

2019

Annual Report



Rhode Island Office of
Veterans Services

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Message from the Director

Kasim J. Yarn



I am honored to present the 2019 Annual Report for the Office of Veterans Services. It is remarkable that we were able to sustain and improve on the dramatic results from 2018. Across the state, our team draws strength and inspiration from a shared mission of serving our Ocean State Veterans and their families. Governor Raimondo directs me to be that Beacon of Leadership to ensure our Veterans are treated in the manner, and with the respect, they deserve.

- To our World War II and Korean War Veterans, your service shaped the world. Our office is proud to stand by your side and ready to assist you or your family.
- To our Vietnam Veterans, welcome home. Our office is grateful for your service to our nation and stand ready to assist you.
- To our Cold War/Peacetime Veterans, our office recognizes your contribution to the security of our nation and thanks you for your service.
- To our Gulf War Veterans, your decisive victory resulted in securing a free Kuwait and appreciate your contribution to the stability of an important region.
- To our Post 9/11 Veterans, September 11, 2001, changed the path of our nation and

defined a generation of Americans. You are latest generation of warriors that have answered the call.

- To our family members and caregivers, you continue to give more and more to support our Veterans. You are truly heroes to our heroes.
- To our Veterans who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness, we strive to ensure that NO Veteran experiences homelessness and pledge to keep up the fight with our partners in the community.
- To our community partners – Thank You! We are blessed to work side-by-side with you to serve America's Heroes and their families. Because of you, we are able to improve the lives of our Veterans and their families.

RIServes

Building the Network

Over the past two years, RIServes has connected 1027 Veterans and their families to resources in our community. Together, with our 50-plus partner-providers, we have addressed the number one challenge facing Rhode Island's Veterans: benefits navigation. Every day, our case managers work with our RIServes partners to coordinate care, resources, and services for veterans and their families of all service eras. In each case, we work towards our root guiding principle: to match the right Veteran to the right provider at the right time.



“ *There are many resources for Veterans throughout Rhode Island, but navigating them can be difficult. RIServes helps solve that problem by getting people connected to the best organization for their needs and allowing providers to work together for our Vets.* ”

- Ty Smith, Director of Employment & Housing, Operation Stand Down Rhode Island

The RIServes network continues to be an innovative model to serve our state's Veterans community. Central to this resource-delivery solution is the concept of "Collective Impact" - the idea that true change comes from working together toward the common goal of improving lives. Our state-wide, coordinated network of service providers ensures unequalled access to the very best and most comprehensive network of care designed exclusively for military-connected Rhode Islanders.

At the heart of the RIServes network is our Veterans Resource Center in Warwick, which serves as the RIServes coordinator - the "air traffic controller" - which receives referrals from and directs Veterans to providers within the community. Clients can get timely, knowledgeable assistance by visiting a network provider, by self-referring through the web-based form found on RIServes.org, or by visiting or calling our Warwick office.

The goal is to match the Veteran with the right provider that can best serve his or her needs in the shortest amount of time. Throughout the process, providers can track the status of the referral and the delivery of care through a secure technology platform designed for Rhode Island's Veterans community.

With the help of our strategic partner, The Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University; our technology partner, Unite Us; and our fellow coordinated care networks across the nation, we are relentless in our focus on value, credibility, and partnership to make the RIServes network sustainable and available to all of our state's Veterans.

RIServes

A Year of Results

RISERVES YEARLY SNAPSHOT

SERVING 5 COUNTIES WITH A VETERAN POPULATION OF 61,078 | TOP NEED: Benefits Navigation



538 Unique
Clients



539 Service
Requests



58
Participating
Organizations



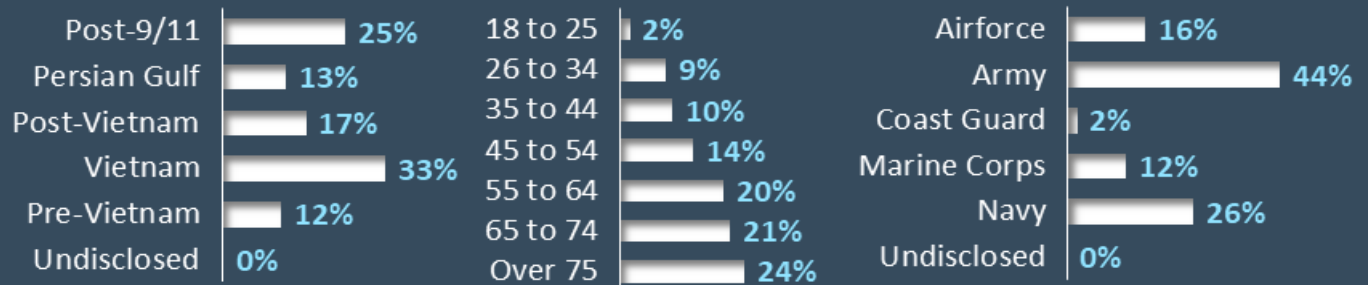
133
Unique
Network Users



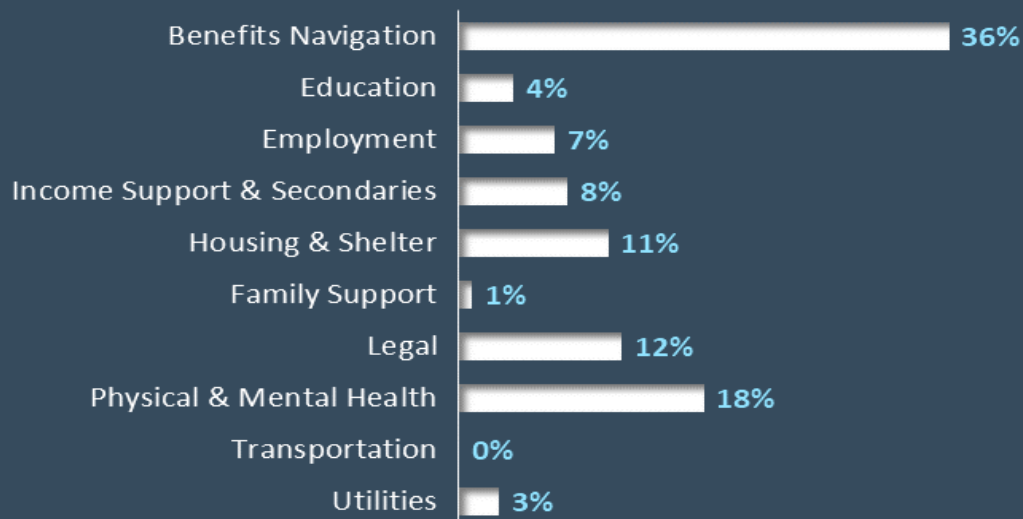
85% Military Members & Veterans
15% Spouses, Family Members & Caregivers
0% Undisclosed



80% Male | 20% Female



SERVICES BREAKDOWN



RIServes

The Road Ahead

Nothing impactful comes in silos. Over the past two years, we have worked with our partners in the Veterans community to break them down and establish an ethos grounded in collective impact - the idea that true change comes from community-wide buy-in. Our action plan for RIServes will once again guide us through this coming year:

Work with our partner-providers to improve service delivery to our Veterans and military-connected families.

Engage regularly with our key partners to learn best practices, identify lessons learned, improve collaboration.

Promote the idea of collective impact to leverage the talent in our network for the benefit of those who've served.

We'll bring Veterans, service members, and their families together to continuously improve care coordination and build healthier military-connected communities.

Truly connecting our work with shared software (tools) and analytics (insights) – along with the structure and rigor of collective impact – will help us make important strides in the improvement of the lives of our Veterans.

“Rhode Island’s deep appreciation for our Veterans is the reason we are able to do what we do. With the backing of our community, we are dedicated to building and sustaining a network of resources to give a helping hand to those who have served in our Armed Forces.”

~ Kasim Yarn, RI Director of Veterans Services



RI Serves

Our Partners

- AmpSurf
- Armed Forces Services RI
- Beachwood Center for Wellbeing
- Brain Injury Association of RI
- Brown University
- Bryant University
- City of Cranston
- City of Providence
- Community Action Partnership
- Community Care Alliance
- Community College of Rhode Island
- Comprehensive Community Action
- Dare to Dream Ranch
- Hire Heroes USA
- HopeHealth Hospice
- IVMF Coordination Center
- IVMF Enrollment Services
- IYRS School of Technology & Trades
- Jewish War Veterans
- Johnson & Wales University
- MA Department of Veterans Services
- Mike & Connie Speidel
- NEADS
- Onward to Opportunity
- Operation Stand Down RI
- New England Center & Home for Veterans
- Providence College
- Providence VA Medical Center
- Providence VA Regional Office
- RI Bar Association
- RI College Veterans Resource Center
- RI Department of Labor & Training
- RI Military Family Program
- RI Military Organization
- RI Transition Assistance Advisor
- RI Veterans Treatment Court
- Roger Williams University
- SENEDIA
- Service Women's Action Network
- Shri Service Corps
- Team RWB RI
- The Center for Mediation & Collaboration
- The Vet Center
- Transition Assistance Program NAVSTA
- University of Rhode Island
- Veterans Assembled Electronics
- Veterans Business Outreach Center
- Veterans, Inc.
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Vets4Warriors
- Westbay Community Action
- YWCA RI

RIServes

Case Highlights



David DosReis, Case Manager

An Iraq War Veteran came to us for assistance navigating education benefits. He suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which caused memory and cognitive impairment. He also had a significant anxiety working with government institutions. As a result, the Veteran was not comfortable coming to an office setting. One of our case managers, David, chose to meet him at a location of his choice. They met in a local coffee shop where David was able to engage in an informative benefits counseling session with the Veteran in an environment where he felt safe.

The Veteran's anxiety has caused him trouble as he reintegrated in civilian life, particularly in an academic setting. He was having difficulty in managing his requests with campus staff to accommodate his disability. Initially, the Veteran had turned to a campus guidance counselor but was not able to get his needs met. David was the Veteran's next stop.

With the Veteran's express permission, David worked with the college's guidance counselor and staff to provide a fuller picture of the Veteran's disability. Knowing there can be unforeseen barriers when requesting academic accommodations, David reached out to a RIServes partner, the Vet Success on Campus program, for additional assistance.

Leveraging this professional partnership, David and the Vet Success on Campus staff member walked the Veteran through the entire accommodation process, from acquiring a doctor's write up to drafting the properly-worded accommodation request. The Veteran's TBI caused him a significant memory impairment and David's focus was to find a solution that would allow the Veteran to achieve academic success.

David was able to establish a formal arrangement with the college to provide memory & cognitive support for this Veteran. He was given a device to record lectures, allowing him to replay segments he could not recall. In addition, the college provided private tutoring services with an emphasis on memory retention.

In addition, David reached out to another RIServes partner, the Vet Center, to connect the Veteran with mental health services. He personally walked the Veteran to the Vet Center and assisted him in signing up for weekly visits. These visits helped the Veteran to cope with his anxiety and provided further medical evidence of his need for accommodation. The Veteran has now been enrolled in college for nine months. Both he and his guidance counselor continue to work with our office to maintain Veteran's newfound success.

RIServes

Case Highlights

During an Office of Veterans Services outreach event, David Rothermel, a case manager with the office, met a homeless Veteran struggling with his transition back into civilian life. The Veteran had been unable to find employment, leaving him without funds to afford housing or food. He had stayed with friends when possible, but his available resources were running out.

David personally transported the Veteran to Operation Stand Down (OSDRI), one of our RIServes partners. There, the OSDRI staff provided him access to the food pantry and enrolled him into the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. David and the team at Operation Stand Down worked together to find the Veteran housing. Within a few weeks, permanent housing was secured with OSDRI providing first month's rent and the security deposit through its SSVF grant.



David Rothermel, Case Manager

After stabilizing the Veteran with housing, David worked with the RI Department of Labor and Training, another RIServes network partner, to find the Veteran employment. Within six weeks, the team secured employment for the Veteran as a rigger for a national defense contracting company. This opportunity provided full time work and a living wage. The Veteran now reports he is a valued member of the company's team.

Following the employment search, David then worked with the Veteran to review his military history. The Veteran had a number of health issues that stemmed from his military service but was unaware of the federal VA's service-connected disability compensation benefit. David worked with the Veteran to establish his case and created an application for this benefit. In August 2019, the VA awarded the Veteran a 60% disability rating. This qualified him to receive a monthly stipend and receive access to VA medical care.

David credits the success of this case to the vast benefits network established by RIServes. With the help of subject matter experts from our partner-providers, David was able to document this Veterans case step-by-step and share all relevant information with each RIServes partner in a HIPAA-secure environment. In under six months, the Veteran transitioned from homelessness to stable housing and a rewarding career.

Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery

The Office of Veterans Services operates and maintains the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery (RIVMC) in Exeter. It is a dignified, solemn resting place for Veterans and their eligible spouses or dependents. Situated on 280 acres, our state's Veterans cemetery showcases our everlasting appreciation for those who served this country honorably.

Operations

Averaging 97 internments per month, the RIVMC continues to be one of the busiest state Veterans cemeteries in the nation. During Fiscal Year 2019, the cemetery conducted 1,680 committal services. Its staff consists of 16 employees, which includes 12 full-time personnel and four seasonal workers.



Memorials & Monuments

The RIVMC offers all Veterans and their families the opportunity to inscribe the Veteran's name on the memorial wall or memorial walkway. Notification of the memorial wall/walkway program is sent out each February.

In addition, many military units, organizations, and campaigns also have monuments throughout the cemetery to honor their respective Veterans. Monument design, placement, and installation is coordinated with the RIVMC leadership.



Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery

Ceremonies & Accomplishments

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services conducts an annual Memorial Day observance at the cemetery against the fitting backdrop of the World War II Monument. In 2019, over 500 attendees listened to Isabella Tobin read her award-winning essay, award-winning essay, “A Veteran, A Voice, A Vote: A Unifying Voyage.”

Wreaths Across America was the second major annual event held at the cemetery on December 14, 2019. Over 500 attendees gathered for the ceremony and then assisted in laying over 4,500 wreaths in sections of the cemetery. Throughout the year, the RIVMC hosts several events that promote our state’s unending gratitude to those Veterans who have so ably served our country, to include 9/11 Patriot Day and Armed Forces Day (Echo Taps) Remembrance, among others.



The Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery continues to make improvements to attain National Shrine status. In 2019, RIVMC was inspected by the National Cemetery Administration and received a passing score of 80 which was a 25-point increase over the 2015 inspection.

As part of a continuing effort to improve the grounds, we welcomed the return of Saluting Branches, a volunteer team from the tree care industry that uses its expertise to trim numerous branches, cut down damaged trees, and plant new ones.

In addition, repairs were made to the Memorial Wall plaza and the chapel roof, a privacy screen placed on our old maintenance facility fence line, a new electric line service and heater installed in the chapel, and almost three miles of cemetery roads paved in collaboration with RIDOT.

The Master Plan was also completed and revealed over 80 years of expansion capability within the current cemetery grounds.



Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery

Partnerships & Future Plans

In 2019, the Office of Veterans Services and the RIVMC continued to build and maintain partnerships with several organizations throughout the state. These relationships not only promote the mission of providing Veterans a dignified resting place, but also strengthen the Veteran community through outreach, fellowship, and a sense of community. The RIVMC Administrator participates as a member of the Rhode Island Historical Cemetery Commission and conducts outreach with the local Veterans service organizations, including the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Other valued relationships include:

- Funeral Directors Association of RI
- Gold Star Families
- Naval Station Newport
- Patriot Guard Riders
- Sons and Daughters of the Revolution
- The University of Rhode Island
- Rhode Island Job Corps of Exeter
- Rhode Island National Guard
- Home Depot of North Kingstown
- Year Up Rhode Island
- VA National Cemetery Administration
- National Grid Saluting Branches

The Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery continues to expand its operations to accommodate an increasing need.

This year, the federal VA awarded the cemetery a \$1.3 million grant to build a columbarium wall plaza. This construction will occur in five phases and allows the Cemetery to continue fulfilling niche cremation placements for over 50 years.

In addition to this major construction project, the cemetery is tracking the following goals for Fiscal Year 2020:

- Building additional Memorial Walkway panels
- Repairing the Memorial Walkway plaza
- Replacing the roof of the Maintenance Facility
- Replacing damaged and mismatched section markers



Rhode Island Veterans Home

On Veterans Day 2017, Governor Gina M. Raimondo presided over a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark the official opening of the new Rhode Island Veterans Home. Completed in October 2017, the project was over a decade in the making. Because of the strong, persistent advocacy of our Veteran community, our state recognized the need for a new skilled nursing home that incorporated the best practices in the nursing home industry. With our Veterans community's input, we designed and built a state-of-the-art facility for the brave men and women who served our country. In 2019, the staff at the Home continued to deliver high quality nursing care, while undertaking efforts to define an operational and financial model for the Home that is sustainable, efficient, and responsive to resident health and safety needs.

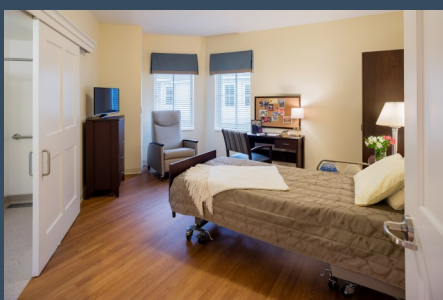


The Rhode Island Veterans Home is a worthy tribute to our Veterans. Upon arrival, guests travel down the tree-lined entry drive and are greeted with views of the relocated historic water tower, which has served as a focal point on the campus since its founding in 1890. The new facility takes up almost 45 acres. There are new walking trails, passive and active recreational opportunities, and new landscaping. By siting the new home on the western side of the property, over 50 acres of forested land on the eastern side have been preserved.

The entry drive intersects a campus ring road, which provides one-way access around the perimeter of the buildings and to each of the “neighborhoods” connected to the main commons building. Continuing on entry drive, guests arrive at the main entry plaza, highlighted by a beautiful flag display and ample room for drop-off and pick-up of residents.

Rhode Island Veterans Home

The Rhode Island Veterans Home is built upon the premise of interconnected service and accessibility and designed around the concept of “neighborhoods.” Each of these neighborhoods house groups of residents in a closer, more personal setting. Each neighborhood is divided into two “cottages,” which provide a home-like feel while directly linking residents to services and amenities in the near vicinity. Each cottage features a series of single-occupancy rooms for residents, a fireplaced lounge, a game room, spa, outdoor recreation area, and full-service kitchen and dining area. For residents seeking variety, other neighborhoods are just a quick walk down the interconnected hallways.



This resident-centered design features individual rooms, neighborhood-based dining and activity centers, and community-wide amenities such as a library, various dining options, physical/occupational therapy improvements, and a beautiful chapel.



The 260,000 square-foot facility is located on the same 100-acre parcel that has served as the home for Rhode Island’s Veterans since 1890. It is anchored by a “Main Street” in the central commons building that connects to each of the six interconnected neighborhoods.

In addition to the improved amenities and increased living space, residents enjoy other perks as well. The Veterans Home operates with a “resident-based” focus, aiming to provide those who live here with a sense of being at home instead of an institution. Each individual neighborhood is staffed with 24-hour caregivers. Residents now have more control of over their meal times and medication schedule. Front porches and enclosed outdoor patios encourage recreational enjoyment during the warmer months.

Rhode Island Veterans Home

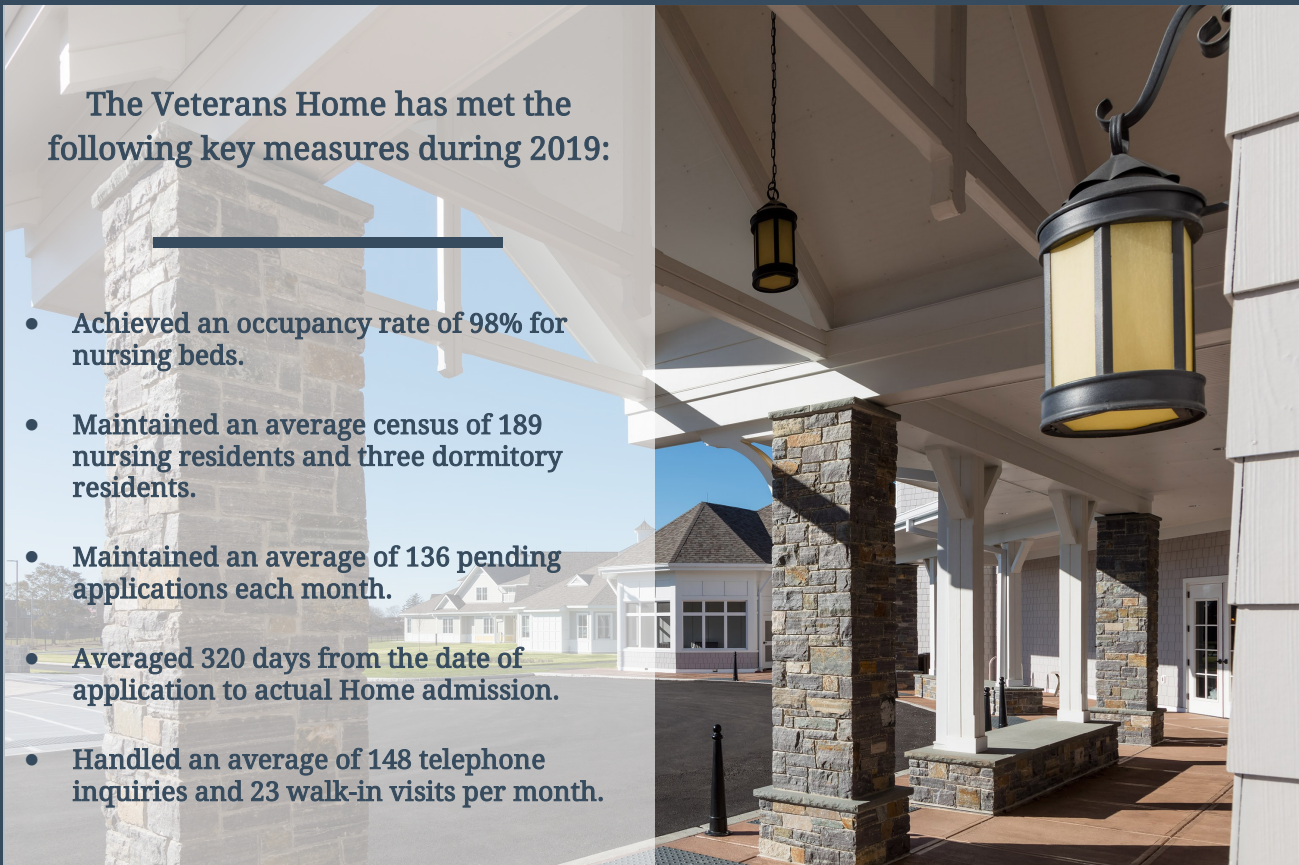
Partnerships, Achievements, & Future Plans

The Veterans Home continues to partner with numerous organizations to provide support and recreational activities for its residents. The organizations include:

- RIVH Family Council
- Disabled American Veterans
- Reserve Officer Association
- Reserve Officer League
- Military Order of Foreign Wars
- Military Women Across the Nation
- American Legion
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Vietnam Veterans of America
- RI Special Forces Association
- RI State Elks Association
- RI Free and Accepted Masons

The Veterans Home has met the following key measures during 2019:

- Achieved an occupancy rate of 98% for nursing beds.
- Maintained an average census of 189 nursing residents and three dormitory residents.
- Maintained an average of 136 pending applications each month.
- Averaged 320 days from the date of application to actual Home admission.
- Handled an average of 148 telephone inquiries and 23 walk-in visits per month.



In the year ahead, the Rhode Island Veterans Home plans to complete its remaining construction projects. It will also seek to maintain its 99% nursing bed occupancy rate while increasing the utilization of its dormitory beds on the second floor of the Home.

Year in Review

2019

February: RIVETS begins Student Town Hall Series at State Colleges

Education and access to quality employment is a top priority of the most recent generation of Veterans. RIVETS knows that a critical part of delivering services is strong communication with the populations we serve.

Director Yarn held Veteran-focused town halls for students at CCRI, RIC, and URI. They provided students with an open discussion forum to discuss concerns and provide ideas for improving access to higher education for Veterans and military-connected families. The town halls also doubled as resource fairs, allowing attendees easy access to the RIServes network and its partners.



March: RIVETS & Elected Officials Honor Vietnam Veterans

In partnership with leadership from the federal VA and a number of elected officials, RIVETS celebrated Vietnam Veterans Day at the Rhode Island Veterans Home in Bristol.

Acknowledgement of their service is a priority for RIVETS staff given the often harsh treatment they received upon their return home. RIVETS seeks out opportunities to remind our Vietnam Veterans of the importance of their service and commitment to duty.



Year in Review

2019

April: ESGR Honors Director Yarn at State House Ceremony



The Department of Defense's Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve program (ESGR) honored Director Kasim Yarn for his support of one of his staff member's service with the Rhode Island National Guard. For more than 40 years, ESGR has encouraged and worked with employers around the country to strengthen their support for their employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve. And our entire country is stronger for it.

May: RIVETS Hosts the State's Annual Memorial Day Commemoration

On Memorial Day, Governor Gina M. Raimondo presided over a solemn ceremony at the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery to pay tribute to those service members who sacrificed their lives in defense of our nation. Joining her were Senator Jack Reed, Congressman Jim Langevin, Congressman David Cicilline, Attorney General Peter F. Neronha, General Treasurer Seth Magaziner, and Kasim J. Yarn, Rhode Island's Director of Veterans Services, among other state and local officials.



“As we near the 75th anniversary of D-Day, I’m reminded of the 2,500 patriots who gave their lives on that day. They served and died to protect us and our freedoms, and for that, we are forever grateful.”

~ Governor Gina M. Raimondo

Year in Review

2019

June: RIVETS Partners with VFW to Host Veterans Resource Fair

The Rhode Island Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the RIVETS co-hosted a Veterans Resource Fair at the VFW Annual Convention on Saturday, June 1. Representatives from a variety of government, nonprofit, and community organizations were on hand to share information on the programs and services they offer to veterans, service members, and military-connected families.

As part of the event, the Rhode Island National Guard's Major General Christopher Callahan provided a 30-minute brief on the state of the National Guard. Following the brief, there was a panel discussion featuring local leaders of the federal VA on topics of concern to veterans, including the 2018 Mission Act, the new appeals procedure for disability claims, and the Forever G.I. Bill.



VFW
NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

June: RIVETS hosts the 75th D-Day Remembrance Ceremony



On the 75th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Affairs hosted a commemorative event to honor the Rhode Island Veterans who lost their lives on D-Day.

Governor Gina Raimondo issued a proclamation to recognize June 6, 2019 as D-Day Commemoration Day in the State of Rhode Island. It read, in part:

“On the 75th anniversary of the invasion of Europe, we pause to remember all of those who gave their lives in defense of their country, and from their willing sacrifice we draw a renewed sense of dedication for the continuous struggle to secure liberty and justice.”

Following the speaking program, Navy veteran Matthew McCoy recognized each of the 99 Rhode Islanders who gave their lives with a ceremonial “Tolling of the Bells.”

Year in Review

2019

September: RIVETS Supports OSDRI's Stand Down Weekend

Diamond Hill Park in Cumberland was the site of another successful Stand Down Weekend. Organized by Operation Stand Down Rhode Island, the weekend provided a military-style encampment for homeless Veterans and those in need of assistance.

More than 50 service providers, including RIVETS and numerous state agencies, set up information tables to connect Veterans with support that includes not only housing but also food, clothing, intensive case management, and job training.

Governor Raimondo had the honor of serving lunch to the Veterans.



October: RIVETS joins MA Veterans Services for Northeast VSO Training



RIVETS was invited to receive training and accreditation from the National Association of County Veterans Services Officers.

Held in Leominster, MA the training brought together over 340 VSOs. The federal VA's catchment areas overlap state lines and this collaborative training brought Veterans services staff from both states together to receive training and share best practices.

Year in Review

2019

November: RIVETS Honors Veterans with Governor Raimondo

In a heartfelt ceremony, Governor Gina M. Raimondo led the state's official Veterans Day proceedings to honor those who have served.

Held at the Rhode Island Veterans Home, over 200 attendees heard remarks of appreciation from the Governor and other elected officials and sang songs to pay tribute to our nation's heroes. Kasim Yarn, the state's Director of Veterans Services, members of the Congressional delegation, and other state and local officials joined her for the event.



December: Wreaths Across America Honors Veterans at the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery



One of over 900 locations for the nationwide Wreaths Across America ceremony, the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery hosted a ceremony and moment of silence along with participating cemeteries, including Arlington National Cemetery, from across the nation.

Wreaths were laid on the gravesites of Veterans recently killed in action. Every branch of the service will be represented in the ceremony honoring fallen soldiers, those who served, and those currently serving in the Armed Forces.

United Way 2-1-1

Partnership Highlight

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services takes pride in the professional partnerships it maintains across the state. In support of our “No Wong Door” approach, we aim to link all service providers together to ensure a Veteran receives wrap around services no matter where they may initially seek help.

One of our closest partnerships is with United Way 2-1-1, a community organization dedicated to bridging the gap between providers and citizens in need of human services. United Way operates a community outreach bus that serves as a mobile office in which individuals can access resources and apply for assistance in locations throughout the state.

The Outreach Bus stops at an average of 10 different locations each week to provide services to communities statewide. United Way staff are on board and ready to assist with a variety of needs.



For the past three years, RIVETS provides staff to accompany the bus. This year alone, RIVETS has engaged in over 250 hours of benefits counseling on the road.

Another resource maintained by United Way is the 2-1-1 phonebank, an easily accessible call center that anyone can call to assistance. RIVETS worked with United Way’s staff by developing a training course for their benefits counselors on Veterans benefits and services to Rhode Islanders. Veteran status is now a standard intake question during the initial 2-1-1 call, and staff are trained to both navigate Veterans benefits and to directly refer to RIVETS for assistance.



United Way Outreach Staff & RIVETS Case Manager

RI Veterans Service Grant

Community Partnership Making a Difference

In 2019, RIVETS awarded \$200,000 to various community groups to address the needs of RI Veterans. Below are some highlights from grant recipients:

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

The VFW utilized our grant funding to support staff at its service offices and increase actionable contacts with Veterans by 20%, for a total of 1,247 contacts. Total claim awards have increased to \$700,000 since the staffing increase.

In addition, the VFW has used this funding to increase its outreach efforts to Veterans. The VFW sponsored two car Shows featuring VFW services and programs for interested Veterans and family members. Two assistant Department Service Officers were sent to the various colleges around the state to spread awareness of the VFW's services.

The VFW highlights one case, in which a 97-year-old Veteran of World War II, and a Silver Star recipient, received a 100% service-connection disability decision, 74 years after his military service had ended.

RI Transportation Authority (RIPTA)

The Vet Pass program at RIPTA is fully funded by the RI Veterans Service Grant. It currently supports 89 Rhode Islanders by providing them with no-cost rides, allowing them access to employment, services, and amenities across the state.

During the first program cycle, RI Veterans utilized 6,069 trips on RIPTA fixed route buses. Ridership data is tracked on a monthly basis and current trends show that 68 Veterans depend on this pass for daily travel, with an average of 44 trips used per Veteran each month.

During RIPTA's community meeting about the future of public transportation—Transit Forward 2040—Veterans came forward to praise the value of Vet Pass. One Veteran explained his need for transportation to work, which came at peak hours that low-income discounts do not typically apply to. Vet Pass allowed him to commute to work and maintain his job.

SHRI Service Corps

SHRI Service Corps offers Yoga classes free of charge to Veterans and active-duty service members. Under this program, Shri has instructed 79 members in yoga at a number of locations, such as the RI National Guard armory in Cranston and the Veterans Treatment Court.

RI Veterans Service Grant

Community Partnership Making a Difference

Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI)

CCRI received funding for the creation of a Veterans Emergency Relief Fund. This fund is used to address unexpected expenses that create barriers for Veterans receiving education at CCRI. It is administered through the Financial Aid Office and reviewed by staff in the Office of Enrollment Services.

The program highlights a Veteran suffering from PTSD. His reliance on Post-9/11 GI Bill Chapter 33 funding prevented him from seeking temporary inpatient treatment. Utilizing the fund, he was able to withdraw for a semester while still receiving support for his family.

The fund also assists student Veterans who are single parents. While they remain in school full time, it is difficult to cover food and living expenses. CCRI utilizes this program to help Veterans with support so they can stay on track to graduation.

Rhode Island College (RIC)

RIC's Military Resource Center used grant funding to establish a Student Veteran Relief Fund. In conjunction with the Vet Success on Campus program, the Resource Center made student Veterans aware of the fund's availability in addressing barriers to education.

The Veteran Relief Fund runs annually and has helped nine student Veterans during the Fall 2019 semester and expect to help a similar number in the spring semester. The fund has helped a student Veteran facing foreclosure, another who could not afford car insurance or transportation to school, and a student Veteran and his family who are raising a newborn child while attending school full time.

YWCA RI

YWCA RI uses RI Veteran Service Grant funding to provide assistance to Veterans transitioning from homelessness. YWCA purchased "Welcome Home" kits using grant funding to provide Veterans with basic household necessities such as wool blankets, pillow covers and sheets, towels, toiletries, appliances, kitchenware, cleaning supplies, and non-perishable food. The YWCA has a long history of supporting Veterans, and is happy to be able to offer this service to RI Veterans facing homelessness.

RI Veterans Service Grant

Community Partnership Making a Difference

RI Veterans Treatment Court (RIVTC)

The RI Veterans Treatment Court used funding from the Veterans Service Grant to continue support of their toxicology screening program. This program is critical in offering their diversion programs for Veterans recovering from substance use.

The randomized toxicology screening process follows national, evidence-based best practices and is used as one of the performance measures for the Veterans Treatment Court. On a positive test, the Treatment Court can deliver therapeutic intervention to keep the Veteran on track with their treatment. Since receiving funding, 182 tests have been performed on recovering Veterans. RIVTC considers this process critical in keeping Veterans on the road to recovery.

One Veteran who was participating in the treatment court had a significant addiction to opiates. The funding provided by the RI Veterans Service Grant allowed the Treatment Court to monitor this Veteran closely as he works towards sobriety.

RI Military Organization (RIMO)

RIMO used funding from the RI Veterans Service Grant to support its Military Lounge at TF Green Airport. The lounge has been operating since 2013 and has seen over 18,000 visitors. Active Duty, Reservists, Veterans, and their families, in addition to military personnel from allied countries attending the Naval War College in Newport, are all welcome at the lounge.

The lounge is staffed entirely by volunteers, with the intent to provide comfort and show appreciation for traveling military personnel. The operation relies entirely on grant funding. Since receiving the RI Veterans Service Grant, the lounge has hosted 1,377 visitors.

Bryant Veterans Professional Network

Veterans Service Grant funding allows the Bryant Veterans Professional Network members to attend the Student Veterans of America conference. The trip consists of three days of training, workshops, and breakout sessions aimed at providing skills for student Veterans to develop employable skill sets and better navigate the college experience.

RI Veterans Service Grant

Community Partnership Making a Difference

Operation Stand Down (OSDRI)

OSDRI received grant funding to provide both housing and legal services. They share testimonials from three Veterans served:

An honorably discharged Air Force Veteran with deployments to Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf presented to OSDRI homeless with insufficient income to be self-supporting. The Veteran was immediately housed in OSDRI's transitional/sober housing program. The Veteran also suffered from nerve damage which caused partial paralysis of his hands. After housing the Veteran, OSDRI's Legal Assistance for Warriors Program, again supported by the RI Office of Veteran Services Grant Fund, met with the client. After the consultation, OSDRI's VA Accredited Claims representative/paralegal procured and assembled the client's treatment and service records. The Veteran then met with OSDRI's staff attorneys. The Veteran was subsequently awarded a retroactive Social Security Disability payment of \$25,000 and an ongoing monthly benefit payment of \$2,150.00. This new income stream nearly tripled the Veteran's monthly income. Simultaneously, OSDRI's VA Disability claims attorney submitted an application for an increase in the service connected disability rating, which is still pending. The Veteran remains housed and receives mental health and substance abuse services. Upon completion of the program, the Veteran will have sufficient resources to self-sustain.

A 56-year-old honorably-discharged Coast Guard Veteran came to OSDRI facing eviction proceedings. He was immediately referred to OSDRI's Legal Assistance for Warriors Program. OSDRI legal counsel initiated five legal cases: (1) eviction defense; (2) bankruptcy evaluation; (3) assistance obtaining SNAP food benefits; (4) social security disability assistance; and (5) driver's license restoration. OSDRI immediately helped find housing for the Veteran, providing him a security deposit and first month rent. OSDRI's legal counsel was able to get the eviction dismissed with the prior landlord waiving their right to all of the back rent. The Veteran was evaluated and advised regarding his eligibility to apply for bankruptcy. OSDRI's legal team then assisted the Veteran with obtaining SNAP food benefits and began receiving the maximum allotment within 30 days of his referral. The Veterans received representation at the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal and was able to get his driver's license restored for no fee. Finally, the Veterans received assistance with his application for Social Security Disability benefits and was approved on his first try, receiving \$21,300 in retroactive benefits and monthly benefits in the amount of \$2,380 going forward.

A Veteran in his thirties, his spouse, and their young children found themselves homeless and living in a van as a result of medical costs and a lack of financial planning. OSDRI placed the family in a hotel while searching for a permanent housing solution. Employment and benefits were secured via OSDRI case managers and legal assistance.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan (VSSP)

In 2013, the General Assembly directed the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services to work with other state agencies and community partners to develop, maintain, and annually update a statewide Veterans services strategic plan ("VSSP") for the delivery of services for Veterans and their families.

Our Mission

We serve the Ocean State’s 61,078 Veterans and their families through the operation of (1) the RI Veterans Home, (2) the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery, and (3) the RI Veterans Resource Center. The Veterans Home in Bristol provides skilled nursing care to our Veterans. The Veterans Memorial Cemetery is a dignified and solemn resting place for Rhode Island Veterans and their eligible dependents in Exeter. The Veterans Resource Center in Warwick serves as the coordination center for RIserves, our referral network to connect Veterans and their families to benefits and resources.

Vision

The RI Office of Veterans Services acts as the lead agency to assist and direct access to community, state, and federal resources to those who have served in the Armed Forces and their families.

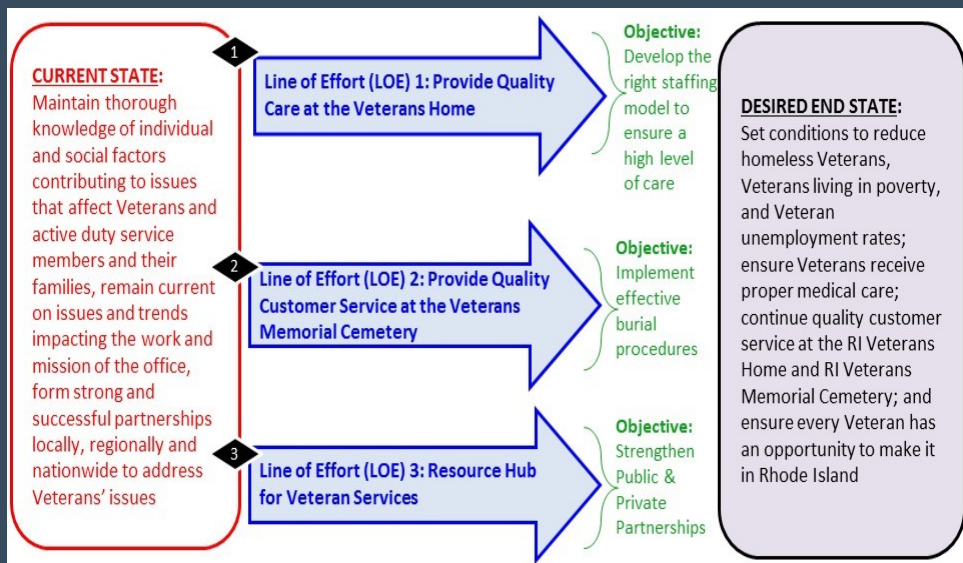


Values

- Maintain thorough knowledge of individual and social factors contributing to issues that affect Veterans, service members, and their families.
- Remain current on issues and trends impacting the work and mission of the office.
- Use a collaborative approach with stakeholders to achieve the mission.
- Form strong partnerships - locally, regionally and nationally - to address Veterans’ issues.

End State

Set conditions to ensure every Veteran has an opportunity to make it in Rhode Island by reducing homelessness, poverty, and unemployment among Veterans; increasing Veterans’ access to healthcare; and maintaining quality, responsive customer service at the RI Veterans Home and RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



VSSP

Planning & Goals

Our Plan

Representatives of several state agencies came together to create a Veterans Services Strategic Plan (VSSP). The execution of the VSSP is conducted through (1) task force/working groups with state agencies (e.g., DOC/VA/DLT/DCYF/DHS task force for incarcerated Veterans); (2) RIServes, our coordinated network of community providers; and (3) community outreach with state agencies, nonprofits, Veteran service organizations, and municipalities. Given the diverse demographics of our Ocean State Veterans, the work focuses on thirteen service categories:

- Veterans Disability Benefits
- Veterans Education
- Veterans Employment & Training
- Veterans Family Members & Caregivers
- Veterans Financial Planning Services
- Veterans Homelessness
- Veterans Living in Poverty
- Veterans Legal Services
- Veterans Long Term Care
- Veterans Mortuary Affairs
- Veterans PTSD, Agent Orange Health Effects, and Burn Pits Health Effects
- Veterans Transitional Assistance
- Veterans Transportation

The RI Office of Veterans Services (RIVETS) recognizes our reach is only limited by our ability to work together. Our time, dollars, and creative energy must be wisely invested. By leveraging municipal, state, and federal capabilities, we can have a collective impact for Veterans and their families throughout the 13 Veterans service categories.



VSSP

13 Veterans Service Categories

The VSSP is built upon addressing the needs of Veterans and their families through the 13 categories identified below:

1. Veterans Disability Benefits:

The federal Department of Veterans Affairs provides service-connected disability benefits. The RI Office of Veterans Services assists Veterans with benefits counseling on the application and appeals process. In addition, RIVETS works with Veterans not eligible for VA disability compensation by connecting them with programs such as SSDI and the General Public Assistance, administered by the state's Executive Office of Health & Human Services and the Department of Human Services.

- RIServes has streamlined the benefits process.

2. Veterans Education:

Rhode Island's state colleges and universities waive tuition for Rhode Island National Guard members. They also provide free tuition for Service Connected Disability Veterans rated at 10% or higher. In addition, the federal VA administers the GI Bill, which provides funds for tuition.

- #RIPromise has succeeded in supplementing educational opportunities for Veterans.
- RIVETS has increased on-campus presence to better provide services to student Veterans.

3. Veterans Employment/Training:

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services has established a partnership with the Department of Labor & Training's Veterans employment counselors to identify appropriate employment and training opportunities for those who've served. RIVETS also works with the Governor's Workforce Board and the federal VA's Vocational Rehabilitation program.

- Through collaboration with the Governor's Office, General Assembly, and state agencies, RI is working towards the adoption of best practices for the transfer of military and spouse licenses in good standing and substantially equivalent; licensure through endorsement; temporary licensure; and expedited licensing processes.

4. Veterans Family Members/Caregivers:

Through RIServes, the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services can help family members and caregivers navigate the benefits system and identify agencies that offer caregiver support. In addition, the federal VA offers caregiver assistance and the Vets Center provides caregiver and family counseling.

- RIVETS awarded grants to nonprofit organizations to provide social services to family members.
- RIVETS has undertaken a multi-agency effort to address issues that impede military spouse employment. The State of Rhode Island recognizes the importance and impact of family readiness on military readiness.

VSSP

13 Veterans Service Categories

5. Veterans Financial Planning Services:

The RI Department of Labor & Training offers vocational finance planning for its clients and the RI National Guard and Naval Station Newport have financial counselors available for their service members. The Providence VA offers free income tax return preparation.

- RVETS identified partners for the RIServes network to offer free financial coaching to Veterans.
- All Veteran employment and training programs have financial counseling available as a supplementary service.

6. Veterans Homelessness:

Rhode Island is making progress with developing a shared vision with community leaders to identify and implement concrete steps to overcome barriers to permanent housing faced by certain Veterans.

- RIVETS Director is an active member of the Rhode Island Continuum of Care Committee (RICOC) and was appointed as co-chair of the RICOC Veterans Committee.
- RIVETS awarded grants to nonprofit organizations to provide social services to Veterans experiencing homelessness.
- RIVETS spearheaded a multi-agency working group to address homelessness and affordable housing in Rhode Island.

7. Veterans Living in Poverty:

While there are no Veteran-specific anti-poverty programs at the state-level, Veterans are eligible for the same programs available to all Rhode Islanders. For example, the state administers SNAP for food assistance, child care assistance, and limited amounts of monetary assistance. Community partners such as Operation Stand Down RI, Veterans, Inc., Riverwood, and the RI Coalition for the Homeless help Veterans who are unable to afford housing and other services.

- RIVETS increased supportive services to give homeless and at-risk Veterans access to needed assistance through the RIServes network.
- RIVETS awarded grants to nonprofit organizations to provide social services to Veterans and family members experiencing poverty.
- RIVETS Director is an active member of the Rhode Island Continuum of Care Committee (RICOC) and was appointed as co-chair to the RICOC Veterans Committee.

VSSP

13 Veterans Service Categories

8. Veterans Legal Services:

The RI National Guard has a legal assistance program for its members, as does the NAVSTA Staff Judge Advocate's office. The RI Bar Association offers reduced-fee and pro bono assistance through the Armed Forces Legal Services Project. Roger Williams Law School launched the Veterans Disability Appeals Field Clinic to represent clients appealing disability decisions before the VA and the Board of Veterans Appeals. The RI Veterans Treatment Court continues to serve Veterans with successful rehabilitation and treatment for service-related issues that have led to misdemeanor infractions.

- RI Legal Services is in the process of joining the RIServes network.
- The RIDOC partnership for incarcerated Veterans is a success story, working to ease their reintegration into the community following release.
- RIVETS awarded grants to nonprofit organizations to provide legal services to Veterans.

9. Veterans Long Term Care:

The Rhode Island Veterans Home and the VA Long Term Care program offer options for Veterans seeking long-term skilled nursing care. In addition, the RI Office of Veterans Services works with the state's Medicaid agency for those Veterans who are not eligible for the RI Veterans Home or VA long-term care options.

- In collaboration with the RI Department of Health and the Providence VA Medical Center, RIVETS is looking to expand services in both Providence and Washington counties.
- RIVETS is committed to optimizing the health and well-being of Veterans with multiple chronic conditions, life-limiting illness, frailty, or disability associated with chronic disease or injury.

10. Veterans Mortuary Affairs:

The Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery provides a dignified, final resting place for Rhode Island's Veterans and eligible dependents. The cemetery staff works closely with funeral directors and the RI National Guard's Honor Detail to arrange military honors and committal services. The state's General Public Assistance program provides funding for basic funeral services for those Veterans who do not have the means to pay for them and are not eligible for the RIVMC.

- Land survey was completed that will expand the life expectancy of the Veterans Memorial Cemetery by 75 years.
- RIVETS is working with the VA National Cemetery Administration for best options for expansion.

VSSP

13 Veterans Service Categories

11. Veterans Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) / Agent Orange Effects / Burn Pits Health Effects:

As a response to Governor Raimondo's Executive Order 18-03, the Governor's Office convened two working groups, one focused on youth and the other focused on adults. The Governor tasked the working groups with proposing strategies for improving the behavioral healthcare (BH) system.

- RIVETS partnered with the Hospital Association of Rhode Island to fight the stigma associated with mental health illness, which presents substantial barriers to the effective and timely delivery of behavioral healthcare.
- Both case managers at the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services are certified for the detection and prevention of suicide and domestic abuse.

12. Veterans Transitional Assistance:

Through an information-sharing partnership with the Department of Defense, RIVETS instituted an outreach program to recently-separated service members. A case manager welcomes the returning service member home, introduces him or her to the services offered by RIVETS, and lets them know that the office stands ready to assist with benefits counseling and resource navigation. The military also offers the Transitional Assistance Program (TAP) to those coming off active duty. The RI National Guard offers transitional assistance to its members returning from deployments. Naval Station Newport conducts a week-long TAP class and has partnered with Director Yarn to provide a brief to each new class every Monday morning.

13. Veterans Transportation:

In June 2017, working with the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services, RIPTA launched a pilot program to learn more about the transportation needs of veterans. Using funds from a Veteran Supportive Services Grant, RIPTA distributed free passes to approximately 89 Veterans in Rhode Island. The passes provided the participating Veterans with free, unlimited travel on RIPTA's fixed-route buses. RIPTA is conducting a survey to gauge Veterans' transportation use and needs based on the pilot program. This grant also enabled RIPTA to offer free service to all Rhode Island Veterans (with proof of eligibility).

- In 2018, RIPTA was awarded additional grant funding based on the results of the pilot program.
- RIPTA is committed to continuing this work with the Office of Veterans Services to find more ways to assist the transportation needs of Rhode Island's Veterans.

VSSP

Partnerships

Our success is defined by our ability to work in a collaborative way with our partners. These efforts allow us and our network of community providers to make a collective impact on improving positive outcomes for our Veterans and their families. To achieve our desired end state, the following partners have been crucial in effecting positive change for those we serve (listed alphabetically):

The RI Commerce Corporation The Commerce Corporation works with public, private, and non-profit partners to create the conditions for businesses in all sectors to thrive by promoting the state's long-term economic health and prosperity. The Commerce Corporation offers several programs that benefit Veteran-owned businesses.

The RI Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) BHDDH is a key agency to assist Veterans who live with mental illness, substance use disorder, and/or a developmental disability by maintaining a system of high quality, safe, affordable, and coordinated care across the spectrum of behavioral health care services. It seeks to promote the health, safety, and well-being of Veterans by developing policies and programs that address the issues of mental illness, addiction, recovery, and community support.

The RI Department of Business Regulation (DBR). DBR is responsible for the implementation of state laws mandating the regulation and licensing of designated businesses, professions, occupations, and other specified activities.

The RI Department of Health (DOH). DOH is the key agency promoting strategies and programs to prevent and fight disease and protect the health and safety of all Rhode Islanders.

The RI Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS is the lead agency to serve the state's most vulnerable populations through safety net programs such as SNAP, TANF, GPA, and child care assistance.

The RI Department of Labor and Training (DLT). DLT provides workforce development, workforce security, and workforce protection for Rhode Islanders. Through federal and state funding, DLT offers Veteran-specific employment, educational, and economic opportunity services.

The RI Department of State. The Office of Secretary of State engages and empowers Veterans by making government more accessible and transparent, encouraging civic pride, enhancing commerce, and ensuring that elections are fair, fast, and accurate.

VSSP

Partnerships

The RI Office of Healthy Aging (OHA). DEA is the key agency responsible for the development of community-based services and programs that encourage independence and preserve the dignity of older Rhode Islanders.

The RI National Guard (The Guard). The Guard's deployment rate is consistently in the top five per capita nationally. The Guard continues to shape and train its force for future and anticipated change and challenges, while continuously supporting overseas and domestic operations. It will continue to have an active role in the development and implementation of our VSSP.

The RI Office of Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC). RIOPC is the lead agency to support the work of the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education in providing an excellent, accessible, and affordable system of higher education designed to improve the overall educational attainment of Veterans.

The RI Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). RIPTA is the lead agency to provide safe, reliable, and cost-effective transit service with a skilled team of professionals responsive to Veterans and their transportation needs.

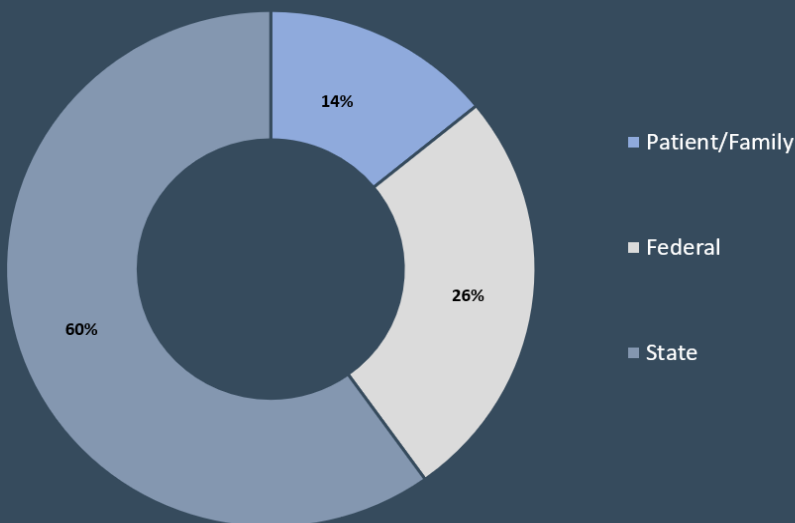
The RI Veterans Treatment Court. The Veterans Treatment Court successfully rehabilitates participants, on a case-by-case basis, by providing the tools and skills necessary to address Veterans' unique challenges to reintegrate successfully into society and maintain a productive, safe lifestyle within the community.



Budget Reports

RI Office of Veterans Services

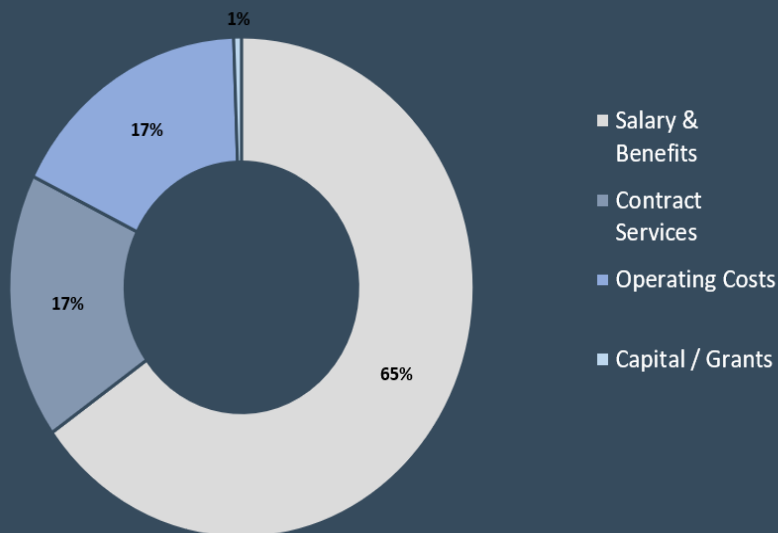
RI VETERANS SERVICES - FY 2019 REVENUE



RI Veterans Services FY 2019 Revenue

Patient/Family	\$5,544,261
Federal	\$10,201,842
State	\$23,515,548
Total	\$39,261,651

RI VETERANS SERVICES - FY 2019 EXPENDITURES



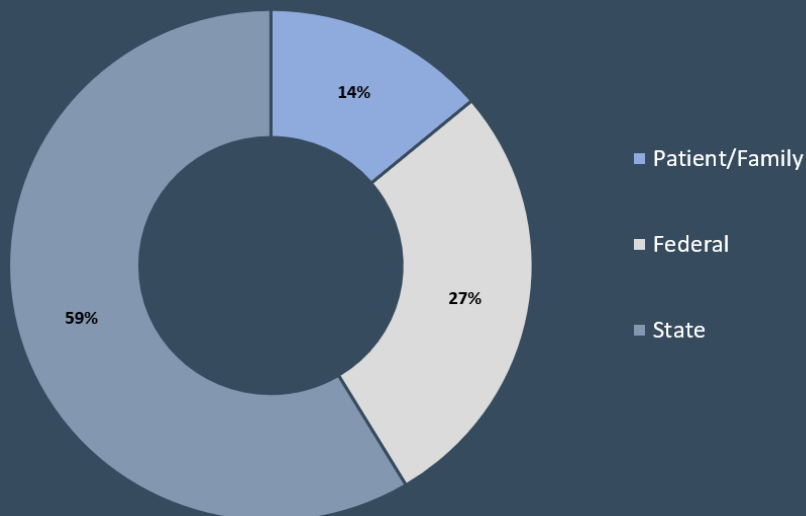
RI Veterans Services FY 2019 Expenditures

Salary & Benefits	\$25,578,688
Contract Services	\$6,737,975
Operating Costs	\$6,734,940
Capital/Grants	\$210,048
Total	\$39,261,651

Budget Reports

RI Veterans Home

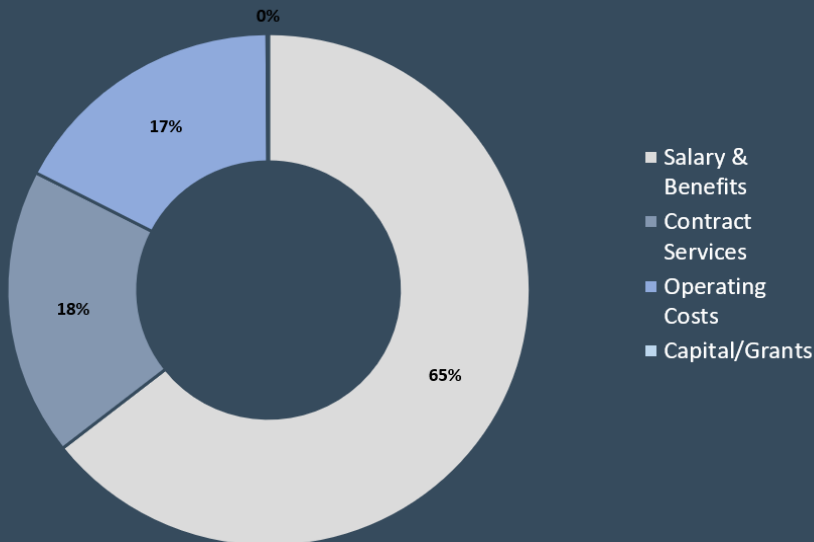
RI VETERANS HOME - FY 2019 REVENUE



RI Veterans Home FY 2019 Revenue

Patient/Family	\$5,149,559
Federal	\$10,201,842
State	\$21,741,028
Total	\$37,092,429

RI VETERANS HOME - FY 2019 EXPENDITURES



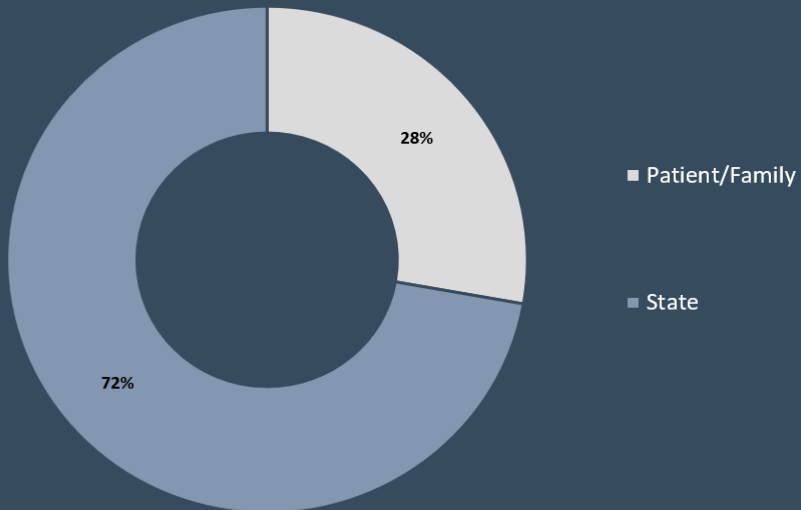
RI Veterans Home FY 2019 Expenditures

Salary & Benefits	\$23,894,047
Contract Services	\$6,729,870
Operating Costs	\$6,433,332
Capital/Grants	\$35,180
Total	\$37,092,429

Budget Reports

RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery

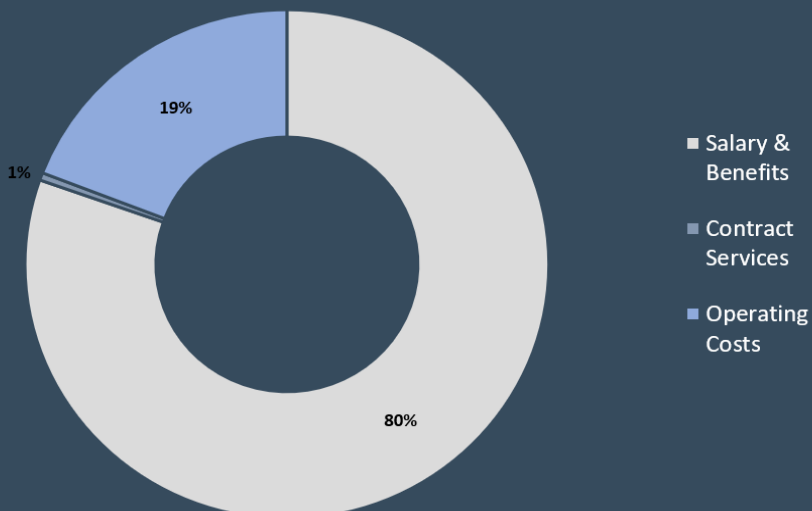
RI VETERANS CEMETERY - FY 2019 REVENUE



RI Veterans Cemetery FY 2019 Revenue

Patient/Family	\$394,702
State	\$1,025,784
Total	\$1,420,486

RI VETERANS CEMETERY - FY 2019 EXPENDITURES



RI Veterans Cemetery FY 2019 Expenditures

Salary & Benefits	\$1,141,744
Contract Services	\$6,737
Operating Costs	\$272,005
Total	\$1,420,486

Directory

Rhode Island Veterans Resource Center

(401) 921-2119

560 Jefferson Boulevard, Suite 206

Warwick, RI 02886

Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery

(401) 268-3088

301 South County Trail

Exeter, RI 02882

Rhode Island Veterans Home

(401) 253-8000

480 Metacom Avenue

Bristol, RI 02809

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SERVING VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS, & THEIR FAMILIES



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