



The Guardian

The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

www.nmdvs.org

1-(866) 433-8387 toll-free

June, 2020

DVS to Continue Telework Assistance

Due to an abundance of caution regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—and concern for staff and the public it serves during this health crisis—the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) will continue to offer assistance by telephone, email, or video conferencing.

Veterans and unmarried surviving spouses of deceased veterans needing help with filing for or updating their VA or state veterans benefits can contact any DVS Veterans Service Officer (VSO) on the VSO's mobile phone number, leaving messages on the VSO's office phone number, real-time video conferencing, or e-mail. Other state agencies are also taking the same precautions.

"I realize many businesses in New Mexico are gradually re-opening in a limited, controlled manner," said DVS Secretary Judy Griego. "But I fully support the Governor and the Department of Health in wanting to make sure that the COVID-19 pandemic is under control throughout the entire state before state government opens its offices for in-office visits by public."

The latest Department of Health data shows that, while the spread of COVID-19 is slowing down, it is still highly volatile in many parts of neighboring Arizona, Colorado, Texas, and northern Mexico. Below is the contact information for DVS VSO's. Assistance is provided on a first-call, first-served basis. "live" video conferencing can be arranged by contacting the VSO. *(more COVID-19 data on page 4)*

Alamogordo (VSO: Larry Weatherwax)

Office: (575) 437-4635

Mobile: (575) 491-3127

larry.weatherwax@state.nm.us

Albuquerque #1 (Karen Abeyta)

Office: (505) 346-3986

Mobile: (505) 429-0856

karen.abeyta@state.nm.us

Albuquerque #2 (Gordon Schei)

Office: (505) 346-4810

Mobile: *(same as office number)*

gordon.schei@state.nm.us

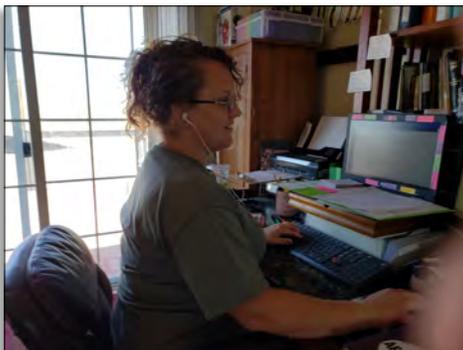
Carlsbad (Dagmar Youngberg)

Office: (575) 885-4939

Mobile: (575) 988-5900

dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us

(continued)



Roswell VSO
Danielle Thompson



Las Cruces VSO
George Vargas

Clovis (Matt Barela)

Office: (575) 762-6185

Mobile: (575) 825-9602

Matthew.barela@state.nm.us**Farmington (Beverly Charley)**

Office: (505) 327-2861

Mobile: (same as office number)

Beverly.charley@state.nm.us**Hobbs (Dalton Boyd)**

Office: (575) 397-5290

Mobile: (575) 241-0714

Dalton.boyd2@state.nm.us**Las Cruces #1 (George Vargas)**

Office: (575) 524-6124

Mobile: (5785) 520-2634

George.vargas@state.nm.us**Las Cruces #2 (Rosa Bycenski)**

Office: (575) 524-6220

Mobile: (505) 870-1349

Rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us**Las Cruces #3 (Craig Chumley)**

Office: (575) 524-6220

Mobile: (same as office number)

Craig.chumley@state.nm.us**Las Vegas, NM (Martin Marquez)**

Office: (505) 454-0068

Mobile: (575) 520-5079

MartinM.marquez@state.nm.us**Roswell (Danielle Thompson)**

Office: (575) 624-6086

Mobile: (575) 416-2284

Danielle.Thompson@state.nm.us**Women Veterans Program***(option for women veterans)***Tracie Brasier
Program Manager**

Mobile: (505) 388-8844

tracie.brasier@state.nm.usVeterans can also self-file for their VA benefits online at www.ebenefits.va.gov**Help for Veteran-Owned Businesses**

Veterans who own their own business can contact the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) for information about emergency assistance programs for small businesses affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Rich Coffel**VBOC Director**

(505) 383-2401

richardL.coffel@state.nm.us**Jim Cassidy (based in SE/southern NM)****VBOC Veterans Business Advisor**

(575) 624-6002

jamesM.cassidy@state.nm.us**Ft. Stanton and Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries**

Committal/funeral memorial services and the rendering of military funeral honors will continue to be temporarily postponed until further notice at the DVS-managed Ft. Stanton and Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries. Burials and interments will be done by DVS interment staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). Gatherings will continue to be limited to five individuals, who will be required to wear masks, and observe six-foot social distancing spacing. Families can choose to schedule full-service interments, once full post-pandemic operations resume, by contacting the following DVS cemetery supervisors:

Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery

David Flores

(505) 383-4381

David.flores@state.nm.us**Gallup State Veterans Cemetery**

Gilbert Lopez

(575) 921-3494

Gilbert.lopez@state.nm.us

Construction has been continuing at the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery by crews wearing personal protective equipment and observing social distancing precautions. Completion is scheduled for this summer. The Memorial Chapel at the adjacent Vietnam Veterans Memorial remains open to the public. Masks are required, and social distancing spacing will be monitored by PPE-wearing DVS staff. The remainder of the Memorial grounds remain closed to the public.

DVS Holds *Curbside Veterans Property Tax Certificate Service Day*

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) held a *Curbside Veterans Property Tax Certificate Service Day* on May 28 at its northeast Albuquerque office parking lot.

DVS Veterans Service Officers (VSO's), wearing personal protective equipment, helped veterans and unmarried surviving spouses of veterans with filing for the state veterans property tax exemption or disabled veteran property tax waiver.



The exemption is a \$4,000 reduction of the taxable value of the primary residence of a veteran or unmarried surviving spouse of a veteran. Veterans with a 100% service-connected disability can have their entire property tax waived.

DVS staff was able to verify veteran status, and then print the tax exemption or tax waiver certificates needed to file for the exemption or waiver with their county assessor's office. This on-the-spot service is provided by all DVS field offices during normal in-office visits. Certificates can also be obtained by mail.

This was the first time DVS has provided drive-up service, according to DVS Albuquerque-based VSO Karen Abeyta (*left photo, in black*) who also said it exceeded expectations.

"It was a very successful, very busy day for us—which is a good thing," she said. "We issued five dozen certificates. I want to thank everyone for their patience as we processed everything—and also thank the Bernalillo County Assessor's office for their input and assistance."

DVS Secretary Judy Griego also stopped by to visit with veterans (*right photo*)—and ended up lending a hand due to the busy flow of veterans stopping by.



"Nothing beats having personal one-on-one assistance—especially when it comes to filing for the property tax exemption or waiver," she said. "A lot of veterans really appreciated being able to talk to someone in-person. Wearing masks really didn't pose a problem for our staff—and I think the visiting veterans appreciated our effort."

DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Tracie Brasier (left photo, standing at left) also helped veterans with filing for the veterans property tax exemption or disabled veteran tax waiver.

Latest COVID-19 Data (as of June 9)

County	County Seat	Cases	Deaths
McKinley	Gallup	2,757	140
San Juan	Farmington	1,999	128
Bernalillo	Albuquerque	1,612	78
Sandoval	Rio Rancho	604	28
Dona Ana	Las Cruces	589	3
Cibola	Grants	169	7
<i>Cibola</i>	<i>Cibola County Correctional Center</i>	2	
Santa Fe	Santa Fe	158	3
<i>Santa Fe</i>	<i>Penitentiary of New Mexico</i>	1	
Valencia	Los Lunas	81	2
<i>Valencia</i>	<i>Central NM Correctional Facility</i>	1	
Curry	Clovis	64	
Rio Arriba	Española	57	1
Socorro	Socorro	55	5
Chaves	Roswell	48	2
Roosevelt	Portales	45	
Eddy	Carlsbad	38	1
Torrance	Moriarty	35	
<i>Torrance</i>	<i>TORRANCE COUNTY DETENTION FACILITY (ICE)</i>	18	
Lea	Hobbs	33	
Taos	Taos	31	
Otero	Alamogordo	28	3
<i>Otero</i>	<i>OTERO COUNTY PRISON FACILITY (ICE)</i>	273	
<i>Otero</i>	<i>OTERO COUNTY PROCESSING CENTER (ICE)</i>	92	
<i>Otero</i>	<i>Otero County Prison Facility (NMDoH)</i>	222	1
Guadalupe	Santa Rosa	20	
San Miguel	Las Vegas	16	
Grant	Silver City	15	
Luna	Deming	12	
Los Alamos	Los Alamos	6	
Colfax	Raton	5	
Lincoln	Ruidoso	5	
Union	Clayton	5	
Quay	Tucumcari	4	1

County	County Seat	Cases	Deaths
Catron	Quemado	2	1
Harding	Mosquero	1	
Hidalgo	Lordsburg	1	
Sierra	T or C	1	
De Baca	Ft. Sumner	0	
Mora	Mora	0	
Total		9105	404

# Tested	241,657
Deaths	404
Hospitalized (currently)	193
Hospitalized (to date)	1,583
Recovered	3,699

Deaths (by Age Group)

20's	4
30's	21
40's	15
50's	46
60's	73
70's	73
80's	109
90's	60
100's	3
Total	404

DVS Produces Video Message for Veterans About Agency Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

DVS has produced a video message for veterans of New Mexico regarding the agency’s continuation of its mission of helping veterans and unmarried surviving spouses of veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

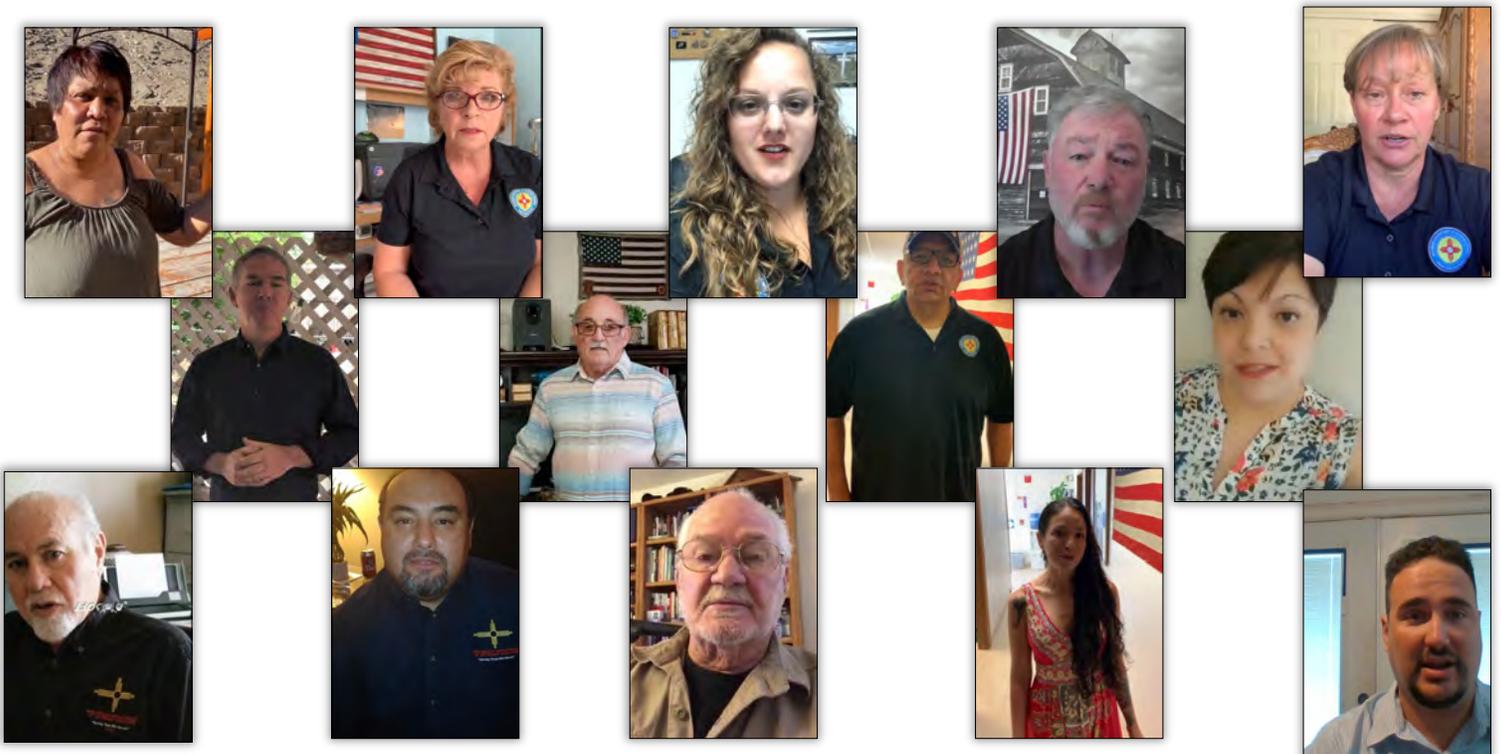
DVS staff, as with all other state agency office employees, have been teleworking from their homes since mid-March as part of a directive by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to help minimize the spread of COVID-19. DVS Secretary Judy Griego, division managers, and Veterans Service Officers (VSO’s) (*photos below*) wanted to express their gratitude to the veteran community for their patience when working with the agency by phone or computer for the past three months.

“We realize that, for many veterans, nothing beats sitting down with a VSO and getting personalized, in-person service,” said Secretary Griego. “Our VSO’s wanted to convey this understanding to our veterans, and let them know they are looking forward to once again being able to sit down with them soon.”

The link below will take you to the video message on the DVS YouTube Channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqgycPVmins>

Or you can go to the YouTube Channel at www.youtube.com. Entering “New Mexico Department of Veterans Services” in the search bar will take you to the DVS YouTube channel...and the video message, along with other video stories recapping DVS events since the agency acquired video equipment last summer.

DVS will resume videotaping and producing stories of DVS and other veterans’ events once normal business operations resume.





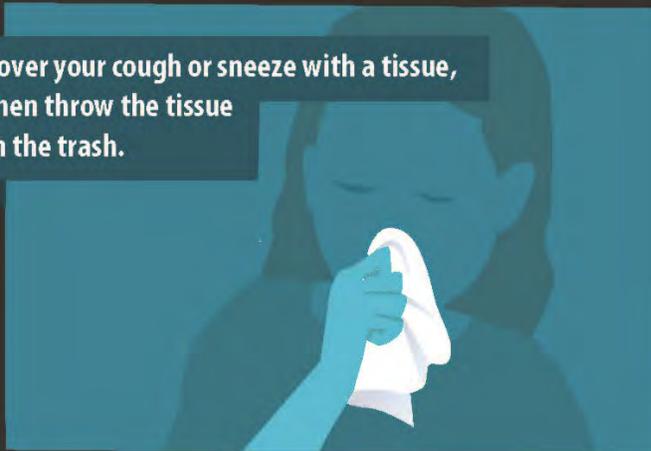
STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

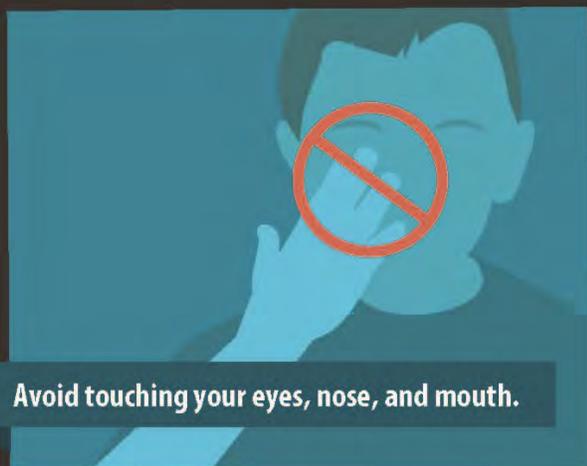
Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.



NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

For more information: cv.nmhealth.org

DVS Commemorates Memorial Day at Three DVS-Managed Facilities

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Memorial Day was commemorated on May 25 with subdued observances at the DVS-managed Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery, Gallup State Veterans Cemetery, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.



Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

The annual public Memorial Day ceremony in the amphitheater was cancelled—as was the annual Flag March from the intersection of State Highway 434 and U.S. Highway 64 featuring members from local veteran and civic groups.

DVS staff placed American and service branch flags on the grounds of the Memorial, which were closed to the public—though the Chapel was open for prayer and reflection. The wearing of masks was required of all visitors, and DVS staff ensured that six-foot social distancing spacing was followed.

In the morning, an unidentified local couple (*above photo*) did march an American flag from Highway 64 below the Memorial grounds and up the driveway to the parking lot.



Ft. Stanton & Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries

The annual Memorial Day ceremonies were also cancelled, though the cemeteries were open for visitation by the public. The wearing of masks was required of all visitors, and DVS staff ensured that six-foot social distancing spacing was followed. Flags were also placed by DVS on cemetery grounds.



Other Memorial Day Observances in New Mexico

Annual public Memorial Day ceremonies were also cancelled in communities throughout New Mexico—substituted with smaller, closed-group observances with COVID-19 safeguard measures and social distancing measures in effect. DVS invited veterans throughout the state to share some pictures of events in their community.

Albuquerque/American Legion Post 49



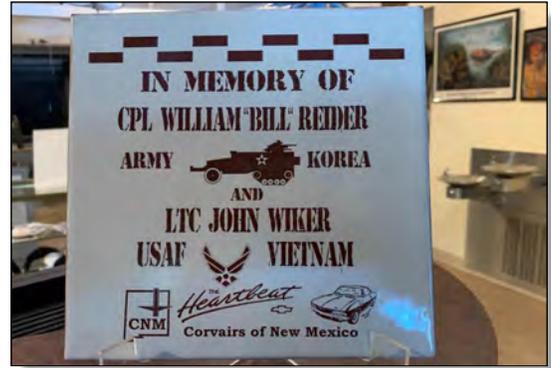
In Albuquerque, the *Women Veteran Warriors Color Guard* and the *Sergeant-at-Arms* from American Legion Post 49 posted the Colors at a Memorial Day observance at the Post. (photo courtesy of Taz Lovena)

Albuquerque Metro Area



In Albuquerque, members of the *Roadrunner Convoy* drove in a 20-vehicle parade from Bullhead Park, the New Mexico Veterans Memorial, and to several cemeteries in the Albuquerque metro area. At each stop, a bugler rendered *Taps* in honor of all men and women who lost their lives while in service to our country. (photo courtesy: Kelly Hunt)

Albuquerque-New Mexico Veterans Memorial



The Corvairs of New Mexico had a brief ceremony at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial to unveil a memorial tile honoring two members who recently passed away.



Bill Reider was a Korean War veteran who served in an anti-aircraft halftrack. After the war, he opened an auto repair shop, finding time to raise four adopted children, and earning the coveted Silver Beaver award from Boy Scouts of America.

Vietnam War veteran John Wiker served 23-years in the Air force. He then embarked on a second career as head instructor of the Del Norte High School Junior ROTC—passing on his values of integrity, honor, loyalty, and patriotism to hundreds of high school students. Both men exemplified a life of service to their church, family, and country.

The commemorative tile was unveiled by Bill's widow Lee (*left photo*), and John's widow Anne. Members then gathered for breakfast burritos, donuts, coffee, and "COVID-19 safe" socializing. (*Photos courtesy of Larry Blair*)



Corrales



LEFT PHOTO:
VFW Post 5432
Commander Seth Orell
and Post 5432
member Rudy Chavez.

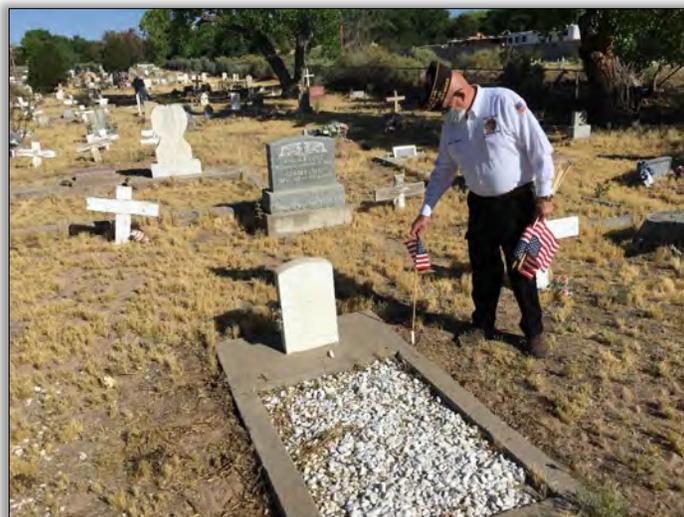


VFW Post Commander Seth Orell

Members of VFW Post 5432 in Corrales placed American flags at the headstones of the 54 veterans buried at the "Campo Santo Cemetery". The historic burial ground is located across the old San Ysidro Church and next to Casa Vieja Brewery. *(photos courtesy of Terrance Brown)*



VFW 5432 Post Member Terry Brown



VFW 5432 Post Member Steve Marsh

Grants



The ninth annual Fields of Honor Memorial Day display in Cibola County featured 925 crosses on display at Fire and Ice park.

The crosses were placed by members of VFW Post 3221, and bears the name of fallen veterans and family members of veterans from Cibola County *(photo courtesy of Aaron Dean)*

Santa Fe



TOP PHOTOS: *Saturnino Martinez served in the U.S. Army from 1942-1945 in World War II.*

Santa Fe city workers hung 36 banners right before Memorial Day weekend as part of a national “Hometown Heroes Banner Program” honoring local veterans for their service to our country.

The city, along with American Legion Post 1, local businesses, and families of veterans, combined to raise funds to design and purchase the banners, which are 2-1/2 feet wide by five feet tall. The first 50 were put up when the city became the 140th city in the nation to join the national effort last fall, bringing the total to 86 banners now on display on Cerrillos Road—one of the city’s busiest streets. *(photos courtesy of Jerry Martinez)*

BOTTOM PHOTOS: *Juan “JJ” Martinez served in the U.S. Army from 1944-1945 in of World War II.*



Museum of the American Family & Learning Center Receives National Award



The Museum of the American Military Family & Learning Center in Tijeras has been awarded the Award of Excellence by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) for the museum's exhibit *Addiction/ Recovery: Military Families Cope— an Experiential Exhibit and Ongoing Workshops*.

The award is the most prestigious award in the 75-year history of the Nashville, Tennessee-based AASLH for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history. It recognizes the museum's ongoing programming focusing on addiction and recovery. The exhibit, a collaboration between the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque and other state resources, addresses questions such as "Why Does Addiction Happen," "What Treatments Work," "How Can I Help", and "How I Should Respond to an Overdose."

This is the third AASLH award in as many years for the museum, following up on its 2018 Albert B. Corey Prize, and its 2019 Award of Excellence. All awards are given for programs and projects of merit.

In 2019, thanks to a NM ARTS grant, military brat and artist Kelly Barnes came to New Mexico from the East Coast to conduct face-to-face workshops at the museum to create a series of decorated ACU pants to accompany the exhibit. Recently, Tacoma, Washington, Poet Laureate and military spouse Abby E. Murray created a series of poetry workshops for the museum's podcast site.

The Museum of the American Military Family & Learning Center brings together people with shared experiences showcasing and honoring those who *also* served our country--America's Military Families. According to Museum Executive Director Circe Woessner, it serves as a repository for their stories, and shapes the future by preserving our country's heritage—recording its evolution, and inviting dialogue by sharing experiences with the world. For more information, contact Executive Director Woessner at militaryfamuseum@comcast.net or (505) 504-6830.





Nominations sought for the
New Mexico Business
Coalition (NMBC) 2020
Veteran of the Year Award



The NMBC Veteran of the Year Award is an annual award presented to a veteran who has shown exemplary service to other veterans and his or her community; the award will be presented at the annual NMBC Heroes Banquet, held in November.

Eligibility: Individual must be a veteran of active duty, reserve duty or national guard military service; proof of service required. Individuals currently serving on active duty are not eligible for this award.

Criteria for award: any one or more of the following:

- significant accomplishments in service to veterans while serving in a government position - elected, appointed, hired or under contract into the position
- accomplishments in the business world, especially accomplishments that benefit veterans such as starting and growing a veteran-owned business; employing veterans; or training veterans
- service to community; a religious organization; other service organizations; the political process (but not partisan politics); or patriotic groups
- service to veterans groups at any level

Who may nominate a veteran? Anyone may nominate a veteran for this award; nominees not selected for the award will automatically be considered for the award the following year.

Nomination due date: 30 June 2020

Submit a nomination (limit the nomination to two typed pages, including a brief statement of military service) to the Marine Corps League, (Attn: Veteran of the Year Award), P. O. Box 44304, Rio Rancho, NM 87174 or by email to BoardMembers@nm-mcl.com.

Any questions can be addressed to BoardMembers@nm-mcl.com; include Veteran of the Year Award in the subject line. Veteran of the Year and one guest will be invited to attend the annual NMBC Awards Banquet on November 14th at the Marriott Albuquerque (2101 Louisiana Blvd NE) hotel at no-cost.

VA Initiates “Deep Dive” Study on the Effects of COVID-19 on Veterans



**VA Secretary
Robert Wilkie**

**For more news and
benefits information
from the VA, visit
www.va.gov**

**The VA has a regional
office in Albuquerque.
For more Information:
[www.benefits.va.gov/
albuquerque](http://www.benefits.va.gov/albuquerque)**

**For information about the
New Mexico VA
Health Care System:
www.albuquerque.va.gov**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun a national four-year study on the impact of COVID-19 on Veterans to help address critical questions about the disease.

Known as EPIC3 (Epidemiology, Immunology and Clinical Characteristics of COVID-19), researchers will study data and biospecimens, such as throat swabs and blood, to learn how the virus that causes COVID-19 has affected veterans.

“By analyzing data on COVID-19 risk factors, progression, outcomes and immunity, this VA research promises to significantly advance the fight against the disease,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The study will complement a similar effort by the Department of Defense (DOD).”

The effort is led by the VA’s Cooperative Studies Program (CSP) and coordinated by the VA’s Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center. CSP epidemiology centers in Durham, North Carolina, West Haven, Connecticut and Boston are also contributing to the four-year study. It involves veterans infected with COVID-19 and those who have recovered or who may be at risk but have not been infected by the virus. They are volunteers who are inpatients, outpatients and residents in VA Community Living Centers. A similar study is being conducted by DoD involving active-duty service members. At the end of their respective studies, VA and DoD researchers will compare findings.

VA Launches Clinical Trial COVID-19 Treatment Based on Prostate Cancer Drug

The VA has begun a new clinical trial to test a Food and Drug Administration-approved prostate cancer drug as a potential treatment for male Veterans with COVID-19.

In a double-blind randomized controlled trial, VA scientists will compare the drug Degarelix (trade name Firmagon) to a placebo for improving clinical outcomes of nearly 200 Veterans who have been hospitalized with COVID-19.

Degarelix is often used to treat advanced cases of prostate cancer. It works by rapidly, but temporarily, suppressing the body’s production of male hormones. These hormones can fuel the growth of prostate cancer. Scientists are testing degarelix because lab evidence suggests male hormones trigger the production of a protein called TMPRSS2 on lung tissue. The virus that causes COVID-19 relies on TMPRSS2 to enter lung tissues. The study is not suitable for female veterans. Evidence shows degarelix may have the opposite effect in women by increasing TMPRSS2 production—and worsening COVID-19 symptoms.

VA, Multiple Agencies Launch Joint Mortgage & Housing Assistance Website for Those Impacted by COVID-19

To ensure homeowners and renters have current and accurate housing assistance information during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today, along with several other agencies, launched a new unified mortgage and housing assistance website:

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/coronavirus/mortgage-and-housing-assistance/>.

Veterans and service members with a VA home loan, other homeowners with a federally backed , and tenants living in properties with a federally-backed mortgage have relief options if they have been financially impacted by COVID-19.

“The VA is committed to ensuring veterans and service members have the financial tools available to make decisions that work for their own situations,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This collaboration provides an invaluable resource, enabling all homeowners and renters to access up-to-date information regarding their housing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The joint website with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Federal Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development consolidates: mortgage relief options, protections for renters, resources for additional help and information on how to avoid COVID-19 related scams. It also provides tools for homeowners to determine if their mortgage is federally backed and for renters to find out if their rental unit is financed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA continues providing home loan services to veterans and service members who have earned those benefits, working with lenders, servicers and appraisers on temporary measures to assist in processing and servicing VA home loans.

These measures include offering alternatives for appraisers to determine property value in lieu of interior inspections and providing lenders with additional information to close loans remotely. Such alternative procedures help ensure VA borrowers can close on a home even during this pandemic and prevent foreclosures when possible.

VA borrowers experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can review VA guidance for borrowers (more information:

<https://benefits.va.gov/homeloans/cares-act-frequently-asked-questions.asp>) and either request forbearance—(more information:

<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/guide-coronavirus-mortgage-relief-options/>

through the mortgage loan servicer collecting their monthly payments, or call 877-827-3702 to speak with a VA Home Loan Representative.

VA, Congress Ensure GI® Bill & Voc Rehab Veterans Are Protected From Any COVID-19 Disruptions

Since the passage of Public Law 116-128 on March 21, the VA has continued to work with Congress to preserve education benefits for impacted students during the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 28, 2020, the President signed the *Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020*. This new law gives the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) additional authorities to continue GI Bill® and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) payments for the period beginning on March 1, 2020 and ending on December 21, 2020.

First, it allows for the continuation of payments to students participating in the Work Study Program who are furloughed or must stop working. It also allows the VA to continue to pay benefits for up to 4 weeks to GI Bill® and VR&E students whose classes are suspended, even if school is still open. Also, there is a provision for restoration of entitlement for GI Bill® and VR&E students who lose credit due to school closure or schools' suspension of training.

Finally, the new law allows the VA to extend the "delimiting date" for Montgomery GI Bill®, Post-9/11 GI Bill®, and VR&E students if they are unable to attend training due to COVID-19. The VA already has the authority to extend delimiting dates for Survivors and Dependent Educational Assistance Program (DEA) beneficiaries. The VA is working to immediately implement the new changes to ensure students continue to receive their education benefits. In addition, this new law allows VR&E students to continue to receive payments if a school permanently closes or a course of study is disapproved for up to 120 days or the end of the term, whichever occurs first, due to COVID-19. GI Bill® students already have access to this benefit. It also permits VR&E to extend payments for an additional two months while VR&E participants are seeking employment. Furthermore, it allows VR&E to extend the 18-month limitation on employment services.

What should GI Bill and VR&E Students know?

At this time, there is no action required from a GI Bill® or VR&E student. The VA will provide new guidance and schedule training sessions with all VA-approved schools and training facilities soon. The VA will work closely with work-site managers and schools to ensure enrollments are accurately certified and processed timely. The VA is committed to providing regular updates through direct email campaigns and social media about the VA's effort to implement these new changes. If you have questions about your GI Bill® benefits, please contact the Education Call Center at 1 (888) 442-4551 between 8am-7pm Eastern Time, Monday-Friday. GI Bill® students may also learn more from the Student COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions webpage at: <https://benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/index.asp>

VR&E students may contact their assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor directly via phone or email with any questions or concerns they may have during this period.

S.3503 - SECTION 1. CONTINUATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN PROGRAMS OF EDUCATION...CONVERTED TO DISTANCE LEARNING BY REASON OF EMERGENCIES AND HEALTH-RELATED SITUATIONS.

By reason of an emergency or health-related situation, training previously approved by the State Approving Agency (SAA) in a face-to-face, resident modality...The enactment of S.3503, signed into law on March 21, 2020 (Public Law No. 116-128)...

*...allows for temporary approval of online/distance learning training through the period of time as stated in the provisions of the law, from March 1, 2020 to **December 21, 2020**. Noting only programs previously approved by the SAA will be available for Non-College-Degree (NCD) institutions to continue enrollments of GI Bill® students. For more information visit:*

<https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ128/PLAW-116publ128.pdf>

NOW IS THE TIME



During these times of uncertainty, you can still make a difference in a Veteran's life. This Mental Health Month, encourage Veterans to start their journey toward recovery.

Here are ways for your organization to help encourage a Veteran with mental health challenges to take that first step:

- Share social media messages and graphics on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Add the Mental Health Month Facebook Frame to your profile photo.
- Publish a campaign announcement in your organization's next newsletter or blog.
- Add a **Make the Connection** web badge or banner to your website to keep the conversation going all year long.

Get involved! Download Mental Health Month materials here:
[MakeTheConnection.net/resources/spread-the-word](https://www.MakeTheConnection.net/resources/spread-the-word)

Check out VA's Mental Health Month campaign at
[MakeTheConnection.net/mhm](https://www.MakeTheConnection.net/mhm)

May is Mental Health Month. VA's 2020 Mental Health Month campaign encourages all Veterans to make their mental health a priority. The campaign emphasizes that a small step today can improve well-being in the future.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE CONNECTION



Veterans shaped our past, and they shape our future.

Veterans are the backbone of communities across America. No matter when you served, your response to the 2020 Census will play a part in shaping our future.

Responses to the 2020 Census will determine how more than \$675 billion in federal funds is distributed annually for the next 10 years. That money is used for education and public services like parks, public transportation, health care, emergency services, and more.

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Census data impacts funding for things like:

- > Emergency services
- > Medical facilities
- > Community mental health services
- > Education
- > Public transportation and roads
- > Disabled Veterans Outreach Program

If you live in a group housing or assisted living facility, a representative of the building will fill out the census questionnaire for everyone in the facility.

For more information, visit:
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