



# The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Dept. of Veterans' Services  
January, 2024

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## Acting DVS Cabinet Secretary Herrera Testifies On DVS Budget Before the House Appropriations & Finance Committee



Acting Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera testified before the House Appropriations and Finance Committee on January 10 at the state Capitol in Santa Fe.

The purpose of his testimony was to request the fiscal year 2025 budget needed to help expand the services for our state's veterans and their families. He testified the greatest need for the agency is to increase the number of veterans' service officers (VSOs)—DVS staff who work with veterans to file VA claims, apply for state veterans' benefits, and help with everything else a veteran or their families needs.

The secretary said the current allotment of 24 full-time VSOs is not enough for such a large state. "Many of your represented counties don't have a VSO there," testified Secretary Herrera. "Therefore, that incurs a veteran driving a 50-miles or more just to get to one of our veterans' service officers to get services. I think that's unacceptable."

**Brig. Gen. Jamison A. Herrera**  
Acting DVS Cabinet Secretary

He also pointed out that most existing DVS field offices only have one VSO, who must close the office when he or she goes on the road to do outreach to serve veterans in outlying areas who cannot make it to an office.

"Every time this happens, that's the decision I have to make—close the office for half a day to let the VSO do an outreach or a presentation, and then get back to the office," he testified. "If I have somebody (a DVS VSO) driving three hours to get to a chapter house, I'm closing a veterans' service office that might have four or five appointments. But If I had two people in that office, those appointments could get met—and the outreach to other veterans can continue."

Other goals for the agency, testified Secretary Herrera, are to purchase a mobile RV-type unit to provide outreach and services in the most rural areas of the state, and the establishing of a Veterans' Resource Center in Albuquerque. This "one-stop-shop," he said, would house DVS staff and representatives from other federal, state, and local agencies and organizations. This, he said, would save veterans from "running all over town, stopping at multiple agencies, trying to get the help they need. A VRC would make things so much easier."

The secretary also testified about the need for DVS to expand its current transportation efforts. The Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program—a VA grant-funded program offering free round-trip rides from a veteran's home in 15 VA-selected counties and 5 tribal areas and nations to VA medical appointments is very successful but limited by VA highly rural criteria. Secretary Herrera said the transportation program needs to be expanded to the remaining 18 counties, pueblos, nations, and tribes in the state utilizing existing infrastructure or additional state assets to ensure all veterans can travel all VA or VA-authorized health care facilities. *(continued on next page)*

After his testimony, HAFC members who spoke supported Secretary Herrera’s presentation, saying they recognize a critical need to expand existing DVS services throughout the state. Several testified to their recommendation for increasing funding levels per his budget proposal utilizing a HAFC working group. Committee Chair Rep. Nathan Small (D-Doña Ana) agreed to form a subcommittee to further discuss the increased budget proposal. The committee will ultimately send its recommendation to the HAFC membership, which will make its final recommendation.

## The 2024 New Mexico Legislature

New Mexico’s 112 legislators are currently meeting at the state Capitol in Santa Fe for the 2024 Legislature. This year’s 30-day session convened January 16 and adjourns at noon on February 15.

Tracking introduced legislation, schedule committee hearings, and other legislative news can easily be done by going to the [state legislature website](#). Click on the “Legislation” tab to find legislation by the [number](#), [sponsor](#), [key word](#) (and then clicking on “2024 Regular” under the Session or Years tab), or [subject](#) (and then clicking “202 Regular” under Sessions). For committee hearings or final votes, click on the “What’s Happening” tab.

DVS will have information in the next edition of *The Guardian* on any veteran-related legislation signed into law after the session.

## VBOC to Present “Boots to Business” Training Class in ABQ for National Guard Members & Spouses

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)—the veterans business development division of DVS—is presenting a “Boots to Business” training class February 15-16 in Albuquerque for current and former New Mexico National Guard members who are interested in starting their own business or growing an existing operation.



This free two-day introduction to entrepreneurship course will be from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the New Mexico National Guard Armory, at 600 Wyoming Boulevard NE. It is also open spouses.

Attendees will learn key elements of small business ownership, techniques for evaluating the feasibility of business concepts, and the steps needed to develop an all-important business plan—a “must” for anyone looking to start or expand a business. Attendees will also be introduced to a broad spectrum of entrepreneurial business concepts, the many resources available to access start-up capital and technical assistance, contracting opportunities, and more.

To register for this class please visit the National Boots to Business Calendar at <https://sba.my.site.com/s/b2b-course-information>. Click on “Log in” and then “Create an Account”. Once an account is created select the class you would like to attend and confirm enrollment.



## Dates Set for 2024 Spring & Fall Honor Guard Training Conferences

The dates and venues have been set for this year's two annual honor guard training conferences in New Mexico.

The Spring 2024 Honor Guard Training Conference is on April 26—once again in Las Cruces at the Sonoma Ranch Golf Course (1274 Golf Club Rd) from 8a.m. – 3p.m.

The Fall 2024 Honor Guard Training Conference will be on August 23—again in Albuquerque at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial (1100 Louisiana Blvd. SE) from 8a.m. – 3p.m. Breakfast and lunch will be provided at both conferences.

These annual training conferences are presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, the New Mexico National Guard, and AARP New Mexico to provide guidance and training for the state's all-volunteer honor guards representing veterans' service organizations that render honors at the funerals of veterans throughout the state. Demonstrations and training are provided by New Mexico National Guard Honor Guards to ensure that the volunteer units render honors in a professional manner.

All honor guards are strongly encouraged to attend at least one of the conferences. Any veterans' service organization that is interested in forming an honor guard are also welcome to attend. For more information, contact Diana Myklebust at (505) 231-8911 or [diana.myklebust@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:diana.myklebust@dvs.nm.gov).

*(all photos are from last year's Spring Honor Guard Conference)*





## State to Offer Free Blood Testing for PFAS for Clovis Residents & Cannon AFB Personnel

This spring, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will offer Clovis residents living near Cannon Air Force Base (CAFB) and Base personnel the opportunity to have their blood tested for specified per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) free of charge.

NMED issued a [Request for Proposals \(RFP\)](#) for a contractor to administer the PFAS blood testing program and is seeking to host two events where up to 500 adult volunteers residing within four miles of CAFB will have a small amount of blood drawn and tested for PFAS. In addition, the participants will complete a survey to determine any potential exposure to PFAS. The RFP closes on Feb. 22, 2024. This program is funded and led by NMED, with assistance from the New Mexico Department of Health and the DVS.



For those who elect to participate, individual results will be sent directly to volunteer participants and not shared with state agencies or other organizations. Participants will be provided information on how to limit PFAS exposure and what they can do should their results show elevated levels of PFAS. The aggregated data will be used to better understand PFAS contamination caused by CAFB, the exposure pathways, and overall risks from these contaminants.

“PFAS chemicals are used in so many consumer products that it is likely that most New Mexicans will have some measurable level in their blood,” said Environment Secretary James Kenney. “However, for those who live near military bases like Cannon Air Force Base, the risk to their health from PFAS exposure may be even greater. This data will help us quantify if there are greater risks and inform how we better protect New Mexicans.”

The testing program will determine the levels of PFAS in participants’ blood, attempting to understand both the baseline and potentially elevated levels due to the [PFAS groundwater contamination plume stemming from Cannon Air Force Base](#). To date, the PFAS contamination caused by the U.S. Department of Defense (U.S. DOD) at CAFB and Holloman Air Force Base has cost New Mexicans over \$8 million dollars in site assessment, cleanup, litigation, and other costs.

The U.S. DOD’s inequitable response to PFAS sites in New Mexico stands in stark contrast to its approach to PFAS remediation at other sites around the United States, including Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas, where the U.S. DOD took responsibility for prompt cleanup. With [715 U.S. DOD sites](#) in the United States contaminated with PFAS, the State of New Mexico is the only state that the U.S. DOD sued in federal court to stop the efforts of NMED to compel cleanup.

PFAS are a group of synthetic chemicals used in a variety of products, including food packaging, nonstick cookware, and certain types of fire-fighting materials. PFAS were used in fire-fighting foam at air force bases across the United States, including Cannon Air Force Base. PFAS were discharged into soil at fire-fighting training areas percolated into the underlying Ogallala Aquifer. PFAS are known as “forever” chemicals because they do not easily degrade in the environment due to their chemical properties. Thus, PFAS can build up over time in soil, water, and living organisms and are found in water sources around the world. Growing evidence suggests exposure to some PFAS chemicals can lead to adverse health effects including increased cholesterol, reproductive problems, and cancer. Additional information about PFAS is available [here](#).

Additional details about the testing program, including when and how to participate, will be released later this spring. NMED will also conduct public meetings before and after the blood draw clinics to answer questions about the project and PFAS with community members. Questions on the risks of PFAS exposure should be sent to [strategic.initiatives@env.nm.gov](mailto:strategic.initiatives@env.nm.gov).

## Governor's Veterans' Advisory Council Briefed by DVS at the Council's First Public Meeting

The Governor's Veterans' Advisory Council conducted its first public meeting on December 13 at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque.

By request of council co-chairs Sam Trujillo and Tina Archuleta, DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera (*at podium, in left photo*) and DVS division directors gave a presentation outlining how the agency helps veterans in New Mexico.



"For us to better understand how we can help our veterans, we need to understand what the state of New Mexico is doing," said Co-Chairman Trujillo, a former U.S. Navy chief petty officer from Albuquerque who served off the Vietnam coast during the Vietnam War. "How can we better serve our veterans? The mandate of this board is to review what is being done, and to see if we can offer suggestions for improvement."

Secretary Herrera and DVS directors briefed the 11-member board on each division, and also outlined plans for the agency this year. Among the key goals, he said, is to add additional staff to increase the agency's reach throughout the state. He also said the agency is actively working to expand its Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program that offers free round-trip rides to VA medical appointments for veterans in 15 New Mexico counties.

"We're very thankful to be able to provide this much-needed service to these 15 counties. But it's a grant-funded program through the VA, which dictates what counties are eligible," he told the board. "We are going to work with legislators to come up with funding to extend this transportation program to the remaining 18 counties. Every veteran should be able to get their health care needs taken care of."

The 11-member council is tasked with working with DVS to make recommendations for improvements. It will also hold regular public meetings throughout the state to solicit feedback from veterans.



## Governor Lujan Grisham Cuts Ribbon For New Residential Suites at the TorC State Veterans Home

DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera was among the dignitaries joining Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham for a ribbon cutting ceremony on December 14 to unveil new residential suites at the New Mexico State Veterans Home in Truth or Consequences.

The six new buildings are a major upgrade over the adjoining existing outdated residential facility, which was built in the 1930s. Each of the six new state-of-the-art buildings will have 12 private suites. Each resident will have their own

private bedroom, living area, and accessible bathroom. The first three homes are finished, with the remaining three scheduled for completion by February 2024.

Residents will also enjoy social interaction in communal spaces such as living rooms, spacious kitchens and dining rooms, and other outdoor and common indoor spaces. The goal of this project was to create a neighborhood community with homes designed to support dignity, social connection, and inclusion for the residents.

(continued on next page)



“It is with immense pride that today we inaugurate these cutting-edge facilities dedicated to the well-being of New Mexico veterans and their spouses,” said the governor. “It is my hope the New Mexico Veterans’ Home serves as a national model for how to care for seniors with dignity and compassion.”

The governor secured \$40 million in 2022 legislative funding for the project, as well as \$20 million in bond funds. In 2021 the state also applied for the federal State Veterans Home Construction Grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which would reimburse 65% of the state’s costs to update the facilities.

“I want to thank the governor for following through on her pledge to provide a modern, safe, and comfortable residence available for our senior veterans,” said Secretary Herrera. “These are beautiful residential facilities that certainly can stand up to any veterans’ home in the country,”

Veterans have begun moving in to the first three completed buildings. The remaining three are scheduled to be finished this summer. More information about the New Mexico State Veterans Home can be found on its [website](#).





## Governor and DVS Staff Give Holiday Gift Baskets to State Veterans Home Residents

After taking a tour of one of the new residences at the state veterans home in Truth or Consequences, the governor and DVS staff presented holiday gift baskets to the residents at the existing residential facility.

The baskets, which were put together by DVS staff, contained fruit, hand soap, hand sanitizer, a small blanket, neck pillow, and other toiletries and comfort items. Each basket also came with a small American flag. The governor made it a point to meet and chat with every resident veteran and thank them for their military service.



**BELOW LEFT PHOTO, L to R:** Albuquerque-based VSO Diana Powers, Social Worker Therese Castillo, Albuquerque-based VSO Jesus Palomino, Silver City-based VSO Clarissa Sierra, and Las Cruces-based VSO Clint Anderson were among the many DVS staff who joined DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera (*BELOW RIGHT PHOTO*) to help give gift baskets to residents at the state veterans home in TorC. VSO Sierra took baskets with her to give to residents living in the residence wing at the Fort Bayard Medical Center







DVS Chief Financial Officer Danelle Lucero (*left*) and Albuquerque-based VSO Jesus Palomino (*2nd from right*) helped fill food boxes on December 19 in downtown Albuquerque.

## DVS Spearheads Governor's Holiday Food Box Drive for Needy Veterans and Their Families

Two-hundred fifty veterans and their families were treated to a lavish holiday food box—courtesy of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

The governor directed DVS to distribute the boxes to needy veterans and families from December 19-22. Each 25-pound box contained a large ham, a bag of potatoes, a four-stick package of butter, a one-pound bag of fresh green beans, a package of dinner rolls, and a bottle of sparkling apple cider. Along with the box came an unbaked frozen cherry pie, and a card from the governor thanking the veteran for their military service.

The food items, which were stored at a downtown HSD warehouse, were packed on December 18 by staff from DVS and HSD, with additional help by volunteers from the Aging & Long-Term Services Department, the city of Albuquerque, and the New Mexico Veterans' Integration Center.

DVS came up with a plan to distribute 50 boxes apiece to the five regions of the state (northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest, and central New Mexico). DVS worked with leadership from the VFW and American Legion to identify families in each region.

"Our staff had a lot of fun working together and with people from other agencies for this great cause initiated by the governor," said Acting DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera, who was among the 15 DVS staff filling the food boxes. "I want to thank the governor for helping make the holiday brighter for some of our veterans in need. I also want to thank the agencies that helped us pack the boxes, and VFW and American Legion leadership for identifying families throughout the state."



DVS Field Services Director Robin Wilson (*left*) and SAA Director Kathy Snyder filling boxes with bagged fresh green beans.







**Left Photo:** DVS Clovis-based Veterans Service Officer helped deliver the sealed food boxes to veterans in eastern New Mexico.



**Right Photo:** Mike and Linda Bowings of Clovis were grateful for receiving a food box.



In Gallup, U.S. Air Force and Vietnam Veteran Herman Benally o St. Michaels, AZ, received a box, along with an unbaked frozen cherry pie.



In Las Cruces, VFW Post 10124 Commander Darrell Mellon far right, in red cap) delivered a holiday food box to the Douglas family





In Roswell, **(left photo)** “Santa” (American Legion Post 28 Vice Commander Felix Sosa) delivers a holiday food box to American Legion Post 28 Past Sgt-at-Arms Tony Wixon.



**Right photo:** DVS Roswell-based VSO Danielle Thompson (*top/center-right*) was joined by members from American Legion Post 28, Post 28 Auxilliary, VFW Post 12184 and the Bureau of Land Management to send Christmas cards that were also given to veterans.



In Albuquerque, former American Legion National Vice Commander and current AL Post 13 member Paul Espinosa (*at left*) delivered a food box and pie to 85-year old Fred Griego, a U.S. Navy veteran of the Vietnam War.



In Santa Fe, Lorena Wigginton (*at right*), president of American Legion Auxilliary Unit 17 from Española, delivered a food box and an unbaked cherry pie to 91-year old former Navy nurse and fellow Auxilliary Unit 17 member June Jafee at her senior residence center.



## Remembrance Wreaths Laid at Cemeteries Across New Mexico on Wreaths Across America Day

DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison A. Herrera, U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan (*below left photo*), and Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez (*lower right photo*) were the guest speakers at the “Wreaths Across America” ceremony on December 16 at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

The ceremony coincided with simultaneous ceremonies taking place at the same time as a noon ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, where thousands of pre-paid remembrance wreaths were placed on selected gravesites. Secretary Herrera reminded everyone of the freedom we enjoy during the holidays...and every day...are fought for and protected by those who served in the U.S. military.

After the brief ceremony, hundreds of volunteers placed 6,500 pre-paid wreaths at selected gravesites—with many placing wreaths at the gravesites of family members, as Sec. Herrera did (*lower photo*): placing a wreath at the gravesite of his parents—both of whom were U.S. Navy veterans: HN2 (Hospital Corpsman-2) Luis Herrera, and HN (Hospital Corpsman) Mary Ann Herrera. Wreaths were placed on gravesites at more than 4,100 cemeteries across the nation.





(UPPER TWO PHOTOS: Gold Star Mothers of New Mexico members Pat Merville (below left photo/2nd from right, with wreath) and Shirley Tetreault (below left photo/3rd from left; and below right photo) helped lay wreaths honoring the service branches and, ex-POWs, and those still listed as missing in action)



BELOW FOUR PHOTOS: Some of the 6,500 wreaths that were placed by hundreds of volunteers at designated areas of the Santa Fe National Cemetery





Wreaths were also placed on gravesites of the three DVS-managed Angel Fire (*below top row photos*) and Gallup (*middle row photos*) State Veterans' cemeteries.....and the For Stanton State Veterans' Cemetery (*bottom row/left photo*) and historic Fort Stanton Merchant Marine & Veterans' Cemetery (*bottom row/right photo*)



# Veterans Community Bulletin Board

The following pages feature event and informational flyers provided to DVS by veterans and community service agencies. These flyers are published for the convenience of New Mexico's veteran community. Inclusion in *The Guardian* does not constitute an endorsement by DVS of the organization, content, products, or services contained therein.

DVS invites government agencies and non-profit service organizations to send flyers for publication in *The Guardian* announcing an upcoming or ongoing veteran-related event. DVS will run these flyers as a public service courtesy to the veteran community.

Please note:

- Flyers must have the name of a point-of-contact from the organization...along with the contact's phone number or email address. Flyers without this information will not be published.
- DVS is not responsible for the accuracy of the content, products, or services in these flyers.
- Views expressed in these flyers are the independent views of the authors/owners of the third-party entity that created the flyer—and does not necessarily reflect the views of DVS.
- To the maximum extent permitted by law, DVS expressly denies liability for any and all losses suffered by any persons or organizations who, in their independent discretion and reliance, either directly or indirectly rely on content, products, services or information offered by these independent third-party organizations.
- DVS reserves the right to edit or decline to publish any flyer.





# HANDMADE Roper's Saddle RAFFLE

## to benefit Korean and Vietnam Veterans



## For Honor Flight

Made by Korean War  
Veteran James Motley

Donated to Honor Flight by an  
anonymous donor

- 15" wooden tree
- Steel horn
- Semi-quarter horse bars
- Rough out seat
- 6 tickets for \$100

Drawing Date - February 3,  
2024 at Tuff Hedeman  
Bull Riding event in El Paso.



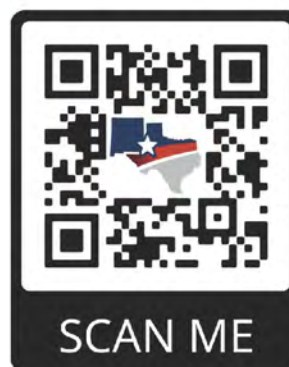
**\$20**  
per ticket

**CALL US TODAY!**  
**TEXAS - 432-848-5264**  
**NEW MEXICO - 575-236-4202**



## **PERMIAN WARRIOR PARTNERSHIP**

Proud Participant in the SSG Parker Gordon  
Fox Suicide Prevention Grant



The **Permian Warrior Partnership (PWP)** is committed to improving veterans and their families' quality of life in the Permian Basin through proactive outreach, engagement, and by coordinating existing services to provide holistic support.

As a Fox Grant participant, **PWP** reaches veterans ahead of a crisis to provide assistance in various areas of their lives. Our goal is to know every veteran in our community and end veteran suicide one warrior at a time.  
**Together, we can do better.**

If you are a veteran, veteran spouse, or caregiver, looking for resources in the Permian Basin, we are here to support you.

- Access to Earned Benefits
- Housing
- Higher Education
- Employment
- Social Networking
- Recreation
- Healthcare
- Spirituality

Email us at  
**Connect@PermianWarriorPartnership.org**



**PERMIANWARRIORPARTNERSHIP.ORG**  
**@PERMIAN WARRIOR PARTNERSHIP**





# Break Free: Understand Your Survival

## AD/Vet Substance Use Support Group

Our mission is to empower individuals in their recovery journey by fostering compassion, facilitating meaningful connections, and promoting the normalization of experiences with substance use as a tool for survival in the midst of trauma. We strive to create a supportive environment where individuals can find acceptance, understanding, and a sense of belonging as they navigate the challenges of substance use problems. We aim to support each person as they work towards healing, growth, and a life free from the grip of addiction.

- Located off Eubank
- Tuesdays at 6:00 pm
- 8 week program
- Free of charge



Resources generously donated by  **DESERT WISE**

**Interested in group? Contact us for more information:**

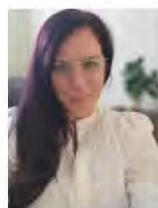
**(505) 361-1957 | [breakfree@desertwise.com](mailto:breakfree@desertwise.com)**



**Sujana Chowdhury**  
LMSW



**Megan Sexton**  
LMSW



**Brittany McKinley**  
MS, LSAA



**Tom Hail**  
LCSW

**23 years combined experience treating Active Duty and Veterans**

**Empowering recovery through compassion, connection, and normalization of experiences.**



## News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)



### More Than Five Million Veterans Screened for Toxic Exposures; Passage of the PACT Act Has Been the Key

VA has screened more than five million veterans for toxic exposures — a critical step to detecting, understanding, and treating potentially life-threatening health conditions. Of these screened veterans, 2.1 million (43%) reported at least one potential exposure.

The screening takes five to 10 minutes and begins with VA health providers asking veterans if they believe they experienced any toxic exposures while serving in the armed forces. Veterans who answer yes are then asked follow-up questions and offered connections to information on benefits, registry-related medical exams, and other clinical resources, as indicated. Their responses to the screenings are then added to their VA medical record to be included as part of their future care.

-up questions and offered connections to information on benefits, registry-related medical exams, and other clinical resources, as indicated. Their responses to the screenings are then added to their VA medical record to be included as part of their future care.

This milestone comes just 13 months after the screening launched at VA medical centers and clinics nationwide as a part of the PACT Act. The PACT Act expanded VA health care and benefits to millions of Veterans, paving the way for VA to deliver [more care and more benefits to more veterans than ever before](#) in 2023.

The screening covers a variety of different types of toxic exposures, but the two most reported exposures are burn pits and Agent Orange, which together make up more than 60% of veteran responses. More than half of the Veterans screened (2.6 million) are 65 years old or older, with veterans under 45 making up just over 900,000 of those screened. Of the nearly 650,000 women veterans who regularly use VA care, more than 535,000 have been screened for toxic exposures.

While the toxic exposure screening does not play a role in determining disability compensation, it does provide an opportunity to connect veterans with the resources they need to file a claim. Each veteran who reports a potential exposure receives a letter with information about how to apply for benefits.

To fulfill the goal of screening every veteran enrolled in VA health care at least once every five years, VA is exploring new and innovative ways to reach out to veterans, including those who are vulnerable or don't routinely access VA care. The department is also in the pilot stages of developing a self-screening tool that will make the initial question of the screening even more easily accessible to veterans with access to web-based electronic communications.

The PACT Act has expanded and extended access to VA health care for veterans. Thanks to the PACT Act and other new laws, many groups of veterans are now able to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits – including World War II Veterans, Vietnam veterans, Gulf War veterans, veterans who deployed to a combat zone and transitioned out of the service less than 10 years ago, and [more](#). All remaining toxic-exposed veterans will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care next year under the PACT Act – including any veteran who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other combat zones during the Persian Gulf War or after 9/11. Veterans who aren't currently enrolled can [submit an application](#) and receive their toxic exposure screening after enrollment.

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The PACT Act also expanded VA benefits for millions of veterans, making more than 300 health conditions “presumptive” for service connection. This means that if an [eligible](#) veteran has one of these health conditions, VA automatically assumes that the condition was caused by the veteran’s service and provides compensation and care accordingly. VA encourages veterans and their survivors to apply for these benefits now at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping veterans and their survivors, visit VA’s [PACT Act Dashboard](#). To self-apply for care or benefits today, visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411.

*If you would like in-person local help filing a claim, please contact any DVS veterans’ service officer listed on the back two pages of this newsletter.*

## VA to Fund Studies on Studies of PTSD Therapies Using Certain Psychedelic Compounds

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has issued a request for applications (RFA) for proposals from its network of VA researchers (in collaboration with academic institutions) to study the use of certain psychedelic compounds in treating posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression.

Through this new research opportunity, VA intends to gather definitive scientific evidence on the potential efficacy and safety of psychedelic compounds such as Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) and psilocybin when used in conjunction with psychotherapy to treat veterans with PTSD and depression. This is the first time since the 1960s that VA is funding research on such compounds.

“Our nation’s veterans deserve the very best care, and VA is constantly supporting innovations to deliver that,” said VA **Secretary Denis McDonough**. “This is an important step to explore the efficacy of a potential new set of promising treatments that could improve the health and quality of life for veterans.”

“[Veterans and VA researchers have told us](#) about the potential promise of psychedelics to treat mental health conditions for some time,” said VA’s **Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal**. “Now is our chance to study this potential method of treating Veterans with PTSD and major depression across the country.”

As with all other VA studies, research conducted on psychedelic compounds will be completed under stringent safety protocols. While these compounds are controlled substances, tightly restricted under federal law, research on these compounds may be conducted with appropriate regulatory approvals, including those from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The FDA granted breakthrough therapy status for MDMA for treating PTSD and psilocybin for treating depression in (2018 and 2019, respectively) based on promising preliminary research evidence.

In September, more than 75 VA and other federal clinicians, scientists and policy makers gathered in Denver to assess the state of existing scientific evidence regarding psychedelic-assisted therapies. This meeting’s working groups provided advice to VA leadership, including the recommendation for VA to begin funding its own studies into these compounds.

This guidance was based on [previously published studies](#) that have found promising results but included few or no veterans. For example, [researchers at Johns Hopkins have shown](#) that psilocybin therapy, given with supportive therapy, can ease symptoms of depression for up to 12 months. Additionally, 86% of participants in a [recent peer-reviewed study](#) achieved a “clinically meaningful benefit” from using MDMA to treat PTSD.

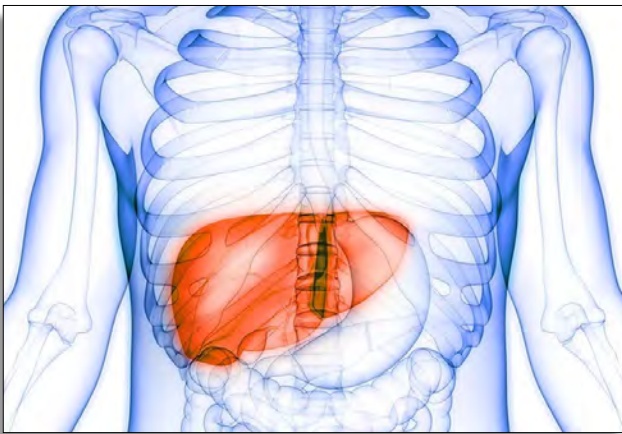
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VA researchers have already conducted a limited number of small studies on psychedelics in VA facilities using non-VA funding. This new RFA will permit the important next step of directly assessing effectiveness and safety of using MDMA and psilocybin-augmented psychotherapy in veterans.

Expanding research on psychedelics to address veteran mental health is also in line with calls from veterans service organizations such as the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans, as well as mental health provider groups. The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2024 also authorized the study of psychedelics within military populations by the Department of Defense. With this new announcement, VA will join the National Institutes of Health in supporting research that will yield insights for treating PTSD and depression.

Psychedelic drugs are a class of substances that alter consciousness or awareness and may be organically or synthetically produced. VA does not recommend psychedelics for use as part of a self-treatment program.



### **VA Forms Partnership With Private Entity to Help Treat Veterans With Liver Diseases**

VA has formed a new partnership with the Global Liver Institute (GLI) to improve the lives of veterans with liver diseases.

Through this collaboration, VA and GLI will provide educational materials and webinars to help increase Veteran awareness about liver disease, increase health care engagement of veterans with a suspected or confirmed liver disease diagnosis, and ensure equitable access to information and care for veterans from disadvantaged or underserved communities.

Educating veterans is a critical step toward preventing and improving care for liver disease. Current data suggests that more than 30% of veterans receiving VA care have risk factors of metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (formerly known as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease), and VA is determined to provide these veterans with the world-class health care that they have earned and deserve.

“Through this partnership with GLI, we’ll be able to better educate – and ultimately care for — veterans who have liver disease or are at risk of liver disease,” said Director of VA’s National Liver Disease Program Dr. Timothy Morgan. “We look forward to working with GLI to help the more than 4 million veterans with risk factors for liver disease.”

“GLI believes in equitable access to information, support, and care for liver health for all — especially our nation’s veterans,” said Chief Operating Officer at the Global Liver Institute Larry Holden. “By partnering with VA, we have a tremendous opportunity to expand liver health education, connections, and opportunities for veterans and their providers.”

Veterans can access various liver disease resources on GLI’s webpage designed specifically for veterans at [Liver Help for Veterans](#). For more information about VHA health partnerships, [visit VHA’s National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnership](#).





## DVS Field Offices in New Mexico

DVS has field offices throughout the state that are staffed with nationally accredited veterans service officers. DVS VSOs are dedicated to helping veterans with filing VA claims, applying for state veterans benefits, or with helping with anything else a veteran or their family needs with.

Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, (excluding holidays). Though this service is free, appointments are required and can be made by contacting the VSOs below. **Please note: VSOs can also provide help by phone or email to any veteran or eligible dependent calling or emailing from anywhere in New Mexico.**

### Alamogordo/Southeast NM

**David Henley**

411 10th Street #107  
(575) 937-5620

[david.henley@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:david.henley@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**May Chavez** (*ABQ metro supervisor*)

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2  
4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd floor  
(505) 527-2302

[helen.chavez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:helen.chavez@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**Ron Saavedra**

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2  
4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr  
(505) 525-3331

[ronald.saavedra@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:ronald.saavedra@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**Diana Powers**

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2  
4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr  
(505) 274-0393

[diana.powers@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:diana.powers@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

*Temporarily vacant*

### Albuquerque (downtown)

**DVS staff Mon. & Wed. (9am-4pm)**

Dennis Chavez Federal Bldg.  
500 Gold Ave. SW/3rd floor  
(walk-ins/no appointment needed)  
(505) 383-2400

### Belen/ABQ Metro & Central NM

**Rob Miller**

Belen Business Center  
719 South Main St.  
(505) 537-9339

[rob.miller@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:rob.miller@dvs.nm.gov)

### Carlsbad/Southeast NM

**Dagmar Youngberg**

101 N. Halagueno  
(505) 537-9339

[dagmar.youngberg@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:dagmar.youngberg@dvs.nm.gov)

### Clovis/Southeast NM

**Matt Barela** (*SE region supervisor*)

904 W. Sixth St.  
(575) 825-9602

[matthew.barela@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:matthew.barela@dvs.nm.gov)

### Clovis/Southeast NM

**Ben Padilla**

904 W. Sixth St.  
(505) 537-1445

[ben.padilla@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:ben.padilla@dvs.nm.gov)

### Farmington/Northwest NM

**Robert Guinn** (*region supervisor*)

San Juan College Vet Center  
4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B  
(505) 327-2861

[robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov)

### Farmington/Northwest NM

**Candice Pioche-Zunie**

San Juan College Vet Center  
4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B  
(505) 916-4835

[candice.pioche@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:candice.pioche@dvs.nm.gov)

(more offices are on the next page)

**Gallup/Northwest NM****John Livingston**908 E. Buena Vista Ave/Room 1A  
(505) 389-8731[john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Miguel Martinez** (*supervisor*)2024 E. Griggs Ave.  
(575) 644-6869[miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Vegas, NM/Northeast NM****Arturo Marlow** (*supervisor*)917 Douglas Ave.  
(505) 331-8838[arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov)**Roswell/Southeast NM****Danielle Thompson**1600 SE Main Street /Suite A  
(575) 416-2284[danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov)**Taos/Northwest NM****Leticia “Lety” Cano**Health & Human Service Bldg.  
145 Roy Rd.

(505) 709-5263

[leticia.cano@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:leticia.cano@dvs.nm.gov)**Grants/Northwest NM****April Ball**551 Washington Ave.  
(505) 521-8132[april.ball@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:april.ball@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Vincent Tellez**2024 E. Griggs Ave.  
(505) 361-5298[vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Vegas/Northeast NM****Jimmy Saiz**917 Douglas Ave.  
(505) 520-5079[jimmy.saiz@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:jimmy.saiz@dvs.nm.gov)**Santa Fe/Northwest NM****Phillip Hernandez**Bataan Memorial Bldg.  
407 Galisteo St./1st Floor, Room 134  
(505) 218-3125[phillip.hernandez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:phillip.hernandez@dvs.nm.gov)**Hobbs/Southeast NM****Fred Solis-Littlejohn**2120 North Alto St.  
(575) 241-0714[fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Clint Anderson**2024 E. Griggs Ave.  
(505) 216-8782[clint.anderson@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:clint.anderson@dvs.nm.gov)**Rio Rancho/Northwest NM****Dustin Newsom**Sandoval County Admin. Bldg.  
1500 Idalia Rd./Bldg. D/room 2041  
(505) 221-7190[dustin.newsom@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:dustin.newsom@dvs.nm.gov)**Silver City/Southwest NM****Clarissa Sierra**Western New Mexico University  
1000 West College Ave.  
Juan Chacon Bldg./Rm. 138A  
(575) 313-5627[clarissa.sierra@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:clarissa.sierra@dvs.nm.gov)**Women Veterans Program (ABQ)****Theresa Figueroa**Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2  
4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd floor  
(505) 372-9106[theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov)**DVS Tribal Liaison (Farmington)****Beverly Charley**San Juan College Veterans Center  
4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B  
(575) 241-3322[beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov)