

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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THE NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES (DVS)

DVS Mission

To provide the highest quality service and advocacy for New Mexico's veterans and their families.

DVS Vision

To be recognized as the premier agency in New Mexico that anticipates and meets the changing needs of our state's veterans and their families.

DVS Core Values (C.A.R.E.S)

Commitment

DVS is committed to the agency's mandate—the sole reason of the agency's existence—of serving our state's veterans and their families.

Accountability

DVS will hold the agency's employees to the highest standards expected of a professional premiere service organization.

Respect

DVS will treat every veteran, regardless of their rank while they were in military service, with the respect and gratitude they have earned for sacrificing to serve and protect our country.

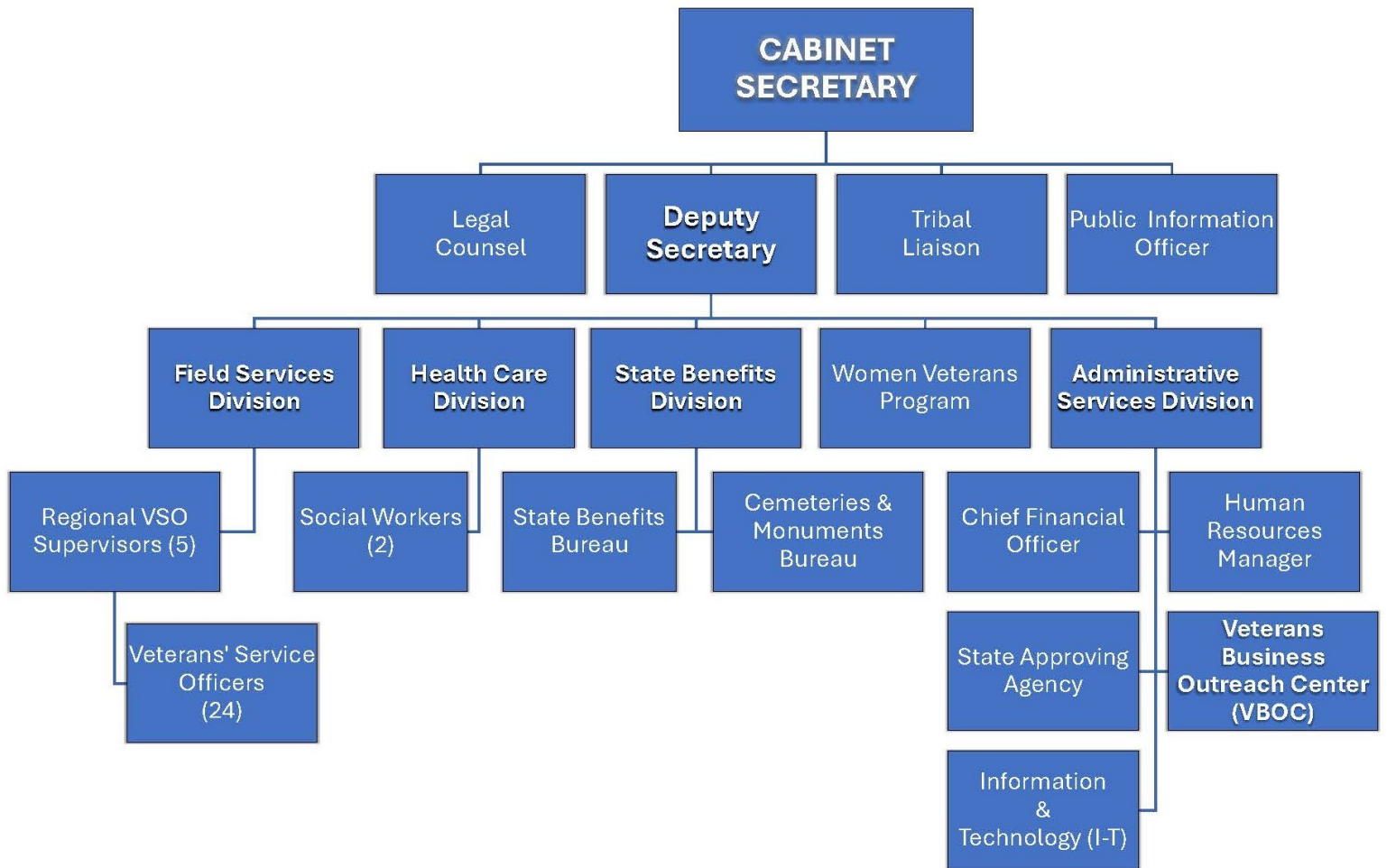
Empathy

DVS staff are veterans themselves, are related to a veteran, or strongly veterans—and therefore understand and have a strong compassion for all veterans and their families.

Stewardship

DVS will ensure responsible stewardship of the veteran, financial, and all informational programs and resources entrusted to us. DVS will improve agency performance through the use of innovative technologies, evidence-based practices, and sound business principles.

DVS Organizational Chart



DVS Division & Program Directory

SANTA FE - MAIN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

*Bataan Memorial Bldg.
407 Galisteo St./first floor, Room 134
(505) 827-6300*

• CABINET SECRETARY (<i>Acting</i>)	Brig. Gen. Jamison A. Herrera	
Executive Assistant to the CabSec	Shannon Quintana	(505) 827-6334
Legal Counsel	(<i>vacant</i>)	
Public Information Officer	Ray Seva	(505) 362-6089
Pueblo & Tribal Liaison	Beverly Charley	(575) 241-3322

• **Deputy Secretary** (vacant)

• Administrative Services Division	Director (vacant)	
Budget Bureau	Danelle Lucero— <i>Chief Financial Officer</i>	
Information & Technology Services	Terrence Rickard— <i>Chief Information Officer</i>	

• State Benefits Division	Ed Mendez—Director	
State Benefits Bureau	Jeff George— <i>Bureau Manager</i>	
Cemeteries & Memorials Program	David Walker— <i>Program Manager</i>	

State Veterans Cemeteries

Angel Fire	Randall Myklebust— <i>Supervisor</i>	(505) 225-4341
Ft. Stanton	Stephen McConnell— <i>Supervisor</i>	(505) 383-4381
Gallup	Gilbert Lopez— <i>Supervisor</i>	(505) 905-9771
Vietnam Veterans Memorial	DB Herbst— <i>Manager</i>	(575) 377-2293

ALBUQUERQUE SATELLITE OFFICE

*Pinetree Corporate Center
4801 Indian School R. NE/Bldg. 2
(505) 383-2400*

• Field Services Division	Robin Wilson—Director	(505) 219-5564
18 Field Offices/24 VSOs	(see pages 7-8 for contact information)	

• Health Care Division	Diane Mourning Brown—Director	(505) 318-6273
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• Veterans Business		
Outreach Center (VBOC)	Johnny Martinez— <i>Director</i>	(505) 318-6273

• Women Veterans Program	Theresa Figueroa— <i>Coordinator</i>	(505) 372-9106
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• State Approving Agency	Katherine Snyder— <i>Director</i>	(505) 280-1047
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DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE OFFICE

*Dennis Chavez Federal Bldg.
500 Gold Ave. SW/2nd Floor
Mon. & Wed (by appointment only) (505) 383-2400*

Acting DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera



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

New Mexico Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Jamison A. Herrera, who is also the state's deputy adjutant general, was appointed on September 1 by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to concurrently serve as the acting cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services.

Brig. Gen. Herrera has served with the state's national guard for 34 years. He enlisted as a private 1st class in 1989 as a member of the New Mexico Army National Guard's 515th Maintenance Battalion in Santa Fe—later earning his officer's commission through Army's Officer Candidate School class 33-91.

The Nambe (Santa Fe County) native is a graduate of the Army's Continuous Process Improvement Black Belt Training, Joint Task Force Commanders Course, and the Dual Status Commander course. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in University Studies with emphasis in education from the University of New Mexico. He has taught at the elementary and middle school levels. Secretary Herrera earned a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from the United States Army War College.



2023 Veterans Day at Angel Fire



Santa Fe Rotary Club Presentation
(Nov. 9)

WWII Veteran Replacement
Medal Presentation (Oct. 27)



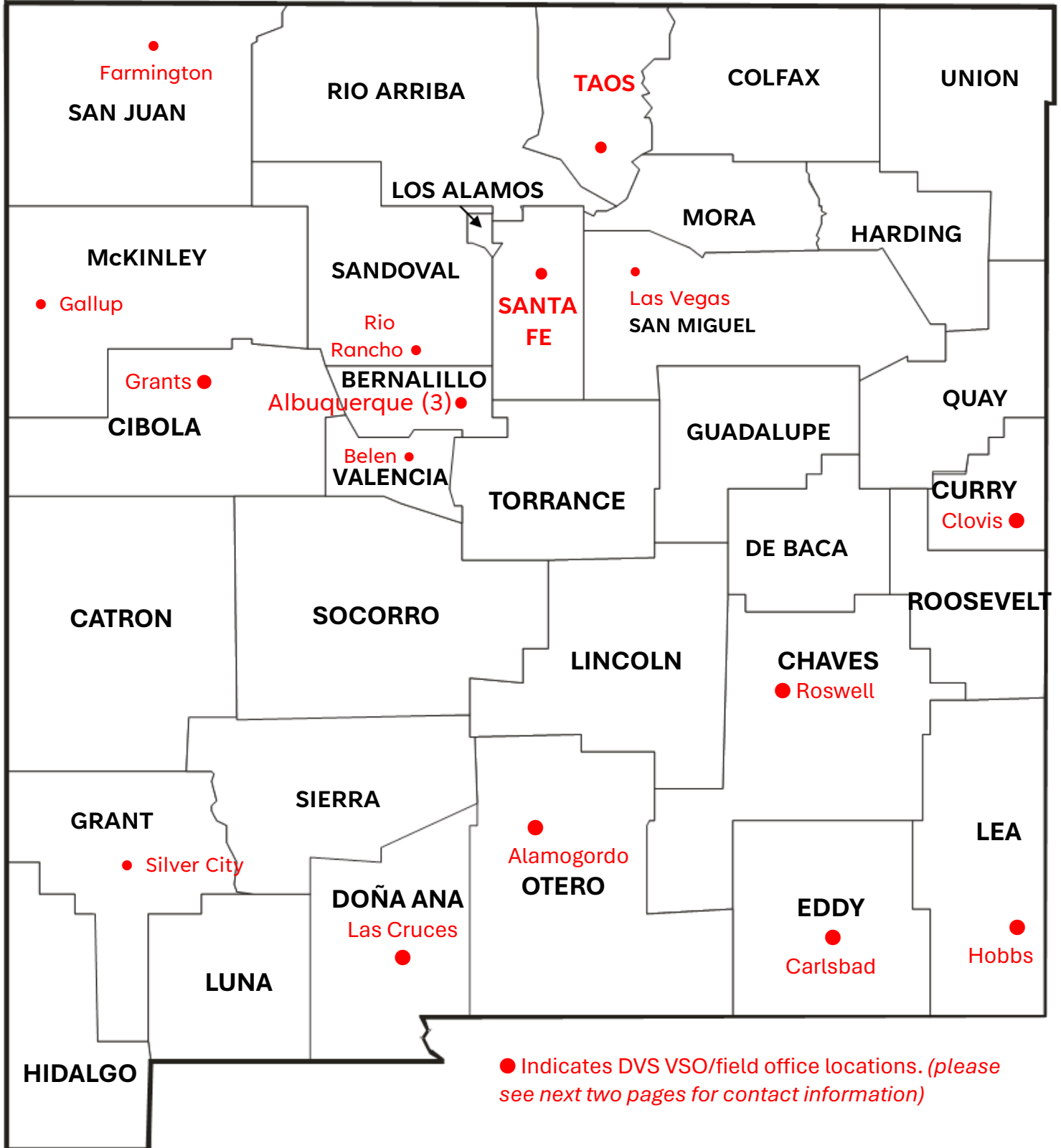
Holiday Food Box Distribution (Dec. 19)



Albuquerque Veterans Town Hall (Oct. 16)

FIELD SERVICES DIVISION

The heart and soul of DVS are the agency's 25 nationally-certified veterans service officers (VSOs) working in the agency's 16 field offices throughout the state shown below in red. These VSOs are the "boots on the ground" staff that help veterans or their eligible dependents with filing VA claims, filing for state veterans benefits, or assisting with any other issues facing a veteran and their family. DVS VSOs also make outreach stops in communities surrounding their office. Please contact a VSO for more information about these scheduled outreach visits.





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

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

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

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

Albuquerque Metro Area

Mathew Zamora

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

mathew.zamora@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque (downtown)

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

Dennis Chavez Federal Bldg.
500 Gold Ave. SW/3rd floor
(No appointment needed)

(505) 383-2400

Albuquerque (VA Hospital)

DVS staff Mon. (9am-3pm) main bldg.

Wed & Thu in NM Dept. of Workforce
Solutions' mobile unit

(505) 383-2400

Belen/ABQ Metro & Central NM

Rob Miller

Belen Business Center
719 South Main St.

(505) 537-9339

Carlsbad/Southeast NM

Dagmar Youngberg

101 N. Halagueno
(505) 537-9339

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

Clovis/Southeast NM

Ben Padilla

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

ben.padilla@dvs.nm.gov

Farmington/Northwest NM

Robert Guinn (NW region supervisor)

San Juan College Vet Center
4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B

(505) 327-2861

robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov

Farmington/Northwest NM

Temporarily vacant

Gallup/Northwest NM

John Livingston

908 E. Buena Vista Ave/Room 1A
(505) 389-8731

john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov

Grants/Northwest NM

April Ball

551 Washington Ave.
(505) 521-8132

april.ball@dvs.nm.gov

Hobbs/Southeast NM**Fred Solis-Littlejohn**

2120 North Alto St.

(575) 241-0714

fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Clint Anderson**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

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**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**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Miguel Martinez** *(supervisor)*

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(575) 644-6869

miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov**Las Vegas, NM/Northeast NM****Arturo Marlow** *(supervisor)*

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 331-8838

arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov**Roswell/Southeast NM****Danielle Thompson**

1600 SE Main Street /Suite A

(575) 416-2284

danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov**Taos/Northwest NM****Temporarily vacant****Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Vincent Tellez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 361-5298

vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov**Las Vegas/Northeast NM****Jimmy Saiz**

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 520-5079

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**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**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

FIELD SERVICES DIVISION

End-of-Year 2023 Report

Interactions

Phone	12,550
Email	11,199
In-person adjustments	12,961
Fax	531
Mail	2,907
Walk-ins/other	1,793

TOTAL 41,941

Claims

New power of attorney (POA)	2,693
Intent-to-file	1,621
State benefits	2,484
VA health care enrollment	268
Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC)	0
Survivor pensions	292
Burial benefit applications	193
Non-service connected pension	62
Individual unemployability	143
Compensation applications	2,607
Appeals	957
Decisions to veterans' law judge	27

TOTAL COMPENSATION & PENSION claims 7,275

Total forms submitted 12,427

TOTAL OF ALL VETERAN INTERACTIONS 106,542

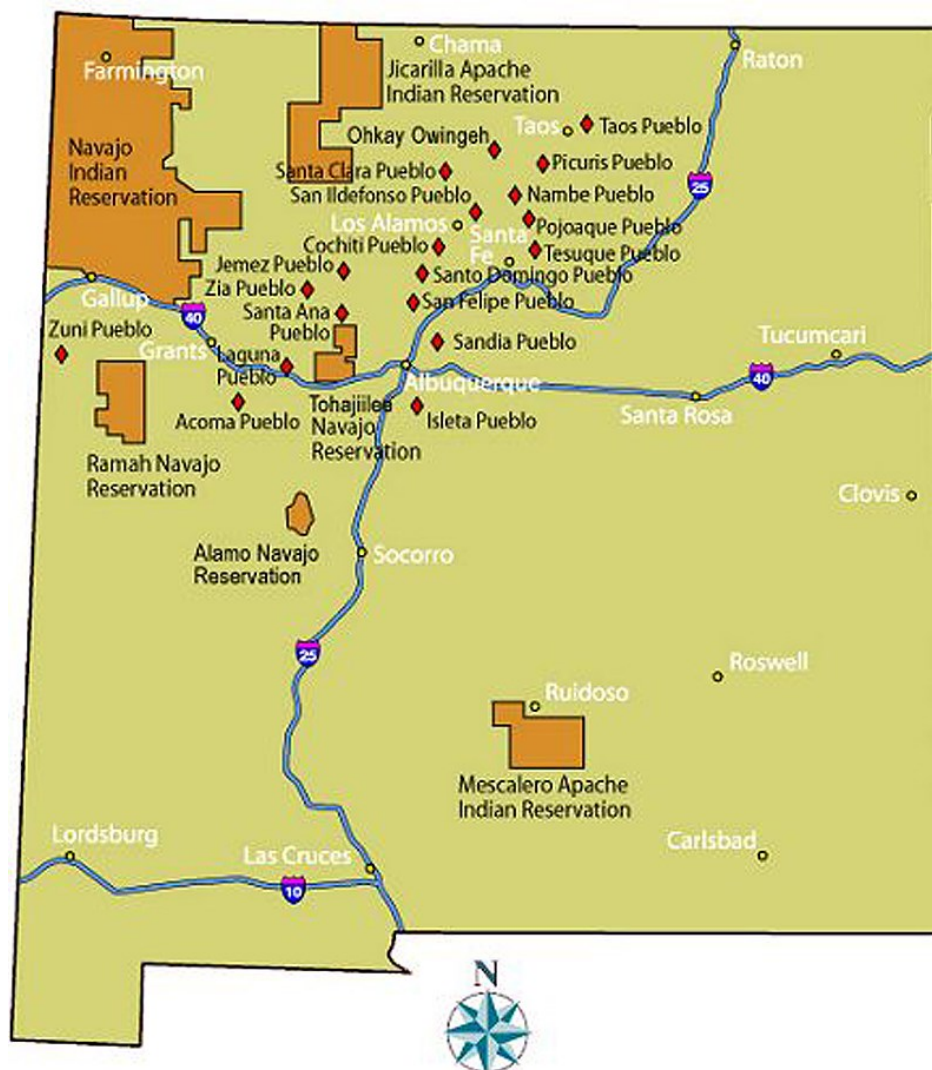
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Type					
Compensation	518	878	957	1,366	2,693
Pension	825	1,264	1,150	1,714	2,607
DIC	495	644	811	1,010	1,621
Supplementals	56	61	42	28	62
Appeals	106	182	211	225	292
TOTAL	2,000	3,029	3,171	4,343	7,275

Pueblo & Tribal Liaison

DVS created a pueblos and tribal liaison position in 2022 to provide advice and guidance to the DVS cabinet secretary and division directors on matters regarding the 9,000 Native American veterans living in New Mexico.

Most of New Mexico's 121,590 square miles is rural, and many New Mexicans do not have access to transportation to come to DVS for help with filing VA claims or applying for state veterans benefits. Many also lack sufficient phone, mobile phone, or internet service to receive remote/virtual assistance by DVS.

This is often the case with many Native American veterans living in the 19 federally recognized pueblos and four tribal lands within the state—including the Navajo nation, which also spreads from western New Mexico into eastern Arizona and southeastern Utah.



The DVS tribal liaison focuses on reaching out to Native American veterans—making sure they're aware of their eligible benefits, offering help with the filing process, and offering assistance with. Any other issues. If DVS can't help, the liaison can refer veterans to the New Mexico VA Health Care System, the Albuquerque VA Regional Office, the New Mexico Department of Indian Affairs, and many other federal, state, and local county governments that help Native American veterans and non-veterans. DVS works with these other agencies to host combined outreach events, conferences, and workshops.

Native American veterans can contact DVS Pueblos & Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley for assistance at (575) 241-3322 or beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov.



DVS Women Veterans Program

The DVS healthcare coordination division manages the agency's Women Veterans Program to specifically focus on assisting New Mexico's women veterans. The program's mission is to advocate for women veterans throughout New Mexico; to ensure women veterans and their eligible dependents are knowledgeable of available state and federal benefits and that women veterans have equitable access to veteran programs and services.

According to VA, women represent the fastest growing segment of our nation's veteran population. VA data indicates there are 2,045,384 women veterans in America—about 10% of the total veteran population of 18.2 million. In New Mexico, VA data shows there are 16,937 women veterans—12% of the state's veteran population of 141,746. VA estimates women veteran enrollment with VA healthcare system will increase 27% by the year 2029.

Women make up 16% of active duty and 21% of Guard/Reserve service members. Based on the upward trend of women in all branches of service, the number of women veterans and female VA users is expected to double again in the next decade. As American service members retire or fulfill their military commitments, our nation—including the state of New Mexico—must be ready to fulfill its obligation to them for their service.

In addition to providing veterans benefits they've earned for this sacrifice, DVS recognizes that many women veterans may have issues and needs that are unique to women. Many do not identify themselves as veterans... because they are women...believing veterans benefits are only for males, or for those who only went into combat.



Many women veterans are unaware about their right to VA healthcare, or don't know how to access it. Many have been subjected to military sexual trauma (MST). Many women veterans manage family households—and can face family reunification/assimilation issues. Many women face employment barriers encountered by non-veteran women in the civilian workplace. The women veterans program coordinator recognizes these unique needs of women veterans and strives to improve the awareness of their eligibility for VA and state veterans benefits, and community resources at their disposal.

The program director also advocates for women veterans by assessing their needs, and makes recommendations to the DVS cabinet secretary for changes to existing benefits or possible introduction of future benefits in the state legislature. As a certified veterans service officer, the woman veterans program coordinator can also help women veterans file VA claims or file for state veterans benefits. The program coordinator is also a consistent presence at statewide veterans events—raising awareness of the program, educating women veterans about their available VA and state benefits, and encouraging women veteran participation. The program coordinator also expands the program's scope by partnering with other organizations that serve women veterans.

Women veterans can contact DVS Women Veterans Program Coordinator Theresa Figueroa for assistance at theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov or (505) 372-9106.

STATE BENEFITS DIVISION

The DVS State Benefits Division encompasses the state benefits bureau and the cemetery & memorial operations bureau. It oversees the many state veterans benefits that are described below that are available for honorably-discharged veterans living in New Mexico.

The cemetery & memorial operations bureau oversees the DVS State Cemetery Program and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

The state benefits division director continuously works to identify additional benefits—bringing these to the attention of the cabinet secretary for possible introduction to state legislators for consideration as state law. The director also coordinates with the DVS Field Services Division for outreach throughout the state to increase awareness of these benefits and programs.

State Benefits Division 2023 End-of-Year Report

(January 1— December 12, 2023)

Property Tax Exemptions	3,068
Disabled Veteran Property Tax Waivers	1,634
License Plate Applications	635
State Parks & Museum Passes	679
Lifetime Hunting & Fishing Licenses	588
Wartime Scholarships	75
Vietnam War Veteran Scholarships	13
WWII Veteran High School Diplomas	1
TOTAL	6,693 (+582 from 2022)

State Veterans Benefits



Veterans Tax Exemptions

Veterans Property Tax Exemption

Any veteran who served a minimum of 90 days consecutive active duty, was honorably discharged, and is a legal resident of New Mexico qualifies for a \$4,000 reduction in the taxable value of their real property for county taxation purposes. If not applied towards a property, the veteran may receive a 1/3 discount off of their

vehicle registrations. This benefit is also available to non-remarried surviving spouses of a veteran who would have otherwise qualified for this benefit.

Disabled Veteran Property Tax Exemption

Any veteran who has been rated 100% service-connected disabled (permanent & total) by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and is a legal resident of New Mexico qualifies for a complete property tax waiver on their primary residence. This benefit is also available to non-remarried surviving spouses of a veteran who would've otherwise qualified for this benefit.

Exemption from Excise Taxes on Vehicle Purchases

Any veteran who has suffered the loss or complete loss of use of one or more limbs due to their military service shall be exempted from excise taxes when purchasing a new vehicle.

Veterans Service Organization Property Tax Exemption

Any U.S. Congressionally-chartered Veterans service organization is exempt from paying property tax on the property of its facility. Many VSO's—especially those in rural areas of the state—have been devoting much of their fundraising revenue to paying property tax.

Veterans Education Benefits



Vietnam Veteran Scholarship

Veterans who have been residents of New Mexico for a minimum of ten years, have served in the Vietnam War, and were issued the Vietnam Campaign or Service Medal are eligible. This scholarship pays full tuition and provides a stipend for all books at any state-funded post-secondary school.

Wartime Veteran Scholarship Fund

Can be used by any veteran who has served in combat since August 1, 1990, and who has exhausted all available federal G.I. Education Benefits options. Veterans must be residents of New Mexico for at least ten years and have also been awarded a campaign medal. Tuition and fees for books are also capped on an annual basis.

In-State Tuition for Veterans

Veterans, their spouses and their children no longer have to wait to establish “in-state” residency status when applying for college. Those who wish to use their G.I. Education Benefit Bill can now immediately take advantage of less-expensive “resident” in-state tuition rates at any state funded college, university, vocational school or vocational training program.

World War II, Korean, and Vietnam War Veterans High School Diploma

Any veteran who left a New Mexico high school before graduating to serve in World War II, the Korean War, or Vietnam War will be awarded a valid high school diploma issued from the high school they were attending.

Children of Deceased Veterans Scholarship

A child between the ages of 16-26 whose parent was killed in action or died as a result of their combat wounds, was a member of the New Mexico National Guard and passed away while on activation by the governor, or was a New Mexico State Police Officer who was killed in the line of duty, qualifies for a full tuition waiver at any state-funded post-secondary school. A \$150 stipend per semester will also be issued to help pay for books or fees.

Military Children School Enrollment Priority

Priority enrollment status is automatically assigned to incoming students or the New Mexico schools system whose active-duty, National Guard or Reservist parent is transferred to a New Mexico military facility.

Veteran Recognition Benefits

National Guard and Reserve Defined as Veterans

In New Mexico, veteran status is given to anyone honorably discharged after serving six consecutive years as a member of any national guard or reserve component unit. Veteran status is also given to any commissioned officers of the Public Health Service or the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration who served on active duty in service of the United States.

Veterans License Plates

Honorably discharged veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible for special veterans license plates—provided they show proof of eligibility. The two plates below are subjected to normal annual registration fees.



Armed Forces Veteran (any branch)



Woman Veteran (any branch)

The three special-recognition plates shown below are available free of charge for veterans who can provide proof of eligibility:



Medal of Honor Recipient



Purple Heart Recipient



Former Prisoner of War

Disabled Veteran License Plate

Honorably discharged veterans rated by the VA at least 50 percent service-connected disabled are entitled to two free disabled license plates. ***NOTE: This plate does not allow parking in blue handicapped spaces.



Gold Star Family License Plate

For families of a son, daughter, stepson, stepdaughter, parent or step-parent killed in combat action. There is a four-plate limit per family. The first plate is free, and registration fees will be waived for the lifetime of the recipient. The remaining three plates are also free, but recipients must pay for annual vehicle registration fees.



Patriot License Plate

The *Patriot License Plate* can be purchased by any licensed New Mexico driver to recognize the contributions and sacrifices of the men and women who are serving or have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. The one-time fee is \$27. (annual vehicle registration fees still apply.)



Special MacArthur Service Medal

The Special MacArthur Service Medal is issued members of the 200th/515th Coast Artillery Units who were residents of New Mexico at their original time of entry into the U.S. Military and served under General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippine Islands during World War II. The medal is also available to surviving family members of the 200th/515th units

Other State Veterans Benefits

Service Member Child Custody Protection

Child custody arrangements cannot be modified while a parent is deployed for military service. All child custody issues involving a deployed parent must wait to be resolved until the deployed parent returns to New Mexico.

New Mexico Personnel Office Veterans Hiring Preference



All veterans honorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces or anyone currently serving in the National Guard shall have five (5) points added to their final passing numerical scores on screening examinations performed by the NM State Personnel Office. Veterans honorably discharged with a service connected disability will have ten (10) points added to their final passing numerical score.

5% Procurement Advantage for Veteran-Owned Businesses or Contractors Who Are Veterans

The state of New Mexico shall set aside an additional 5% hiring preference for veteran-owned businesses or contractors over the existing 5% preference currently established for locally-owned businesses during the bidding process for state contracts and jobs.



Military Discharge Papers Protection

Military discharge papers filed with county clerks in the state of New Mexico shall only be made available to the veteran who filed them, the veteran's next-of-kin, or a person designated by a court of law as the veteran's general power-of-attorney.

Deceased Military Person's Disposition Arrangements

A person designated as the immediate contact on the Department of Defense (DoD) Emergency Data Form of an active-duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces can determine the means of disposition of that deceased Armed Forces member. The designee is authorized to make burial, funeral and disposition arrangements.

Veterans Free & Reduced-Fee Recreation Benefits

Veterans Day Recreation and Museum Privileges

Every Veterans Day, any New Mexico resident who was honorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces or is currently on active-duty—along with their spouse and children—is entitled to free use of any New Mexico state park. Admission fees will be also be waived for campsites, the Museum of New Mexico, the New Mexico Museum of Natural History, and the New Mexico Museum of Space History.

State Parks Day-Pass and Three Free Camping Nights for Disabled Veterans

Any veteran rated 50% or higher service-connected disabled may obtain an annual free day-use pass and three free nights of camping for personal use only. Qualified veterans may apply for these passes by showing proper identification and proof of disability at any DVS field office.

Free State Parks Monuments and Museums Pass for Disabled Veterans

Any veteran rated 50% or higher service-connected disabled may apply for a free state monument and museum pass for personal use only. Qualified veterans can apply for this pass by showing proper identification and proof of disability at any DVS field office.



Lifetime Hunting and Fishing License for 100% Service-Connected Disabled Veterans

Any veteran who is a New Mexico resident and is rated 100% service-connected disabled is eligible for a free lifetime New Mexico small-game hunting and fishing license.

Reduced-Fee Hunting and Fishing License for Disabled Veterans (any disability rating)

New Mexico's 26,000 service-connected disabled veterans may apply for a reduced fee \$10 small-game & fishing license--no matter *what percentage their disability*.

Hunting Fee Discount for Non-Resident Disabled Veterans Undergoing Rehabilitation

Hunting licenses for deer, antelope, elk, javelina and turkey may be sold to non-resident disabled U.S. Armed Forces members or veterans at resident license-fee rates if the applicant is undergoing a rehabilitation program utilizing hunting activities supported by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or an authorized nonprofit organization.

Temporary Hunting and Fishing License for Active-Duty Military Personnel

Any active duty military personnel, National Guard or Reserve member who is a legally domiciled resident of New Mexico can apply for a temporary active duty fishing or small game hunting license. Applicants must show proof of residency and not claim residency elsewhere. Applicants may also apply if they are on active duty outside the state but are currently on leave here in New Mexico for not more than 30 days.

DVS State Cemetery & Memorial Operations Bureau

All honorably discharged veterans of the United States military are entitled to a burial with military honors. However, according to VA, nearly half of New Mexico's 141,746 veterans live beyond VA's 75-mile targeted service-area radius of its two national cemeteries: the Santa Fe National Cemetery in northern New Mexico, and the Fort Bayard National Cemetery in the southwestern part of the state. To serve these rural-area veterans, DVS created the State Cemetery & Memorial Operations Bureau in 2013 to build four state veterans' cemeteries mentioned below. DVS successfully applied for funding from the VA's Cemetery Grant Program to build these VA-funded-but state-managed cemeteries.



Fort Stanton State Veterans Cemetery

New Mexico's first state veterans cemetery was built in Fort Stanton in Lincoln County (*left photo*). The 14.8-acre, \$5.7 million cemetery opened on Veterans Day, 2017, featuring 510 in-ground crypts, and 140 in-ground and columbarium niches for interment of cremated remains. As with the three other state veterans' cemeteries, there is adjacent plan available for future expansion.

2022 interments: 39 Total interments: 259

Fort Stanton Merchant Marine & Military Cemetery (*right photo*) Since 2017, DVS has managed the adjacent Fort Stanton Merchant Marine & Military Cemetery, which opened in 1899 to bury members of the U.S. Merchant Marines who succumbed to tuberculosis while being treated at the then-adjacent Fort Stanton Hospital. The cemetery also accepted burials from hospital staff and Lincoln County veterans. More than 1,000 remains are interred at this historic cemetery, which stopped accepting burials in 2014.



Gallup State Veterans Cemetery

The Gallup State Veterans Cemetery (*left photo*) opened on Memorial Day 2019 as the second DVS-managed state veterans' cemetery. The 20-acre, \$6.6 million cemetery currently has 443 in-ground crypts, 140 in-ground cremains gravesites, and 400 columbarium niches.

2023 interments: 35 Total interments: 230

Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery

The Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery opened on July 23, 2020 as the third state veterans cemetery managed by DVS. The 10.3-acre, \$3.2 million dollar cemetery is located in the meadow below the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and features 100 in-ground crypts, 100 in-ground cremains gravesites, and 200 columbarium niches.

2023 interments: 47 Total interments: 169



Carlsbad State Veterans Cemetery

Plans are in the development phase for the Carlsbad State Veterans Cemetery—the fourth and final DVS-managed state veterans cemetery. The 436-crypt facility will be built on ten acres just north of the existing Sunset Memorial Gardens Cemetery.

Military Honors Burial Program: Providing *The Final Salute*

There are 26 all-volunteer honor guards throughout the state to render military honors and a “final salute” for deceased honorably discharged veterans.

The DVS Cemeteries & Memorials Bureau oversees the state’s *Military Honors Burial Program* which, courtesy of these honor guards, provides a burial befitting someone who was honorably served and defended our country.



The honor guards feature trained uniformed men and women who perform the ceremonial military funeral duties: the covering and uncovering of a casket with an American flag, folding and presenting this flag to a widow or family member, and a bugle rendition of *Taps*. Larger-size honor guards may also render a rifle volley.

This service is provided free to the family. DVS ensures that all units undergo annual training, and are compensated for their duties with a stipend for each service performed. It is up to a veterans’ family and/or a local funeral home to schedule an Honor Guard at a funeral. Any veterans service organization interested in registering as an honor

guard can contact the DVS State Cemetery Division at diana.myklebust@dvs.nm.gov or (505) 231-8911.

New Mexico’s 26 Registered Volunteer Honor Guards

ACOMA

American Legion Post 116
PO Box 116
Acoma Pueblo, NM 87034
(505) 362-2868

ALBUQUERQUE

American Legion Post 13
1201 Mountain Road NE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
(505) 243-1901

ALBUQUERQUE

American Legion Post 69
9000 4th St. NW
Alameda, NM 87114
(505) 379-1136

ALBUQUERQUE

Women Veterans of NM
PO Box 36648
Albuquerque, NM 87176
(505) 306-3756

CARLSBAD

Carlsbad Veterans Honor
Guard/PO Box 615
Carlsbad, NM 88220
(575) 200-6236

ESPAÑOLA

American Legion Post 17
PO Box 1273
Española, NM 87532
(505) 753-6712

ESTANCIA

American Legion Post 22
PO Box 656
Estancia, NM 87016
(505) 384-3096

FARMINGTON

VFW Post 2182
5641 Bloomfield Hwy.
Farmington, NM 87401
(505) 327-2182

GRANTS

VFW Post 3221
202 Davis St.
Grants, NM 87020
(505) 287-2328

(list continues on next page)

ISLETA PUEBLO

Isleta Pueblo Veterans Assoc.
PO Box 338
Isleta, NM 87002
(505) 514-7332

LAS VEGAS

VFW Post 1547
PO Box 1294
Las Vegas, NM 87701
(505) 429-3009

RATON

VFW Post 1793
PO Box 716
Raton, NM 87740
(575) 428-8116

SANTA CRUZ

DAV/Luchetti Castner Ch. 15
7 Fresquez Lane
Santa Cruz, NM 87567

SHIPROCK

VFW Post 9517
4705 Baltic Ave.
Shiprock, NM 87402
(505) 947-5171

TAOS

VFW Post 3259
PO Box 3122
Taos, NM 87571
(575) 779-7850

LAS CRUCES

El Perro Diablo Detachment 478/
PO Box 7322
Las Cruces, NM 88006
(575) 523-1236

MORA

VFW Post 1131
PO Box 0555
Mora, NM 87732
(575) 387-2618

RIO RANCHO

Marine Corps League Det. 1316
PO Box 44304
Rio Rancho, NM 87174
(505) 892-5618

SANTA FE

American Legion Post 1
1601 Berry Ave.
Santa Fe, NM 87505
(505) 469-6270

SILVER CITY

Marine Corps League
Detachment 1328/Box 2251
Silver City, NM 88062
(575) 574-0361

TOHATCHI

Tohatchi Veterans Org./
Navajo Nation
PO Box 1236
Tohatchi, NM 87325
(505) 701-6435

LAS VEGAS

Vietnam Veterans of America/
Northern NM Chapter 1063
PO Box 3211
Las Vegas, NM 87701

PORTALES

American Legion Post 31
PO Box 275
Portales, NM 88130
(575) 226-0302

ROSWELL

Roswell Veterans Honor Guard
PO Box 4112
Roswell, NM 88202
(575) 626-3157

SANTA FE

American Legion Post 12
1000 Cordova Pl #906
Santa Fe, NM 87505
(505) 230-9740

SILVER CITY

American Legion Post 18
PO Box 1464
Silver City, NM 88062
(623) 293-1639

The Forgotten Heroes Funeral Program



The New Mexico Forgotten Heroes Funeral Program ensures that, in the event no family member claims the body of an honorably discharged veteran upon death, that veteran will be provided with a military funeral at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

The program was developed in 2010 through a collaboration between DVS, Bernalillo County, and the State Office of the Medical Investigator to provide military funerals for unclaimed deceased Bernalillo County veterans whose cremated remains had been kept in possession by local funeral homes. The idea was to provide funeral befitting someone who had sacrificed to serve our country as a member of the United States military.

This program was then introduced to all 33 counties in New Mexico. It designates the state as the family of record of any verified unclaimed deceased veteran. Verification of an honorable discharge from the United States Armed Forces is done by county officials and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

After an unclaimed deceased veteran is cremated, DVS takes possession of the cremains and makes arrangements with the Santa Fe National Cemetery and the New Mexico National Guard honor guard to provide a military funeral.

The public is invited to serve as “family” at these funerals—with the governor, lieutenant governor, or DVS cabinet secretary delivering the eulogy, ensuring that no honorably discharged veterans is ever alone and forgotten upon death.



The photos on this page are from the September 28, 2023 Forgotten Heroes Funeral, where the unclaimed cremated remains of 52 deceased veterans were laid to rest with military honors at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. This was the largest number of veterans to be interred in the history of the funeral.

2nd/above middle photo: Acting DVS Cabinet Secretary/Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera delivered the eulogy. Secretary Herrera is also the current deputy adjutant general of New Mexico.

Above left & right photos: New Mexico Army National Guard Col. Pia Romero presents the flags that draped the two urn carts during the funeral service to State Sen. Harold Pope (*left photo*) and Bernalillo County General Services Dept. Deputy Manager Lisa Sedillo White—both of whom accepted the flags on behalf of the citizens of New Mexico.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire



The DVS Cemetery & Monuments Bureau manages the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire—the first formal Vietnam War memorial in the country. It is at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and along the Enchanted Circle Scenic Byway in northeastern New Mexico.

The memorial was built by Albuquerque residents Victor and Jeanne Westphall, the parents of U.S. Marine 1st Lt. David Westphall who was among sixteen Marines killed when their unit was ambushed by North Vietnamese attackers on May 22, 1968 in South Vietnam.



**USMC 1st Lt.
David Westphall**

The Westphalls were compelled to build a 32-acre memorial honoring not only their son, but all Americans who served during the war. It was dedicated in 1971—on the three-year anniversary of David's death. The monument received national attention and is credited for inspiring the 1982 creation of the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Five years later, the Westphall Memorial was recognized by Congress as a memorial of national significance. In 2004, the David Westphall Foundation donated the Memorial to the New Mexico State Parks Division—becoming the state's 33rd state park.



On July 3, 2017, management of the memorial was transferred from the state parks division to DVS. Legislators agreed with the following reasoning successfully argued by DVS, with agreement by state parks:

"The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not a park. It is not a place for families to picnic or hike. It is hallowed ground for visitors to reflect upon and honor the service and sacrifice of American service members during the Vietnam War. It is especially sacred for family and friends of the 58,200 who lost their lives—398 of whom were from New Mexico."

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire is the most visited monument in New Mexico, attracting 44,952 visitors in 2023. It is an especially powerful place to visit for Vietnam War veterans, their families, and friends.



A half-scale replica of the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in our nation's capital is being installed on the grounds of the memorial. It is in the final stages of construction and is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2024. Like the national wall, the replica wall will feature the names of the 58,200 U.S. service members who lost their lives in combat during the war—including the 398 from New Mexico.

HEALTH CARE DIVISION



The DVS Health Care Coordination Division develops and coordinates veterans health care, homelessness assistance/ transitional living, housing, suicide prevention/behavioral health needs, and transportation programs.

The DVS Health Care Coordination Division works with the New Mexico VA Health Care System to raise awareness of VA health care benefits. The division makes referrals to the NMVAHCS, which operates New Mexico's only VA hospital--the Raymond G. Murphy Medical Center in Albuquerque.

The NMVAHCS also manages 15 VA community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) throughout the state, four VA Vet Centers that provide behavioral/mental health care for veterans. More Information on VA health care in New Mexico can be found at: www.va.gov/directory/Guide/state.asp?STATE=NM.

The Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program

The DVS Health Care Division manages the Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program that provides free round-trip transportation from a veterans home in 15 of the states most rural counties... to medical appointments at VA facilities or pre-approved non-VA facilities.

The lack of transportation options was the greatest factor cited by many rural veterans nationwide for not being able to access their earned VA health care benefits. DVS successfully applied for a VA Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Grant in September of 2020 to address this critical need for New Mexico's rural-area veterans.



The grant stipulates that only "highly rural" counties are eligible for coverage—counties that VA identifies as those with seven or fewer veterans per square mile. Per this VA definition, the program serves the following 15 counties: Catron, Cibola, Colfax, De Baca, Guadalupe, Harding, Hidalgo, Lincoln, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Sierra, Socorro, Torrance, and Union. (see map on next page).

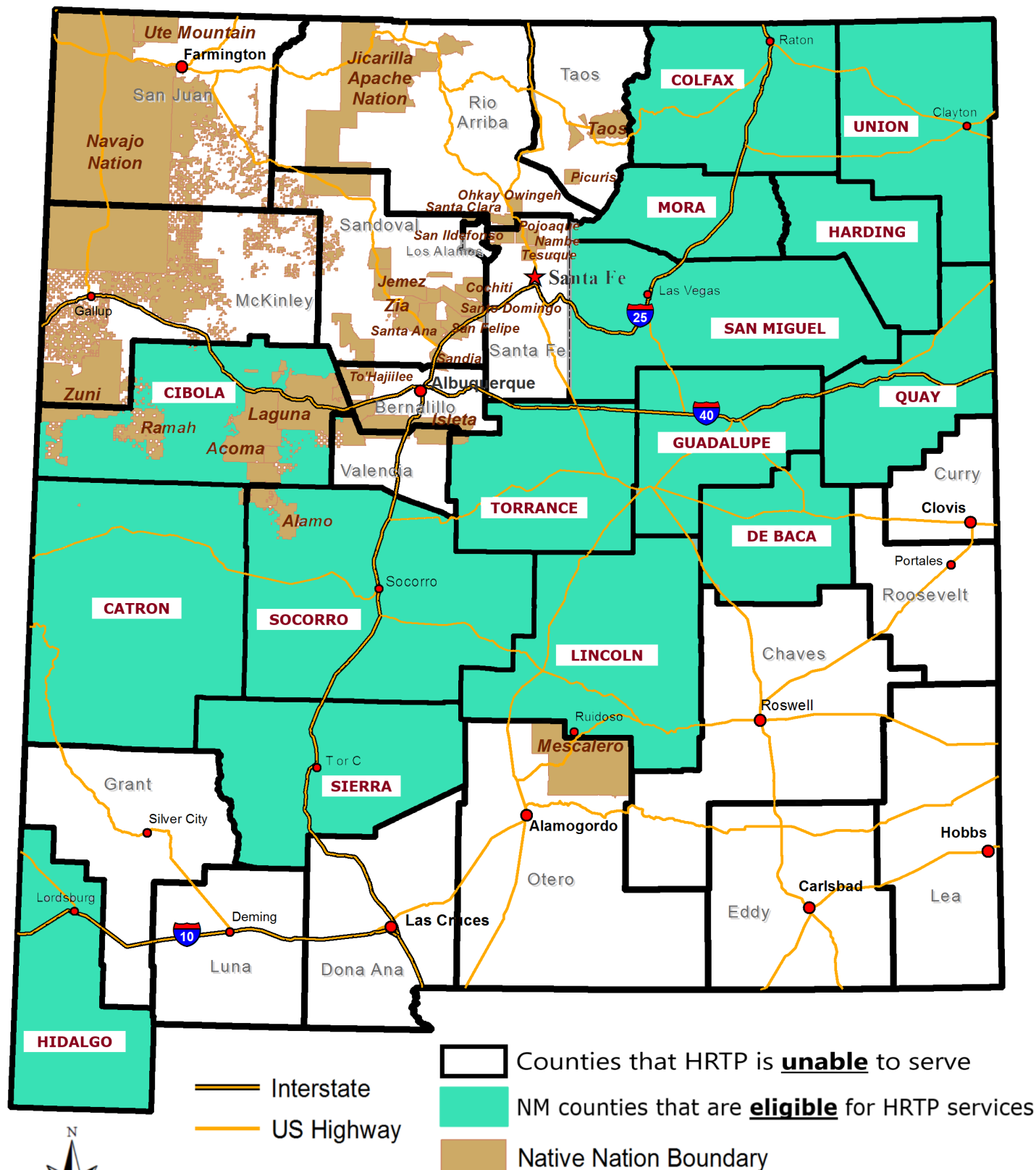
In 2023 the grant was expanded to include Native American veterans in Acoma Laguna pueblos; and veterans in Navajo Nation land in parts of Zuni Pueblo, along with the communities of Alamo and Ramah. Veterans in these 15 counties and five tribal lands

must make reservations at least three days in advance of their appointment by calling (505) 429-5906 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In 2023, the HRVT Program provided 632 rides--covering 144,928 miles of travel. DVS is working on expanding this program to serve the state's 18 other counties through a combination of partnerships, additional grants, and state funding. Details will be released as this plan is developed and finalized

The 15 counties served by the
New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

HIGHLY RURAL TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM



*The H RTP is happy to offer services within Native Nation Boundaries in any of the eligible counties we serve!

Suicide Awareness and Prevention

Veteran suicide awareness and prevention is another key task for the Healthcare Division. DVS has joined the nationwide *Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Veterans and Family Members*--more commonly known simply as The Governor's Challenge.

As co-chair (along with the Albuquerque mayor's office) of the New Mexico effort, the DVS Healthcare Coordination Division will plan and implement suicide prevention best practices and policies state-wide. Measurable

outcomes will be tracked and reported to VA and the Substance and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Partners in the New Mexico effort include the New Mexico Department of Health, New Mexico Human Services Department, the New Mexico VA Health Care System, and local veteran and suicide awareness organizations. The goal is to continue to build, strengthen and increase partnerships among behavioral health providers, the NM Governor's Challenge partners, veterans' service organizations, faith-based communities, and others in an effort to reduce the incidence of veteran suicide. VA estimates that 17 veterans die by suicide every day; 11 of these deaths involving veterans not enrolled in VA mental health care.

In 2023 DVS received state funding to bolster New Mexico's statewide Governor's Challenge effort. Engagement and contractual services are currently being developed with Goodwill Industries in Roswell, the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope in Las Cruces, the National Veterans Wellness & Healing Center in Angel Fire, and the Navajo Nation Division of Behavioral Health Services.

Additional funds will be utilized for advertising and outreach, to also include printed material in Spanish and Navajo; and partnerships with national 9-8-8 crisis phone line program (a 24/7/365 resource for immediate emotional, mental or substance misuse support), and other groups impacted by suicide such as women, justice-involved, and the homeless.



Veteran Homelessness

Ending veteran homelessness is another focus of the DVS Health Care Division. While there is no reliable count for the number of homeless veterans here in New Mexico, nationwide VA estimates it housed nearly 75,000 homeless veterans and their families.

DVS Health Care Coordination Division social workers participate in homeless outreach events that provide veterans with basic needs (toiletries, clothing, blankets and food). DVS veterans' service officers often come along to assist veterans with filing VA claims or accessing state veterans benefits.

Any veteran who stops by a DVS field office and is identified by a DVS veterans' service officer as homeless, or possibly at-risk of being homeless, is referred to the [New Mexico Veterans' Veteran Integration Center](#) in Albuquerque, the [Mesilla Valley Community of Hope](#) in Las Cruces, or other veterans' service or community organizations for immediate short-term and transitional housing.

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)



The New Mexico Veteran's Business Outreach Center (VBOC) is the business development division of DVS. It is funded by a U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) grant to help the SBA increase its effort to help entrepreneurial-minded veterans, transitioning active-duty personnel, National Guard & Reserve members, and their spouses who are interested in starting or growing a small business.

DVS was the first state agency to offer this "one-stop-shop" when the SBA launched this grant program in 2010. The VBOC can help with everything from business planning, start-up and expansion funding, marketing, landing federal contracts, and anything else a small business needs to launch and grow. For transitioning service members or their spouses based at the state's four military installations (Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque, Holloman AFB in Alamogordo, and the White Sands Missile Range in southern NM/El Paso, TX), the VBOC presents two-day *Boots to Business* entrepreneurial training courses. Veterans with on-base privileges can also sign up for these courses. For all other veterans and their spouses, the VBOC presents *Boots to Business: Reboot* entrepreneurial one, two, or three-day courses throughout the state. The VBOC also presents a yearly *Southwest Veterans Business Summit* featuring small business experts from across the nation to provide valuable instruction and insight on a much larger scale.

The VBOC is located in the DVS Albuquerque office at 4801 Indian School Road NE/Building 2. Drop-in visits for business counseling are welcome—but scheduling an appointment is strongly recommended. You can do so by contacting VBOC Director Johnny Martinez at johnny.martinez@dvs.nm.gov.

VBOC 2023 End-of-Year Report

Clients counseled	198
Training events	81
Federal contracts secured by VBOC clients	37
• Value of these 37 contracts: \$8.2 million	
New business created	21
Jobs created	11
Boots-to-Business classes presented	19
Boots-to-Business training modules taught	148

Help for Job-Seeking Veterans



DVS has formed a strong partnership with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS)—the agency where DVS refers veterans who are looking for help finding a job.

DWS has a division dedicated to helping veterans, transitioning active-duty service members, and their spouses with all aspects of job-seeking and training opportunities.

DWS employs a state veterans workforce coordinator to manage the federally funded Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program. This grant employs several Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) for veterans' job development, and promotes the value hiring of veterans to employers.

The JVSG program also utilizes the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) to assist eligible veterans who have significant barriers to employment. The grant also provides job readiness skills, job training referrals, and community-based resource referrals. LVERs and DVOPs are assigned to 12 workforce connections centers permanently, and nine workforce connections centers on an out-station basis.



The grant also provides assistance with “Stand Downs” for homeless veterans, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, and the VA Supportive Services to Veterans and Families Program



Additionally, the grant helps fund veterans suicide prevention efforts, the Veterans Court program, veterans job & career fairs, veteran small-business initiatives, apprenticeships, internships, work-study programs, and other veteran-related activities.

More information about DWS veteran employment assistance is available at the [New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions website](#), the [Workforce Connections Online System](#), or the [U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service website](#).

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIVISION

The DVS Administrative Services Division manages all financial and administrative matters for the agency. The division works with the cabinet secretary to create the agency's operational budget—according to the parameters set by the overall state budget passed each year by the state legislature and signed into law by the governor.

In addition, the division oversees all inter and intra-agency administrative, information technology, human resources, supply, workplace safety, and other infrastructure matters.

DVS Expenditures

	FY23 (Actuals) (7/1/22 - 6/30/23)	FY23 (Budgeted) 7/1/23 - 6/30/24
<u>Sources</u>		
General Fund Transfers	\$5,265,800	\$6,000,100
Federal Revenue	795,600	784,000
Other Revenue	209,400	250,000
TOTAL	\$6,270,800	\$7,034,100
<u>Uses</u>		
Personal Services & Employee Benefits	4,055,233	5,276,800
Contractual Services	472,309	537,800
Other	978,931	1,219,500
TOTAL	\$5,506,473	\$7,034,100
<u>Full-Time Employees</u>		
Permanent	63	70
Term	4	4
TOTAL	67	74



VA Expenditures in New Mexico

Federal FY22 (Oct. 1, 2021-Sep. 30, 2022) (latest data)

Total VA Expenditures	\$2,199,677,000
Compensation & Pensions	1,180,440,000
Medical Care	929,930,000
Education, Vocational Rehab, Employment	56,027,000
General Operating Expenses	19,255,000
Insurance & Indemnities	5,898,000
Construction	8,127,000

Unique Patients	53,363
<i>(patients who received treatment at a VA health care facility)</i>	

The DVS State Approving Agency (SAA)



The New Mexico State Approving Agency (SAA) is a bureau within the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) contracted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide approval, oversight, training, outreach, and liaison activities to ensure the quality and integrity of programs of education and proper administration of GI Bill® benefits. The SAA also provides oversight of programs such as on-the-job training, apprenticeships, vocational flight, licensure & certification, and correspondence for individuals using their GI Bill benefits.

A key role of the SAA is to review, evaluate, and approve education and training programs for the GI Bill—ensuring compliance with strict state and federal statutory and regulatory criteria. The SAA accomplishes this by making onsite and other supervisory and inspection visits to educational institutions and training establishments throughout the state. Technical assistance for interested colleges, universities, other postsecondary educational institutions, and training establishments is also provided upon request. In addition to this regulatory responsibility, the SAA is also active in outreach activities throughout the state to promote awareness of the GI Bill education benefit—advocating for quality and diverse education and training opportunities for veterans and other eligible persons.

The SAA also performs compliance surveys, supervisory visits, and targeted risk-based reviews to ensure facilities and approved programs are in compliance with all applicable statutory, regulatory, and policy provisions. The SAA verifies the propriety of payments of educational benefits under the provisions of the laws administered by VA. It identifies potential fraud, waste, and abuse by utilizing data and risk factors that are outside of the normal approval and compliance liaison processes.

The SAA also confirms compliance with all approval criteria. It assists educational institution and training establishment officials to determine, on the basis of facts, whether there are deviations from responsibilities and requirements by eligible individuals, educational institutions, or training establishments. The SAA ensures proper action is promptly taken through appropriate channels to correct discrepancies. It will move to discontinue benefits in the event correction is not accomplished in accordance with all applicable provisions of Title 38 of the U.S. Code.

GI Bill® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by VA is available at the official U.S. government website at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill>.

SAA End-of-Year Data For Federal Fiscal Year 2023

(Oct. 1, 2022 – Sep. 30, 2023)

The New Mexico SAA once again received the highest rating of “Satisfactory” by VA.

Number of program and other approvals	3,175
Number of programs and other disapprovals	372
Number of risk-based surveys	10
Technical assistance	1,323
Outreach events and other outreach	75
Number of liaisons w/other state & federal agencies	564



2023 Year In Review



January



DVS Presents First Veterans Quarterly Briefing of 2023

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) presented the first quarterly Local Community Veterans Briefing of the year on January 4 at the Taos County Commissioners Chamber.

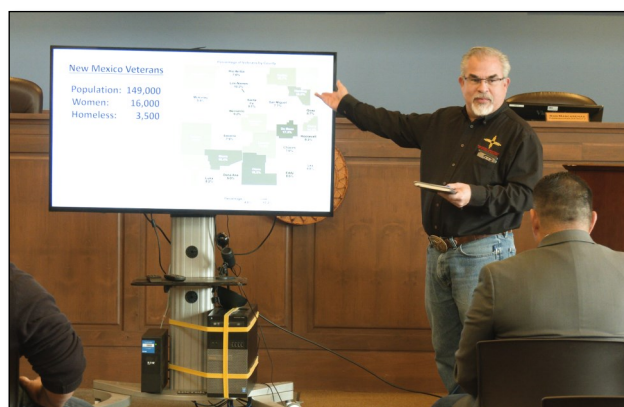
DVS division directors and program managers presented information about the agency's programs and service offered. A good portion of the meeting focused on the Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program offering free round-trip rides for veterans in 15 select counties to and from their home and medical appointments at VA or pre-approved VA facilities. Though Taos County is not covered by the

program, DVS staff assured veterans that the plan is to extend the program to include service to all 33 counties.

(see page XX for more program information)

Representatives from the New Mexico VA Health Care System and the Albuquerque VA Regional Office (VARO) were also there to talk about the new PACT Act law that enables veterans to finally get VA treatment for presumptive health problems tied to exposures to certain toxics while serving in the middle east, certain African countries, and even in southeast Asia during the Vietnam War.

****Note: in this section you'll find DVS and the two VA agencies collaborated on several presentations in 2023.*



DVS Takes Part in a PACT Act Informational Town Hall Meeting At Western New Mexico University

DVS joined the New Mexico VA Health Care System and the Albuquerque VA Regional Office to host a PACT Act informational town hall meeting at Western New Mexico University in Silver City on January 18.

The three agencies presented information and answered questions relating to the PACT Act—the law signed by President Joe Biden in August, 2022, that greatly expands VA medical care for veterans exposed to burn pits in the Middle East, the Agent Orange herbicide during the Vietnam War, and many other toxic substances during their service over the course of their service. The law also added to the list of eligible health conditions, and substantially lowers the burden of proof in tying these conditions to exposure during service.



The Sgt 1st Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or PACT Act, is named for Sgt. 1st Class Robinson, a medic with the Ohio Army National Guard who was exposed to toxic smoke from burn pits during a tour of duty in Iraq. The military used burn pits to dispose of a wide variety of hazardous materials, including pesticides, fuels, rubber, medical waste, human remains, computer parts and chemical weapons. He was diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer ten years after his deployment, and was denied VA medical benefits because he was unable to prove his cancer was caused by burn pit exposure. Robinson died in 2020 at age 39. Click [here](#) for more information about the PACT Act.

January *(continued)*



DVS Provides Veterans' Benefits Outreach at NMG&F Midwinter and Spring Open Houses

DVS Las Cruces-based Veterans Service Officer Miguel Martinez (*seated in photo*) passed out informational brochures and answered questions about VA and state veterans benefits at a New Mexico Department of Game & Fish open house for veterans at the DGF Southwest Area office in Las Cruces on January 23.

The open house was the first of several scheduled midwinter and early spring events hosted by DGF at offices throughout the state as an opportunity for veterans to get information about or apply for

disabled veteran and veterans' hunting and fishing licenses, and draw hunts.

DVS Tribal Liaison Among the Speakers/Presenters at a Zuni Pueblo Social Gathering

DVS Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley was among the speakers and presenters at a special social gathering and dinner on January 31 at Zuni High School. Nearly 200 people attended the event, with many Zuni Pueblo veterans and members of the Zuni High School National Honor Society volunteering as food servers.

In addition to outlining the services offered for veterans by DVS, Charley also talked about the new PACT Act law that expands VA health care benefits to veterans who believe they were exposed to toxic chemicals during their service.



"Many veterans who now have post-service health issues have always thought it is linked to being exposed to toxic substances during their military service," she said. "With this new law, you don't need proof. VA will presume exposure. All you need to show is when you served, and where."



Charley cited examples of possible exposures for Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans to "burn pits" used by U.S. bases to destroy waste material—many of which emit toxic smoke when burned—or Vietnam War veterans exposed to the Agent Orange herbicide sprayed by the U.S. to clear out jungle growth in Southeast Asia.

During the dinner, Charley also presented a DVS "coin" to 92-year old former Korean War Army Military Police Cpl. James Lunasee (*left photo*). He was acknowledged for his military service, and subsequent 42-year career working in the federal government.

February



Veterans, Active Duty Personnel Honored at Military & Veterans Day at the 2023 Legislature

New Mexico's veteran community was honored at the state Capitol on February 20 on Military & Veterans Day at the 2023 New Mexico Legislature.

This annual day during the legislative session is presented by DVS and the New Mexico National Guard to highlight the service and sacrifice of the men and women of New Mexico who have served or are currently serving in the United States military.

The theme of this year's traditional noon ceremony in the rotunda was *Yesterday...Today...and Tomorrow*—honoring the past, present, and future generations of military service members. Guest speakers included a Vietnam War veteran, a current Kirtland Air Force Base service member, and a young woman from the Kirtland Central High School JROTC Program—which also presented and retired The Colors for the ceremony.

The keynote speaker (*right photo*) was New Mexico Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera, who is also the state's deputy adjutant general—and who later in the year would be named as DVS acting cabinet secretary (*see page 5 for story*).



“Although the past can be indicative of what we are going to face in the future, we will never forget the sacrifices that you have made, and that you will continue to make if called upon,” he said to the packed Rotunda audience full of veterans and active service members—including several dozen members of the New Mexico National Guard's Youth Challenge Corps of cadets. “Your present—your National Guard and your military members of today—hold that same narrative. We will not quit. We will continue to fight for what's right—even though it's not popular at times, we will continue to do what's right.”



The east and west wings of the Rotunda featured informational tables staffed by representatives of DVS, VA, and other state agencies and local veterans service organizations. (*RIGHT PHOTO/in gray suit at right: DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Theresa Figueroa*)

February *(continued)*



DVS Health Care Coordination Division Director Speaks at African American Day at the 2023 Legislature

DVS Health Care Coordination Division Director Diane Mourning Brown (*left photo*) was a guest speaker at a ceremony on February 10 commemorating African American Day at the Legislature. (*left photo*)

Noting that February is National Black History Month, Director Mourning Brown talked about the achievements and contributions of Black Americans in helping shape the history of our country through their military service.

“Military service by Black Americans dates back to the Revolutionary War, when current and freed slaves helped the colonists defeat the British and gain independence from British rule,” she said. “Military service remains strong today. Nearly 17-percent of today’s military is Black—though we make up only 12-percent of our country’s total population.”

According to the latest VA veteran population projections, here in New Mexico there are nearly 7,400 Black veterans—making up about 5% of the state’s total of 141,746 veterans. Director Brown urged veterans in attendance to make sure they have filed claims for VA and state veterans benefits, reminding them that these have been earned through their military service—which can also benefit their families as well.

DVS Briefs Native American Veterans & Community Leaders

DVS division directors, including then-VBOC Director Rich COFFEL (*RIGHT PHOTO/back row, black shirt*), current VBOC Director Johnny Martinez (*back row, light-blue shirt*), and DVS Health Care Coordination Division Director Diane Mourning Brown (*back row, far right*), provided an outline of DVS at a February 24 briefing in Albuquerque of Native American veterans and community leaders.

The meeting was the first in a series of monthly in-person and virtual briefings led by DVS Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley to reach out to the state’s Native American veteran community. According to the latest VA population projections, there are 7,600 Native American veterans in New Mexico—with many living in rural pueblos and other tribal land.



“DVS will do a better job reaching out to you, and all Native American veterans,” said Charley. “Just because you live in rural tribal areas doesn’t mean you’re not eligible for veterans’ benefits. These are yours—you’ve earned these benefits through you military service.”

Any pueblo, tribal nation, or Native American veterans’ organization that would like DVS to provide an agency briefing and talk about how DVS can help Native American veterans can reach out to DVS Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley at beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov or (505) 241-3322.

March



DVS Moves Its Albuquerque Satellite Office to New Location; Opens Belen/Valencia County Field Office

After several years of planning, DVS made two moves in March of 2023 to accommodate its mission of increasing its service to veterans. It moved its Albuquerque satellite office from its northeast heights location to the Pinetree Corporate Center, located at 4801 Indian School Rd NE. The building is a quarter mile west of San Mateo Blvd NE, and next to the HB & Lucille Horn Family YMCA Center.

The move provides easier access and a more central location for veterans and their families from the

Albuquerque metro area. The new second-floor location also provides more room for the DVS field services division, the four Albuquerque-based veterans' service officers, the Women Veterans Program, the Health Care Coordination Division, the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC), and the New Mexico State Approving Agency.

And in a corresponding move, DVS opened a field office in Valencia County, located just south of Albuquerque/Bernalillo County. The new office is in the city of Belen, in the Belen Business Center, located at 719 South Main Street (*right photo*). It is staffed by a certified veterans' service officer for Valencia County's 5,400 veterans—the state's seventh-largest veteran-populated county.



DVS now has 18 field offices...and 25 veterans' service officers. Both numbers are the highest ever for the agency.

DVS Staff Busy With Helping Veterans File for Veterans' Property Tax Exemptions and Waivers

DVS helped veterans file for veterans' property tax exemptions or waivers at day-long clinics in Los Lunas (Mar. 10), Clovis (Mar. 22), and Roswell (Mar. 30). Veterans and unmarried widows of veterans were able to file for the veterans' property tax exemption.

The popular state veterans' benefit provides a \$4,000 reduction off the taxable value of a veteran's primary residence. Veterans rated by VA at 100% service-connected, permanent-and-total disabled were able to file for a veterans' property tax waiver which eliminates the property tax.

Waiver or exemption certificates were issued on the spot—which the recipient then only had to take to their county assessor's office to complete the process of receiving the discounts. The March 10 clinic in Los Lunas was at the Valencia County assessor's office—allowing the process to be completed at the location. A reminder: veterans can contact their nearest veterans' service officer any time during the year for assistance with filing for a veterans' property tax waiver or exemption. (*see page 37-38 for DVS office locations*)



DVS State Benefits Bureau Chief Jeff George provided assistance at the March 22 veterans property tax waiver & exemption clinic in Clovis.

March *(continued)*



Albuquerque VA Regional Office Change Management Agent Mike Nelson and DVS Roswell-based Veterans Service Officer Danielle Thompson at the March 30 Chaves County Veterans Symposium, which hosted the PACT Act town hall meeting at the Roswell National Guard Armory.

DVS Co-Presents Five PACT Act Information Town Hall Meetings in March

DVS participated in PACT Act town hall meetings in March organized by the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) and the Albuquerque VA Benefits Regional Office in the following communities: Mescalero (Mar. 9), Santa Fe Community College (Mar. 13), Zuni Pueblo (Mar. 23), Crownpoint (Mar. 24), and Roswell (Mar. 30).

The meetings were the latest in an ongoing joint effort by the three agencies to present information and answer questions about the PACT Act. Congress passed this landmark law in August of 1992—creating a presumption of service-connected illness for service members exposed to burn pits in Iraq or Afghanistan, veterans of the Gulf War and Southwest Asia, and even Vietnam War-era veterans exposed to the “Agent Orange” jungle defoliant.

With the passage of the PACT Act, VA now presumes a veteran’s service may be the cause of a medical condition, and will provide a screening. Veterans only need to prove they did serve in these regions and during these war eras. Please note—veterans can contact any

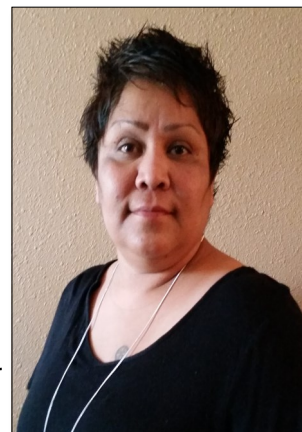
DVS veterans’ service officer on pages 6-8 of this publication throughout the year to get help filing PACT Act claims.

DVS Tribal Liaison Invited by VA Secretary to Attend Ceremony in Washington, D.C.

DVS Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley was invited by VA Secretary Denis McDonough to attend VA’s *Mission to Serve All Who Served* ceremony on March 16.

She was among the few dozen invited dignitaries from across the nation to attend the ceremony at the Military Women’s Memorial at the Arlington National Cemetery celebrating the diversity of veterans that VA serves.

Charley had been recognized by VA a year earlier as one of two dozen “Women Trailblazers” from across the nation for their dedication during and after their military service. The 14-year Army veteran was honored for being the driving force behind the launching of the annual San Juan County Homeless Veterans Stand Down in 2012 that provides free food, clothing, health screening, and many other benefits and services for homeless and at-risk veterans.



Beverly Charley
DVS Tribal Liaison



“This was a trip of a lifetime,” said an ecstatic Charley (*left photo, with VA Secretary McDonough*). “I met so many women veteran movers-and-shakers, and made new friends. Plus, being able to meet the VA secretary and hear him speak...at the national memorial honoring women veterans...is something I’ll remember for the rest of my life.”

April



DVS Co-Hosts 2023 New Mexico Spring Honor Guard Conference

New Mexico honor guards attended the 2023 New Mexico Spring Honor Guard Training Conference on April 21 in Las Cruces.

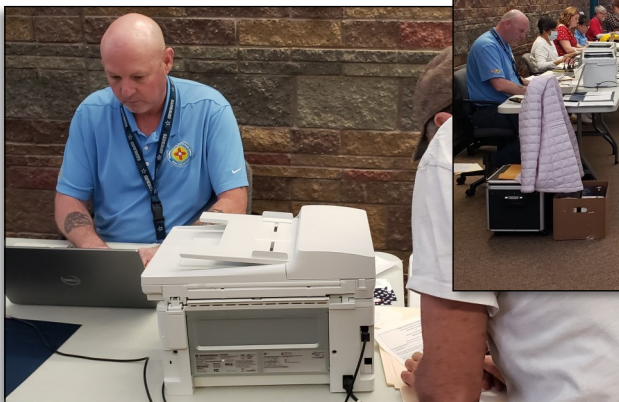
The conference is one of two presented annually in the state by DVS, the New Mexico National Guard, and AARP-New Mexico as learning and training opportunities for the state's honor guards-- the all-volunteer units that perform the rifle volley, bugle rendition of Taps, and the folding of casket American flag at most funerals of honorably discharged veterans in the state. Instruction was provided by members of the New Mexico National Guard's Honor Guard, who

then observe and judge the volunteer units as they render honors at mock funerals.



DVS Hosts Two Veterans Property Tax Exemption/Waiver Clinics

DVS staff was busy in Farmington on April 18 (at the San Juan County Assessor's Office) and in Las Cruces on April 20 assisting veterans and the county assessor staffs with filing for the Veterans Property Tax Exemption (a \$4,000 reduction of the taxable value of a veteran's home), or the Disabled Veterans Property Tax Waiver (waiving the entire property tax bill for veterans rated by VA as 100% permanent-and-total, service-connected disabled).



April *(continued)*



DVS Gives Team Presentation at the NATI Native American Veterans' Symposium

DVS division directors and program managers gave a team presentation at the Native American Training Institute's Veterans' Symposium on April 22-23 at the Isleta Resort and Casino Conference Center.

DVS State Benefits Division Bureau Chief Jeff George gave a presentation about the many state veterans benefits available for New Mexico's veterans. DVS Health Care Division Director Diane Mourning Brown was joined by New Mexico VA Health Care System

Transportation Program Director Hugo Rodriguez to present information about the NMVAHCS' free transportation program. This program provides rides to the Albuquerque Murphy VA Medical Center for veterans in the Albuquerque metro area. Director Mourning Brown then presented information about the DVS Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program, which offers rides for veterans in 15 select counties for their medical appointments anywhere in the state (*more information about this program is on page 21*)

DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Theresa Figueroa presented information about VA and state veterans programs for women veterans. New Mexico Veterans Benefits Outreach Center (VBOC) Interim Director Johnny Martinez also led a session discussing available help for veterans, transitioning active-duty service members, and their spouses looking to start their own small business or grow an existing operation.

On the second day of the conference, DVS Field Services Division Director Robin Wilson presented information about the help her division's 16 field offices/24 veterans' service officers provide for veterans looking to file VA claims or apply for state veterans' benefits.

Pueblos & Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley and Native American Training Institute Vice President Ramus Suiza wrapped up the conference after a morning featuring additional benefits and services for veterans—with an emphasis on Native American veterans.

DVS Provides Benefits Outreach at *Eighth Annual Hiring Heroes Job Fair*



DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Theresa Figueroa (*left photo*) and DVS/Veterans Business Outreach Center Director Rich Coffel (*right photo/far right*) provided veterans' benefits outreach assistance at the *Eighth Annual Operation Hiring Heroes Employment Event* in Albuquerque on April 26—hosted by American Legion Post 13. More than three dozen federal, state, local, and public/private agencies and businesses were represented at the event, which was billed as a veteran-focused event open to all job seekers.

May

DVS Commemorates Memorial Day at its Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

DVS observed Memorial Day (May 29) with a ceremony at the DVS-Managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

The day was designated a national holiday in 1971 by Congress as the last Monday in May to honor U.S. service members killed while in service to our country—though it seems to have evolved into a day that many honor non-combat-deceased veterans.

The Keynote address was delivered by Dr. James Willbanks, (*photo below*) a professor emeritus of military history at the U.S. Army Command & General Staff College and a former Army Lt. Colonel who saw combat action in the Vietnam War. He reminded everyone about the real, original meaning of Memorial Day



“As we prepare to leave this hallowed place, let us rededicate ourselves to the ideals for which our fallen heroes fought, and paid the ultimate sacrifice while in service to our country,” he said. “Let us work together to create a more peaceful and just world. As we rededicate ourselves, let us do everything in our power to make sure that our future generations understand and honor these ultimate sacrifices—that they realize the cost of freedom, and appreciate the gift they have been given.”

DVS Presents 2nd Quarterly Briefing of the Year in Raton

DVS hosted its latest Local Veterans Community Briefing on May 17 at the Colfax County Administration Building in Raton.

DVS division directors presented information about the agency’s latest news—including updates on its Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program, and the half-scale Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall at its Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.



Representatives from the New Mexico VA Medical System and the Albuquerque VA Regional Office talked about the PACT Act—the new law that expands VA health care to veterans who were previously denied coverage for health issues possibly linked to exposures to toxics during their military service. Vietnam War veterans can also now apply for possible Agent Orange-related health issues.

There was also a presentation about VA home loans, and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions office in Raton that helps employment-seeking residents in the region.

May *(continued)*



DVS Hosts Spring Native American Veterans Quarterly Briefing in Southern New Mexico

DVS hosted its spring Native American veterans quarterly briefing on May 25 in Mescalero at the Inn of the Mountain Gods. The theme and focus of these briefings is *Building Relationships Between DVS and New Mexico's Pueblos, Nations, & Tribes*.

Pueblos and tribal nations were briefed by DVS Pueblos & Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley about agency news, plans for the upcoming year—and most importantly, to emphasize DVS' commitment to working with Native American leadership, veterans' service

organizations, and community service agencies to help the state's 7,700 Native American veterans. Most live in the 19 federally recognized pueblos in New Mexico, and four tribal nations: Mescalero Apache, Fort Sill Apache, Jicarilla Apache, and Navajo.

A key point stressed by Charley was a commitment by DVS to help train and certify representatives as veterans' service officers in Native American communities to help veterans in their areas. A lot of veterans living in pueblos and tribal nations live in rural areas and have difficulty getting to a DVS office. Spotty Internet and mobile phone coverage also makes it difficult for these veterans to access DVS help via computer or phone. And many have indicated a preference for working with someone from their own community who may be more familiar with pueblo or tribal customs and issues affecting their community.

Volunteers Help DVS Polish Bataan Memorial Bldg. Plaques

Several veterans volunteered to join DVS staff on May 20 to help with polishing several brass plaques located in and around the Bataan Memorial Building in downtown Santa Fe.

The event not only cleaned the plaques that honor Bataan Peninsula defenders of World War II, it was also a great way for staff and veterans to meet and socialize. DVS grilled hot dogs and burgers and provided ice-cold soft drinks for a lunch at the end of the morning polishing.

"It was great to meet and informally talk to veterans in a casual, non-work setting," said DVS Public Information Officer Ray Seva. "We had a lot of fun, and ate way too many burgers, hot dogs, chips, and cookies. But most importantly, we all helped to beautify these plaques that honor the men of the New Mexico National Guard who sacrificed so much to defend the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines at the start of World War II."



June



DVS Women Veterans Program Hosts 2023 New Mexico Women Veterans Conference/Benefits Fair

DVS presented the 2023 New Mexico Women Veterans Conference in Albuquerque on June 10 at the Central New Mexico (CNM) Workforce Training Center.

The conference was presented two days before National Women Veterans Day. DVS was joined by representatives from the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) and the Albuquerque VA Regional Office in presenting information about VA and state veterans benefits available not only to women veterans, but benefits and

programs specifically for women veterans. Women make up the fastest-growing segment of our nation's veteran population—accounting for about 11% (2,045,000) of our 18.5 million veterans. Here in New Mexico, 16,800 of our state's 143,100 veterans are women—a little over 11% of the veteran population.

Keynote speaker United States Marine Corps Major Mariela Peña urged women veterans not only file for these benefits they've earned, but to also believe themselves as women—as women veterans, specifically, and to help out other women.

"I want you to challenge the next crop of women currently serving," said the native of Nicaragua whose family fled to the United States during the Sandinista-Contra wars. "Reach out to them. Help them if they need help. Inspire them to continue. This is the best way to ensure women continue to succeed not only in the military...but in life afterwards."

Remains of a Bataan Death March Survivor Re-Buried in His Hometown of Portales

DVS State Benefits Division Director Ed Mendez attended the re-burial funeral of World War II Bataan Death March survivor, U.S. Army Priv. 1st Class Thomas Vernon Long, at the Portales Cemetery on June 8.

Director Mendez presented a state Flag to 96-year old Billie Jean Sawyer (*below photo*), the only remaining Long family member. It was flown at the state capitol in Long's honor. He perished four months while imprisoned after surviving the Bataan Death March that began on April 9, 1942. He was 27 years old. What were originally identified as his remains were discovered and returned to the family back in Portales and interred in 1949.



But today's advanced DNA technology identified recently discovered remains in the Philippines as those of Long. These were sent back to Sawyer in July.

At the re-burial, Director Mendez also presented the Long family with a letter from DVS, reading in part "we hope that your family can find closure and peace of mind now that Thomas is back home, where he can finally rest in eternal peace."

June (continued)



2023 Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico Returns to a Hero's Welcome

DVS Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley was among the 25 chaperones who paid out-of-pocket expenses to chaperone 25 veterans on the 2023 Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico. The group returned to the Albuquerque International Sunport on June 22 from the two-day trip to Washington, D.C—an all-expenses-paid trip courtesy of the Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico Foundation and the national non-profit Honor Flight Network.

These annual flights bring veterans to visit the national war monuments in our nation's capital that are dedicated to their war era of service. The trip also includes a visit to the Arlington National Cemetery. Priority is given to veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and any veteran suffering from a terminal medical condition.

"It was an honor, and an extremely emotional one, for me to finally be a part of this special yearly event, said Charley, who chaperoned U.S. Air Force and Vietnam War veteran Bill Strabo (*both in right photo*). "It could've been tiring, but we all felt energized by seeing those beautiful monuments and the national cemetery."

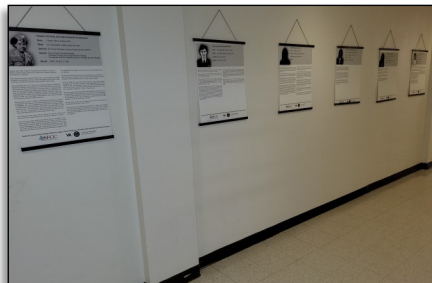
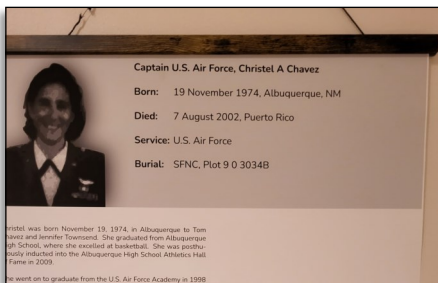


[DVS videotaped the hero's welcome](#) the group—two WWII veterans, seven Korean War, one Cold War, and 15 Korean War veterans--received upon its return to the Sunport.

DVS Welcomes Two Art Exhibits Honoring Women Veterans



DVS proudly announced the arrival of two art exhibits put on display in the halls outside of its Santa Fe headquarters in the Bataan Memorial Building that honor women veterans. (*Top two photos*) The "Proudly She Served" national art exhibit is on display in the east-west hallway of the venerable building. Artist Steve Alpert painted twelve 36"x30" oil portraits showcasing women veterans who have demonstrated courage, strength, and selfless service for our country. (*Bottom two photos*) A second separate exhibit in the same hallway, courtesy of the Santa Fe Community College Veterans Legacy Grant Program, features six unique women veterans interred at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.



July



DVS Welcomes Author of Book Detailing Family's Ongoing Search For PTSD-Afflicted Combat Veteran Son

DVS welcomed author Patrick Smithwick to the Collected Works Bookstore and Coffeehouse in downtown Santa Fe on July 11. Smithwick read several passages from his book *"War's Over, Come Home: A Father's Search for His Son, Two-Tour Marine Veteran of the Iraq War."*

The book is a powerfully emotional account of an ongoing search for Smithwick's son Andrew, a Marine from 2004-2009, who is now homeless and wandering the country. He developed a severe case of

PTSD from the effects of what Patrick called "his two tours of hell"—two deployments to Iraq, where Andrew saw extensive combat. The family has been actively searching for Andrew to get him the treatment he needs—either through VA or non-traditional therapies. During the hour-long reading and ensuing Q&A session, Smithwick talked about how PTSD not only changed his son, but the entire family—with home Andrew had been previously close with. Smithwick said he has had several close encounters with Andrew—even briefly meeting him a couple of times. But Andrew always "blew me off...and took off."

"I'll be perfectly honest. Sometimes you meet people, and they just say to give up. That...disturbs me. We're not going to give up. I remain optimistic."

DVS Division Directors Host Veterans Benefits Outreach Events in the ABQ Metro Area

DVS hosted a PACT Act/veterans' benefits fair along with the New Mexico VA Health Care System on July 13 at the DVS Albuquerque satellite office. Veterans who stopped by were able to file PACT Act or general VA health care claims, and apply for state veterans' benefits.

RIGHT PHOTO: DVS Albuquerque Metro Area Veterans' Service Officer Supervisor and Veterans Business Outreach Business Advisory Austin Walker at the July 13 outreach fair.



LEFT PHOTO: DVS division directors also gave a veterans' benefits presentation at the invitation of the Del Webb at Mirehaven Retirement Community in Albuquerque's west side on July 31. There is a sizeable veteran population among the residents of the 55+ gated community. Many who attended were grateful for the information—admitting they've put off learning about and registering for their benefits

July *(continued)*



DVS, Members of Vietnam Veterans of America Interviewed by Host of Vietnam War Podcast

DVS and members of Vietnam Veterans of America/Northern New Mexico Chapter #996 recorded a podcast with host Michael Croan on July 18 at the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

Croan (*left photo, at right*) produces the popular podcast *Echoes of the Vietnam War* that featuring stories about the Vietnam War told by Vietnam War veterans themselves. The topic of this podcast was the building of a half-scale replica at Angel Fire of the national Vietnam

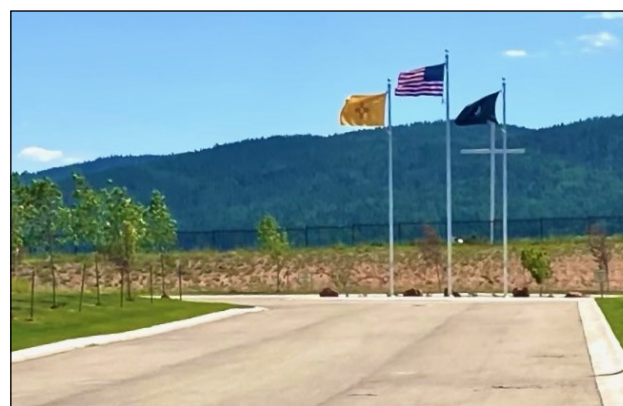
Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.--as well as a history of the Angel Fire monument.

DVS State Benefits Division Director Ed Mendez (*upper-right corner*) said the replica wall, like the national wall in our nation's capital, will also feature black granite panels listing the names of all 55,200 American service members who lost their lives in the war—including 398 from New Mexico.

The replica wall (*artists rendition in right photo*) is scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2024. DVS will put out news releases and social media posts with more precise information once plans for a dedication ceremony have been finalized.



Company Donates Trees to the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery



DVS received a generous donation of 28 Patmore Ash trees from *Trees of Corrales* that were planted at the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery on July 1. The trees line the main entrance to the cemetery—and while dormant for the late fall and winter, are expected to eventually grow to a height of 50 feet, with a canopy spreading 35 feet... providing a beautiful framed path leading into the cemetery, which is in a meadow below the adjacent Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"Please know that your donation will truly enhance the visitation of families visiting their fallen loved ones," said DVS State Cemetery Program Bureau Chief David Walker in a thank you letter to the company. "DVS is forever grateful to you for your generosity."

August



DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Addresses Women's Empowerment Summit in Albuquerque

DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Theresa Figueroa (*second from left*) was a speaker at a *Women Building Women Summit* on August 5 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.

This inaugural summit focused on the empowerment of women—blazing trails at work, and helping other women along the way. Figueroa, a former U.S. Army sergeant and combat medic who was deployed to Kuwait and South Korea, was joined by other women executives and visionaries to talk about their paths to success, and

pass along advice and lessons learned along the way. Figueroa stressed the importance of “not being afraid to take calculated risks or chances, while always believing in yourself.”

“This was a tremendously invigorating event,” said Figueroa. “A lot of inspirational stories were told. Great Ideas were presented. Old friendships were renewed, and new ones made. I look forward to collaborating with many of these women and their agencies on future events that can empower women veterans.”

DVS Presents Summer Quarterly Native American Briefing at Isleta Pueblo

DVS Gives Summer Native American Veterans Quarterly Briefing at Isleta Pueblo DVS Pueblos and Tribal Liaison Beverly Charley presented a summer quarterly briefing of Native American veteran issues to with Native American veteran representatives on August 31 at the Isleta Pueblo Veterans Association.

In addition to highlighting agency programs, Charley talked about DVS plans to expand training of Native American veterans' service officers embedded within pueblos and other tribal communities . She cited the desires of many who indicated they would appreciate working with someone from their own communities—in part because of cultural familiarity, but also to lessen the need to travel far distances to get help.



Vietnam War Army veteran Chuck Zobac (*standing in left photo*), who is involved with the Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico, urged the briefing attendees to spread the word about this program that provides free all-inclusive round trips for older veterans to visit the national war monuments at the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

“We would really love to see Native American veterans on future flights. It’s the one segment of the veteran population that hasn’t been represented,” he said. “Let Korean and Vietnam War veterans know--these flights are free, and to experience the monuments in the company of their fellow veterans is something special.”

More information about the program can be found on [the Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico website](#). DVS has [produced a short video highlighting the hero's welcome](#) provided to returning veterans when they returned to Albuquerque on June 23.

August *(continued)*



DVS Presents 2023 Summer Honor Guard Training Conference

DVS, the New Mexico National Guard, and AARP/New Mexico presented the 2023 New Mexico Honor Guard Summer Training Conference on August 25 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.

This second of two annual conferences provides training for the all-volunteer honor guards that render military honors at many veterans' funerals in New Mexico. The highlight of the day was a competition between these units that rendered military honors for a mock funeral—which was graded by a panel of judges. [DVS has](#)

[produced a short video](#) that further explains the importance of these honor guards—as well as showing highlights of the competition.



1st place-Large Group:

Las Cruces Marine Corps League/
El Perro Diablo Detachment 478



1st place-Medium Group:

Santa Fe American Legion Post 12



1st place-Small Group:

Las Cruces Marine Corps League/
El Perro Diablo Detachment 478

September



New Mexico National Guard Deputy Adjutant General Jamison Herrera Named DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary

New Mexico Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Jamison A. Herrera, who is also the state's deputy adjutant general, was appointed on September 1 by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to concurrently serve as the acting cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS).

Brig. Gen. Herrera has served with the state's national guard for 34 years. He enlisted as a private 1st class in 1989 with the New Mexico Army National Guard's 515th Maintenance Battalion in Santa Fe—later earning his officer's commission through Army's Officer Candidate School class 33-91.

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

The Nambe (northern NM) native is a graduate of the Continuous Process Improvement Black Belt Training, Joint Task Force Commanders Course, and the dual status commander course. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in University Studies with emphasis in education from the University of New Mexico. He has taught at the elementary and

middle school levels. Secretary Herrera earned a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from the United States Army War College

DVS Expands Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program to Five Native American Pueblos and Tribal Land Communities

DVS expanded its Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program (HRVTP) on September 1 to include service to five Native American pueblo and tribal lands. Veterans living in Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni pueblos—all three of which have parts or are entirely located in Cibola County. Service was also extended to the Navajo Nation communities of Ramah (in Cibola County and Alamo (Socorro County).



The new areas are in addition to the 15 counties served by the HRVTP that provides free round-trip rides for veterans to and from their home--and medical appointments at any U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility or approved/eligible non-VA facility. It is funded by VA's Transportation of Veterans in Highly Rural Areas Grant, which can only be used for addressing transportation solutions in counties VA defines as "highly rural"—those with seven or fewer veterans per every 1,000 square miles.



The remaining 13 VA-defined highly rural counties in New Mexico served by the HRVT Program are: Catron, Colfax, De Baca, Guadalupe, Harding, Hidalgo, Lincoln, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Sierra, Torrance, and Union. DVS is working to expand this service to the state's remaining 18 counties. (see page 21 for more information about the HRVT Program)

September *(continued)*



52 Veterans Laid to Rest During the 2023 *Forgotten Heroes Funeral*

The cremated remains of 52 military veterans, who went unclaimed after death, were buried with military honors during the 2023 New Mexico Forgotten Heroes Funeral on September 28 at the Santa Fe (New Mexico) National Cemetery.

It was the largest number of veterans interred in the 13-year history of the program. The funeral provided the military burial that is available for any honorably discharged deceased veteran. New Mexico is the only state in the nation that has a program that provides one for

veterans who are not claimed after death by any family.

DVS manages the Forgotten Heroes Funeral program. Everyone who attends these public funerals represents the families of these veterans--ensuring that the veterans are *not* forgotten and not alone in the end.

DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison A. Herrera read the eulogy honoring the veterans. DVS videotaped the funeral and has [produced a brief video](#) highlighting the solemn and emotional highlights of the 2023 Forgotten Heroes Funeral.



Volunteers Lay Commemorative Bricks at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

More than 500 memorial bricks were laid by volunteers at the annual Labor Day weekend bricklaying ceremony at the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

The bricks line the pathways on the grounds of the popular monument. Each brick bears the name of a veteran--alive or

deceased--who has served our country. These commemorative bricks can be purchased ahead of time by anyone wishing to honor a veteran in this unique way. Along with the name is that veteran's service branch, and his or her years of service. For more information, contact the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire at (575) 377-2293



October



DVS Re-Opens its Downtown ABQ Field Office

DVS re-opened its downtown Albuquerque office on October 1. The office is located on the third floor of the Dennis Chavez Federal Building, at 500 Gold Avenue SW between 5th and 6th streets.

DVS veterans' service officers will be there Mondays and Wednesdays from 9a.m. – 4p.m. to help veterans or their eligible dependents with filing VA claims, applying for state veterans' benefits, or assisting with anything else a veteran needs help with. No appointment is necessary. Veterans or dependents will be assisted on a first-come, first-served basis.

The reopening of the office is the 17th DVS field office in the state—the highest number of offices in the history of the agency. For more information: (505) 383-2400 or dvs.info@dvs.nm.gov.

Please bring your driver's license or ID card, proof of residency, a copy of your DD-214 separation papers, and any letters or supporting documents from VA to facilitate an immediate claims filing.

World War II Veteran Receives His Replacement Service Medals

Acting DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison A. Herrera presented eight replacement WWII service medals to 97-year-old Army veteran Ascension J. Martinez at a presentation ceremony on October 27 in Martinez's hometown of Chimayo.

Martinez served in the Pacific theater of the war—helping with the liberation of the Philippines, and in Japan immediately after its surrender in September of 1945. He lost track of the medals—one of which was a Bronze Star—and told his family he'd really like to see them again "before I go." (the family says he's in good health).



Secretary Herrera, who is the deputy adjutant general of the New Mexico National Guard, was emotional when he presented the medals of front of Martinez's family and friends who had gathered at the famed Rancho de Chimayo restaurant for the ceremony.



"They're small tokens. They're trinkets. But they represent so much more...of the sacrifice, of what he chose to do," said the secretary, who presented the medals at a family luncheon at the famed Rancho de Chimayo restaurant. "His service represents the best of America...the best of New Mexico. I'm proud to be here to be able to do this for him.

He was then presented with a WWII Veteran baseball cap—something he had mentioned to his family that he always wanted... but never got around to getting one. DVS has produced [a short video](#) highlighting the medal presentation.

October *(continued)*



First Restoration Phase of Historic Albuquerque Cemetery Completed

Phase one of the DVS cleanup of the Albuquerque Historic Fairview Cemetery was completed in October.

DVS received funding from Bernalillo County to provide oversight for the restoration of the veterans' sections and gravesites at the now-closed cemetery, which opened in 1881 and is Albuquerque's oldest cemetery. More than 12,000 are buried at the site—550 of whom are veterans, including some who served as far back as our nation's Civil War.

Under the agreement with the county, DVS will oversee the restoration of the veterans' sections. Restoration of the non-veteran portions is to be continued by the Fairview Historical Foundation. In the completed first phase, the first veterans' section was cleared of debris, graded, and leveled. All headstones in this section were removed, cleaned, raised, and realigned to national and state veterans cemetery standards. Headstones that were broken were reordered and replaced. The monument to unknown service members was also restored.

Phase 2 is now underway, which involves cleaning another area of veterans' gravesites, and the installation of a 30-foot lighted flagpole. Roads in and around the veterans' areas will be graded and redefined. The foundation holds a public cleanup on the first Saturday of each month. Volunteers are encouraged to bring rakes, shovels, gloves, hats, sunglasses or protective eyewear, and water...and join in this all-volunteer effort to restore the cemetery. For more information, contact Gail Rubin at (505) 363-7514 or gail@agoodgoodbye.com.

NMVB OC Presents the 2023 New Mexico Veterans Business Summit

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) presented the 2023 New Mexico Veterans Business Summit on October 31-November 1 in Las Cruces at the New Mexico State University Corbett Center.

The VBOC is the veterans' business development division of DVS, tasked with helping entrepreneurially minded veterans, transitioning active-duty service members, and their spouses with creating and expanding a small business.



At the free two-day conference, VBOC Director Johnny Martinez (*above photo/top-center*) was joined by staff from other federal, state, and local small business advocates to present information about the many services, programs, and grants available in New Mexico to help not only New Mexico's entrepreneurs—but specifically, veterans and spouses...including women and service-connected disabled veterans.

Other organizations that presented information were the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), SBDC, APEX Accelerator, SCORE, WESST, Arrowhead Center, and the NM MBDA. State agencies/departments that also presented information were: Economic Development, Workforce Solutions, General Services, Taxation & Revenue, Regulation & Licensing, and the Secretary of State office.



DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Herrera Addresses Rotary Club of Santa Fe Luncheon

DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera was invited to speak at a meeting of the Rotary Club of Santa Fe on November 9 at the Santa Fe Women's Club. *(photo/at upper right corner)*

It was the first time in several years, according to RCSF President Carolyn Moore, that a member of DVS had spoken to the group. The 50 members—several of whom were veterans—who gathered for the luncheon were eager to learn about DVS and how it helps veterans. Many later admitted they haven't yet filed for their benefits.

"We are not the VA. That is a federal agency. We are a state agency," said Secretary Herrera. "We not only help veterans file VA claims, we can leverage our connections with other state, federal, and community agencies to help veterans and their families with whatever it is they need help with."

Secretary Herrera also talked about expanding the agency's existing Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program, which provides free round-trip rides to VA medical appointments from a veteran's home in 15 of the state's most rural counties.

"We are working to expand coverage to every county in the state," he said. "Every veteran should be able to have access to transportation for their medical needs."

DVS Celebrates Veterans Day at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

DVS celebrated Veterans Day today at the annual Veterans Day ceremony at its Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire. Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison A. Herrera *(right photo)*, U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-New Mexico—*bottom left photo*), and American Gold Star Mothers Past President Becky Christmas *(bottom right photo)* honored veterans in their remarks during an abbreviated ceremony that was moved indoors due to windy conditions.



"Thank you, to all of New Mexico's veterans," said Secretary Herrera. "You've honorably served, with great distinction—and we can never say this enough. For your service, in war and peace...thank you, and God bless you, our great state, and our great nation."

[Here is a link to a short 2:30 video](#) with more of the secretary's remarks, along with remarks from Senator Lujan and Mrs. Christmas.



November *(continued)*

Albuquerque VSO Invited to Korean War Veterans Luncheon

DVS Albuquerque-based Veterans Service Officer Daisie Couch (*back row/center, in red top*), who is Korean American, was invited by the Hiroshi Miyamura Chapter of the Korean War Veterans Association of New Mexico to a special luncheon on November 14 in Albuquerque. The luncheon commemorated the 70th anniversary of the signing of the armistice that formally stopped all military operations on the Korean peninsula on July 27, 1953.

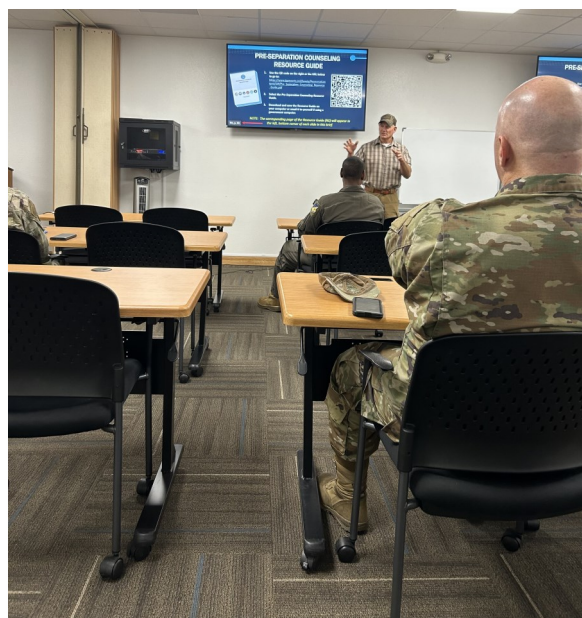
Attending the luncheon was Consul General Kim Youngwan, from the South Korean Consulate in Los Angeles (*to the left of Couch*), Korean War veterans from the U.S. and South Korea, their spouses, and local surviving families of Korean War veterans.



DVS Makes Outreach Stop at Cannon AFB

DVS Alamogordo-based Veterans' Service Officer Dave Henley (*standing at the front of the classroom*) made an outreach stop at nearby Holloman Air Force Base on November 29.

Henley is an Air Force veteran and an Alamogordo native who was stationed for a time at the base during his 23-year career. He makes monthly outreach stops at his old stomping grounds as part of the base's Benefits Delivery at Discharge Program to go over available VA and state veterans' benefits for service members who are close to completing their service. On this date he briefed 30 transitioning airmen.



December



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.

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

DVS staff (*below two photos*) helped Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (*right photo*) distribute holiday gift baskets on December 14 to residents at the State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences.

The baskets, which were put together by DVS staff the previous week, 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.



December *(continued)*



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 an Albuquerque Human Services Department (HSD) warehouse, were packed on December 18 by staff from DVS, HSD, Aging & Long-Term Services Department, the city of Albuquerque, and the New



Christmas Takes Part in Nationwide *Wreaths Across America* Day

DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Jamison A. Herrera (*right photo*) was a guest speaker at the Wreaths Across America ceremony on December 16 at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

The ceremony coincides with simultaneous ceremonies taking place at the same time as a noon ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, where thousands of pre-paid holiday wreaths were placed on selected gravesites.

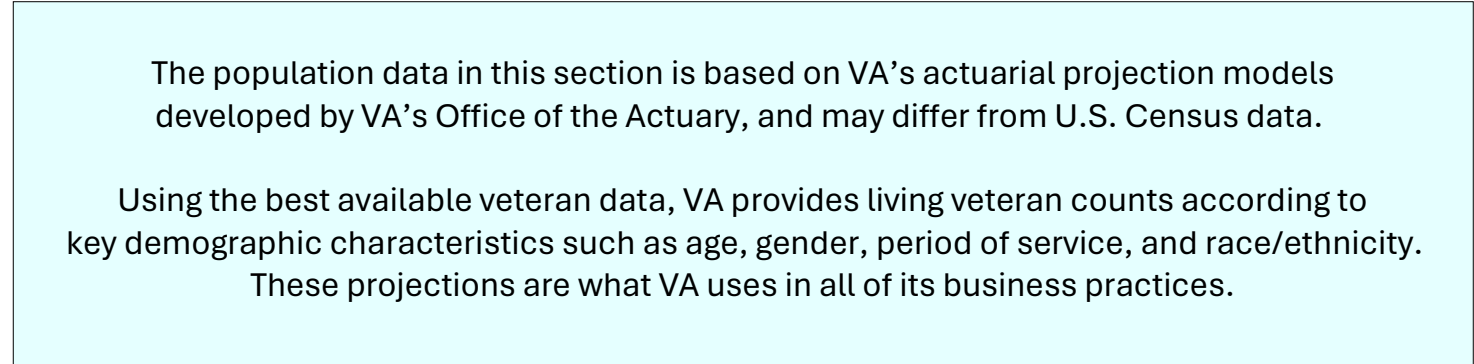


Secretary Herrera reminded everyone of the freedom we enjoy during the holidays...and every day...are fought for and protected by those who served in the U.S. military.

The three hundred people who gathered for the ceremony then placed more than 6,000 wreaths on select gravesites. These wreaths were prepaid by people who wanted to contribute towards placing a wreath on gravesites as a way of showing gratitude to deceased veterans during the holiday season.

New Mexico's Veteran Population

The Numbers



New Mexico's Veteran Population (by County)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>County</u>	
1	Bernalillo	48,399
2	Doña Ana	13,206
3	Sandoval	11,186
4	Santa Fe	8,276
5	Otero	8,000
6	San Juan	7,403
7	Valencia	5,407
8	Curry	4,687
9	Chaves	3,480
10	Eddy	3,407
11	McKinley	3,085
12	Grant	2,468
13	Taos	2,293
14	Lea	2,277
15	Rio Arriba	2,208
16	San Miguel	1,753
17	Lincoln	1,693
18	Cibola	1,450
19	Luna	1,399
20	Sierra	1,326
21	Torrance	1,359
22	Socorro	1,318
23	Los Alamos	1,227
24	Roosevelt	1,080
25	Colfax	1,051
26	Quay	552
27	Union	347
28	Catron	338
29	Mora	335
30	Hidalgo	277
31	Guadalupe	271
32	De Baca	152
<u>33</u>	Harding	57
TOTAL		141,746

New Mexico's Veteran Population

Population of the United States of America 335,893,238

Source: U.S. Census projection as of January 1, 2024

National Veteran Population 18,250,044

Source: VA projected population as of 9/30/23

National Veteran Percentage of Population 5.4%

Population of New Mexico 2,114,371

Source: U.S. Census/July, 2023

New Mexico's Veteran Population 141,746

Source: VA projected population as of 9/30/23

Veteran Percentage of New Mexico's Population 6.7%

Five Largest Veteran-Populated Counties in New Mexico

Bernalillo 48,399

Doña Ana 13,206

Sandoval 11,186

Santa Fe 8,276

Otero 8,000

Total 89,067

63% of New Mexico's veterans live in these five counties

Albuquerque Metro Area Veteran Population

Bernalillo 48,399

Sandoval 11,186

Santa Fe 8,276

Valencia 5,407

Total: 73,268

52% of New Mexico's veterans live in the four-county Albuquerque metro area

Wartime Veterans	113,764
Peacetime Veterans	27,982
WWII Era Veterans	794
WWII only	583
WWII & Korea	9977
WWII, Korea, & Vietnam	134
Between WWII & Korean War Era	243
Korean War Era Veterans	5,753
(WWII & Korea)	(77)
(WWII, Korea, & Vietnam)	(134)
Korea Only	4,608
Korea & Vietnam	934
Between Korean War Era & Vietnam	8,110
Vietnam War Era Veterans	48,539
(WWII, Korea, & Vietnam)	(134)
(Korea & Vietnam)	(934)
Vietnam Only	44,413
Vietnam, & Gulf War	2,264
Vietnam, Gulf War, & Post-9/11	517
Vietnam, Post-911	277
Between Vietnam War & Gulf War Eras	19,629
Gulf War Era Veterans	63,014
(Vietnam & Gulf War)	(2,264)
Gulf War Only	21,879
Gulf War & Post 9/11	11,897
Post-9/11 Era Veterans	39,681
(Vietnam, Gulf War, & Post-9/11)	(517)
(Vietnam, Post-9/11)	(277)
(Gulf War & Post 9/11)	(11,897)
Post-9/11 Only	26,180

Age Breakdown of New Mexico's Veterans

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total</u>
18-19	55
20-29	6,015
20-24	1,628
25-29	4,387
30-39	13,228
30-34	6,083
35-39	7,145
40-49	17,040
40-44	8,952
45-49	8,088
50-59	21,962
50-54	10,210
55-59	11,752
60-69	29,510
60-64	14,828
65-69	14,682
70-79	33,049
70-74	15,481
75-79	17,568
80-84	10,597
85+	10,290
TOTAL	141,746

Racial Makeup of New Mexico's Veteran Population

<u>Race</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>% of Vet Population</u>
White	80,559	57%
Hispanic	43,905	31%
Native American	7,677	5%
African American	6,326	4.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,048	<1%
Other	2,231	<1%
TOTAL	141,746	

New Mexico's Women Veteran Population

Number of U.S. Veterans	18,250,044
Number of Women Veterans in the USA:	2,045,384
Percentage of the USA's Veterans That Are Women	11.2%

Number of Veterans in New Mexico:	141,746
Number of Women Veterans in New Mexico:	16,937
Percentage of New Mexico's Veterans That Are Women	12%

Age Breakdown of New Mexico's Women Veterans

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
18-19	15
20-29	1,144
30-39	2,501
40-49	3,183
50-59	3,205
60-69	4,299
70-79	1,869
80+	721