
VA Office of Tribal Government Relations Newsletter ~ Winter 2022

Greetings!

Welcome to our mid-Winter edition of the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations newsletter. I'll offer up front that some of the information shared in my welcome update letter may have been touched upon previously, but that much of it is ongoing so I thought I would offer some updates.

The year has been off to a running start with the launch of the first VA Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs, or the "VA TAC" as we like to call it. The TAC was created by statute and is what is referred to as a "Federal Advisory Committee Act" or FACA Committee. The first meeting was virtual, was held during late January, and is chaired by Choctaw Nation Assistant Chief Jack Austin. The Committee was briefed by VA Secretary Denis McDonough along with other senior VA leadership and national program directors. Three subcommittees were identified and will focus on three areas of priority for the VA TAC. The next meeting will be held this summer. These meetings are public sessions and we will work to continue to share and post information about when the meetings will be held along with registration (there is no cost) or sign-up information. The VA TAC represents the chance for tribal leaders and Native Veterans to have their voices and experiences shared with, responded to, and addressed by the VA Secretary as well as the rest of the leadership from across the VA, on a regular basis, which is an unprecedented step forward.

There are also a number of announcements and efforts underway to be aware of as I write this note. These include:

1. The Federal Register Notice for the graduate medical education program (100 medical residents who will serve rotations in Indian Health Service and Tribal Health program sites funded in part by the Veterans Health Administration).
2. The Federal Register Notice and accompanying Dear Tribal Leader Letter announcing the Tribal Representation Expansion Project (or T-REP) for short. The T-REP effort uses a special authority held by the VA Office of General Counsel to expand the number of individuals assisting Veterans with their benefits claims.
3. VHA is gearing up to implement the "no co-pay" legislation for American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans which went into effect on January 5, 2022, but there will be some delays, as was originally anticipated.
4. Last week, a call was held between the VHA Office of Community Care, Tribal Reimbursements Program and a number of Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs). There is strong interest by the UIOs in establishing reimbursement agreements with the VA. This is positive news on the outreach front, as we anticipate these purchased care relationships between the VHA and the UIOs may result in stronger outreach and care coordination serving the urban American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veteran population. We also anticipate that tribal consultation will be scheduled in the near future focused on crafting a revised VA/Tribal/IHS reimbursement agreement template that will include reimbursements for purchase referred care (previously called contract health).

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5. The new VHA Office of Tribal Veteran Health is preparing to recruit staff to newly-created positions/vacancies in that office, possibly as soon as this month or April. Those jobs should be posted on the USAjobs website.

We continue our “Web Ex Wednesdays” series featuring web ex topics of interest to tribal leaders, Veterans and Veteran service providers. We are also slowly getting back to in-person engagements. I just presented to the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) during their conference in DC and we look forward to more in-person engagements in the weeks and months ahead. Our tribal government relations team has been hard at work these past several months, continuing virtual engagements (with occasional in person meetings) and supporting efforts to implement the different pieces of Native Veterans legislation.

These past few months (and years) have been an extended season of loss and grief for many across our nation. We are grateful for the resilience and perseverance of our Veterans, their families, and our tribal nations. The VA continues to work with the White House Council on Native American Affairs to co-chair the health committee and there will now be an emphasis on efforts to strengthen AI/AN Veteran health, which is a step forward towards implementing the policy announcements VA Secretary McDonough made during the White House Tribal Nations Summit last fall.

I’ll go ahead and sign off so you can get to reading. If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions for newsletter content, please don’t hesitate to reach out to our editor, Peter.Vicaire@va.gov or to our tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov email site.

Take care and stay well –



Stephanie Birdwell
Director, VA OTGR



VA and Indian Health Service broaden scope to serve American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans

Here's a VA press release from November 23, 2021

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health Service renewed a partnership, Oct. 1, to help the country's nearly 145,000 American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans overcome health care access barriers.

The partnership, originally established in 2003, facilitates health care access and improves patient experience, information technology, resource sharing and will now open the door for these agencies to develop an operational plan to achieve four goals and objectives agreed upon with Tribal stakeholders.

"VA and IHS leadership engaged key tribal stakeholders during 90-day tribal consultation sessions in late 2020 and early 2021 to gain insights and feedback on how both agencies can better serve these historically marginalized patient populations," said Executive Director of Veterans Health Administration's Office of Rural Health Thomas F. Klobucar, Ph. D. "Through these collaborative efforts, we will continue to bridge existing gaps and provide equitable care delivery to American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans, and ensure they receive the high-quality care they have earned."

The four mutual goals of this partnership are to:

- Increase access and improve quality of health care and services for the benefit of eligible AI/AN patients served by VHA and IHS.
- Facilitate enrollment and seamless navigation for eligible AI/AN Veterans in VHA and IHS health care systems.
- Facilitate the integration of electronic health records and other Health Information Technology systems that affect the health care of AI/AN Veterans.
- Improve access for patient populations through resource sharing, including technology, providers, training, human resources, services, facilities, communication and reimbursement.

VA has made major strides for AI/AN Veterans to provide the care they need, including:

- The establishment of reimbursement agreements enabling VHA to reimburse IHS for care that AI/AN Veterans receive at IHS and Tribal Health Program facilities.
- Since its inception in fiscal year 2012 through the end of FY 2021, nearly \$149 million has been provided from VHA to IHS and THPs for the care of nearly 14,000 VA-enrolled AI/AN Veterans.
- The agreement to extend VA Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy services to VA-enrolled AI/AN Veterans who receive care at IHS clinics. Since its inception in FY 2010 through the end of FY 2021, nearly 6.8 million prescriptions have been processed for VA-IHS Veterans.
- The launch of several successful programs to serve AI/AN Veterans. The Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program will be a project under this new agreement. Through this program, Health Care Patient Navigators help AI/AN Veterans overcome health care access barriers by coordinating care across VA, VHA, IHS, federally recognized tribes, local communities and other state and federal agencies.

For more information about the VHA-IHS partnership and AI/AN Veterans, please contact the VHA Office of Rural Health at ORHcomms@va.gov or IHS at newsroom@ihs.gov.

2021 VHA/IHS Memorandum of Understanding



October 21, 2021



Dear Tribal Leader and Urban Indian Organization Leader:

We are pleased to report that the United States (U.S.) Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Indian Health Service (IHS) have signed a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) aimed at improving the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans. We have enclosed a copy for your reference.

The MOU establishes a framework for coordination and partnering between the VHA and the IHS to leverage and share resources and investments in support of each organization's mutual goals. We entered into an initial MOU in February 2003 to improve access and health outcomes for AI/AN Veterans and subsequently updated the MOU in October 2010. We believe this newly signed MOU builds on nearly 2 decades of experience and will continue to support our objective to improve access and health care outcomes for AI/AN Veterans.

We would like to thank each and every one of you who participated in any of the six technical assistance and listening sessions provided in the 90-day Tribal Consultation and Urban Confer. Your recommendations and guidance have helped us make improvements that enhance the care provided to AI/AN patients. By actively encouraging collaboration between our agencies to the maximum extent permitted by law, we have made noteworthy progress. The VA published a Tribal Consultation listening session summary report that presents feedback on proposed updates to the draft revisions to the MOU, available online at https://files.kauffmaninc.com/projects/VA/VA_2021_Consultation_Final_508.pdf.

Now that we have executed a new MOU, we will begin the process of creating a new operational plan that will identify operational goals and performance metrics. Annual Tribal Consultation and Urban Confer on the newly developed operational plan will be essential to ensuring ongoing involvement by Tribal Leaders and Urban Indian Organization Leaders with the MOU.

Thank you for your partnership and collaboration. We look forward to full implementation of this MOU.

Sincerely,

Steven L. Lieberman, M.D.
Acting Under Secretary for Health
Veterans Health Administration

Elizabeth A. Fowler
Acting Director
Indian Health Service

Enclosure:
As stated

Here's the text of the updated Veterans Health Administration (VHA)/Indian Health Service (IHS) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which has been signed by both agencies. Now that the MOU is signed, IHS and VHA will begin the process of creating the newly required operational plan that will contain operational goals and performance metrics for each project/program.

Tribes have been and will be included in the MOU through the tribal consultation process. The draft MOU went through an intensive, 90-day tribal consultation during which VHA and IHS conducted 6 separate technical assistance and listening sessions. Under the new MOU, annual tribal consultation on the operational plan is an integral part of the new process that will ensure ongoing tribal involvement in the MOU.

You can access a signed pdf copy of the MOU at our OTGR website [HERE](#). Or I can send you a copy if you let me know at: Peter.Vicaire@va.gov

**Memorandum of Understanding between the
United States Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration
and
United States Department of Health and Human Services Indian Health Service**

I. Purpose: The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to establish a framework for coordination and partnering to leverage and share resources and investments in support of each organization's mutual goals. The United States (U.S.) Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Indian Health Service (IHS) recognize and respect the sovereign status of tribal governments and the important role that tribal governments and Urban Indian Organizations have in the delivery of health care services to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Veterans. Accordingly, VHA and IHS recognize the value of tribal input into the policies, programs and services that effect AI/AN Veterans. Although this MOU may serve as an agreement between two Federal agencies, both agencies commit to engaging in communication, collaboration, Tribal Consultation, and Urban Confer consistent with their respective policies, applicable statutes, regulations, and Executive Order(s).

With full delegated authority of VA and HHS Secretaries, VHA and IHS enter into this MOU to provide authority for a broad range of collaboration and resource sharing between the agencies that facilitates development of additional agreements around specific activities. This MOU recognizes the importance of coordinated and cohesive efforts on a national scope, while acknowledging that implementation of such efforts requires local adaptation through an agreement to meet the needs of individual Veterans and their families, as well as any local VHA, IHS, Tribal Health Program¹ (THP), and Urban Indian Organization (UIO).²

¹ The term "tribal health program" means an Indian tribe or tribal organization that operates any health program, service, function, activity, or facility funded, in whole or part, by the IHS through, or provided for in, a contract or compact with the IHS under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. § 5301 et seq.) 25 U.S.C. § 1603(25).

² The term "Urban Indian organization" means a nonprofit corporate body situated in an urban center, governed by an urban Indian controlled board of directors, and providing for the maximum participation of all interested Indian groups and individuals, which body is capable of legally cooperating with other public and private entities for the purpose of performing the activities described in 25 U.S.C. § 1653(a). 25 U.S.C. § 1603(29).

II. Authority: The Indian Health Care Improvement Act, 25 U.S.C. Sections 1645, 1647; 38 U.S.C. Sections 523(a), 6301-6307, 8153.

III. Background: The mission of IHS is to raise the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level. The vision of IHS is healthy communities and quality health care systems through strong partnership and culturally responsive practices. IHS will achieve its mission through three strategic goals: to ensure that comprehensive, culturally appropriate personal and public health services are available and accessible to AI/AN people; to promote excellence and quality through innovation of the Indian health system into an optimally performing organization; and, to strengthen IHS program management and operations.

The mission of VA is to "care for him who shall have borne the battle and his widow and orphan." Those words were spoken by Abraham Lincoln during his second inaugural address and reflect the philosophy and principles that guide VA in everything it does. VA's priorities in service to all Veterans include:

1. Provide Veterans with greater choice in health care;
2. Focus resources in things that matter to Veterans;
3. Modernize VA;
4. Improve timeliness of services; and
5. Prevent suicide.

VHA and IHS enter into this MOU to further their respective missions and priorities. This MOU builds upon decades of successful collaboration, including the 2003 and the 2010 VA and IHS MOUs. This MOU conforms to the most current legislation. VA and IHS agreed with the recommendation made in the June 2014 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to establish written policy or guidance designating specific roles and responsibilities for agency staff to hold leadership accountable and improve implementation and oversight of the MOU. Health Care Access: Improved oversight, accountability, and prioritization can improve access for Native American Veterans (Publication No. GAO-14-489).

The intent of this MOU is to ensure that that both organizations achieve greater accountability, prioritization and success in service to AI/AN Veterans, and more effectively serve as stewards of public resources. This will be accomplished through coordination, collaboration and resource sharing.

IV. Mutual Goals: To the maximum extent permitted by law, available resources, and funding, VHA and IHS will coordinate and partner to leverage and share the resources and investments in support of the following four goals:

1. Access – Increase access and improve quality of health care and services for the benefit of eligible AI/AN Veteran patients served by VHA and IHS. Effectively leverage the strengths of VHA and IHS at the national, regional and local levels to support the delivery of timely and optimal clinical care.
2. Patients – Facilitate enrollment and seamless navigation for eligible AI/AN Veterans in VHA and IHS health care systems.
3. Information Technology – Facilitate the integration of electronic health records and other Health Information Technology systems that affect the health care of AI/AN Veterans.

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4. Resource Sharing – VHA and IHS will improve access for their patient populations through resource sharing, including technology, providers, training, human resources, services, facilities,³ communication, and reimbursement,⁴ etc.

V. Mutual Objectives: To achieve the MOU's four goals, VHA and IHS agree to actively collaborate and coordinate on the mutual goals listed above, and the objectives that come from these goals:

1. Access
 - a. Build on the successes of the 2010 MOU, through performance monitoring of the implementation of the MOU through joint VHA and IHS quarterly meetings to discuss and monitor MOU metrics.
 - b. Develop, coordinate, and expand new ways to connect facilities operated by VHA, IHS, THPs and UIOs.
2. Patients
 - a. Improve care coordination processes between facilities operated by VA, IHS, THPs and UIOs, as authorized by law.
 - b. Develop, coordinate, and expand evidence-based training programs for patient navigation specialists from VA, IHS, THP and UIO programs to assist AI/AN Veterans in navigating VA, IHS, THP and UIO care systems.
 - c. Improve and expand utilization of the VHA consolidated mail outpatient pharmacy by IHS and THP care providers, including options to extend access to UIOs and non-Resource and Patient Management System electronic health record (EHR) sites.
3. Information Technology
 - a. Closely monitor the development of new Health Information Technology systems and advocate for full interoperability of VA, IHS, THP and UIO EHR systems to the fullest extent allowable.
 - b. Develop robust Health Information Exchange systems among VHA, IHS, THP and UIO care systems where they currently do not exist.
 - c. Monitor and continue to advocate for increased use of telehealth systems to connect VA, IHS, THP and UIO care facilities to provide patient care closer to home for AI/AN Veterans, including mental and behavioral health care services.
 - d. Monitor and continue to advocate for increased access to broadband services in rural and remote locations where AI/AN Veterans reside.
4. Resource Sharing
 - a. Promote collaboration to share services and health care providers between VA, IHS, and THP care facilities, and UIOs, to the fullest extent allowable by law.

³ The IHS Director may enter into (or expand) arrangements for the sharing of medical facilities and services between the IHS, THPs, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Defense. The IHS Director may not finalize any arrangement between the IHS and a Department without first consulting with the Indian tribes which will be significantly affected by the arrangement. 25 U.S.C. § 1645(a).

⁴ The IHS, an Indian tribe, a tribal organization, or a UIO shall be reimbursed by the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense (as the case may be) where services are provided through the IHS, an Indian tribe, or a urban Indian organization to beneficiaries eligible for services from either such Department, notwithstanding any other provision of law. 25 U.S.C. § 1645(c).

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- b. Evaluate new options to reimburse all services provided to AI/AN Veterans at IHS and THP facilities, and UIOs, to the fullest extent allowable by law.
 - c. Expand telehealth programs that connect VHA, IHS, THP and UIO care facilities to facilitate virtual provider-sharing arrangements.
 - d. Develop and expand collective resources and learning options, including, but not limited to, training, research and development, collaboration, communications, Tribal Consultation, Urban Confer, etc. For example, ex officio participation in HHS and VA advisory committees (e.g., HHS National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, VA Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee, IHS Direct Service Tribes Advisory Committee, IHS Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee, etc.).

V. Operational Planning: To facilitate attainment of our mutual goals and objectives, VHA and IHS will work together to create an operational plan each fiscal year. The plan will include the goals and objectives specified above, as well as the tactics used to attain them. The plan will also specify points of contact, workgroups, targets and metrics created to evaluate processes and assess outcomes. VHA and IHS will jointly review and renew the Operational Plan each fiscal year.

VI. Other Considerations:

1. VHA and IHS will comply with all applicable Federal laws and regulations, including those regarding the confidentiality of health information and the release of information to the public. For example, medical records of VHA and IHS patients are Federal records, and as such, are subject to some, or all, of laws that follow: the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. 552a; the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552; Confidentiality of Records, 42 U.S.C. 290dd-2; the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996; VA's Confidentiality of Certain Medical Records, 38 U.S.C. 7332; Confidential Nature of Claims, 38 U.S.C. 5701; Medical Quality Assurance Records Confidentiality, 38 U.S.C. 5705; and Federal regulations promulgated to implement those acts.
2. Care rendered under this MOU will not be part of a study, research grant, or other test, without the written approval of both VHA and IHS, subject to all appropriate VA, IHS and tribal research protocols.
3. VA and IHS agree to cooperate fully with each other in any investigation, negotiation, settlement, or defense in the event of a notice of claim, complaint, or suit relating to health care rendered under this MOU.
4. No services under this MOU will result in any reduction in the range of services, quality of care, or established priorities for care provided to the Veteran population or the IHS populations. Rather, the intent of this MOU provides a framework for collaboration between VHA and IHS to increase the efficiency of services rendered by VHA and IHS.
5. VHA will provide authorized IHS employees with access to VHA automated patient records maintained on VA computer systems to the extent permitted by applicable Federal confidentiality and security laws and policies. Additionally, IHS will likewise provide authorized VHA employees with access to patient records of AI/AN Veterans maintained by IHS to the same extent permitted by applicable Federal confidentiality and security laws and policies.
6. Both parties to this MOU are Federal agencies and their employees are covered by the Federal Tort Claims Act, 28 U.S.C. Sections 1346(b), 2671-2680, in the event of an allegation of negligence. It is agreed that any and all claims of negligence attributable to an action or actions taken pursuant to this MOU will be submitted to legal counsel for both parties for investigation and resolution.

7. This MOU does not authorize the expenditure or reimbursement of any funds. This MOU does not create a binding contractual obligation, obligate either Party to expend appropriations or other monies or enter into any contract or other obligation, or create any rights between the Parties. Should any exchange of funds or resources be necessary, the Parties will first enter into a supplemental binding instrument.
8. This MOU replaces and supersedes the MOU signed on October 1, 2010, by the VA Under Secretary for Health and IHS Director.

VII. Termination: This MOU can be terminated by either party upon issuance of written notice to the other party not less than 30 days before the proposed termination date. The 30-day notice may be waived by mutual written consent of both parties involved in the MOU.

VIII. Effective Period: VHA and IHS will review the MOU at least annually to determine whether terms and provisions are appropriate and current.

IX. Severability: If any term or provision of this MOU becomes invalid or unenforceable, such term or provision shall in no way affect the validity or enforceability of any other term or provision contained herein.

Steven L. Lieberman, M.D.
Acting Under Secretary for Health

Elizabeth A. Fowler
Acting Director

VA Reimburses Over \$153 Million to Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal Health Programs (THPs)

Tribal health programs interested in entering into a reimbursement agreement with VA for serving veterans should send an initial note of interest to: tribal.agreements@va.gov

VA-IHS/THP Reimbursement Agreements Through October 2021

Executive Summary				
	Oct 2021	FY21	FY22	Since Program Inception
Disbursed	\$2,776,505.06	\$27,386,004	\$2,776,505.06	\$153,437,447
Unique Veterans	2,559	7,268	2,559	14,109
Inpatient Claims	62	629	62	7,786
Outpatient Claims	6,547	62,597	6,547	413,665
Total Claims	6,609	63,226	6,609	421,451

	IHS/THP Oct. 2021	
	IHS	THP
Claims	1,821	4,788
Unique Veterans	778	1783
Disbursed	\$593,271.43	\$2,183,233.63

New Committee to help improve care for Native American veterans

Here's an article by Jonathan Lehrfeld which ran in the [Army Times](#) on January 25, 2022.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough tasked his agency's new Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs with helping the VA take more innovative approaches to serving Native American veterans.

The newly created panel, [one of 27 VA advisory committees](#), met for the first time on Tuesday to advise the VA on everything from COVID-19 efforts to homelessness among American Indians and Alaskan Native veterans. Its 15 members are Native American veterans, each from different tribal nations. "My commitment to you was and is clear, that VA will not make decisions about you without you," said McDonough.

He also outlined his goals for the advisory group. "The work of this committee will be essential in helping us to find and to develop better and more innovative ways to serve native veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors," he said. Jack Austin, an Army veteran and the Assistant Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, serves as the advisory panel's chairman. "I believe this is a great opportunity for our native veterans' voices to be brought to the table with hope of solutions for the real struggles they face today," he said.

Veteran benefits, native cemeteries and health care services for rural and urban communities are among the issues being discussed during this week's session. Over 140,000 Native Americans veterans currently [receive their health care through the VA](#) but have faced significant challenges receiving care during the pandemic, something McDonough charged the committee with helping to resolve.

"There are many hard truths that need to be addressed, and I will be here for my people addressing those truths on their behalf," said committee member Reyn Kaupiko, a Navy veteran and Native Hawaiian. The new advisory committee was [created by Congress in 2020](#) and members were [officially appointed to their roles](#) in October. Although committee recommendations are not binding, other VA advisory committees have had more than 90 percent of their suggestions accepted, according to Jeffrey Moragne, director of the VA Advisory Committee Management Office. In addition, the VA's existing [Office of Tribal Government Relations serves veterans who are members of tribal nations](#).

The top Democrat and Republican on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee said the new committee has an important role to play. "Native Americans serve our nation in uniform at the highest rates, and it's critical these veterans are well represented at VA and empowered to shape department policy to meet the needs of all Native veterans," said Sen. Jon Tester, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and former chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee.

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"Native Americans serve our nation in uniform at the highest rates, and it's critical these veterans are well represented at VA and empowered to shape department policy to meet the needs of all Native veterans," said Sen. John Tester, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and former chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee.

Sen. Jerry Moran, the top Republican on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, called the committee "an enduring forum to learn more from these veterans and tribal leaders on how VA and Congress can best serve this veteran population."

New Native American VA Advisory Committee Holds First Meeting

This article by Benjamin Krause ran in [Disabled Veterans.org](https://www.disabledveterans.org) on January 31, 2022. There's also a video [4:41] which provides background info on the Congressional origins of the Committee

The first meeting of the new VA Advisory Committee focused on improving care for Native American veterans was held last week. The newly created committee is one of 27 VA advisory committees that advises VA Secretary Denis McDonough. Called the Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs, the new committee consisting of 15 Native American tribal members will advise the secretary on everything from COVID-19 efforts to homelessness.

"My commitment to you was and is clear, that VA will not make decisions about you without you," said McDonough.

"The work of this committee will be essential in helping us to find and to develop better and more innovative ways to serve native veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors," he said.

VA provides health care services to over 140,000 Native American veterans. But many of these veterans have experienced difficulty receiving care during the pandemic. "There are many hard truths that need to be addressed, and I will be here for my people addressing those truths on their behalf," said committee member Reyn Kaupiko, a Navy veteran and Native Hawaiian.

Native American veterans have faced decades of challenges after exiting military service from the federal government. The agency's new reliance on technology to deliver benefits and health care services may seem great to millennials, but it risks alienating older veterans living on reservations if the agency does not enhance its outreach.

While VA administrators still struggle to apprehend cultural differences, the new Tribal and Indian Affairs committee has an important role to play.

How It Was Created

The new committee was created by Congress in 2020 after decades of advocates complaining that VA was not doing enough to reach Native American veterans living on tribal lands. Its purpose and structure were codified in [38 USC § 547](#). Its charter can be found [here](#).

Senators Comment on New Committee (Click on image below to access video)



Senator Krysten Sinema co-sponsored S 524 Department of Veterans Affairs Tribal Advisory Committee Act, the Bill for the committee’s creation. “Native Americans serve our military at a higher rate than any other ethnic group,” said Sinema.

“Native Americans serve our nation in uniform at the highest rates, and it’s critical these veterans are well represented at VA and empowered to shape department policy to meet the needs of all Native veterans,” said Sen. Jon Tester, chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee and former chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. Sen. Jerry Moran, the top Republican on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, called the committee “an enduring forum to learn more from these veterans and tribal leaders on how VA and Congress can best serve this veteran population.”

Tribal Representation Expansion Project (T. REP)

See the very recent “Dear Tribal Leader Letter” below regarding the proposed pilot project. [Click HERE](#) or on any of the images of the letter below to register to attend the March 23 tribal consultation. If you have any issues registering, let me know at Peter.Vicaire@va.gov.



February 15, 2022

Dear Tribal Leader:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is writing to facilitate Tribal consultation on The Tribal Representation Expansion Project (T. REP), through which VA strives to ensure that Native American Veterans and their families have access to qualified, competent representation on their VA benefit claims. Through T. REP, VA intends to focus on the Tribal communities that are underserved in terms of representation. To help improve access to claims representation in those underserved communities, VA would like to collaborate with Tribal governments to designate a Tribal member as authorized to prepare, present, and prosecute VA benefit claims.

By consultation, VA seeks comments about which Tribal communities have access to representation on VA benefit claims, and whether such representation is viewed by the Tribe as culturally competent representation. In addition, from the Tribal communities that self-identify as being underserved in terms of representation, VA seeks comments on whether their Tribal government may be interested in collaborating with VA to provide an option for claims representation within their community. Specifically, VA is interested in learning if there are Tribes that may be interested in identifying an individual, affiliated with their government, who is of good character and reputation and that, after completing training on the adjudication of VA benefits, may be fit to be authorized by the VA General Counsel to provide representation on VA benefit claims. Pursuant to 38 C.F.R. § 14.630, the VA General Counsel has the authority, apart from the usual accreditation process, to specially authorize individuals to prepare, present, and prosecute benefit claims before VA when unusual circumstances are present.

In addition, VA is seeking comments and recommendations from Tribal leaders and representatives of Tribal communities on any issues, concerns, or processes that should be addressed in T. REP to ensure that the project is successful in expanding access to representation for Native American Veterans on their VA benefit claims.

Through this tribal consultation, the Secretary seeks information on the questions listed below. Comments do not need to address every question and should focus on those that are relevant to the commenter’s Tribal community. To the extent possible, please clearly indicate which questions you are addressing in your response and include any rationale or information that may be helpful to VA.

1. Are Native American Veterans in your community receiving any assistance in pursuing their VA benefit claims? Are they being represented before VA on their VA benefit claims? Who is providing those representation services? For example, those claims services may be provided by: (a) a person employed by the Tribal government; (b) a member of your Tribe or Tribal community; (c) a VA-recognized organization or a representative of a VA-recognized organization; or (d) an agent or attorney. Please provide details as to the extent of the assistance provided and whom we may credit if your Tribal community currently has access to benefit claims assistance and/or representation before VA.

2. If Veterans within your Tribal community have access to representation for their VA benefit claims, do you consider the option(s) for representation to be culturally competent representation? Please explain.

3. If Veterans and their families within your Tribal community are not being adequately represented on their VA benefit claims, is there someone employed, or affiliated, with your government that is currently, or could be, positioned to serve Veterans? For example, such individual may be currently serving Veterans and their families as a Tribal Veterans Service Officer (TVSO) or as a Tribal Veterans Representative (TVR).

4. Are there barriers to Veterans and their family members within your Tribal community in accessing representation on their VA claims? For example, barriers may include: (a) location or environmental obstacles; (b) language difficulties; (c) cultural differences; (d) distrust of the Federal or State government; (e) difficulties in finding training; (f) difficulties in securing office equipment and internet services; or (g) other circumstances.

5. Do you believe that your Tribal government may want to collaborate with VA to identify someone affiliated with your government to be authorized to represent Veterans and their families on benefit claims before VA?

6. Are you interested in being contacted by VA's Office of General Counsel to learn more about the project?

7. Are there issues, concerns, or processes that should be addressed in T. REP so that the project functions effectively in support of access to representation for Native American Veterans within your Tribal government and/or community? If so, how do you recommend VA address those matters in this project?

Written comments may be submitted by March 30, 2022, via e-mail to Tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov, by facsimile to 202-273-5716, or by mail to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Suite 915B, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20420. Comments should indicate that the submission is in response to "The Tribal Representation Expansion Project." For additional information regarding this effort,

please contact Clay Ward, VA Office of Tribal Government Relations at (202) 461-7445.

VA will also be hosting a Webex meeting on T. REP to provide a forum for virtual consultation on March 23, 2022, at 3:00 pm EST. Participation in the webinar is voluntary and does not affect your ability to provide comments to VA through other means. Registration for this event may be accomplished through <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/onstage/g.php?MTID=eaa07b769b5f8a27cfe390e0c732ee1eb>. For audio by phone, please dial 1-404-397-1596, access code 2760 198 8717.

Sincerely,



Richard A. Sauber
General Counsel,
Office of General Counsel



Raphael Chavez-Fernandez
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

The VA Wants to Help Native American Vets Better Access Their Benefits

Here's an article by Courtney Bubl  which ran in [Government Executive](#) on February 14, 2022.

The Veterans Affairs Department wants to know how it can better help veterans from Native communities access their benefits.

The information sought is to further VA's Tribal Representation Expansion Project, an initiative to make sure that Native American veterans have sufficient representation to prepare, present and prosecute their benefit claims to the agency. The project was listed in a [report](#) the White House released in November about the Biden administration's efforts to better support Tribal communities. There are about 160,000 American Indians/Native Hawaiians/Alaska Natives veterans nationwide, VA [said](#) in October.

"VA has long since recognized the unique circumstances of Tribes and that cultural, geographical, or language barriers may exist that prevent or deter Native American Veterans from seeking out representation on their benefit claims before VA," said a [notice](#) from VA published in the *Federal Register* on Monday. "In 2017, VA took affirmative steps to improve access to representation on Tribal land...VA, however, recognizes that there is still more that VA can do to advance equity in the access to representation for Native American veterans on their VA benefit claims." *Stars and Stripes* [reported](#) in June 2019 on the "dead end" result of the changes made in 2017.

Also, in order to "further facilitate access to culturally competent representation for Native American Veterans, and to honor the unique nature of the federal government's nation-to-nation relationship with the Tribes, VA would like to collaborate with Tribal governments to expand opportunities for claims representation where needed," said the notice.

VA would like feedback from Tribal communities on a slew of questions, which include:

- Are the Native American veterans in your area receiving any help in obtaining their VA benefit claims?
- If the veterans have access to representation for their VA benefits claims, then is this "culturally competent representation?"
- If veterans and their families are not being represented adequately, is there some in your Tribal government who could fill the need?
- Do veterans and their family members within your Tribal community face any barriers in accessing representation on their VA claim? This can include: location or language obstacles, distrust of federal/state governments and internet service challenges
- Would your Tribal government want to work with the VA to identify someone affiliated with your government to represent veterans and their families on benefits claims?
- Are there any other issues that should be addressed in order to fully support access to representation for Native American veterans?

The VA is holding a [virtual tribal consultation](#) session on March 23 then feedback on the request is due by March 30.

The Tribal Representation Expansion Project was announced on November 15 at the White House Tribal Nations Summit, VA spokesperson Gary Kunich told *Government Executive*.

“Native Americans serve in the military at among the highest rates, per capita, as compared to other ethnic groups,” said Kunich. “VA has heard, through anecdotal evidence, that some Native American veterans may be unaware of their potential entitlement to veterans' benefits and their right to obtain representation on their benefit claims.”

The project “is intended to promote the traditional paths of VA accreditation and to offer an additional pathway—through the general counsel’s special authority,” Kunich continued. “VA has the authority to specially authorize certain individuals, who are not otherwise accredited to practice before VA, to prepare, present, and prosecute benefit claim(s) so long as the services are provided free-of-charge and the person providing such services has been appointed by the claimant to represent on the claim before VA.”

Smithsonian Magazine published an [article](#) in November 2020 that looks at the “remarkable and complex” history of Native Americans serving in the military.

“It has been a long-held view that Native Americans have served at a higher rate in proportion to their population than any other racial or ethnic group,” said the article. “[Alexandra Harris, co-author of *Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces* and senior editor at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian] says that can’t be proven true or false, in part because the U.S. military itself does not keep accurate tallies...Yet Native Americans—a group that includes American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians—have served in U.S. conflicts since colonial times.”

The Defense Department [said](#) in a November post that 29 Native American service members (25 soldiers, three sailors and one Marine) have been awarded the Medal of Honor, which is the highest medal for valor.

Among the initiatives from the Biden administration to support Tribal nations, the VA [announced](#) in October it appointed members to its first-ever advisory committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs to advise the VA Secretary on all matters related to Indian tribes, Tribal organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and Native American veterans.



8342

Federal Register / Vol. 87, No. 30 / Monday, February 14, 2022 / Notices

document on February 8, 2022 and authorized the undersigned to sign and submit the document to the Office of the Federal Register for publication electronically as an official document of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Luvenia Potts,

Regulation Development Coordinator, Office of Regulation Policy & Management, Office of General Counsel, Department of Veterans Affairs.

[FR Doc. 2022-03124 Filed 2-11-22; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8320-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Department of Veterans Affairs' Tribal Representation Expansion Project

AGENCY: Department of Veterans Affairs.

ACTION: Notice of Tribal consultation.

SUMMARY: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is seeking Tribal consultation on "The Tribal Representation Expansion Project (T. REP)", a project through which VA strives to ensure that Native American Veterans have access to responsible, qualified representation in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of their benefit claims before VA. VA is seeking comments on whether Tribal communities currently have access to representation for VA benefit claims and, for those Tribes that are being underserved in terms of representation, whether the Tribal governments may be interested in collaborating with VA to designate an individual within the community as authorized to prepare, present, and prosecute VA benefit claims. In addition, VA is seeking comments and recommendations on any issues, concerns, or processes the Tribes believe should be addressed in T. REP to better ensure that the project is successful in helping to expand access to representation for Native American Veterans on their benefit claims before VA.

DATES: VA will hold the virtual tribal consultation session on March 23, 2022, from 3:00–5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time). Written comments may also be submitted to VA on or before March 30, 2022.

ADDRESSES: Participants can access the virtual consultation session by registering through the following link: <https://veteransaffairs.webex.com/veteransaffairs/onstage/g.php?MTID=eaa07b769b5f8a27cfe390e0c732ee1eb>; for audio by phone, please dial 1-404-397-1596, access code 2760 198 8717. Participants will

interact by submitting written comments and/or questions using the chat function during the presentation. Written comments may also be submitted by any of the following methods:

- By email to tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov.
- By facsimile to 202-273-5716.
- By mail to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Suite 915B, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20420.

Comments should indicate that the submission is in response to "The Tribal Representation Expansion Project."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Clay Ward, VA Office of Tribal Government Relations at (202) 461-7445 (this is not a toll-free number), or by email at Tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov, or by mail at Suite 915B, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20420.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Through T. REP, VA strives to ensure that Native American Veterans and their families have access to responsible, qualified representation in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of their benefit claims before VA. Through T. REP, VA aims to focus on the Tribal communities that are being underserved in terms of representation. To help improve access to claims representation in those communities, VA would like to collaborate with Tribal governments to designate an individual within the community as authorized to prepare, present, and prosecute VA benefit claims.

VA has long since recognized the unique circumstances of Tribes and that cultural, geographical, or language barriers may exist that prevent or deter Native American Veterans from seeking out representation on their benefit claims before VA. In 2017, VA took affirmative steps to improve access to representation on Tribal land by revising its regulations to, among other things, permit veterans' service offices affiliated with Tribal governments to be recognized by VA as Tribal organizations in a manner similar to State organizations (*see* 82 FR 6265 (Jan. 19, 2017)). VA, however, recognizes that there is still more that VA can do to advance equity in the access to representation for Native American Veterans on their VA benefit claims. Accordingly, to further facilitate access to culturally competent representation for Native American Veterans, and to honor the unique nature of the Federal government's Nation-to-Nation relationship with the Tribes, VA would like to collaborate with Tribal

governments to expand opportunities for claims representation where needed.

Through consultation, VA seeks to learn which Tribal communities have access to representation for VA benefit claims. VA is interested in learning which Tribal communities have access to representation that is provided by representatives of VA-recognized organizations. VA is also interested in learning which Tribal communities have access to representation by attorneys and agents. Moreover, VA also seeks to learn whether such representation is viewed in the Tribal community as culturally competent representation.

In addition, from the Tribal communities that self-identify as being underserved in terms of representation, VA seeks comments on whether their Tribal governments may be interested in collaborating with VA to provide an option for representation. Specifically, VA is interested in learning if there are Tribes that may be interested in identifying an individual who is affiliated with their government, is of good character and reputation, and, who, after proper training on VA benefits, would be fit to be authorized by the VA General Counsel to represent on VA benefit claims. The General Counsel then plans to use his discretionary authority, pursuant to 38 CFR 14.630, to specially authorize such individuals to prepare, present, and prosecute VA benefit claims before VA. In addition, to help ensure the fitness of these specially authorized individuals, VA is exploring the possibility of coordinating with VA-recognized organizations that have established veterans benefits training programs and that may be willing to make their training available to such individuals.

In addition, VA is seeking comments and recommendations from Tribal leaders and representatives of Tribal communities on any issues, concerns, or processes that should be addressed in T. REP to ensure that the project is successful in expanding access to representation for Native American Veterans on their VA benefit claims.

Accordingly, through this Tribal consultation, the Secretary seeks information on the questions listed below. Comments do not need to address every question and should focus on those that are relevant to the commenter's Tribal community. To the extent possible, please clearly indicate which questions you are addressing in your response and include any rationale or information that may be helpful to VA.

1. Are Native American Veterans in your community receiving any

assistance in pursuing their VA benefit claims? Are they being represented before VA on their VA benefit claims? Who is providing those services? For example, those claims services may be provided by: (a) A person employed by the Tribal government; (b) a member of your Tribe or Tribal community; (c) a VA-recognized organization or a representative of a VA-recognized organization; or (d) an agent or attorney. Please provide details as to the extent of the assistance provided and whom we may credit if your Tribal community currently has access to benefit claims assistance and/or representation before VA.

2. If Veterans within your Tribal community have access to representation for their VA benefit claims, do you consider the option(s) for representation to be culturally competent representation? Please explain.

3. If Veterans and their families within your Tribal community are not being adequately represented on their VA benefit claims, is there someone

employed by, or affiliated, with your Tribal government that is currently, or could be, positioned to serve Veterans? For example, such individual may currently be serving Veterans and their families as a Tribal Veterans Service Officer (TVSO) or as a Tribal Veterans Representative (TVR).

4. Are there barriers to Veterans and their family members within your Tribal community in accessing representation on their VA claims? For example, barriers may include: (a) Location or environmental obstacles; (b) language difficulties; (c) cultural differences; (d) distrust of the Federal or State government; (e) difficulties in finding training; (f) difficulties in securing office equipment and internet services; or (g) other circumstances.

5. Do you believe that your Tribal government may want to collaborate with VA to identify someone affiliated with your government to be authorized to represent Veterans and their families on benefit claims before VA?

6. Are you interested in being contacted by VA's Office of General Counsel to learn more about the project?

7. Are there issues, concerns, or processes that should be addressed in T. REP so that the project functions effectively in support of access to representation for Native American Veterans within your Tribal government and/or community? If so, how do you recommend VA address those matters in this project?

Signing Authority

Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, approved this document on February 8, 2022 and authorized the undersigned to sign and submit the document to the Office of the Federal Register for publication electronically as an official document of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Luvenia Potts,

Regulation Development Coordinator Office of Regulation Policy & Management, Office of General Counsel, Department of Veterans Affairs.

[FR Doc. 2022-03084 Filed 2-11-22; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8320-01-P

New VA Office Tasked with Reducing Rural Health Problems for Native American Vets

Here's an article by Jonathan Lehrfeld which ran in [Military.com](https://www.military.com) on January 31, 2022.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is creating a new umbrella office to manage health care for all American Indian and Alaska Native veterans and expanding a new program to help rural Native American veterans more easily access VA health care, officials announced last week. Both moves are part of VA Secretary Denis McDonough's effort to do "everything in our power to help tribal nations through the remainder of the pandemic," he told the first session of a multi-day meeting of the VA's new Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs on Jan. 25. McDonough acknowledged that the agency fell short in providing adequate care for native veterans in the first two years of the coronavirus pandemic.

McDonough added that he wants "to make sure that what happened over the last 22 months never happens again."

"As a part of that effort, we have vaccinated more than half of American Indian and Alaskan Native veterans and cared for them with almost 90,000 telehealth visits," he said.

VA officials said they are creating the Office of Tribal Health within the Veterans Health Administration to manage health care for all American Indian and Alaska Native veterans, from those who live in urban environments to those on rural reservations.

The department also plans to expand its Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program, which began in 2020, to several new VA facilities. The pilot program aims to decrease barriers to health care services in rural areas by partnering native veterans with peers in their communities -- similar to case managers -- who can help them reach culturally competent care, according to Jay Shore, a population specialist at the VA Office of Rural Health, who spoke to the advisory committee on Jan. 26.

A 2018 Government Accountability Office report found that the Indian Health Service, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services, faces ongoing challenges to recruiting and retaining its clinical care providers, leading to "a negative effect on patient access, [and] quality of care." Approximately 25% of positions remain unfilled, including at rural IHS facilities.

VA advisory committee member Angela Pratt, an Army veteran and speaker of the Osage Nation Congress, said creating new programs and offices won't be enough if the current programs can't be better coordinated. "A lot of times, my frustration with things is because there is so much information coming out through all these tribes, and there are so many layers of groups and things. And it is like, this isn't quite working well," she said.

A memorandum of understanding, or MOU, between the Veterans Health Administration and the Indian Health Service that establishes a framework to coordinate programs and communicate between the federal agencies was last renewed in October, VA officials noted.

"We are committed to tribal consultation and, really, this MOU is going to be, and is, an organic document. We anticipate it will change," said Benjamin Smith, deputy director for intergovernmental affairs for the IHS.

Chief William Smith, vice president of the Valdez Native Tribe in Alaska, praised the effort to coordinate Native American health care issues across government agencies. "I want to commend the Indian Health Service and the VA for being together in the same rooms, to tear down their silos to work together to help veterans. This has been a dream for a long time," he said.

A flag raising ceremony at the VA to commemorate Native American Heritage Month

Here's an article which ran in the [13 WIBW website](#) on November 1, 2021

TOPEKA, Kan. (WIBW) - Topeka's Colmery O'Neil Veterans hospital held a flag-raising ceremony to commemorate Native American Heritage Month.

The events were not only to celebrate the ways Native Americans and tribes shaped American society but to recognize that strengthening tribal sovereignty means we must work together. The VA even created a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Indian Health Service to promote access to high-quality healthcare for American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans. A veterans group with the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation assisted with the ceremony on Monday.



“We’re the original Americans, we stand and we fight for America just like everybody else, and we take great pride in it, we love our flag, our country, or duty, our service,” said Robert Jackson Sr. with Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. There are approximately 160,000 native veterans across the nation.

Menominee Tribal Veterans Service Officer elected second vice-president of County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO)/Tribal Veterans Service Officer (TVSO) Assoc. of WI

Here's a letter from Aloysius "Ali" Nelson, First Vice President, County Veteran Service Officers Association of Wisconsin

"The association consists of 72 counties with CVSO's and 11 tribal nations with tribal TVSO's whose responsibilities are to serve and be advocates for over 350,000 veterans in Wisconsin. The association's mission is to train CVSO/TVSO to prepare them to carry out their duties as "advocates" for the veterans in their communities. Bruce joined the association in 2016 and was appointed in 2019 to the executive committee leadership. He has been instrumental in sharing knowledge and information to include tribal nation's customs and traditions. Our association has grown over the years as Bruce always "does his part" to ensure we continue to strengthen the association; to train, learn and serve our veterans.

Our nation's first County Veterans Service Officer, Retired Navy Chief Gunner's Mate Leo J. Promen was appointed by the Fond Du Lac County Board in 1932, from the great state of Wisconsin. The County Veterans Service Officer Association (CVSOA) was established in 1936, so, fast forward 85 years later the CVSOA of Wisconsin held 85th Anniversary combined with the 2021 Fall Training Conference in Fond Du Lac County during the week of October 11-15, 2021 in the same building (now Hotel Rethaw) where Mr. Promen started his advocacy to assist veterans and their eligible dependents.

On October 13, 2021 Mr. Bruce Wilber Jr. was elected to become the first ever Native American Tribal Veterans Service Officer to hold a position as second Vice-President, which will ultimately lead to him leading the association as President in two years. Bruce is enthusiastic to work as second vice-president to strengthen our association by being an advocate for all veterans to include addressing policies, educating and training our future CVSO/TVSO to be advocates. His broad sense of knowledge has been instrumental in serving on the executive committee and now as second vice-president. Our association and veterans are blessed to have state statutes in Wisconsin to support veterans and to make sure no veterans are left behind; this isn't the case in every state in our nation. Some of Bruce's past experiences are as follows: served in the United States Army from 1976 to 1979 where he earned the rank of SP4, he was a Sergeant for the Sheriff's Department, Police School Liaison Officer, AODA Counselor and a Judge for Menominee Tribal Lower Court.

The goals of the CVSOA of Wisconsin are to increase communication with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Association of County Veterans Service Officers and Wisconsin

Department of Veterans Affairs to assist veterans and their eligible dependents with obtaining local, state and federal benefits.

Our association has experienced a tremendous amount of challenges directly due to the COVID-19 Pandemic but was able to pivot and change course as necessary to take care of the needs of our veterans. Our creed is to never leave a veteran behind when it comes to advocating for their VA benefits; to ensure ALL veterans obtain benefits they so rightly earned.

I know Bruce and the rest of CVSOA of Wisconsin leadership will continue their great work and fight for delivery of benefits for veterans and eligible dependents.”

Borne the Battle Podcast #262: Air Force Veteran DJ Vanas, Best-Selling Author of Finding Your Warrior Spirit

Here's a [link to a podcast](#) with Ottawa Native Air Force veteran D.J. Vanas

Synopsis: In this week's episode DJ Vanas talks about his life's highs and lows, including the life changing moment he learned of his appointment to the U.S. Air Force Academy, his struggle to take responsibility when he was starting out in the Academy, and his experience serving as the Academy's youngest Chief of Minority Enrollment.

Links: [Podcasts](#) | [Blog](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [YouTube](#)



Native American Heritage Month: Native Americans have long history of military service

Here's an article by Will Jones which ran on the [ABC 7 website](#) on November 11, 2021.

CHICAGO (WLS) -- Patty Loew's grandfather fought in World War I, part of a long tradition of Native Americans who have joined in the U.S. military. "I could never understand why he would volunteer because they weren't citizens," she said. "They didn't have to serve."

Loew is the director of Northwestern University's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research. She said despite the fraught history between Native Americans and the U.S., many Native Americans have still chosen to serve.

"This was a theme I found repeated throughout Indian Country, the United States is at war. Our homelands are threatened. So we're going to protect our people," she said. Joseph Podlasek is the founder and CEO of Trickster Cultural Center in Schaumburg. The center has exhibits on Native American military service. We have engaged in every war the U.S. took part in," Podlasek said. "The military is deeply embedded in our culture."

Podlasek and Loew said some Native Americans have been motivated by family and tribal traditions. "Some men and women were born into war clans so they were obligated to be protectors," Loew said. Others wanted a better life.

"I was working at a flower shop which I loved, but it was minimum wage," said Jennifer DeBouver, who was 22 when she decided to enlist in the U.S. Army. She said she believes many Native Americans continue to enlist in the military for the same reasons she did. "I think a lot of Native Americans are attracted to the military because a lot of us are in rural areas. There's nothing there for us," she said. "So I think a lot of them turn to the military to give themselves a lot more opportunities."

DeBouver has a family member who served as a code talker during World War II. She said it's important for everyone to know the history of service of Native Americans in the military.

Grant and Per Diem Program Webinar

Here's a link/password to access the OTGR webinar we held on December 1, 2021 regarding the VA Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program. Click on the image below to access the link and enter the password:
Fhi882T*



VA |  U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs |  Office of
Tribal Government
Relations

VA OTGR WEBEX SERIES Website: <http://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/>

VA Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program

VA's Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program is offered annually (as funding permits) by the Department of Veterans Affairs to fund community agencies providing services to Veterans experiencing homelessness. The purpose of the transitional housing component of the program is to promote the development and provision of supportive housing and services with the goal of helping homeless Veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income, and obtain greater self-determination. Additionally, the GPD Program offers Case Management grants to support housing retention for Veterans who were previously homeless and are transitioning to permanent housing.

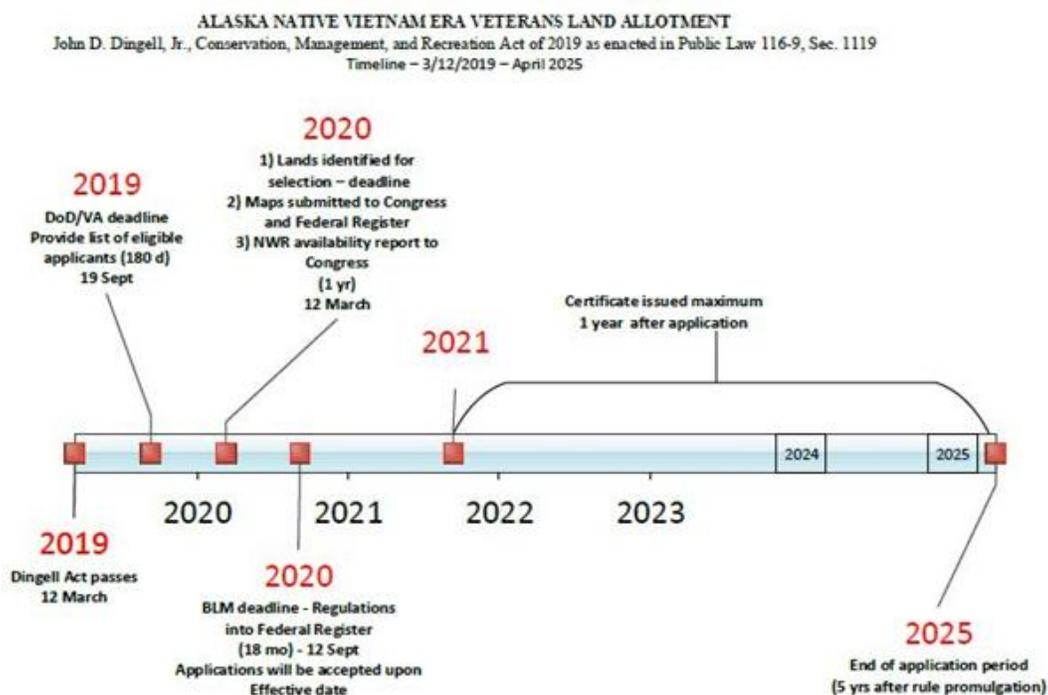
Federal Bureau finalizes first Alaska Native Vietnam Veteran land allotments

Here's an article which ran in [KINY Radio](#) on November 5, 2021.

The Bureau of Land Management has finalized the first federal land allotments as part of the Alaska Native Vietnam-era Veteran Land Allotment Program. In an announcement from the Department of the Interior Thursday, they said this is the third time that federally managed land has been offered to Alaska Native Vietnam veterans, who did not have access to land allotments while serving during the Vietnam War. The Alaska Native Vietnam Era Veterans Land Allotment Program was established by the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019. Through the program, BLM lets qualifying veterans to select an allotment of up to 160 acres from unused federal, state or, Native corporations owned lands in Alaska, if the owner agrees to relinquish the property.

BLM has worked with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, as well as Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs to identify eligible veterans and their families. To date, over 1,400 veterans and families have been contacted to apply, with almost 130 applications received.

"We have a sacred obligation to America's veterans. I know the sacrifices made by those who serve in our military, and we are committed to ensuring the rights of our Alaska Native Vietnam-era veterans," said Secretary Deb Haaland, whose father served during the Vietnam War. "The Department will continue to move forward expeditiously so that Alaska Native Vietnam-era veterans are able to select the land allotments they are owed, with an expansive selection area." Lands are available for selection through December 29, 2025.



University of Southern California to name building for Crow veteran and tribal historian Joe Medicine Crow

This article ran in the [AP News](#) on November 18, 2021.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A University of Southern California building that had been named for a former president who was a eugenicist will be renamed for the late Joseph Medicine Crow, a USC graduate who became the tribal historian for the Apsáalooke (Crow) Nation and published influential works on Native American history and culture.

The Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow Center for International and Public Affairs will be dedicated in a ceremony in spring 2022. USC President Carol L. Folt also [announced](#) Thursday a scholarship program for Native American students in his name. “This building serves as a crossroads for different cultures and communities from around the world, and it is a gathering place for our students,” Folt said. “We wanted to rename it for an individual who embodies the qualities we strive for at USC, and when we asked the university community to nominate people for this honor, the selection of this beloved and inspiring figure -- one of our most cherished alumni -- became clear.”

The landmark building, which has a distinctive tower topped by a globe, was previously named for Rufus von KleinSmid, who was USC’s president from 1921 to 1947. His name was stripped last year because of his support for California’s eugenics movement, which led to a 1909 state law that forced sterilization of people deemed “unfit.”

Medicine Crow, who died at age 102 in 2016, was raised by his grandparents in a log home on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana, hearing stories during his childhood from direct participants in the Battle of Little Bighorn. A member of the Whistling Water clan, his grandfather trained him to be a warrior. He received an associate degree from Bacone College in Oklahoma, where he pitched on the baseball team, and then pursued as degree in sociology and psychology at Linfield College in Oregon.

Medicine Crow came to USC on scholarship in 1938 and earned a master’s degree in anthropology in 1939. His thesis was titled, “The Effects of European Culture Contacts Upon The Economic, Social and Religious Life of the Crow Indians.” His pursuit of a doctorate at USC was interrupted by World War II. Serving in the U.S. Army, Medicine Crow completed the deeds necessary to earn the title of war chief, including stealing horses from an enemy encampment and engaging in hand-to-hand combat with a German soldier whose life Medicine Crow ultimately spared.

Upon his return from the war, Medicine Crow was designated tribal historian by the Crow Tribal Council, a position he filled for decades — all the while cataloging his people’s nomadic history by collecting firsthand accounts of pre-reservation life from fellow tribal members.

Medicine Crow received four honorary doctorates during his life and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama.

Native American Code Talkers

Here's an article from the Society of American Indian Government Employees.



Every WWII combatant appreciated the need for an unbreakable code that would help them communicate while protecting their operational plans. The U.S. Marines knew where to find one: the Navajo Nation.

Marine Corps leadership selected 29 Navajo men, the Navajo Code Talkers, who created a code based on the complex, unwritten Navajo language. The code primarily used word association by assigning a Navajo word to key phrases and military tactics. This system enabled the Code Talkers to translate three lines of English in 20 seconds, not 30 minutes as was common with existing code-breaking machines. The Code Talkers participated in every major Marine operation in the Pacific theater, giving the Marines a critical advantage throughout the war. During the nearly month-long battle for Iwo Jima, for example, six Navajo Code Talker Marines successfully transmitted more than 800 messages without error. Marine leadership noted after the battle that the Code Talkers were critical to the victory at Iwo Jima. At the end of the war, the Navajo Code remained unbroken. See more information about the WWII Code Talkers, as well as video with Peter MacDonald, on the National Archives website:

<https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2020/12/01/navajo-code-talkers/>

Over 400 Navajo Code Talkers served during World War II in the Pacific.

Not all Code Talkers were Navajo. The Navajo and Hopi were assigned to service in the Pacific in the war against Japan. The Comanches fought the Germans in Europe, and the Meskwakis fought them in North Africa. Code Talkers from other tribes fought at various locations in Europe, the Pacific, North Africa, and elsewhere.

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/code-talkers/code-talking/>

https://www.army.mil/article/178195/comanche_language_helped_win_world_war_ii

National Museum of the American Indian

Here's a message from the National Museum of the American Indian - released on November 11, 2021.

Today the National Museum of the American Indian extends our gratitude to all Veterans and their families for their service. We are pleased this Veterans Day to share the online exhibition, [Why We Serve](#), which honors the generations of Native Americans who have served in the armed forces of the United States. The exhibition also recently opened in our museum in Washington, D.C., for those visiting in-person. The Dedication of the National Native American Veterans Memorial and Native Veterans Procession will take place on November 11, 2022. We look forward to this occasion and will share additional details about the events via email updates and our website. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to NNAVMDedication@si.edu with any questions.

If you know someone who might be interested in receiving updates on the memorial, or if you received this email from a friend, register to receive future messages from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian on the memorial [here](#).



Alan Karchmer for the National Museum of the American Indian

The National Native American Veterans Memorial opened on November 11, 2020, on the grounds of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. This tribute to Native heroes recognizes for the first time on a national scale the enduring and distinguished service of Native Americans in every branch of the US military.

“I Chose to Serve Because of My Mother. I Wanted to Make Her Proud.”—Chief Warrant Officer Two Misty Dawn Lakota

Here's an interview/article by Dennis Zotigh which ran in the [Smithsonian Magazine](#) on April 2, 2020

Misty Dawn Lakota (Oglala Lakota) has been a member of the National Guard and a special agent with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services. She currently serves as a Chief Warrant Officer Two in the U.S. Army Reserves, awaiting deployment to Afghanistan, and a supervisory special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement. As the museum looks ahead to the dedication of the National Native American Veterans Memorial, Chief Lakota talks to us about the women in her family who have inspired her and the people for whom she serves.

Highlighting Native Americans' extraordinary record of service in the U.S. Armed Forces is important to the museum's goal of promoting a more complete and accurate understanding of American history and contemporary Native Americans' lives. So thank you for giving us this interview. Please introduce yourself and, if it's appropriate, share your Native name and what it means.

Thank you for inviting me. My name is Misty Dawn Lakota. I'm an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Nation (Oglala Sioux Tribe) of the Northern Great Plains and grew up in Oglala, South Dakota. My Lakota name Iglág Thokáhe Wiŋ. It means Woman Moves Camp First.

You enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces. As a woman, why did you choose to serve?

I chose to serve because of my mother, Delilah Dawn PlentyHoles. I wanted to make her proud. My primary source of childhood joy was fascination with all things Army. I dreamed of my mother's adventures as a soldier, and I would “play Army” with rocks and sticks.

Our home had no running water or electricity, so I'd accompany my great-grandmother on walks to collect wood to burn, haul water to drink, or pick berries to eat. Sometimes I'd hear or see a plane fly overhead. My great-grandmother would often tell me that my mother was on that plane, probably traveling to a far-off land as a brave soldier. I remember staring up at the sky and thinking, “Mom, when will you come get me? I want to see the Army, too.”

I made up stories of the epic battles she must be fighting. Little did I know that her biggest battle was within, as she struggled with alcoholism. My mother returned to my life in 2001 and promised she was done drinking. She wanted to be there for me. That reunion was one of the happiest days of my life, but it was short-lived. On August 11, 2001, an alcohol-induced car crash signaled the start of her journey to the Spirit World.

Despite her weaknesses, she was my hero and my soldier. I remember holding her tight and kissing her that day. She was cold; her hair had dried blood and dirt in it. I whispered to her through my tears that I forgave her and that I knew her journey was a difficult one. From that day forward, it became my goal to carry on in her memory and to make her proud.

Did your Native background play any part in your decision to join the Army?

Yes. I wanted to be a positive representation to my daughters, my brothers, my family, and my tribe. Despite all the stress, traumas, and challenges we face—particularly as Native American females—there is hope, and I wanted to convey that through being an officer in the military.

Did other members of your family serve as well as your mother?

Yes, my grandmother Joan Chief Eagle.

Is the warrior culture strong in your family or nation?

Most definitely in my tribe. We are known as a great nation. My family has a long history of service as police officers, who are also known in Lakota as *akicitas* (warriors). My grandmother Paulette Weasel Bear, a career policewoman, inspired me to become a police officer. I have been serving in that profession for the past 19 years.

What year did you enlist, and why did you enter your specific branch of the military?

When I enlisted, I wanted to become a part of the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG Corps), the Army's premier legal team. I enlisted in 2008 and served a full-term contract with the U.S. Army National Guard in honor of my mother. Immediately after, in 2014, I re-enlisted with the U.S. Army Reserve.

What is your current rank, and what unit do you serve in?

I am currently serving as a Chief Warrant Officer Two (CW2) with the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), awaiting deployment to Kabul, Afghanistan, for a year as soon as the travel restrictions are lifted.

Were there other Natives who served with you?

During basic training, which was a huge adjustment and culture shock for me, I was mentored by Drill Sergeant Ryan Whitebull, who was from the same tribe. He made me feel at ease so far away from home. He was a piece of home to me and reminded me of who we are as Lakota people.

Were you treated differently in the service because you are Native?

No, I was treated the same. At times it felt like others expected me to excel at land navigation. Although I did and still do, it doesn't mean we are all the same because we're Native Americans.

Can you share something that sticks out the most in your mind about your service?

Yes, when I won New Mexico Army National Guard [Soldier of the Year](#) in 2011 and advanced to the Regionals.

That competition tests physical ability, as well as marksmanship, tactics, knowledge, and judgment, doesn't it?

Yes. Physical fitness has become a way of life for me as a supervisory special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, as well as an officer in the military. I owe it to my brothers and sisters in blue and green to the left and right, my leaders in front, and the soldiers who are following to maintain my physical fitness.

You've served as a color guard for Native ceremonies and events. What does the American flag mean to you?

The flag is a symbol that reminds me of having been appointed an officer in the Army—that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.

Do you go back to you reservation often and participate in ceremonies or powwows?

Lately I've been mostly as a spectator.

Would you recommend joining the service to your family members or others of your tribe?

Yes. I've learned so much as a leader and a soldier in the military. From the beginning of my service until now, the Army instilled and reinforced values that I live by daily—loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. I work to embody these values in every aspect of my life. They are complementary to my being the Native American woman my great-grandmother raised.

What do you think of the [National Native American Veteran's Memorial](#) being built in Washington?

I am pleased and very proud that the memorial will finally come to fruition.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

The Army was imprinted on my soul from such a young age, and my experiences—and those of my mother—as a soldier have truly defined who I am today. I am very proud to be a part of the Warrant Officer Cohort and, most importantly, the JAG Corps!

My life story has been one of adversity, but also of resiliency and success. I overcame, and will continue to overcome, challenges for the people I serve, the country I love, and the family I care for. I give it my all each day for my mother, whose internal burdens were too great, my two girls who gave me the title Mother, a little brother who reveres me as his hero, and a little angel who calls me Grandmother.

Thank you, Chief Lakota. Take care.

Thank you.

Dennis Zotigh | [READ MORE](#)

Dennis W. Zotigh (Kiowa/Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo/Isante Dakota Indian) is a member of the Kiowa Gourd Clan and San Juan Pueblo Winter Clan and a descendant of Sitting Bear and No Retreat, both principal war chiefs of the Kiowas. Dennis works as a writer and cultural specialist at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

Department of Veterans Affairs offers health services to those who served

Here's a [short article and video \[1:09\] from ABC 7 News](#) by Alex Rosa-Figueroa with OTGR's very own Mary Culley!

LAWTON, Okla. (KSWO) - Tuesday, the Department of Veterans Affairs helped host a Presumptive Conditions Campaign event. The department worked with Lawton Indian Health Service and Fort Sill Apache Tribe of Oklahoma to hold the event. They worked to help identify and assist veterans from across southwestern Oklahoma who may have disabilities from their military service and may be eligible for a VA pension.



Mary Culley said this effort is vital for veterans in our area, who may not know they could be eligible. “A lot of our American Indian vets, and while we serve at the highest, both men and women per capita, we are at the lowest in terms of receiving VA healthcare, receiving VA disability benefits,” Culley said. “And a lot of it goes to, when you look at our history, when the federal government tells you no, you don’t try again, you just stop right there. So we find a lot of our older vets, who are first time applicants for getting the disability that they’ve earned the right to have, or we find a lot of widows who have never applied.”

In addition, staff from the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center helped enroll veterans not already signed up for VA health care. Veterans were also offered COVID and flu vaccines, as well as COVID booster shots.



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, DC 20301

AUG - 2 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

SUBJECT: Service Cross Reviews for African American and Native American War Veterans

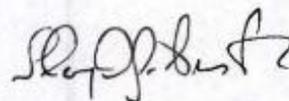
It has come to my attention that African American and Native American Service Cross recipients, unlike their Asian American, Native American Pacific Islander, Jewish American, and Hispanic American counterparts, did not receive the same opportunities to have their valorous actions reviewed for possible upgrade to the Medal of Honor. To correct this oversight, I direct the Secretaries of the Military Departments to conduct the following Service Cross (Distinguished Service Cross – Army; Navy Cross – Navy and Marine Corps; Air Force Cross – Air Force) reviews to determine if such Veterans' actions warrant award of the Medal of Honor:

- African American Veterans: Review Service Crosses awarded to such Veterans for valorous actions performed during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. (Note: The Departments of the Army and Navy already performed reviews for said World War II Veterans.)
- Native American Veterans: Review Service Crosses awarded to such Veterans for valorous actions performed during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

To facilitate any award upgrades resulting from these reviews, I waive the requirement in DoD Manual 1348.33, Volume 1, "Manual of Military Decorations and Awards: Medal of Honor," that a previously adjudicated nomination may only be reconsidered if new, substantive, and material information is provided to justify an upgrade.

Complete your reviews and endorse any resulting Medal of Honor nominations to me in no later than 5 years. Given the breadth and scope of these reviews, 5 years should provide adequate time to complete a methodical and professional review. The resulting Medal of Honor nominations shall include draft congressional waiver language for the statutory time limits on awarding the Medal of Honor found in 10 U.S.C. §§ 7274, 8298, and 9274 where appropriate and necessary. Until your reviews are complete, please provide semi-annual status updates, every October 1 and April 1, to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

My point of contact regarding this matter is Mr. Carl "Doug" Johnson, at (703) 697-4615 or carl.d.johnson3.civ@mail.mil.



OSD005500-21/CMD007471-21



U.S. Department of Defense

Request to VSOs/MSOs Regarding the African American and Native American Service Cross Review Directed by the Secretary Of Defense on August 2, 2021

On August 2, 2021, the Secretary of Defense directed the Military Department Secretaries to review Service Cross Medals awarded to certain African American and Native American war veterans to ensure the veterans were appropriately recognized for their valorous actions.

The Secretary of Defense directed the review based on a recommendation from the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, who had informed the Secretary of Defense that the Department had reviewed the Service Crosses awarded to Asian American, Native American Pacific Islander, Jewish American, and Hispanic American Service members for possible upgrade to the Medal of Honor, but no similar review had been conducted for African American and Native American recipients.

To ensure equitable treatment, the Secretary of Defense directed the Secretaries of the Military Departments to conduct the following reviews of previously awarded Service Crosses (Distinguished Service Cross – Army; Navy Cross – Navy and Marine Corps; Air Force Cross – Air Force) to determine if the heroic actions for which the awardees were decorated merit award of the Medal of Honor:

African American veterans: Review Service Crosses awarded to such veterans for valorous actions performed during the Korean and Vietnam wars. (Note: The Departments of the Army and Navy previously conducted reviews for Service Crosses awarded during World War II.)

Native American veterans: Review Service Crosses awarded to such veterans for valorous actions performed during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

In an effort to identify qualifying war veterans for inclusion in the review, the Department of Defense respectfully requests the assistance of national veteran and military service

organizations who may have relevant information to share regarding any possible eligible veterans based on the war/conflict information identified above that following definitions of applicable veteran groups:

African American Veteran – any person who served in the United States Armed Forces and was awarded a Service Cross for actions during the Korean or Vietnam wars, and whose military personnel records identify them as being of African descent.

Native American Veteran – any person who served in the United States Armed Forces and was awarded a Service Cross for actions during World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War, and whose military personnel records identify them as being a member of a federally recognized tribe within the modern territory of the United States of America.

Alternatively: If the military personnel records of an otherwise eligible Service Cross recipient do not establish definitively that the veteran was African American or Native American, but there exists other historical evidence indicating the veteran was African American or Native American, that Service Cross recipient will be treated as falling within the parameters of the review.

The Department respectfully requests that each of your respective organizations review your records to determine if you have relevant information about individual veterans who meet the criteria for inclusion in the review. If you have such information, we would appreciate your sharing, with the applicable Military Service, the names of qualifying war veterans, along with any associated documents regarding the veteran's eligibility for inclusion in the review and their associated qualifying valorous act(s). The Military Services would appreciate receiving this information as soon as possible to allow adequate time to research and prepare the records for its internal review process. Accordingly, we would appreciate if all inputs were received no later than August 3, 2023.

Based on the information provided, the respective Military Department will determine if the veteran is eligible for inclusion in the review pursuant to the Secretary of Defense memorandum directing the review.

Contact information for each respective Military Service is listed below. Thank you for your assistance with this matter and for your longstanding support for the well-being of America's veterans.

Military Service	Contact Information
Army	Commander U.S. Army Human Resources Command Attn: AHRC-PDP-A 1600 Spearhead Division Ave., Dept 480 Ft. Knox, KY 40122-5408 Email: usarmy.knox.hrc.mbx.tagd-awards@army.mil Phone: (502) 613-9126
Navy	Chief of Naval Operations (DNS-13) Navy Awards Office 2000 Navy Pentagon Washington, DC 20350-2000 Email: cno_awards@us.navy.mil Phone: (202) 685-1770
Marine Corps	Commandant of the Marine Corps Military Awards Branch (MMMA) 2008 Elliot Road Quantico, VA 22134-5030 Email: hqmcMMMA.awards.policyquestions@usmc.mil Phone: (703) 784-9344 / 45
Air Force	Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center AFPC/DP1SSP 550 C Street West JB San Antonio-Randolph, TX 78150 Email: AFPC.DP1SSP.RecognitionProcess@us.af.mil Phone: (210) 565-2520

Farmer Veteran Coalition Partners with Native American Agriculture Fund to Gather Critical Input from Native Veterans Working in Agriculture

Here's a joint [PRESS RELEASE](#) from the Farmer Veteran Coalition and Native American Agriculture Fund which was released on February 16, 2022.

WOODLAND, Calif. (AgPR) Feb. 16, 2022 – Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) and the Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) formally announced today a partnership aimed at gathering critical input from Native American U.S. military veterans working in the agricultural industry. The goal of the partnership is to generate responses to NAAF's veteran survey and the feedback will be incorporated into their long-term vision for providing an infrastructure framework to harness Indian Country's economic and nutritional potential to recover from COVID-19, which is outlined in their [white paper, 'Reimagining Native Food Economies.'](#)

The survey is open for responses through March 7 and can be completed at nativeamericanagriculturefund.org/veterans-survey.

“Native Americans serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at one of the highest rates compared to other ethnicities and often the obligation to serve is steeped in ones' traditional connections to our land,” said Toni Stanger-McLaughlin, J.D., (Colville), CEO of the NAAF. “When our Native veterans return, we want them to find healing and opportunity in the land. That is why the Native American Agriculture Fund is committed to assisting Native American veterans and our first step in assistance is this survey.”

The questionnaire aims to understand how Native veterans are involved in food production and agriculture; the financial, business, and technical needs of Native veterans and Native food entrepreneurs; and how to connect Native veteran farmers, ranchers, fishers, and growers more seamlessly with NAAF grantees to realize the vision and mission of NAAF.

“The Native American Agriculture Fund's plan to develop 10 regional food hubs throughout the country will provide Native farmers and ranchers with the necessary infrastructure to create thriving and self-sustaining food systems for both Native and rural communities,” said FVC Executive Director Jeanette Lombardo. “As the nation's largest nonprofit assisting military veterans embark on careers in agriculture, Farmer Veteran Coalition is the perfect fit to partner with the NAAF on this important project.”

American Indian or Alaska Natives who are veterans or currently serving members of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible to complete the survey. The first 200 Native farmer veterans to complete the survey will receive a limited edition co-branded FVC/NAAF challenge coin.

To learn more about the Native American Agriculture Fund and to read their whitepaper,

visit nativeamericanagriculturefund.org. To learn more about Farmer Veteran Coalition, visit farmvetco.org.

About Farmer Veteran Coalition

Based in Woodland, Calif., Farmer Veteran Coalition's (FVC) mission is to mobilize veterans to feed America. Established in 2009, FVC's in-house programs include the Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund small grant program, the nationally recognized *Homegrown By Heroes* label for veteran-grown products, and national and regional conferences. As the nation's largest nonprofit assisting veterans and active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces embark on careers in agriculture, FVC works to develop a new generation of farmers and food leaders, and expand viable employment and career opportunities through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. For more information, visit www.farmvetco.org or follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) at @FarmerVeteranCoalition and on [Twitter](#) at @FarmVetCo.

About The Native American Agriculture Fund

The Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) is a private, charitable trust serving Native farmers and ranchers through strategic grantmaking in the areas of business assistance, agricultural education, technical support, and advocacy services. The charitable trust was created by the settlement of the landmark *Keepseagle v. Vilsack* class-action lawsuit. NAAF is the largest philanthropic organization devoted solely to serving the Native American farming and ranching community. For more information visit nativeamericanagriculturefund.org or follow them on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at @NativeAgFund.

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Native American Agriculture Fund
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Public can approach Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, see Native American Honor Guard

Here's an article by George D. Titsworth, Public Contact Coach, VA Albuquerque Regional Office



Members of the Chief Plenty Coups Honor Guard will place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Nov. 9. (Photo courtesy RaeAnna Victor).

For the first time in nearly 100 years, and as part of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Centennial Commemoration, the public [was] able to walk on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Plaza and lay flowers in front of the Tomb on Nov. 9 and 10, 2021. The flower ceremony [started] at 8 a.m. Nov. 9 with representatives from the Crow Nation placing flowers at the Tomb. They [recited] a prayer in honor of Chief Plenty Coups, who served as a scout for the U.S. Army.

Invited by President Warren Harding, Chief Plenty Coups was the sole representative of Native Americans for the dedication of the [Tomb Of The Unknown Soldier](#) in 1921. He gave a short speech in his native tongue in honor of the soldier and the occasion. He placed his war-bonnet and coup stick upon the tomb, which are preserved in a display case in Arlington.

Chief Plenty Coups Honor Guard

For the 100th anniversary of the Tomb, the Chief Plenty Coups Honor Guard is traveling from Montana to Arlington National Cemetery. One of the members of the Chief Plenty Coups Honor Guard is Marine Veteran Elsworth Goes Ahead. Enlisting at 18 and serving as a combat engineer, he served in Okinawa, Korea and Camp Pendleton in California during his time in service.

Goes Ahead said there will be eight honor guard members, with six carrying flags. This includes a U.S. flag; a single flag with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine and Coast Guard symbols; a Crow Nation travel flag; a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier flag; a Montana flag; and the Chief Plenty Coups flag. The Chief Plenty Coups flag contains the spelling “Plenty-Coos,” as the name was originally misspelled.

Also during the wreath laying, the honor guard will perform a traditional smudging ceremony. The members use cedar to smudge, cleanse and purify themselves and the things around them, Goes Ahead explained. “The smoke from the smudging is a way of lifting our prayers and good thoughts up to our Creator,” he said.

Learning about Native American service

Goes Ahead said he hopes those attending will ask questions and learn about the significant number of Native Americans who served the nation, following Chief Plenty Coups’ example.

“Chief Plenty Coups prayed for peace for both races,” he said. “He had a very high level of respect for the warriors laid to rest in Arlington. I hope that others learn the role that Natives have played and still play in the Armed Forces. From that early time, the Native people have enlisted, joined and fought for this country. I hope that strengthens our bond with non-Natives.”

Elsworth Goes Ahead is carrying on a family tradition with the event. Vincent Goes Ahead Sr. was one of the founders of the Chief Plenty Coup Honor Guard, along with John Bulltail, Sylvester Cartie Goes Ahead, Philip Beaumont Sr., Clem Goes Ahead and Ben Pease. He said following in the footsteps of his ancestors is humbling.

“It is overwhelming in the sense that my patriotism in my service to this country and to the U.S. flag itself means so much to me,” he said. “To know I’ll be in the presence of all these fallen warriors, that will be an honor. My love and devotion to this country is overwhelming.”

THE VETERANS' PRESS: Native veteran, Native pride

Here's an article by Ruth Aresvik which ran in the [Coeur d'Alene/Post Falls Press](#) on November 11, 2021

Simple and powerful ... timeless and inclusive. This is the description given for the Native American Veterans Memorial at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. The memorial opened to the public in November 2020 and was designed by Harvey Pratt, a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and a Southern Cheyenne Peace Chief. Pratt is a Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran. A stainless steel circle sits atop a carved stone drum surrounded by benches. Pratt's design incorporates elements of fire, water, air and earth, and four lances where visitors can tie cloths for prayers and healing, remembrance and reflection.



November is American Indian Heritage Month with an opportunity to learn and honor, as does this memorial, American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians who served in the military of the United States. These veterans have defended our country for centuries, and Native Americans serve in the United States Armed Forces at five times the national average. According to the USO and VeteranAid websites, General Ely S. Parker, a member of the Seneca Nation, served as military secretary for General Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War. Parker would later write the final draft of the Confederate terms of surrender. Despite not being recognized as American citizens, an estimated 12,000 Native Americans served in World War I. When the entire population of Native Americans was less than 350,000, an estimated 44,000 served in World War II (nearly 800 were women), and 42,000 served in the Vietnam War — 90% of them

volunteers. In recent years, statistics show almost 20% of all Native American service members are women, compared to the approximate 15% of other ethnicities.

And who hasn't heard of the Navajo Code Talkers? Their indigenous unwritten language was supreme in creating a special code to transmit sensitive information during World War II. Twenty-nine Navajo Marine Corps men began the operation, and by the end of the war, about 400 Talkers from the Navajo, Cherokee, Choctaw, Lakota, Meskwaki and Comanche tribes were translating encrypted messages. Japanese forces never broke the Navajo Code.

For Native Veterans, like so many others, service to their country does not end when handed their DD 214. Dr. Ricky Robinson, Army veteran and member of the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, was past Executive Director of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe at Fort Hall, Idaho. He was also Director of the Cherokee Nation Veterans Affairs Center after his retirement from the Bureau of Indian Affairs — Office of Indian Education. Dr. Robinson follows a tradition of service much like his uncles and grandfather, and continues to work in helping veterans. As past manager for the Cherokee Nation Veterans Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Dr. Robinson said "A lot of veterans just want to come in and talk about something, maybe experiences they've had. They can do that here...we will help them get an appointment with a licensed counselor in the tribe or through Veterans Affairs."

The GI Bill was an advantage that helped John Daugherty, Air Force veteran and tribal member of the Cherokee, Shawnee and Delaware tribes. After his four years as an administrative specialist, serving mostly in Spain, John took business and Indian social science courses. He worked in various roles for Indian Health Services and became Area Director of Indian Services for the State of Oklahoma. "I lived with my grandmother who spoke only Shawnee. My mother was full blood Shawnee and Delaware. I've been a singer at tribal ceremonies, responsible for maintaining drums and had the pleasure and honor of mentoring young people — encouraging them with their singing."

Cherokee tribal member and Navy Veteran S. Joe Crittenden has no shortage of warrior spirit. After his tour in Guam, and on the USS Princeton, Joe came back to work for the tribe in many areas. He served as Deputy Chief of the Cherokee Nation, participated in several Warrior (Honor) Flights, and worked with the Department of Veteran Affairs so that veterans who would normally use VA health facilities, could use tribal health centers for routine care. Joe also signed an agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in securing a housing program for homeless Native American veterans. "It blesses my heart. We talk about sacrifice that has been given by veterans through the ages ... I'm going to do everything I can to improve what's already a success in our tribe." Joe is proud of his service, it "gave me direction, taught me respect, and to obey orders. I believe we see this land as something created to use and take care of and defend." Joe was a member of the advisory committee for the National Native American Veterans Memorial. From 2015 until the summer of 2017, the committee conducted many consultations, bringing together tribal leaders, Native veterans, and community members across the nation in order to establish a shared vision and set of design principles. Joe now serves as the Cherokee Nation Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in Tahlequah, Okla.

Challenges aside, Native American service members have stepped up to serve the United States with dignity and distinction. They have dedicated their lives to protecting this country and helping veterans. They have blended harmony and fierce spirit in leaving a legacy of tribal pride.

We will be known forever by the tracks we leave. — Dakota

Cherokee Phoenix Breakdown: Cherokee Warriors

In this episode of the Cherokee Phoenix Breakdown, Cherokee Nation Secretary of Veterans Affairs S. Joe Crittenden and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Director of the Office of Tribal Government Relations Stephanie Birdwell discuss the history of Cherokee people serving in the United States military as well as the services and programs the tribe offers to support veterans.

Click [HERE](#) or on the image below to access the video [28:59] on YouTube.



Julia Kabance, oldest member of Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and WWII veteran, dies at 111

Sad news to share from Prairie Band Potawatomi. Here's a [Facebook post](#) the tribe released on November 17, 2021. Also, a short VA video of her is [HERE](#).

The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation would like to take a moment to honor the life of Julia Kabance. She was both the oldest member of the tribe and female WWII veteran. She began her journey on Tuesday, November 16, 2021 at 111-years-old.

Born on the Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation in 1910, the 11th out of 12 she pursued her education at Haskell Institute (now Haskell Indian Nations University) and later attended the University of Kansas. On March 17, 1943 she joined the Women's Army Corp (WAC) during World War II and was stationed at McChord Air Force Base in Washington state in the Adjutant Corps. Honorably discharged in 1945 she returned to civilian life where she continued to give of herself by volunteering for seventeen years at the VA in Topeka. She was active with the Catholic Church and was a life-member of the American Legion We-Ta-Se Post 410.

Julia will have a viewing and Rosary, this Friday evening at 5:30 p.m., with burial on Saturday at 9 a.m. in St. Mary's, KS at the Assumption Chapel, 200 E. Mission St, Saint Mary's, KS. Piper Funeral Home is handling the arrangements. A small reception will be held after the burial at the St. Marys Senior Center, 403 Lasley Street.



Julia Kabance, Oldest Known Woman Veteran of World War II, Dies at 111

Here's an article by Livia Gershon from the [Smithsonian Magazine](#), which ran on November 22, 2021

Julia Kabance, who served during World War II as a member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC), died last Tuesday at the age of 111. She was the oldest known woman veteran of the conflict and the oldest living citizen of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. "Julia was a proud member of the American Legion Post 410 We Ta Se, for her service in World War II," Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Chairman Joseph Rupnick tells *Native News Online*. "She was an inspiration to our tribe."

Kabance was born on the Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation in 1910 as the 11th of 12 children, says the tribe in a [statement](#). Speaking with the *Mercury's* Megan Moser in 2019, she recalled her family buying an early hand-cranked car when she was 3 years old.

"Just about the time they got it started, it went 'bang!' and backfired," Kabance said. "I wanted to jump out!" The supercentenarian studied at Haskell Institute (now known as Haskell Indian Nations University) and the University of Kansas before joining the WAC in March 1943 at age 33. She told the *Mercury* that she and other women were sent to Kansas' Fort Leavenworth to take over office jobs so that the men who had previously performed them would be able to fight overseas—a fact that didn't sit well with the men.

"They said, 'We were just pulled in. We had no choice. You just walk in because you wanted to be here,'" she recalled. "They rubbed it in all the time. I told them, 'Well, there is such a thing as patriotism.' I said, 'The country's at war.' I said, 'Everybody needs to help.'"

In addition to performing clerical work, Kabance spent time as a driver for the United States Army before receiving an honorable discharge in 1945 as a staff sergeant. She cared for her ailing mother until the older woman's death four years later. After that, she went to work for the Air Force in Topeka and, later, for other military installations, including in Washington State and on the East Coast. She spent years volunteering with Veterans Affairs and was active with the Catholic Church and her American Legion post. She continued her volunteer work well beyond her 100th birthday, according to her [obituary](#).

"Julia Kabance lived the life of a warrior, patriot and respected tribal veteran," former Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation chairperson Tracy Stanhoff tells *Native News Online*. "She was extraordinary in exhibiting a true zest for life. At her birthday party three years ago, held in concert with the Annual Potawatomi Gathering hosted by our tribe, she was a beautiful spirit sharing with us stories from the photos on display and instructing us to archive them at the tribal government center."

Kabance told the *Mercury* that she hoped to live to 112 and beyond, setting national and international records for longevity. While she didn't reach that goal, she was the oldest living

female World War II veteran and probably the oldest living person in Kansas. As Tim Hrenchir reports for the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, this title is uncertain because the state doesn't keep an official record. The oldest living person in the United States is 115-year-old Thelma Sutcliff of Omaha, Nebraska. The oldest World War II veteran is 112-year-old Lawrence Brooks of New Orleans.

Asked about the secret of her longevity, Kabance told the *Mercury* that part of it may have been the fact that she never married. "I could do whatever I wanted," she said.



The advertisement features a dark background with a VA logo at the top center. On the left side, there are three images: a group of four smiling women, a document titled "VETERAN BENEFITS" with a VA logo, and a portrait of a woman. The main text is in large, bold, yellow letters: "ARE YOU NOT USING VA SERVICES AND/OR BENEFITS?". Below this, it says "WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU." and provides a survey link: <https://survey.voice.va.gov/?cwv-women-veterans>. A QR code is located at the bottom right.

Veterans Affairs Secretary pays respect to Native veterans

Here's a short piece by *Jourdan Bennett-Begaye* which ran in [Indian Country Today](#) on November 12, 2021

U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough paid respects to Native American and Alaska Native veterans on Veterans Day in Washington, D.C. McDonough visited and laid a wreath at the memorial site. He said, "My heartfelt appreciation for Native vets." He is likely the first secretary to pay tribute to the memorial since it was finished in late 2020.



Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis Richard McDonough paid respect to Native veterans by laying a wreath at the National Native American Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., on November 11, 2021. The secretary was joined by Juanita Mullen, the liaison for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans, and Gregorio Kishketon, Kickapoo. Lance Fisher, Northern Cheyenne, and Giovanna Gross, Oglala Lakota and Peruvian, sang the Cheyenne flag song and victory after the wreath ceremony. (Photo by Jourdan Bennett-Begaye, Indian Country Today)

Juanita Mullen, liaison for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans from the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Gregorio Kishketon, Kickapoo, joined the secretary at the event.

Lance Fisher, Northern Cheyenne, and Giovanna Gross, Oglala Lakota and Peruvian, sang the Cheyenne flag song after the wreath ceremony. Fisher said it is the equivalent of the national anthem. They also sang a victory song from the Cheyenne that came out of World War I and says the flag is still waving. — *Jourdan Bennett-Begaye, Indian Country Today*

Native American Direct Loan Program

Opening Doors for Native American Veterans



You've earned an opportunity for homeownership through your military service.

The Native American Direct Loan (NADL) program offers VA-direct loans to help Native American Veterans buy, build, or improve a home on Federal trust land.

What are the Benefits of NADL?

- 01 Low fixed interest rate
- 02 No down payment
- 03 No private mortgage insurance
- 04 Limited closing costs
- 05 Reusable benefit
- 06 Ability to refinance NADL loans

Who is Eligible for a NADL?

If you are a Native American Veteran enrolled as a member of a Federally recognized tribe, you and your spouse are eligible for a NADL if you meet all of the following requirements:

- » Your Tribal Government has a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** with VA regarding NADL. Go to https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/nadl_mou.asp to find a complete list of Tribes with MOUs.
- » You have a valid VA home loan **Certificate of Eligibility (COE)**.
- » You can provide proof that your income will cover the mortgage payments and costs of owning a home.
- » You meet VA's flexible credit standards.
- » The home you are seeking to buy, build, or repair using NADL loan funds will be your residence.

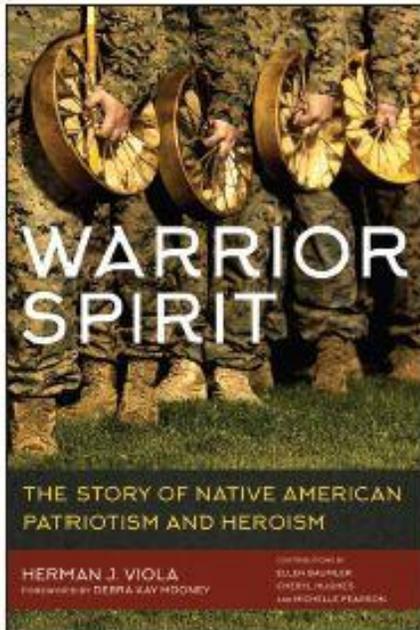
For more information, visit the NADL homepage at www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/nadl.asp or call 877-827-3702 and request to speak to a NADL team member.





BOOK NEWS

For Immediate Release



A history and celebration of Native American military service

Warrior Spirit

The Story of Native American Heroism and Patriotism

By Herman J. Viola

Foreword by Debra Kay Mooney

Contributions by Ellen Baumler, Cheryl Hughes, and Michelle Pearson

For decades, American schoolchildren have learned only a smattering of facts about Native American peoples, especially when it comes to service in the U.S. military. They might know that Navajos served as Code Talkers during World War II, but more often they learn that Native Americans were enemies of the United States, not allies or patriots. In *Warrior Spirit*, author Herman J. Viola sets the record straight by highlighting the military service—and major sacrifices—of Native American soldiers and veterans in the U.S. armed services.

American Indians have fought in uniform in each of our nation's wars. Since 1775, despite a legacy of broken treaties, cultural suppression, and racial discrimination, indigenous Americans have continued to serve in numbers that far exceed their percentage of the general U.S. population. *Warrior Spirit* introduces readers to unsung heroes, from the first Native guides and soldiers during the Revolutionary War to those servicemen and -women who ventured to Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

This outstanding record of service begs a question: Why do American Indians willingly serve a country that has treated them so poorly? Native veterans invariably answer that they are a warrior people who have a sacred obligation to defend their homeland and their families. Written to be accessible to young adult readers, *Warrior Spirit* is a valuable resource for any reader interested in Native American military history.

Herman J. Viola, Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution, was the senior advisor for the National Native American Veterans Memorial, dedicated in November 2020. He is the author of numerous articles and pathbreaking books, including *After Columbus: The Chronicle of America's Indian Peoples since 1492* and *Warrior in Uniform*. **Debra Kay Mooney** (Choctaw) retired from the U.S. Army a Sergeant First Class in 2015 and lives in Idabel, Oklahoma. **Ellen Baumler** has served as an interpretive historian with the Montana Historical Society in Helena and is the author of numerous books and articles on Montana. **Cheryl Hughes** is retired as a high school English teacher in Montana and has taught Native American literature and place-based education. Educator and historic preservationist **Michelle Pearson** teaches in Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Thornton, Colorado, and is the author of *Historic Places of Denver for Children and Families*.

MARCH 2022

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NATIVE AMERICAN/MILITARY HISTORY

FOR AUTHOR INTERVIEWS AND OTHER

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Navajo Nation Insulin Dependent Diabetic Veterans

Here's an article from Bill Ward, Vietnam Veteran, President, Community Health Advocate and Motivational Speaker, Men's Cancer & Health Issues

A partnership between Corporate and Non-Profit for the benefit of insulin dependent diabetic Veterans on Navajo Nation is a notable example for others to follow. The partnership objective is to prolong the life of diabetic Veterans who do not have electricity in their home. This is done by providing a solar unit with a refrigerator/freezer unit to keep the Veteran's insulin cool during hot summers and allow for food storage in the freezer and dual-purpose unit at no cost to the Veteran on behalf of USAA and [Veterans Medical Leadership Council](#) (VMLC) & VMLC Charities.

VMLC selected their council member Bill Ward, who was raised on the White Mountain Apache Indian Reservation just south of the Navajo Nation, to be the lead for the project. He played high school sports against schools on the Navajo Nation and was familiar with Navajo Nation.

Bill traveled to Tuba City, met with the Western Agency Chapter Commanders, and shared the concept of wanting to provide support for diabetic Veterans at no cost. He asked the chapter commanders to identify Veterans in their respective chapter and provide the names and locations of the individuals that were interested in our project. The Western Agency Chapter Commander submitted 11 names and their contact information and location, and each commander agreed to meet Bill and guide him to the locations of the Veterans that agreed to participate in the program. Chinle provided two Veterans and a community facility equipped with the solar unit which would allow the community to charge cell phones. There was a total of fourteen units contracted for installation.



Harry Clauschee, left, Vietnam War Veteran and recipient of Solar unit and refrigerator/freezer unit from VMLC/USAA. Bill Ward, right, Vietnam War Veteran-VMLC Council Member and Solar project Leader for Navajo Nation Diabetic Veterans.

VMLC signed a contract with a solar company NUE (New Use Energy) to provide a complete package of solar system, Refrigerator/Freezer unit completely installed and operational at the Veteran's homes. These Veterans lived in areas a long way from the main highway, and it was somewhat of a surprise for the solar company to see how vast the Navajo Nation is and how isolated the Veterans are from services.

Bill accompanied the contractor to every location as he had contacted them to notify them that the solar team was coming to install the system. He was the primary contact with all the veterans and Navajo Nation on a Government-to-Government basis to secure permission to work on Navajo Nation, a Sovereign Nation.

The project started in Chinle and moved to the Western Agency in distinct locations, Leupp, Cameron, Kayenta, Tuba City, AZ, Navajo Mountain, UT and Dennehotsoh, AZ. As of January 24th, there are nine installed units with the final five being installed before the end of January.

We are grateful for the generosity of USAA supporting our Veteran brothers and sisters living in conditions that parallel conditions we saw while fighting in Vietnam.



Harry Clauschee, Vietnam Veteran from Chinle sitting in front of his Hogan prior to the installation of his solar refrigerator/freezer at no cost to him.

OTGR Southern Plains Region

(KS; OK; TX)

OKLAHOMA WOMEN VETERANS

2022 VIRTUAL LUNCH & LEARN SERIES
TIME: 11:30AM-12:30PM CENTRAL TIME



February 1 - Filing a VA Disability Claim - Basic Claim Information

February 15 - BDD Claims - Are you separating from the military soon?

March 1 - Appeals and Supplemental Claims

March 15 - Filing a Claim with Military Sexual Trauma

March 29 - Filing a Claim for Gynecological Issues

Presentations provided by VBA, with time for Q&A!

For more information and or to submit early questions, please email okwomenvets@odva.ok.gov.

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://tinyurl.com/okwvlunchandlearn2022>

Meeting ID: 815 7466 7876 Passcode: 898778



VBA SERIES-PROVIDED BY THE VA REGIONAL
OFFICE, MUSKOGEE OK

HOST BY THE ODVA WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM
EMAIL OKWOMENVETS@ODVA.OK.GOV
405-523-4020

2022 Women Veterans Symposium

Purpose After Service

March 5th, 2022

9 am to 1 pm Via Zoom

Register at veteran.okstate.edu



Keynote Speaker:
Kim Howerton
LtCol Ret.
OK Air Guard
US Air Force Reserve



Connect:
Patricia Mathes-Kerr
US Army



Community:
Tracy Lewis
Author
US Air Force



Commitment:
Tracy Morrill
US Air Force



VA Volunteer Activities:
Rochell Alexander
US Army

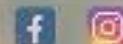
Oklahoma Women Veterans

#okwomenvets

2022 Activities & Events

With the Women Veterans Program of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs

For more information on events, please follow us on social media, visit our website at oklahoma.gov/veterans, email okwomenvets@odva.ok.gov or telephone 405-523-4020.



OTGR Southwest Region

(AZ; CO; NM; UT)

APPLY FOR VA BENEFIT CLAIMS WEB CAMERA SESSION

Veterans and Widows of Veterans can now apply for VA disability compensation or pension claims at our office.

Using web camera technology, an Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Benefits Officer will speak directly with you to apply for VA claims.

Please bring a copy of your military discharge document (DD Form 214); an ID card; social security card; marriage and/or divorce documents; birth and/or death certificates; and any financial award letters.

Who: Veterans and Widows of Veterans

How: Call (928) 734-3461 or 734-3462 to schedule an appointment.

Where: Hopi Veterans Services office
Tribal Complex DATS Building, First Floor
Kykotsmovi, AZ.

Why: To qualify for the VA benefits you earned!



Thank you for your service.

Now let us serve you.



APPLY FOR YOUR VA BENEFITS TODAY!



Office of Hopi Veterans Services
Regulated Entity – The Hopi Tribe
(928) 734-3461

Timothy L. Nuvangyaoma
CHAIRMAN

Craig Andrews
VICE-CHAIRMAN

January 19, 2022

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Effective January 14, 2022, Hopi Tribal Executive Order #001-2022, “Return to Phase Two with Modified Provisions, was issued by Chairman Nuvangyaoma, The Hopi Tribe. Hopi Veterans Services will abide with the executive order and has implemented the following procedures for program services:

- HVS office hours remain Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (MST).
- Staff will be on a rotation work schedule daily, however, our goal is to keep the main office covered.
- A majority of our services can be accomplished by telephone calls to (928) 734-3461 or 3462. Please leave a voice mail message with name, telephone number and specific assistance needed.
- Alternate method to contact us is by e-mail: ETalas@hopi.nsn.us or HPolewytewa@hopi.nsn.us
- In-person office visits **shall** be by appointment only. This is necessary to reserve a conference room to meet privately with clients and to ensure your confidentiality. One escort for elderly Veterans or their dependents, i.e. spouses, etc., are permitted during the appointment.
- All visitors must abide by COVID protocols when entering Honanie Building. A Security guard will screen visitors and notify us to meet you in the lobby. All visitors shall:
 - Check-in at the lobby.
 - Wear a protective facemask at all times.
 - Have your “COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card” available.
 - Not exhibit COVID symptoms.
- Transports for VA medical appointments are limited to border towns only (Flagstaff, Winslow or Tuba City) and must be requested 7 work-days prior to date. Transports to Prescott or Phoenix VA will be on case-by-case basis with approval by program director.
- Other veteran-related services:
 - National VA Call Center: (800) 827-1000 or internet at www.va.gov
 - Veteran’s Crisis Line: (800) 273-8255, press 1. Free support available every day and confidential.
 - AZVS Benefits Claim assistance: (602) 535-1215 (ask for north region) to schedule VA claims appointment.

Ensuring our client’s and staff’s health and safety is paramount to implement these necessary precautions for the well-being of all during this challenging time. However, we will continue to do our best to serve you and your families, with your cooperation and patience. Remain firm in your personal and family COVID protocols to safeguard your family as we work through this together. Be Careful, Keep Safe and Stay Hopi Strong!



Eugene “Geno” Talas, Director
Hopi Veterans Services

OTGR Western Region

(AK; CA; ID; NV; OR; WA)

S.A.V.E.

Suicide Prevention Training

For Veteran Service Organizations

Trainer: VA Puget Sound Suicide Prevention

When: 2nd Thursday of each month

12:00pm-1:30pm (PST)

Where: Virtual/Zoom

Register using the QR code or go to:

www.eventsquid.com/event/14886



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VTSC

VETERANS TRAINING SUPPORT CENTER



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS - SEATTLE REGIONAL OFFICE



SPOKANE OFFICE GRAND OPENING!



Compensation, Pension,
and other services are now
available in our new
location. Veteran
Readiness & Employment
(VR&E) services are
available by appt only.

OPENING FEB 22 –

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(Foley Courthouse)

Schedule an appointment now!

Benefits Counselors are available now
for **in-person and virtual appointments**.
If you would like to set up a meeting with
us, please click the link to the new **Visitor
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zip code for an appointment near you.

Assistance is also available by contacting
VA's National Call Center at
1-800-827-1000 or by visiting:
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/seattle/>



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