



## Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Customer Service Annual Report



## **Contributors**

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## Table of Contents

FY18 Highlights.....	4
Recognition Given to Employees .....	5
Leadership Analysis of FY18 and Summary of FY19 Approach .....	6
Detailed FY18 Results and FY19 Plans .....	7
Voice of the Customer - Survey Results .....	7
Customer Service Training .....	7
Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution.....	8
Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries .....	8
Best Practices.....	8
Plans for Improvement.....	8
Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives .....	8
Making Agency Services Available Online .....	8
Processing Times for Customer Transactions.....	8
Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands .....	9
Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience.....	9

## FY18 Highlights

The Department of Veterans Affairs Customer Service Promise describes our approach.

FY18 highlights include:

Correspondence tracking and time to resolution (electronic, telephone, written, and in person):

- Twenty-four hour turnaround on correspondence
- All identified customer service survey responses receive individualized contacts

Customer Service Training:

- Staff completed refresher HUB customer service training
- 100% training completion rate by August 21, 2018

Processing times of agency services:

- MDVA does not process online transactions outside of a Charlotte Hall Veterans Home donation button and Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund donation button

Online publication updates and Frequently Asked Questions:

- Website updates are made on a weekly basis or as necessary, immediate
- FAQ's placement on website home page
- Archived electronic newsletter available on the website

Social media engagement:

- Social media posts are made in alignment with electronic newsletter event notifications
- Expanded social media 'tagging' to reach more customers

Customer Experience Survey and Results:

- Survey results are shared weekly with Executive Staff and Directors
- Individual contact made to all identified survey respondents
- Survey responses shared with Directors for immediate intervention and resolution



*Shown left is the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon, April 2018*

## Recognition Given to Employees

March 2018

Sharon Murphy, Director  
Charlotte Hall Veterans Home  
Governor's Citation

Sharon Murphy serves as the Director of Charlotte Hall Veterans Home. During the March Cabinet Meeting, Governor Hogan presented Ms. Murphy with a citation in recognition of her commitment and leadership as the Home's Director. She has more than three decades of devoted service to our veterans and exemplifies the highest standards of customer service. *Governor Hogan, Lt Governor Rutherford, Secretary Owings and Ms. Murphy are shown right as she receives her Citation.*



May 2018  
Employee Appreciation Day  
MDVA celebrated Employee Appreciation Day May 8, 2018.

*Shown left are staff from the Annapolis Office and below staff from Charlotte Hall Veterans Home.*



## Leadership Analysis of FY18 and Summary of FY19 Approach

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is committed to providing exceptional customer service. With approximately 80 employees, from cemetery caretakers to program directors, the Department is diligent in its service to both internal and external stakeholders. Our primary constituency, the men and women who have served this nation, are deserving of nothing less than outstanding care as they seek benefits earned through military service.

MDVA completed customer service refresher training during the spring and summer of 2018. The Department had a 100% training completion rate by August 21, 2018.

In FY18, the Department had 83 customer service survey responses. As of this date, 77% of respondents indicated being 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with their MDVA experience. Lessons learned from 'very dissatisfied' respondents were that most were reporting dissatisfaction with their experience with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA), not with MDVA. When responses indicating dissatisfaction with the USVA are removed, there are a total of 79 responses. Of the 79 responses, 63, or 80%, report being 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with their experience. This is a 4% increase in overall customer satisfaction.

Moving forward into FY19 the MDVA will continue in its commitment to providing outstanding customer service and delivery of the Maryland Customer Service Promise. The Department has added a FAQ's (frequently asked questions) website post and has modified all printed marketing materials to highlight the Maryland Flag.

The purpose of this redesign is to more effectively message to customers MDVA as a State Government Department and the services we offer as an organization.

*Pictured above right: A United States Army Medevac Pilot, Vietnam, is presented with the Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin and Citation by MDVA Deputy Secretary Robert Finn.*



## Detailed FY18 Results and FY19 Plans

### Voice of the Customer - Survey Results

Between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018, MDVA received 83 responses to the



customer service survey. Seventy-seven percent of respondents indicated they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with their experience. When responses indicating dissatisfaction with the USVA are removed, there are a total of 79 responses. Of the 79 responses, 63, or 80%, report being ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with their experience. This is a 4% increase in overall customer satisfaction.

Sixty respondents provided personal information and were contacted individually by phone or email. The overriding majority of respondents who indicated dissatisfaction were unhappy with their experience with the USVA. MDVA continues to improve messaging to clarify our Department as a State agency as well as continue to resolve any complaints, regardless of subject matter, shared by customers.

<b>Overall Satisfaction Results: Total Responses 83</b>		
Very Satisfied	60	72% of respondents
Somewhat Satisfied	4	5% of respondents
Neutral	4	5% of respondents
Somewhat Dissatisfied	5	6% of respondents
Very Dissatisfied	10	12% of respondents

### Customer Service Training

As of August 21, 2018 100% of MDVA staff had completed customer service refresher training via the HUB system.

With the 2017 implementation of the Veterans Services Specialist Program in State Government, also managed by the MDVA Outreach Program, staff across all Departments are being trained on Maryland based and federally managed veteran benefits and programs. The goal of this program is to improve agency collaborations, hence improving customer service to veterans who work in State Government and our veteran community as a whole. Since September 2017, liaisons to this program have attended three meetings and a one day training on veteran related programs and benefits.

## Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution

### Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries

Between July 1, 2017 and December 31, 2017, MDVA received 40 responses to the timely and responsive customer service question.

<b>Timely and Responsive Satisfaction Results: Total Responses 40</b>		
Very Satisfied	29	73% of respondents
Somewhat Satisfied	1	2% of respondents
Neutral	4	10% of respondents
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	5% of respondents
Very Dissatisfied	4	10% of respondents

MDVA will continue in its diligence to provide timely and responsive service. However, the Department continues to be confused with the USVA. MDVA is making efforts to clarify the differentiation between the State and Federal VA. Examples of efforts include the FAQ's web page and redesigned marketing materials now highlighting the Maryland flag.

### Best Practices

The MDVA Benefits and Services Program now has secretarial staff in its busiest offices. This allows for an immediate phone response when a service officer is in the field. In addition, the Office of the Secretary continues to have support staff assisting with phone coverage. This addition has significantly improved customer service response times.

Upon receipt of a survey which indicates MDVA dissatisfaction, the liaison contacts the associated program director to seek immediate resolution. Open lines of communication between program directors helps to quickly and efficiently resolve expressed dissatisfaction.

### Plans for Improvement

MDVA continues in its diligence to assist veterans, family members, and all internal as well as external stakeholders. The Department is exploring ways to increase the number of surveys completed by direct customers of MDVA.

## Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives

### Making Agency Services Available Online

MDVA Outreach manages website content, the bi-weekly electronic newsletter, and social media presence (Facebook and Twitter). In November 2017, MDVA migrated email communications to the eGov Delivery System. The migration now enables MDVA to collect demographic data on registrants and to encourage citizens to enroll to receive our newsletter when accessing other State Government websites. Demographic data is helping MDVA determine who is signing up to receive emails and how to tailor outreach to specific veteran populations.



### Processing Times for Customer Transactions

MDVA processes online donations to the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund. Charlotte Hall Veterans Home maintains a donation button on its website, [www.charhall.org](http://www.charhall.org). This button allows individuals to make donations in support of the veterans living there.

### Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands

MDVA continues to work regular business hours, evenings and weekends. The MDVA Secretary and Deputy Secretary frequently attend evening and weekend events. The MDVA Cemetery Program is a 365-day operation. The Cemetery Program has weekend contractual staff to reduce the load placed on full time personnel. The addition of these contractual employees has alleviated stress and improved service from an internal customer perspective.

In addition, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home is a 24 hour/365-day operation. The MDVA outreach program frequently attends evening and weekend events. Most staff work every Memorial and Veterans Day. With the utilization of email and social media, MDVA staff have the ability to respond to the needs of customers at virtually all hours. The MDVA website also has a contact us button which allows customers to email [mdveteransinfo@maryland.gov](mailto:mdveteransinfo@maryland.gov) 24/7.

### Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience



MDVA Outreach manages both a Facebook and Twitter account. Posts are scheduled and shared on a regular basis. In FY18, there were 118,000 Facebook posts and Twitter tweet follower views. Over 658,000 copies of the electronic newsletter were distributed in FY18 to an email list of over 90,000 subscribers. A goal for FY19 is to use video to educate customers on veteran benefits and services. These videos will be shared on social media, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as well as on the MDVA website.

In May 2018, MDVA celebrated a social media success story. Following receipt of an active duty service member's Facebook comment on the disabled veteran's vehicle plate, Outreach staff collaborated with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration on a re-design. The new plate design is colored in red, white, and blue, is patriotic in nature, and more successfully honors those who have served.

### Customer Service Survey Highlights from FY18

"Russell Ware provided exceptional customer service and definitely went above and beyond to provide information to the family of a veteran in Washington State. When asked whether a name was included on your Korean War Memorial, he not only verified that the name was there, but also took the time to go the memorial and take photos of the name and the monument itself so the family members in Washington could see it. Thank you very much Russell and the Maryland DVA!"

“I was very impressed with how Maryland takes care of its’ veterans. Mr. Hendricks from Maryland’s Veterans Affairs helped me and my family out by granting me funds to pay my rent during my healing time after bilateral knee replacement surgery back in September 6, 2017.”

“I forgot to get the honors for my father, so one day before the funeral, the nice woman at Cheltenham Cemetery faxed the documents for me, putting my already exhausted mind at ease again. Thank you, thank you, some of the friendliest people I have dealt with.”

### Media Coverage

“The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration, recently announced the release of its redesigned disabled-veterans license plate. The new plate adds color and prominently features red, white and blue stripes with stars to symbolize service to the United States.” –HERALDMAILMEDIA.COM, August 2018

“You know, it’s interesting, on your Facebook page it says, ‘thus far this year our service program has received a total of 2,505 VA decisions with 2,235 of those claims being granted,’ this equates to an 89% approval rate, that’s crazy good.” –Donna Cole, WNAV Radio, May 2018

“What I’ve seen from going through your website, you’ve got a lot of great information on it, a lot of stuff, and it’s easy to navigate...it looks like you guys have really worked to make it easy to navigate...I was able to go there and get the information I needed fairly quickly, and that’s great.” –Stephanie Gaines-Bryant, Sisters 4 Fitness, Bowie Community Television, November 2017



*Pictured at right: MDVA Secretary George Owings and Outreach Director Dana Burl, interview with WNAV 1430 Radio*

### Conclusion

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) strives every day to ensure our customers, both internal and external, experience the very best in customer service. The Department had 100% customer service refresher training compliance and looks forward in the coming year to providing SafeTalk training to all employees. Upon completion of SafeTalk training, MDVA staff will be capable of identifying individuals who might be experiencing a crisis and will know how to refer them for assistance. Over the course of the next fiscal year, the Department will continue to develop innovative ways to improve the customer experience.



**BACK COVER**