



Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services

Annual Report

2023

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Message from the Director

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services (RIVETS) is pleased to present the 2023 Veterans Services Annual Report and Veterans Services Strategic Plan. I am grateful to the hundreds of RIVETS employees who have put their best foot forward and continue to devote themselves to serving Veterans and military families.

I am grateful to Governor Daniel J. McKee for his commitment to Veterans by supporting RIVETS' efforts and meaningful budgetary and legislative initiatives impacting Veterans and military families. Thank you to our partners in the General Assembly who also initiate and support legislation benefitting Veterans and RIVETS' budget.

Recent years have posed challenges for all Rhode Islanders, challenges also experienced by Rhode Island's Veterans and military families. After a few years of disruption to our lives and services, RIVETS has emerged with new ideas, energy, and enthusiasm for our vision ahead, and we have already accomplished much to strengthen that vision. We have ensured service excellence to our Veterans and military families throughout Rhode Island, pursuing new and innovative programs and partnerships aimed at benefitting Veterans living across the state.

This past year, we've created new approaches to outreach where we find, serve, and connect with Veterans and their families. We've strengthened our presence at the Westerly and Woonsocket Education Centers, while expanding our partnership with the Office of Post-Secondary Commissioner and bringing more Rhode Islanders into the health care workforce. We are also working with the Rhode Island Department of Health to conduct direct mailings to Veterans and providing resources to health care professionals and first responders as part of our work on the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Program.

We continue our work to remove the stigma associated with mental health. Mental health is critically important to everyone, everywhere. We are committed to working with partners to strengthen the systems that care for mental health, ensuring Veterans and military families have expedient access to mental health supports and programs.

We have great momentum, including cessation of taxation on military service pensions and implementation of Burial Equity for the National Guard and Reservists. Now, more than ever, Veterans see Rhode Island as a great place to establish their families, to work, and to retire from service while pursuing second careers. Veterans want to make Rhode Island their home. RIVETS supports continued investments in programs and supports for Veterans and military families.

It is the highlight of my career to be serving as Director of the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services. I am blessed to carry out this work and commit to pushing our agency forward to ensure all Veterans receive the full measure of all benefits for which they are eligible – benefits they've earned and deserve.

It is my pleasure to share this year's annual report, and I encourage readers to learn about the tremendous work accomplished by the Office of Veterans Services in 2023.

Kasim Yarn
Director of Veterans Services

"America's Veterans have been willing to give all for that which we hold sacred – freedom, justice, and democracy. Today, let us honor them by living up to their example by putting service before self and caring for our family, friends and neighbors."

-Governor McKee



MISSION

Effective immediately, the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services maintains the following:

- Thorough knowledge of individual and social factors contributing to personal problems that affect the Veteran, active duty, guard and reserve, and/or their families;
- Remains current on issues and trends impacting the work and mission of the agency;
- Forms strong and successful partnerships locally, regionally, and nationwide to address Veterans' issues in Rhode Island.

These focuses are imperative to reduce homelessness amongst Veterans, Veterans living in poverty, Veteran unemployment rates, ensure Veterans receive proper medical care, continue quality customer service at the Rhode Island Veterans Home and Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery and ensure every Veteran has an opportunity to make it in Rhode Island.

VISION

A community of partners, providing a collective impact to all Veterans, active duty, guard and reserve, and their families, in having equitable access to programs and services.

VALUES

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services' core values underscore the obligations inherent in our mission. The values define who we are, our culture, and how we interact with Rhode Island's Veterans, active duty, guard and reserve, and their families. Our values are more than just words – they spell the word 'SERVE' – guiding us daily, reminding us that RIVETS serves America's Heroes.

Support: Be Veteran-centric; identify, consider, and advance the interest of Veterans.

Excellence: Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement.

Respect: Treat all those we serve and colleagues with dignity and respect.

Veracity: Adhere to the highest professional standards and maintain the trust and confidence of all whom we encounter.

Engagement: Work diligently to provide excellent service to Veterans and others regardless of their eligibility for RIVETS programs and services. Be driven by the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services' mission and fulfill responsibilities as a public servant

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services (RIVETS) strives to provide quality services and care to all Veterans, services members, and their families, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity. Our goal is to eliminate barriers so that all Rhode Islanders have equal treatment and experiences when interacting with RIVETS.

In 2023, the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services revised the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan (DEI plan) to update goals and strategies for continuous improvement. RIVETS has implemented strategies outlined in the DEI plan and also carries out the following:

RIVETS reviews DEI plan and strategies with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services' Race, Equity, and Community Engagement Director semi-annually

RIVETS engages key stakeholders and community partners to solicit feedback on what should be included in the DEI Plan

RIVETS continues to ensure that key internal decision-making committees are chaired by diverse members of our staff

RIVETS partners with Department of Administration Human Resources regarding strategies for recruitment of veterans and diverse candidates for state employee positions

RIVETS continues to participate in community-based meetings, events, engagement opportunities, and educational opportunities to further develop cultural competence. In 2023, staff from RIVETS participated in Indigenous Cultural Awareness training facilitated by the Behavioral Health & Homelessness Prevention Training Group. RIVETS staff also attended the Virtual LGBTQ+ Veteran Outreach Symposium facilitated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Director Yarn and RIVETS staff presented to Pride in Aging RI senior café, which was attended by a number of Veterans who served during the Don't Ask, Don't Tell era. RIVETS can connect these Veterans with state benefits and assist them with discharge upgrades for federal VA benefits.

In February 2023, RIVETS participated in a two-day site visit facilitated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Technical Assistance Center. The site visit included a review of Veteran demographics in the Rhode Island and focused on incorporating diverse military and Veteran populations in suicide prevention planning.

Discussions of diverse Veteran populations included the following cohorts:

- Aging Veterans
- American Indian/ Alaskan Native Veterans
- Asian American/Pacific Islander Veterans
- Black Veterans
- Hispanic and Latino Veterans
- LGBTQ+ Veterans
- Women Veterans

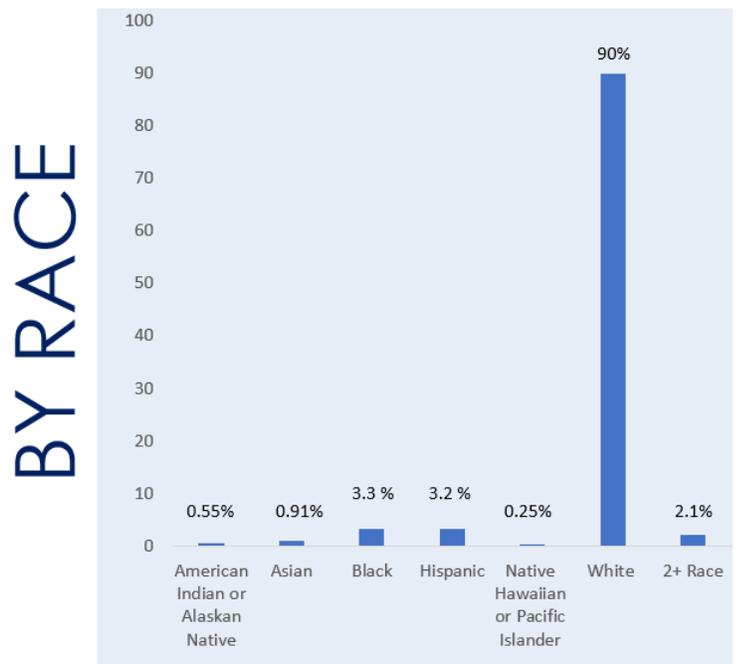
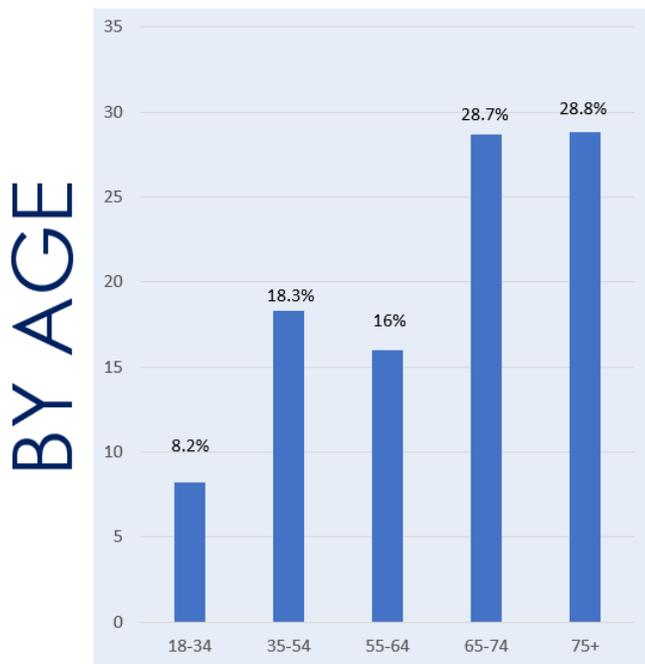
The presentation of this data, along with collaboration with our federal, state, and community partners has resulted in the identification of strategic efforts within the state to ensure and increase inclusivity. RIVETS continues to utilize data from the Unite RI network and customer feedback to inform and influence the programs and services provided. Our vision is to ensure that our decision-making reflects the diversity in the Rhode Island Veteran population.

Veteran Cohorts in Rhode Island

Minority Veterans

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2020) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, minority (all races/ethnicities except non-Hispanic White) Veterans represent about nine percent of Rhode Island's Veterans. By 2045, the minority Veteran population is projected to represent 33 percent of Rhode Island's Veteran population, making them one of the fastest-growing Veteran cohorts.

Veteran Population in Rhode Island



Created using SAMSHA SMVF TA Center Data

Female Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics estimated that female Veterans represent only eight percent of Rhode Island's Veterans. While the male Veteran population is projected to decline over the next 25 years, by 2045, women will represent 22 percent of Rhode Island's Veteran population, making them one of the fastest-growing Veteran cohorts.

In 2023, Sarah Prak joined the RIVETS team as the Rhode Island Women's Veterans Coordinator.

Sarah traveled to Washington, DC, in September 2023 to attend the National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators Conference. This conference was an opportunity for Ms. Prak to collaborate with other Women Veteran Coordinators, hear community engagement and outreach practices, learn effective communications strategies, and brainstorm the top challenges facing our female Veterans and their families.

In the upcoming years, RIVETS looks forward to expanding Women Veterans programming to include additional outreach, support and comradery.

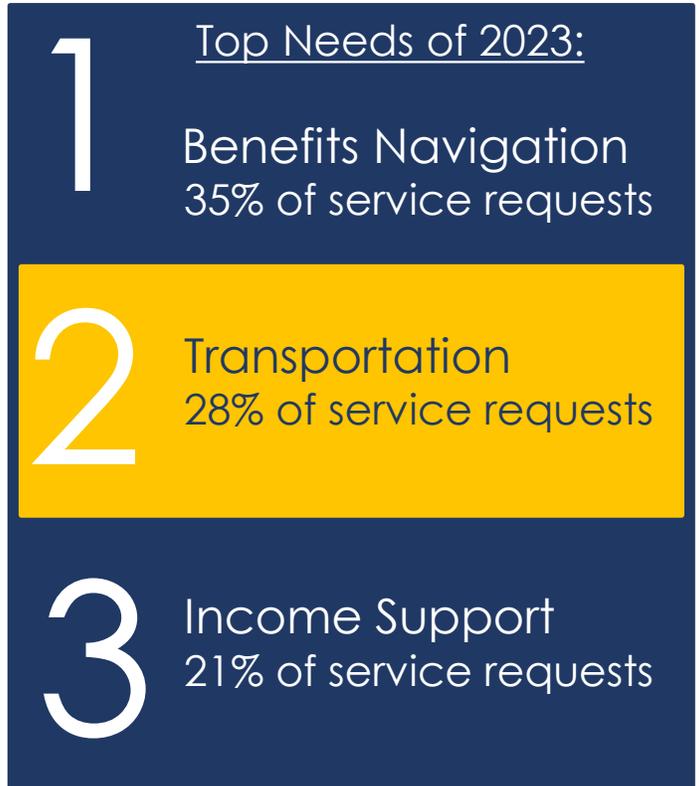


Unite Rhode Island

Unite Us is a no-wrong-door platform serving all Rhode Island residents who are in need of resources and referrals to access benefits, including health care, housing, food, education, job training, legal and financial counseling, and much more.

The RIVETS Resource Center utilizes the "Coordination Center" model, called Unite Rhode Island, to connect Rhode Island Veterans, military members and their families with services they need. The Unite RI platform allows for continued coordination between public, private, and non-profit entities that are now able to work together to ensure positive outcomes for Rhode Islanders

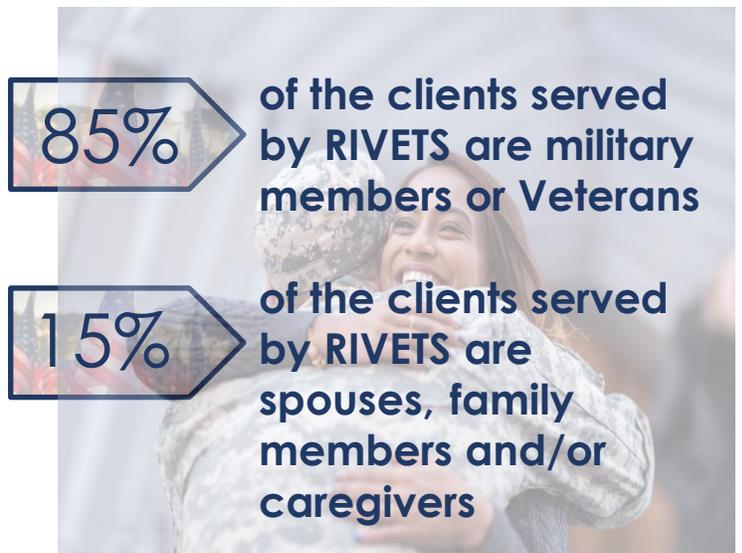
RIVETS UNITE RI YEARLY SNAPSHOT - 2023



“Unite RI has allowed us to serve more and more Veterans and military families due to the power of the network and the data we are able to extract from the system.

Unite RI is a powerful tool that ensures every Veteran receives the services they've earned and deserve.”

–Director Kasim Yarn



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.

Averaging 100 interments per month, the RIVMC continues to be one of the busiest state Veterans cemeteries in the nation. During Fiscal Year 2023, the cemetery conducted 1121 committal services. Its staff consists of 17 employees, consisting of 15 full-time personnel and two seasonal workers. Four gardener positions were added for Fiscal Year 2024 to assist in maintaining the cemetery grounds.

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 and the engraving occurs in late September.

In addition, many military units, organizations, and campaigns have monuments throughout the cemetery to honor their respective Veterans. Monument design, placement, and installation is coordinated with the RIVMC leadership. Three new monuments were dedicated this year: the Elks Monument, the Portuguese Monument, and the Native American Monument. Two monuments are currently in the construction phase: the Military Working Dog Monument, and the Warriors Cairn.



Ceremonies & Accomplishments

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services conducts an annual Memorial Day observance at the cemetery against the fitting backdrop of the Gold Star Family Memorial. In 2023, Governor McKee and Director Yarn hosted approximately 400 members of the public in an outdoor ceremony honoring our departed Veterans. Over 40,000 flags were placed within RIVMC for Memorial Day and 65,000 stick flags were distributed for placement on Veteran graves throughout Rhode Island.

Throughout the year, the RIVMC hosts several events that promote our state's unending gratitude to those Veterans who have honorably served our country, including 9/11 Patriot Day, and Saluting Branches, among others. Saluting Branches assisted with the removal of eight diseased or rotten trees and helped plant 15 trees in areas of the cemetery that were in need of trees and shade coverage. Saluting Branches also removed four large pine trees that had overgrown behind the Chapel preventing structural work which would have otherwise been necessary. Wreaths Across America was held in December 2023 at the RIVMC. Volunteers laid over 3,500 wreaths throughout the cemetery.

RIVMC completed the construction of a second row of Memorial Walkway Border Panels to continue that program well into the future. New section markers were placed to replace damaged and mismatched section markers. RIVMC also purchased a new tractor, pickup truck, woodchipper, and screener this year to assist in maintaining the cemetery grounds.

Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery



Partnerships & Future Plans

In 2023, 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.

As we continue to invest in ensuring RIVMC remains a dignified and solemn resting place for our Veterans, the cemetery is planning to purchase additional heavy equipment to replace our aging vehicles. RIVMC is in the process of designing CW4 Phase II to add six new columbarium walls by 2026. These walls are needed for RIVMC to meet future inurnments.

Other Valued Partners Include:

Funeral Directors Association of RI

Gold Star Families

Home Depot of North Kingstown

Naval Station Newport

Patriot Guard Riders

Rhode Island Energy Saluting Branches

Rhode Island Job Corps of Exeter

Rhode Island National Guard

Sons and Daughters of the Revolution

The University of Rhode Island

VA National Cemetery Administration

Rhode Island Veterans Home

The Rhode Island Veterans Home (RIVH) serves as a testament to our state's appreciation for all the men and women who honorably served in the United States military. Rebuilt from the ground up in 2017, the Home provides housing and care for Rhode Island's Wartime Veterans, and it is located on the same 100-acre parcel that has served as the home for Rhode Island's Veterans since 1890. The mission of the Veterans Home continues to be the delivery of high-quality nursing care, responsiveness to resident health and safety needs, and the commitment to providing the highest quality of life for Rhode Island's military heroes.



The Rhode Island Veterans Home is built upon the premise of interconnected service and accessibility for Veterans and their visiting families. The design concept focuses around “neighborhoods,” which are groups of resident housing, providing a closer and more personal sense of community. This community living design creates a home for residents and leads to more meaningful and fulfilling lives, as well as ensuring a relationship-rich living environment.

Throughout the year, the staff of the Rhode Island Veterans Home have worked diligently to ensure health and safety, while maintaining quality of life for the Veteran residents. The health and safety of residents at RIVH continues to be the top priority. Our alliance with the Providence VA Medical Center continues to expand with the development of on-site telehealth services including wound care, optometry, podiatry, cardiology, and dermatology.

The Veterans Home remains committed to keeping Veterans connected with their families. In the height of the public health emergency, the Veterans Home was required to adhere to strict visitation and Infection control policies. Visitation is now completely open, requiring only a brief symptom check upon entry. The Home continues to utilize a single point of entry system, which is designed to enhance security and safety.



Our Residents

The staff at the RIVH remain steadfast in our commitment to providing residents an environment that is safe and truly improves their quality of life. The RIVH supports robust therapeutic recreation programs, activities, entertainment, and off campus excursions. Each neighborhood has dedicated activities staff who provide a wide range of enjoyable, beneficial, and informative activities based on the individual preferences of that neighborhood.

The RIVH features plenty of outdoor space and the design of the campus is conducive to outdoor open-air events which allow for ample social distancing. In partnership with the University of Rhode Island, the on-site greenhouse continues to provide enrichment opportunities for residents. The URI Master Gardeners offer a gardening program that teaches residents how to grow and care for food and other plants.

Additional activities are provided throughout the home like pet therapy, mentoring programs from religious and Veterans groups, and centralized activities like movie night, BINGO, bocce, and volleyball.

In partnership with Real Access Motivates Progress, a leading inclusion and accessibility advocacy group in Rhode Island, a "Tina's Table" was unveiled on Veterans Day outside of the Galley. The table features bench seating designed to look like powered or manual wheelchairs, along with room for up to three functional wheelchairs.



Significant emphasis is placed on entertainment and off-campus excursions.

RIVH maintains relationships with numerous local performers who provide weekly entertainment to our Veterans. In addition to the weekly local entertainment and individual neighborhood activities, RIVH facilitated over 35 off-campus trips and over 97 on-campus performances, including concerts and entertainment events.

In addition to the regular weekly entertainment schedule, numerous big-bands, orchestras, jazz bands, and dancers perform each year. The Audubon series and local farms provided education and entertainment with live access to "birds of prey", farm animals, and reptiles. Numerous VFW's and Elks clubs have graciously hosted residents for cookouts, clambakes, and holiday gatherings. RIVH continues the tradition of including families for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner.

Perhaps the most notable activities this year were the lighthouse tours and "Cycling Without Age" trishaw tours at Colt State Park, which afforded our Veterans the opportunity to be shuttled around the park on a bike resembling a rickshaw.

Through the leadership of our resident and family councils, advocacy from Veteran-serving organizations, along with partnership from Governor McKee's administration and the General Assembly, in 2023 the Rhode Island Veterans Home was able to offer no-charge basic cable and Wi-Fi access to all residents. As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, more residents have become comfortable with FaceTiming, watching television via streaming providers, and using other tech-enabled services. Due to this demand, the Veterans Home engaged the services of a provider who was able to guarantee a high level of customer service and support for our residents. i3 Broadband has provided a dedicated customer service team to usher residents through enrollment processes, equipment installation, and continued user-support. This added benefit has been welcomed by residents and families alike.

RIVH Family Council

The partnership and support from Rhode Island Veterans Home families has always been essential to ensuring the quality of life of residents. Family members continue to provide support and are key partners in our work to serve Veterans. RIVH works to provide an inclusive environment, fostering mutual recognition, respect, and a sense of belonging and acceptance for family members.

This work could not be accomplished without the support of our Family Council—a dedicated group of individuals, led by Deborah Fowler. The RIVH Family Council meets monthly to share issues of concern with RIVH leadership, bring solutions and suggestions for best practices, and share information. The Family Council continues to be an important advocacy voice for the residents.

Veterans Service Grant

The Veterans Service Grant program provides opportunities for the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services (RIVETS) to expand our reach by partnering with non-profit organizations and institutes of higher education serving the Rhode Island Veteran community. In 2023, RIVETS awarded grants totaling \$200,000 to seven recipient organizations.

Each organization identified one or more of the following areas where grant funding would be used to support the Veteran community:

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

RIVETS is proud to partner with the following organizations which are recipients of the 2023 Veterans Service Grant:

Child and Family of Newport County
Community College of Rhode Island
Meals on Wheels
Operation Stand Down Rhode Island

Rhode Island College
SHRI Service Corps
University of Rhode Island

Veterans Service Grant

Child and Family of Newport County

Child and Family offers comprehensive, evidence-based programs to help children, families, and seniors cope with complex social problems that require immediate or long-term intervention. Child and Family operates community engagement centers with office space in Middletown and Providence, an early learning center in Middletown, and a residential treatment program for youth across Aquidneck Island. Child and Family also operates four evidence-based family preservation programs (Family Care Community Partnership, Family Centered Treatment, Family Stabilization Program, and Functional Family Therapy), an Aging Well program for elders, an Independent Living Program for former foster youth, a comprehensive Foster Care program, and a Supportive Housing Program for homeless parents and their children.

Child and Family utilizes Veteran Service Grant funding to offer clinical, evidence-based supports through Family Preservation Programs. These programs were created to support families who are struggling, buried under layers of stress and daily pressure; the program keeps them safely together and improves outcomes for children and youth. Child and Family focuses on collective goals, with the intention to work with each family to achieve sustainable changes and help them to function in more adaptive and productive ways with the resources they have.

Child and Family also utilizes Veteran Service Grant funding to offer case management and care coordination through the Aging Well Program to provide guidance and support to individuals and families who are in need of services, short term support, social and recreational outlets, and clinical support and counseling.

Community College of Rhode Island

Many student Veterans experience financial hardship, and without relief these financial obstacles present potential barriers to academic success. To bridge unforeseen gaps by providing critical support funds, the CCRI Veterans Services Office utilizes the Veterans Service Grant as an Emergency Relief Fund for student Veterans requiring emergency funding support to facilitate academic persistence. The Emergency Relief Fund has proven to provide the necessary support that will ensure that struggling self-identified student Veterans remain on their academic path and achieve program completion.

***“We are so thankful for the Veteran Relief Fund at CCRI.
It has helped so many Veterans stay on their path toward degree completion.
Our Veterans are adult learners, and they are supporting families, juggling work, handling other responsibilities, paying rent / mortgages, dealing with medical appointments and more.
Even the slightest financial insecurity can derail their academic pursuits
and we are pleased to have a way to help prevent that from occurring.
Additionally, we’ve found that making this grant money available as a ‘relief fund’ has helped us identify applicants who could be better connected to other resources.”***

Micaela Black, VetSuccess Coordinator

Veterans Service Grant

Meals on Wheels

Utilizing the Veterans Service Grant funding, Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island provides the Home-Delivered Meal Program to Veterans and spouses of Veterans, delivering a total of 2,029 meals to more than eight homebound program clients.

As program clients, these Veterans/spouses of Veterans also benefit from the Emergency Meal Program, ensuring they have access to nutritious foods should the rare event arise where an unpredictable circumstance prevents daily meal delivery.

Operation Stand Down RI Homelessness

OSDRI serves approximately 2,500 Rhode Island low-income Veterans annually. Many of these Veterans are either literally homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

While some housing programs are restricted based upon federal definitions of eligibility, OSDRI utilizes Veterans Service Grant funding to provide temporary financial assistance to Veterans whose housing stability/security has been negatively impacted causing them to either become homeless or become at risk of homelessness.

Operation Stand Down RI Legal Assistance

OSDRI's Legal assistance for Warriors (LAW) program works with Veterans to assess their legal needs and then provide legal assistance.

The program's objective is to bridge the justice gap for Veterans who have low- to very-low income and are unable to employ the services of an attorney in matters such as misdemeanor criminal offenses, expungements, traffic offenses, license restoration, eviction, and limited estate planning. These types of assistance reduce barriers to housing, employment, and more.

Further, the program aims to help disabled Veterans in need secure income through disability benefits they are entitled to receive through the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Rhode Island College

The Military Resource Center at Rhode Island College (MRC/RIC) was established in November 2009. Since that time, the MRC/RIC has served as a resource hub for all military-affiliated students (active duty, National Guard, retired, Veteran, and family members) who wish to attend or are attending RIC.

Utilizing the Veterans Service Grant funding, the MRC/RIC offers a Veterans Relief Fund at Rhode Island College that supports some of the financial challenges that student veterans face.

The MRC/RIC engages in academic sponsorship and VetSuccess on Campus to reach out to and support military-affiliated students. The RIC Student Veterans Organization (SVO) serves as a support network for military Veterans and their families and provides a fundamental peer to peer connection on campus. The RIC SVO encourages members to be successful in and outside of the classroom and work to incorporate skills learned from the military to help others – mission, camaraderie, and service.

Veterans Service Grant

SHRI Service Corps

SHRI Service Corps utilizes Veteran Service Grant funding for the SHRI Military Project, which serves active members of the military, Veterans, and military-connected family members.

SHRI is an acronym for Support, Honor, Respect and Inspire. Those values are a part of their curriculum and every class, combining movement-based yoga with community building and mindfulness activities. SSC is dedicated to building healthy, balanced communities through the practice of yoga and wellness.

The objective of the SHRI Military Project is to promote secure, judgment-free, and carefully designed environments for Rhode Island active military and Veterans to participate in a regular yoga practice and receive its healing benefits.

Research reports that a yoga practice can relieve PTSD symptoms, such as psychological distress, disrupted sleep, anxiety and sadness and provides a sense of connection to the self and to the community.



University of Rhode Island

The Center for Military and Veteran Education (MAVE) is the hub of the military-connected community and Veteran assistance at the University of Rhode Island. The MAVE Center supports, assists, and empowers Veterans and military-connected students to achieve their educational goals while fostering an inclusive atmosphere with an emphasis on health and well-being.

The MAVE Center provides support in the following areas:

- Academic Support
- Benefits and Financial Aid Assistance
- Career Development and Employment Services
- Community and Peer Support
- Mental Health and Wellness Services
- Transition Assistance
- Veteran-specific Scholarships and Programs

The URI Student Veteran Relief Fund uses Veteran Service Grant funding to alleviate financial hardship for student Veterans so that they can continue their education to completion despite unforeseen financial challenges.

Mental Health and Wellness

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services is committed to promoting mental health as a critical part of overall wellness. We advocate for prevention services for all, early identification for those at risk, integrated services, care and treatment for those who need them, and recovery as a goal. We believe that acknowledging mental health struggles makes us stronger, not weaker. We are constantly working to break down the stigma surrounding mental health, and we partner with mental health advocates to help create parity and reduce disparities and inequities for people with mental health concerns. We ensure that Veterans are connected to a variety of mental health resources, information, treatment options, and more. We are able to connect Veterans with clinical resources and peer support so they can confront and manage any mental health challenge.



RIVETS is committed to working with a wide array of advocates, stakeholders, and policy makers to elevate Veteran and military family well-being and mental health to a priority position on multiple policy, programmatic, and budgetary agendas.

RIVETS has been a key partner to the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) in securing and executing the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Through this partnership with RIDOH, RIVETS continues engaging with community-based service providers to identify service members, Veterans, and their family members, connecting them with appropriate benefits and services.

RIVETS also collaborates with RIDOH to conduct suicide prevention trainings and public awareness campaigns. "Ask the Question" training is conducted with health care centers to improve the identification of Veterans during the initial triage in health care centers. The "Ask the Question" initiative encourages community providers to better identify and understand the unique health care needs of those who have served in the military. The goal of this initiative is to improve access to and quality of services for Veterans and their families. "Ask the Question" trainings are also conducted with community first responders, community mobile outreach teams, and other health care professionals who provide immediate assistance, crisis stabilization, and make referrals to longer term services. "Ask the Question" training was also conducted with local barber shops as a non-traditional outreach approach to engage community members to encourage Veterans to seek services. As a result of this work, a comprehensive referral system has been created to streamline mental health care through the Providence VA Healthcare system, prioritizing the health and well-being of Rhode Island's Veterans, Service Members, and their families.

RI is ensuring coordination of services through federal, state and community agencies to address the issues of mental health and suicide among Rhode Island Veterans and their families. Our agency also leads the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families, which has been a key contributor to development of the Rhode Island 2023-2030 Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. The strategic plan was the first state-wide plan to address suicide prevention in Rhode Island, and RIVETS is using the information and strategies contained within the plan to frame our work with the Governor's Challenge Team.

Director Yarn is a leading mental health advocate, playing a crucial role in development of numerous campaigns and reports shining a light on the mental health and substance use crisis. Director Yarn leads peer discussions and mentors young Rhode Islanders, sharing his own personal story and brings home that no one should feel shame for seeking help. Director Yarn, and the entire team at RIVETS, is committed to the men and women who have served our country by continuing to advocate for better mental health and early intervention services. We proudly partner with federal, state, and local agencies, as well as private entities, to achieve our shared goals.

Community Partnerships and Outreach

In 2023, the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services was represented at over one hundred community events, raising awareness of the services that our office provides and meeting Veterans where they live, work, and learn. We continue to expand our network of partners and extend our reach in the community. Our role on the Governor's Challenge Team and our partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health allowed for increased engagement with Veterans, active-duty, guard, reserve, and military families.

RIVETS participated in more than 100 outreach events throughout the state to meet Veterans and military families in their communities.

Through partnership with the Rhode Island National Guard, RIVETS offered case management services at Pre- and Post-Deployment Yellow Ribbon Events.

Our team attended community mental health events, partnering with organizations that serve Rhode Island Veterans and military families.

RIVETS partnered with higher education institutions throughout the state to offer Student Veteran Town Halls virtually and on-campus.



Legislation

The momentum from the 2022 legislative session was carried into 2023, thanks to strong partnerships with members of the Rhode Island Senate and House of Representatives, and the General Assembly's commitment to serving Veterans and military families. This year saw investments in programs and services for Veterans and our National Guard and Reserve service members. By advancing legislation benefitting members of the military, we continue to make Rhode Island an attractive place for Veterans and their families to live, work, and learn.

BUDGET

Governor McKee recognizes the importance of investing in programs serving Rhode Island's Veterans and military families. His support was echoed by Senate President Ruggerio and House Speaker Shekarchi, as the General Assembly supported and passed the following budget initiatives:

- In Fiscal Year 2024, statutory language was updated to allow for interment of National Guard and Reservists at the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery. This change brought Rhode Island in compliance with the federal Burial Equity for Guard and Reservists Act, which recognizes the significant contribution of Guard and Reserve members to keeping us safe at home and abroad.
- In Fiscal Year 2024, \$250,000 was allocated to digitize the more than 65,000 paper DD214 documents (military discharge paperwork) RIVETS has in our possession. Digitizing these records allows for more efficient, secure, and accessible storage of these important documents needed to verify military services for benefits, retirement, employment and membership in Veterans' organizations.
- In Fiscal Year 2024, dedicated funding was provided for the Vet Pass Transportation program. Many injured, ill and disabled Veterans identify access to reliable transportation, including services to get them to and from VA healthcare appointment, as critical and important to reintegration efforts.
- In Fiscal Year 2024, \$150,000 in dedicated grant funding was added to the RIVETS budget. \$50,000 of that was dictated to be used for a build-out of Operation Stand Down RI's food pantry and clothing shed storage facility. Another \$100,000 was directed to Veterans of Foreign Wars of Rhode Island for Veteran Service Officer services.



Legislation

LEGISLATION

In addition to the critical investment made in Fiscal Year 2024, several pieces of legislation were introduced and gained passage with the support of members of the General Assembly:

- Since passage of legislation in 2021 giving local property tax exemptions to Cold War Veterans, several National Guard members who served during the Cold War have been denied access to these benefits by municipal tax officials. RIVETS introduced legislation ([S-710/H-5951](#)) to rectify this situation, and in 2023 the General Assembly passed laws allowing for National Guard members to access these local tax exemption benefits.
- Gold Star Families have given the ultimate sacrifice – their loved one died in service to our country – yet there are very few state-level benefits extended to these surviving family members. In 2023, RIVETS introduced legislation ([S-748/H-5999](#)), working with the Department of Environmental Management, to provide free beach parking and use of the golf course at Goddard State Park to these families who have already given so much.
- The Rhode Island Veterans Home has been without a permanent administrator since 2020. Hiring for this position had been difficult as no qualified candidate applied for the position over those three years. Demand for long term care services is increasing as our population ages, and at the same time a generation of aging-services leaders – baby boomers – are retiring. This shortage of licensed nursing home administrators (LNHA), coupled with the added Veterans requirement, had prevented RIVETS from hiring a permanent administrator for the Rhode Island Veterans Home. Removal of the Veteran requirement, via legislation ([S-942/H-5466](#)) passed in 2023, has allowed us to recruit and hire a talented and well-qualified LNHA, thus allowing for consistent and permanent leadership at the Veterans Home.



These successes are indications that Rhode Island continues to advance and prioritize issues of importance to Veterans and military families. The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services will continue to elevate the needs of Veterans and further ensure military families can thrive in Rhode Island.



Veterans Services Strategic Plan

The nation makes a simple promise when one signs up to serve in the military: if you serve us, we will serve you when you transition out of service. The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services (RIVETS), takes up the directive given by President Lincoln to care for those who have borne the battle. To further that objective, in 2013 the General Assembly directed RIVETS 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.

In October 2023, Director Yarn and the RIVETS team convened the annual meeting of the VSSP Advisory Committee, which includes partners from the following agencies and organizations:

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals
Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation
Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, & Families
Rhode Island Department of Corrections
Rhode Island Department of Health
Rhode Island Department of Human Services
Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training
Rhode Island Department of State
Rhode Island National Guard
Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging
Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner
Rhode Island Public Transit Authority
Rhode Island Veterans Treatment Court

During that meeting, the Advisory Committee worked to update the VSSP, break down barriers, and renew focus areas. The Advisory Committee concluded that a focused effort should continue for coordination of services through a no-wrong-door approach. Another recommendation from the Advisory Committee was encouraging delivery of programs and services where Veterans live, work, and learn. Other recommendations and updates are included in the VSSP, and our agency is carrying out the nation's most sacred obligation to care for military members and their families when they return home. The Advisory Committee continues its work with standing check-ins to ensure proper coordination of Veterans services throughout Rhode Island.

RIVETS serves more than 50,000 Ocean State Veterans and their families through the operation of the Rhode Island Veterans Home, the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery, and the Rhode Island 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 provides in-person benefits counseling while also serving as the coordination center for UniteRI, our referral network which connects Veterans, active duty, guard and reserve, and their families to benefits and resources.

Working with partners from several community, state, and federal partners, the VSSP is executed through:

- (1) Task force and working groups with state and federal agencies (e.g., U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Corrections, Department of Labor and Training, Department of Children Youth and Families, Department of Human Services, Office of Healthy Aging, the Task Force of Incarcerated Veterans, the Rhode Island Judiciary, the Rhode Island State Police, and others);
- (2) UniteRI, our coordinated network of community providers; and
- (3) Community outreach with state agencies, non-profits, Veteran service organizations, and municipalities.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

The work RIVETS executes is reliant upon our excellent working relationship with the Providence Veterans Affairs Regional Office as well as the Providence Veterans Affairs Health Care System. These partnerships allow us to ensure holistic assessments of medical, mental, vocations, education, and economic well-being for all transitioning service members, Veterans, their families and caregivers to improve their economic security, health and quality of life outcomes. We continue to develop and enhance these partnerships by allowing our Federal VA partners to utilize our RIVETS state office locations in Bristol, Exeter and Warwick to meet with Veterans and military families in need of in-person appointments. This partnership executes on the directive from the Advisory Committee to deliver services where Veterans live, work, and learn.

The work of the VSSP and the utilization of the UniteUS platform have provided us with insight and allowed us to advocate for changes, new programs, and partnerships that will benefit the Ocean State's Veteran population. In 2023, Veterans and military families presented to the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services seeking assistance with financial needs, housing, and shelter. The greatest needs in 2023 continued to be benefits counseling and transportation services for medical and employment needs.

RIVETS recognizes that our reach is only limited by our ability to work together. RIVETS leverages municipal, state, and federal capabilities, ensuring the Office can have a collective impact for Veterans and their families throughout the following thirteen Veterans Service Categories:

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

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

The Veterans Services Strategic Plan and the Advisory Committee are charged with outlining goals and reporting on progress toward those goals on an annual basis. While the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services is continuously working toward achieving overall goals of service and program excellence while serving our Veterans and military families, 2023 is the first year the Advisory Committee has laid out goals specific to each Veterans' issue identified in R.I. General Laws § 30-17.1-11.

The categories are described below, along with details on the work being carried out, and a five-year goal in each service area. We thank the advisory committee members, our local, state, federal and community partners, and our dedicated staff as they are key to carrying out this work and achieving these goals.

Veterans Disability Benefits

The federal Department of Veterans Affairs provides service-connected disability benefits. The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services assists Veterans with benefits counseling, application, and appeals processes. 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 (GPA) program, administered by the state's Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the Department of Human Services.

- UniteRI continues to streamline the benefits navigation process.
- RIVETS benefits from being part of the broader UniteRI network, offering access to hundreds of providers for Veterans, active duty, guard and reserve, and their families.
- UniteRI is the first 'no wrong door' referral system for Veterans in Rhode Island, allowing for warm hand-offs and follow-ups, ensuring clients get the services they need in a timely manner.
- Delivery of benefits, care, and services to underserved, marginalized, and at-risk Veterans to prevent suicide, homelessness, improve economic security, health, resiliency, quality of life, and to achieve equity.

5-year goal: RIVETS will provide annual training opportunities to human services agencies (EOHHS, DHS, DCYF, United Way of RI, others) to ensure our common clients are offered referrals to RIVETS when appropriate.

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 Disabled Veterans rated at 10% or higher. In addition, the federal VA administers the Forever GI Bill, which provides funds for tuition.

- Director Yarn was recognized for his advocacy with the 2023 New England Higher Education Excellence Award. He was honored for supporting peer-to-peer programs that help Veterans, service members, and their families navigate higher education as students adjust from military life to college life and beyond.
- RIVETS continues to increase the level of student Veterans advocacy amongst the state college campuses, and partners with private higher education providers to deliver better access to resources for their Student Veteran populations.
- RIVETS continues our partnership with the Rhode Island Office of Postsecondary Commissioner, maintaining satellite offices at the Westerly and Woonsocket Education Centers. Student Veterans face unique challenges when transitioning from military to campus life. RIVETS has successfully connected student Veterans to programs, services, and case management through our close partnerships with the on-campus Veteran service providers.
- RIVETS is ensuring access to educational opportunities, training, and jobs worthy of the Veteran's skills and service.

5-year goal: In partnership with the Rhode Island Office of Postsecondary Commissioner, we will remove non-academic barriers – including financial struggles, transportation difficulties, and insufficient childcare – to allow for Veterans to complete their degrees.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

Veterans Employment & Training

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services continues to partner with the Department of Labor and Training's Veterans employment counselors to identify appropriate employment and training opportunities for those who have served. RIVETS also works with the Governor's Workforce Board, Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation, and the federal VA's Vocational Rehabilitation program.

- Through collaboration with the Governor's Office, General Assembly, and state agencies, RIVETS supported the adoption of effective practices for the transfer of military and spouse licenses in good standing and substantially equivalent; licensure through endorsement; temporary licensure; and expedited licensing. With passage of 2023 [H-5335](#) as amended, portability of some licenses for military service members and their spouses relocated to Rhode Island is provided.
- RIVETS has built high-performing, integrated partnerships with federal, state, local, tribal, and community agencies and organizations to enhance Veterans job-readiness, placement, and Veteran entrepreneurship. An example of such a partnership is RIVETS' relationship with General Dynamics/Electric Boat. RIVETS and General Dynamics engage in weekly communication, sharing opportunities for Veterans including job postings, job fairs, training and education opportunities, and Veteran-centric events sponsored by General Dynamics. RIVETS and General Dynamics also both occupy space in the Westerly Education Center.
- RIVETS has implemented an innovative career pipeline for health and nursing professionals to ensure employment and a career ladder at the Rhode Island Veterans Home.

5-year goal: Through engagement with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services Healthcare Workforce Transformation program, RIVETS will assist in recruiting and connecting Veterans and their families to the statewide health workforce planning efforts. RIVETS will also continue to engage the state's nursing colleges to train and recruit workforce for the Rhode Island Veterans Home.

Veterans Family Members & Caregivers

Through UniteRI, 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 Vet Center provides caregiver and family counseling.

- RIVETS awards grants to nonprofit organizations to provide social services to Veterans' family members.
- RIVETS has expanded the UniteRI network to include more services accessible to family members.
- RIVETS is ensuring multiple channels to information about benefits, care, and services are clear and easy to understand and access.
- RIVETS works collaboratively with OHA, who in 2021 released the State of Rhode Island's first State Plan on Caregiving, which extends through 2023. Rhode Island has one of the highest general populations of adults over age 85, and our Veteran population skews much older as well. Our caregivers are supporting loved ones, ensuring they are aging with dignity and purpose. Caregivers have a tough job, and RIVETS is here to support them.
- RIVETS is delivering quality services and promoting the health and well-being of Veterans' eligible family members, survivors, caregivers, and service members.

5-year goal: RIVETS will work with the Providence VA Medical Center to formally join the VA's Veteran Community Partnerships (VCPs) in RI. VCPs are coalitions of Veterans and their caregivers, VA facilities, community health providers, organizations, and agencies that provide seamless access and transition throughout the full continuum of care and support services in the VA and the community.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

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 service members. The Providence VA offers free income tax return preparation and community partners, like Operation Stand Down RI, help with financial planning.

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

5-year goal: RIVETS will ensure financial planning and counseling services are offered to all Unite RI participants and increase utilization of such services by 20%.

Veterans Homelessness

Rhode Island continues to make significant progress and has developed a shared vision with community leaders to identify and implement concrete steps to overcome barriers to permanent housing faced by Veterans. RIVETS' Director and staff are continuously engaging with Rhode Island's Housing Secretary to ensure Veterans needs are incorporated into the state's plans to address homelessness.

- RIVETS Director is an active member of the RI Continuum of Care Committee (RICOC) and was appointed as co-chair of the RICOC Veterans Committee.
- RIVETS awarded grants to non-profit organizations providing social services to Veterans experiencing homelessness.
- RIVETS works with municipalities and agencies in ensuring housing developed for Veterans is providing person-centered services, so the Veteran has every opportunity to succeed.
- RIVETS is working to strengthen and build partnerships across federal, state, local, tribal, and private sector organizations, and provide integrated support to homeless Veterans that ensures homelessness is prevented, curtailed, and non-recurring.
- With our sister-state agencies and the VA, RIVETS is taking an all-of-governance approach to ending homelessness among Veterans to obtain permanent and sustainable housing with access to high-quality healthcare and supportive services.
- RIVETS provided direct, on-site case management services to Veterans experiencing homelessness who were encamped at the State House and who were residents of the Armory during the 2022-2023 winter season.

5-year goal: RIVETS will ensure that Veteran advocacy organizations and providers are engaged with the Department of Housing and are eligible for hosting overnight emergency hubs for people experiencing homelessness.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

Veterans Legal Services

The RI National Guard has a legal assistance program for its members, as does the Naval Station Newport 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.

- The RIDOC partnership for incarcerated Veterans continues to be a success, working to ease the reintegration into the community for Veterans following their release from incarceration. In 2023, RIVETS assigned a new program manager resulting in more efficient operation and connection to programs and services for Veterans transitioning from incarceration to the community.
- RIVETS awarded grants to non-profit organizations providing legal services to Veterans and military families.

5-year goal: RIVETS will promote medical-legal partnerships (MLPs) through the VA. It has been shown that Veterans who receive legal services at an MLP experienced significant mental health improvement, as well as improvements in their housing and income.

Veterans Living in Poverty

Veterans are eligible for the same programs available to all Rhode Islanders. For example, the state administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), childcare assistance, and monetary assistance. Community partners such as Operation Stand Down RI, Veterans, Inc., Gateway to Independence, and the RI Coalition To End Homelessness help Veterans who are unable to afford housing and other services.

- RIVETS is increasing supportive services to give homeless and at-risk Veterans access to needed assistance through the UniteRI network.
- RIVETS awarded grants to non-profit organizations to provide social services to Veterans and family members experiencing poverty.
- RIVETS has strengthened partnerships with the RI Department of Human Services to better serve Veterans and military families who require food assistance. RIVETS has also been able to refer older Veterans who are just above Medicaid levels to the Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging to explore options for long term services and supports that would allow them to age in their own homes and avoid more costly nursing home placements.

5-year goal: RIVETS will provide semi-annual training opportunities for DHS and OHA staff, ensuring Veterans and their families are connected to the appropriate programs and services. RIVETS will assist the RI Department of Environmental Management to expand their successful Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to at least one location specifically serving Veterans and military families.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

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, RIVETS works with the state's Medicaid agency to determine other long-term care options for those Veterans who are not eligible for admission to the RI Veterans Home nor VA long-term care options.

- In collaboration with the RI Department of Health and the Providence VA Health Care System, RIVETS continues to look to expand VA-approved nursing home services in both Providence and Washington Counties.
- The VA delivers long-term services and supports (LTSS), including home care related services and nursing home care to eligible, aging, frail, and end-of-life Veterans of all ages. RIVETS is working to ensure Veterans are living either at home or in the least-restrictive environment possible.
- 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.
- RIVETS leadership participates in the Rhode Island Long Term Care Coordinating Council.
- RIVETS Strategic Planning, Policy and Communications Administrator is a member of the RI Haven Elder Justice work group, ensuring the rights, needs, and issues impacting Veterans are included in the planning and including elder abuse prevention.
- RIVETS Strategic Planning, Policy and Communications Administrator is a member of the Attorney General's Multi-Disciplinary Team to review complex elder abuse and exploitation cases.

5-year goal: RIVETS will work with the Attorney General's Multi-Disciplinary Team to deliver semi-annual training and information sessions to Veteran-serving organizations, training them on how to recognize and report cases of abuse and exploitation.

Veterans Mortuary Affairs

The Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery (RIVMC) 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 helps to fund basic funeral services for those Veterans who do not have the means to pay for services and are not eligible for the RIVMC.

- On December 16, 2021, RIVMC cut the ribbon on a set of new columbarium walls as part of a multi-phase project which will eventually build 40 walls containing 14,000 niches. RIVETS will begin the next phase of the columbarium wall construction in 2024. The project is expected to allow the cemetery to continue offering niche inurnment for more than a half-century.
- In 2023, at the request of RIVETS, Rhode Island expanded eligibility for burial at RIVMC to qualifying National Guard and Reserve service members in alignment with the Burial Equity for Guard and Reserve Act.
- RIVETS continues to advocate for our nation's heroes, caregivers, families, survivors, and service members to improve their quality of life and ensure end-of-life dignity.

5-year goal: RIVETS will partner with DHS GPA program, providing annual training and information to ensure any Veteran without next-of-kin receives the appropriate services and interment with dignity and respect.

Veterans Services Strategic Plan

Veterans Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Veteran Suicide, Agent Orange Effects & Burn Pit Health Effects

In the wake of COVID-19, millions of people uncovered new mental health conditions and millions more have had their existing challenges exacerbated. That is why RIVETS, along with Governor McKee, led the way in Rhode Island, and partnered with a coalition of more than 1,400 nonprofits, brands, government agencies, and influential leaders nationwide to observe Rhode Island's Third Annual Mental Health Action Day to drive our culture from awareness to action on mental health.

- Rhode Island is an active participant in the VA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families, co-chaired by Director Yarn.
- RIVETS is a member of the Rhode Island Summit Policy Committee addressing tobacco and other substance addictions through the Center for Health Promotion.
- RIVETS is a key member of the Adult Behavioral Health System of Care team at EOHHS, recognizing the importance of including the Veteran perspective in health and human services behavioral and mental health planning.
- The VA is pursuing research, implementing studies to establish a holistic approach for military toxic exposure presumption, and delivering benefits, care, and services that improves quality of life for Veterans. RIVETS hosted and participated in PACT Act Town Halls, ensuring Veterans are connected to appropriate services and programs.
- RIVETS is working with partners to provide innovative and state-of-the-art mental health care to prevent suicide and promote Veterans' and service members' health outcomes and quality of life.
- RIVETS is working with Rhode Island Department of Health for delivery of services through the VA Staff Sergeant Fox Suicide Prevention Grant. Through this work, RIVETS is providing resources toward community-based suicide prevention efforts to meet the needs of Veterans and their families through outreach, suicide prevention services, and connection to VA and community resources.

5-year goal: RIVETS will work with RIDOH to continue SSG Fox Suicide Prevention funding and support the State of RI's Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. In support of these initiatives, RIVETS will partner on delivering over 18,000 direct-mailings to Rhode Island's Veterans and military families providing suicide-prevention information. RIVETS will work to annually expand the number of mailings to ensure we are reaching as many Veterans as possible through multiple communication methods.

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. A case manager 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.

- During normal operations, Naval Station Newport conducts a week-long TAP class and has partnered with Director Yarn to provide a brief to each new convening class.

5-year goal: RIVETS staff will engage in monthly TAP classes as well as attending at least three Yellow Ribbon events annually. Yellow Ribbon events provide access to civilian and military services and information to help service member and their families manage any stage of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, demobilization, reintegration, and beyond.

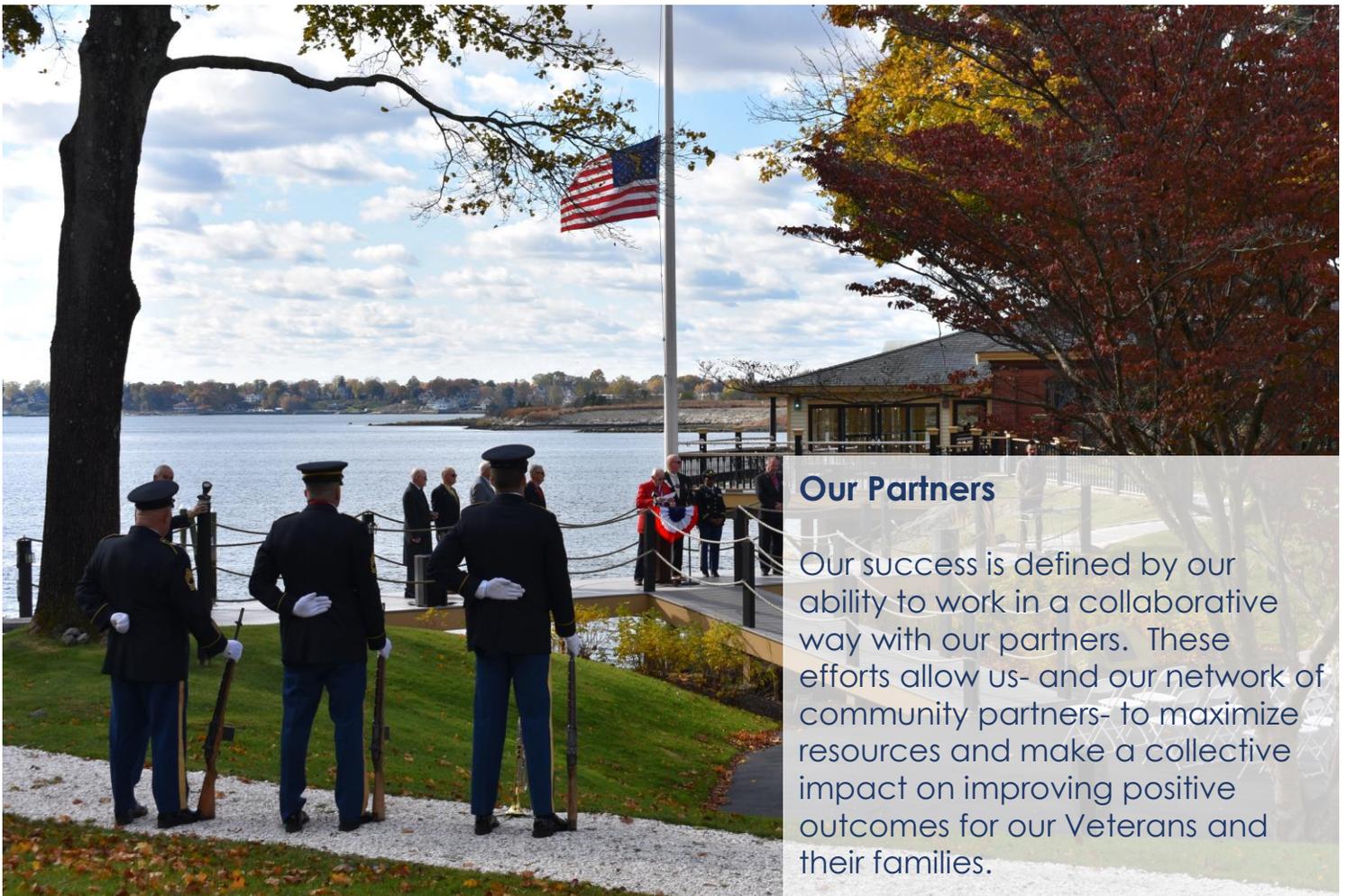
Veterans Services Strategic Plan

Veterans Transportation

RIVETS quickly identified transportation as a top need amongst the Veteran community. Transportation is commonly known as a co-occurring need, in that it often accompanies requests for food, housing, and employment assistance. Within the Veterans Services community, a holistic approach is always the target approach to assisting our Veterans.

- In 2023, Governor McKee provided for dedicated funding to support RIVETS' VetPass program. VetPass leverages RIPTA's low cost and wide-reaching bus network by securing reloadable RIPTA WAVE passes for eligible Veterans based on their need and circumstance.
- RIVETS is working to increase access to virtual and in-home services, promoting federal and community care solutions to improve well-being for Veterans in under-served suburban areas of the state.
- RIVETS recognizes that transportation is a social determinant of health. Transportation can affect access to healthcare services, social services, employment, and educational opportunities. For this reason, RIVETS is ensuring our Veterans Service Officers are able to provide benefits counseling where our Veterans live, work, learn, age and play.

5-year goal: Many injured, ill, and disabled Veterans identify access to reliable transportation, including services to get them to and from VA health care appointments, as critical and important to reintegration efforts. Based on utilization data, RIVETS will advocate for increased funding to support the VetPass program to ensure all eligible Veterans have access to this program.



Our Partners

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 partners- to maximize resources and make a collective impact on improving positive outcomes for our Veterans and their families.

Building the Team

Sarah Prak



Sarah Prak joined the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services in July 2023 as the Chief of Program Development. Prior to state service, she served four active-duty years in the United States Air Force. She was stationed at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, located in Goldsboro, North Carolina and was assigned to the Force Support Squadron. During her time in service, she was deployed to Saudi Arabia and Niger, Africa.

As a Veteran herself, Sarah feels passionate about helping fellow Veterans and their families discover all the resources that are available and ensures they have the support needed during their transition. She is also Rhode Island's Women's Veterans Coordinator who works to identify needs, resources and program development. Sarah has a bachelor's degree in Communications and Psychology from the University of Rhode Island. During her spare time, Sarah enjoys exploring new places, photography, reading and working out.

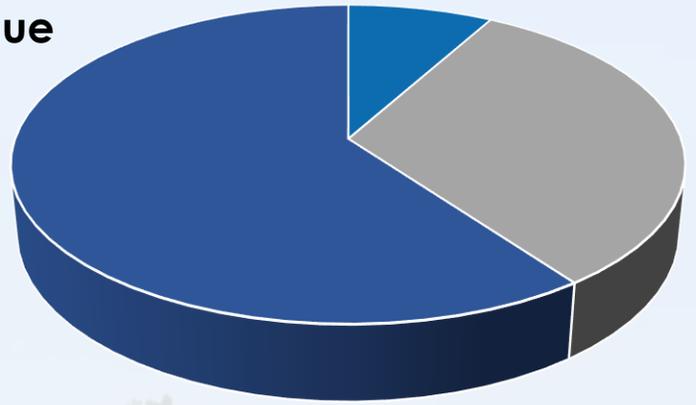


Revenue Totals

RI Veterans Services FY 2023 Total Revenue

■ Patient/family	\$ 3,369,802
■ Federal	\$13,234,841
■ State	\$24,968,247

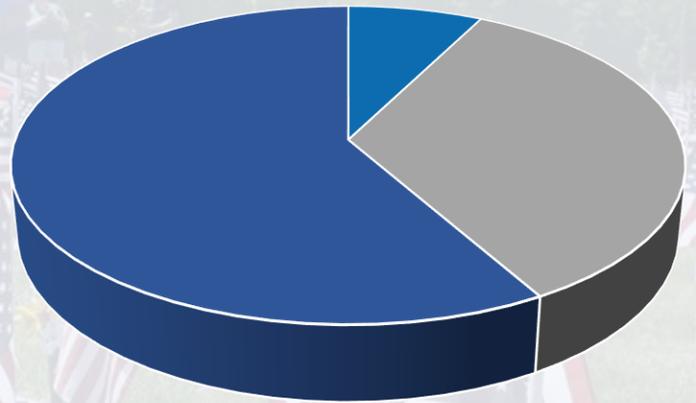
Total \$ 41,572,890



RI Veterans Home FY 2023 Revenue

■ Patient/family	\$ 2,912,419
■ Federal	\$13,237,550
■ State	\$22,527,830

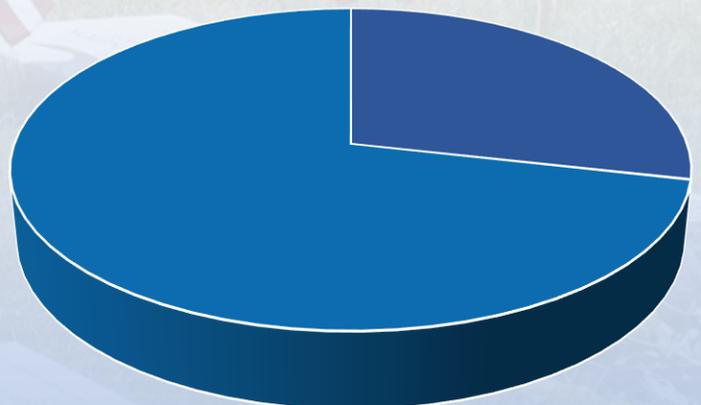
Total \$ 38,677,799



RI Veterans Cemetery FY 2023 Revenue

■ Patient/family	\$ 457,383
■ Federal	\$ 1,398
■ State	\$1,147,262

Total \$ 1,606,043

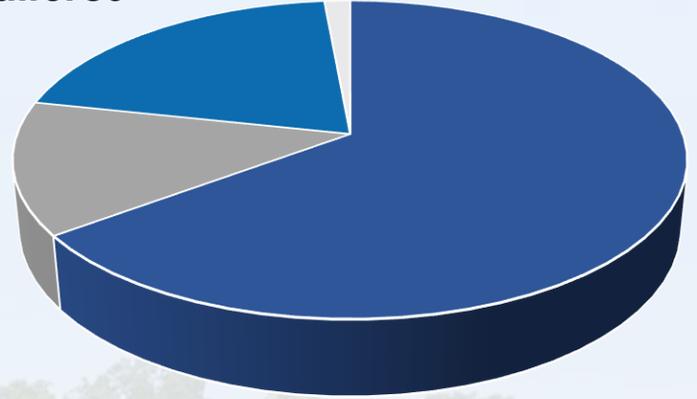


Expenditure Totals

RI Veterans Services FY 2023 Total Expenditures

Salary/Benefits	\$26,969,841
Contract Services	\$ 5,609,414
Operating Costs	\$ 8,393,831
Capital/Grants	\$ 599,804

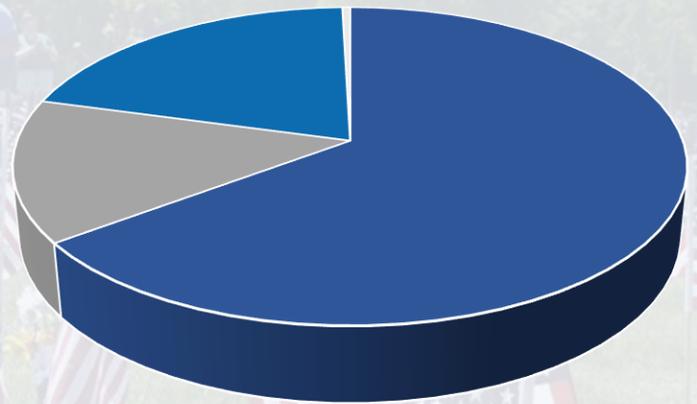
Total \$ 41,572,890



RI Veterans Home FY 2023 Expenditures

Salary/Benefits	\$25,064,761
Contract Services	\$ 5,596,690
Operating Costs	\$ 7,844,978
Capital/Grants	\$ 171,370

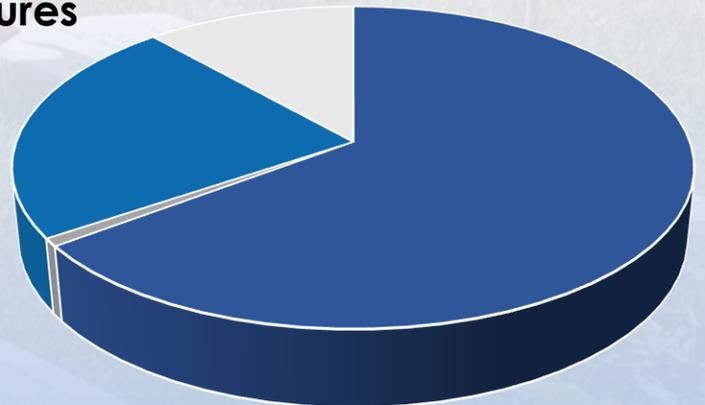
Total \$ 38,677,799



RI Veterans Cemetery FY 2023 Expenditures

Salary/Benefits	\$1,039,573
Contract Services	\$ 12,730
Operating Costs	\$ 368,027
Capital/Grants	\$ 185,713

Total \$ 1,606,043





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