



# **Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Fiscal Year 2021-2022**



**Thomas J. Saadi**  
**Commissioner**

## ***At a Glance***

**Commissioner:** Thomas J. Saadi

**Established:** 1986

**Statutory Authority:** C.G.S. Chapter 506 Sec. 27-102l - 27-137

**Central Office:** 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

**Number of Full-Time Employees:** 227

**Recurring Operating Expenses 2021-2022:** \$25,534,948

**Agency Generated Revenue 2021-2022:** \$23,923,796

**Organizational Structure:** Executive Branch State Agency- Office of the Commissioner oversees all aspects of the agency which has the four core function areas of Long-Term Skilled Nursing Healthcare, Residential Programs & Services, Office of Advocacy & Assistance and Cemetery and Memorial Services. These four core functions are supported by additional agency divisions as follows: Projects & Operations, Facilities, Food Services, Human Resources, Fiscal and Procurement, Safety and Security, and Intergovernmental and Community Affairs. Each division has a manager who reports directly to the Commissioner.

## **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 healthcare 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 1986. Today the DVA provides Connecticut's nearly 180,000 Veterans with four core services: (1) Skilled Nursing Long-Term Care and Rehabilitation, (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 assist Veterans and eligible dependents in applying for and accessing 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 under federal, state, and local laws; skilled nursing 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 agency. 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, healthcare 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 180,000 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 female VSOs.

Additionally, advocacy work is performed throughout the state on a staff available, rotating basis at satellite office locations and through numerous jobs, 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 and obtain the benefits to which they are entitled.

## **Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center**

The Healthcare Center provides continuous professional comprehensive skilled nursing care 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 healthcare 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 Description:

The Veterans' Healthcare program is a major element of the agency's operations. The program offers progressive care including social, recreational and rehabilitative services dedicated to professional excellence. The Healthcare 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 Skilled Nursing Facility. The Healthcare Center opened the doors to its current brand new, state-of-the-art facility to the growing Veteran Patient community in 2008. Under the direction of the Healthcare Services Administrator, the medical, nursing, spiritual and rehabilitation professionals provide ongoing patient-centered care to Veterans.

The Healthcare Center offers twenty-four hour quality healthcare to Veteran Patients who require skilled nursing care. We treat a wide array of diagnoses 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, and 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 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. 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 for which they are eligible. 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 2021-2022 fiscal year, 28 Veteran Residents were admitted, and 8 Veteran Residents successfully discharged back into the community. The average daily census for 2021-2022 was 100.17 (Residential Facility and Patriot's Landing combined) and 95.24 (for the Residential Facility only).

Major upgrades were recently completed in the Residential Facility, including new ADA compliant ramps, doors, and elevators, the fitness center was updated with new equipment and all residents' rooms have been renovated from four-person open bay style rooms to semi-private two-person rooms with new furniture.

### **Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services**

The Department operates a full-time Cemetery and Memorial Services Office at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus, which 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 15,201 remains of Connecticut Veterans and their spouses. The Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery is reserved for the burials of Veterans residing at the DVA Residential Facility and Healthcare Center. 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 (VSOs), 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 female VSOs. 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.

In Fiscal Year 2021-2022, OA&A continued its advocacy work despite lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The OA&A team is returning to full, in office services while maintaining the capability to provide services remotely. The advocacy and outreach efforts resulted in over \$3 million in new income and benefits to Connecticut Veterans and their families.

In Fiscal Year 2021-2022, the Office of Advocacy and Assistance continued to review the eligibility status 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 473 additional medals – bringing the total number of Wartime Service Medals awarded to eligible Veterans since 2006 to over 40,000 recipients.

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 1921 applications processed during this period. Since the inception of the program in January 2013, more than 14,000 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 148 towns have appointed a Veteran's representative and over 250 volunteers have completed a benefits training seminar since the training was first offered in October 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 Offices.

### **Residential Facility Programs/Services**

#### **New or Revised Policies**

- Marijuana Policy effective date July 1, 2021, providing the use and possession of marijuana in any form is prohibited on campus as the DVA receives significant Federal VA funding for capital improvements, and the state General Fund receives per-diem grant funds from the Federal VA for each veteran in the DVA's care.
- Temporary Residential Inspections Policy updated December 13, 2021.
- Program Fee Policy revised January 18, 2022 reducing the Program Fee amount to 25% of applicable income with program fee exception for those with income of \$500 or less.
- Main Dining Room Code (MDR) of Conduct revised April 2, 2022, providing for removal of food from the MDR
- COVID-19 Residential Isolation Procedures updated effective April 11, 2022, providing detailed process to follow for residents placed in isolation.
- Health and Safety Protocols to Mitigate Risk of Exposure to COVID-19, initially issued on March 12, 2020 with various revisions made during the COVID-19 pandemic with the latest updated revisions completed effective April 11, 2022.
- Care and Treatment of Patients, Residents and clients updated May 13, 2022.
- Veteran Resident Violence and Bullying Policy dated June 1, 2022.

#### **Vocational Department**

The Vocational Department continues to make referrals for Veteran Residents to receive employment readiness and job search assistance from our community partners at the CT Department of Labor.

The Vocational Department continues to provide transportation services to Veteran Residents to assist them in commuting to work, attending college or other training programs, court appointments, probation appointments and housing appointments.

During the fiscal year, the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on society as a whole created some difficult challenges for those Veteran Residents who were enrolled in school, who were employed and out of work for a time, and those seeking employment. The Vocational Department

continued to provide support and guidance to the Veteran Residents to achieve their educational and vocational goals. Support and guidance were also provided to those who were employed to assist them in maintaining their current employment. Even with these challenges, Veteran Residents have continued to obtain employment, attend educational and training programs, and obtain volunteer opportunities.

### **Veteran Vocational & Therapeutic Program**

The Veteran Vocational & Therapeutic Program (VVTP) had 33 participants for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. VVTP is designed to address the needs of the diverse Veteran Resident population at the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Residential Facility. The vocational component is designed to assess a Veteran Resident's ability to return to gainful community-based employment, improve basic work skills, and to assist the Veteran 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.

**Time Limits:** Veteran Residents participating in the Veteran Vocational & Therapeutic Program (VVTP) have a maximum of twenty four (24) months of participation.

If at the end of the first initial 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:

- Documentation of a “good faith effort” in the pursuit of finding outside employment at regular intervals;
- Documented attendance at employment skills classes, such as resume writing or computer training;
- Be compliant with either IEP or IAP;
- Be compliant with any other recommended courses of action as directed by the Residential Facility Director or designee; and
- Be compliant with monthly Residential Facility program fees.

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.

**Extended Program Participation:** 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 the Veteran’s control including, but not limited to:

- Past criminal convictions;
- Age limitations;
- Medical, Mental Health or Physical limitations,

and the Veteran wishes to continue with the VVTP, the Veteran Resident Participant may request consideration 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.

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.

Continued Extended Program Participation will be reviewed quarterly by the Interdisciplinary Treatment Team to determine continued participation

**Hours of Participation:** 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.

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.

### **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 Residential Facility. The Veteran's Recovery Center 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 Licensed Clinical Social Worker, one Substance Abuse Counselor, and one Secretary. In 2021-2022 fiscal year, 45 clients were served, of which 25 were DVA Veteran Residents, and 20 National Guard Service Members.

### **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 2021-2022 fiscal year, we had 0 discharges to independent living and 1 admission to the program with the average occupancy rate for Patriots' Landing during this period of 100%.

### **Cemetery and Memorial Services Office**

The State Veterans' Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 15,000 remains of Connecticut Veterans. The Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery has more than 1600 Veterans interred on its grounds. The Spring Grove Cemetery closed for interments in 1980.



From July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022, 841 interments were performed at Connecticut State Veterans Cemeteries.

## **Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2021-2022**

### **DVA-Wide 2021-2022**

- The DVA began a self-help program in 2019 to improve the quality of life (QOL) in the Residential Program. This Residential QOL Program focuses on configuring living spaces to semi-private living quarters from four beds to a room with two beds separated by a T wall. The program is also improving common spaces with enhanced cleaning and painting. As the COVID-19 pandemic arrived at the DVA, this program became critical to complete. The work continued during this fiscal year to a point where now approximately 172 beds are in this new semi-private configuration. The DVA completed this effort in Spring 2022.
- The DVA Residential QOL program is also improving the safety and appearance of other areas of the residential complex. The DVA auditorium is receiving upgrades which will enhance its flexibility as a multi-purpose center. Upgrades in progress are the following: new curtains, hardwood floor repairs and refinishing, new lighting, painting, and ADA accessibility improvements. The initial improvements are complete with follow-on added improvements scheduled for completion by Spring 2023.
- The DVA Cemetery and Memorial Services Program continued to work on executing its comprehensive master plan that was completed in March of 2019. This plan focuses on the capacity of current cemeteries in Middletown and Rocky Hill. This master plan revealed a window of 10-12 years of burial services availability. If burial services increase, this window will close sooner at possibly 8-10 years. Over the last year, many more Veterans and their families chose the Middletown State Veterans Cemetery as their final resting place. This increase in burial rates is closing the window of availability much quicker than planned. Burial options are expected to be more restricted in 4-7 years. The DVA is now actively looking at options disclosed in this master plan to increase the cemetery capacity so burial options are preserved for Connecticut Veterans and eligible family members for at least the next 50 years.
- Public Act 21-79 directs the DVA to establish a Qualifying Review Board (which the DVA is administratively referring to as the Eligibility Qualifying Review Board “EQRB”) for the purpose of restoring eligibility for State Veterans Benefits to Veterans who have an Other-Than-Honorable (OTH) characterization of discharge due to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Gender Expression. The DVA has established the board, procedures and processes to follow. The EQRB is now accepting applications.

### **Office of Advocacy and Assistance 2021-2022**

- As of July 2021, in-person events have resumed; district offices have resumed in-person meetings.
- 473 Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medals were issued this year totaling more than 40,000 medals awarded since 2006.

## **Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services 2021-2022**

- Burial Services Office answered more than 7,100 inquiries and saved Veterans' families more than \$2,500,000 by utilizing DVA burial services.
- Burial Services Office collected \$414,755 in federal reimbursement burial allowances for the General Fund. Also, installation payments for over 1,526 federal Veteran headstones/foot markers were processed totaling \$178,530.
- Burial Services continued to support dignified burial services six days a week at our State's two active Veterans' cemeteries.

## **Safety and Security 2021-2022**

- Conducted several fire drills throughout the agency.
- Implemented Fire Emergency Plan training for Security, Residential, and the VOC.
- Conducted in-service training for all employees.
- Supported various events for the agency including: 9/11 Event, Stand Down, Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Ceremony, Veteran Conflict Specific License Plates-Press Conference, Holiday Concert, Wreaths Across America, Veterans Day Ceremony, K9 Graduation Ceremony, State Police Promotion Ceremony, Unclaimed Cremains Ceremony, F-Wing Ribbon Cutting, AFSMCE Picnic.
- All Officers and staff attended Diversity and Inclusion Training.
- Up to date with fleet requirements- sent in list of fleet and agency vehicles.
- Assisted in updating the DVAs Respiratory Protection Program Policy and worked alongside OSHA consultant. Work alongside HR to track compliance among employees and scheduled fit testing dates.
- Hired (1) Part-Time Officer, (3) Full-Time Officers, (1) Operator, and added new position and hired a Safety Program Officer.
- Took over criminal background checks for incoming employees.
- Took over workplace violence mandating reporting to DAS.
- Installed new antenna and radio repeaters.
- Our new Safety Program Officer has performed pre-event Fire & Life Safety Inspections, oversaw construction and maintenance project safety, conducted Fire & Life Safety surveys across campus and revised several safety policies.
- The DVA hosted multiple trainings on grounds that included federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. These trainings included SWAT teams, K9 units, hostage negotiations, state and local police academies, State Police Drone Unit, etc.
- Continued our frontline work through the COVID-19 pandemic and were available for assistance for all security needs across campus.

## **Projects and Operations Management 2021-2022**

The DVA Projects and Operations Division staffs the following agency disciplines: emergency management, facilities maintenance, building services, transportation, environmental management, strategic planning, information technology, energy efficiency and project management with the collective responsibility for three state Veteran cemeteries and a 92 acre

campus with approximately 800,000 square feet of facilities. Projects and Operations functions to synchronize and coordinate these functions to support the DVA's mission, core functions, and customer satisfaction.

### **Projects and Operations Management Accomplishments for 2021-2022**

- Managed the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic impact on DVA operations and Veteran residential environments. Instituted operational measures to provide the best possible protection to Veterans and staff throughout the last year.
- Completed an annual update to a comprehensive Emergency Preparedness Program and Plan covering community risks to the operating environment. This plan was essential to maintaining the DVA on a focused common path in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Completed weekly COVID-19 Mitigation Huddles on a virtual platform. These huddles focus on infection control procedures, logistics and the operational environment relative to any natural or man-made adverse events.
- Continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, all Facilities Branch Staff continued to render support services to the Veterans and staff. Transportation, repairs, maintenance, power generation, and many more support services were rendered without interruption. Facilities Branch operated two COVID-19 quarantine and isolation wings set up in the Skilled Nursing Facility and Residential Facility.
- The Information Technology Branch completed a self-help project to upgrade all Wi-Fi platforms throughout the Main Campus. The upgraded wiring and wide area platforms improve the quality of life for Veteran Residents by improving access to web based environments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wi-Fi web access was especially critical to Veteran Residents to attend telehealth appointments and maintain contact with family, friends and other support for Residents.

### **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](http://www.portal.ct.gov/DVA).

### **Human Resources**

The Human Resources (HR) Department is comprised of a Human Resources Business Partner and Human Resources Generalist assigned to the DVA from the Department of Administrative Services assigned to the DVA and located on the DVA Campus in Rocky Hill. The HR Department provides support and assistance to the agency and its employees, which include ADA accommodations, ergonomic assessments, recruitment, staffing and staff transactions such as management of all position actions in CORE-CT. The HR Department also oversees all labor relation activities, including collective bargaining, discipline, investigations as well as providing guidance to managers and supervisors regarding employee relations issues.

## **Affirmative Action**

The DVA's Affirmative Action Plan was approved by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities for the plan year November 1, 2020 through October 2021 and will continue annual filing at least through next year's filing scheduled for March 2023. The DVA continues to monitor and improve its practices in employment and contracting, giving special consideration to affirmative action goal attainment.

Since the middle of 2021, the DVA has an EEO Specialist assigned to the agency through the Department of Administrative Services providing guidance with policies, conducting investigations and supporting the recruitment efforts.

In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs required all staff to attend Diversity and Inclusion training, which was accomplished in March and April 2022 with 100% compliance.

## **Fiscal Updates**

Fiscal Services division continues supporting each agency department with prioritizing expenditures to conservatively manage appropriated resources while meeting the challenges of supply chain shortages and rising costs associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The DVA's FY22 Operating Expenses (OE) increased 17% and Personal Services (PS) increased 2% compared to FY21 expenditures. The department closed FY22 balanced within its appropriated funding resources and will continue to apply strategic methodologies using a conservative approach in the face of ongoing fiscal challenges to innovatively and responsibly manage our resources while fulfilling the core mission of "*Serving Those Who Served.*"

## **Special Events**

**Stand Down 2022** - Stand Down is the DVA's signature event bringing together federal and state agencies, community providers, Veteran service organizations providing medical screenings, employment and education assistance, legal and motor vehicle help, Veterans' benefits information, and housing referrals. Stand Down 2022 will be the third year in a row using a new approach. In the years prior to 2020, Stand Down was held at one location, DVA's Rocky Hill campus. The new approach is holding this one-day event at five regional locations: Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, Rocky Hill, and Norwich, where personal needs items are distributed and Veteran services available. The event in 2021 was again widely attended with more than 800 attending and the feedback continues to be very positive.

**Veterans Hall of Fame** - Since its inception in 2005, we have received over 70 nominations annually for this award that recognizes Veterans who no longer wear the uniform but continue their selfless service to their communities. Nominations for 2022 are currently being accepted and the induction ceremony will be held in December 2022.

**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. Ceremony will continue this year, Nov. 11, 2022.

**Vietnam and Korean Veteran Ceremonies** – The DVA in conjunction with the Lieutenant Governor’s office have been traveling the state honoring Vietnam and Korean Veterans weekly. Vietnam Veterans are presented with the Vietnam Veteran Pin. These events will continue throughout the next fiscal year as well.

### **Volunteer Services**

Volunteers continued to log several hours prior to the pandemic in support of Veterans Home activities and have slowly returned as restrictions have been lifted. Volunteers are comprised of individuals who volunteer their time with Veterans on campus, as well as community groups who come to complete specific projects on the grounds of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Stand Down, the DVA’s yearly statewide outreach event, is conducted with the assistance of multiple volunteers.

### **Community Partnerships**

**Saluting Branches** – Arborists again from around the east coast spent the day at the Colonel Gates Veterans Cemetery in Rocky Hill as well as on the DVA Campus cutting down trees, grinding and removing tree stumps, and trimming trees and hedges. Since working with Saluting Branches, the DVA has received approximately \$200,000.00 worth of in-kind services from this incredible organization. On September 28, 2022, Saluting Branches will again be working in Colonel Gates Cemetery, Rocky Hill and on the DVA Campus providing additional in-kind services.

**Giving Days** – Companies and organizations from across Connecticut consistently provide 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 and 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. 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. Current Giving Days have begun with our first organization being Henkel out of Rocky Hill doing a wonderful job landscaping and painting the Purple Heart parking lot locations on the DVA Campus.

**Donations** – Community partners continue to donate funding, gift cards and personal needs items for Veterans on campus. Some of these items include bottled water, coffee, beverages, snacks, toiletries, electronics, books, games and various other needed items.