit claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs, resulting in tens of millions in federal dollars flowing into the state in the form of increased benefits to Connecticut veterans and their families. OAA also publishes numerous brochures including *Office of Advocacy and Assistance*, *State of Connecticut Veterans’ Benefits* and *Reference Guide for Connecticut Veterans, Active Duty, National Guard and Reserves* that help explain the complex federal and state laws that govern health care and financial services for veterans and their dependents.

OAA cooperates with service organizations in disseminating information and furnishing counsel to resident veterans concerning the availability of educational training and retraining facilities; health, medical, rehabilitation and housing opportunities; and employment and reemployment services and other rights, benefits or privileges.

The Cemetery and Memorial Services unit is responsible for processing all necessary paperwork for burial in state cemeteries at Rocky Hill and Middletown for veterans and their eligible dependents. Additionally, the unit pre-approves those who wish to establish eligibility for burial planning purposes.

OAA also processes the applications for, and issues, the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal and maintains the corresponding State Veterans Registry database.

Veterans’ Health Care Services

## Statutory Reference

C.G.S. Sections 27-102l through 27-126.

## Statement of Need and Program Objectives

The John L. Levitow Healthcare Center provides inpatient healthcare covering an array of services, from rehabilitation to long-term nursing, dementia and end of life care. An individual plan of care is developed and continually updated throughout the veteran’s stay to assist the veteran in reaching his/her maximum potential.

## Program Description

The Veterans’ healthcare program offers a progressive, caring continuum of health care and social and rehabilitative services.

The Healthcare Center is licensed by the State Department of Public Health as a Chronic Disease Hospital with 125 beds. The center opened its doors to the growing veteran community in October, 2008.  Under the direction of the Healthcare Services Administrator, the medical staff and nursing department provide ongoing comprehensive medical and rehabilitation services in order to improve every aspect of care for each veteran served.

DVA offers 24 hour healthcare to veterans with chronic and disabling medical conditions. Programs include general medical care, Alzheimer’s and related dementia care, end of life care, palliative care, long term care, rehabilitation, respite care, mental health and psychological counseling and a formal substance abuse rehabilitation program. Primary care clinics are available for veterans in the healthcare facility and residents in the residential facility. In addition to medicine and nursing, specialty areas include physical, occupational, speech and recreational therapy, laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, social work, cardiopulmonary and dental.

The Special Care Unit provides a safe, structured environment for veterans with Alzheimer’s disease or other related dementias.

The Respite Care Program provides intermittent care to disabled veterans in an inpatient setting for the purpose of providing relief to family members or caregivers. Veterans are eligible for 28 days of respite care per calendar year.

The End of Life and Palliative Care Program provides special medical, psychological and spiritual needs to terminally ill veterans. Pain management, special nursing visits, alternative therapies and volunteer companions are provided to comfort individuals at end of life. A wide range of support and counseling, including individual and grief counseling, spiritual counseling, resource planning and assistance with end-of-life issues are provided.

The Recovery Support Rehabilitation Program provides education, motivation and environmental support for veterans seeking recovery from substance abuse. Veterans who are committed to their recovery from drug and/or alcohol addictions receive a concentrated program of treatment, work opportunities and community service.

Residential and Rehabilitative Services

## Statutory Reference

C.G.S. Sections 27-102l through 27-126

## Statement of Need and Program Objectives

To provide homeless and needy veterans a domiciliary level of care to facilitate rehabilitation and a return to independent living.

## Program Description

The basic philosophy of the Residential and Rehabilitative Services (RRS) Program is to facilitate rehabilitation of all its residents. Rehabilitation includes medical care, substance abuse treatment, social work services, recreational services, educational and vocational services, job training and supportive housing. The ultimate goal is to return productive citizens capable of independent living.

The Recovery Support program provides education, group activities, motivation and environmental support for veterans seeking recovery from substance abuse.

In the Social Work Services program, each new resident is assigned a social worker. Social workers provide case management services to residents to manage a variety of issues. They can assist residents in resolving problems with finances, family, legal matters and eventual housing needs upon discharge. They can also assist them in pursuing any disability and retirement benefits for which they may be eligible.

The Veterans Work program for residents includes the ability to participate in a compensated work program earning minimum wage, receiving vocational counseling and testing to develop realistic future career goals. The program also provides assistance in attending local colleges and training institutions to enhance marketability, develop a resume and learn interview skills that can result in job placement.

Recreational activitiesincluding bingo, table games, pool tournaments, weekly bowling leagues, softball, basketball and volleyball teams, movies and pet therapy are available on the campus.  Community trips to professional ballgames, theater, fishing excursions, shopping malls and local organizations are also available and encouraged.

The Residential Facility is certified by the federal Department of Veterans’ Affairs and has 488 licensed beds.