



# NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

Newsletter

November-December 2010



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*Saratoga County Rural Preservation Company, pictured above, is one of 26 grantees for a new DOL-VETS program serving homeless female veterans and veterans with families.*

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## **Homeless Female Vets, Vets with Families Get Dedicated Services through VETS**

*By Randy Brown*

*NCHV Communications Officer*

This summer, the U.S. Department of Labor-Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) announced the recipients of over \$5 million in Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) grant funding dedicated to assisting homeless female veterans and homeless veterans with families.

DOL-VETS made 26 grants in 14 states and the District of Columbia to provide job training, counseling and placement services (including job readiness, and literacy and skills training) that will more effectively reintegrate homeless female veterans and veterans with families into the labor force.

With more women serving in the military than ever before, the number of homeless female veterans has likewise increased. Service providers, having primarily dealt with male homeless veterans in the past, must now answer the question of how to best provide services to female homeless veterans.

Veterans with families are also an emerging subpopulation that faces unique challenges. Rarely is a homeless veteran able to receive comprehensive services for his or her family in addition to himself or herself.

These grants seek to successfully address these complex issues, and to build up programs for homeless female veterans and veterans with families that can be expanded and replicated.

*St. Francis House – Little Rock, AR*

While the grant program is still new, limiting data on results, grantees have been providing services for several months now. One grantee, St. Francis House in Little Rock, AR, shared some insights four months into the program.

“HVRP programs fill a special need because we serve veterans who may be shunned by other programs and services because of problems such as severe PTSD, long histories of substance abuse, serious psychosocial problems, legal issues, and those who are HIV-positive,” said Eloise Cotton, Employment Coordinator for St. Francis House’s new DOL-VETS-funded program.

According to Cotton, “These veterans require more time-consuming, specialized, intensive assessment,

referrals and counseling than is possible in other programs that work with veterans seeking employment.”

St. Francis House, established in 1970 as a social outreach of the Episcopal Church, has grown to provide intake and counseling, food baskets, clothing, furniture, houseware, financial assistance, other social services, veterans programs and a health clinic. In 2009, St. Francis House served 20,426 families and 45,117 individuals.

One of DOL’s most successful grant programs, HVRP has a strong record of success. But Cotton pointed out some of the unique challenges affecting the target populations of this program. “Homeless women veterans and single veterans with families face the difficult task of assimilating back into civilian and family lifestyles,” she said. “Their transition will depend upon their experiences and the support systems they have that can help them.”

“While women veterans share a myriad of challenges with their fellow male service members, they also face issues unique to their gender as well as not being able to take care of themselves or their family,” Cotton continued. To begin addressing each veteran’s individual needs, the veterans are given one-on-one service so that staff are able to get a strong understanding of each individual’s needs.

St. Francis House has developed partnerships with different agencies to ensure veterans have access to helpful services, especially those relating to employment. Arkansas Workforce Center is one key partner that provides access to job search tools, Job Clubs, and One-Stop Center services. The Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) is also available through Arkansas Workforce Center. Additionally, an agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Drop-in Center is in place, and the VA Outreach Program Manager participates in outreach to and assessment of veterans.

According to Cotton, one of the top priorities in serving homeless women veterans and single veterans with families is making sure there is more than one housing option available. Funding should also be set aside for emergency shelters for women and veterans with dependent children. Transportation is another important aspect: Veterans and their children will need a way to get to appointments, school and other necessities. Another imperative is providing ample child care at the times needed while veterans work through their programs.

“Our biggest challenge in serving this population effectively is knowing exactly where to find the female veterans and the veterans with families,” Cotton said. “Another problem we face in dealing with this population is not having adequate space or [housing] organizations that are willing to accept veterans with children.”

*Saratoga County Rural Preservation Company – Ballston Spa, NY*

The Saratoga County Rural Preservation Company (SCRPC) in Ballston Spa, NY, has been an HVRP grantee since 2000 and is a recent recipient of DOL-VETS program funding for homeless women veterans and single veterans with families. The veterans who fall within this new target population will have access to all of SCRPC’s services.

“These veterans have all the same challenges that a single male veteran will have but will also have the challenge of child care, child support, education, and health care for children,” said Michael Brown, an Employment Specialist at SCRPC. “Female veterans are less likely to self-identify as veterans.”

He also pointed out that some services are slow to recognize and address the female veterans population, and don’t have the necessary programs and services in place.

SCRPC programs are continuously evaluated and improved upon, and rely greatly upon partnerships.

“The most helpful partnership is all of them,” Brown said. “Having partners in health care, child care, employment, legal, financial and educational are vital to treating the cause, not the symptom.”

In addition to the new HVRP grant, SCRPC has been approved for an 11-bed female VA Grant and Per Diem facility. “We will work closely with the VA and any other service agency that can help our veterans,” Brown said.

He also stressed that female veterans and veterans with families should be made a part of the process. “This means treating them as a person, not a number.”

SCRPC sees a number of challenges that face these groups: The public is generally unaware of their unique issues, and service providers do not usually provide them dedicated services, in part because they lack the financial means to do so.

St. Francis House, SCRCP and the other 24 grantees under this program seek to be leaders in providing

services to these specific populations. Service providers should become aware of these demographics, if they are not already, and find ways to serve all veterans, regardless of their unique situations.

## **Recommendations of the VA Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans**

*By Matt Gornick*

*NCHV Program and Policy Assistant*

For eight years, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans – made up of community-based providers, treatment experts, state veterans affairs officials, VA staff, advocates and formerly homeless veterans – has made recommendations to VA. Its mission is to ensure all veterans are provided the programs and services to aid their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

“The significance of the report is that it really has lead VA policy on homelessness over the eight years it has existed,” said George Basher, Chairman of the Advisory Committee as well as the NCHV Board of Directors. “If you look at the Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans, you are really seeing a compilation of Advisory Committee recommendations over the years. Feedback from VA program offices has improved over time, and we have often been asked to provide comments on proposed program changes and initiatives outside the annual report cycle.”

Basher noted how the Advisory Committee’s role has shifted from general advocacy, asking for “a laundry list of things,” to specific, achievable improvements.

“One of the biggest (accomplishments) was getting VA to embrace permanent supportive housing, but others included special needs grants in GPD,” he said. “As we get we get ready to meet to put next year’s report together I think our role is more one of looking ahead and trying to determine what the need will be going forward – more prevention initiatives, more family-inclusive activities and more community involvement.”

Recommendations from the “2010 Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans” are outlined below.

*The committee’s recommendations are bulleted; each is followed by VA’s response.*

## 1. Payment and inspection systems under GPD need improvement

- Change GPD payment to cost-based funding system that will allow payment contemporaneous with services.

- o Allow payment variation based on geographic, programmatic needs.

- o Needs to include service centers to pay for needed staffing, services.

*VA response:* VA would support legislation that provides options for the current per diem rate-system. ... VA would only support proposals for a legislative change that ensure the providers' accountability for reasonable costs of care and meets standards required of other federal agencies.

- Institute payment modifications to allow VA funds to be used as a match or leverage for other federal funds, and to allow other federal funds to be used without offset by VA.

*VA response:* VA would support legislation that would remove the off-set requirements; however, VA would not support legislation that would limit appropriate accountability of funds paid to providers.

- Establish a uniform system of inspection of community facilities.

*VA response:* Although variations in the interpretation of these standards (found in VHA Handbook 1162.01 Grant and Per Diem) may exist among sites, the GPD Program office works with local teams on a regular basis to ensure consistency. VA believes that it is necessary that local teams inspect provider programs, as the authority for per diem program oversight rests with the host medical center director.

## 2. OEF/OIF veterans post-deployment health services

- VA and DOD, along with Labor, should review the current transition assistance efforts to determine effectiveness and look to see if a model based less on offering information and more on offering services would be more effective.

*VA response:* A portion of the (plan to engage servicemembers during TAP and DTAP) would require each servicemember to develop an individual transition plan that will guide him/her from military to civilian status. ... One assistance approach being considered (by the TAP Steering Committee) is to allow servicemembers to enroll for online courses and select services based on their individual needs and goals.

- Research on prevention of homelessness for recently discharged or about-to-be discharged service members and the development of a screen for "risk of homelessness" should be undertaken as quickly as practical. This review should use Post Deployment Health Assessment and/or Post Deployment Re-assessment information.

*VA response:* National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans is currently conducting an OEF/OIF Risk and Resiliency Study, which is designed to determine risk and protective factors for homelessness among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

- Develop better screening and assessment tools for TBI and better clinical interventions for both TBI and PTSD. While some work has been done the pace needs to quicken in order to enable VA to be more proactive in responding to these newest veterans.

*VA response:* Overview of VA accomplishments...

## 3. Improve delivery of benefits to aid homeless veterans

- Develop a comprehensive method to ensure that all claims for benefits filed by homeless and at-risk veterans be appropriately identified and receive prompt consideration with a tracking system to systematically identify claims from homeless and at-risk veterans.

*VA response:* VBA and VHA are developing a homeless registry to systematically identify and track homeless and at-risk veterans. This system will provide seamless notification to all program offices in VBA and VHA.

- VBA should establish specific performance measures for the VARO Homeless Veteran Outreach Coordinators. These measures should be monitored frequently to ensure effective staff performance and utilization. Also, VBA should reconsider its current staffing to determine if there are adequate resources to reach out to homeless veteran service providers to identify and promptly process eligible claims.

*VA response:* VBA is developing guidance for field offices to clarify the roles and responsibilities of HVOCs. After the guidance is issued, VBA will determine HVOC performance measures and staffing allocations.

- All veterans should be able to participate in training through the Post-9/11 GI Bill that leads to certifications and two-year degree programs.

*VA response:* Legislation is required to change or expand provisions of the Post-9/11 GI Bill; however, individuals may use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for two-year degree programs and may also receive benefits for non-degree programs offered by degree-granting institutions.

- VBA should review its efforts to prevent veteran borrowers from going into foreclosure to identify ways to avoid this whenever possible. Specifically, VBA's Loan Guaranty Service should review and develop an effective plan to make foreclosed properties available to house homeless and low-income veterans.

*VA response:* VBA Loan Guaranty Service concurs with the recommendation to continue to develop the current homelessness prevention program, which offers VA Real Estate Owned properties to eligible nonprofit organizations at discounted rates to shelter homeless veterans.

#### 4. Access to medical care

- VA should report about its "cross walk" between the Mental Health Handbook and the Mental Health Strategic Plan. Also, the Committee needs information about how VHA will assess the unmet primary care and other specialty care needs of the homeless veteran population and develop a plan to address those needs.

*VA response:* The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, authorized by Public Law 110-387, allows for the provision of supportive services to very low-income veteran families in, or transitioning to, permanent housing. ... Supportive Services Grants will provide funding to non-profit organizations to conduct outreach to and work with veterans and their families in order to maintain them in their current housing or to help them gain permanent housing. ... VA is also developing a screening tool to identify women veterans at risk for homelessness as a means to intervene to prevent homelessness and provide better access to housing and employment resources.

#### 5. Permanent housing

- VA should take meaningful action to insure that case managers are hired or community providers are contracted to provide these services in a timely manner and that they are appropriately trained.

*VA response:* VHA has taken measures to ensure that HUD-VASH case managers are hired in a timely manner and that their training is appropriate. ...

Measures include a performance monitor that is a component of each VISN Network Director's performance plan. ... Select VA medical centers were funded to hire homeless substance use disorder (SUD) case managers. ... National regional training conferences have been developed. ... Monthly VISN conference calls [were held]. ... Contracting case management services has been successful in housing vulnerable and chronically homeless veterans rapidly.

#### 6. Surplus land

- VA should use its vast resources to get new housing to veterans where it is needed and not just where facility directors desire it. Also, the Committee requests to be provided with a copy of the plan to spend \$50 million in the appropriations legislation to create housing for homeless veterans on VA land.

*VA response:* After an extensive filtering process to determine which (vacant and underutilized buildings located at VHA facilities) could meet the housing needs of homeless veterans, the Site Review

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Initiative (SRI) process identified 49 priority sites. ... Through the Building Utilization Review and Re-Purpose (BURR) program, VA is looking at an additional 1,100 buildings for supportive housing for veterans. ... Regarding the \$50 million authorized by Congress, VA will be utilizing those funds to “jumpstart” and renovate for environmental and safety concerns those vacant and underutilized buildings that are determined feasible to help eliminate veterans homelessness through VA’s enhanced-use leasing and other VA programs. VA will provide the Committee with a copy of the BURR findings when completed and identify how VA proposes to spend the \$50 million.

### **7. Staffing of homeless programs**

- VA should conduct a personnel audit to determine if the homeless veteran programs are appropriately accounted for and placed. It appears that some (HCHV) staff is being called upon to cover multiple duties due to staff shortages or failure to replace existing staff as new positions are created. A thorough review should be conducted to ensure if there is adequate staffing to perform the needed services.

*VA response:* VA currently collects staffing information regarding mental health and homeless program Full Time Employee (FTE) from facilities, including progress made by facilities in meeting their assigned staffing targets. ... Selected site visits include validation of FTE status. ... Additionally, each VAMC recently completed a local operational plan for executing the Five-Year plan. Included in each plan was a comprehensive report outlining the number of new FTE needed to support programs and initiatives targeted to eliminating homelessness. VAMC operational plans will be used in determining future VAMC staffing needs.

### **8. Increase collaborative efforts with community**

- VA should create a discretionary fund of \$10 to \$25 million to allow community providers to seek funding to support innovative practices that could be used to identify new collaborative ways to serve veterans. This innovation fund could be limited to projects of one-three years with expected quick implementation and be reviewed and monitored by VA’s Centers for Homeless Veterans to determine if these innovative programs have applicability to be replicated in other areas.

*VA response:* The suggestion to create a discretionary fund... is worthy of further consideration. We will review this idea and will seek to add it to the

Committee’s agenda at its next meeting. Additional opportunities to dialogue about this idea would be helpful.

- The Centers for Homeless Veterans should establish regular joint training programs for VA homeless staff and their community partners in order to insure a continuous flow of the latest information on the housing, care and treatment of homeless veterans, as well as provide networking opportunities.

*VA response:* Currently, the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans is compiling a training and education agenda for the remainder of this year. ... VHA agrees that future training offered by the Center include joint education efforts with community providers on the housing, care and treatment of homeless veterans.

### **9. Continue efforts with justice-engaged veterans**

- VHA should revise its self-imposed regulatory barrier that prevents veterans living in “half way houses” from receiving needed health care services. We ask that VA’s Director of Homeless Programs monitor this and that the Committee be briefed on this at its next meeting.

*VA response:* VA concurs with the need for this change and VHA has proposed changes to VA regulation that would enable otherwise eligible veterans living in “half way houses” to receive VA hospital and outpatient services. This regulation (RIN 2900-AN41 “Medical Benefits for Veterans Released from Penal Institutions to Transitional Housing”) was published in the Federal Register on May 12, 2010, for public comment.

### **10. Leadership**

- VA’s efforts for more than 10 years have been led by the smallest office with the least staff at the lowest grade among all federal efforts. ... Just like in the military and civilian world, having rank gives both structure and access to key leaders both inside and outside of government. ... The position of Director of Homeless Programs should be elevated to a Senior Executive Service position.

*VA response:* VA is in the process of reviewing staff needs for the Homeless Veterans Program Office and anticipates that more staff will be added. Grade levels are assigned based on position responsibilities.

### **Issues Resolved or Needing Modest Attention:**

- VA should request Congress to amend title 38 U.S.C. section 2062 to allow veterans living in

HUD-VASH housing to be eligible specifically for dental services.

*VA response:* VA will review this suggestion and will advise the Committee of actions taken related to this recommendation to modify current law. As the Committee correctly notes homeless veterans placed in HUD-VASH are not eligible for dental care under 38 USC, Sec. 2062.

- Funds in excess of \$43 million that have already been appropriated (for the Multifamily Transitional Housing Loan Guarantee Program) and will not be used to fund these loans should be re-programmed into funds that could be used for other homeless prevention activities.

*VA response:* VA agrees that the program be terminated and any remaining funds be used to acquire housing for homeless veterans using the Enhanced Use Lease program, sharing agreements and other contracting methods.



## PUBLIC POLICY

### **New Law Authorizes Program for Homeless Women Vets, Homeless Vets with Children**

*Also reauthorizes HVRP through FY 2011*

On Oct. 13, President Barack Obama signed H.R. 3219, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, into law (Public Law No: 111-275). After passage by the U.S. House of Representatives on July 27, 2009, the U.S. Senate took up the bill and passed it by unanimous consent with an amendment on Sept. 28, 2010. The amendment included two significant homeless veterans provisions: The first reauthorizes the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) through fiscal year (FY) 2011; the second authorizes \$1 million from FY 2011-2015 to provide dedicated services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children.

Both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, led by Sens. Daniel Akaka (D-HI) and Richard Burr (R-NC) and Reps. Bob Filner (D-CA) and Steve Buyer (R-IN), came to a "compromise

agreement" including these homeless veterans components. The amended language largely follows that of H.R. 1171, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2009. The major difference between the two is the authorization lengths and levels.

*New Law Compared to H.R. 1171*

- **The new law reauthorizes HVRP through FY 2011.** H.R. 1171, the legislation from which the amendment was derived, would have reauthorized the program through FY 2014.

- **The new law authorizes \$1 million for FY 2011-2015 for the "homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children reintegration grant program."** H.R. 1171 – as well as S. 1237, the Homeless Veterans and Other Veterans Health Care Authorities Act of 2010, which was denied multiple requests for passage by unanimous consent in the Senate – would have authorized ten times as much (\$10 million per year) over the same length of time.

Congress should be commended for reauthorizing HVRP, as well as for its investment in homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children – two underserved, growing subgroups of homeless veterans. NCHV still hopes to see the original measures of H.R. 1171 signed into law and will continue to advocate on their behalf.

### **Little Time, Uncertainty Remain for Congressional Action**

*Congress on break until Nov. 15*

When Congress reconvenes for a lame duck session – the term for congressional business conducted between elections (Nov. 2) and the year's end – on Nov. 15, there will be few weeks left to complete outstanding work. Considering its plans to adjourn for the week of Thanksgiving and then again by Christmas, prospects for significant action are dim. Since the current fiscal year (FY 2011) began on Oct. 1, Congress had to extend last year's spending levels with a "continuing resolution," or "CR," through Dec. 3. Now, in order to preserve all federal funding, Congress must pass another CR in lieu of the

*For the most up to date information on pending legislation, visit [www.nchv.org/policy\\_legislation](http://www.nchv.org/policy_legislation).*

FY 2011 appropriations bills. All remaining legislation must also be addressed.

In this environment, there is very little likelihood of S. 1237 or H.R. 4810 – the two major homeless veterans bills – receiving floor time, at least not in their current forms. NCHV has worked with key congressional staffs to explore other vehicles for this legislation’s passage. There may be opportunities to amend a bill scheduled to receive floor time; a homeless veterans “rider” would contain the most critical components of the two bills, thereby providing a different vehicle by which they are signed into law.

This scenario is uncertain at best. As of late October, there is little to no sense of what Congress will be able to accomplish in the lame duck session. Political majorities will be disrupted, if not displaced. Whether or not the U.S. Senate has enough time to debate and vote upon its appropriations bills – which would still need to be reconciled with the U.S. House of Representatives’ versions – is also unclear. Should one of these bills receive a floor vote, there is still no guarantee that a homeless veterans rider will receive consideration due to strict rules on allowable amendments to appropriations bills.

NCHV will continue to advocate for and facilitate the passage of S. 1237 and H.R. 4810 until final adjournment.



## POTENTIAL INVESTORS

**THE CHARLES A. FRUEAUFF FOUNDATION** is committed to assisting in areas that it believes can make the most profound impact today and tomorrow – focusing intently on educational, human services and health-related causes around the country. Application guidelines for 2011 will be posted on the Foundation’s website after Dec. 1, 2010. For more information, visit [www.frueauff.org](http://www.frueauff.org).

**CRACKER BARREL FOUNDATION** seeks to strengthen and preserve the communities where Cracker Barrel restaurants operate by supporting programs in the areas of education, human services, cultural affairs and the environment. Applications are accepted at all times. For more information, visit [www.crackerbarrel.com/about.cfm?doc\\_id=1239](http://www.crackerbarrel.com/about.cfm?doc_id=1239).

**G&K SERVICES FOUNDATION**’s mission is to help people reach their full potential by assisting them in developing self-esteem and cultivating life and leadership skills. Priority consideration is given to organizations and programs that promote sustained, long-term change in the following areas: education, human services, skills development and self-sufficiency. The deadline for applications is March 1 each year. For more information, visit <http://gkservices.voyageurit.com/about/foundation.html>.

**THE HEARST FOUNDATIONS** are national philanthropic resources for organizations and institutions working in the fields of education, health, culture and social service. The Foundations’ goal is to ensure that people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to build healthy, productive and inspiring lives. Applications are accepted continuously and reviewed on a rolling basis. For more information on how to apply, visit [www.hearstfdn.org](http://www.hearstfdn.org).

**VETERANS SUPPORT FOUNDATION**, formerly Vietnam Veterans Assistance Fund, is a nonprofit humanitarian and educational organization founded to improve the quality of life for deserving veterans and their families. The Foundation’s office is located in Silver Spring, MD. The main objectives of the Foundation are to: help fund nonprofit organizations in support of veteran-related projects throughout the United States; assist disabled veterans and their qualifying dependents/family members; assist and provide transitional and permanent housing for homeless and at-risk veterans; and enrich the lives of all veterans and their families. The deadline for application submissions is March 31 of each year. For more information, visit <http://vsf-usa.org/funding.html>.

## Regional Grants

**THE ALLERGAN FOUNDATION** is committed to providing a lasting and positive impact on the community. The Foundation focuses in four philanthropic areas: the arts, civic programs, education, and health and human services. The Foundation contributes to a wide spectrum of public charitable organizations in Southern California and McLennan County, Texas, where the majority of Allergan’s U.S. employees live and work. The new grant cycle typically starts in May each year. For more information, visit [www.allerganfoundation.org](http://www.allerganfoundation.org).

**THE BRUENING FOUNDATION** gives priority to grant requests that address the educational, employment and basic human needs of those living in poverty, particularly vulnerable populations such as

children, the elderly, and the physically/mentally impaired. Projects and programs should be aligned with the Foundation's mission to reduce the impact of poverty and enhance the quality of life for those most in need in greater Cleveland. The next deadline for applications is March 1. For more information, visit [www.fmscleveland.com/bruening/](http://www.fmscleveland.com/bruening/).

**THE COLUMBIA BANK FOUNDATION** is committed to serving the needs of its local communities (in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania). The Foundation will actively seek affordable housing programs, community investment and economic development opportunities, financial literacy and educational opportunities, and health and human services opportunities. The Foundation will focus on innovative programs that provide measurable impacts in the communities they serve. Applications are accepted throughout the year. For more information, visit [www.columbiabankonline.com/home/about/foundation](http://www.columbiabankonline.com/home/about/foundation).

**THE GUIDO A. AND ELIZABETH H. BINDA FOUNDATION** welcomes proposals from nonprofit organizations in southwest Michigan. The Foundation focuses on the following program areas: education, arts and culture, health education and human services, and environmental education. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis. For more information, visit [www.bindafoundation.org](http://www.bindafoundation.org).

**THE H&R BLOCK FOUNDATION** supports projects and programs that strive for excellence, improve service for clients and strengthen organizations. Major emphasis is placed on activities that serve underserved, low-income people living in Jackson, Clay, and Platte counties in Missouri, and Wyandotte and Johnson counties in Kansas. Grant deadlines for 2011 will be posted at the end of the year. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/2f545qx>.

**THE JOHN DEERE FOUNDATION** contributes to growth and improvement in John Deere communities by supporting organizations working in the areas of human services, community development, and arts and culture. This includes communities in Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin. Grant applications are accepted year-round, and organizations must complete an eligibility questionnaire before applying. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/2d3p5ct>.

**THE KIMBALL INTERNATIONAL-HABIG FOUNDATION** focuses its funding and resources on grants to organizations and programs that most

directly benefit those U.S. communities in which Kimball has operations or facilities, or from which it draws employees. The Foundation's charitable contributions support health and human services, education, religious institutions, arts and culture, and civic and community programs. Kimball has facilities in Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, New York and the District of Columbia. Applications are accepted at all times and reviewed quarterly. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/2363r97>.



## RESOURCES

### **Disability.gov Veterans Update: National Resource Directory**

The U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs have announced the release of a new state widget on the National Resource Directory (NRD). The NRD is a website for wounded warriors, transitioning service members, veterans and those who support them. It provides quick and easy access to thousands of resources to help in their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

The NRD State Widget – [www.nationalresource-directory.gov/stateWidget/](http://www.nationalresource-directory.gov/stateWidget/) – enables users to display resources from the NRD, tailored by state and subject area, on any website or blog, creating a single point of access to local, community-based programs and services. As new resources and information are added to the NRD for your state, the widget will automatically update to show them on your site.

Make the NRD State Widget a part of your website, and visit the NRD at [www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov](http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov) for answers to questions about benefits and compensation, housing, education and training, and much more.

### **Mild TBI Pocket Guide Now Available**

In collaboration with the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC), the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health & Traumatic

Brain Injury (DCOE) has published a Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Pocket Guide for providers. The guide is a quick reference, all-encompassing resource for primary care and other TBI health care providers on the assessment, treatment and management of patients with mild TBI and related symptoms.

To order hard copies of the guide, contact DVBIC at [info@dvbic.org](mailto:info@dvbic.org) or call 1-800-870-9244. An electronic version can be downloaded at <http://tinyurl.com/2foo8s4>.

## **DoD Publishes Report on Suicide Prevention**

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide submitted a report to the Secretary of Defense on Aug. 23 in response to the rising number of suicides that have plagued our nation's armed forces in recent years. The task force, composed of 14 DoD and civilian personnel, spent 12 months researching suicide across all the services to "make recommendations regarding a comprehensive policy designed to prevent suicide by members of the armed forces."

To download the report, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2c5qg22>.

## **New "Understanding PTSD" Interactive Program Online**

The National Center on PTSD – which focuses on research and education on the prevention, understanding and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – has introduced an interactive program called "Understanding PTSD." The Flash program allows users to learn about common reactions to trauma, hear real stories from trauma survivors who have dealt with PTSD, and find out how to get help.

A printable booklet, also called "Understanding PTSD," is available through the Center as well. It contains full color photos, stories and more.

To use the interactive program, go to <http://tinyurl.com/267t2rx>. To download the booklet, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2cbu9re>.

## **U.S. Census Bureau Releases 2009 Poverty Figures**

On Sept. 16, the U.S. Census Bureau announced the nation's official poverty rate in 2009 was 14.3 percent, up from 13.2 percent in 2008 – the second statistically significant annual increase in the poverty

rate since 2004. There were 43.6 million people in poverty in 2009, up from 39.8 million in 2008 – the third consecutive annual increase.

These findings can be found in the report "Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009." To access the report and for more information, including a breakdown of the poverty data, visit <http://tinyurl.com/3xvsd6d>.

## **VetJobs Offers Comprehensive Job Lists**

VetJobs ([www.vetjobs.com](http://www.vetjobs.com)), widely recognized as the leading recruitment site to reach the military market, has performed a three-month study of all United States-based job boards. The result of this study is four comprehensive, vetted lists, which have been published in the VetJobs Employment Assistance section.

To access these four lists – Niche, Comprehensive, State and Aggregator Job Board Sites – visit [http://nchv.org/news\\_article.cfm?id=807](http://nchv.org/news_article.cfm?id=807).

## **Urban Institute Publishes Survey on Gov't Contracting**

Nearly 33,000 human service nonprofits had government contracts and grants last year, which provided the largest source of revenue for 62 percent of these organizations. A new study from the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy reveals that 57 percent of these nonprofits struggle with contract changes, including cancellation, reduced payments and postponement.

For more information and to download the full report, go to [http://www.nchv.org/news\\_article.cfm?id=805](http://www.nchv.org/news_article.cfm?id=805).

## **Nonprofit Gives Service Dogs to Vets with PTSD, TBI**

Paws and Stripes, a nonprofit organization, works to provide service dogs to wounded veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). The service dogs are obtained only from shelters and are trained by professionals. The organization aims to offer these dogs and training at no cost to veterans.

Service dogs, which can cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$30,000, can instill a sense of safety, stability and camaraderie in veterans, making society seem less threatening and stressful.

For more information and to enroll in the program, visit [www.pawsandstripes.org](http://www.pawsandstripes.org).

## Website Helps Florida Vets Find Employment

A new job-focused web portal is available for Florida veterans. The site provides information and resource links that can assist employers, veterans and their families.

The site is also a valuable tool for identifying local One-Stop Career Centers, which can provide cost-effective job- and employee-search resources. To start your employment search, visit <http://veterans.employflorida.com> and enter your zip code.

## Free Depression Screenings Available for Veterans

Anonymous depression screenings can be one of the first steps in getting well. The following sites and telephone numbers provide free screenings:

- Military Pathways, a U.S. Department of Defense partnership: [www.militarymentalhealth.org](http://www.militarymentalhealth.org) or 1-877-877-3647.
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/depression.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/depression.asp).
- Screening for Mental Health: [www.mentalhealthscreening.org/programs/military/](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/programs/military/).



### IN THE NEWS

## HUD Announces Funding Availability for Project-Based VASH Vouchers

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has issued a notice to inform public housing agencies that have already received an allocation of HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers in 2008, 2009 or 2010 of a set-aside of approximately 500 project-based vouchers (PBVs). These PBVs will enable homeless veterans to access affordable housing with an array of

supportive services. A PHA may request no more than 50 of these vouchers under this notice.

PHA applications will be scored based on the following criteria:

- Project readiness, indicating when project units will be ready for occupancy.
- Supportive services available from VA and other sources, in addition to the VA case management services provided with the voucher.
- Poverty rate of the census tract in which the project will be located.
- Experience of the owner/developer.
- Collaboration with VA programs.
- Relative need, based on homeless veteran data provided by local Continuums of Care and VA centers.
- Availability of tenant-based HUD-VASH vouchers.

All applications are due Jan. 26, 2011.

To view the full notice, visit <http://tinyurl.com/22mdjye>. Inquiries should be directed to Phyllis Smelkinson or Kathryn Greenspan in the Housing Voucher Management and Operations Division, Office of Public Housing and Voucher Programs, at 202-402-4138 or 202-402-4055, respectively.

## Service Provider Snapshot: United Veterans Beacon House

United Veterans Beacon House began as the vision of a Vietnam veteran from Pennsylvania who wished to house and help homeless veterans suffering from substance abuse issues and post-traumatic stress disorder. During the 1970s, this veteran was able to establish one house that could accommodate eight veterans.

United Veterans Beacon House, Inc. (UVBH), is now an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity located in Bay Shore, NY. The organization's President/CEO and Executive Director, Frank Amalfitano, manages 23 properties, helping a minimum of 115 veterans and numerous civilians every day.

The myriad issues affecting veterans are extensive, complex and often compounded by alcoholism and substance abuse; UVBH's services have expanded to address them. Its network of supportive and partner organizations on Long Island, NY, have steadily grown as well. The organization is a member of its local Continuum of Care and works with local and federal government agencies, including the U.S.

Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Veterans Affairs.

UVBH is called and depended upon by public and private agencies, local veterans posts, parishes, and locals who live on the street and are in need of food and clothing.

Returning OEF/OIF veterans, many of whom suffer greatly from traumatic brain injuries, require unique treatment from the Long Island organization. UVBH works closely with VA to provide safety and sustenance to all of these veterans.

On Sept. 24, UVBH hosted a Dedication Ceremony at its headquarters to celebrate the completion of renovations and the addition of a new, donated 45-foot flagpole. It considered the event “a perfect combination of friends, associates, residents past and present, staff, volunteers and donors.”

Highlights of the festivities, which were led by Amalfitano, included a Marine Corps Color Guard, two speakers from the Northport VA Medical Center, and a barbecue.

For more information on this service provider, go to [www.uvbh.com](http://www.uvbh.com).

## **Homes for Our Troops Donates Specially Adapted Houses**

Homes for Our Troops is a national, nonprofit organization that assists severely injured servicemen and servicewomen and their immediate families by raising donations and coordinating the process of building homes that provide maximum freedom of movement and the ability to live more independently. To date, the organization has completed almost 80 home-building projects and expects to complete its 100th home by mid-2011. These homes are provided to eligible veterans at no cost.

This Veterans Day, Homes for Our Troops plans to announce that it will help build another 100 specially adapted homes as part of its “100 More... Homes for Our Troops” campaign. A number of different partners will collaborate to make this happen.

“At this time we have several large corporations and associations interested (in the next 100 homes),” said Executive Director Dawn Teixeira. “We have also been forming committees for the campaign. We have a commitment from Gen. Richard A. Cody to be the chairperson of the campaign committee, Stone Phillips will be a committee member, and we are excited to announce that our own Massachusetts Sen.

Scott Brown will be a co-chair of the Honorary Congressional Committee.”

For the 100 homes completed or currently in production, all recipients have been selected. Recipients of the next 100 homes, however, which will take approximately three years to complete, are still being chosen. There are over 50 applicants on the organization’s waiting list at this time.

For more information on Homes for Our Troops, visit [www.homesforourtroops.org](http://www.homesforourtroops.org). To become a member of the fundraising committee, contact Dawn Teixeira at 508-823-3300 x 202, or [dawn@homesforourtroops.org](mailto:dawn@homesforourtroops.org).

## **National Survey Reveals Increase in Substance Use from 2008 to 2009**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The use of illicit drugs among Americans increased between 2008 and 2009 according to a national survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) shows the overall rate of current illicit drug use in the United States rose from 8.0 percent of the population aged 12 and older in 2008 to 8.7 percent in 2009. This rise in overall drug use was driven in large part by increases in marijuana use.

The annual NSDUH survey, released by SAMHSA at the kickoff of the 21st annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (in September), also shows that the nonmedical use of prescription drugs rose from 2.5 percent of the population in 2008 to 2.8 percent in 2009. Additionally, the estimated number of past-month ecstasy users rose from 555,000 in 2008 to 760,000 in 2009, and the number of methamphetamine users rose from 314,000 to 502,000 during that period.

Flat or increasing trends of substance use were reported among youth (12 to 17-year-olds). Although the rate of overall illicit drug use among young people in 2009 remained below 2002 levels, youth use was higher in 2009 compared to 2008 (10.0 percent of youth in 2009, versus 9.3 percent in 2008, versus 11.6 percent in 2002). The rate of marijuana use in this age group followed a similar pattern, declining from 8.2 percent of young people in 2002, to 6.7 percent in 2006, remaining level until 2008, and then increasing to 7.3 percent in 2009. Additionally, the level of youth perceiving great risk of harm

associated with smoking marijuana once or twice a week dropped from 54.7 percent in 2007 to 49.3 percent in 2009, marking the first time since 2002 that less than half of young people perceived great harm in frequent marijuana use. The rate of current tobacco use or underage drinking among this group remained stable between 2008 and 2009.

Overall past-month illicit drug use among young adults aged 18-25 increased from 19.6 percent of young adults in 2008, to 21.2 percent in 2009. This rise in use was also driven in large part by the use of marijuana.

“These results are a wake-up call to the nation,” said SAMHSA Administrator Pamela Hyde, J.D. “Our strategies of the past appear to have stalled out with generation ‘next.’ Parents and caregivers, teachers, coaches, faith and community leaders, must find credible new ways to communicate with our youth about the dangers of substance abuse.”

“Today’s findings are disappointing, but not surprising, because eroding attitudes and perceptions of harm about drug use over the past two years have served as warning signs for exactly what we see today,” said Director of National Drug Control Policy, Gil Kerlikowske.

Despite some troubling trends, the 2009 NSDUH shows continued progress in lowering levels of tobacco consumption among people aged 12 years and older. Current cigarette use among this population has reached a historic low level at 23.3 percent. However, even in this case, the pace of improvement is stagnating. The use of cocaine among those aged 12 or older has also declined 30 percent from 2006.

As in previous years, the 2009 NSDUH shows a vast disparity between the number of people needing specialized treatment for a substance abuse problem and the number who actually receive it. According to the survey, 23.5 million Americans aged 12 or older (9.3 percent of this population) need specialized treatment for a substance abuse problem, but only 2.6 million (or roughly 11.2 percent of them) receive it.

NSDUH is a scientifically conducted annual survey of approximately 67,500 people throughout the country, aged 12 and older. Because of its statistical power, it is the nation’s premier source of statistical information on the scope and nature of many substance abuse behavioral health issues affecting the nation.

The complete survey findings are available on the SAMHSA Web site at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/Latest.htm>.

## **President Obama Signs Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act into Law**

*From the National American Indian Housing Council*

The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC), the only national Indian organization advocating solely on behalf of tribal housing issues, thanks President Barack Obama for signing the Indian Veterans Housing Opportunity Act into law on Oct. 12. The Veterans’ Act was passed in the Senate on Sept. 29.

The Veterans’ Act amends the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) to be consistent with the IRS Tax Code and other federal statutes and regulations by excluding income received by a veteran, or his or her family, for service-related disability, dependency or indemnity from the definition of “income” under NAHASDA. The bill was originally introduced by Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ) in the House and by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and co-sponsored by Sen. John Thune (R-SD) in the Senate.

“On behalf of the NAIHC Board of Directors and membership, I extend sincere gratitude to President Obama for signing the bill into law and recognizing that our native veterans deserve the opportunity for safe and affordable housing,” said NAIHC Chairwoman Cheryl Causley. “I also want to thank Congress for its bipartisan efforts to introduce and pass this legislation. It is with their leadership that this bill is able to help many veterans and their families.”

The Navajo Housing Authority received concerns that veterans were ineligible for NAHASDA housing programs when they returned from military service. The Navajo Nation and the housing authority approached Rep. Kirkpatrick regarding a possible legislative fix, which started the bill’s momentum.

“We have worked hard together to right this wrong. With our victory, more of America’s heroes will be able to move into higher quality housing with their

***If your organization has any news you would like to share in the NCHV newsletter, please email [rbrown@nchv.org](mailto:rbrown@nchv.org).***

families, and communities across Indian Country will grow stronger,” Rep. Kirkpatrick said in a news release. “However, enacting this law is just one of many steps we must take to help the tribes create new and better opportunities in Indian Country. I am committed to continuing my efforts on behalf of Native Americans, and I will keep fighting to make Congress work for them. Together, we can overcome the many obstacles we face and blaze a path to a brighter future.”

## **VA Leads Federal Agencies in Awarding Contracts to Veteran-Owned Businesses**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – VA has been recognized by the Small Business Administration (SBA) with a rating of “A” on its Small Business Scorecard for its success in contracting with small businesses. VA’s Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) collaborated with other VA acquisition professionals to achieve the high rating.

VA led the federal government in procurements with service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. While the government-wide statutory goal for contract awards in this category was three percent of all agency procurements, VA awarded nearly 17 percent of its acquisition dollars to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses.

Each agency’s small business procurement performance was assessed along three quantitative measures: prime contracting, subcontracting and progress achievement. Previous scorecards only addressed prime contracting achievement and did not offer an overall grade. SBA’s Small Business Procurement Scorecard reports for all federal agencies can be found at [SBA.gov](http://SBA.gov) under “Goaling Program.”



## **Upcoming Events**

**December 1-3 – The Housing Assistance Council’s National Rural Housing Conference 2010** will be held at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, D.C. Pre-conference activities will begin Nov. 30. This year’s theme is “A Place to Live: Rural Housing in a Changing Landscape.” For an agenda and to register, visit <http://tinyurl.com/24hl8cu>.

**December 3 – The 12th Annual New Jersey Supportive Housing Conference**, hosted by the Corporation for Supportive Housing and the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey, will be held at the Pines Manor in Edison, NJ. This all-day conference will offer workshops in areas including direct services, development and operations, policy and advocacy, and innovations. To preview a brochure and register online, visit <http://tinyurl.com/2akfqg5>.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Thank you to **new** members:

Universal Helping Hands for Humanity,  
Hendersonville, TN

Thank you to **renewing** members:

American GI Forum, San Antonio, TX  
American Legion Department of Wisconsin,  
Portage, WI  
Catholic Social Services, Scranton, PA  
Cornerstone Services, Inc., Joliet, IL  
Goodwill Industries of Lower SC, N. Charleston, SC  
The Home of the Brave Foundation, Milford, DE  
Joseph House for Homeless Veterans, Cincinnati, OH  
MN Assistance Council for Veterans, St. Paul, MN  
Operation Stand Down Rhode Island, Johnston, RI  
Potomac Highlands Support Services,  
Petersburg, WV  
RI Veterans Action Center/Vietnam Era Veterans  
Association, Providence, RI  
San Antonio Metropolitan Ministries,  
San Antonio, TX  
Saratoga County Rural Preservation Company,  
Ballston Spa, NY  
Serenity House of Volusia, Inc., Daytona Beach, FL  
South Wilmington Street Center, Raleigh, NC  
Veteran’s NE Outreach Center, Haverhill, MA  
VietNow, Rockford, IL  
Welcome Home, Inc., Columbia, MO

## OUR MISSION:

*"NCHV will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, promoting collaboration, and building the capacity of service providers."*



## 2010 STAND DOWN INFORMATION

If you would like your Stand Down information listed in this newsletter and on our website, send us the date, location and contact information. Email [lcook@nchv.org](mailto:lcook@nchv.org); fax to 202-546-2063 or 888-233-8582; or mail to NCHV, 333 ½ Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003.

*Key: A - Stand Down (3 days or longer); B - Homeless Veterans Resource Fair (2 days); C - Homeless Veterans Resource Fair (1 day); D - Homeless Veterans Health Fair; E - Homeless Veterans Job Fair; F - Other events*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Email</b>
Nov 6	C	Los Angeles	CA	Doris Nickelson	810-545-2937	<a href="mailto:dorisnickelson@roadrunner.com">dorisnickelson@roadrunner.com</a>
Nov 9	C	Mankato	MN	Susan Sorenson	507-345-8258	<a href="mailto:ssorenson@mac-v.org">ssorenson@mac-v.org</a>
Nov 10	C	Salem	VA	Gayle Sanford	540-982-2463 x 1230	<a href="mailto:gaylene.sanford@va.gov">gaylene.sanford@va.gov</a>
Nov 11	C	Chicago	IL	Jeanne Douglas	708-383-3225	<a href="mailto:jean.douglas@va.gov">jean.douglas@va.gov</a>
Nov 12	A	Huntsville	AL	Sandra Childress	256-715-0556	<a href="mailto:bsjennings@bellsouth.net">bsjennings@bellsouth.net</a>
Nov 17	C	Ft. Worth	TX	Kim Havanis Campbell	214-287-0326	<a href="mailto:kimhcampbell@verizon.net">kimhcampbell@verizon.net</a>
Nov 18	C	Mobile	AL	Dan Williams	251-450-3345	<a href="mailto:dan@housingfirst-al.org">dan@housingfirst-al.org</a>
Nov 18	C	Binghamton	NY	Maribel Asencio	607-771-8888	<a href="mailto:maribel.asencio@yourmha.com">maribel.asencio@yourmha.com</a>
Nov 22	C	Freeport	NY	Michael Kilbride	516-227-8731	<a href="mailto:michael.kilbride@hhsnassaucountyny.us">michael.kilbride@hhsnassaucountyny.us</a>
Dec 3	A	Yuma	AZ	Bill Thornton	928-503-0552	<a href="mailto:bill@southwestarizonastanddown.com">bill@southwestarizonastanddown.com</a>

## From the Department of Veterans Affairs



### **Secretary Shinseki Announces \$41.9 Million for Grant and Per Diem Program**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki has announced that 40 states will share more than \$41.9 million in grants to community groups to provide 2,568 beds for homeless veterans this year.

“These grants wouldn’t have happened without the extraordinary partnerships forged with community organizers,” said VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. “These investments will provide transitional beds to veterans who have served honorably but for various reasons now find themselves in a downward spiral toward despair and homelessness.”

The Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD) provides grants and per diem payments to help public and nonprofit organizations establish and operate new supportive housing and service centers for homeless veterans.

The \$41.9 million is broken into two categories. About \$26.9 million will help renovate, rehabilitate or acquire space for 1,352 transitional housing beds. A second group of awards, valued at \$15 million, will immediately fund 1,216 beds at existing transitional housing for homeless veterans this year. The awards will cover daily living costs based upon the number of homeless veterans being served in transitional housing.

A key component of VA’s Five-Year Plan, the grants and per diem payments helped reduce the number of veterans who were homeless on a typical night last year by 18 percent to about 107,000 veterans within one year.

VA’s strategy to eliminate homelessness among veterans is to implement a “no wrong door” approach, meaning veterans who seek assistance should find it in any number of VA’s programs, from community partners or through contract services.

Under the Secretary’s action plan to end homelessness among veterans, VA will continue to offer a full range of support necessary to end the cycle of home-

lessness by providing education, jobs, health care and counseling, in addition to housing. VA will increase the number and variety of housing options available to homeless veterans and those at risk, including permanent, transitional, contracted, community-operated and VA-operated housing. Most importantly, VA will target at-risk veteran populations with aggressive support intervention to try to prevent homelessness before it starts.

A complete list of capital grant recipients can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/25p6zl4> (PDF).

A complete list of “per diem only” grant recipients can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/2dtnk51> (PDF).

For more information, visit the National GPD Office’s webpage at [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless).

### **Shinseki: Evidence Led to New Agent Orange Presumptions**

*From American Forces Press Service*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Sept. 23, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki defended his decision to add heart disease, Parkinson’s disease, and leukemia to the conditions VA officials can presume in Vietnam War veterans to be caused by Agent Orange exposure.

Speaking before the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Shinseki said he made the recent decision based on the findings of the National Academy’s Institute of Medicine and numerous medical, legal and program experts’ opinions.

U.S. forces used the chemical herbicide Agent Orange during the Vietnam War to deny enemy fighters cover by defoliating forested areas.

“My determination that there is a positive association between herbicide exposure and ischemic heart disease was based solely upon evaluation of the scientific and medical evidence and application of the statutory standard prescribed by the Agent Orange Act,” Shinseki said.

The institute's most recent report, issued in July 2009, found sufficient evidence of a positive association between exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide and B-cell leukemia – the most common cancer of white blood cells – as well as Parkinson's disease, heart disease, and hypertension. The evidence of a causal link to hypertension was less compelling, Shinseki said, so he did not include it in his determination of VA "presumptions."

The secretary said his decision is in accordance with the Agent Orange Act of 1991, which directs VA to establish presumptions of service connection for any disease discussed in the Institute of Medicine's biennial reports to VA for which the evidence shows a positive association.

Shinseki noted that Congress members have objected to the new presumptions based on the commonality of the three diseases, the numerous other factors that can lead to them, and the potential expense of extending benefits payments to Vietnam veterans with those diagnoses. But, Shinseki said, the law does not allow him to consider the economic impact of a presumption, or exclude a disease based on how common it is. "Those factors did not enter into my decision," he said.

The institute's findings were controlled for other risk factors for the diseases, and the law allows VA to challenge presumptions in veterans for whom other risk factors exist, he said.

"My determinations were not made lightly," Shinseki said. "They were made in accordance with the responsibilities entrusted to me in the Agent Orange Act and my duty as Secretary of Veterans Affairs."

Shinseki added that a significant portion of costs associated with the new presumptions are the result of a 1985 class-action lawsuit that allows for retroactive payments for all presumptions made before 2015.

"While there is always room to review decisions with respect to specific diseases, there is no question that the actions of Congress and VA related to the Agent Orange Act demonstrate the government's commitment to provide veterans with treatment and compensation for the health effects of herbicide exposure," he said.

## **VA Improves Access to Health and Benefits Information**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – VA is launching a multi-year initiative called Veterans Relationship Management

(VRM) that will greatly improve veterans' access to health care and benefits information.

"VRM will transform veterans' interactions with VA by using innovative 21st-century technologies," VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said. "Veterans will have a better experience when they contact VA for assistance, and our employees will be able to quickly convey accurate, up-to-date information through call centers and the Internet."

Ultimately, veterans will find enhanced self-service capabilities, and VA employees will have the best tools to serve veterans, their families and survivors better.

By the end of 2010, VRM will deliver improved telephone services to enable veterans to reach a call center agent faster. Recording and review of calls will ensure the quality of services provided to veterans. To help guarantee success, VRM enhancements will be rolled out in six-month increments.

An important component of VRM is the Internet site, which puts the veteran in the driver's seat for information. VA collaborated with the Department of Defense to provide a single sign-on capability for both service members and veterans. Single sign-on will quickly establish an individual's identity and allow that person to complete transactions without having to re-enter information.

Self-service access through the Internet site ([www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov)) is already available in some benefit areas, including military personnel records, VA home loan eligibility certificates, and status information on compensation and pension claims.

VRM is just one of the many initiatives VA is launching to help veterans get timely access to health care and benefits.

VA provides tax-free compensation, pension, education, loan guaranty, vocational rehabilitation, employment and insurance benefits to eligible veterans, their families and survivors through 57 VA regional offices.

Disability compensation is paid to a veteran for disabilities that are a result of – or made worse by – injuries or diseases that happened while on active duty, active military, naval or air service. Pension is a benefit paid to wartime veterans with limited income, and who are permanently and totally disabled or age 65 or older.

For additional information, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call VA's toll-free benefits number at 1-800-827-1000.

## From the Department of Labor



*VETS Assistant Secretary Raymond Jefferson (left panel) listens to Chamber President and CEO Tom Donohue (center panel) discuss the business case for hiring veterans.*

### **U.S. Chamber of Commerce, VETS Launch Pilot Program**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Labor-Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) announced on Oct. 1, 2010, the launch of a 14-state pilot program to help veterans find meaningful employment after service to our nation.

“We’re launching this program not just to honor the sacrifices made by our veterans but because it makes sense for America’s businesses,” said Chamber President and CEO Thomas Donohue. “Military veterans are prized by the business community not just for their technical expertise, but also for their leadership skills and dedication.”

By leveraging a network of state and local chambers of commerce, this effort will expand on the Chamber’s “Hiring Our Heroes” initiative, which launched in 2008 to focus on the employment of wounded, ill and injured veterans as they transition from military service. This program involving the Chamber and DOL-VETS will educate employers on the value of hiring veterans and help connect employers with veteran talent.

To support this program, Chamber executives will collaborate with the DOL-VETS directors in their states to discuss sponsorship of events that offer veterans the opportunity to network with prospective employers. The pilot program launched on Oct. 1 in

Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and Georgia. The Chamber’s goal for 2011 is to expand the program into all 50 states.

“Let there be no doubt, the Chamber is committed to our military heroes for the long haul,” Donohue said. “If we’re going to put America back to work and create 20 million jobs, it should start with the veterans who have protected our freedom.”

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world’s largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.

### **ODEP Unveils Return-to-Work Toolkit**

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has unveiled a new toolkit to help both employers and employees understand the return-to-work process. This toolkit provides resources to assist in getting employees, who have experienced an illness or injury, back on the job quickly and smoothly.

Through this toolkit, the following information and strategies are offered: job accommodations, preparing for a job interview, resume writing, self-employment, employment-related laws, offering the opportunity to work part-time, telecommuting, and modifying work duties or schedules.

Additionally, resources that can help employers retain the talents of older workers are available through the site.

To access the toolkit, go to [www.dol.gov/odep/return-to-work/](http://www.dol.gov/odep/return-to-work/).

### **New DOL Resources Available**

DOL’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has added three new publications to its publications library:

- “The Earned Income Tax Credit: Capitalizing on Tax Incentives.”
- “Effective Integration of Technology and Instructor-Led Training to Promote Soft Skills Mastery.”
- “Teaching Soft Skills Through Workplace Simulations in Classroom Settings.”

These briefs are designed to increase awareness of ideas, services and products that improve employment opportunities for all workers, including workers with disabilities. Each brief provides a subject overview and includes a link to a more comprehensive review of the subject for those who want to learn more.

To download these publications, go to [http://nchv.org/news\\_article.cfm?id=792](http://nchv.org/news_article.cfm?id=792).

## **VETS Submits USERRA Annual Report to Congress**

In October, DOL-VETS submitted its Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Report to Congress. USERRA, signed into law on Oct. 13, 1994, prohibits discrimination in employment based on an individual’s prior service in the uniformed services, current obligations as a member of the uniformed services, or intent to join the uniformed services. An employer is prohibited from discriminating against a person because of such person’s attempt to enforce his or her rights under the law.

The report contains information for the preceding fiscal year such as:

- The number of cases reviewed by DOL.
- The number of cases referred to the Attorney General.
- The number of such cases involving disability-related issues.
- An indication of any apparent patterns of violation.
- Recommendations for administrative or legislative action.

To read the full report, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2cy3hlh>.

## **Veteran’s Career Powered by DOL Funding**

The power remains on in Oregon thanks to the efforts of Jason Morgan, a Navy veteran, whose work as a

linesman for the Asplundh Tree Expert Company involves pruning trees and branches from high-voltage electrical lines. Morgan, whose small business construction company closed a few years ago, felt his military and business backgrounds would qualify him for a linesman job for companies involved in delivering uninterrupted electricity to the public.

Morgan’s good fortune, however, can be directly traced to the hard work of DOL’s Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist Andrew Zobrist who is also a veteran. Zobrist helped the 40-year-old Morgan select a career, then apply for and receive training through a scholarship funded by the department’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service. After taking classes offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration on safety equipment operations, climbing and basic electricity, Morgan graduated and was immediately hired by Asplundh.

Morgan said of Zobrist’s efforts, “Andrew helped me out a lot, knew exactly what to do and connected me with the right people. Without him, none of this would have happened.”

On helping Morgan, Zobrist said, “It is a huge challenge to get people back into the workforce because of the economy, so when it works out it feels really good.”

## **OFCCP Strengthens Efforts for Veterans, Official Tells Congress**

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) has strengthened its enforcement capabilities, implemented a robust regulatory agenda and identified more individual complaints through greater outreach, Deputy Director Les Jin said in testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, on Sept. 29. The subcommittee hearing focused on laws prohibiting federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating against veterans.

“We are educating veterans about their rights in the job market,” Jin said. “We are showing them how to identify discriminatory practices, and we are creating avenues for two-way communication between communities of veterans and OFCCP.”

To read Jin’s testimony, go to [www.dol.gov/\\_sec/media/congress/20100929\\_Jin.htm](http://www.dol.gov/_sec/media/congress/20100929_Jin.htm).



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