



# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*WWII Memorial Dedication*



*Legislative Update*



*Reintegration*



*CVSO Grant Program*



*State Soldiers Assistance Program*

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# MINNESOTA

## ANNUAL REPORT 2007

Clark Dyrud, Commissioner  
Michael Pugliese, Deputy Commissioner

**Mission:** To serve the veterans of Minnesota, their dependents and survivors; and, to secure all benefits and services afforded them under state and federal law.

**Concentration:** The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) focuses on the needs of veterans while functioning as a single, comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served in the military.



Veterans Service Building

## From the Desk of the Commissioner:

Fiscal Year 2007 was filled with memorable events, and significant policy and programming changes. The year's events began with the Governor's Military and Veterans Support Cabinet's Summit, followed by the Veterans Legislative Day on the Hill, and concluded with the WWII Memorial Dedication where over 23,000 Minnesotans filled the Capitol Mall. Our state's legislature passed, and Governor Pawlenty signed into law, one of the largest veterans spending bills in Minnesota history. Programs and initiatives included in the legislative package were then implemented by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA).

Some of the accomplishments of the past year include:

- MDVA staff working together with County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) and other agencies helping to reintegrate over 3000 Minnesota soldiers who were returning from deployment. MDVA Enhancement Grants provided funding for CVSO reintegration expenses.
- first in the nation programs, such as LinkVet, which allowed thousands of veterans to have one-stop access to veterans benefits experts and 24 hour a day/seven days a week crisis counselors.
- the Higher Education Veterans, Enhancement Grants to County Veterans Service Officers, Tribal Veterans Service Officer, Outreach and Marketing Programs that greatly increased access to services for our state's veterans, especially women, minority and our returning Iraq veterans.
- the State Soldiers Assistance Program which expanded to include special needs grants for families of veterans who are experiencing financial hardship.
- the Minnesota GI Bill that provided additional educational assistance to eligible veterans and to the children of the spouses of deceased and severely disabled veterans.

It has been a remarkable year. However, there is still much work to do. Many veterans are still not receiving the services for which they are eligible, and it is the mission of the Minnesota Department of Affairs to vigorously pursue every option to ensure that veterans receive the benefits they earned.

I want to thank the MDVA staff, CVSOs, Veterans Service Organizations, private and non-profit organizations for their energy, enthusiasm and dedication to Minnesota's veterans. People not programs make the difference in service delivery, and it is your professional excellence and hard work that made FY 2007 such a success.

Sincerely,



Clark Dyrud, Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

## About Veterans Affairs:

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is a cabinet level agency and is a separate and distinct organization from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs is lead by a Commissioner who is appointed by the Governor, and one Deputy Commissioner who is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Commissioner.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' mission and purpose is to serve the veterans of Minnesota. Since its creation in 1943 (M.S. Chapter 196), the department accomplishes its mission by focusing on the needs of veterans and functioning as a single comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served in the military.

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides overall leadership and direction to the veteran community through collaboration with public and private service providers. The core functions of the Department of Veterans Affairs are to:

- ◆ Promote self-sufficiency and personal responsibility through a temporary safety net of benefits and services;
- ◆ Supply representation to clients pursuing claims for federal veterans benefits;
- ◆ Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life; and
- ◆ Provide dignified and compassionate committal services at the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery.

The department has office locations around the state. The Central Office is located in the Veterans Service Building; the Claims and Outreach divisions are located at the VA Regional Office in St Paul and in the VA Regional Office in Fargo, ND. The department's Higher Education Assistance Program is located on 54 Higher Education campuses around the state; while, the Tribal Veteran Service Officers are located on the 7 northern Minnesota Indian Reservations.

The department serves over 420,000 Minnesota veterans as well as their dependents and survivors with assistance from the 87 County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) and representatives from Minnesota's Congressionally Chartered Veterans' Service Organizations. The department budget activities are divided between Programs and Services and Veteran Health Care.

## Agency Profile:

*The department is comprised of three divisions: Benefits; Services; and Departmental Operations.*

The following programs fall under the **Benefits Division**:

- ◆ **State Soldiers Assistance Program** provides temporary cash assistance in the form of shelter payments, utilities, and personal needs grants to veterans who are unable to work as a result of temporary disability. Dental and optical needs for veterans and their dependents are also available for those who meet strict income and asset guidelines. A “special needs” allowance has been added to cover emergency needs of veterans, military personnel and their families.
- ◆ **Grant to Counties Program** provides the County Veterans Service Offices with an opportunity to submit proposals for special funding to enhance the benefits and services provided to veterans, with an emphasis on outreach, reintegration, collaboration with other social service agencies, and reducing homelessness among veterans.
- ◆ **Operational Improvement Grants** are available to those County Veterans Service Officers who attend training and continuing education classes and pass the MDVA’s annual certification test.
- ◆ **MDVA Surviving Spouse/Dependent Education Benefit** in the form of a one-time grant of \$750 is available to surviving spouse/dependents each year until a bachelors degree is obtained. The survivors of veterans who died as a result of a service connected injury or disease are also eligible to receive this educational grant.
- ◆ **Veterans Preference Act** gives most veterans a limited preference over non-veterans in hiring and promotion for most Minnesota public employment positions, as granted in Minnesota Statutes. The department enforces the Veterans Preference Act and represents veterans in pursuing relief when these rights have been violated.
- ◆ **LinkVet** is a toll-free, one-stop customer service line for all Minnesota veterans. MDVA, along with the Crisis Connection, will provide information referral, immediate crisis intervention and psychological counseling 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



The following programs fall under the **Services Division**:

- ◆ **Claims** offices at Fort Snelling and Fargo/Moorhead provide veterans and their families with representation before the US Department of Veterans Affairs and the Board of Veterans Appeals when requesting federal benefits and services. These claims services are free of charge for veterans.

- ◆ **Outreach** personnel concentrate on assisting the homeless, minority, and women veterans as well as other underserved veterans in the state. They have a strong presence in the community, host town hall meetings and attend veteran specific events in an effort to educate veterans on the help and resources available to them.



- ◆ **Veterans Service Organizations** receive state funding through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the Vietnam Veterans of American (VVA) are congressionally chartered veterans' organizations authorized to represent veterans, dependents, widows, and orphans submitting claims before the local, state and federal government.

- ◆ **Support Our Troop License Plates** proceeds are deposited in a Special Revenue Fund and split between the Department of Military Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs. These funds are used for financial support of military families and the Department of Veterans Affairs for grants to veteran service organizations and outreach to underserved veterans.



The following functions fall under the **Departmental Operations**:

- ◆ **Cemetery Operations** oversees the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery in Little Falls, which provides dignified burial services to Minnesota veterans. Widows and widowers are also eligible for burial at the Little Falls State Cemetery.
- ◆ **Higher Education Veterans Assistance Offices on Campus** provides assistance to veterans at all public and private higher education institutions across the state.
- ◆ **Information Technology** coordinates internal and external web applications, including a centralized, one-stop information website for Minnesota veterans at: [Minnesotaveteran.org](http://Minnesotaveteran.org)
- ◆ **Administrative Services** are responsible for all budgeting, financial transactions, human resource management, affirmative action, MAPS, and SEMA4 dealings within the department.



**Non-budgetary programs within Departmental Operations:**

- ◆ **Recently Separated Veterans Program (RSVP)** is a collaborative effort between MDVA and the Department of Employment and Economic Development in welcoming home Minnesota veterans discharged from active duty with an informational letter on veteran's benefits and services, as well as the Department of Economic Security's programs and services.



- ◆ **State Approving Agency (SAA)** oversees the federal GI Bill's Minnesota Education and Training Programs on behalf of our veterans and other eligible individuals to ensure all programs meet the necessary requirements prescribed in federal law.

## 2007 ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

**Governor's Military and Veterans Support Cabinet's Minnesota Summit and Yellow Ribbon Task Force.** On September 21, 2006, over 700 Minnesota veterans had the opportunity to interface over 70 businesses, state and federal agencies, non-profit and private sector service providers, and veterans service organizations at this statewide summit.

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs also worked with the Yellow Ribbon Task Force to produce policies and initiatives to serve not only returning veterans, but the entire veterans' community. LinkVet, the veterans linkage line that provides 24/7 crisis intervention, was one of the programs that was developed as a part of this process.



**Minnesota GI Bill** was established to provide post-secondary educational assistance (last dollar in) to eligible Minnesota veterans and to the children and spouses of deceased and severely disabled veterans. The total education assistance for any eligible person who is a full-time student must not exceed \$1000/semester or term of enrollment, \$2000 per state fiscal year and \$10,000 in a life-time.



Reintegration

**County Veterans Service Officer Enhancement Grant** program, which was created in 2006, received an additional \$1.5 million in funding. These competitive grants are directed toward enhancing veterans outreach efforts; helping reintegration of returning combat veterans; collaborating with other social service agencies, educational institutions, and other community resources; and reducing homelessness among veterans.

**Higher Education Campus Representatives** program received a funding increase of \$900,000 for the biennium to support the 13 campus veterans assistance officers at all the public and private higher education institutions in Minnesota.

## 2007 ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

**WWII Memorial Dedication** took place on June 9, 2007, on the grounds of the Minnesota State Capitol, with over 22,000 in attendance. Deputy Commissioner Michael Pugliese began the day as he introduced the roll call of the names of Minnesota's WWII casualties. Visitors to the event enjoyed presentations and exhibits of vintage military equipment and vehicles while being served free donuts and coffee by Salvation Army Donut girls dressed in WWII attire. Minnesota's Blue Star Moms presented WWII veterans in attendance with a medallion as a memento of the event. Almost 10,000 pieces of cake were served during the reception following the program. The dedication program began promptly at 2:00 p.m. with the largest fly-over of WWII aircraft in over 30 years. The event concluded with a second flyover of WWII aircraft in the missing man formation followed by a 21-gun salute and echo taps.

WWII Memorial Dedication



### **Veterans Legislative Day on the Hill**

Tuesday, January 30, 2007, was Veterans Day on the Hill. Participants gathered in the Veterans Service Building for lunch and a briefing on how to present veterans initiatives to their legislators. They attended rally in the Capitol Rotunda where Governor Pawlenty addressed the crowd. After the rally the veterans spent the remainder of the afternoon meeting with their legislators.



**Tribal Veteran Service Officers (TVSO)** program received the requested start-up funding of \$1.5 million for the biennium to expand the outreach efforts to an underserved veterans population. TVSOs will be placed on northern Minnesota tribal reservations and one will be located in the metro area.

# FY2007 FINANCIAL PROFILE - AGENCY

DOLLARS IN THOUSANDS

## DIRECT APPROPRIATIONS BY FUND

GENERAL FUND  
ING

FY2007 ACTUAL SPEND-

CURRENT APPROPRIATION	7,345
FORECAST BASE	7,345

MISC SPECIAL REVENUE

CURRENT APPROPRIATION	855
FORECAST BASE	855

EXPENDITURES BY FUND

### DIRECT APPROPRIATIONS

GENERAL	8,426
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MISC SPECIAL REVENUE	472
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### STATUTORY APPROPRIATIONS

MISC SPECIAL REVENUE	114
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FEDERAL	400
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MISCELLANEOUS AGENCY	437
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GIFT	4
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TOTAL	9,853
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EXPENDITURES BY CATEGORY

TOTAL COMPENSATION	3,555
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OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES	1,306
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PAYMENTS TO INDIVIDUALS	3,663
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LOCAL ASSISTANCE	1,329
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TOTAL	9,853
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EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM

BENEFITS	4,058
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SERVICES	2,203
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DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS	3,592
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TOTAL	9,853
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FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (FTE)

55.9

## VETERANS ASSISTANCE NUMBERS AT A GLANCE:

- ◆ IN FY2007, MINNESOTA VETERANS RECEIVED MORE THAN \$200 MILLION IN FEDERAL VETERANS' BENEFITS AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE DEPARTMENT'S CLAIMS AND OUTREACH OFFICES.
- ◆ OVER 2,000 VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES RECEIVE STATE SOLDIERS ASSISTANCE BENEFITS ANNUALLY.
- ◆ VETERANS ASSISTANCE OFFICES ON CAMPUS ARE OPERATIONAL AND ASSISTED 593 VETERANS AT MINNESOTA'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN FY 2007.
- ◆ OUTREACH OFFICES HAVE SERVED APPROXIMATELY 1,500 VETERANS SINCE 2004.
- ◆ SUPPORT OUR TROOPS LICENSE PLATES HAVE GENERATED MORE THAN \$450,000 FOR VETERANS PROGRAMS IN FY2007.
- ◆ IN CALENDAR YEAR 2007, MDVA CLAIMS AND OUTREACH OFFICES HAVE SERVED AS POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR APPROXIMATELY 16,000 VETERANS.
- ◆ A CENTRALIZED ONE-STOP WEBSITE IS OPERATIONAL TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON VETERANS' BENEFITS AND SERVICES OFFERED BY STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
- ◆ THE "LINKVET" TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE LINE PROVIDES INFORMATION ON VETERANS' BENEFITS, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, AND REINTEGRATION SERVICES.



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This information is available in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, audio tape and computer disk.