*Nevada Department of Veterans Services*

**Veterans In Care (VIC)**

**Overview:**

The purpose of this overview is to introduce an initiative of the Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS), "**Veterans In Care**”, that rolled out in the summer of 2016. However, before introducing "VIC" it is worth revisiting the history of caring for veterans and taking a step back in time to the inception of NDVS (formerly the Office of Veterans Services), to just share historical department information.

The commitment of supporting veterans began in 1636, with the Pilgrims of Plymouth passing a law to ensure disabled soldiers would be supported by the colony and spans many years of programs and services for our veterans.

The Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) was established in 1943 and titled "Nevada Office of Veterans Service Commissioner" with a Veteran Services Officer to serve those 12,080 who served during WWII.

Over the past 76 years the Department has undergone tremendous growth and program expansion in service of our veterans and their families. The outreach and program expansions of the NDVS continue to serve the nearly 300,000 veterans in our state, with many programs and services*.* The NDVS Vision, Mission and focus remains the same for all programs and services and on a yearly basis new initiatives are discovered, developed, and deployed.

**History of Care Facilities in Nevada:**

In 2003, the Nevada State Veterans Home in Boulder City was established to provide long term care services, therapy and support to our aging and wounded warriors, creating a home of "culture and caring" specific to veterans, spouses and gold star parents of veterans. This home typifies the valuable environment of military culture and camaraderie for those who served our country. NDVS submitted a grant request to the Veterans Administration in 2006 for a second home in northern Nevada and was approved, pending the required state match. This state match was met in 2015, once again with the blessing of the Nevada State Legislature, Governor Sandoval and Veterans groups and organizations it has been constructed on the northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Campus and is located at 36 Battle Born Way in Sparks.

It became evident to NDVS that we likely had many veterans in care facilities and settings throughout the state, who have not had the recognition or benefits that would be initiated in a designated "Veterans Home". It raised the question….how many veterans do we not know about and how can we reach out to locate them, where are these silent heroes?

**Creation of "Veterans In Care"- VIC:**

A "Veterans In Care" (VIC) initiative was launched in May of 2016, with the mission to reach out to all skilled care facilities (SNF), residential care/assisted living facilities (RCF/AL) and outreach to over 400 facility providers in the state. A letter was sent to all licensed administrators of SNF and RCF/AL facilities in Nevada, requesting information regarding veterans in their facilities asking how many are receiving benefits and how many are enrolled in the VA medical center system. We continue to reach out to providers to assure we can identify new veterans in residence to acknowledge.

Our newest step is to contact community-based care (CBC) service facilities and programs to locate our veterans needing and receiving care and services outside of facilities. The PCA (Personal Care Agencies) fill a vital role in finding what are often times the home bound veteran and spouse. This will allow NDVS to collect data that had not been researched before and to ensure that no untapped benefits are being left on the table that might financially enrich their lives.

The vision of VIC encompasses three (3) components: Benefits and Programs education and support; Veteran Culture Education and Training; and Quality of Life Recognition and Communication.

**Benefits and Programs:**

A primary goal is to advise and educate veterans and their family of potentially untapped Federal VA benefits for which they might be eligible. Eligibility requirements have changed over the years and many of our aging veterans do not realize they may be eligible for benefits not previously accessible. This outreach involves our Nevada Veteran Advocates (NVA) and our Veterans Service Officers (VSO) of the Veterans Advocacy & Support Teams (VAST). The VSO of the NDVS are specialists in evaluating, educating and assisting our veterans and their family members, at no cost to the veteran.

In addition, veteran burial benefits and availability in the two Nevada State Memorial Veterans Cemeteries are not well understood. A veteran may be buried at no cost and there is an option for an additional very low cost for spouse burial.

**Veteran Culture Education and Training:**

Facilities and service programs that are not veteran specific may or may not understand the influence and impact of a veteran's service experience on their aging process or health care needs. Certainly for those individuals with Alzheimer's and related dementias, many behaviors are misunderstood when they actually may be influenced by past military experiences. Individuals who have served in the military are not always willing to ask for help when needed, and even more importantly, depending on which period served, may have "cultural bias" toward certain care providers.

NDVS recognized that the opportunity to have training on military culture and how it affects successful care giving strategies has not been consistently available to facilities and providers. A key component of VIC is partnering with other state agencies and VA health partners to bring this training to the care provider setting and their front-line staff. A program called “Bravo Zulu” was developed in 2017, working with Dr. Jennifer Carson of the Sanford Center for Aging and the Perry Foundation. This is a 16-hour course that overlays the foundation of military experience with the process of providing dementia care and is approved for dementia training credit for facilities.

**Quality of Life Recognition and Communication**:

This third component of VIC is expansive. Veterans in community care settings often times are not recognized. A primary initiative of acknowledgement and recognition of their service to our country was developed and launched. The Director of NDVS issues personalized certificates of gratitude to veterans in care settings for being "Nevada Heroes". These certificates of recognition are presented in ceremonies within the facilities where the veteran is located when possible. NDVS has conducted numerous VIC recognition events since its Inception: 128 facilities, 183 ceremonies, 2292 veterans honored as of this date.

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Ceremonies and recognition span beyond the traditional Veteran's Day and Memorial Day holidays with the engagement of veteran volunteer groups, color guards, schools with ROTC programs and other volunteers to support special events in facilities that request such programs.

The goal is to ensure that all veterans, no matter where they live receive support, information and recognition. We anticipate the discovery of up to 5000 veterans that we may have not reached before. As the VIC program expands, the reach will include veterans receiving care and services through Hospice, Home Health, Personal Care Agencies, Adult Day Care Centers and many other community partners.

NDVS has expanded multi agency outreach and support for our veterans in care beyond what was initially anticipated with regard to the State veteran's homes and other health and wellness programs. NDVS is honored to be expanding health and wellness initiatives to locate, support and recognize our veterans in community living settings, and to serve those professionals caring for our veterans.

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