

# Annual Report

## Fiscal Year 2013





August 1, 2013

Governor Kasich and Secretary Husted,

It has been my great honor to lead the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. It's also my distinct pleasure to present to you the FY 2013 Annual Report which chronicles our responsibilities and the actions we are undertaking on behalf of Ohio's veterans.

Since the days of the Civil War, Ohio has always been a leader in answering the call for our nation's defense. The nearly 900,000 veterans currently residing in Ohio – the sixth largest population of veterans in the U.S. – are a living testament to that legacy.

More young veterans join their ranks each day as Ohio's sons and daughters return home from deployments in Afghanistan and other areas or from a term of active military service. All of us in this department believe it is our sacred duty to do all that we can on behalf of those in every generation of veterans who have put their lives on the line to guarantee our freedoms.

The department's mission is "to actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans & their families." Our goal is to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits they have earned from both the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the State of Ohio. In turn, this is a great economic engine for our state – for example, the VA spent a record-high \$5.8 billion in Ohio in 2012, with almost \$1.6 billion of that total going to direct compensation to veterans.

This Annual Report provides you a detailed picture of how we are accomplishing this vital mission. I look forward to working together to maintain Ohio as a place that veterans of all eras and their families are proud to call home.

Sincerely,

Thomas N. Moe  
Director  
Ohio Department of Veterans Services





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## INTRODUCTION

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) was created as a Cabinet-level agency on August 21, 2008, by Senate Bill 289 of the 127<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly.

The mission of the ODVS is to actively identify, connect with, and advocate for veterans and their families. Senate Bill 289 defined the mission and gave the department the responsibility to work directly with the county veterans service offices (CVSO) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), as well as with the various veterans service organizations and other concerned associations.

In January 2011, Governor John Kasich selected Tom Moe as the second Director of ODVS. Director Moe is a retired Air Force Colonel who served over 30 years in the military, first in the Navy enlisted ranks and later as an Air Force officer and pilot.





## EXECUTION OF MISSION

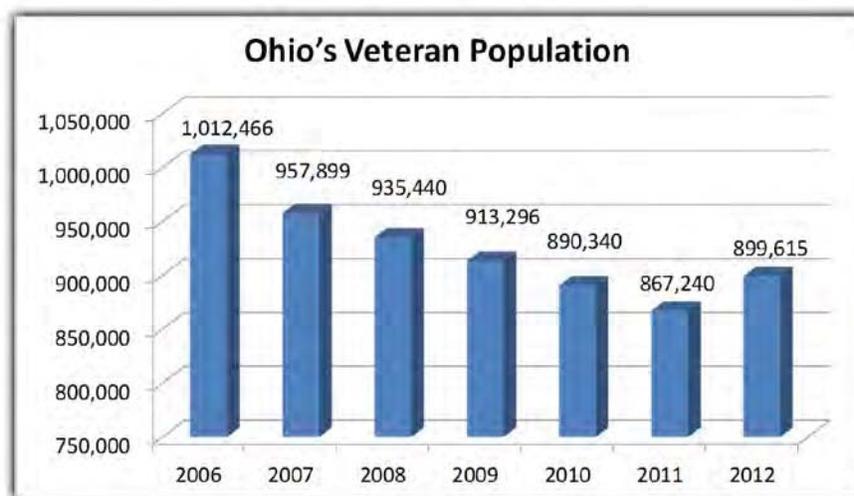
The department carries out its mission by the following major priorities and programs:

- Conducts outreach to veterans.
- Provides training and oversight to the 88 County Veteran Service Offices (CVSO).
- Coordinates programs and operations with the VA, which provides benefits to Ohio veterans.
- Works with the Ohio General Assembly and Congressional representatives to craft legislation in support of veterans and their families at the state and federal levels.
- Communicate with other state agencies concerning veterans' programs and coordinate support to veterans.
- Administers the Ohio Veterans Bonus for veterans of the Persian Gulf War era and post-9/11 era conflicts, a program which is funded by bonds approved by Ohio voters.
- Operates the Ohio Veterans Homes in Sandusky and Georgetown which are open to Ohio-resident veterans who served in periods of armed conflicts.
- Manages two federal education-related programs: Troops to Teachers and the State Approving Agency.
- Hosts several veterans' ceremonies each year including the Governor's Wreath-Laying Ceremony to honor Ohio's killed in action and the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame induction ceremony.
- Maintains custodianship of over 1.9 million veterans' records dating back to World War II.

## PROFILE OF VETERANS IN OHIO

The VA estimates state veterans' populations and compiles funding statistics during each federal fiscal year. As of federal FY 2012 (Oct. 1, 2011 – Sept. 30, 2012), Ohio's veterans' population was estimated to be nearly 900,000. This represents the sixth-largest veterans' population in the country. A graphic of the state's population is highlighted in the graph on the following page. The numbers show a slight increase in the state's number of veterans

due to a change in the way the VA calculates census data. The overall number of veterans will likely continue to decrease as veterans from World War II and the Korean War pass away. However, there remains a sizable community of Vietnam veterans in the state and a growing population of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans.



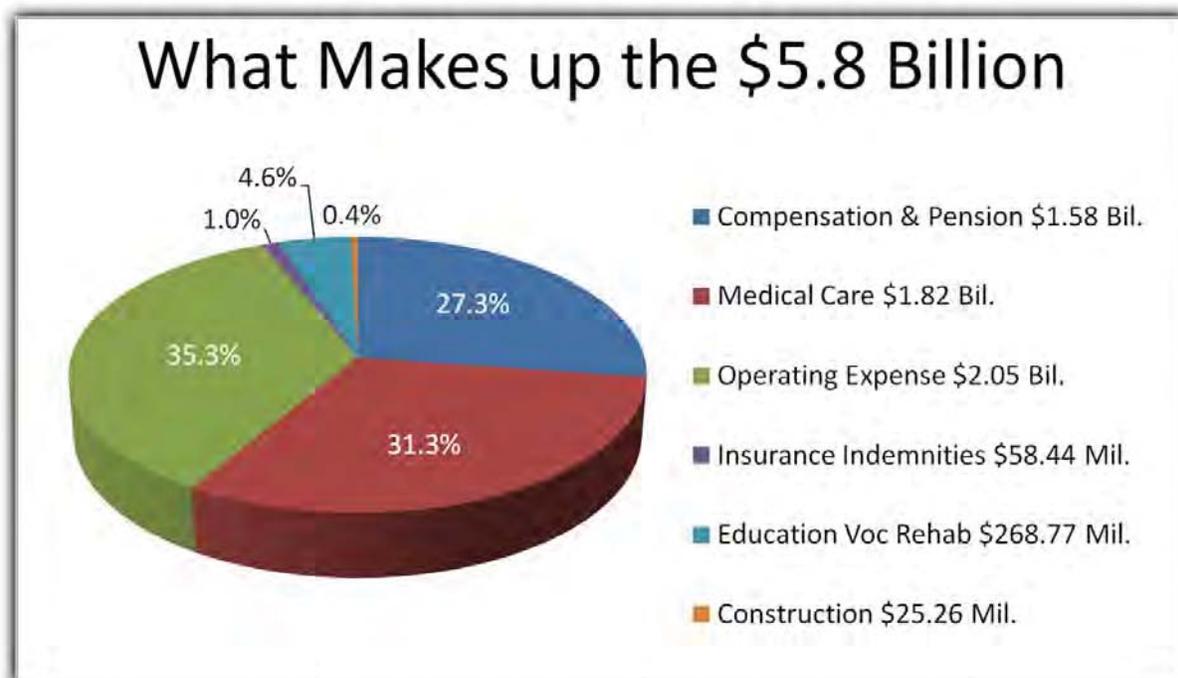
★ Ohio Currently has the 6<sup>th</sup> Largest Veterans Population in the Nation.

\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2006 -2012

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FEDERAL SPENDING

The success of ODVS in accomplishing its mission directly impacts the economic health of Ohio. Most of the benefits received by veterans originate at the federal level. These benefits are comprised of compensation for injuries, health care, educational assistance, home loans and many other programs provided by the VA. In federal FY 2012, the VA spent over \$5.8 billion in Ohio, a record high in VA spending in the state and an increase of over \$72 million from the previous year. These dollars directly benefited not only Ohio veterans but the state's local communities and colleges as well.

The composition of VA funds brought to Ohio is shown in the chart below:

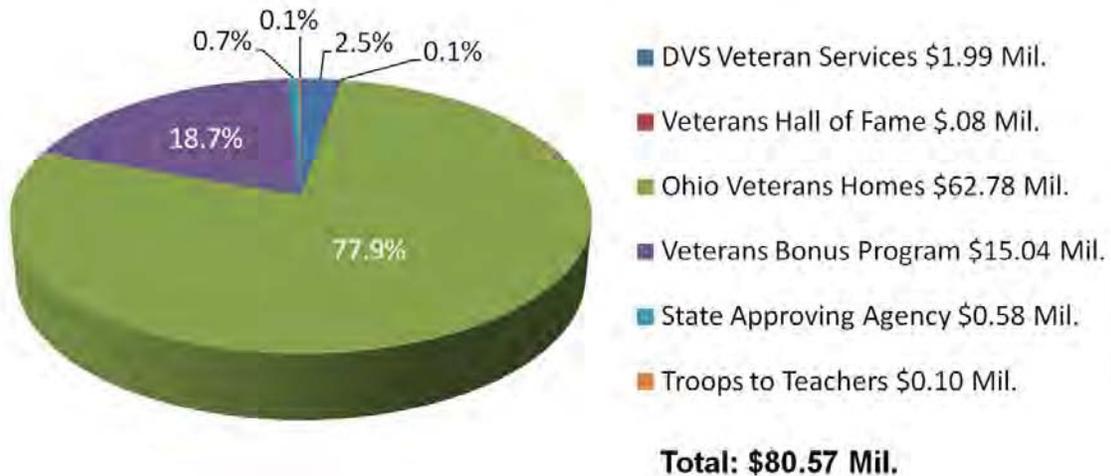


\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDG) Report 2012

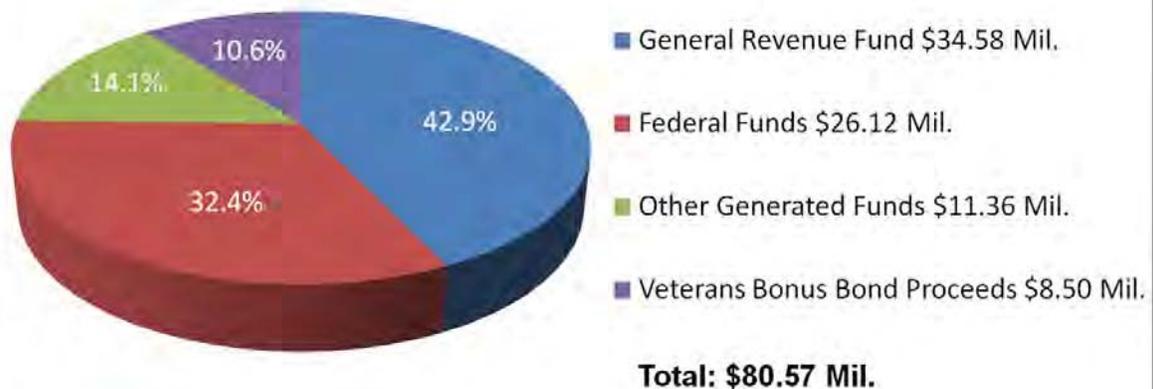
ODVS has continued to perform its mission while holding the line on spending in both fiscal years 2012 and 2013.

The department spent a total of \$80.57 million in FY 2013 on all programs, as highlighted in the first chart on the following page. Funding came from four major sources, which is shown in the second chart on the following page.

## Expenditures by Program



## Expenditures by Funding Source





## THE DEPARTMENT'S MAIN CHALLENGE

The mission of finding and connecting our veterans to their benefits is made particularly challenging since veterans of all eras often don't realize they might qualify for benefits. For example, a veteran who injured his leg jumping from the back of a truck during peacetime service 30 years ago – and whose injury healed at the time – could be eligible for compensation today if the injury developed into arthritis. While the VA has relatively accurate estimates of the number of veterans living in each county, identifying and contacting those veterans continues to be the priority mission of the department.

Once veterans are identified, work begins to connect them to their benefits in the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) of their respective county. The CVSO work for a County Veterans Service Commission (CVSC) whose members are nominated by veterans service organizations and appointed by a county common pleas judge. ODVS is responsible for the training and certification of both service officers and commissioners.

The CVSOs help veterans apply for the benefits they have earned and also provide them with direct financial assistance when necessary. Historically, veterans in all states receive about 40 percent more of the federal benefits they have earned when they receive assistance applying for them.

In all actions, ODVS's work is guided by the words spoken by Abraham Lincoln and enshrined in the rotunda of the Ohio State House – “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.”

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

FY 2013 represented another step forward for the department in serving Ohio's veterans and their families while also providing maximum value to the taxpayers of this state.



There is no doubt that the efforts made on all fronts by the department's staff, combined with strong support from the CVSOs and the state's veterans organizations, are paying significant dividends to connect the state's veterans to their benefits. For example, Ohio has connected a record number of veterans who qualify for VA disability compensation because of service-connected injuries. This climbed from 7.9 percent of all Ohio veterans (even those who are not eligible for compensation) in 2005 to nearly 12 percent in federal FY 2012. A great deal of effort has also gone into connecting low-income veterans to VA pension benefits at the appropriate level. The average dollars a qualifying Ohio veteran received annually in pension benefits in 2006 was \$8,670; in federal FY 2012, that number rose to \$11,432.

Director Tom Moe and Assistant Director Jason Dominguez had visited each of Ohio's 88 CVSOs by October 2011, fulfilling a promise to Governor John Kasich to ascertain first-hand the delivery of services to veterans across the state. These visits provided a baseline of information for a study commissioned in FY 2012 by ODVS to examine best practices in other states to better serve Ohio's veterans within the county veterans service system that has served the state well for over 100 years. This study was ongoing during FY 2013, and the results are expected to be delivered early in the next fiscal year.

### **Outreach**

Communications and outreach efforts continued to focus on outreach efforts through a variety of means. The department maintained an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. The web site was continually updated with department and other news releases related to veterans. The department's listserv had a 350 percent increase during the fiscal year, growing to roughly 4,600 subscribers over the 3,300 level of FY 2012. The listserv is the primary channel for releasing a monthly newsletter as well as periodic news releases and other items of interest to the veterans' community. Direct outreach at veterans-themed events – such as unit re-integration briefings, partnership events with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and veterans' days at



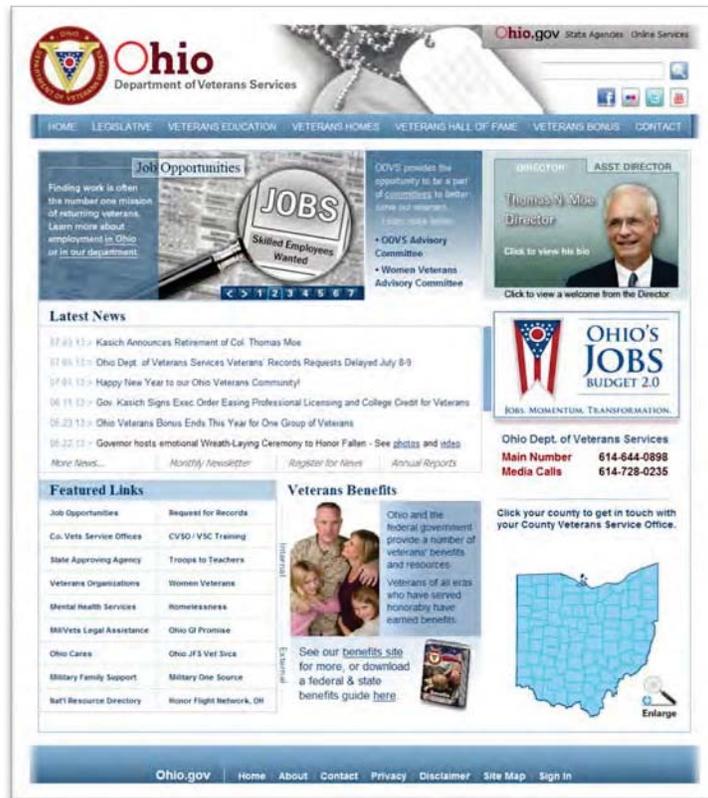
# Department of Veterans Services

John R. Kasich, Governor  
Thomas N. Moe, Director

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various venues, to include the Ohio State Fair – were ongoing by members of the ODVS Columbus staff, Ohio Veterans Homes staff, and the Ohio Veterans Bonus team.

Statewide radio and TV advertising on both general veterans’ benefits and the Ohio Veterans Bonus was done in two-month packages through the Ohio Association of Broadcasters. This was augmented by a month of advertising on general benefits in small- to medium-market community newspapers, and a series of print ads on Veterans Day in the state’s eight largest newspapers. The department’s toll-free number, 1-877-OHIOVET, allows veterans



to call for county veterans service office contact information and a direct connection to the Ohio Veterans Bonus team. This number was enhanced in FY 2013 to provide a direct connection to each county.

The department published a pocket-sized, spiral-bound “Benefits Resource Guide” in FY 2013 that describes every federal and state benefit available to veterans in Ohio, a brief explanation of how to access these benefits by applying through their CVSO, and contact information for all CVSOs and VA facilities. To date, more than 40,000 of these guides have been distributed to veterans in Ohio through CVSOs, other state agencies, military units, and veteran-themed events.



Building on the success of the Resource Guide, ODVS began work with a private contractor during the fiscal year to build a mobile phone application that contains a summary of veterans' benefits, contact information for CVSOs and the VA, and interactive maps and directions to get there. The app will be tested statewide in the first quarter of FY 2014.

For over two years, ODVS has maintained a partnership with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) to gather names and addresses of persons who self-identify as veterans when asked by a deputy registrar at the time they renew their driver's license. The high costs of postage have necessitated agency partnerships and a targeted use of this list. For example, the list was employed in March 2013 in a partnership with BMV on a targeted mailing to Vietnam veterans to inform them of the upcoming commemoration. Several CVSO have entered into pilot agreements with the department to obtain access to the data base for their county. ODVS is planning to expand access to all 88 counties by December 2013. Additionally, ODVS has coordinated with BMV to include a veterans' benefits message on the fall 2013 driver's license renewal mailers, which will reach an estimated 3.5 million Ohioans, veterans and regular citizens alike.

The goal of all outreach efforts will continue to be bringing veterans to the doors of their local CVSOs where they can learn about and apply for all the federal and state benefits they're qualified for. Thus, the training of county veterans service officers is vitally important.

### **Training and Standards**

ODVS, in conjunction with the Ohio Association of County Veterans Service Officers, Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Commissioners, and the VA, provides training and certification to CVSOs and CVSCs. The department meets quarterly with all veterans service officers and conducts annual refresher training on a small-group level, by region or district. This annual training includes any federal or state benefit changes,



so that the county officers are prepared to answer questions and properly prepare claims applications.

Prior to the beginning of each calendar year, the department publishes a training guidance policy letter detailing the plan of training events for the calendar year and allowing the CVSOs and CVSCs adequate time to plan their attendance.

CVSO training is a vital investment in serving the state's veterans because of near-constant changes in VA compensation, pension and other benefits claims processes. To develop and present this training, the department works cooperatively with the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers (OSACVSO), which is recognized as one of the premier associations in the United States, and has trained service officers on the national level. Such training enhances the CVSO's ability to assemble what the VA refers to as a "fully-developed claim" with all available documentation present. In an era in which the backlog of veterans' claims with the VA has reached crisis levels, one of the best tools to reduce the backlog is to submit fully-developed claims that in turn are "ready to rate." These claims can be decided quickly so that veterans will begin receiving the benefits that they have earned and need.

Throughout 2013 ODVS continued a two-part program of training the new and reappointed CVSCs to become more knowledgeable of their duties and responsibilities concerning veterans under Ohio Revised Code Title 59, the Sunshine Laws, and the ethical standards for a commissioner. The department's goal is to improve their technical knowledge and help them improve the efficiency of their county operations wherever possible. This training also makes a commissioner able to operate more effectively with their county board of commissioners. The department is now halfway through a five-year process of conducting this training.

The department this year also forged ahead with its 2012 initiative, intended to continuously improve and upgrade county operations, called the Strategic Planning Initiative. Department staff members meet regularly with representatives from the

OSACVSCs OSACVSOs. The goal of these sessions is to improve operations, develop standards, and identify ways to improve service delivery to veterans in all counties.

### **Cleveland VA Regional Office Liaison**

Ohio's five largest veterans service organizations (VSOs) have all certified the training offered by ODVS. This is an important broadening of service to veterans. The VSOs have representatives at the Cleveland VA Regional Office (VARO), where claims generated in Ohio are submitted. These VSO representatives receive claims filed by the county veterans service officers in which individual veterans have designated the VSO to advocate the claim on the veterans behalf. This enables ODVS and the county veterans service officers the department has trained to become advocates for claims filed through the VSO's.



Since the beginning of FY 2011, the department has had a liaison officer assigned to the Cleveland VA Regional Office. This person, along with two additional staff members, monitors claims and identifies problems, which the department then works to resolve by directly coordinating with the CVSOs who originated the claims and the VSOs

who advocate on the veterans' behalf. This initiative has demonstrably expedited numerous claims. In FY 2013, the department's liaison officer made large strides to improve service to veterans, including the following:

- Increased training opportunities at the VARO for CVSOs who have completed the requirements necessary to gain online access to VA claims processing. This allows the CVSOs to view the claims in progress and further understand the steps necessary to complete them. Currently, 132 individual CVSOs have this access, representing 70 counties; this is more than double the rate of 20 percent in the previous fiscal year. The remaining CVSOs will be certified in the first quarter of FY 2014.



- Implemented a checklist to assist the VA in identifying claims that are originated by a CVSO, thus allowing the CVSO to receive a rapid notification of the rating decision when the claim is completed.
- Provided training and incentive opportunities to CVSOs to assist them to submit “fully developed claims” that allow for quicker completion and return of rating decision, thus lessening the VA backlog. The number of fully developed claims submitted to the VA by CVSOs increased 28.5 percent in the final quarter of FY 2013.

### **Ohio Veterans Bonus**

The Ohio Veterans Bonus is a major program administered directly by the department that provides a tangible financial benefit to veterans, their families and the communities where they live. Ohio voters overwhelmingly approved the bonus in November 2009 and in August 2010 the department launched the program statewide. The bonus is funded by the sale of bonds and provides direct payments to Ohio resident veterans of the periods of the Persian Gulf War and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. A rule change recommended by the department in June 2011 protects the privacy of Bonus applications and supporting documents.

The Ohio Veterans Bonus continues a tradition of awarding bonuses to Ohio veterans that dates back to the Civil War. The payment is \$100 a month to veterans who served during the eligible periods in the Persian Gulf theater, or in the Iraq or Afghanistan theaters, up to a maximum of \$1,000. For veterans who served in other parts of the world during these times, the payment is \$50 a month up to a \$500 maximum. Veterans medically discharged as a result of combat service can receive \$1,000, regardless of how much time they spent in theater, plus up to \$500 for months of service elsewhere. Family members of those killed in action or who died from disease as a result of their in-theater service can receive a bonus of \$5,000 plus whatever the service member was eligible for, up to \$6,500.



By the end of FY 2013, the Ohio Veterans Bonus program paid over \$55.9 million to more than 68,000 Ohio veterans and families. The statistics as of June 30, 2013 are shown below:

**Ohio Veterans Bonus, Totals Approved and Disbursed**

	Number of New Applications Received	Number of Applications Approved for Payment	Amount Approved For Payment
<b>FY 2011</b>	46,333	42,298	\$35,011,993
<b>FY 2012</b>	12,139	14,782	\$12,825,541
<b>FY 2013</b>	11,323	9,561	\$8,076,484
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69,795</b>	<b>66,641</b>	<b>\$55,914,018</b>



**Ohio Veterans Homes**

A major part of the department’s mission is operating the Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH), a responsibility assumed when the department was created in August 2008. The Homes provide direct nursing home care at facilities in Sandusky and Georgetown, as well as domiciliary (similar to independent living) to qualified veterans in Sandusky. The Sandusky home opened in 1888 to care for veterans of the Civil War. The home in Georgetown opened in 2003.

Both homes and the domiciliary are open to honorably discharged veterans of periods of armed conflicts who are or were Ohio residents for at least one year during their lifetime. These veterans must also be infirmed or disabled and incapable of earning a living. Each home offers standard nursing home care as well as special care for Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. There are a total of 867 beds maintained between the two homes.

The Sandusky home provides 427 nursing home beds and an additional 293 domiciliary or “DOM” beds. The DOM total includes a 42-bed domiciliary plus (DOM+) unit. The DOM+ is open to veterans who can mostly live independently, but still require some additional supervision and prompting for issues such as medication and meal times. Georgetown offers 147 nursing home beds, including 21 dedicated hospice beds.

The table below shows the number of residents at each OVH facility throughout FY 2013:

<b>Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH), FY 2013, Residents Served</b>			
	Sandusky	Georgetown	Total
<b>Nursing home (standard and special care)</b>	618	180	798
<b>Hospice unit</b>		53	53
<b>Domiciliary</b>	236		236
			<b>1,087</b>



Throughout the fiscal year, the Homes continued providing a nationally-recognized quality of care for veterans, at a cost of care about one-third that of private nursing homes. Per-resident per diem funding by the VA, combined with a sliding scale resident assessment based on ability to pay, provides long-term care value at the Homes both for veterans and their families as well

as taxpayers. This continues a trend of OVH's decreasing reliance on General Revenue Fund (GRF) dollars – from FY 2004, when GRF funding comprised 61 percent of the Homes' budget, that share decreased to 41 percent in FY 2013, which itself represented a one-percent drop from the 42 percent level of FY 2012. VA per diem funding, meanwhile, increased from 28 percent to 37 percent of OVH's budget. All of this allows the OVH facilities to continue to provide a high quality of care and activities for veteran residents without compromising standards.

The OVH have made the most of the GRF funds allocated to them by implementing several cost-saving strategies. For example:

- The Sandusky home's cemetery required significant work to bring it into compliance with National Cemetery Association (NCA) shrine standards and State Cemetery Grant Services (SCGS) requirements. OVH did not seek state funds for this purpose, and instead was awarded a \$690,000 grant from the VA in May 2012 to fund the project. The work began in FY 2013 and is ongoing. The renovation includes repairing or replacing existing headstones, resetting and realigning all of the headstones, restoring associated turf and the potential

removal of trees that may interfere with current and future grave sites. This hallowed ground is the final resting place of 4,177 men and women veterans of Ohio, dating back to those who served in the Civil War. This number includes two Medal of Honor recipients and 11 Purple Heart recipients.

- OVH is in the middle year of a three-year discounted power agreement with American Electric Power in Sandusky. So far, the Home is on pace to save over \$90,000 in electricity costs each year.
- Since April 2011, the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) has been a tenant agency at the Sandusky Home. This agreement is saving RSC more than \$50,000 annually in rent and is keeping state dollars in-house.
- During FY 2012 OVH continued a two-year practice of purchasing from federal U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procurement contracts rather than state contracts, leveraging the larger federal buying power to save additional state dollars.



### Veterans Educational Programs

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services is the Ohio agent for the federally-funded Veterans Educational Programs (VEP) Office, which oversees the Troops to Teachers (TTT) and State Approving Agency (SAA) programs.

TTT assists veterans in obtaining teaching certificates and provides counseling and mentoring to place them in high-needs schools, not only to teach, but to serve as positive role models in their schools and local communities. Despite the challenge of a limited number of teaching positions available during FY 2013 across the state, the program continues to show positive results.

The principal role of the SAA is to function as an extension of the VA's educational programs and audit the academic programs at more than 750 VA-approved institutions to ensure that they are in compliance with federal policies and are providing student veterans with the benefits they are entitled to. In federal FY 2012, the VA spent more than \$268.7 million in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation, employment and education. This amount represents an increase of roughly \$11.6 million from 2011 and an overall increase of \$157 million from 2009 spending. Short-term VA programs like the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) provided over 1,800 unemployed Ohio veterans an opportunity to education/training and job assistance. Ohio currently ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the amount of veterans using this program.

### Justice-Involved Veterans

Ensuring appropriate justice for veterans in the court system is a priority for the department. This builds upon efforts begun in 2011 by Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Stratton. Courts throughout the state are studying the implementation of special Veterans' Courts, where the emphasis is on treatment and diversion rather than punishment. Currently, eleven jurisdictions have Veterans' Courts in operation, and Veterans' Courts are under consideration in at least two other locations. The Department of Veterans Services is establishing working relationships with these courts in order to provide guidance and assistance on issues like sustainable funding and obtaining certification from the Ohio Supreme Court. The locations of Ohio's Veterans' Courts are shown to the right.



This past year saw the enactment of House Bill 197, which amended sections 2929.12 and 2929.22 of the Ohio Revised Code. The new law requires judges to consider an offender's military service and any conditions or circumstances stemming from that military service when sentencing in both felony and misdemeanor cases. The goal is to ensure that veterans are identified and linked with any needed treatment while they are held accountable for their crimes.

The department is also working closely with the Ohio Ex-Offender Re-entry Coalition to identify and assist veterans leaving the criminal justice system. The objective of this relationship is to ensure that veterans are identified and linked with additional resources that will help prevent recidivism.



Two veteran-oriented legal assistance programs have been launched with the help of ODVS. The first is the Ohio Military/Veterans Legal Assistance Program (OM/VLAP). This program, the first of its kind in the nation, provides free legal representation to veterans when they go to court in civil matters like foreclosure and credit card collections. Volunteer lawyers will also provide representation in dissolutions and child support matters. The program has begun as a pilot located in Central Ohio, with statewide participation as the ultimate goal. The second program is the Lt. Jonathan Grassbaugh Legal Assistance Project at the Ohio State University. ODVS is helping this program recruit lawyers to supervise law students who will be trained to provide legal assistance to military service members and veterans.



## Inter-Agency Initiatives

The department maintains open lines of communication with other state agencies concerning veterans issues and sits on a number of committees concerned with the education, mental health, and family support of Ohio's veterans.

ODVS also established a military liaison position during the fiscal year. This individual is charged with building relationships with active, Reserve and National Guard units of all military services throughout the state, as well as the Department of Defense, to better inform all serving military of the benefits and support available to Ohio's veterans and coordinating ways to more effectively access them.

In FY 2013, ODVS efforts in the inter-departmental area were primarily focused on employment and education:

- The department continued efforts in a pilot project with The Ohio State University to connect student veterans to intern opportunities that can lead to full-time employment following graduation. ODVS is working with employers to seek their commitment to this initiative.
- The department built on the work of a Board of Regents' liaison officer to promote veterans' services and awareness at Ohio's public colleges and universities to continue advocacy and support for student veterans. Currently, there are over 20,000 student veterans or their family members attending Ohio public colleges and universities, double the number of five years ago.
- The "Battlefront to Homefront" campaign, launched in FY 2012, continued to link Ohio National Guard troops returning from overseas deployments to veteran-specific employment services provided by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). ODJFS and the Guard are collaborating to identify the troops in need of employment prior to their return from overseas and beginning the process of connecting them to one-on-one employment services at the county level upon their return.

- ODVS coordinated activities between the Ohio National Guard, the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to establish inter-agency lines of communication to make employment opportunities available to veterans.
- The department met and continues to meet with private employers in the insurance industry and in a variety of other employment disciplines statewide to educate them on the value of hiring veterans and the most effective means for them to outreach directly to veterans.
- The military liaison conducted nearly 30 briefings at various military unit re-integration events, establishing personal relationships with the leadership of units of active Air Force and Coast Guard; Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy Reserve; and the Ohio Army and Air National Guard, as well as their with their family support groups. Future efforts will focus on addressing units during their drill training weekends.

### **Legislative Activity**

Throughout the fiscal year, ODVS continued to actively work with the administration of Governor John R. Kasich and legislative sponsors to assist in crafting legislation to benefit veterans in Ohio.

Governor Kasich set the wheels in motion to give Ohio veterans a huge step up in employment and education opportunities when he signed Executive Order 2013-05K in June 2013. The Executive Order opens greater opportunities for Ohio veterans to obtain professional licenses and college credits as a result of their military training.

It specifically directs the state's departments, boards and commissions to take military education, training and service into account when granting professional licenses. It says they must review, revise and streamline the process of granting professional licenses to veterans to ensure that their training, experience and service is taken into consideration during this process.

The order also directs the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, in collaboration with the presidents of Ohio's public colleges and universities, to review the credit-granting process and identify procedures to simplify it in order to grant credit for military education and training.

All agencies and institutions are mandated under the order to identify any barriers to streamlining licensing and granting credits and report this to the administration by December 31, 2013, along with recommendations for reforms. Legislation will be required to fully implement the provisions outlined in the Executive Order.

Legislation enacted and signed into law by Governor Kasich during fiscal year 2013 was aimed at improving sentencing conditions for justice-involved veterans, improving employment prospects and educating families, and honoring the sacrifice of military and veterans:

- **House Bill 197 Military Sentencing** (Slesknick)  
Requires that a defendant's military service must be considered by a judge during sentencing for a misdemeanor crime, and that such service shall be considered by a judge during sentencing for a felony.
- **House Bill 280 and House Bill 555 War Orphan Scholarship** (Dovilla, Stebelton)  
Expands eligibility for the scholarship to all children of military veterans who participated in an operation for which the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal was awarded; and authorizes the administrators of the Ohio National Guard Scholarship Program and the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship Program to apply for and receive grants and to accept gifts, bequests, and contributions from public and private sources.
- **HB 284 Physician Assistants** (Gonzales)  
Allows an individual seeking a certificate from the State Medical Board to practice as a physician assistant to qualify for the certificate without holding the otherwise required master's or higher degree if the individual has (1) a degree from an accredited

educational program for physician assistants and (2) at least three years of active duty experience practicing as a physician assistant in the United States Armed Forces or the National Guard of any state.

- **House Bill 459 Purple Heart State** (Hottinger)

Designates Ohio as a “Purple Heart State.” This makes Ohio the first state in the nation to officially codify a law that formally recognizes these special veterans who have been wounded in the service of our country.

- **House Bill 532 Medal of Distinction** (Kozlowski)

Revises Ohio law pertaining to qualifying eligible circumstances, specifying that the military service member being honored must have been killed after September 10, 2001, in a combat zone or engaged against a hostile force. It requires the Governor and the General Assembly to hold a joint ceremony annually to recognize the previous year’s qualifying recipients of the Ohio Military Medal of Distinction. It also provides an appropriation to produce the medals.

- **Senate Bill 222 Flag Display** (Burke)

Requires that the POW/MIA Flag be displayed at rest areas along the state’s interstates and the Ohio Turnpike where a flag pole is already erected.

The department will continue to serve as an advocate with both the administration and the Ohio General Assembly on behalf of the state’s veterans and their families.



### Public Ceremonies and Events

Each year, ODVS plans and conducts a number of official events to honor Ohio veterans.

The Governor's Wreath-Laying Ceremony is held each year the week prior to Memorial Day weekend to honor the men and women of Ohio who were killed during the previous year in service to the nation. In 2013, 12 were so honored. For the first time this year, the ceremony was held immediately after the Ohio General Assembly's Joint Session in which the next-of-kin of the fallen service members are awarded the Ohio Medal of Distinction on their loved one's behalf. These same-day ceremonies will be the standard in years going forward.

A ceremony is held every November, near Veterans Day, to welcome the distinguished veterans selected for induction into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame. The Hall was established in 1992 to honor Ohioans for their post-military contributions. At the most recent induction in November 2012, 15 more veterans joined the Hall that now includes a total of 443 astronauts, government officials, police officers, community leaders, and veterans' advocates.

Two special groups of veterans were honored with exhibits at the Statehouse in a partnership between ODVS and the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board. A March 2013 ceremony, at which Lieutenant Governor Mary Taylor was the featured speaker, officially opened permanent exhibits to honor Ohio's women veterans and the members of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame.



Governor Kasich signed Senate Bill 134 on March 30, 2012, designating that day each year as Vietnam Veterans' Day in Ohio. The date represents the first day that all U.S. combat troops were out of Vietnam, following their withdrawal on March 29, so that symbolically, March 30 is the day that all troops could be welcomed home. For the first



official commemoration of Vietnam Veterans' Day in 2013, ODVS planned and conducted a four-day celebration under the leadership of Director Moe and in coordination with the Vietnam Veterans of America, Department of Ohio that featured a traveling Vietnam Wall at the Ohio History Center, panel discussions, a special Statehouse exhibit, opening and closing ceremonies at both the History Center and the Statehouse, and a formal Statehouse dinner.

Women now comprise over 14 percent of the active military, and the department maintains a women veterans' advisory committee. This committee assisted in planning the Annual Training Conference of the National Association of State Women Veterans



Coordinators in June 2013. Every other year, ODVS and the women veterans' advisory committee hold a statewide conference to highlight women veterans' issues, with the next one taking place in September 2013. The last conference in October 2011 was the largest in the U.S. and attracted over 500 women veterans.

### **Veterans' Records**

In FY 2013, ODVS became the first state to be granted access to military records through the electronic portal of the Defense Personal Records Information System (DPRIS). These records primarily detail the assignments of service members to various positions during their military career. Records from the DPRIS portal unfortunately are limited to the mid-1990's and forward. Claims for veterans who served in earlier periods must still be supported from documents gathered from paper records.

As a result of a successful test of the system at the department level, ODVS was also the first state to be granted permission to allow each of the 88 CVSOs to access these military records through DPRIS. This allows service officers who are assembling a claim for VA benefits, such as medical care, disability compensation and pension, to have the records and documents needed to complete the claim. This permits a claim to be prepared in what the VA considers "fully developed" status, which in turn allows it to be completed faster.

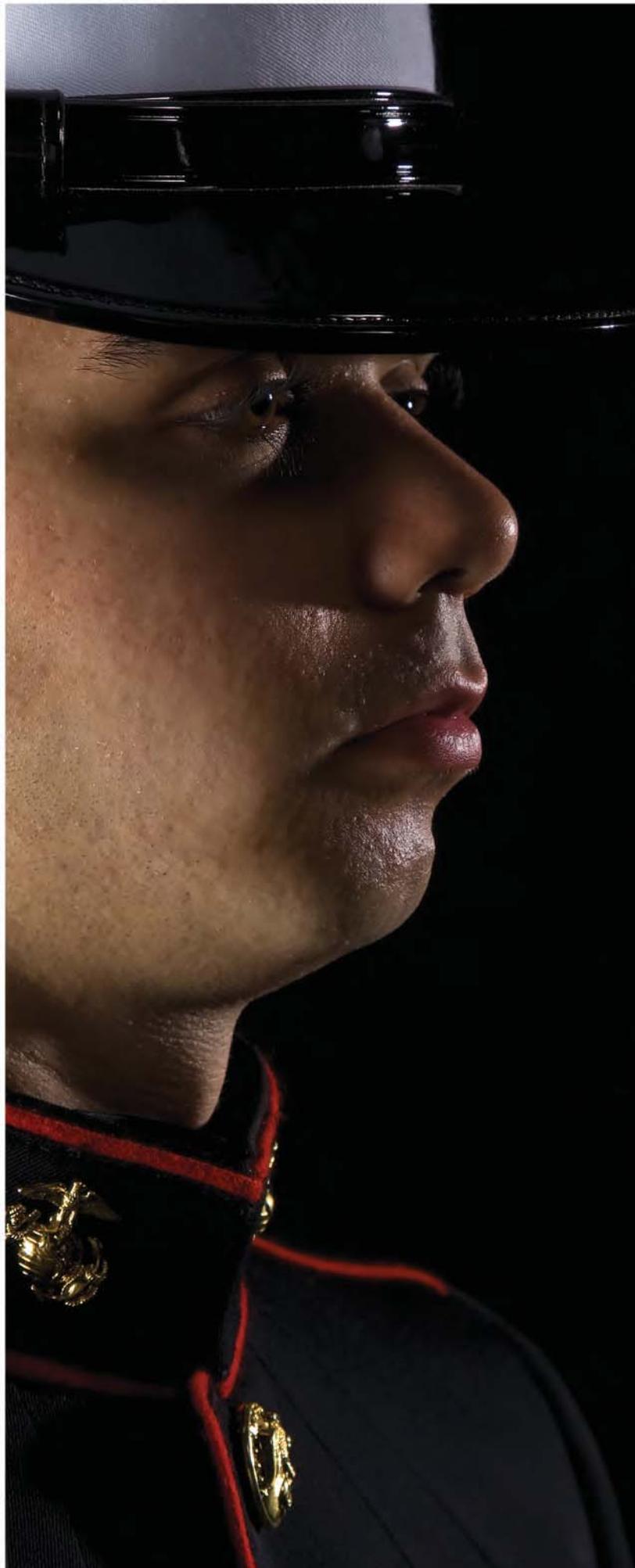
The Records mission was enhanced in FY 2013 by the purchase of a state-of-the-art microfilm reader which makes it possible to pull details of a veteran's military service directly from their discharge document, providing easily-red copies of information relevant to claims. The new reader effectively uses cutting edge technology to better support Ohio's veterans.

In terms of customer service, the ODVS Records Section received approximately 75 requests per week for copies of discharges throughout the fiscal year. Constituent contacts for assistance, inquiries, or complaints were at a steady pace during the year, and were responded to in both a timely and professional manner.

## CONCLUSION

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services proved during FY 2013 that it can and will continue to perform each task set before it to the highest standards. The majority of the department's staff are veterans, including several combat veterans, and share a dedication and passion for the cause of serving other veterans. Everyone in ODVS will continue to give their utmost efforts to provide veterans and their families with the best service and support possible at the greatest value to taxpayers.





**“This will  
remain the land  
of the free  
only so long as  
it is the home  
of the brave.”**

**– Elmer Davis**

Journalist, author and  
Director of the U.S. Office  
of War Information  
during World War II