



2024 - 2026 REPORT



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MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

A photograph of Secretary Meganley speaking at a dedication event. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a grey t-shirt with a yellow outline of Louisiana. He is holding a microphone in his left hand and gesturing with his right hand. In the background, there is a large, olive-green military tank with "LSUA" written on its side. Other people and vehicles are visible in the background, but they are out of focus.

Secretary Meganley speaks at the dedication for the decommissioned U.S. Army M60A3 Main Battle Tank at LSU Alexandria.

On behalf of the nearly 850 dedicated employees of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA), it is my privilege to present this 2024-2025 Report. We are deeply grateful for the steadfast support of Governor Jeff Landry, the Veterans Affairs Commission, and the Louisiana Legislature. Through landmark legislation and dedicated resources, they have positioned Louisiana as one of the nation's most veteran-friendly states—offering tax exemptions, employment preferences, expanded benefits, and protections that make our state an ideal home for veterans and their families.

Veterans are the backbone of American society, having sacrificed personal safety to defend our freedoms. With Louisiana's proud military heritage and approximately 252,000 veterans, providing strong advocacy and unrelenting support is both a moral duty and a necessary investment in our state's vitality. Through strategic and deliberate planning and engagement, the LDVA delivers essential services, from healthcare navigation and compensation assistance to education, employment, and family support, ensuring veterans receive the benefits and care they have earned.

Civically, Louisiana veterans enrich communities profoundly. Their military-honed discipline, leadership, and teamwork translate into vital public service and impactful volunteerism. Organizations like American Legion, VFW, and VVA lead local charities, disaster response in our storm-prone state, and youth mentorship programs that strengthen neighborhoods and promote civic education. Veteran engagement builds social cohesion, reduces isolation, boosts voter participation, and enhances resilience amid economic and environmental challenges.

Economically, veterans drive growth and innovation. They bring specialized skills in logistics, engineering, cybersecurity, and more, filling critical workforce gaps in energy, agriculture, defense contracting near bases like Barksdale, Ft. Polk, and beyond. Veterans are far more likely to start businesses, with veteran-owned enterprises generating billions in activity, creating jobs (often hiring fellow veterans), and helping maintain low veteran unemployment rates. Federal VA expenditures in Louisiana exceed \$4 billion annually—including disability compensation, pensions, and healthcare—injecting substantial spending power into local economies. State investments in programs like vocational training and mental health services yield high returns: healthier veterans are more productive, increasing tax revenues and reducing reliance on social services.

Looking forward, we must tackle key challenges to sustain progress. An aging veteran population may necessitate expansion of our long-term care facilities. Persistent issues—PTSD, mental health access, homelessness, and suicide prevention—require ongoing resources and vigilance. In a disaster-vulnerable state, bolstering veterans' recovery resilience is essential. Building on recent successes—such as military family protections, enhanced assistance funds, and new benefits like discounted hunting/fishing licenses—we can keep Louisiana leading in veteran support amid changing federal dynamics.

In conclusion, championing veterans is vital to Louisiana's prosperity and unity. By investing in their needs, the state repays a debt of gratitude while amplifying veterans' positive ripple effects on communities and the economy. This report highlights the impactful work of LDVA staff and partners. With continued legislative and gubernatorial support, we will secure a brighter future for Louisiana's veterans and families for generations to come.

It has been the privilege of a lifetime to serve in this role and my honor to showcase the extraordinary daily contributions of LDVA employees, who make a meaningful difference in the lives of Louisiana veterans.

MISSION & VISION

OUR MISSION

Relentlessly advocate for Louisiana veterans and their families to ensure they receive superior customer service and support by connecting them to the benefits they have earned in service to our country, while meeting the economic, educational and employment needs of transitioning service members looking to make Louisiana thier home.



Secretary Meginley visited our deployed Louisiana National Guard troops from the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (the "Tiger Brigade") and soliders from 1084th Transportation Company in Kosovo and Poland

OUR VISION

To make Louisiana the most veteran-friendly state in the nation by ensuring every veteran and their family is supported, respected, and cared for at every stage of life and in every community.



Secretary Meginley and Deputy Secretary Buller at the New Orleans Airport to greet Soaring Valor

EXECUTIVE TEAM



**Col Charlton J. Meginley,
USAF (Ret.)**
Secretary



**COL (Dr.) Jerome L.
Buller, USA (Ret.)**
Deputy Secretary



**LCDR John C.
Phillips, USN (Ret.)**
Undersecretary



Dustin Guy
Chief of Staff



Connor Junkin
Executive Counsel

OUR TEAM



**Earnest Buckner,
LANG**
Dep. Asst.
Secretary of Benefits



**Matthew Duhon,
LANG**
Dep. Asst.
Secretary of Homes



**Torrence Joseph,
LTC, LANG**
Education Prog.
Consultant



**Ted Krumm, CDR
(Ret.), USN**
Cemetery Program
Director



**William McInnis,
SFC (Ret.), USA**
Training and
Development
Program Manager



**Daniele Palen,
USAF**
Director of
Communications



Kate Seba
Confidential Assistant
to the Deputy
Secretary
and Chief of Staff



**Cleophus D.
"Cleo"
Wallace**
State Approving
Agency Director



**Clifton Williams, LT
(Ret.), USN**
LaVetCorps Director



**Larry Williams, SFC
(Ret.) USA**
Asst Sec of Outreach



Miracle Williams
Confidential Assistant
to the Secretary

OUR COMMISSIONERS



**H. Paul
Hermann, Jr.,
USAF (Ret.)**
Chairman, DAV



**Deron G.
Santiny, USA**
Vice Chairman,
MOPH



**Eric B. Kuyper,
USA (Ret.)**
American Legion



**Elena P.
Branzaru,
USMC**
Marine Corps
League



**Robert J.
Lovergne, Jr.,
USAF**
VFW



**Mark M. St.
Romain, Jr.,
USA**
MOPH



**Bobbie L. Ragsdale, III,
USA**
At-Large



**Richard Adams,
USAF (Ret.)**
At-Large

HIGHLIGHTS

Operational Excellence & Customer Satisfaction

Three of **Louisiana's five State Veterans Cemeteries**: Rayville, Jennings, and Central Louisiana were honored with the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Operational Excellence Award, recognizing superior performance, compliance, and service standards.



Louisiana Veterans Homes continue to demonstrate strong satisfaction ratings based on recent survey results:

Jennings Veterans Home – 5.0 out of 5.0 (8 surveys)

Reserve Veterans Home – 4.63 out of 5.0 (19 surveys)

Monroe Veterans Home – 4.44 out of 5.0 (9 surveys)

Bossier City Veterans Home – 4.44 out of 5.0 (9 surveys)



HIGHLIGHTS

The Benefits Division continues to expand its reach and enhance outcomes for Louisiana veterans.

- Clients Served: 200,860 in FY 2025, a 9% increase from 184,230 in FY 2024.
- Claims Processed: 179,363 in FY 2025, a 21% increase from 147,739 in FY 2024, demonstrating significant gains in efficiency and volume.
- Title 29 Louisiana Tuition Exemption Benefits: 1,443 approved and issued in Calendar Year (CY) 2025, up from 1,279 in CY 2024, providing greater access to higher education for veteran dependents.
- Other Actions/Services: 225,188 in FY 2025, up from 183,037 in FY 2024, reflecting expanded and more impactful support.
- Louisiana veterans achieved a 6% increase in the number receiving VBA benefits—from 103,120 to 108,894—tripling the national average growth rate of 2%.



Larry Williams, Assistant Secretary of Outreach serving veterans at a Saints Game



Secretary Meginley speaks at Veterans Day at the Capitol

“Louisiana isn’t just keeping pace—we’re setting the standard. Our veterans are getting the benefits they deserve at a rate that far exceeds the rest of the country. This isn’t luck. It’s leadership.”

— Governor Jeff Landry

HIGHLIGHTS



BENEFITS: CONTACT ASSISTANCE, OUTREACH & EDUCATION

The Benefits and Appeals section of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) serves as a vital pillar of support for Louisiana's veterans and their families. Through free, expert guidance, our dedicated Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) help secure the federal and state benefits earned through military service. Organized across five regions and led by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Benefits and Appeals, with oversight from six Veterans Assistance Counselor Managers, our team delivers comprehensive advocacy. Services include filing and developing VA claims, conducting outreach and retrieving military records, processing appeals, assisting with educational benefits applications, and securing burial benefits. Every Louisiana VSO is accredited by the federal VA, and undergoes rigorous training and certification to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, compassion, and effectiveness.

Programs & Accomplishments: Delivering Measurable Impact

The Benefits Division continues to expand its reach and enhance outcomes for Louisiana veterans.

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With 74 VSO offices strategically located statewide and ongoing expansions to reach additional communities, the division prioritizes accessible, high-quality service. Given our substantial footprint in every parish, it is important to remind our leaders that no veteran should ever have to pay a private entity for an initial VA disability rating.

In CY 2024, LDVA efforts helped secure \$2,118,672,000 in VA Compensation and Pension income for Louisiana veterans, fostering economic stability for thousands of families and underscoring the state's strong performance in VA benefits delivery. (CY 2025 figures are forthcoming and expected to build on this momentum.)



These achievements align closely with Louisiana's statewide leadership in VA benefits growth. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' latest Annual Benefits Report (covering Fiscal Year 2023 to 2024), Louisiana veterans achieved a 6% increase in the number receiving VBA benefits—from 103,120 to 108,894—**tripling the national average growth rate of 2%**. This positions Louisiana as a national leader in year-over-year progress, with notable outperformance in areas such as education benefits (9% growth vs. national 5%) and Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (25% surge vs. national 10%). LDVA attributes this success to aggressive outreach, targeted education campaigns, and strong partnerships with VA facilities and local veteran service organizations.

Quality & Process Improvements

Beyond increased volume, the division emphasizes excellence through:

- An onsite assessment program to maintain superior performance among Veterans Assistance Counselors.
- Customer satisfaction surveys (conducted onsite and telephonically) to refine service delivery.
- A customer defection rate metric to identify and address service gaps proactively.
- A workload distribution program to balance caseloads statewide, improving response times, enhancing satisfaction, and reducing staff burnout.
- These initiatives ensure sustained high-quality support while scaling operations effectively.

Appeals Division: Ensuring Justice at Every Stage

Embedded within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office in New Orleans, the Appeals & Review Division rigorously examines compensation and pension rating decisions for veterans and surviving family members.

The team identifies errors, uncovers additional entitlements, and provides full representation through appeals preparation, hearings, and proceedings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA).

Key FY 2025 results include:

- Rating Decisions Reviewed: 6,226 (compared to 6,506 in FY 2024).
- Hearings Conducted: 272 (up from 228 in FY 2024), expanding advocacy reach.
- Approval Rate on Represented Hearings: 84.87% (improved from 82.47% in FY 2024), reflecting exceptional effectiveness.
- Retroactive Payments Secured: \$3,873,229 (FY 2024: \$4,371,918).
- Increase in Recurring Monthly Compensation: \$66,092 (FY 2024: \$72,422).

Many complex cases span multiple fiscal years, yielding enduring financial relief. Veterans benefit from enhanced accessibility, including virtual BVA hearings from home or via video at the Regional Office.



Local hearings with Rating Specialists address predetermination issues, proposed reductions, or overpayments promptly. The division's practitioners blend deep regulatory expertise with compassionate advocacy, focusing on accuracy, timeliness, and thorough documentation to minimize remands and expedite final decisions.

Continuous improvement draws from decisions data, judge feedback, and client surveys to prioritize senior oversight for complex cases and efficient handling of straightforward ones. Strong partnerships with federal counterparts further bolster evidence development and ensure veterans' voices are fully represented.

Key Takeaway

The Benefits and Appeals Division has significantly expanded service scale, financial impact, and accessibility for Louisiana veterans, while implementing innovative quality and customer satisfaction measures. These efforts have contributed directly to the state's national leadership in VA benefits growth, transforming lives and strengthening communities through earned support.



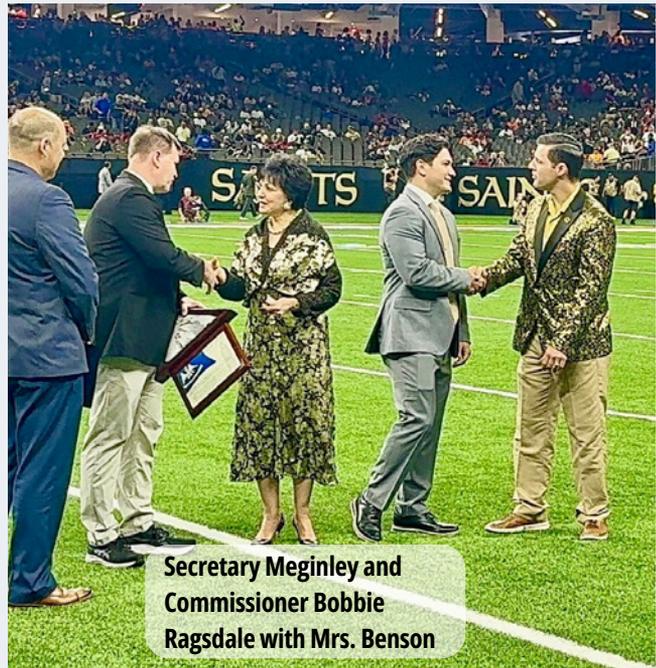
Veterans Outreach Program

The Veterans Outreach Program stands as the cornerstone of the LDVA strategy, embodying our unwavering commitment to connecting Louisiana's approximately 252,000 veterans and their families with the benefits, resources, and support they have earned through selfless service. In an era where veterans face mental health needs, homelessness risks, employment barriers, and caregiver burdens, aggressive, innovative outreach has proven essential to ensuring no veteran is left behind.

Over the past two years, LDVA leadership has expanded outreach beyond traditional veteran service organizations to include college campuses, veteran-friendly businesses, and non-traditional events such as those hosted by the Acadiana Veterans Alliance and Blue Star Mothers. This proactive approach also includes younger veterans and emerging needs, resulting in unprecedented engagement.

In 2024, LDVA leadership attended and addressed veterans at 226 events across the state. Seeking to build on this momentum, in CY25, we shattered expectations by attending 302 veteran events statewide.

By meeting veterans at their schools, sporting events, or places of employment, we engaged in meaningful one-on-one interactions with members of our community. These efforts resolved critical issues across key categories: employment assistance, financial aid, veteran benefits, and suicide prevention, while also linking them to vital resources in areas like general support, veteran business owner assistance, transition services, legal aid, and veteran service organization collaboration. Key events included LDVA's support of the New Orleans Saints Military Appreciation Game, during which the Department acknowledged Ms. Benson for the organization's involvement in the DOW SkillBridge Program and its commitment to Louisiana's veterans. In return, the New Orleans Saints formally recognized the service and accomplishments of veterans across our community before a statewide audience.



LDVA also supported the Blue Star Mothers of Louisiana's Memorial Day Garden of Flags, where LDVA Secretary Meginley led a commemorative ruck march from the LSU campus to the State Capitol and delivered remarks honoring Louisiana's fallen service members.

Key Collaborations Enhancing Veteran Services

In FY25, the Outreach Program partnered with leading organizations to amplify impact and strengthen statewide coordination, reflecting LDVA's role in driving measurable progress in veteran well-being, including:

- Louisiana Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families
- Louisiana Balance of State Continuum of Care Veterans Committee
- East Baton Rouge Mayor-President's Advisory Council on Veterans
- Louisiana Economic Development's Louisiana Growth Network
- Louisiana Workforce Commission's Disabled Veterans Outreach Program
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Women Veterans Outreach Program



Veteran Homelessness Prevention

Chairing the Louisiana Balance of State Continuum of Care's Veteran Working Group, the Outreach Director led approximately 40 professionals from VA, VSOs, and nonprofits to coordinate resources for homeless veterans. Partnerships provide emergency/transitional housing, food, healthcare, rent/utility assistance, housewares, automotive repairs, employment support, resume help, bus passes, and life skills training. LDVA ensures eligibility for benefits like disability income, pensions, VA healthcare, education, and the Military Family Assistance Fund—critical steps toward stability and preventing homelessness.



Military and Veteran Caregivers

Partnering with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and VA Caregiver Support Program, the LDVA pledged support for Louisiana's more than 100,000 military and veteran caregivers by joining the Hidden Heroes Campaign as the 12th Hidden Heroes state in the nation. This initiative raises awareness and delivers resources to "hidden heroes" caring for wounded, ill, or injured veterans.



A landmark achievement was hosting Louisiana's first Military and Veteran Caregivers Summit on November 18, 2025, uniting experts and resources. The event culminated in a proclamation from Governor Jeff Landry declaring November 2025 as Military and Veterans Caregivers Month—a powerful symbol of statewide recognition.

Women Veterans Outreach

LDVA honors Louisiana's women veterans by connecting them to tailored support. The statewide Women Veterans Symposium on June 12, 2025, featured expert panels on challenges and solutions, with onsite assistance from VA and partners—empowering women veterans and planning future events.



Gold Star Families

The program raises awareness of resources like Tuesday's Children, Survivor Outreach Specialists, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, and scholarships (Fry, Folded Flag Foundation, and Freedom Alliance). Annual recognition ensures ongoing support.

The annual Gold Star Family Day on September 27, 2025, at Veterans Memorial Park in Baton Rouge honored all Louisiana Gold Star Mothers and their families.



Suicide Prevention

LDVA reaffirms its unwavering commitment to pioneering innovative suicide prevention strategies each year, ensuring Louisiana’s veterans receive the most effective, forward-thinking support possible. The Outreach Director leads the Governor’s Challenge team of 30 professionals, developing new methods and boosting program enrollment.

A key innovation: the **Veterans Resource Card** with a QR code linking to comprehensive resources—offering immediate, portable help to prevent crises. On September 16, 2025, LDVA partnered with Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport for a joint Suicide Prevention Summit, featuring the Deputy Secretary and Outreach Director as speakers addressing warning signs, women veterans' risks, and support for those in crisis.

Veteran Job Placement and Referrals

Maintaining ties with employers and agencies (Louisiana Economic Development, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, U.S. Department of Labor, Louisiana Workforce Commission), LDVA facilitates hiring. Referrals to nonprofits like NextOpVets and Work for Warriors connect veterans directly to opportunities.

Through our support for The Boot, Louisiana positions itself as a premier post-military destination. Presentations delivered to transitioning service members actively promote LDVA services and resources, helping to attract and retain skilled veteran talent within the state.

These outreach accomplishments underscore the program's vital role in transforming lives, reducing barriers, and positioning Louisiana as a leader in veteran support. By meeting veterans where they are—across every corner of the state—LDVA ensures our heroes receive the comprehensive, compassionate assistance they deserve.

Military Recruiting

Outreach at the LDVA also includes recruiting for our next generation of military service members. Veterans are just as responsible for recruiting our future military service members as traditional recruiters are. In order to meet this mission, The Outreach Director visits high school JROTC’s to speak with students about joining the military and tells his Army story during events and programs.

Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among SMVF
Louisiana
Service Members, Veterans, and their Families
Resource Card

Veterans Crisis Line
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs - 225-219-5000
Louisiana Department of Health - 225-342-9500
Louisiana 211 Help Services - 211
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - 800-698-2411

Our goal is to provide Louisiana Service Members, Veterans, and their families with a single place to find the resources needed to enjoy quality of life and to thank you for the sacrifices made. We will continue to provide unwavering support to you and your families.

SCAN THIS CODE FOR RESOURCES

<https://linktr.ee/LaGovernorsChallenge>

LDVA
LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



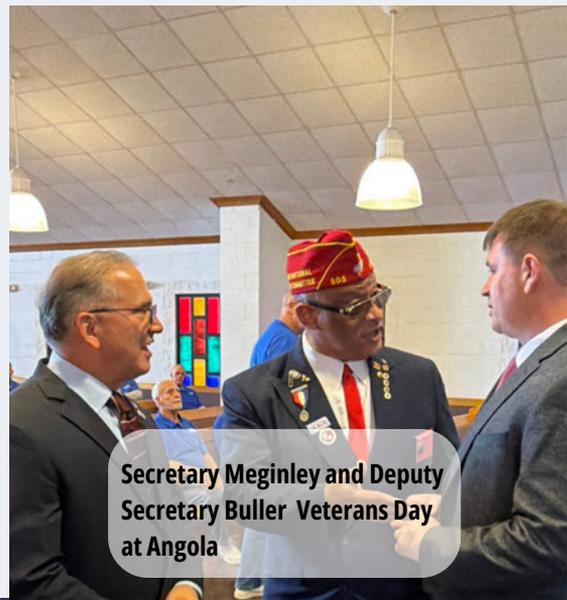
The Outreach Director is also a member of the United States Army Recruiting Command's Community Partner program and the United States Army's Partnership Outreach program. Both programs dictate that we tell our personal stories, as a veteran and someone who's experienced the positive impact of military service, to send a powerful message to our communities. A message that can greatly support the future of our all-volunteer force.

Incarcerated Veterans Outreach

The Incarcerated Veterans Program is dedicated to supporting justice-involved veterans and their families by providing access to benefits, reentry services, and coordinated assistance to promote successful reintegration into society.

Key Events from CY25 included: Louisiana State Penitentiary Veterans Day Program, Elayn Hunt Correctional Center Resource Fair, Federal Correctional Institute Oakdale Veteran Job Fair, and B.B. Rayburn Correctional Center Veterans Annual Summit.

Of these events, LDVA would like to highlight the Louisiana State Penitentiary Veterans Day Program. There are over 400 incarcerated veterans at the Louisiana State Penitentiary and The Men of the Roundtable put together a program that celebrated the 250th birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps, honored all military branches, recognized the service of veterans, and featured guest speakers such as Secretary of the LDVA, Charlton Meginley and Secretary of Department of Public Safety and Corrections Gary Westcott.



Secretary Meginley and Deputy Secretary Buller Veterans Day at Angola



Secretary Meginley and Deputy Secretary Buller along with the LDVA team at Veterans Day at Angola

“In recognition of the sacrifices made in defense of our country, the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs honors these veterans’ service and stands ready to assist them in reclaiming their place in civilian life after their obligations to society are fulfilled.”

— Deputy Secretary Jerome Buller



Support for Incarcerated Veterans

LDVA provides services to incarcerated veterans that include: VA benefits guidance and reinstatement, family eligibility support (i.e. Title 29, Chapter 35), VA compensation assistance, DD214 retrieval, and discharge upgrade assistance.

LDVA also provides reentry services that include helping soon to be released incarcerated veterans with support with finding housing, employment assistance, financial resources, and connecting them with VA reentry liaisons.

LDVA also partners with our federal VA counterparts such as the Healthcare for Reentry Veterans Specialists to provide healthcare services and additional reentry coordination for incarcerated veterans.



LaVetCorps

Executive Summary

LaVetCorps, a partnership between the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) and AmeriCorps, embeds trained Navigators in Student Veteran Centers on college and university campuses across Louisiana. These peer mentors help student veterans and military-connected family members navigate benefits, education funding, campus resources, and community support to promote well-being and academic success. In 2025, despite major funding uncertainty and a four-month grant interruption (April–July), the program exceeded its goal by serving 2,068 veterans and family members (target: 2,000). It also supported 272 Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve members. LaVetCorps remained fully compliant with AmeriCorps requirements and secured funding through November 30, 2026.



Program Overview: LaVetCorps operates on 26 campuses statewide, spanning the UL, LSU, Southern University, and LCTCS systems. Louisiana is one of only three states with this comprehensive campus-based veteran navigation model, making LaVetCorps a national example.

Since launching in 2019, Navigators have assisted thousands of veterans, families, and communities by bridging information gaps, providing peer support, and connecting individuals to VA, campus, and local resources.

2025 Activities & Community Engagement: Navigators delivered robust outreach, service projects, and partnership-building efforts. Highlights included events like the Veterans Festival/Fair at LSU–Eunice, which connected veterans with mental health providers, employers, LDVA staff, and other resources. Each Navigator completed three annual service projects, including the signature **“Mail Call”** initiative: creating holiday cards or coordinating visits for residents of Louisiana’s five state Veterans Homes, often in partnership with campus veteran organizations or local K–12 schools.

Funding Context: In April 2025, nationwide AmeriCorps funding cuts (via DOGE) created uncertainty for LaVetCorps and other Volunteer Louisiana programs. The 2025–2026 Notice of Grant Award was delayed until early August, complicating recruitment and campus contracts. Despite 10 unfilled positions and temporary service pauses, the program met all requirements and is now fully funded through November 2026.

2025 Performance Outcomes:

- Goal: Serve 2,000 veterans/family members
- Actual: 2,068 served → Goal exceeded
- Navigator retention: 88.5% (23 of 26 positions filled by year-end)
- Key services: benefits/education navigation, peer mentoring, referrals (VA/campus/community), volunteer coordination, outreach, and civic engagement.



Conclusion & Outlook: LaVetCorps showed strong resilience in 2024–2025, exceeding goals, maintaining high retention, and preserving key partnerships amid funding challenges. The program thanks its higher-education partners for their support and looks forward to continued growth, expanded campus presence, and enhanced veteran services across Louisiana in the fully funded 2025–2026 year.



For 2025–2026, priorities include:

- Expansion: Fill campus gaps and restore positions.
- Integration: Collaborate more with financial aid, counseling, disability, and career services for seamless veteran support.
- Impact: Track time-to-benefit, persistence/completion rates, and post-graduation outcomes.

We extend our sincere appreciation to LDVA, AmeriCorps, Volunteer Louisiana, our university partners, faculty, student Veterans, and the families who continue to support them. Next steps: Restart recruitment, host pre-term clinics, and train on trauma-informed practices, data, and referrals. With funding secured, LaVetCorps will scale successes, document practices, and share nationally for replication. The future holds greater impact and reach for those who've served.



Louisiana National Guard (LANG) Disability Benefit Program

Disability Benefit: From Underperformance to Model

The Louisiana National Guard (LANG) Disability Benefit program, administered by the LDVA LANG team under R.S.29:26.1, provides one-time payments of \$100,000 or \$50,000 to eligible members who sustain permanent and total disability resulting from active duty on or after September 11, 2001.

Prior to January 2024, only one employee processed these claims, resulting in an average wait of over two years for disposition; this led to a backlog of over 400 claims. However, in the last year, this critical program has undergone a dramatic transformation through deliberate process redesign and strategic staffing improvements. With four full-time, and six part-time employees now processing these claims, and by implementing disciplined case management, cross-training team members, and transparent performance tracking, the team has dramatically accelerated life-changing payments to veterans. Key improvements include mapping the full claims workflow, eliminating bottlenecks, and clearly defining medical evidence requirements.

“The State of Louisiana has provided this incredible benefit for our National Guard members who, through their service, incurred injury. Rapid processing of this benefit is vital to address financial and medical needs stemming from service-connected conditions. Delays prolong hardships and impede recovery for these dedicated National Guard members.”

—Secretary Charlton J. Meginley



Secretary Meginley visiting the Transportation Company in Poland

These changes have simultaneously reduced cycle times and increased accuracy delivering a clear win for both disabled Guardsmen and taxpayers. Ongoing collaboration with medical evaluators, finance personnel, and legal counsel ensures that eligibility decisions remain evidence-based, fair, and consistently applied. A real-time dashboard tracking throughput, aging cases, and workload distribution enables balanced staff assignments, safeguards quality, and identifies opportunities for proactive outreach to potentially eligible Guardsmen who may be unaware of the benefit. The result has been exponential growth in awards processed and overall program efficiency, establishing a powerful model of how targeted, intentional reforms can provide timely support to those who served while setting a high standard for accountability and responsiveness.

We note that in FY 2026, for the first time since the program's inception, the state general funds allocated for the program were exhausted. Furthermore, not only were the funds exhausted, but these funds were depleted in less than six months of the fiscal year.

In the early years of the program, although annual allocations ranged from \$800,000 to nearly \$3.85 million, actual expenditures consistently fell short of the total budgeted amounts. During that period, completed claims ranged between 30 and 96 annually, with payments significantly below the funds available.

Beginning in FY 2024, with the addition of staff and a focused effort to improve workflow efficiency, claim processing accelerated substantially. Completed claims nearly doubled to 158 in FY 2025, and payments increased to \$3.35 million bringing expenditures much closer to the full appropriation.

In FY 2026, the impact of these staffing and process improvements became fully evident. As of February 2026, 191 claims and appeals have been completed, with \$4.35 million in approved claims fully expending available funds, with an additional \$800,000 in approved claims (13 claims total) awaiting payment due to lack of remaining funds.

This program's turnaround reflects the broader culture of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA): measure what matters, invest in people, and pursue continuous improvement to honor military service through decisive, effective action. #ProtectWhatMatters



LANG Benefit Claims Historical Overview 2020 -2026

FY	Amount Budgeted	Amount Paid	# of Claims/ Appeals Completed	# of Claims/ Appeals Approved	# of \$100K	# of \$50K
2020	\$800,000	\$800,000	30	8	8	0
2021	\$3,850,000	\$2,650,000	66	29	24	5
2022	\$3,850,000	\$2,100,000	96	29	13	16
2023	\$3,850,000	\$1,550,000	87	30	1	29
2024	\$3,848,999	\$1,350,000	85	22	5	17
2025	\$3,848,009	\$3,350,000	158	58	9	49
2026	\$3,594,271	\$4,350,000**	191	75	12	63

As of Date: 02/10/2026. Note: as of this date, 13 Unfunded Approved claims were awaiting to be paid.

State Approving Agency (SAA)

The State Approving Agency (SAA) is responsible for reviewing, evaluating, approving, and supervising educational and training programs to ensure they meet rigorous VA quality standards and comply with federal requirements. This enables eligible veterans and other beneficiaries to use their G.I. Bill® benefits at approved institutions. SAA audits ensure compliance with the college and non-college degree programs, vocational flight training, apprenticeships, on-the-job training (OJT) programs, and license and certification tests based on rigorous VA standards related to the G.I. Bill® requirements.

Louisiana Department of Veterans (LDVA) maintains a contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which funds the SAA for Veterans' Education and Training. Costs are reimbursed 100 percent by VA and include coverage of clerical and administrative expenses of the Department, so that educational assistance benefits may be paid to veterans and other eligible persons under programs administered by the USDVA.

The following is a list of entitlement programs, codified in Title 38, U.S. Code, for which the SAA has approval and supervisory responsibilities within Louisiana:

- Montgomery G.I. Bill®-Active Duty (Chapter 30)
- Post 9/11 G.I. Bill®- (Chapter 33)
- Survivors and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program(Chapter 35)
- Montgomery G.I. Bill® - Selected Reserve (Chapter 1606)



In FY25, the SAA provided Louisiana veterans with opportunities to train at approved education and training facilities across the state. These numbers include educational programs at universities, colleges, and community colleges, vocational schools, and high schools for dependents using the Survivors and Dependents Education Assistance program. The State Approving Agency also approved apprenticeship and on-the-job training facilities for veterans, military service members, and their families.

Economic Impact

Louisiana’s economic impact of federal benefits paid to veterans, their family members and dependents, and colleges and schools (tuition & fees, monthly housing payments) constitutes more than \$215 million annually.

Educational Training Institutions (ETI)

Institution Type:

- Apprenticeship (APP)
- Flight (FLT)
- Institution of Higher Learning (IHL)
- Non-College Degree (NCD)
- On-the-Job-Training (OJT)

2024 Active Student Count		2025 Active Student Count	
APP	87	APP	89
FLT	17	FLT	38
IHL	9,885	IHL	10,907
NCD	572	NCD	675
OJT	46	OJT	39
TOTAL	10,607	TOTAL	11,748
2024 Active ETI Count		2025 Active ETI Count	
APP	18	APP	18
FLT	4	FLT	4
IHL	95	IHL	91
NCD	92	NCD	133
OJT	16	OJT	13
TOTAL	225	TOTAL	259

The Louisiana SAA is a member of the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA). NASAA is an organization comprised of the State Approving Agencies (SAAs) for each state plus several territories. There are 53 SAAs. State Approving Agencies were established by Congress to work in partnership with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to ensure that education and training programs funded under the GI Bill® are of quality and represent value to veterans, their family members and dependents, and the U.S. taxpayers.

FINANCIALS

In Fiscal Year 2025-2026, the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs' total operating budget increased to \$102.2 million, an \$8.3 million (8.8%) increase over the prior fiscal year. This growth is driven primarily by expanded federal support for Louisiana's five state veterans homes, ensuring continued high-quality care and services for resident veterans. State General Fund support remains stable, while federal funding increases reflect strengthened reimbursement and operational capacity across our veterans homes.



With minimal reliance on State General Funds, the department continues to operate with a lean, disciplined budget while maintaining strong operational stability and expanding resources dedicated directly to veteran care.

A key focus has been reducing vacancies, particularly in direct patient care positions, to align staffing levels with our growing census. In January 2024, the department reported 177 vacancies. As of February 2026, that number has been reduced to 82, reflecting significant progress in workforce stabilization and recruitment.

Over the past two years, the LDVA has implemented a comprehensive workforce strategy focused on competitive compensation, career field modernization, and long-term retention. In close coordination with State Civil Service, these efforts not only delivered targeted pay increases but also modernized job classifications, expanded promotional



pathways, and strengthened succession planning across critical operations, reinforcing our ability to fulfill our mission of providing the highest quality programs and services to veterans and their families statewide.

These initiatives reinforce our capacity to deliver the highest quality programs and services to Louisiana’s veterans and their families, while positioning the department for sustained operational excellence.

Highlights:

2024

- Updated Special Entrance Rates (SER) for Nursing Assistants with corresponding pay adjustments.
- Enhanced premium pay for Nursing Assistants, Psychiatric Aide Supervisors, and Registered Nurses.
- Implemented SER for Veterans Assistance Counselor (VAC) positions with corresponding pay adjustments.

2025

- Approved targeted pay adjustments for Cemetery Administrative Coordinators to remain competitive in hiring.
- Updated Veterans Homes shift differential, premium pay, and SER policies to:
 - Add Nursing Assistant Supervisor 1 and 2 titles.
 - Eliminate the outdated Psychiatric Aide Supervisor classification.
- Developed the new VAC Specialist title.
- Reallocated the Cemetery Administrator and Manager positions, with corresponding pay adjustments and improved leadership alignment.
- Established a new SER policy for Long Term Care Administrator and Associate Administrator positions, with corresponding pay adjustments.



“With minimal reliance on State General Funds, the department continues to operate with a lean, disciplined budget while maintaining strong operational stability and expanding resources dedicated directly to veteran care.”

—Secretary Charlton J. Meginley

VETERAN FOCUSED LEGISLATION

With support from Governor Jeff Landry, the LDVA has actively pursued a strategic vision to position Louisiana as the most military and veteran-friendly state in the nation. As part of this vision, the department collaborates with state leaders, legislators, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to advance our vision through targeted legislation, expanded benefits, and protective measures. Below are some of our major initiatives, or bills we championed to broaden military and veteran support:

- **Major Richard Star Act Passage** - HR 258 (Owen, 2025) urged Congress to pass the Major Richard Star Act to provide that combat wounded, medically retired service members receive their DOD retirement, which may be offset by federal VA benefits.
- **Veteran Treatment Courts** - HR 247 (Crews, 2025) authorized the Special Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs to study and determine any needed revisions to the laws establishing the Veteran Court Program Treatment Act and the Post-Conviction Veterans Mentor Program.
- **Protections and Anti-Discrimination** — Act 100 (Foil, 2025) prohibits discrimination against service members and their family members based on military service in housing, employment, education, and other areas.
- **Financial Aid and MFA Expansion** — Act 241 (Egan, 2025) & Act 637 (Knox, 2024) empowers the Military Family Assistance Board to fund indigent veteran burials, increase educational benefits for children of certain disabled veterans (up to \$1,000), and provide grants to veteran-supporting organizations (up to \$10,000).



- **Education and Campus Support** — Act 130 (Horton, 2025) established the "Purple Star Campus" designation for higher education institutions demonstrating strong support for veterans and military-connected students. Act 74 (Owen, 2024), reduced Title 29 residency requirements from two years to one year and ensured the benefit was available to children of servicemembers who passed away while stationed in Louisiana.
- **Veterans Homes and Residency** — Act 132 (Galle, 2025) extends eligibility for state veterans homes to Louisiana National Guard veterans and retirees (not federally deployed).



- **Expanded Definitions** — Act 137 (Knox, 2025) includes the U.S. Space Force in the definition of "Armed Forces" under state law, ensuring our Guardians receive the recognition they deserve.
- **Fee Adjustments and Family Support** — Act 191 (Dickerson, 2025) allows LDVA flexibility in adjusting care/maintenance fees for spouses and Gold Star families in veterans homes.
- **Recognition Programs** — Act 197 (Adams, 2025) authorizes LDVA to issue Civilian Honor Medals to non-veterans showing exceptional support for veterans/military.
- **Recreational Discounts** — Act 321 (Myers, 2025) provides an 80% discount on hunting and fishing licenses for honorably discharged veterans (implemented via LDWF in 2025).
- **State Guard Inclusion** – Act 242 (Wiley, 2025) amended the Louisiana laws governing death and disability benefits for Louisiana National Guard members to now include Louisiana State Guard members for eligibility purposes. Further recognized the Louisiana State Guard in additional statutes regarding definitions of armed forces, military, and uniformed services.

- **Parking and Accessibility** — Act 17 (Horton, 2024) amended disabled veteran parking privileges (unlimited airport parking, resident-only cruise terminal access).
- **Insurance Relief** — Act 173 (Boudreaux, 2024) allows auto insurers the discretion to expand discounts to reservists, retired military, and service-connected disabled veterans (effective 2025). Implementation of this act required substantial partnership and coordination between the LDVA, the Louisiana Department of Insurance, and major insurance carriers.
- **Louisiana’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial** - Act 760 (Stine, 2024) established that the official Louisiana Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial located at Veterans Memorial Park in the city of Lake Charles. The Memorial was dedicated on March 31, 2025.



- **Concurrent Jurisdiction** - Act 125 (Foil, 2024). This landmark piece of legislation amended La. R.S. 52:6 to provide a legal framework for the cession of limited jurisdiction from the Federal Government back to the State, specifically the territories covered by United States military installations. Currently, the US government has exclusive jurisdiction over the land and property identified as federal military installations (Barksdale AFB and Fort Polk). With this legislation, the base commanders of these installations can propose a limited cession of jurisdiction back to the state for limited subject matters – namely juvenile criminal charges and state fish and wildlife laws. The main objective of this legislation was to protect juveniles, who violate minor criminal law while on the military installation, are not subjected to the federal judicial system, and can be adjudicated by local Louisiana authorities that have alternative processes such as diversion, rather than potentially having federal charges on their record.

- **Parish Veterans Affairs Offices** - Act 425 (Dickerson, 2024) amended La. R.S. 29:262 to better clarify the responsibilities and suitability for the offices of our Veterans Assistance Counselors, which led to significant improvement in the quality of our offices. Since the passage of this Act, Bossier, East Baton Rouge, Evangeline, Orleans, and Rapides are some of the parishes that made an effort to improve services to our veterans.



"Louisiana's progress in supporting our military and veterans did not happen by accident. It is the result of deliberate collaboration between the Governor's Office, legislative leaders, federal partners, and fellow cabinet members. Together, we have broadened benefits, strengthened military and veteran families, and reinforced Louisiana's position as a national leader in veteran advocacy.

These legislative accomplishments reflect what is possible when state leadership, federal partners, and veteran advocates unite with shared purpose. Louisiana is not merely responding to the needs of our military families and veterans—we are proactively bolstering systems, expanding legal protections, and building enduring support structures that establish our state as a national model.

These achievements underscore our commitment to partnership, accountability, and results—ensuring Louisiana continues to lead the nation in serving those who have served."

—Secretary Charlton J. Meginley



MILITARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE FUND

The Louisiana Military Family Assistance Fund (MFA) is a state program administered by the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) to provide critical financial support to eligible veterans and their families during times of hardship.

Established under Act 151 of the 2005 Regular Legislative Session, the fund offers need-based grants to Louisiana veterans (with honorable or under honorable conditions discharge) and members of the Louisiana National Guard (LANG) or Reserves in good standing. Immediate family members may apply on behalf of eligible service members or veterans. Applicants must be current Louisiana residents and meet service-related criteria.

The MFA provides non-repayable financial assistance of up to \$10,000 per need-based claim in a 12-month period. Grants help cover essential expenses that create undue financial hardship, such as housing (rent/mortgage, utilities, foreclosure/eviction prevention), vehicle repairs, medical services, household needs, and other basic life necessities, including storm-related costs in disaster scenarios.

Since its creation in 2005, the MFA Fund has provided over \$1.5 million in assistance to Louisiana veterans and their families, helping ensure that those who serve receive the support they deserve.



“The fund exists to offer Louisiana veterans and their families a measure of stability during times of unexpected financial hardship, helping ensure they can weather the storm without the added fear of losing their home or being unable to put food on the table.”

—Holly Talley, MFAF Administrator

How to Apply

Applications are submitted through the LDVA. Veterans or eligible applicants can apply online at bit.ly/mfafapply, or download and complete a fillable PDF application to submit via email (holly.talley@la.gov), or mail to: Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs, ATTN: MFA Administrator, PO Box 94095, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9095. For assistance or to request an application, call (225) 219-3700 or toll-free 1-877-432-8982.

Required documentation typically includes:

- Copy of the veteran's DD-214 or discharge papers
- Proof of relationship (for family members applying on veteran's behalf)
- Valid photo ID or military/dependent ID
- Proof of Louisiana residency
- Current leave/earnings statements or household income proof
- Proof of total household monthly income. This includes, but is not limited to: Bank Statements, Leave and Earning Statements, Award Letters, etc.
- Itemized repair estimates (if applicable)

The MFA Board reviews applications and determines awards based on demonstrated need. The fund is supported entirely through voluntary private donations from individuals, businesses, and corporations—not state appropriations. Louisiana citizens and companies can contribute directly (e.g., by check to Military Family Assistance Fund, Attn: MFA Donation, PO Box 94095, Baton Rouge, LA 70804) or via state income tax check-off options. All donations are deposited into the dedicated special fund and used exclusively for approved claims.

This program plays a vital role in helping Louisiana's veteran and military community overcome temporary financial crises, ensuring stability for those who have served. For the most current details, visit the official LDVA site at vetaffairs.la.gov/military-family-assistance-fund.

VETERANS HOMES



Louisiana Department of Veteran Affairs (LDVA) operates five Veteran Homes strategically located in different regions across our state. The mission of the Louisiana State Veterans Homes is to honor and serve Louisiana's veteran population by delivering comprehensive medical, nursing, restorative, and rehabilitative care in an atmosphere of dignity, respect, and compassion. We provide integrated services as part of a coordinated continuum of veteran health care, while embracing innovative approaches to continuous quality improvement.

Our homes foster an integral organizational culture that emphasizes teamwork, values employees, and nurtures high performance supported by educational and promotional opportunities. We provide an environment that encourages the continuous professional development of our staff and supports allied health education in Louisiana. Our LDVA team works in collaborative partnerships with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Louisiana Department of Health, local health care providers, community agencies and the public to develop and maintain an efficient and cost effective state-wide veterans health care delivery system.

At our Louisiana Veterans Homes, we provide both short-term and long-term services for Veterans, their spouses, Gold Star Parents, as well as National Guardsmen & Reservists. Some residents come to our facilities after a difficult hospitalization for skilled therapy. For these residents, their goal is to regain their strength and one day return to their home, back to their prior level of functioning before their hospitalization. We provide a wide range of rehabilitation including speech therapy, occupational therapy, & physical therapy.



Our Veteran Homes are funded through several sources, including federal VA per diem payments, Medicare payments, care and maintenance fees paid by veteran residents, and private-pay revenue from non-veteran residents such as spouses, Gold Star parents, and National Guard or Reservists. Additional self-generated funds are collected through pharmacy charges, meal tickets, and similar services.

Federal VA funding is provided either as Basic Per Diem or a higher Service-Connected Per Diem. Veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or greater qualify or admitted for a Service-Connected disability may reside in our veteran's homes at no cost. Currently, the Jackson facility is the only home receiving state general funds while it continues to work to grow their census.

In April of 2025, LDVA Secretary Meginley testified before the House Veterans Affairs Committee Health Subcommittee, on regulatory oversight of our State Veteran Homes. He was invited due to the exemplary performance of Louisiana’s five Veteran Homes in the delivery of safe, high-quality patient care. This hearing highlighted how LDVA is leading the nation in long term veteran care and is the model for other states to follow.



Successes by the numbers:

Over the past two years, the census has risen across all five LDVA state veteran homes. In January 2024, we served 603 Veterans, and by the end of 2025, 639 Veterans called our homes their own.

With the increase in census across our homes, we also realized a corresponding growth in revenue, which enabled us to strengthen our financial position by building carryover savings to nearly three months of operating expenditures. Achieving this level of reserve is a critical component of our strategic objectives, as it provides essential financial stability while pending reimbursement of services rendered from the federal Veterans Health Administration or during economic downturns—such as the challenges we faced while navigating the historic COVID-19 pandemic.

This upward trend in census and revenue is mirrored by an observed rise in the number of service-connected Veterans residing in our facilities. In January 2024, LDVA served 213 service-connected Veterans. By the end of 2025 that number had increased to 226 service-connected Veterans representing 35% of our total population.

Under current LDVA leadership, and through environments of ever-increasing challenges, our clinical teams have driven significant improvements in quality of care. Our long-term care facilities are tasked with providing care for higher acuity patients and an increase of mental and behavioral health issues, as well as increased admissions of

Korean and Vietnam Era Veterans. Even through these challenges, VA survey deficiencies have decreased by 36%, dropping from 53 in 2023 to 34 in 2024, followed by an additional reduction of 6 in 2025. These improvements have resulted in a total of only 28 deficiencies across all five homes in 2025. In addition to annual VA surveys, our Veteran Homes received 11 CMS deficiencies in 2025. Jackson Veteran Home received a zero deficiency CMS annual survey in 2025.

LDVA has partnered with Senior Psych Care (SPC) to address the increased burden of mental health disorders faced by our Veteran Homes. SPC provides qualified personnel to meet the psychiatric and behavioral health needs of our Veterans with psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners and psychologists. With this collaboration, our Veteran Homes have been able to better address mental and behavioral health issues and admit more Veterans with behavioral issues, while also helping to keep Veterans out of acute care facilities.

Home Location	Avg. Census (Annual)		Avg. % Falls * (Annual)		Avg. % Pressure Ulcers ** (Annual)	
	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Bossier City	120	132	23.1%	26.3%	1.8%	1.5%
Jackson	89	94	47.1%	42.9%	5.5%	3.0%
Jennings	138	143	33.2%	29.2%	6.2%	8.0%
Monroe	120	127	27.6%	30.2%	9.6%	12.9%
Reserve	127	138	36.2%	32.0%	0.4%	0.1%
Combined Average	118.8	126.8	33.4%	32.1%	4.7%	5.1%

*National Averages % - Annual Falls - 50-75%

**National Averages % - Pressure Ulcers - 11-20%

To enhance communication and engagement with Veterans, their families, and our employees, LDVA partnered with Activated Insights. This partnership provides valuable, ongoing feedback through monthly customer satisfaction surveys administered across all five veteran Homes. These surveys capture meaningful insights from Veterans and their families, allowing LDVA to better understand their experiences and identify opportunities for improvement. In addition, Activated Insights engages directly with newly hired employees to enhance the on-boarding process and shares survey findings with LDVA leadership. This feedback strengthens our ability to support our workforce and reinforces our commitment to delivering high-quality, compassionate health care to the state's Veterans.

In 2025 LDVA partnered with LSU Health to pilot a hydration program targeted at reducing falls, pressure ulcers and urinary tract infections (UTI's). Our clinical teams have subsequently demonstrated exceptional commitment to patient safety, achieving significant reductions in UTI's and pressure-ulcer rates. By enhancing bedside vigilance, refining risk-screening processes, implementing targeted prevention bundles, and fostering strong interdisciplinary communication, they have created a safer environment for every patient we serve. Their proactive approach and unwavering focus on quality reflect the best of our organizational values, and we are proud to recognize their impact. With the success of this pilot program at our LDVA facilities, LSU is now implementing the hydration program in every long-term care facility across Louisiana.



Individual stories capture the heart of our mission:

- At Northwest Louisiana Veterans Home, Navy Veteran James Lester arrived profoundly weak after hospitalization, dependent on mechanical lifts. Through dedicated therapy and compassionate care, he regained full independence, walking 600–1,000 feet unaided before discharging home to his wife in June 2024.

- At Southeast Louisiana Veterans Home, Navy Veteran Michael Tanner entered bedbound in May 2025. With intensive therapy and unyielding spirit, he achieved independent wheelchair mobility, self-feeding, and dressing—progress toward standing unaided.

- At Northeast Louisiana Veterans Home, 44-year-old Navy Veteran Allen Gee arrived paralyzed from central pontine myelinolysis. After six months of tailored rehabilitation, he now walks independently and manages all personal care—reclaiming a life once thought lost.



Our staff's commitment, paired with community support drives these transformations. Despite challenges like renovations and post-pandemic recovery, our homes continue rebuilding—filling waiting lists, restoring morale, and honoring every Veteran's service with personalized, restorative care that maximizes independence and quality of life.

Louisiana's Veterans deserve nothing less. We are proud to lead the nation in serving them with excellence and compassion.

Home Location	Annual Budgets	
	FY 2024	FY 2025
Bossier City	\$15.0M	\$15.9M
Jackson	\$12.4M	\$14.2M
Jennings	\$17.1M	\$16.6M
Monroe	\$14.8M	\$15.0M
Reserve	\$15.1M	\$15.5M
Total Annual Budget	\$74.4M	\$77.2M
% Federal Funds	78%	78%



“Our residents receive high quality, compassionate care in an environment that honors their service to our nation. Through reduced deficiencies, innovative partnerships, and rising census, Louisiana continues to lead the way in delivering safe, dignified, and restorative veteran care.”

— Deputy Secretary, Dr. Jerome Buller





VETERANS CEMETERIES



LDVA operates five state veteran cemeteries across Louisiana. Our cemeteries are primarily funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. These grants often cover most or all costs for establishment, expansion, and improvements, creating a network of dignified, permanent resting places for veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents.

Arguably the face of our department, the cemeteries provide honorable final resting options—including in-ground casket burials (with preplaced crypts), in-ground and above-ground cremains, and scattering gardens (available at four locations)—while offering compassionate support to grieving families. Every committal is conducted with reverence, and grounds, headstones, and records are meticulously maintained.

Cemetery Locations and Opening Years

- Northwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery – Keithville (2007)
- Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery – Leesville (2012)
- Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery – Slidell (2014)
- Northeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery – Rayville (2015)
- Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery – Jennings (2020)

These five sites serve all of Louisiana except the Baton Rouge area (covered by national cemeteries). Since opening, they have interred nearly 12,000 veterans and 2,500 eligible dependents.

Operational Excellence

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) conducts triennial Compliance Reviews, evaluating 95 standards (7 Critical, 42 High, 46 Medium). To earn the Operational Excellence Award, a cemetery must achieve 100% on Critical, $\geq 90\%$ on High, and $\geq 85\%$ on Medium standards.

Recent results:

- Northeast (Rayville) — Earned the award in every review; in 2025: 100% Critical, 90% High, 97% Medium.
- Southwest (Jennings) — Earned the award in 2024 (first review, conducted 2023): 100% Critical, 97% High, 100% Medium.
- Central (Leesville) — Earned the award in 2025: 100% Critical, 90% High, 100% Medium.

The other two cemeteries achieved full compliance.



Additionally, all five cemeteries scored 90% or higher in annual safety audits by Sedgwick (Office of Risk Management contractor), reflecting strong safety training, hazard controls, and a proactive culture.

This consistent performance demonstrates LDVA's commitment to excellence, compassion, and perpetual care for those who served.

Voices of Families: Customer Satisfaction and Trust

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) conducts annual customer satisfaction surveys with next-of-kin and funeral directors. These align with key compliance standards and serve as strong indicators of performance in areas most important to families.

Our Louisiana state veteran cemeteries show consistent high performance and year-over-year gains in most metrics, often exceeding or matching national benchmarks for state veterans cemeteries.

Key highlights (Strongly Agree/Agree percentages):

- Quality of service from cemetery staff: 94.8% (2024) → 95.6% (2025) (in line with national)
- Overall cemetery appearance: 99.04% (2024) → 99.38% (2025) (exceeds national by ~1%)
- Gravesite appearance: 97.06% (2024) → 97.56% (2025) (exceeds national by ~1%)
- Sufficient signs for visitors: 95.07% (2024) → 94.23% (2025) (exceeds national by ~2%, despite added markers)
- Would recommend to veteran families: 98.11% (2024) → 98.15% (2025) (in line with national)
- Committal shelter clean and private: 96.89% (2024) → 98.84% (2025) (exceeds national by ~2%)
- Upkeep of headstones/markers: 96.29% (2024) → 97.08% (2025) (in line with national)
- Easy interment scheduling (funeral directors): 93.10% (2024) → 92.30% (2025) (exceeds national by ~0.5%)
- Satisfied with phone scheduling time: 93.11% (2024) → 100.00% (2025) (exceeds national by ~7%)



"Honoring in death those who honored our nation in life: Our cemeteries preserve veterans' legacies with dignity, while our staff fulfill a sacred trust by supporting families in their time of need."

**— Deputy Secretary,
Dr. Jerome Buller**



Trust metrics reinforce the system's strong reputation:

- Trust state to maintain cemeteries as national shrines: 97.44% (2024) → 98.46% (2025) (exceeds national by ~0.5%)
- Trust state to meet future veteran burial needs: 97.09% (2024) → 97.24% (2025) (within 0.7% of national)
- State cemeteries honor all veterans and their service: 97.76% (2024) → 97.79% (2025) (in line with national)

These results reflect compassionate service, reliable stewardship, and growing family confidence.

Cemetery Name	Location	Year Established	Total Acreage	Total Interments Since Opening	Recent Expansion Details
Southeast Louisiana	Slidell	2014	75 acres (22 developed)	5450	Grant expansion in 2024 (\$6m)
Northwest Louisiana	Keithville	2007	81 acres (25 developed)	4867	Grant expansion 2023 (\$4.4m)
Central Louisiana	Leesville	2012	204 acres (17 developed)	1693	Grant expansion 2023 (\$2.25m) and \$600K in state funds for filtering system
Northeast Louisiana	Rayville	2015	52 acres (22 developed)	1317	Grant expansion 2024 (\$2.45m)
Southwest Louisiana	Jennings	2020	20 acres (10 developed)	837	No expansions



Annual interments remain steady to growing, supported by targeted federal grants and infrastructure upgrades (e.g., irrigation improvements). The network is well-positioned for long-term sustainability as total interments exceed 14,000 veterans plus eligible dependents.



On February 28, 2025, Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery Director, Chief Warrant Officer IV (Ret.) Dwayne “Chief” Guidry unexpectedly passed away. Dwayne dedicated his life to honorable service through a distinguished Army career and groundbreaking leadership at the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery, where he is now laid to rest among the veterans he served and honored. A respected veteran, employer, coworker, and friend, he set a standard of excellence and integrity that endures, and he is profoundly missed by his LDVA family.

Continuous Improvement: Safety, Access, and Family Experience Annual safety audits by Sedgwick (Office of Risk Management) score all five cemeteries 90%+, reinforcing a safety-first culture across equipment, storm preparedness, ADA accessibility, and staff training.

High survey scores on signage (94–95%) demonstrate effective wayfinding despite expansion. Ongoing investments in map kiosks, digital locators, and directional markers support visitors, especially during peak events like Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Committal shelters—critical for meaningful services—saw strong gains (96.89% → 98.84%), exceeding national peers. Phone scheduling reached perfect satisfaction (100%) in 2025 through streamlined processes.

20/20/20 Spouse Rule: LDVA is currently accepting public comment on a proposed administrative rule that formalizes a long-standing agency practice of waiving burial fees for the “20/20/20” spouse. This refers to those spouses that were married to military service members for 20 years during their time of active duty service.

Looking forward, Louisiana will continue leveraging VA grants for expansions, modernizing systems, and offering diverse burial options to honor preferences while upholding national-shrine standards, regional accessibility, and compassionate care.



Honoring Our Fallen Heroes – Bringing Them Home

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency is committed to providing the fullest possible accounting for America’s missing personnel from past conflicts. A critical component of this mission is the Disinterment Program, which focuses on identifying remains previously designated as “Unknowns.”

Many of these Unknowns were recovered from conflict zones using the limited technology available at the time. They often underwent multiple burials, exhumations, and examinations before being declared unidentifiable and permanently interred in cemeteries overseen by the American Battle Monuments Commission or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Today, through cutting-edge forensic science, DNA analysis, archival research, and family collaboration, long-unidentified heroes are being restored to their names, their histories, and their families.

By returning four USS Oklahoma Pearl Harbor Navy veterans; Cyril Isaac Dusset, Charles Clay Gomez, Clarence Thompson, and Ralph Boudreaux, who are now laid to rest at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery, along with Marine Corps PFC Harry LeBert, buried at the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery, the department reaffirms its sacred commitment: no service member is forgotten.

PFC Blanchard Pruitt, was laid to rest in Anacoco, Louisiana. While he was not interred in one of our state veterans cemeteries, we remain deeply grateful that he, too, was brought home through the efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

The department also continues to support ongoing recovery efforts for those still unaccounted for, including MSGT Thornburg, who is memorialized at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery as the search for his remains continues.

These ceremonies are not simply burials. They are acts of restoration—restoring identity, restoring honor, and restoring a hero to the soil of the state he called home. Louisiana will remember them always.



LDVA PUBLIC & PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS



Public-private partnerships play a vital role in supporting state veterans affairs departments by leveraging the strengths, resources, and reach of nonprofits, private organizations, community groups, and federal entities to address critical challenges faced by veterans. These collaborations are especially important in combating veteran suicide, homelessness, and legal barriers, which often strain limited state budgets and capacity. For instance, partnerships enable expanded outreach and community-based suicide prevention programs, connecting veterans to mental health resources and crisis support beyond what state agencies can provide alone. In tackling homelessness, collaborations with nonprofits and housing providers have helped states and cities dramatically reduce veteran homelessness through coordinated housing, supportive services, and employment assistance.

Similarly, public-private initiatives, including grants to nonprofit legal service organizations, deliver essential legal aid for issues like housing disputes, benefits claims, and debt resolution—directly alleviating burdens on state entities by preventing or resolving crises that could otherwise lead to instability or greater reliance on public resources. Ultimately, these partnerships amplify impact, foster innovation, and ensure more veterans receive timely, comprehensive support. The following are some of the vital partnerships the LDVA has fostered and cultivated over the last two years:

Federal Veterans Health Administration

The Veterans Health Administration, especially the three VA Medical Centers in the state (New Orleans, Shreveport, and Alexandria), remain our strongest partners in addressing healthcare, including mental healthcare needs of our veterans. LDVA Secretary and Deputy Secretary are in regular contact with leadership from all three VAMCs, whether in person, by email, or by phone. We have frequent, open communications, which are mutually supportive with a forward-leaning approach. From the State Veteran Home's perspective, this relationship is further strengthened when the VAMC appoints a single liaison (LNO) assigned to the homes in the VAMC catchment area. With backup assigned, this single point of contact (POC) allows for home-specific, robust, and personal relationships with VAMC LNO and our homes' clinical leadership. The VA continues to play a pivotal role in the credentialing and oversight of our State Veteran Homes.



Our LDVA Assistant Secretary for outreach is also closely connected with the outreach teams from all three VAMCs. Event attendance is mutually supportive, with rare exceptions. This has directly strengthened our state's response in addressing key issues like veteran mental health, homelessness, and suicide. Leadership is in constant communication with each National organization (National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) and National Association of State Veterans Homes (NASVH) and major veteran service organizations. In addition to close connectivity to our VA partners and the federally chartered Veteran Service Organizations, there are a number of community partners that have demonstrated a deep desire and unrelenting commitment to serving veterans.

Veterans Law Clinic, Paul M. Hebert Law Center, Louisiana State University

The William A. Brookshire Veterans Law Clinic at LSU's Paul M. Hebert Law Center plays a vital role in serving those who have served our country. Established in 2022 through generous funding from the Brookshire Foundation and inspired by a veteran law student, the clinic provides free legal assistance to active-duty members,



veterans Reserves, National Guard members, and surviving family — with a focus on appealing claims before the federal Board of Veterans' Appeals in collaboration with the LDVA and the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP). Since Fall 2024, Secretary Meginley and UnderSecretary Phillips have been providing instruction, guidance, and strategy in these cases. This work helps ensure veterans receive the benefits they've earned, often navigating complex administrative processes involving medical records, denials, and advocacy — support that many veterans might otherwise struggle to access.



The clinic has offered LSU Law students invaluable hands-on experiential learning under the supervision of Secretary Meginley and UnderSecretary Phillips. Students have gained real-world skills in administrative law, client counseling, negotiation, brief writing, oral advocacy, and public service — fostering a lifelong ethic of helping those who may lack access to legal representation.

“Partnerships with nonprofit and veteran service organizations are vital for the LDVA because these entities often provide specialized, community-based services—such as housing support, mental health resources, employment assistance, and emergency aid—that complement and extend limited state resources, enabling more comprehensive care for veterans.”

—Secretary Charlton J. Meginley





University of Louisiana at Lafayette

To better understand the needs of our veterans, the LDVA partnered with the University of Louisiana – Lafayette to conduct a groundbreaking needs assessment survey entitled, “Bridging the Gap: Louisiana Veterans’ Mental Health and Support Needs. The study is being administered by the Louisiana Center for Health Innovation (LCHI), University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

This preliminary report presents early findings from an ongoing statewide survey of Louisiana veterans, conducted between May 5 and July 7, 2025, with data collected from 410 respondents to date. The survey closed at the end of July 2025, and complementary focus groups are scheduled to begin in early September. Current findings point to a deeply concerning mental health crisis among the state’s veteran population. Over half of the respondents reported diagnoses of depression and/or anxiety, and nearly half reported being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These figures significantly surpass national averages reported by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Nationally, PTSD prevalence among veterans ranges from 11% to 20%, depending on the conflict era. The prevalence of depression and anxiety hovers around 24%. By contrast, the Louisiana veterans surveyed thus far report a PTSD rate of 45.6% and a depression/anxiety rate of 54.1%, more than double the national figures.

These findings must be understood within a broader context of systemic barriers and social determinants of health. A staggering 41.7% of Louisiana veterans live over an hour from the nearest VA hospital, and 10.2% lack reliable transportation. Older veterans experience even more significant access challenges. Compounding these barriers are environmental stressors, such as perceived neighborhood safety and proximity to essential services, which are closely correlated with adverse mental health outcomes.

While the current dataset provides essential insights, it represents only a portion of the whole picture. The survey's final results, along with qualitative findings from upcoming focus groups, will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing Louisiana veterans and refine the strategic recommendations outlined here. In the interim, we will continue to work closely with our VA partners and local community partners to address the needs of our veterans as efficiently and as completely as possible.

Other Partners

The Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) enhances veterans' mental well-being by leveraging a network of community partners, each offering specialized services that complement LDVA's mission. Close coordination with these partners, alongside federal Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) and national veteran organizations, creates a robust support system addressing critical issues like mental health, homelessness, and suicide prevention. Below is a brief overview of how some of our community partners contribute to veterans' mental health and well-being:

Acadiana Veteran Alliance (AVA)

(Lafayette, LA): The AVA is a dedicated nonprofit organization based in Lafayette committed to supporting veterans across the Acadiana region. Founded by Mr. Andrew Ward in 2020, their mission is to unite veterans, veteran-owned businesses, and local companies for a common purpose through three key pillars: putting veterans to work, helping veterans to heal, and giving back to the local community programs. Specifically, AVA's "Heal Program" focuses on innovative mental health support, particularly for PTSD, by funding and facilitating treatments like the Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB) injection procedure combined with counseling, earning national recognition, including the prestigious Fisher Service Award for its impactful results. The AVA meets once a month and welcomes all veterans and those interested in supporting the veteran community.



Veteran Service Organizations (VSO)

In addition to the stress of transitioning from military to civilian life, many veterans may have combat-related injuries, those seen and those unseen, which may adversely impact their mental well-being. Yet, outside of federal funding, the LDVA has limited state funding, and like many states, we do not have a dedicated appropriation to address the mental health needs of our veterans. As such, we rely heavily on 501(c) organizations and our congressionally chartered veteran service organization partners to help fill our gaps when identifying distressed veterans. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) (of which both the Secretary and Deputy Secretary are “Life” members), the American Legion, Blue Star Mothers of America, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), the Marine Corps League, Catholic War Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), and Military Officers of America Association (MOAA), are just a some of the VSO’s we work closely with to make sure our veterans have the support they need and deserve. Make no mistake, no state DVA can do its job effectively without VSO support.





Louisiana VFW Leaders at the National Convention, Columbus, OH, Aug 2025



DAV Honor Medal Presentation, Westwego, LA, Oct 2024



Catholic War Veterans National Convention, New Orleans, August 2024



Governor Landry with the Marine Corps League cutting the 250th Birthday Cake



Bastion Community of Resilience (New Orleans, LA): Operates a 5.5-acre intentional community in Gentilly for post-9/11 veterans and families, particularly those with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) or neurological conditions. Funded in part by the Wounded Warrior Project, Bastion’s Headway day program fosters peer support and recovery through community living, reducing isolation and promoting mental resilience.



Bayou Veterans Advocacy (BVA) (Monroe, LA): A Louisiana nonprofit dedicated to supporting and advocating for the rights of Louisiana veterans. BVA works to pair veterans at risk of suicide with peer support mentors who provide relatable guidance during crises. Additionally, BVA connects at-risk veterans with VA community care resources for professional treatment. To strengthen the veteran-mentor relationship, BVA engages subject matter experts to address common stressors—such as financial, legal, and relationship challenges—that can trigger crises. By proactively tackling these issues, BVA helps equip veterans with the tools and resources to manage stressors before they become overwhelming.

The Boot: A pioneering Louisiana-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, dedicated to recruiting, retaining, and returning military service members to Louisiana after their term of service. The Boot provides comprehensive support to transitioning veterans to facilitate their integration into civilian life in Louisiana. The Boot offers a veteran-led initiative in Louisiana, offering peer-to-peer support, outdoor recreational programs, and community events to combat isolation. We especially note that The Boot is working closely with officials from Fort Polk and Barksdale AFB to assist those service members who are currently stationed in Louisiana in their transition needs.



Elizabeth Dole Foundation: Supports military and veteran caregivers through its Hidden Heroes Campaign, which Louisiana joined as the 12th state in 2024. The foundation offers resources, training, and community support to caregivers, reducing their stress and indirectly bolstering veterans' mental health by ensuring stable home environments.

Face the Fight against Veteran Suicide: A USAA initiative focused on reducing veteran suicide through awareness campaigns, funding mental health programs, and connecting veterans to crisis resources such as the Veterans Crisis Line. The initiative also offers free suicide prevention training, emphasizing early intervention and reducing the stigma surrounding mental health care.

Longbranch Recovery Center (Abita Springs, LA): A private treatment facility in Louisiana offering comprehensive mental health and substance abuse services, including therapy for PTSD, depression, and anxiety. It provides veterans with personalized care plans, often integrating holistic approaches like mindfulness and outdoor activities to support mental well-being.

National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP): NVLSP is an independent, nonprofit veterans service organization that trains and mentors VA-accredited attorneys to represent veteran claimants before the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. LDVA and NVLSP have partnered to provide trained, VA-accredited attorneys to Louisiana veterans seeking to appeal their disability benefit claims.

New Orleans Saints and New Orleans Pelicans: the NFL and the Saints, and NBA and Pelicans, have been tremendous partners helping the LDVA conduct opportunistic outreach to veterans who attend these sporting events. During their "Salute to Service" games, and military appreciation games, the Saints and Pelicans allowed the LDVA to make one on one contact with many veterans who were unaware of the benefits they may be entitled to.



Secretary Meginley and Commissioner Bobbie Ragsdale with Mrs. Benson



Veterans Appreciation Game, Pelicans, Nov 2025

NORBA (Northshore Off-Road Bicycling Association): the LDVA has been working with NORBA to promote outdoor therapy for veterans through the use of mountain biking. Outdoor therapy (or nature-based therapy), can be a game-changer for veterans dealing with mental health or personal challenges. For veterans, outdoor therapy may offer benefits that traditional therapies can't offer. A 2019 study in the Journal of Veterans Studies found that veterans participating in outdoor recreation programs reported significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, depression, and anxiety. We commend Mr. Toby Cortez for his dedication to our veteran community through his work with NORBA. The LDVA has met with other groups, such as Eight Belles, which uses equine therapy to help veterans.



Next Op (Washington, D.C): Focuses on veteran employment and transition support, offering job placement and mentorship programs. By aiding veterans in finding meaningful work, Next Op reduces financial stress and enhances self-esteem, key factors in mental well-being.

Objective Zero: A non-profit providing a mobile app and peer support network to connect veterans with mental health resources, including suicide prevention tools and trained peer responders. It empowers veterans to seek help anonymously, addressing barriers to mental health care.



David St. Romain at our Louisiana Veterans Home

Songs of Survivors (SoS): Led by Mr. David St. Romain, SoS uses music therapy and creative arts to help veterans process trauma and improve mental health. By engaging veterans in songwriting and performance, it fosters emotional expression and community connection, reducing symptoms of PTSD and depression.

Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS): SLLS is a non-profit law firm that offers representation, advocacy, and legal education to low-income veterans.

The National World War II Museum:

led by CEO Stephen Watson, the museum in New Orleans holds profound importance to the veteran community by serving as a living tribute to the Greatest Generation, preserving thousands of oral histories, artifacts, and personal stories from WWII veterans to ensure their sacrifices and experiences are never forgotten. It provides a place of honor, reflection, and connection offering free admission to WWII veterans, hosting special events, such as the Victory Ball and D-Day remembrances, ceremonies, and programs that celebrate their service while educating future generations about the true cost of freedom.



The museum hosting the French Ambassador's presentation of the Legion of Honor to WWII veteran Sam Meyer - Feb 2024



The museum hosting the Navy's 250th birthday party - Oct 2025



Hosting the United States Veterans Service Dogs Gala - Nov 2025



25th Anniversary of the National WWII Museum on June 6, 2025



Vet the Vote: VtV is a national campaign that recruits veterans and military family members to serve as poll workers, helping to address shortages, support smooth elections, and boost public confidence in the democratic process. Through widespread outreach, partnerships with organizations like the NFL, and dedicated recruitment drives, the campaign has successfully enlisted over 160,000 such volunteers in recent election cycles, far exceeding initial goals and ensuring trusted, disciplined individuals help run polling locations nationwide.

Through these partnerships, LDVA amplifies its outreach, delivering targeted mental health services, peer support, and innovative therapies. The collaborative ecosystem ensures veterans receive holistic care, addressing both immediate crises and long-term well-being, while constant communication with national and local organizations aligns efforts to maximize impact.

LOUISIANA HONOR MEDAL

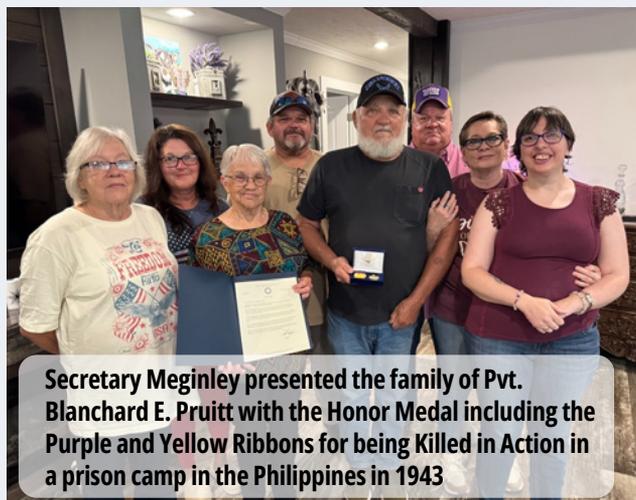
The Louisiana Veterans Honor Medal was created to recognize and thank Louisiana veterans for their honorable military service. Medals are available to all honorably discharged Louisiana veterans, and to the families of those Killed in Action.

The Louisiana Veterans Honor Medal is available with a blue ribbon for honorable discharge; a purple ribbon for Purple Heart recipients; a black ribbon for Prisoners of War/Missing in Action; and a yellow ribbon for those Killed in Action.



On behalf of Governor Landry, in CY 2024, the LDVA presented Honor Medals to approximately 600 veterans; in CY 2025 we presented approximately 750 medals.

Blanchard Pruitt was raised in Florien, Louisiana, where many of his relatives still reside. A Private in the U.S. Army's Medical Detachment, 31st Infantry Regiment, he was captured following the fall of Bataan on April 9, 1942, and endured the Bataan Death March before being held at the Cabanatuan POW camp in the Philippines. He died on January 1, 1943, at just 20 years old. Decades later, through the efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, his remains were identified and he was finally brought



Secretary Meginley presented the family of Pvt. Blanchard E. Pruitt with the Honor Medal including the Purple and Yellow Ribbons for being Killed in Action in a prison camp in the Philippines in 1943

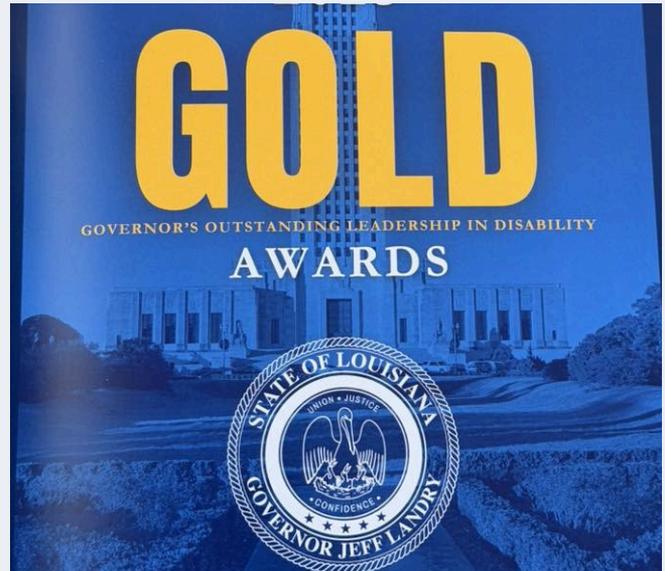
home. Secretary Charlton J. Meginley, Col (Ret), USAF, traveled to meet with the Pruitt family to personally present the Louisiana Honor Medal, bearing the Purple and Yellow ribbon, in recognition of his being killed in action. His return ensures that his sacrifice is honored and remembered in the state he called home.

Louisiana veterans, or families of those Killed in Action, can submit an online application or complete a fillable PDF application and submit via email to holly.talley@la.gov, fax to (225) 219-5590, or mail to Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs, ATTN: Honor Medal, PO Box 94095, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9095. Applicants may also request an application be sent to them by emailing the address listed above or by calling (225) 219-3700 or email Holly Talley at holly.talley@la.gov.



THE GOLD AWARDS (GOVERNOR'S OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP IN DISABILITY)

The 2025 Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities (GOLD) Awards, hosted by the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs, serve as a statewide recognition of individuals and organizations whose leadership, advocacy, and service have made a measurable impact within Louisiana's disability community. The GOLD Awards highlight those who demonstrate excellence in advancing accessibility, inclusion, and opportunity for citizens across our state.



These awards reflect Louisiana's commitment to honoring those who strengthen communities through service and compassionate leadership. From elected officials to volunteers, service providers to veterans, the honorees represent a broad cross-section of individuals working diligently to ensure that all Louisianans, including those with disabilities, are empowered to thrive.

Among this year's distinguished honorees, we proudly recognize **Irwin Marant**, named Veteran of the Year. Mr. Marant was honored for his continued dedication to Louisiana's veterans and for his steadfast commitment to service beyond the uniform. His work exemplifies the enduring spirit of leadership and sacrifice that defines our veteran community. Through advocacy, mentorship, and engagement, he continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of fellow veterans across the state.



Also recognized in 2025:

- **Shreveport Elks Lodge #122**, honored as Volunteers of the Year, for their sustained commitment to service and their impactful support of Louisiana communities.



The Department also celebrates distinguished leaders recognized in 2024 whose work continues to strengthen veteran care and support systems across Louisiana:

- **Shellie Talbot**, RN, recipient of the Public Servant of the Year Award, recognized for her exceptional care and dedication at the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Home. Her professionalism and compassion directly enhance the quality of life for veteran residents and their families.
- **AJ Sumner**, named Volunteer of the Year, for his outstanding service at the Northeast Louisiana Veterans Home. His consistent presence and meaningful engagement provide encouragement and comfort to veteran residents.
- **Andrew Ward**, recognized as Veteran of the Year, for his leadership with the Acadiana Veteran Alliance's HEAL Program. His advocacy continues to expand access to vital resources and support services for veterans in the region.



The GOLD Awards ceremony stands as a powerful reminder that progress is achieved through collaboration, service, and a shared commitment to ensuring that Louisiana remains a state where every citizen is valued and supported. The Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs is proud to recognize these outstanding honorees and to celebrate the meaningful work being done to strengthen our communities.



THE FUTURE OF VETERANS IN LOUISIANA

Veterans in Louisiana face a future shaped by both persistent difficulties and meaningful advantages. The RAND Corporation's 2026 report, *State-Level Summaries of Veteran Needs and Well-Being*—based on sources including the 2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), American Community Survey (ACS), and VA records shows the state performing below national averages in several key areas, particularly mental health, economic security, and certain health behaviors. These rankings reflect real issues that require ongoing attention and resources.

At the same time, Louisiana offers strengths that support many veterans, including a relatively strong quality of life ranking for military retirees. In WalletHub's 2026 *Best States for Military Retirees* report, Louisiana places 26th overall, with a 15th ranking in quality of life, 30th in economic opportunities, and 33rd in health care. The state provides generous benefits, such as tax exemptions on military retirement pay and property tax relief for disabled veterans, alongside a cost of living about 7% below the national average. Recent legislative progress from the 2025 session has further strengthened support.

Economically, the state is experiencing historic momentum. In 2025 under Governor Landry's leadership, Louisiana saw record-breaking business development with over \$61 billion in capital investments and more than 9,300 new direct jobs announced—many in high-wage sectors like maritime manufacturing, defense innovation, and advanced industries. Military-related spending generated \$17 billion in economic impact in FY 2024 (up 77% since 2021), supporting over 117,000 jobs statewide and highlighting the vital role of installations, contracts, and veteran communities. These influxes create opportunities for veterans transitioning to civilian careers, leveraging their skills in growing fields.

Coupled with rising educational scores, cultural appeal, and strong community support, and aligned with Governor Landry's *Come Home Louisiana* inaugural vision to make our state the most veteran- and family-friendly in the nation, these factors make Louisiana a desirable home for many veterans despite the challenges. As the state advances mental health programs and trains more providers, we believe suicide and homelessness rates will continue to decrease, though this demands sustained investment.

Finally, a message the LDVA preaches daily: Our American way of life is only guaranteed by the next generation of servicemembers. Elected, civic, and educational leaders must play a role in recruiting them. Veterans are essential to this effort. As those who have lived military realities, veterans offer credible mentorship and inspiration, sharing authentic stories of service, leadership, resilience, and growth that no advertisement can match. By mentoring recruits, supporting ROTC, and engaging youth, veterans bridge gaps, dispel misconceptions, and show how service builds transferable skills for success. In veteran-rich communities, their involvement makes national service feel relevant and attainable, ensuring our force remains strong and rooted in defended values. Every veteran who shares their experience becomes part of this vital recruiting mission.



APPENDIX 1

Data Points

United States & Louisiana's Veteran Population

The national veteran population is declining, from 18.3 million in 2023 to a projected 12.1 million by 2048. In Louisiana, the figure was 252,165 in 2024 (projected ~151,868 by 2050).⁷

The U.S. veteran population is declining due to aging cohorts from earlier eras (e.g., Vietnam, WWII) and fewer new enlistments. Nationally, the VA projects a drop from 18.3 million in 2023 to 12.1 million by 2048—a 34% decrease. The share of U.S. adults who are veterans fell from 18% in 1980 to 6% in 2022. Gulf War-era veterans now dominate, surpassing Vietnam-era in 2016.

As for the average service-connected (SC) disabilities per Veteran by period of service, the 2024 VA data is as follows:

	World War II	Korean Conflict	Vietnam Era	Gulf War Era	Peacetime Periods	Totals
All Veterans	8,024	50,508	1,403,881	3,678,404	852,150	5,992,967
Disabilities	19,238	128,086	6,327,502	31,936,472	3,254,274	41,665,572
Avg # of SC disabilities per Veteran	2.4	2.54	4.51	8.68	3.82	6.95
Total Veteran Population	58,182	398,103	4,780,882	8,981,692	3,702,372	17,921,241
Louisiana Veteran Population	306	4,739	67,450	130,021	49,649	252,165

In Louisiana, VA data shows a substantial decrease in veteran population over the past 25 years:

Fiscal Year	# of Veterans	# Receiving Compensation / Value	# Receiving Education Benefits
2000	390,000 (est)	33,455 / \$225.6M	7,737
2011	297,658	45,702 / \$597.6M	10,625
2016	322,607	60,158 / \$970.4M	12,142
2021	282,998	70,846/1.4B	9,773
2024	252,165	82,385/2.182B	11,197

Additional Demographics (2023):

- Women veterans make up about ~12.1% of our veteran population
- 42.7% of Louisiana veterans are aged 65 or over
- There are 125,709 VA healthcare enrollees.

Suicide, Homelessness, and Mental Health

Suicide, homelessness, and mental health issues remain at the forefront of veterans concerns. Louisiana must remain vigilant in providing veterans with the resources they need. At the forefront of veterans issues is the scourge of veteran suicide. Louisiana's veteran suicide rate stands at 33.2 per 100,000 according to RAND (ranking 21st, above the national 30.8).¹ Earlier VA data showed around 31.2 per 100,000 in 2022, with national figures dipping slightly to about 17.5 per day in 2023.^{3,4} The 2025 VA National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report indicates modest national declines overall, though risks remain higher for certain groups.⁵

Veteran homelessness declined 4.1% from 2017 to 2023, with about 530 affected in 2025. VA grants totaling nearly \$12 million that year, including \$7.5 million to Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana, support housing programs with strong retention rates (up to 97.5% in some cases). Economic vulnerabilities persist, however —RAND notes 24.6% of veterans with family income below 200% of the federal poverty line (ranking 50th nationally).¹ State property tax exemptions for disabled veterans and other aid provide relief, but housing shortages and broader economic pressures continue to pose risks.^{1,7}

(Per VA data, the table below shows veterans permanently housed in fiscal year 2025 across key facilities.)

VAMC	Unique Veterans Housed	Unique Unsheltered Interim or Permanent Housing Placements
Alexandria, LA HCS	132	52
*Houston, TX HCS	985	597
New Orleans, LA HCS	444	219
Shreveport, LA HCS	297	110
Total	1,858	979

*VA Houston covers ~25% of Louisiana's Balance of State Continuum of Care.

Mental Health: The RAND report cites 5.4 “bad mental health days” per month for Louisiana veterans (vs. national 4.5, ranking 51st), alongside higher rates of fair/poor self-rated health (24.9%, rank 47th), obesity (79.6%, rank 50th), and other behaviors.¹ Our Louisiana VA hospitals provide specialized care for PTSD, MST, and substance use, expanded under the PACT Act. Telehealth growth and family support programs help address rural access issues, but provider shortages and wait times remain concerns. Louisiana shows positive trends in VA benefits uptake—leading nationally in growth for compensation, vocational rehab (+25%), and GI Bill usage (+9%).

APPENDIX 2

Louisiana Veteran Business Owners Opportunities

1. HIRE Vets Medallion Program

The HIRE Vets Medallion Award is the only federal-level veterans' employment award that recognizes a company or organization's commitment to veteran hiring, retention, and professional development. (Source: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/hvmp>)

Program History

The 2018 HIRE Vets Medallion Program Demonstration allowed the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to initially run applications, raise awareness of the HIRE Vets Medallion Program, and enabled 239 employers to garner recognition. The HIRE Vets Medallion Award was earned by 429 employers in 2019, 675 in 2020, 849 in 2021, 835 in 2022, 859 in 2023, and 838 in 2024. (Source: <https://www.hirevets.gov/about#timeline>)

Program Purpose

The purpose of the HIRE Vets Medallion Award is to recognize employers who have employed and retained veterans, including their efforts to establish employee development programs for veterans, and employers who offer veteran-specific benefits to improve retention. Award recipients will have the opportunity to utilize the medallion in the marketing of their firm as a veteran friendly business when hiring, and in efforts to attract additional business. (Source: <https://www.hirevets.gov/about>)

Louisiana 2025 Participation

Only three companies were awarded in 2025: Entergy, Goodworks, Inc., and Hernandez Consulting Inc. (Source: <https://www.hirevets.gov/awardees>)



2. Louisiana Economic Development's (LED) Louisiana Growth Network

CEO Roundtables

This popular, yearlong LED program brings together 15 to 18 key decision makers from Louisiana-based small businesses for collaborative, growth-oriented roundtable sessions in which CEOs can safely explore business issues with the guidance of experienced facilitators in a trusting environment.

Participation in the roundtables provides access to numerous benefits, including:

- Peer-to-peer learning through discussion, interaction and the sharing of experiences that allow participants to learn from each other's achievements and mistakes.
- Support through highly qualified facilitators, expert guest speakers and connection to various small business resources. (Source: <https://www.opportunitylouisiana.gov/program/ceo-roundtables>)

Bonding Assistance Program

Louisiana Economic Development's Bonding Assistance Program provides access to quality bid, payment and performance bonds at reasonable rates from surety companies when bonding capacity is needed on public or private jobs.

- Offers 25% of contract price or \$100,000, whichever is less, in bond guarantee to surety
- The default mitigation fund will provide recipients up to \$40,000 of that guarantee, or 10 percent of the contract price, whichever is less, in mitigation funds
- Sureties perform all underwriting and offer competitive rates
- LED's Bond guarantees may mitigate some risk to surety company, leading to a positive underwriting decision. (Source: <https://www.opportunitylouisiana.gov/program/bonding-assistance-program>)

3. Source Louisiana

Source Louisiana allows businesses to showcase their services, certifications and capacity, ensuring that more Louisiana companies are in the pipeline for opportunity. Louisiana businesses are encouraged to register, verify and update their information as soon as possible.

- Access high-profile projects backed by global and national companies investing in Louisiana.
- Expand their client base by securing contracts related to major developments in Louisiana.

- Boost credibility through participation in high-value infrastructure and economic development projects.
- Tap into business resources designed to help vendors, subcontractors, and suppliers scale and compete effectively. (Source: <https://www.opportunitylouisiana.gov/source-louisiana>)

Summary

- There are approximately 1,655 veteran owned Louisiana businesses registered with the Louisiana Veterans First Initiative (Source: <https://laveteransfirst.org/search>). Each of these businesses should be aware of the programs available to them.
- There are numerous benefits, available to Louisiana veteran business owners, but getting the word out has been challenging. LDVA will continue to work closely with LED to explore opportunities to sharpen our messaging and enhance our partnership to expand support to veteran business owners.

APPENDIX 3

Debunking Myths and Celebrating Veteran Strengths

It's easy to focus on the challenges veterans face, but the reality is that overall the veteran community is incredibly strong and resilient. Media coverage and public discussions often emphasize challenges veterans face—like PTSD, homelessness, or transition struggles—which can overshadow the many positive attributes. While those issues are real and deserve attention, veterans as a group demonstrate impressive strengths, resilience, and contributions to society.

Myth 1: Most or all veterans have PTSD (or mental health issues dominate their lives)

Reality: PTSD affects a minority of veterans, and rates are only slightly higher than in the general population. Only about 7% of veterans experience PTSD at some point in their lives, compared to around 6% of non-veterans. The majority of veterans transition successfully without these challenges, and many who do face them recover with support. Veterans with PTSD are not inherently dangerous or violent—that's a harmful stereotype often amplified by the media. Many lead fulfilling lives, feeling love, happiness, and purpose.

See, The VA National Center for PTSD – "How Common is PTSD in Veterans?" (updated as of recent VA publications, e.g., 2024–2025),
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp

Myth 2: Veterans are less educated than civilians

Reality: The opposite is often true, especially for Post-9/11 veterans. They tend to be more educated than their civilian counterparts, thanks in part to benefits like the GI Bill. Student veterans show high success rates in higher education, with average GPAs about 0.40 higher than civilian peers and completion rates often double those of other financially independent students (e.g., ~47% complete a degree within six years using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, vs. ~23% for similar non-veterans). Veterans frequently pursue high-demand fields, making them strong job market candidates.

See, National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST) / Student Veterans of America (various reports, e.g., citing Post-9/11 GI Bill data),
<https://studentveterans.org/research/invest>; National University / other compilations (2024–2026 stats), <https://www.nu.edu/blog/military-and-veteran-higher-education-statistics>

Myth 3: Veterans struggle more with employment or have fewer opportunities

Reality: Veterans often have lower unemployment rates than non-veterans in many periods (e.g., around 3.1% in recent data, sometimes below the national average). They bring transferable skills like leadership, discipline, and adaptability. Many companies actively recruit veterans, and those with specialized military roles (e.g., intelligence) often earn significantly more in civilian jobs (e.g., \$55,000+ starting averages in some fields vs. lower for combat arms roles). Post-service earnings and stable employment are strong for many, especially with education benefits. See, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) – "Employment Situation of Veterans" annual report (2024 data, released March 2025): Annual average unemployment rate for veterans was 3.0% in 2024 (little changed from prior year), lower than non-veterans at 3.9%. Gulf War-era II veterans at 3.2%; <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm> (or latest at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.htm>); see also, U.S. Department of Labor – Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS): Confirms 3.0% annual average for veterans in 2024; often below national averages in many periods, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers>

Myth 4: Veterans are disengaged from society or less civically involved

Reality: Veterans outperform civilians in civic participation. In the 2024 election, 80.8% of veterans were registered to vote (vs. 73.9% non-veterans), and 72.9% of registered veterans voted (surpassing non-veterans by over 7 points). They are 40% more likely to contact public officials and 50% more likely to donate to political causes. Veterans volunteer 35% more hours annually (averaging 93 hours vs. 70 for non-veterans), equating to the work of about 220,000 full-time workers nationwide. They engage more in community activities like talking to neighbors, belonging to civic groups, and supporting local causes. See, 2025 Veterans Civic Health Index, <https://ncoc.org/2025-veterans-civic-health-index>.

Myth 5: Military service doesn't translate well to civilian success

Reality: Military training builds highly valued skills (leadership, teamwork, problem-solving) that apply directly to civilian roles. Most military jobs have civilian equivalents, and veterans often thrive in leadership positions. Positive contributions extend broadly—veterans volunteer in disaster relief, mentorship, conservation, and more, bringing crisis readiness and reliability.

APPENDIX 4

Estimated total Veteran population: 252,165

Louisiana

Compensation – Veterans on the rolls at the end of FY 2024

Number of Veterans		Estimated total amount paid monthly	Estimated total amount paid annually
82,385		\$181,838,917	\$2,182,067,000
Age 34 and under	Age 35 through 54	Age 55 through 74	Age 75 and over
7,574	27,356	28,886	18,569

Pension – Veterans on the rolls at the end of FY 2024

Number of Veterans		Estimated total amount paid monthly	Estimated total amount paid annually
2,986		\$3,493,190	\$41,918,276
Age 34 and under	Age 35 through 64	Age 65 through 74	Age 75 and over
5	327	1,404	1,250

Education – Participants by program during FY 2024

MGIB-AD	MGIB-SR	DEA	VEAP	Post 9/11	Total participants
105	1,239	5,180	0	4,673	11,197

Insurance

Life insurance payments during FY 2024	Total face value of insurance at the end of FY 2024	Total number of policies at the end of FY 2024
\$12,178,110	\$86,988,931	6,067

Home Loan Guaranty – Loans guaranteed during FY 2024

Number of loans	Total amount of loans
5,100	\$1,420,139,166

Veteran Readiness and Employment – Participants during FY 2024

Total applicants	Number of new plans of service (enrollments)	Number of entitled applicants	Number of program participants	Number of Veterans rehabilitated through independent living	Number of Veterans rehabilitated by obtaining suitable employment
1,983	347	576	1,159	6	91

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Benefits Administration



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