

Department of Texas
2017-2018 American Legion Auxiliary Programs Action Plan

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

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What is this program, and why do we have it?

The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program promotes our mission to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families. The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program and the 2014-2019 ALA Centennial Strategic Plan: Our work to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families provides our members opportunities to serve in volunteer leadership roles within their local Veterans Affairs hospital (Goal 3), which broadens our membership pool (Goal 1) among a target population and builds brand loyalty (Goal 5) with the veterans themselves.

What can you do?

1. Assist in activities that help homeless veterans.

Ideas:

Members and Units

- Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your department and offer to assist that coordinator in responding to requests for assistance from homeless veterans or homeless veteran service providers.
- Crochet hats, scarves or mittens to be distributed to homeless veterans. Use information provided by your department chairman to contact the homeless veteran coordinator at the VA health care system nearest you to explore what the unit or you can do to help homeless veterans in your community.
- Participate in the VA Project CHALENG organized by the VA health care system nearest to you. (Project CHALENG for Veterans enhances the care for homeless veterans provided by your local VA and its surrounding community service agencies.)
- Contact your local post chairman and offer your assistance if requests for help

- come through the Legion’s Family Support Network (FSN).
- Raise funds for local American Legion posts to help veterans and their families through the Family Support Network for veterans at risk of losing their housing or homeless veterans transitioning to permanent housing.
 - Make payments of overdue rent, utility payments or deposits and security deposits.
- Host or volunteer at homeless veterans’ stand downs, events where homeless veterans receive free goods and services such as haircuts and medical exams.
- Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters, transitional housing projects and permanent housing projects in your community and identify the organization’s volunteer and in-kind contribution needs, including:
 - Meal preparation and serving
 - Clothes collection and distribution
 - Assembly and delivery of hygiene kits, buddy baskets
 - Purchasing or securing household items or furniture
- Reach out to specific homeless veterans, such as residents of projects mentioned above to provide her/him practical, social and moral support.
- Compile “blessing bags” to be given to the local police department or other organizations that deal with the homeless veteran population.
- Create a “Tree of Warmth” by collecting scarves, mittens, hats and attaching them to a tree in a location the homeless frequent. Include a sign that says, “Please Take if Needed,” “Free if Needed,” or something similar.

2. Support rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts, and hobbies.

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)

NVCAF is the national, annual competition and festival that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation’s veterans after disease, disability or life crisis. As the national presenting sponsor, the American Legion Auxiliary should strive to increase monetary support by encouraging departments to sponsor fundraisers that will contribute to the increased awareness and support of this program.

Ideas:

Members/Units

- Obtain and become familiar with the *ALA Guide for Volunteers*.
- Help your unit and department earn recognition at National Convention through donations to support VA Creative Arts Festivals. Volunteer individually, with a fellow member, or as a unit at a local Creative Arts Festival.
- Identify arts, crafts and hobby projects targeted to veterans (such as writing, oral history recording, visual and performing arts, quilting and gardening). A unit may organize a project of its own or introduce a unit to veteran arts, crafts and hobby projects already operational in the community.
- Contribute donated supplies to help supplement visual veteran artists’ needs for their projects. Contact your department chairman or your local VA hospital coordinator for a list of items.

- Donate, through departments, funds that help local veterans attend state and national Wheel Chair Games, Veterans Creative Arts Festivals, Paralympics, etc.

3. Help The American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.

Ideas:

Members

- Take part in a veteran job fair by organizing or working at an informational table. Other opportunities include helping implement a Legion-sponsored job fair and/or co-hosting a Legion Family information table at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation-sponsored job fair. Additionally, Auxiliary members may initiate and host a job fair for veterans in their community.
- Serve as a career e-mentor for women veterans.
- Volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, specifically if a house build is supported by The American Legion.

Unit

- Host an informational table at a local job fair.
- Support the Legion by helping host a local job fair at your post home.

4. Enroll Auxiliary members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers at VA health care facilities.

Ideas:

Member

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- If you live near a VA facility, become a regular VAVS volunteer and invite others to become VAVS volunteers with you.
- Send notes and provide supplies to support those who volunteer at VA facilities.
- Enter all of your VAVS hours into the VAVS tracking system. Note: VA Healthcare facilities volunteer hour tracking system is different from the tracking utilized for ALA hour bars. Please consult your department.

5. There isn't a VA hospital close to your community? Find opportunities for Auxiliary members to serve veterans in your area. These hours will count toward your Service to Veterans pin and hour bars.

Service to Veterans recognizes volunteers who provide service to veterans, servicemembers and their families outside a VAMC. Volunteers conduct projects and work for military/veterans and/or families from their homes and in their communities. Service to Veterans volunteers maintain their own recordkeeping and dollars spent. The Service to Veterans pin has been designed to reflect the work of those who volunteer in their communities and at home for veterans. Hour bars, which attach to the pin, are also available to earn. More information may be in the *Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers* available online for download at www.alaforveterans.org. To purchase a printed copy, please visit www.emblem.legion.org.

Ideas:

Member

- Read the *Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers*
- Sew quilts for the Quilts of Valor Foundation. For more information, please visit www.qovf.org/.
- Help a veteran use the Internet.
- Supply postage for local veterans in rest homes or assisted living facilities.
- Organize transportation for veterans to assist them with essential errands or medical appointments; many live far from a VA facility and shouldn't be driving if they don't feel well.
- Contact the Legion Service Officer at your post and offer to be on the list of people to call when a military family needs help.
- Buy school supplies, throw a baby shower, or send care packages to military kids who are headed to college.
- Report your Service to Veterans hours to your unit VA&R chairman.
- See Awards section of this plan for information on Hour Bar Recognition.

Unit

- Become the catalyst to find needs and encourage members to help veterans in their community.
- Provide hospitality for a job fair for veterans.
- Coordinate with local quilt shops to help your unit sponsor a quilting event in support of Quilts of Valor.
- Contact members, including those who never or only occasionally attend meetings and events and invite them to participate for specific limited duration projects that would help area veterans.
- Compile and record hours provided by your members.
- Coordinate with your PR chairman to tell the community what work your unit members are doing for veterans.

6. Transitioning back to civilian life is one of the biggest challenges veterans face today. Educate yourself about resources so you can help veterans access all their VA benefits, not just health care. Work with your local American Legion Post Service Officer.

Ideas:

Members

- Coordinate with local American Legion posts to identify the local Service Officer or see list at www.legion.org/serviceofficers.
- Help eligible veterans attain benefits through referrals.
- Encourage eligible veterans to use the VA health care system and its services, including hospitals, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Vet Centers, etc.
- Participate in and encourage veterans and their family members to participate in town-hall meetings organized by The American Legion in advance of the Legion's *System Worth Saving* site visits to VA health care systems: www.legion.org/systemworthsaving.

- **Resource:**
VA Health Care Hotline for women veterans
1-855-VA-Women (1-855-829-6636); explore.va.gov/health-care

Unit

- Invite the local, county or state Service Officer to be the guest speaker at a unit event.

7. Assist and support caregivers of veterans.

Ideas:

Members

- Familiarize yourself with the service of the VA caregiver support program.
- Familiarize yourself with the Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network.
- Become a veteran caregiver peer support trainer or volunteer.
- Become a Legacy Corps AmeriCorps member if the Legacy Corps project is offered in a state or locality near you.
- Volunteer as a VA Voluntary Service volunteer support caregiver if the VA health care system closest to you offers such volunteer opportunity.

Units

- Familiarize your unit and community with the services of the VA caregiver support program.
- Invite the VA caregiver support coordinator in the VA healthcare system closest to you to make a presentation to your unit, district or community-wide meeting.

Additional Resources

ALA Resources: How to Organize a Job Fair for Veterans and/or Military and Veteran Spouses

- www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes
- www.ementorprogram.org/militaryspouse-ementor/
- The American Legion and Habitat For Humanity Volunteer involvement toolkit–
www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/habitat.pdf
- VA Caregiver Support – www.caregiver.va.gov/
- Elizabeth Dole Foundation- www.elizabethdolefoundation.org
- Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network - milvetcaregivernetwork.org

Additional Information

Welcome Home Celebrations

Provide assistance to your local VA health care system in supporting returning servicemembers and their families in the community. VA supports this initiative by providing information about the opportunities available to them through the VA. Every VA health care system sponsors welcome home celebrations in their facilities and community.

National Salute to Veterans

This initiative salutes America's heroes, the more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. Armed Services who are cared for every day in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14 annually.

How-to Sheets

- How to Raise Awareness in Your Communities About the Ever-Increasing Number of Homeless Veterans.
- How to Increase Donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Additional Resources You Can Use

1. Homeless Veterans Coalition: www.nchv.org
2. Other "How to Sheets" can be found at ALAFORVeterans.org
3. Quilts of Valor: www.qovf.org
4. VA Homeless Programs: www.va.gov/homeless/
5. HUD Homeless Assistance Programs:
https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/homeless/programs
6. On-Call: Handbook for Homeless Veterans and Service Providers
www.legion.org/publications/168493/homeless-veterans-handbook
7. The American Legion Family Support Network: www.legion.org/familysupport
8. American Legion Auxiliary Veterans Creative Activities Action Guide,
www.ALAFORVeterans.org
9. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov
10. The national VA&R Committee Facebook group, search ALA Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R)
11. Your national VA&R committee members (see VA&R program page on the national website or Annual Supplement for contact information)

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Reporting:

Mid-Year Reports

Mid-Year reports reflect the program work of units in the department, and are intended as an opportunity for mid-year correction. Each department VA&R chairman is required to submit a narrative report by January 5, 2018 to the division VA&R chairman, plus copy the national VA&R chairman. Units should make certain their reports are to Department Chairman by **December 15, 2017**.

Year-End Reports

Annual reports reflect the program work of units in the department, and may result in a national award for participants if award requirements are met. Each department VA&R chairman is required to submit a narrative report by May 15, 2018 to the division VA&R chairman, plus copy the national VA&R chairman. Members and units should follow their department's protocol and deadlines. Units should make certain their reports are to the Department Chairman by **April 15, 2018**.

Department of Texas Awards

A certificate will be awarded to all Units submitting narratives for Most Outstanding Overall VA&R Unit Program. One - \$50.00 award will be given to the Unit selected by the Department VA&R Committee with the Most Outstanding Overall Program. Units will submit entries to the Department VA & R Chairman, Brenda Towers by April 15, 2018. Entries must be typewritten in narrative form not to exceed 1,000 words and may include pictures.

A certificate will be awarded to Units that donate to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Donations must be received in the Department office August 1, 2017 – July 31, 2018.

