



WDVA WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of VETERANS AFFAIRS
BIENNIAL REPORT 2021-2023



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This 2021-23 biennial report of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) is submitted pursuant to §15.04(1)(d), Wis. Stats., which requires each agency to prepare a report on the performance and operations of the department or independent agency during the preceding biennium, and projecting the goals and objectives of the department or independent agency as developed for the program budget report. Additional information about the WDVA is available on the department's website at WisVets.com.

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Wisconsinites can be proud of the programs and services that the state provides to residents who served in the U.S. armed forces and their families. Our history of supporting veterans dates back to shortly after the Civil War and continues to this day. The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs was created in 1945 to consolidate separate veterans' programs under one agency and was reorganized as a Cabinet level agency in 2011.



WDVA's mission is to work on behalf of Wisconsin's veteran community in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and nation.

The programs administered by WDVA are designed to assist and improve the lives of veterans of the United States armed forces and their families. These programs include:

- *Skilled nursing care.*
- *Memorial cemeteries and military funeral honors.*
- *Federal veterans claims assistance.*
- *Transitional housing, mental health and substance use treatment, financial assistance and individual case management for veterans in need.*
- *Grants to individuals and organizations.*
- *Historical and educational promotion.*

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WDVA is headed by a Secretary appointed by the Governor. The Secretary administers the department through the Deputy Secretary, Assistant Deputy Secretary, and Division Administrators. Working with external stakeholders, the Secretary provides the vision to enable the department to establish long-range strategies, plan for the future, and achieve its mission.



Under the leadership of Secretary-designee James Bond, the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs is embarking on ambitious goal-setting to better deliver benefits and services to Wisconsin veterans and their dependents:

- ***STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS:*** *No one of us can do this alone – we are strongest when we work together. WDVA works closely with County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs), Tribal Veterans Service Officers (TVSOs), Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), University of Wisconsin System, Wisconsin Technical College System, various state cabinet agencies, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), nonprofits, businesses, and many other individuals and organizations who advocate and provide services for eligible veterans and their dependents.*
- ***RAISING AWARENESS OF WISCONSIN'S VETERANS PROGRAMS:*** *As Wisconsinites, we can be proud of the many benefits that our State provides to veterans. Due to the diffuse and sometimes confusing nature of benefits, many veterans are not receiving all the benefits they are entitled to and may be unaware of them altogether. The department is embarking on creative and partner-forward measures to ensure every Wisconsin veteran is aware of the variety of benefits and services available to them.*
- ***ATTRACTING AND RETAINING VETERANS TO LIVE AND WORK IN WISCONSIN:*** *Veterans are a valuable asset to our State and to our workforce. We are making a concerted effort to retain Wisconsin veterans and attract new veterans, both for a better workforce and to show the state as a fantastic place for veterans to work, live, and build a community.*
- ***MENTAL HEALTH, SUICIDE PREVENTION, AND HOMELESSNESS:*** *We must do better to help veterans in need. Veterans are more likely to suffer from a variety of mental illnesses, including suicidal ideation, than the general population. WDVA is dedicated to saving veteran lives and aiding them in receiving full-rounded and effective mental health care.*
- ***WISCONSIN VETERANS HOMES – IMPROVING AND TELLING THEIR STORY:*** *WDVA is proud of the quality of care at our Homes, but we know we can improve. These Homes are well-loved, by residents, employees, and the communities where they reside. They provide excellent care to the veterans and veteran spouses who live there. However, as nursing homes across the country feel pressures and challenges from the changing industry, the Homes must adapt and improve to provide the best possible level of care.*

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) manages all communications, media inquiries, imagery, publications, departmental events, social media, and community outreach.

Outreach is essential to help promote benefits and services throughout the state. While attending CVSO veteran expos, athletic events, fairs, speaking engagements, presentations, meetings, and more, this team connects veterans not only to their state benefits but also to partners and other government benefits.



The outreach team also tracks the outreach efforts across all divisions of the department, where staff interact with veterans, community partners, and the public. **From July 2021 to June 2023, the entire Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs conducted more than 1,000 outreach events, meetings, activities, and more.**

Within OPA, the outreach team has doubled the number of attendees at the Women Veterans Retreat, hosted six mental health forums across the state, began new monthly programming with community partners, reinvigorated the department's presences on committees, and began new initiatives, all while supporting the marketing efforts of individual programs.

The outreach team works with all veterans, but the team also has two specialized positions that work to help underserved veteran populations due to their different needs.

- *The Women Veterans Coordinator, Jodi Barnett, is a service-connected Navy veteran and military spouse who focuses on issues and spreads awareness about women veterans and their unique experiences. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the Women Veterans Retreat returned with overwhelming success and is continuing strong. Barnett does many speaking engagements, has increased the department's participation in suicide task forces, and functions as the statewide advocate for the over 30,000 women veterans in the state. Currently, the program is running "She is a Veteran," a women veteran outreach campaign to connect women veterans across the state.*
- *The Tribal Veteran Liaison, Melissa Doud, is a retired service-connected Army veteran of 22 years with multiple combat deployments to Iraq, a military spouse, and a member of the Lac du Flambeau tribe. Doud works tirelessly to bridge the gap between the tribal sovereign nations and the state while also teaching cultural and veteran competency. Having just joined the team in April of 2023, Secretary Bond and Doud have already scheduled meetings with all 11 federally recognized tribes to discuss issues facing their individual nations and veterans.*

AFFILIATED BOARD AND COUNCIL

The [Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs](#) is a nine-member, part-time citizen board that advises the department. Board members are veterans appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate for staggered four-year terms.

Membership roster as of October 2023:

- *Pat Beggs – District 1 Janesville*
- *William Schrum – District 2 Middleton*
- *Christopher Hanson, Vice Chair – District 3 Sparta*
- *Tonnetta D. Carter – District 4 Milwaukee*
- *Vern Larson, Secretary – District 5 Oconomowoc*
- *Mark Mathwig – District 6 Lodi*
- *Jason Maloney, Chair – District 7 Washburn*
- *Chris J. Cornelius – District 8 Seymour*
- *Robert Hesselbein – At Large Middleton*

The [Council on Veterans Programs](#) is composed of representatives from 18 active organizations that affiliate with and advocate for veterans' issues. The Council advises the Board of Veterans Affairs and the department on solutions and policy alternatives relating to veterans issues.

Membership roster as of October 2023:

- *American Legion Dept. of WI – Paul Fisk, Vice Chair*
- *American Red Cross – Michelle Matuszak*
- *AMVETS – Dale Wiegand*
- *County Veteran Service Officers Association – Colin Moten*
- *Disabled American Veterans (DAV) – Larry Hill, Chair*
- *Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. – Kim Queen*
- *Marine Corps League – Phillip Landgraf*
- *Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) – Roger Fetterly*
- *Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)*
- *National Association for Black Veterans, Inc. (NABV) – William Simms*
- *Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) – Scott Griffith*
- *Polish Legion of American Veterans (PLAV) – Nellie DeBaker, Secretary*
- *United Women Veterans, Inc. (UWV) – Carolyn Morgan*
- *VFW Department of Wisconsin – Michael Furgal*
- *Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. – Vern Larson*
- *Wisconsin American GI Forum – George Banda*
- *Wisconsin Association of Concerned Veterans Organizations (WACVO) – David Zien*
- *Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans, Inc. – William Hustad*

DIVISION OF VETERANS BENEFITS

The Division of Veterans Benefits (DVB) administers an array of grants, benefits, programs, and services to all eligible state veterans, their families, survivors, and organizations that serve veterans. Assistance to veterans includes education grants to expand employment opportunities, transportation assistance to ensure veterans can access VA medical services, additional medical support and services not provided by USDVA, and intervention services for veterans experiencing hardship. The division also maintains responsibility for the department's Military Funeral Honors program and the three state veterans cemeteries, located in Spooner, King, and Union Grove.

BUREAU OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Bureau of Programs and Services is comprised of the Veterans Assistance Section, the Veterans Claims Unit, and the State Approving Agency (SAA).

VETERANS ASSISTANCE SECTION

The Veterans Assistance Section consists of the Grants Unit and the Veterans Benefits Resource Center (VBRC).

GRANTS UNIT

The Grants Unit administers the following grants to individuals and organizations, providing direct financial assistance to veterans, and organizations that provide programs and services to the benefit of veterans across the state.

- **Veterans Retraining Grant** – Provides up to \$3,000 to recently unemployed or underemployed veterans who demonstrate financial need while enrolled in a training program expected to lead to employment.
- **Grants to Employers** – Provides funding of up to \$100,000 to employers who hire veterans with a federal service-connected disability rating of at least 50 percent.
- **Veterans Education Reimbursement Grant (VetEd)** – Provides tuition and fee reimbursement to eligible veterans enrolled at most Wisconsin academic institutions. The VetEd grant provides up to eight semesters or 120 credits toward a bachelor's degree, depending on the length of active service.
- **Veterans Assistance Grants (VAG)** – Formerly known as the Assistance to Needy Veterans Grant (ANVG), the VAG provides assistance for veterans who need vision, dental, or hearing care, three areas not normally covered by the federal VA. This program also provides temporary emergency financial aid to veterans and their household when the veteran experiences a loss of income due to an injury, illness, or natural disaster, and their dependents in the event of financial loss due to a deployment or death of a veteran while serving on active duty. Grant awards for health care and subsistence aid combined cannot exceed a \$7,500 lifetime limit.
- **County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) Grant** – Supplements the operations of county veterans services offices. The grants to counties with a full-time CVSO are based on the total county population. The grants to counties with a part-time CVSO are given a flat rate.
- **Tribal Veterans Service Office (TVSO) | American Indian Veterans Service (AIVS) Grant** – Supplements the operations of Tribal Veterans Service Offices. The department provided annual grants of up to \$15,000 to eligible, federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands.

- **Veterans Service Organization (VSO) Grants** – Provides financial assistance of up to \$175,000 to veterans' service organizations that assist veterans with claims for benefits from the USDVA and are located at the Milwaukee Regional Office.
- **Transportation Grants** – Provides grants to the Disabled American Veterans - Wisconsin (DAV) and to counties with veterans not served by the DAV to provide transportation services to veterans traveling to USDVA-approved medical appointments.
- **Grants to Local Governments** – Provides grants up to \$300,000 biennially to local governments, cities, villages, and towns for providing fire and emergency medical services to veterans homes.
- **Grants to Nonprofit Organizations** – Provides funding of up to \$250,000 for grants to nonprofit organizations that provide financial assistance or other services to Wisconsin veterans and their families.
- **Entrepreneurship Grant** – Provides funding of up to \$400,000 for grants to nonprofit organizations that provide entrepreneurship training, technical or business assistance, or other assistance to veteran entrepreneurs to improve employment outcomes.
- **Camp American Legion Grant** – Provides funding of up to \$75,000 for the operation of Camp American.
- **Veterans Employment and Transition Support (VETS) Grant** – Provides grants up to \$100,000 annually to registered 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) nonprofit organizations that provide improved access to regional veterans' resource networks through established partnerships with community organizations to help transitioning service members, and their families access federal and state veterans' services and state community resources to improve employment outcomes, general transition services, and improve care transitions.

GRANT PROGRAM	NUMBER AWARDED	AMOUNT
VETERANS RETRAINING GRANT	19	\$54,000
VETERANS ASSISTANCE GRANTS	126	\$227,426.79
VETERANS EDUCATION GRANT	10	\$27,850.74
CVSO GRANT	143	\$1,580,075
TVSO GRANT	20	\$220,000
VSO GRANT	8	\$1,425,511.44
TRANSPORTATION GRANTS	60	\$200,000
CAMP AMERICAN LEGION	2	\$144,757.95
GRANTS TO EMPLOYERS	36	\$98,322.53
NONPROFIT GRANT	21	\$499,780.13
ENTREPRENEURSHIP GRANT	8	\$670,940
VETS GRANT	2	\$100,000
MUNICIPALITIES GRANT	9	\$300,000
TOTALS	464	\$5,548,664.58

VETERANS BENEFITS RESOURCE CENTER (VBRC)

The VBRC provides veterans improved access to information about the department's programs, benefits, and services via phone, chat (through WDVA's website), walk-in, and email communications. The goal of the VBRC is to ensure that veterans who contact WDVA during business hours will be able to immediately speak to center support staff who are trained to provide information about the department's programs, benefits, and services.

The VBRC uses an information system that enables customer service history and physical mailing of information to the veteran when needed. The VBRC records metrics that capture trends in veterans' requests and enable quality improvement efforts based on the collected data.

VETERANS ASSISTANCE SECTION ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Processed 38,018 applications for benefits (not including grants).*
- *VBRC responded to 10,489 inquires related to state veterans' benefits through approximately 22,000 support activities including: 8,359 emails; 3,491 chats; 1,475 DD-214 requests; 737 voicemail responses; and handling over 8,000 phone calls.*
- *Evaluated 264 businesses and issued 183 Veteran-Owned Business Certifications to increase the opportunity for veteran firms to sell their products and services to the state of Wisconsin.*
- *VBRC received a 97.87% satisfaction rating from client surveys.*

VETERANS ASSISTANCE SECTION FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Develop and implement a modernized information system for tracking and monitoring benefit application and benefit inquiry data to improve reporting capability deficiencies identified in the previous biennial period.*
- *Establish semi-annual training and development conferences for the Veterans Assistance Section. The training will include new and upcoming policy changes to enable staff to maintain current knowledge of state and federal veterans benefits.*
- *Continue to develop and strengthen relationships with other state agencies, county veterans service offices, and other organizations that serve veterans.*

VETERANS CLAIMS UNIT

The Veterans Claims Unit assists Wisconsin veterans and their dependents with federal claims for compensation, pension, education, medical care, and death benefits provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). The Veterans Claims Unit is located at the USDVA Regional Office in Milwaukee and provides accreditation and continuing education training to Wisconsin's Tribal and County Veterans Service Officers (TVSOs and CVSOs).

CLAIMS UNIT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Assisted with 3,687 federal benefits claims, filing over 4,200 documents on behalf of Wisconsin veterans.*
- *Conducted 1,265 hearings regarding veterans' benefits and appeals.*

STATE APPROVING AGENCY (SAA)

The SAA is federally funded and provides institutional oversight for Wisconsin colleges, universities, and vocational training facilities under US Code Title 38 and Title 10 for eligibility under federal GI Bill education benefits. The SAA conducts compliance survey visits at these institutions to determine compliance with the requirements of state and federal law. The SAA is responsible for evaluating programs at all facilities and testing organizations and makes a determination to approve or deny programs and facilities for GI Bill eligibility. In addition, the SAA has jurisdiction for any program approval in private, for-profit institutions, non-college degree institutions, and non-accredited institutions. The SAA also provides consultation and technical assistance to school officials, veterans, and other eligible individuals and organizations regarding federal GI Bill benefits and approval criteria.

STATE APPROVING AUTHORITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Earned a "Satisfactory" rating from the Joint Peer Review Group for both FY 2022 and 2023. Satisfactory is the highest rating available.*
- *Assessed 16,088 educational programs and completed 975 technical assistance actions to ensure program approval for federal education benefits funding.*
- ***Successfully completed a 100% review of all state public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities.***
- *Conducted 73 total site visits providing assistance, conducting assessments, and inspecting learning institutions within the state.*
- *Approved a first-in-the-nation Telecommunications Industry Registered Apprenticeship Program that enabled Wisconsin veterans to take advantage of training and employment in the high-demand telecommunications field.*

BUREAU OF HEALTH SERVICES

The Bureau of Health Services operates the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) and the Veterans Housing and Recovery Program (VHRP).

VETERANS OUTREACH AND RECOVERY PROGRAM

The Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) connects Wisconsin veterans to community services and provides case management and clinical support with a special focus on treatment and recovery. The VORP Outreach and Recovery Coordinators work with participants to identify issues and barriers that may prevent them from living the life they want and uncover solutions to achieve their goals.

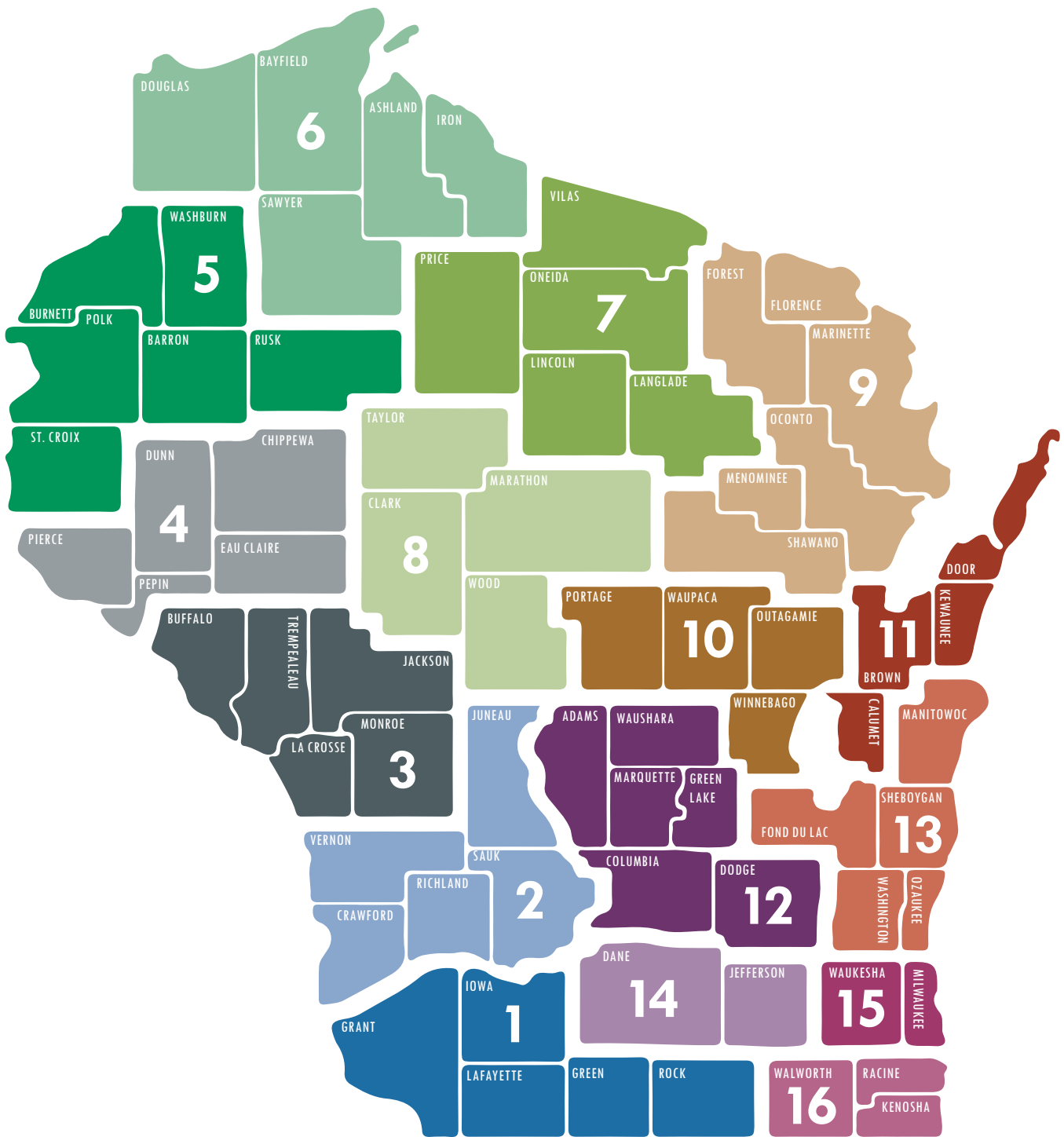
Based on the needs, strengths, and values of each participant, and in collaboration with community service providers, VORP connects participants to a variety of programs and services designed to meet their unique needs until they reach their goals. VORP staff work to provide many support services to veterans, including mental health services, substance use treatment, financial assistance, housing, and utilities assistance, claims and benefits assistance, and employment and education opportunities.

VORP ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Provided \$133,736.24 in treatment funding and \$148,622.83 in emergency services for veterans experiencing hardship. VORP also referred veterans to partner community agencies and utilized their funds as applicable.*
- ***Enrolled 473 veterans in the program and made 5,460 contacts with veterans seeking assistance across the state.***
- *Outreach Coordinators conducted 8,745 hours of case management services to participants enrolled in the program. Case management services include referrals, assistance, and interventions to address needs identified in enrollment and ongoing assessments.*
- *Conducted 1,403 contacts with non-enrolled veterans. During these outreach efforts, staff make referrals and provide short-term intervention assistance to veterans based on needs, even if program enrollment and further interventions may not be required.*

VORP FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *VORP secured federal grant funding to increase the number of outreach and clinical staff, which allows staff to promptly respond to veterans in need. Although this funding ends in December 2024, VORP hopes to make the expansion permanent.*

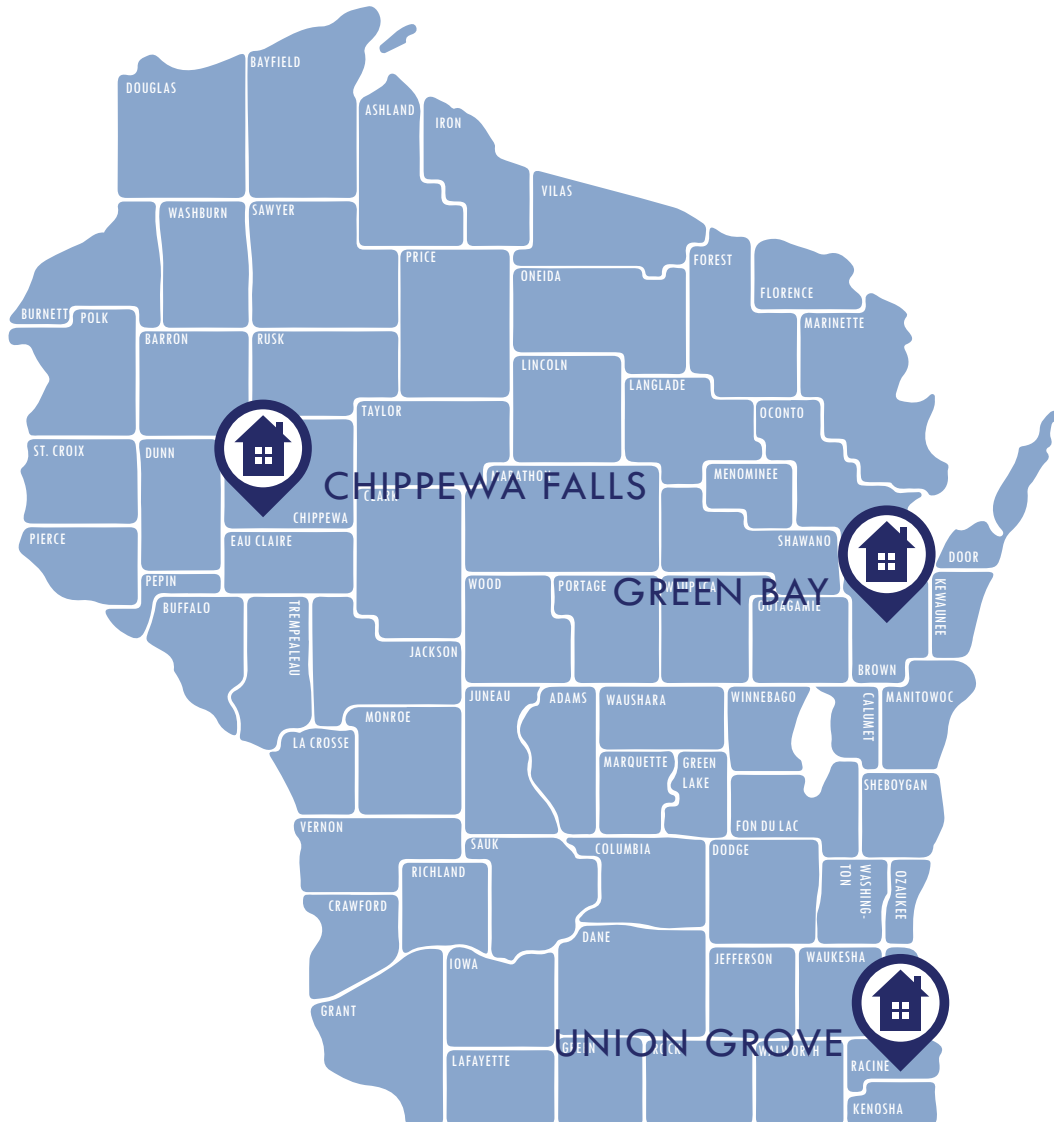


VETERANS OUTREACH AND RECOVERY PROGRAM'S 16 REGIONS

The VORP team includes 16 Regional Veterans Outreach and Recovery Regional Coordinators (ORRCs) located within each of the 16 VORP regions, two supervisors based in Madison, and four clinical coordinators.

VETERANS HOUSING AND RECOVERY PROGRAM

The Veterans Housing and Recovery Program (VHRP) is designed to help homeless veterans receive the job training, education, counseling, and rehabilitative services they need to obtain steady employment, affordable housing, and the skills to sustain a productive lifestyle. The goal of VHRP is to break the cycle of homelessness and help veterans transition back into the mainstream of society. To achieve this goal, transitional housing for veterans is currently located in Chippewa Falls, Green Bay, and Union Grove. These centers partner with federal, state, and local governments, county veterans service offices, and representatives from local communities to operate a statewide coalition providing outreach and an extensive referral network that enables the program to provide housing to over 100 homeless veterans.



VHRP ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Provided temporary or emergency shelter to 384 veterans.*
- *Accommodated 57,740 bed-nights of shelter. Average length of stay for an individual veteran in the program was 150.36 nights.*
- *Successfully transitioned 136 veterans to permanent housing.*

BUREAU OF CEMETERIES AND MEMORIAL SERVICES

The Bureau of Cemeteries and Memorial Services operates and maintains the three veterans cemeteries throughout the state of Wisconsin and operates the Military Funeral Honors Program.



WISCONSIN VETERANS CEMETERIES

The Bureau of Cemeteries and Memorial Services manages three state veterans cemeteries: Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery (NWVMC) located at Spooner, Central Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery (CWVMC) located at King, and Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery (SWVMC) located at Union Grove. These cemeteries provide a final resting place for veterans and create a lasting monument to their achievements and sacrifices on behalf of our grateful nation.

To date, the three cemeteries combined have interred 35,640 veterans, spouses, and dependents and pre-registered 27,180 requests for interment.

MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS PROGRAM

The mission of the Military Funeral Honors Program is to provide and coordinate the appropriate final tribute to eligible Wisconsin veterans acknowledging their faithful and honorable service to the State of Wisconsin. The program coordinates military funeral honors at any of the cemeteries across the state and conducts military funeral honors at the three state veterans cemeteries. Additionally, program staff process stipends to reimburse veterans organizations that provide military honors.

BUREAU OF CEMETERIES ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *SWVMC is one of the busiest state veterans cemetery in the United States and conducted 2,548 interments during this biennium, a 112% increase from the previous biennium.*
- *Interments across all Wisconsin state veterans cemeteries totaled 3,758, an 115% increase from the previous biennium.*
- *The Military Funeral Honors Program coordinated 14,462 military funeral honors in the state and processed 13,261 stipends, reimbursing a total of \$651,675 to veterans organizations.*

BUREAU OF CEMETERIES FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Priority 1 expansion projects phases 5 and 6 at SWVMC will expand burial spaces and columbarium niches by a total of 6,500 spaces.*
- *Priority 1 expansion project at CWVMC will provide a new committal shelter and an additional 430 burial spaces.*
- *These projects will enable facilities to keep up with the increasing demand for burial at state veterans cemeteries.*

DIVISION OF VETERANS HOMES

The Division of Veterans Homes (DVH) provides long-term and short-term rehabilitative care to veterans, eligible spouses, and Gold Star parents at the Wisconsin Veterans Homes (Homes), which are located at King, Union Grove, and Chippewa Falls.

In June 2023, satisfaction surveys, based on nursing home industry-standard surveys, were issued for residents, family members of residents, and staff were asked to respond based on their experience over the last six months:

RESIDENT SATISFACTION:

- *Residents gave the state veterans homes an average of 8.1 when rating the care from 1 to 10, where 10 is the best care possible. Over 75% of residents gave the nursing home a score of 10|10, 9|10, or 8|10.*
- *Nearly 75% of residents said they were never unhappy with care they received at the nursing home.*
- *About 42% of residents feel there are enough nurses and aids in the nursing home.*
- *More than 93% of residents say they are treated with courtesy and respect all or most of the time.*
- *3 of every 4 residents said they never saw an aide or nurse be rude to them or any other resident.*
- *Nearly 90% of residents indicated nurses and aides explain things in a way that was easy for them to understand.*
- *Over 95% of residents indicated the public areas of the nursing home look and smell clean all or most of the time.*

FAMILY SATISFACTION:

- *Families gave the state veterans homes an average of 8.71 when rating the care from 1 to 10, where Zero is worst care possible, and 10 is the best care possible. About two of every three families gave the nursing home a score of 10|10 or 9|10.*
- *More than 80% of families said they were never unhappy with care their family member received at the nursing home.*
- *Over 80% of families indicated that they always saw nurse or aides treat their family member with courtesy and respect.*
- *Over 90% of families indicated that never saw an aide or nurse be rude to their family member or any other resident during any of their visits.*
- *3 of every 4 families said if a veteran or eligible veteran spouse you knew needed nursing home care, they would recommend the state veterans nursing home to them.*

EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION:

- *Over 90% of staff feel like their work has a positive impact on residents' lives.*
- *More than 88% of staff said they take pride in their team and the work we do to care for residents.*
- *Nearly 75% of staff members indicated their supervisor respects them and treats them fairly.*
- *Over 70% of staff said their supervisor appreciates the work they do for the residents.*

- *Only 35% of staff feel that their pay is fair in relation to the local community.*
- *Nearly 1 of every 2 staff members said they choose to continue working at the homes instead of another potential employer because it is meaningful work and making a difference for residents.*

The Veterans Home at King provides skilled nursing services for up to 521 members. The Veterans Home at Union Grove provides skilled nursing services for up to 158 members. The Veterans Home at Chippewa Falls provides skilled nursing services for up to 72 members and is unique from the other homes in that the WDVA contracts the operations of the facility to a private healthcare provider.

DVH ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *While the public health emergency officially ended in Spring 2023, the effects of Covid continue to have significant impacts on the Homes' operations, including increased requirements for infection prevention and use of personal protection equipment (PPE), and ongoing workforce challenges. While enduring the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff continued to do a remarkable job of following the required safety protocols, offering comfort, caring for members affected by Covid, supporting their peers out of the work unit with Covid-exposure, and working with families and volunteers in an attempt to maintain normalcy in the Homes.*
- *Collaborated with the department's Office of Public Affairs in the creation of a single brand for new logos, website, and marketing materials for the three Veterans Homes.*
- *Continued progress toward the Smoke-Free by 2025 plan for all three Veterans Home campuses in alignment with the USDVA directive 10.85, which requires federal VA facilities to be smoke-free.*
- *Successfully completed an application and was awarded a federal FY2023 VA Nurse Hire and Retention Grant, which is a three-year grant opportunity.*
- *Submitted a grant application for the federal FY2024 VA Nurse Hire and Retention Grant.*
- *Updated scheduling software UKG (with timekeeping add-on possibilities), which eliminated the former labor-intensive agency scheduling program and allows staff more access to their data, shift availability, and more.*

DVH FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Continue our commitment to member safety. With the uptick in COVID-19 cases across the nation, balancing this ongoing demand includes updated regulations and recommendations for the Covid monovalent vaccine.*
- *Continue to collaborate with the Office of Public Affairs to roll out the new marketing materials and webpage for the Homes.*
- *Develop a master plan to provide a framework to guide decision-making for future operations of the State's Veteran Homes and potential uses of the King campus.*
- *Complete the final stages of implementing the plan for smoke-free campuses by 2025.*
- *Implement requirements from the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) relating to [staffing mandates](#) and [Minimum Data Set \(MDS\)](#) coding, which will require significant staff time to complete the training and implement the changes.*

WISCONSIN VETERANS HOME AT KING

The Veterans Home at King is located one mile southwest of the town of Waupaca, and is the largest skilled nursing facility in the state.

There are three individual skilled nursing facilities at King that are Medicare-certified and individually licensed: Moses Hall holds 192 licensed beds, Ainsworth Hall holds 205 beds, and MacArthur Hall holds 116 beds. The beds at Stordock Hall, which was closed in the last biennium, are no longer state-licensed. However, WDVA retains the beds for the USDVA. More than three-quarters of all beds are in private rooms.

King provides a variety of ancillary services in addition to skilled nursing, dietary, maintenance, and housekeeping services. King offers many amenities, including a bar and game room with pool tables, bowling alley, café, library, computer center, fitness room, King Exchange (KX), museum, and theater. King is uniquely nestled on the shore of Rainbow Lake, which allows members to enjoy pontoon rides and fishing, in addition to many other activities, such as bingo, ceramics, mini golf, music therapy, and many outings and sponsored events.



VETERANS HOME AT KING ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Opened Moses Hall and passed the onsite USDVA Recognition Survey on the first inspection with zero deficiencies.*
- *Closed Olsen Hall on December 20, 2022.*
- *Consolidated MacArthur Hall into Moses Hall and Ainsworth Hall.*
- *Dissolved the on-campus fire department and transferred the Life and Safety Code inspections to the Waupaca Fire Department on January 1, 2022.*

WISCONSIN VETERANS HOME AT UNION GROVE

The Veterans Home at Union Grove is located on the campus of the Southern Wisconsin Center, and consists of a 158-bed skilled nursing facility. Boland Hall and Gates Hall offer 148 spacious private rooms with private half baths and 10 semi-private rooms. Maurer Hall offers a centralized Member Center. The facility offers a variety of ancillary services and has an active volunteer program, which includes many veteran service organizations. The Union Grove campus includes a chapel, library, woodshop, ceramics studio, and a pub/café. Union Grove members enjoy many activities including weekly happy hour, special meals, parties, and recognition events, music, gardening, fishing trips, and many other outings and activities.



VETERANS HOME AT UNION GROVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Transferred the previously closed assisted living facility, Fairchild Hall, to the VHRP for use as transitional housing for veterans.*
- *Completed renovations of the kitchenettes and public restrooms at Boland Hall.*

WISCONSIN VETERANS HOME AT CHIPPEWA FALLS

The Veterans Home at Chippewa Falls is located in the city of Chippewa Falls and is licensed as a skilled nursing facility with 72 beds. This facility is managed via a contract with Health Dimensions Group.



VETERANS HOME AT CHIPPEWA FALLS ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Wisconsin Veterans Home at Chippewa Falls has been recognized as a 2022 Silver – Achievement in Quality Award recipient by the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA|NCAL) and is rated by CMS as a 5-Star facility.*
- *Maintained a 97% occupancy level in this biennium.*
- *Initiated a contractual agreement in 2021 to utilize the pharmacy services at King, with consulting services to be added in 2024.*

WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM

The WDVA operates two museums that are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The main facility, the [Wisconsin Veterans Museum](#) (WVM), is located on Capitol Square and contains 10,000 square feet of displays. A satellite location, named the Megellas Gallery, is located in the F. A. Marden Memorial building on the grounds of the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King.

The WVM employs exhibits, displays, and presentations to tell the stories of men and women from Wisconsin who served in America's conflicts from the Civil War to today's Global War on Terrorism. WVM is also a Smithsonian Affiliate and has been accredited since 1974.

Though WVM was closed from March 2020 until 1 July 2021 due to the pandemic, the museum has operated normally since July 2021 and is nearly at 2019 visitation levels as schools and visitors return to the museum. In early 2023, the WVM created a special exhibit in the front window and online commemorating 50 years since the end of the war in Vietnam. The WVM coordinates several traveling exhibits throughout the state.



WVM ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *The Wisconsin Commission for the United States semiquincentennial Commission, (Wisconsin A250 Commission) was created by the 2021 Wisconsin Act 95. At its November 2022 meeting, the Commission elected WVM Director, Chris Kolakowski, as the Chair of the Commission. The Commission has held 4 meetings since its formation, and its work, involving statewide and national partners, will continue through the national Semiquincentennial in 2026.*
- *Expanded the reach and engagement of partners and audiences across the state and the nation through digital and virtual programs, burnishing the WVM as an important resource and authority about Wisconsin military history. This included new partnerships with the Wisconsin National Guard, Wisconsin VFW, and Wisconsin American Legion, among others.*

- *Engaged partners around the state for joint programming and promotion about the Vietnam 50th and Iraq 20th anniversaries, the 75th birthday of the U.S. Air Force, and the 75th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift, among other events.*
- *Answered more than 2,000 reference questions about Wisconsin veterans from patrons in all 50 states as well as Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Uruguay, and Wales.*
- *Launched an initiative to expand collections in areas where WVM is lacking and created relationships to bring in under-represented service members in groups such as women, LGBTQ+, people of color, and small rural Wisconsin communities, among others. As part of this collection initiative, 77 artifact and archive collections and oral histories from demographically underrepresented veterans were added, a 148% increase over the amount collected in the previous biennium.*
- *Signed a cooperative agreement with the Ho-Chunk Nation to work together in documenting Ho-Chunk veterans' stories.*
- *Sold the greatest amount of goods in the museum store on record, recovering store profitability post-pandemic, and added 14 new veteran-owned product lines for purchase, as well as increased Wisconsin-related product offerings.*

WVM FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Complete a successful reaccreditation process with the American Alliance of Museums.*
- *Develop a 3-5-year plan for additional upcoming exhibits.*
- *Collaborate with partners and stakeholders in preparation for the America 250th commemoration.*
- *Expand engagement with Indigenous nations to improve the sharing and documentation of Native veterans' stories and voices at the museum and throughout Wisconsin.*
- *Develop operation options and a plan for increasing usage of the museum at the King location.*
- *Launch the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant project to digitize and expand access to WVM's post-Civil War images.*
- *Rehouse the Veterans Memorial Database in a format that allows online accessibility to all state constituents.*

DIVISION OF ENTERPRISE SERVICES

The Division of Enterprise Services (DES) provides management and program support to all of the department's operating units and works collaboratively to achieve a streamlined administrative process.

BUREAU OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The Bureau of Information Systems (BOIS) provides information technology resources in IT support that includes customer support (Help Desk), technical support (network and desktop), application development, support for network hardware and software, desktop/laptop hardware and software, security, and telecommunication equipment. BOIS develops and maintains automated systems and processes the agency uses to support its business programs.

BOIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Implemented the network infrastructure at the newly constructed John R. Moses Hall at King Veterans Home.*
- *Integrated third-party vendor systems for Moses Hall, including a nurse call system, security cameras, member monitoring, building automation systems, and VoIP phones.*
- *Implemented secure printing on our Ricoh multi-function devices and significantly reduced the number of personal and network printers in the agency.*
- *Migrated Central Office (Madison) Centrex phones to Mitel Voice over IP (VoIP) system.*
- *Implemented Mobile Device Management (MDM) for all WDVA state-issued cell phones utilizing DOA-DET's MDM service.*
- *Migrated the Veterans Benefits Resource Center call center from Call Center Anywhere to the Mitel MiContact Center system.*
- *Implemented an enhancement to the CemNet system to allow customized staff signatures in forms.*
- *Implemented numerous agency scheduling programming changes due to restructuring of facilities at the Veterans Homes campuses.*
- *Updated Southern Cemetery maps and functionality for the addition of new section plots and columbariums as part of the cemetery expansion.*
- *Developed and implemented the new Vehicle Reservation Application.*
- *Developed and implemented account flagging enhancements with the MyWisVets portal for improved communication during processing of veterans' records.*
- *Created new metrics reports of benefit applications for the Division of Veterans Benefits.*
- *Developed modifications of the search feature and data output for the Open Records Request Application in coordination with the Office of Legal Counsel.*

BOIS FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Plan and implement a VoIP phone system at the Union Grove Veterans Home.*
- *Renovate space in Shemanske Hall at Union Grove for a server room, IT equipment storage, and setup room.*
- *Plan and implement member safety upgrades at Union Grove Veterans Home, which will include structured cabling, wireless infrastructure upgrade, additional security cameras, a new nurse call system, and a new*

member freedom system.

- *Implement UKG Dimensions staff scheduling system and annual vacation planning at King and Union Grove.*
- *Install structural cabling and wireless access points in the main kitchen and in the office spaces for the kitchen remodeling project at Union Grove.*
- *Remodel and install telecommunications rooms in Ainsworth Hall at King to support the current and future technological needs.*
- *Install and implement building access control, a new network closet, a gravesite locator system, and security cameras as part of the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery Administration Building Expansion and Fire Protection Project.*
- *Redesign the Veterans Benefits Application Tracking System (VBATS) to modernize the application, utilizing and integrating it with the new Claims Information Management System (CIMS).*
- *Redevelop the existing veteran support applications, allowing them to function and integrate with the new VBATS.*
- *Add functionality to the new VBATS for Veteran Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP) for the staff to securely record case notes and documentation.*
- *Develop a new application for women veterans to register with WDVA. Once registered, women veterans will be able to receive information or notifications from WDVA about Women Veteran events, benefits, and opportunities.*
- *Upgrade numerous WDVA SharePoint projects, to include Request to Fill, Forms Approval, Project Request, Help Desk Request, Employee Input, bureau-specific sites, and the new intranet.*

BUREAU OF FISCAL SERVICES

The Bureau of Fiscal Services (BFS) provides financial services for accounts payable, expense reports, purchasing cards, accounts receivable, member finance, purchasing and loan program accounting, as well as maintains high levels of internal controls, compliance, and review procedures for all WDVA financial and purchasing operations.

BFS ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Requested, received, monitored, and reported over \$30M in stimulus funds.*
- *Assumed additional tasks and duties due to vacant or eliminated positions at the Veterans Homes.*
- *Achieved efficiencies and adjusted staff workload allowing the Bureau of Fiscal Services to leave positions vacant.*
- *Updated BFS policies and procedures.*
- *Completed agency-wide training covering Procurement, Purchasing, Pcards, Accounts Payable, Asset Management, Travel Expenses, and Gifts and Bequests.*
- *Migrated to electronic processing and storage of financial documents.*
- *Maintained adequate supply of COVID-19 supplies for the Veterans Homes.*
- *Implemented and improved internal control plans on IT assets.*
- *Streamlined activities within the Gifts and Bequests system, and updated policies and procedures to reflect the updated practices.*
- *Realigned pharmacy expenses within the Veterans Homes to more accurately allocate costs to each Home.*

- *Received approval from the Secretary to use the Crime Protection Bill for member accounts instead of an additional surety bond for Union Grove.*

BFS FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Complete agency-wide training in Procurement, Asset Management, Purchasing Cards, WISBuy, Accounts Payable, ChartFields, Query and Reporting.*
- *Ensure the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) from DOA are spent on eligible expenses by the established deadlines and that the required reporting of these funds is completed timely.*
- *Finish cleaning up all remaining loans in the loan portfolio.*
- *Continue to improve internal controls on IT assets.*

BUREAU OF BUDGET, POLICY, AND FACILITIES

The Bureau of Budget, Policy, and Facilities (BBPF) develops, monitors, and manages the department's annual and biennial capital and operating budgets and provides financial, policy, and statistical analysis of department programs. BPPB staff monitors and manages all construction and building projects for the department. The bureau coordinates operational risk assessments, risk management (liability and property), and internal audit services. BPPB also coordinates the collection and analysis of demographic data concerning Wisconsin veterans.

BBPF ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- *Assisted in coordinating the opening of the Moses Hall at King in February 2022.*
- *Coordinated the completion of four projects at the Veterans Homes, which included upgrades to the nurse's station at Union Grove, upgrades to the roof on Marden Hall and the condensation line at King, and upgrades to several floor areas at Chippewa Falls.*
- *Supported the VHRP in applying for the federal per diem grant.*
- *Oversaw the demolition of Cottages 1, 2, and 16 at Union Grove.*
- *Oversaw the department's biennial budget request and submitted it to the Governor.*
- *Oversaw the department's capital budget request and submitted it to the Governor.*
- *Monitored grants for 11 federal construction projects.*

BBPF FUTURE INITIATIVES:

- *Oversee the kitchen project at Union Grove.*
- *Oversee the water improvement project at King.*
- *Oversee all department audits requested by the Secretary.*
- *Oversee the department's operational budget.*
- *Oversee and submit the department's biennial budget requests.*
- *Oversee and submit the department's capital budget requests.*
- *Continue to support department grant applications.*
- *Continue to monitor federal construction grants*

PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT AND FLEXIBLE-TIME SCHEDULES

WDVA, like most other cabinet agencies, transitioned to a fully remote work environment at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic for agency employees not working in one of the State Veterans Homes. Our information technology bureau worked around the clock to ensure staff had the appropriate equipment and software to continue working and providing services to veterans and their spouses in the State of Wisconsin. WDVA implemented a return-to-work plan that incorporated those employees back into the workplace in a hybrid model. The hybrid model includes a mixture of remote work and office work.

Current policy allows supervisors not located in our Veterans Homes to work directly with their employees to create flexibility with their work start and stop times while also ensuring that department employees are available to assist the public during state office hours of 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Due to the nature of the work performed at the State Veterans Homes and the need to be staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, there is less opportunity for the department to be flexible with work schedules in order to ensure appropriate coverage to care for the needs of those veterans in our State Veterans Homes. WDVA has worked to create more part-time opportunities at both King and Union Grove Veterans Homes to attract and retain employees. WDVA also implemented a weekend work program to allow more flexibility to those who preferred to be home on weekdays to care for family members, eliminate the need for daycare or to pursue further education.