

# Ohio Department of **VETERANS SERVICES**

2016 Annual Report

gratitude.



find it here.



**John R. Kasich, Governor**  
**Chip Tansill, Director**

## Director's Message

Ohio is home to more than 848,000 veterans – the sixth largest population of veterans in the United States. The Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) serves those who have served by actively identifying, connecting with, and advocating for veterans and their families.

Recent education and employment reforms established by the Kasich Administration and the Ohio General Assembly are making it easier for employers to hire veterans and for veterans to jump-start their careers or receive free college credit for their military experience.

Here are just a few reasons why Ohio is the best state for veterans and military families:

- A new fast track to jobs and education for veterans via [OhioMeansVeteranJobs.com](http://OhioMeansVeteranJobs.com)
- Free college credit for military experience at all of Ohio's 37 public colleges and universities
- Ohio Veterans Bonus that pays between \$500 and \$1,500 to eligible Afghanistan veterans
- County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) in all 88 counties to help veterans applying for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare or filing a VA claim for compensation and pension. CVSOs also provide free transportation to medical appointments and emergency financial assistance for veterans in need.

Military families appreciate the supportive community and quality of care we provide to Ohio's wartime veterans in the state veterans' homes in Sandusky and Georgetown.

Together with our partners, ODVS continues to connect more Ohio veterans to the benefits and resources they have earned by virtue of their service to our country. Ohio veterans received \$195 million more in compensation and pension payments in federal fiscal year 2015 when compared to FY2014, according to the recently released 2015 Geographic Distribution of VA expenditures report.



Ohio will continue championing innovative education, workforce, and healthcare initiatives that enrich veterans' lives and sustain Ohio's reputation as a national leader on veterans' issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chip Tansill'. The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial 'C' and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Chip Tansill  
Director, Ohio Department of Veterans Services

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## Introduction

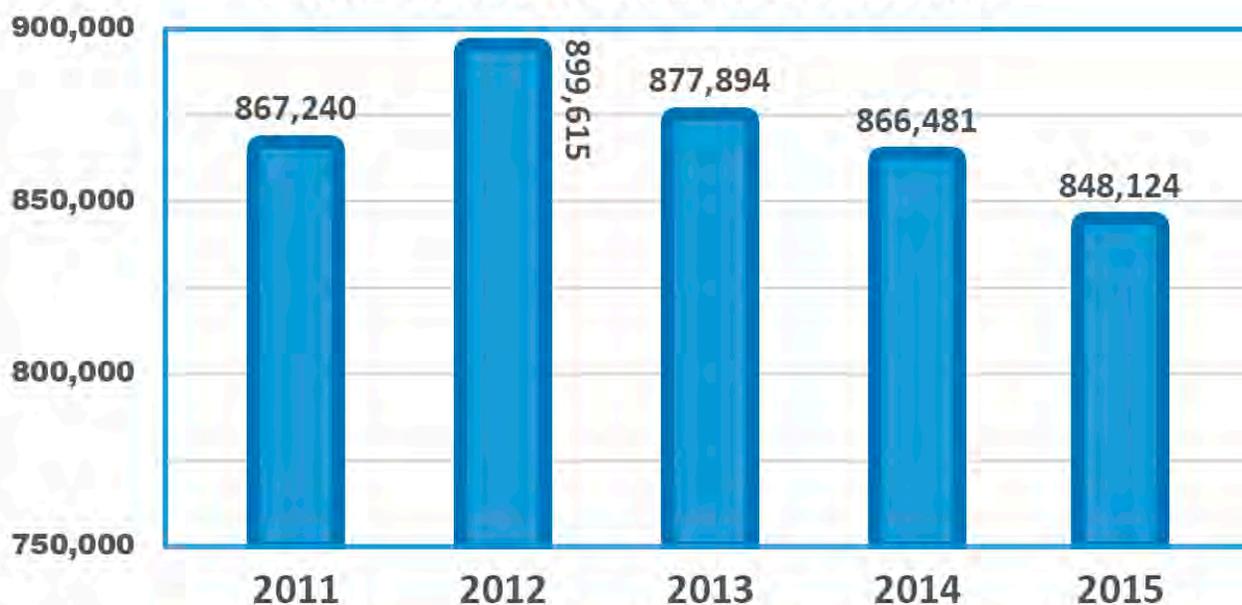
Ohio law gives the Ohio Department of Veterans Services the responsibility to partner with county veteran service commissions and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, in order to “serve those who have served.”

Mission: Provide opportunities and resources for our veteran community through advocacy, collaboration and partnerships.

This mission supports the department’s vision of being “The Trusted Voice for Veterans.”



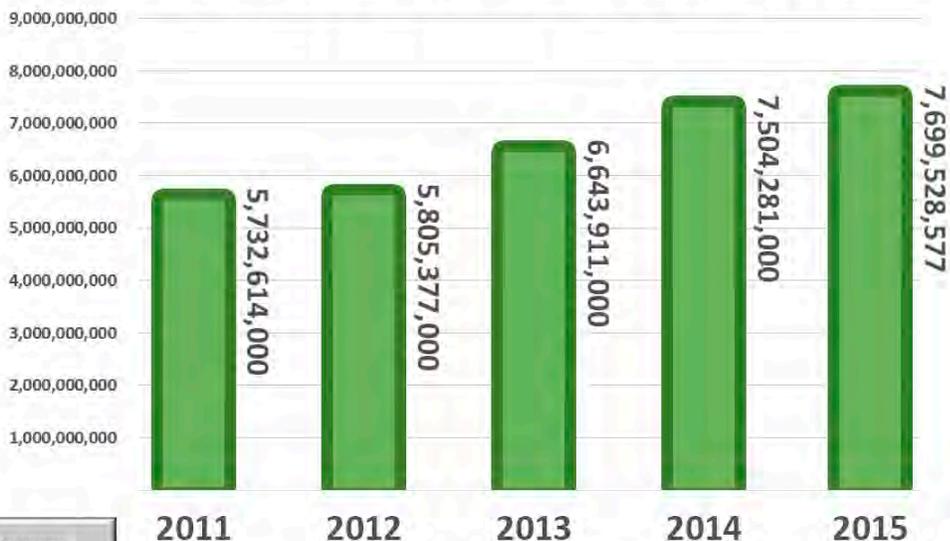
### OHIO VETERAN POPULATION



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

*\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDG) Report 2011 - 2015*

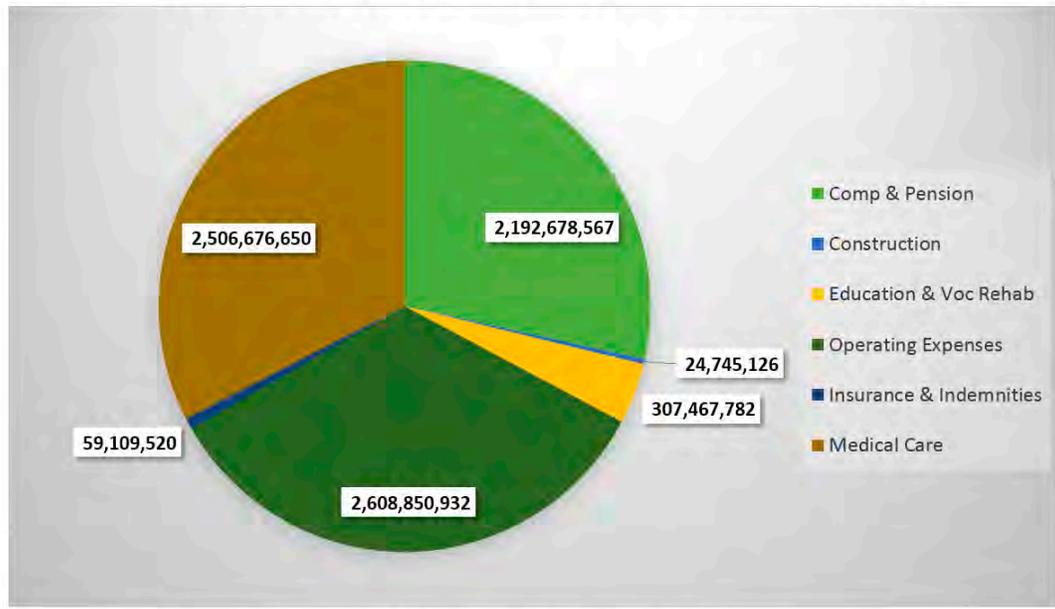
## TOTAL VA EXPENDITURES IN OHIO



Rate of Increase	
11 - 12	73 Million
12 - 13	838 Million
13 - 14	860 Million
14 - 15	195 Million

*\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2011 - 2015*  
 A primary focus of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services is to direct former service members to all the programs and benefits at their avail by encouraging them to visit their County Veterans Service Office. This increased awareness has enabled the VA to raise its expenditures for the benefit of Ohio veterans.

## WHAT MAKES UP THE \$7.7 BILLION



*\*Source - VA Annual Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report 2015*

## Serving & Supporting

Fulfilling the mission of providing opportunities and resources for our veteran community brings with it the challenge of identifying and contacting veterans. The department and its partners work to identify and connect veterans and military families with the benefits and opportunities they have earned through their military service. Veterans of all eras often don't realize they may qualify for benefits.

Once veterans are identified, the process to connect them to benefits through their local County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) begins. The CVSO works 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 service officers and commissioners within the 88 CVSOs to help veterans filing VA claims and to ensure veterans are connected to resources at the state, local and federal level. The CVSOs help veterans apply for benefits, offer free transportation to medical appointments and provide direct financial assistance when necessary.

## Welcoming Transitioning Veterans Home

The federal government estimates 200,000 service members will leave the military every year. We estimate that about 10,000 of those service members will have Ohio homes of record.



In May 2016, ODVS sent personal letters to the nearly 8,000 veterans with Ohio homes of record who transitioned out of the military in the last 10 months. We now are mailing letters to transitioning veterans within one month of receiving their DD214 discharge certificate.

Our goal is to show our gratitude. We want to ensure service members leaving the military know everything Ohio has to offer veterans and military families.

It is imperative that returning service members enjoy a post-military life with proper health care and a head start on a new career. Ideally we would like these brave men and women to already have a job when they come home. With more than 190,000 job openings on [OhioMeansJobs.com](http://OhioMeansJobs.com) in April 2016, we are confident that every veteran who wants to work can find a good job in Ohio.

## Employment

ODVS continues to work together with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and Ohio's workforce system including the Department of Job and Family Services, Ohio Higher Education and the Adjutant General to give priority service to military members and their families living and working in Ohio.

The ODVS Office of Employment, Education, and Policy initiated development of a new Veteran Workforce Section to strengthen relationships with Ohio employers and improve access to employment opportunities for veterans, service members, and their families.

Employers often cite challenges identifying veterans or effectively promoting their employment opportunities to the veteran and military community. With an annual veteran unemployment rate in Ohio around 3.5 percent, the ability of an employer to stand out and compete for the best veteran candidates is absolutely critical.

In examining the robust suite of services available to employers and veteran job-seekers through our state workforce partners, and in conversations with employers, it is clear that a demand exists for intensive



Dir. Tansill joins Cynthia Dungey, Director of Job and Family Services (L), in commending employers at a job fair in Akron.

assistance in establishing veteran and military friendly recruiting and retention initiatives among employers.

Three Regional Veteran Workforce Consultants will be aligned with the JobsOhio Regional Network Partners. These consultants will conduct outreach to employers in their regions individually and in collaboration with our state workforce partners.

They will consult with employers to identify their service needs in becoming a veteran and military friendly workplace and develop training and assistance products to address those needs.

The Veteran Workforce Section will provide ODVS the opportunity to better promote all the veteran employment business services available through JobsOhio, [OhioMeansJobs.com](http://OhioMeansJobs.com), Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, and Ohio National Guard Employment Enhancement Program.

The ODVS Veteran Workforce Section already has built constructive collaborative relationships with our state workforce partners and has begun scheduling local and regional employer training opportunities through local Chambers of Commerce.



Dir. Tansill and Asst. Dir. Cappone (R) congratulate Policy Administrator Danny Eakins, winner of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Veterans Small Business Champion Award.

In FY2017, the Workforce Section will build on ODVS' prior relationships with more than 160 employers around Ohio and establish a permanent, regionally based presence in support of Ohio's veterans and veteran employers.

## Higher Education

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services continued its collaboration with the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the University System of Ohio (USO) in the implementation of the HB488 (130th General Assembly) veteran education provisions through the Military Strategic Implementation Team. During FY2016 the USO met the new legal requirement to have a dedicated Veteran Point of Contact office established at all of Ohio's 37 public colleges and universities.

This year also saw rapid expansion in the number of Ohio-specific Military Transfer Assurance Guides (MTAGs) that make it easier for veterans and service members to apply their military education, training and experience towards meaningful college credit. With the recent addition of 61 MTAGs in electrical and industrial engineering, there are now more than 130 MTAGs available through the University System with many more pending approval that will be established in the coming year.



Dir. Tansill (center) and Chancellor of the Ohio Dept. of Higher Education John Carey (3rd from L) meet with students from Shawnee State University.

In FY2016, ODVS and Ohio Department of Higher Education continued their long collaboration in providing higher education opportunities to the children of killed-in-action and severely disabled war veterans through the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship.

For the 2015-2016 school year, the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship Board awarded more than \$6.8 million in scholarships to

920 students attending 67 public, private, and non-profit higher education institutions around the state. In Governor Kasich's operating budget, funding for the War Orphans Scholarship Fund was increased 30 percent over the FY 2016 -2017 biennium.

## Veterans Educational Programs

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services is the Ohio agency for the federally funded Veterans Educational Programs office, which oversees the Troops to Teachers program and State Approving Agency for Veterans Training.

### Troops To Teachers

Troops to Teachers assists veterans in obtaining teaching certificates and provides counseling and mentoring to place veterans in high-needs schools, not only to teach, but to serve as positive role models in their schools and local communities.

### Educator Licenses Fees Eliminated

The Ohio Department of Education eliminated fees for educator licenses to recognize the contributions of military families. The fees for any initial Ohio educator license, permit or certificate – or for a renewal – will be waived for candidates who are veterans

with honorable discharges or current service members of all branches of the United States Armed Forces, the National Guard or Reserve, and the Ohio Military Reserve or Ohio Naval Militia (under the Ohio Adjutant General). Spouses of active duty service members also may receive a license free of charge.

### State Approving Agency

The principal role of the SAA is to promote and safeguard quality education and training programs for all veterans/dependents and to ensure education and training opportunities meet the changing needs of veterans.

There are more than 790 approved Ohio institutions where veterans/dependents are able to use their Post 9/11 GI Bill® educational benefits. Each year the VA contractually requires the SAA to review these programs offered by institutions for validity and to perform 118 compliance surveys (audits) of institutions predetermined by the VA. These surveys acknowledge the reporting accuracy of tuition/fees schools make on behalf of the veteran. In federal FY2015, the VA spent more than \$307 million in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation, employment and education.



## Ohio Veterans Bonus

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.

The deadline for Ohio Persian Gulf War and Iraq War veterans has passed.

The Bonus will remain in effect for veterans who served in Afghanistan, or were assigned anywhere else in the world, from Oct. 7, 2001 until the President declares an end to our involvement in Afghanistan. Eligible applicants will have three years after the President declares an end to our involvement in Afghanistan to apply.

The Ohio Veterans Bonus program has paid more than \$74 million to more than 90,650 Ohio veterans and military families as of June 17, 2016.

## Training & Standards

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services coordinates the training and certification for Ohio's County Veterans Service Officers and County Veterans Service Commissioners in all 88 counties. The training provided throughout the year allows members to stay cognizant of changes in federal and state benefits and the impact these changes may

have on the operation of the veterans service commission.



Dir. Tansill speaks during County Veterans Service Commissioners Training.

ODVS trained more than 430 Commissioners during FY2016 and held separate training for 50 newly appointed Commissioners on their duties and responsibilities under Ohio Revised Code Title 59, the Sunshine Laws, and ethics.

The most recent fall and spring conferences provided training to over 390 County Veterans Service Offices representing all 88 counties and the new CVSO school provided training to over 82 newly appointed service officers in various counties. ODVS also conducted eight district training events that provided information on shared services available within their county as well as employment resources to their veteran population.

## Veterans Affairs Regional Office

ODVS has had a liaison office at the Cleveland Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) since 2011. The liaison office continuously works to find ways to improve claims processing, promote and support information technology, and assist in special case management. ODVS's liaison role allows for quality assurance of claims processing and assistance with claims that need immediate attention or special management.

One of the greatest benefits of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services' liaison with the VARO is a partnership to assist the CVSOs by providing information and status of claims filed. The VARO has extended computer systems access to qualified and trained CVSOs. This access allows the county offices to ensure claims are received, monitor the process and view rating decisions accordingly.

## Helping Ohio Veterans with Needs

### Access to Community-based Mental Health Services

In FY2016, ODVS built on efforts to expand the availability of military culturally competent behavioral health services through the Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) initiative.

Ohio's initiative was established in partnership with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Ohio Brain Injury Program, Ohio National Guard, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Department of Defense.

The SBHP initiative provides training to non-VA behavioral health providers in communities throughout Ohio. Those providers are then eligible to be included as part of an online registry at <http://starproviders.org> allowing veterans, their caregivers and supporters to identify nearby providers who can assist them regardless of discharge or veteran eligibility status. Nearly 800 behavioral health providers have received military culture training and almost 200 have been added, or applied to be added, to the online registry.



## Diverting Veterans from Medicaid to the Veterans Benefits They Have Earned

Since June 2015, ODVS has made contact with thousands of Ohio veterans who requested information about Medicaid coverage. Most of these veterans were not receiving the VA benefits they may be eligible for based on their military service. ODVS referred these veterans to County Veterans Service Offices for assistance in applying for VA benefits, instead of going on Medicaid. Thanks to these referrals, veterans may receive a more comprehensive array of services and benefits without first having to spend down assets or meet other thresholds required for Medicaid eligibility. The program is now in law thanks to the passage of Senate Bill 10.

## Expansion of Extended Homestead Tax Exemption

Veterans receiving compensation for individual unemployability often have “invisible wounds” and face other challenges that can make it uniquely difficult for them to find and maintain meaningful employment. Expanding eligibility for the extended homestead tax exemption to them will help ease financial burdens.

The expanded extended homestead tax exemption permits eligible veterans to deduct \$50,000 from the value of their primary property of residence for purposes of assessing property taxes. (Age and income limitations applicable to the regular homestead tax exemption do not apply to the extended homestead tax exemption.)

## Preventing Homelessness

In 2009, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced an initiative to end veteran homelessness across the United States by the end of calendar year 2015. Its stated goal was to achieve and sustain “functional zero” – a well-coordinated and efficient community system that assures homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.



A volunteer at the Valor Home in Lorain, which provides food and shelter for transitioning homeless male veterans.

ODVS has worked with the VA here in Ohio to help connect its homeless outreach and service staff with Ohio’s network of 88 County Veteran Services Offices that provide

financial assistance and VA disability and pension claims assistance to veterans and their families. In FY2016, these efforts have included incorporating VA Homelessness information and coordinating briefings into ODVS-supported training for more than 600 County Veterans Services Commissioners and Service Officers.

During this fiscal year, the VA provided more than 2,000 supportive housing vouchers to assist homeless veterans in Ohio with procuring and maintaining housing. Thirteen Ohio public housing agencies received \$17 million in grants to provide supportive services for at-risk veteran families to prevent homelessness.

## Supporting Justice-Involved Veterans

It is important to ensure that veterans in the justice system are given the resources to succeed afterwards, which makes it a priority for ODVS.

Ohio continues to be a leader in the Veterans Treatment Court movement, with 21 specialty dockets in Ohio courts. Some courts that don't have the resources or veteran population to support a regular Veterans Court are incorporating the principles and procedures into their regular case management when the defendant identifies as a veteran.

ODVS also works closely with the **Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction** and the **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 to help prevent recidivism.

## Women Veterans

Ohio is home to more than 67,000 female veterans, which ranks 7th in the nation. ODVS works closely with women veterans organizations to ensure their voices are heard. In the fall of 2015, more than 500 female veterans attended the Women Veterans Conference, which is a biennial event. Also, ODVS collaborated with the Ohio Department of Public Safety to introduce the first-ever women veterans license plate.



## Ohio Veterans Homes

The Ohio Veterans Homes are comprised of three facilities – a nursing home located in Georgetown, and a nursing home and a domiciliary located in Sandusky. Each one offers a quality of life which emphasizes privacy, encourages independence, provides comfort and security, and meets social needs.

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.

The Homes continue providing quality care at affordable rates. Per-resident per diem funding by the VA, combined with a sliding scale resident assessment based on ability to pay, provides a long-term care value for veterans and their families.

The Ohio Veterans Homes continue to decrease their reliance on General Revenue Fund from FY2004 when funding comprised 61 percent of the homes budget to 37.9 percent in FY2016. VA per diem funding, meanwhile, increased from 28 percent to 39.5 percent of OVH's budget.



## Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame

The Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame (HOF) was established in 1992 to recognize the post-military achievements of veterans in community service after their military service ended. Charter members of the Hall's Class of 1993 included the six Ohio military veterans who were elected President of the United States and all Ohio's Medal of Honor recipients. Honorees of the past 22 years include astronauts, government officials, community leaders, and veterans' advocates. Last year's class of distinguished veterans brings the Hall's enshrinement total to 498.

The HOF Executive Committee is comprised entirely of veterans, and its members serve as advisors for the HOF. They select up to 20 inductees annually from nominations provided by the citizens of Ohio. Men and women chosen for induction into the HOF come from all eras, all branches of service and all walks of life.



The Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame is on permanent display on the second floor of the Riffe Center for Government and the Arts at 77 S. High St. in downtown Columbus.

## Veterans Records

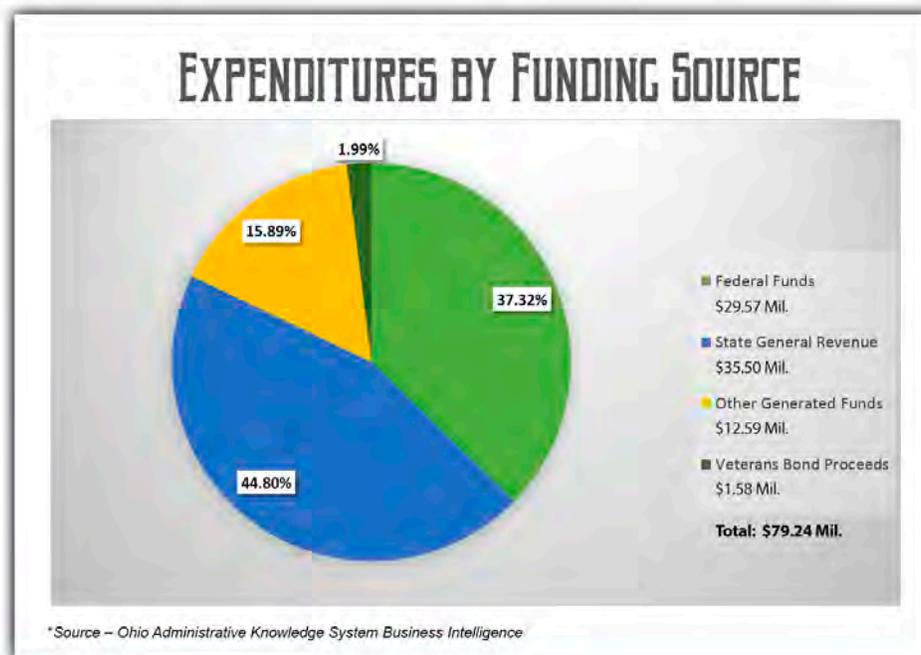
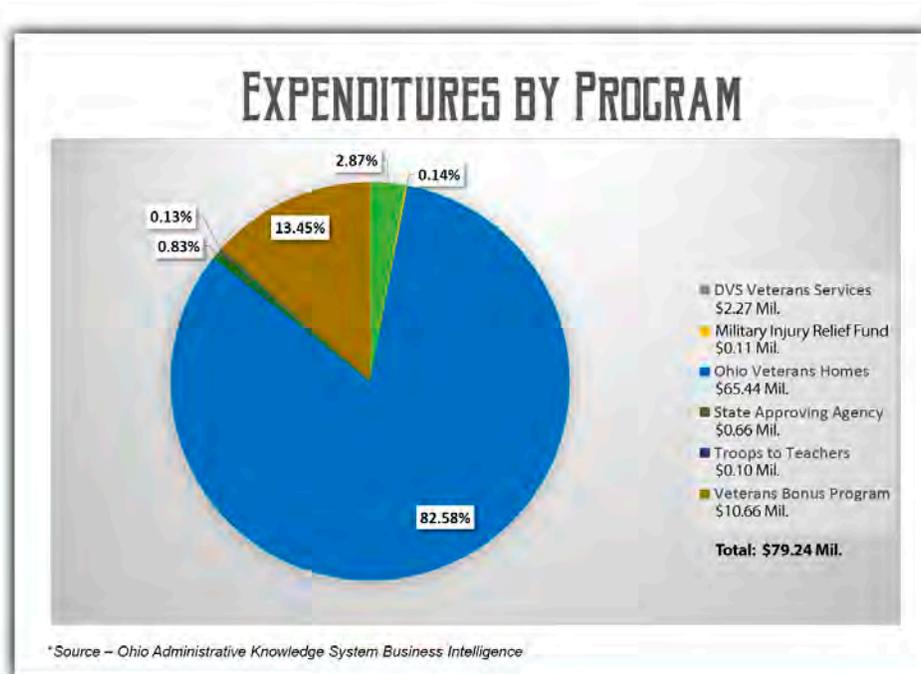
ODVS is proud to be the first state veterans agency in the nation to be granted full access to the Defense Personnel Records Information System (DPRIS). Currently DPRIS is used by all 88 County Veterans Service Offices, with more than 141 employees enrolled with accounts.

Ohio's use of the DPRIS system has cut down the amount of time that recently discharged Global War on Terrorism era veterans have to wait in order to certify their eligibility for locally funded benefits including emergency housing and shelters, emergency financial assistance, food pantries, transportation and fuel card programs. With DPRIS an applicant's eligibility can be verified typically within about 30 minutes of arriving at a County Veterans Service Office.

ODVS stores 1,420,658 discharge records in our Onbase software program which enables easy organization and access to microfilm archives and electronic storage of modern day discharge certificates (DD214s and DD215s) obtained through the Department of Defense.

The records office also maintains nearly complete muster logs from wars of our late generations detailing the heroic service of nearly 4.3 million Ohioans at war as far back as The War of 1812 through the completion of the First World War. These records are bound in 49 historic hard-cover log books.

The records office received approximately 3,822 requests for records between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016, with an average of 74 requests per week.



The Ohio Department of Veterans Services continues to “serve those who have served” by actively identifying, connecting with, and advocating for veterans and their families. Stay informed on the many ways Ohio supports its veterans by visiting [OhioVets.gov](http://OhioVets.gov) and registering for email updates.