



DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS

# 2021 Annual Report

Reference MSAR #s: 5564 & 5667

Larry Hogan, Governor  
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor  
George Owings, Secretary  
Robert Finn, Deputy Secretary



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QR codes and embedded hyperlinks in this year's report will take readers directly to detailed program information, contacts, and websites.





## Secretary's Message

On behalf of Governor Hogan and Lt. Governor Rutherford and the entire team at the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), I am pleased to present this year's Annual Report. The following report provides the opportunity to share our successes and ongoing efforts to improve the quality of life for our Maryland Veterans and their families.

The MDVA manages five key programs with one mission, to serve our veterans and families by ensuring they have access to the benefits and services to which they are entitled as a result of military service. Our mission is accomplished in a number of ways as evidenced by this report.

With the ongoing COVID-19 health pandemic, 2021 has come with challenges but also successes. In July, the majority of MDVA staff returned to the office, at least on a part time basis. The Department has adjusted how we serve our veterans and their families in a way that preserves our mission but also supports a healthy work life balance for the team.

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home personnel tirelessly continue to work alongside St. Mary's County Health Department, the Maryland Department of Health, Maryland National Guard and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to maintain the highest standard of safety for its residents and personnel. We are thankful for HMR of Maryland and for their frontline healthcare workers who provide care for our veterans and their spouses.

The Department established the Women Veterans/Inclusion Program and hired a full time Program Manager to expand outreach to women and traditionally underserved veteran populations. Even while working in a hybrid virtual and in person capacity, the Service and Benefits Program submitted almost 2,800 VA claims.

One additional service program office opened inside the Cumberland Motor Vehicle Administration service center. We continue to work with the Department of General Services and Public Safety and Correctional Services to bring a second veterans home to Carroll County.

The pages that follow highlight the ways in which MDVA adjusted its mission to ensure the health and safety of veterans, their families and our personnel while continuing to serve our community.

The Department is hopeful as we approach 2022 and we look forward to another year of serving those who served.

Sincerely,



George Owings, III



# Data Snapshot



## MDVA Data Highlights

Outreach and  
Advocacy Program



2,128,359  
total contacts

Service and  
Benefits Program



2,798 VA claims  
submitted

Charlotte Hall  
Veterans Home



300  
average census

Cemetery and  
Memorial Program



3,929  
interments

Maryland Veterans  
Trust Fund



\$230,000  
in grants

### Veteran Population\*\*

Women Veterans  
54,693  
Total Population  
377,772

### Age Distribution\*

14% Less than 40  
44% Age 40-64  
42% Age 65+

### Educational Attainment\*\*\*

31% Some college  
38% Bachelor's or higher

### VA Benefits Utilization\*\*\*

83,730 receiving disability  
compensation  
3,131 receiving pension  
6,360 receiving dependency  
and indemnity compensation

### Period of Service\*

48% Gulf War I/II  
28% Vietnam  
4% Korea  
1% World War II  
20% Peacetime

### Race Distribution\*

60% White, Not Hispanic  
40% Minority  
  
(Minority is defined as all  
races/ethnicities except non-  
Hispanic White Veterans)

### Income Levels\*\*\*

45% \$100K or more  
32% \$50K to \$99.9K  
15% \$25K to \$49.9K  
8% Less than \$25K

### Suicide Data

99 suicide deaths among  
Maryland residents who served  
in the Armed Forces (2019).  
Over a five year period, an  
average of 104 Maryland  
residents who served in the  
Armed Forces died by  
suicide, representing  
17% of all Maryland  
suicides

\*VetPop Maryland State Summary Report, projected 9/30/20

\*\*VetPop, projected 9/30/21

\*\*\*VetPop Maryland State Summary Report, projected 9/30/2017



# County Based Veteran Population & Homeless Veteran Data



Jurisdiction	Total Veteran Population*	Female Veteran Population*	Homeless Veteran Population**	Data Source	
Anne Arundel County	49,761	8,465	18	US Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics <a href="http://www.va.gov/vetdata/">www.va.gov/vetdata/</a>	
Allegany County	4,881	353	3		
Baltimore City	32,030	4,171	235		
Baltimore County	45,825	5,445	27		
Carroll County	10,270	953	6		
Calvert County	7,970	1,008	S. Maryland		
Caroline County	2,243	225	Mid Shore		
Cecil County	7,262	861	39		
Charles County	15,922	3,130	S. Maryland		
Dorchester County	2,355	257	Mid Shore		
Frederick County	17,117	2,148	6	<hr/> Key Performance Measures for Veterans Represented by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (FY21)	
Garrett County	2,051	133	2		
Harford County	19,416	2,458	8		
Howard County	18,562	2,770	6		
Kent County	1,605	104	Mid Shore		
Montgomery County	42,974	7,220	14		
Prince George's County	55,739	10,263	22		
Queen Anne's County	3,694	332	Mid Shore		
Somerset County	1,613	120	Lower Shore		
St. Mary's County	11,960	1,910	S. Maryland		
Talbot County	3,089	172	Mid Shore	Inputs: Potential # of veterans to be served: 377,772 (projected only)	
Washington County	9,679	1,027	28		
Wicomico County	6,765	749	Lower Shore		
Worcester County	4,989	418	Lower Shore		
	T-377,772	T-54,693	T-462/415 sheltered/21 Female		
	*VetPop, projected 9/30/21 population	*VetPop, projected 9/30/21 population	**2020 Point in Time Count		Outputs: Claims filed and developed on behalf of service connected disabled veterans: 2,798
					Outcomes: Total of awards to veterans and survivors represented by MDVA: \$30 million dollars



# MDVA Programs: Outreach and Advocacy Program



The MDVA Outreach and Advocacy Program is charged with developing innovative ways to seek out and inform veterans about benefits, services, and incentives that are available from federal, state and local governments. This year the Program launched its Instagram presence and continued building out its YouTube Channel.



This year MDVA established a Women Veterans/Inclusion Program under the direction of the Outreach and Advocacy Program. The Department hired a full time program manager to collaborate with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), state and local governments, and community organizations to raise awareness of the needs of Maryland's women, minority, and underserved veteran populations. In 2022, a statewide advisory group will convene to identify resources to support and advocate on behalf of this group of veterans.

### Highlights

- Co-facilitated a VA Veterans Benefits Administration Townhall
- Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Briefing to the Lt Governor and the Maryland Commission on Mental and Behavioral Health
- Signed the VA PREVENTS/REACH Suicide Prevention Pledge
- Hosted a Memorial Day Special Production with more than 250 virtual guests
- Hosted a Governor's Summer Internship Program Fellow
- Planned, along with the VA, an Economic Development Initiative Event
- Designee to a Maryland Congressional Delegation Roundtable
- Presented at three Maryland General Assembly Townhalls

## FY21 In Review



324 Outreach events attended



8,640 Face to face or virtual contacts



1,808,853 Newsletters opened



42,775 Facebook post reach



7,482 Twitter tweet impressions



131,319 Website visitors

# 2,128,359 TOTAL CONTACTS

# MDVA Programs: Service and Benefits Program



The MDVA Service and Benefits Program assists veterans, dependents, and survivors, in obtaining benefits from the VA, the U.S. Department of Defense and the State of Maryland. With offices statewide, benefits specialists have access to VA claim tracking systems. Access to these systems allows personnel to provide the most accurate information to our customers. Since October 15, 1979, the Program has served as a repository for DD214s for veterans released from active duty who return to Maryland.



## Improving How We Do Business

To make office access more convenient for veterans and their families, MDVA opened its sixth co-located service office at the Cumberland Motor Vehicle Administration Service Center.

MDVA now has a presence in the Glen Burnie, Salisbury, Hagerstown, Bel Air, Gaithersburg, and Cumberland MVA Service Centers.

At left: Mr. Aaron Clark, VBSII, Cumberland Service Office

## FY21 In Review



129,576 contacts made with veterans, dependents, and survivors



2,798 claims submitted to the VA



\$30 million dollars in new/increased and one-time monthly cash benefits to veterans and dependents



91% claim approval rating



1,369 veterans provided MDVA with Power of Attorney



987 property tax exemption applications processed



870 DD214's provided at the request of veterans

## What Customers Are Saying...



*"I would like to thank you for all of your help and kindness...Your service and kindness were such a help in this trying time. Your superior work made things much easier and clearer for me to understand.", Veterans Benefits Specialist II, Willie Borden was recognized for assisting a veteran with their VA benefits application, July 2021*



## MDVA Programs: Charlotte Hall Veterans Home



Charlotte Hall Veterans Home (Charlotte Hall) is a 444-bed facility in St. Mary's County. Charlotte Hall had an average census of 300 this year and provides assisted-living and skilled nursing care for Maryland Veterans and eligible spouses. Residents are usually elderly, and there is a high occurrence of underlying health conditions.

Charlotte Hall continues to be the most impacted MDVA program during the pandemic. Roughly, 1100 covid tests have been performed weekly since August 19, 2020. To ensure vaccine availability, Charlotte Hall collaborated with Walgreens, the Department of Health & the Washington DC VA Medical Center to provide all 3 available brands through 5 vaccination clinics. In January 2021, the St. Mary's County Health Department donated a dry heat hot box for the sterilization of PPE. This generous gift was provided using CARES funding.

Shortly after closing to visitation in March 2020, Charlotte Hall was fortunate to receive 20 iPads from the Rotary Club of St. Mary's County to facilitate virtual visitations between residents and loved ones. Through 1:1 visits, hallway Bingo, Touchtown entertainment, active exercise and other life enriching programs staff has diligently worked to fill the void.

The outpouring of community support continues through PPE, boxed meal, snack, clothing, and toiletry donations as well as messages and cards.

CHVH launched its in-house Geriatrics Nursing Assistant (GNA) program on June 2021. This program aims to uphold our quality of care by providing training to qualified applicants. Graduates receive a full time CHVH employment offer. At right: CHVH GNA Graduates



## FY21 Donations \$206,146.09



Farming 4 Hunger  
2 Tower Gardens



Combat Veterans of America  
Motorcycle Club Holiday Donation



Charlotte Hall Rotary Club  
iPod donation



# MDVA Programs: Cemetery and Memorial Program



**Total interments**  
**113,822**

The MDVA Cemetery Program maintains five veteran cemeteries, providing a final resting place for Maryland veterans and their eligible dependents. This year, 3,929 veterans and dependents were interred at our cemeteries. In FY21, the program interred 10% of the Nation's veterans. The cemeteries include Crownsville in Anne Arundel County, Cheltenham in Prince George's County, Eastern Shore in Dorchester County, Garrison Forest in Baltimore County and Rocky Gap in Allegany County.

Interment services are provided Monday through Friday and cemeteries are open to the public 365 days a year. Over the past five years, the Cemetery Program has averaged 3,405 interments each year.

## Cemetery Program

Memorial and Veterans Day ceremonies resumed this year at four of the five cemeteries. Due to construction, ceremonies were not held at Cheltenham. In addition, three cemeteries welcomed the return of the Inmate Worker Program which supports grounds maintenance projects.

## Memorial Program

In FY21, the Memorial Program hosted 8 events between the WWII Memorial and Korean War Memorial. Two clean up projects were held, the first at the WWII Memorial, sponsored by the District 30 Delegation, MD General Assembly and the second, at the Gold Star Families Memorial, sponsored by the Travis Manion Foundation's Annapolis Chapter. Ceremonies were held at the WWII Memorial on both Memorial and Veterans Day. A Veterans Day ceremony was also held at the Vietnam Memorial.

At right: Secretary Owings helps youth volunteers wash the Gold Star Families Memorial during a service project in 2021



## 2020 Year In Review

**Process improvements** included transitioning burial claim submissions from facsimile to online, updating the burial request form to include cemetery policies, and an invitation to begin attending quarterly National Cemetery Administration meetings.

## Physical Improvements

- Cheltenham: Front gate refurbished, bell tower replacement, and expansion construction (with more projects reaching completion in early 2022)
- Crownsville: Shop roof repaired, maintenance yard reorganized
- Eastern Shore: Administration building exterior repaired, Gold Star Marker dedicated
- Garrison Forest: Trees removed, added drainage stones and benches, installed pond water feature, exterior fence replacement
- Rocky Gap: Raise and realignment project initiated, driveway area repaved

Crownsville Veterans Cemetery was honored to be selected as a pilot location for a Veterans Cemetery Grants Program initiative. The pilot initiative assesses mid-cycle progress after compliance reviews at state veteran cemeteries.



# MDVA Programs: Maryland Veterans Trust Fund



Since 2010, the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund (Fund) has helped hundreds of veterans who have fallen on difficult times. The Fund is a 501c3 organization designed to assist with non-emergency, temporary financial challenges facing veterans or widows/widowers of veterans. The Fund primarily provides eviction prevention assistance and helps with overdue mortgage and utility bills.

The Fund is governed by a Board of Trustees which is chaired by the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Veteran Affairs. The Fund's Grant Administrator completes a brief interview with each veteran/widow/widower before submitting applications for review. A review committee convenes as applications are ready and, based on information supplied in the application, approves or denies requests for assistance.

## What Customers Are Saying...

*"Very patient with me, understanding my needs, caring, thoughtful, nice,...helping me through the application, very nice person, I'm so thankful, this pandemic has been so painful, mentally and physically and financially, this help has been a great help." -Veteran seeking assistance with a water bill, May 2021*

*"Mark Hendricks has been such a great help throughout this entire process. My family is so grateful for his expertise and professionalism." -Veteran seeking assistance with rent, February 2021*



## FY21 In Review



More than **\$230,000** in grants awarded to veterans in need



**\$215,968** received from the Maryland Lottery



**\$115,657** in Maryland Live Casino donations



**\$10,920** in Perryville Casino donations



**\$10,317** in Rocky Gap Casino donations



**\$5,109** in National Harbor Casino donations



**\$1,066** in Horseshoe Casino donations



## Finance and Administration/Fiscal Unit Team



The fiscal unit team performs a critical role in the mission of MDVA. While they do not generally interact directly with veterans, their team mission is to perform the back-office services required by those who do, and to perform those services so effectively that their ability to serve Maryland's veterans is maximized. The fiscal team takes pride in their achievement of this behind-the-scenes, but critical, aspect of the mission.

For the first time, the fiscal team will soon hire an Employee Relations Manager. This role will be crucial in increasing our team's capacity to meet its fiscal and budget responsibilities while achieving a robust, full-time employee relations capacity. A second procurement officer will be coming soon as well. The added capacity will allow the agency's procurement personnel to handle the volume of procurement needs in a more timely way while preserving the process improvements and regulatory compliance our existing procurement officer has achieved.

### Quadrennial Fiscal Audit Outcomes

In January 2021, MDVA received its report from the quadrennial fiscal audit by the Maryland Office of Legislative Audits. The improvements made by its team resulted in a 67% reduction in the number of audit findings from the last such audit report, from six to two. This result was even more gratifying considering that the legislative audit commenced just as State employees began telework during the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic and took place entirely during the pandemic.



**Budget and Management extends streamlined recruitment process for veterans cemetery caretakers**

From November 1, 2020, to October 1, 2021, MDVA hired 14 veterans cemetery caretakers, over 50% more than the comparable period the year before. (From November 1, 2019, to October 1, 2020, MDVA hired 9 veterans cemetery caretakers)

## Governor's Customer Service Promise

In FY21, MDVA received 143 customer service surveys. Eighty seven percent of respondents indicated being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their MDVA experience.

This year, in conjunction with annual customer service training, MDVA personnel received the VA S.A.V.E. Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training. The acronym S.A.V.E. provides the foundation for what to do when working with a veteran who may be in crisis. The S stands for 'signs of suicidal thinking', the A stands for 'ask the most important question, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"', the V stands for 'validating the veteran's experience', and the E stands for 'encouraging treatment and expediting getting help'. MDVA personnel received certificates of completion and pocket cards containing the Veterans Crisis Line.

In addition to MDVA personnel completing this training, Department of Human Services Constituent Services personnel participated as well.

[Read the FY21 Customer Service Annual Report Here.](#)



## Additional Programs and Initiatives Managed by the Outreach and Advocacy Program

### Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program and Fund

The Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program and Fund continues to provide grants to organizations who place service dogs with veterans or provide qualifying equine therapy to veterans. Five programs currently participate: [Hero Dogs](#), [Warrior Canine Connection](#), [Fidos for Freedom](#), [Bridges at Worthmore](#), [Taking the Lead](#), and [Therapeutic and Recreational Riding Center](#). Grants in FY21 totaled \$44,000 with \$40K to service animal programs and \$4K to equine therapy programs.

Legislation passed during the 2021 General Assembly Legislative Session required updates to program regulations and the program is currently undergoing updates. Plans for 2022 include formalizing the application process and awarding grants to organizations who identify in advance of an award how a grant will improve overall veteran mental health and wellbeing.

The Program has a general fund balance of \$54,000 and special fund balance of \$12,451. The goal for 2022 is to distribute the full program balance with grant awards ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

### Joint County Veteran Commission Meetings

Meetings of the county veteran commissions, councils, and collaboratives were held in August, October, and December of 2020 and in March of 2021. A joint virtual summit was held in November of 2021 with an attendance of 60.

Meeting agenda topics included: VA homeless services, VA enrollment and eligibility, VA caregiver support, engaging veterans not enrolled in VA, and Purdue University's Measuring Communities data portal. The November summit included the documentary short screening of True North: Inspiring Stories of Finding Home. The documentary highlighted the [Valhalla Sailing Project](#), located in Annapolis. [Find a list of local commissions here.](#)

These meetings support collaboration and best practice sharing for serving veterans. A goal for 2022 is to host a larger in person summit.

### Veterans Services Specialist Program in State Government

Three meetings of the Veterans Services Specialist Program in State Government were held in FY21. Meetings were held in November of 2020 and in February and June of 2021 with agenda topics including VA enrollment, VA benefits, and a Baltimore Station briefing. Each meeting also includes the opportunity to share best practices and partner opportunities.

In November 2020, 23 veteran liaisons received the VA S.A.V.E. Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training. Liaisons participated alongside local veteran groups in this year's virtual summit, held November 18, 2021. MDVA is hopeful to resume in person meetings in 2022.

### Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families (SMVF)

The Maryland Department of Health and MDVA continue to lead the Maryland based Governor's Challenge along with more than 25 other states in the implementation of a statewide veteran suicide prevention plan. The Challenge, sponsored by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) and the VA, regularly convenes an interagency team of military and civilian leaders to develop an evidenced based action plan to prevent suicide among SMVF.

Three priority areas were identified and are the focus of the work.

The areas are: identifying SMVF and screening for suicide risk, promoting connectedness and improving care connections, and lethal means safety and safety planning.

Working alongside the Department of Health, MDVA is committed to supporting the implementation of this plan.



# Commissions, Councils and Boards

## Maryland Veterans Commission

This commission meets quarterly and advises the Secretary on issues related to veterans, including veteran related legislation. Commissioners represent the Department at commemorative events, present Governor's Proclamations on special days to include Veterans Day and Memorial Day. The Commission has the following active sub-committees: Combating Substance Misuse Impacting Maryland Veterans and Their Families, and Incarcerated Veterans. Commissioners are appointed by the Governor to five-year terms. The Governor also names the Chair.

## **In addition to the eight congressional districts, the following organizations or categories are represented:**

- American Ex POW's
- American Veterans AMVETS
- Catholic War Veterans
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Disabled American Veterans
- Fleet Reserve Association
- Jewish War Veterans
- Korean War Veterans Association, Inc.
- Marine Corps League
- Maryland Officer's Association of America
- Military Order of the Purple Heart
- National Association of Black Veterans
- Vietnam Veterans of America
- Pearl Harbor Survivors Association- (honorary nonvoting member)
- Polish Legion of American Veterans
- The American Legion
- The Retired Enlisted Association
- Iraq/Afghanistan War Veteran
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Women Veterans
- Member at Large (Chair)

## Maryland Veterans Home Commission

This Commission advises the Department on issues related to State veteran homes. They interact with veterans and other organizations to disseminate information concerning Charlotte Hall Veterans Home. The Commission has fourteen members and meets quarterly. Eleven members are named by the Governor with Senate advice and consent to five-year terms. Three members serve ex-officio, representing the Governor, Speaker of the House and President of the Senate.

## War Memorial Commission

This Commission shares custody and supervision of the War Memorial Building and the War Memorial Plaza with the City of Baltimore. Maintenance costs are equally shared by the State of Maryland and the City of Baltimore. The Commission meets quarterly and consists of ten members who serve five-year terms; five are appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with the Governor's approval, and five by the Mayor of Baltimore.

**The MDVA Secretary or his/her designee is appointed and serves as a member of the following commissions, councils or boards. In 2021, Outreach and Advocacy Program personnel served as designees to:**

- Maryland College Collaboration for Student Veterans Commission
- Maryland Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention
- Governor's Workforce Development Board
- Maryland Semiquincentennial Commission
- Maryland Commission on Health Equity
- Maryland Interagency Council on Homelessness





# Partnership Highlights: Maryland's Commitment to Veterans



## Connection

Connect service members, veterans, and their families with mental health, substance use, and other supportive services

## Support

Provide peer support via Operation Roll Call program and financial support via one-time crisis funding grant

## Education

Provide and host training and education opportunities to behavioral health providers, police departments, community groups, and others

Connect with us at: (877)770-4801,  
bha.mcv@maryland.gov,  
Facebook @ MarylandVeterans



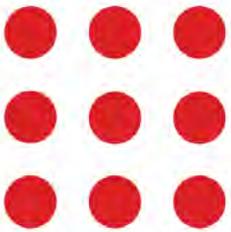
Scan QR Code to visit  
[Maryland's Commitment to Veterans](#)

Partnership Highlights: US Department of Veterans Affairs



**Veterans  
Crisis Line**

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**Military  
Crisis Line**

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**1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**



Scan QR Code  
at left for more  
information on  
[VA mental health  
resources](#)

## MDVA Leadership Team

**George W. Owings, III**  
Secretary

**Robert Finn**  
Deputy Secretary

**Katie Sonntag**  
Executive Assistant

**Pete Pantzer**  
Director, Finance and Administration

**Phil Munley**  
Director, Service and Benefits  
Program

**Michelle Cariaso**  
Director, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home

**Russell Ware**  
Director, Cemetery and Memorial Program

**Dana Burl**  
Director, Outreach and Advocacy Program

**Mark Hendricks**  
Grant Administrator, Maryland Veterans  
Trust Fund



For the MDVA Staff Directory,  
scan QR Code at left or visit:  
[veterans.maryland.gov/staff-directory](https://veterans.maryland.gov/staff-directory)



The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs is a State Government Executive Department with a service mission to assist veterans, active duty service members, their families and dependents, in securing benefits earned through military service.

Under the Department of Veterans Affairs are five major programs:

- Service and Benefits Program
- Charlotte Hall Veterans Home
- Cemetery and Memorial Program
- Outreach and Advocacy Program
- Maryland Veterans Trust Fund

Office of the Secretary  
16 Francis Street, 4th Floor  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-260-3838

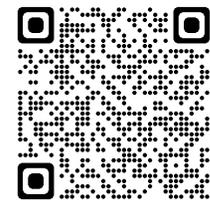
[mdveteransinfo@maryland.gov](mailto:mdveteransinfo@maryland.gov)

Facebook @MDVeterans

Twitter @MdVeterans

YouTube: MDVeterans

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