

The Bay State Patriot

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Massachusetts Department Of Veterans' Services

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Deval L. Patrick
Governor

JudyAnn Bigby, M.D.
Secretary, EOHHS

Timothy P. Murray
Lieutenant Governor

Coleman Nee
Secretary, DVS



Secretary's Welcome

It was just over a year ago that I was privileged to be appointed Secretary of the finest veterans' service system in the nation. Since that time, the Department of Veterans' Services has seen the cases of Chapter 115 financial and medical assistance benefits for veterans and dependents rise to an all time high. We currently have over 10,000 cases - which is an increase of about 14% since June 2011. We also have seen a significant increase in disabled veterans' benefits claims through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with a corresponding 3% increase in Chapter 115 veterans' annuity benefits applications processed through our office. To be sure, all of us who work to serve the veterans and military families of the

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Commonwealth are very busy, and our shared mission continues.

I am pleased to share that, despite continued national economic challenges and a challenging state budget, the Governor's proposed FY13 budget made veterans' services a priority by proposing to increase resources to the Department of Veterans' Services and the Soldiers' Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke by 13 percent over this year.

One of the proudest days I have ever experienced was this past January when I joined officials from the VA and the U.S. Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness to announce a new report that shows homelessness among veterans in Massachusetts has dropped 21% since January 2011, nearly twice the rate of reduction nationally. By working across agencies and in partnership with our dedicated advocates and service providers, Massachusetts continues to make great strides in providing resources for our military servicemen and women.

In conjunction with this report, we also announced a new pilot program that will supplement these efforts by offering comprehensive, peer-to-peer services to chronically homeless veterans receiving HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers in the Boston area. Through a \$323,000 grant from the VA, we launched the DVS-administered Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention (SHARP) initiative, which will offer peer support, mental health services, psychiatric evaluation and linkages to emergency shelter to veterans recently placed in supportive housing at a veteran-centric facility. The team will also identify and enroll new homeless veterans in the HUD-VASH program.

This is the fourth federal grant that the Department of Veterans' Services has sought out and obtained in the past two years as part of our forward-leaning efforts to end homelessness among veterans and to assist them with job training for meaningful career paths and placement in good paying jobs. These four federal grants represent more than \$1.2 million dollars that we are putting to work to help our most vulnerable veterans. Through our collaborative efforts, we have already begun to experience a decrease in the homeless veteran population in Massachusetts, and our aim is to nurture the system to sustain this downward trend.

DVS is also making great strides in the effort to aid veterans in their search for employment opportunities. In November, Governor Patrick launched an Interagency Task Force on Hiring Veterans and

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directed all Executive Branch agencies to promote the benefits of hiring veterans. Despite recent positive news on declining unemployment, the economic downturn has hit veterans hard and veterans as a whole remain unemployed at a much higher rate than national and state averages. Unemployment rates are even higher among young veterans and women veterans. These facts reflect the harsh realities veterans face when they return to civilian life. This is tragic, not only because of the special contributions of servicemen and women in the military, but also because of the special opportunity for employers to benefit from the training, discipline and skill sets of veterans.

These are some examples of the big strides the Department has made over the past year to honor and to provide meaningful services and benefits for our veterans and their families.

In short, the state of our veterans' services in Massachusetts remains solid, and we continue to lead the nation caring for and supporting the men and women of the Commonwealth who have served this great nation.

Sincerely,



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Comcast Hire a Veteran Program

We all know how difficult it can be to look for a job. You drafted your resume and visited your One Stop Career Center to have it reviewed and updated. You then signed up for workshops and seminars, searched web resources, and joined a virtual network like LinkedIn. After sending your resume out to multiple employers only to be lost in the sea of other similar applicants, how can you get those employers to see your talent and motivation above all those other resumes? What if you could get your face out there for employers to actually see you, even for just a minute?

Comcast partnered with us last month to do just that. In a "Hire a Veteran" pilot program to help Veterans find jobs, the staff at Comcast worked with 24 veterans to prepare short video interview segments that summarized their careers and the type of jobs they are seeking. Each participant shared their military experience as well as the special skills and qualities veterans bring to the workplace. Check out these veterans and their stories on Comcast Xfinity TV under the "Get Local" Section. You will also be able to see an introduction from Secretary Nee as well as some video clips of seminars in this section as well. Employers interested in learning more about these veterans can contact us at veteransvoice@massmail.state.ma.us or by calling our Veterans' Employment Line at

617-210-5970.

Social Security Serves Those Who Serve America

Each and every day of the year, Americans in the armed forces serve our nation. At Social Security, we honor our nation's military personnel and all of America's veterans not only on Veterans Day, but every day of the year.

In fact, military service members receive expedited processing of their disability applications from Social Security. Under an agreement initiated by Social Security, the Department of Defense transmits information that allows us to quickly identify military personnel injured in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

The expedited process is available for any military service member who becomes disabled during active duty on or after October 1, 2001, regardless of where the disability occurs. Depending on the situation, some family members of military personnel also may be able to receive benefits, including dependent children and spouses.

If you, or someone you know, were wounded while on active duty in the military, find out more about what Social Security can do for you by visiting our website designed specifically for our wounded veterans: www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors. There, you will find answers to a number of commonly asked questions, as well as other useful information about disability benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Please pay special attention to the fact sheets available on that website, Disability Benefits for Wounded Warriors and Expediting Disability Applications for Wounded Warriors.

You'll also find links to useful Veterans Affairs websites. There are links to information about the "Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom Home," information on Survivors Benefits, the Task Force on Returning Global War on Terror Heroes, a fact sheet on Veterans benefits, and the Veterans On-Line Application, known as VONAPP.

Although the expedited service is relatively new, military personnel have been covered under Social Security since 1957. Even people in the service before 1957 may receive special credit for some of their service. People in the military are covered for the same Social Security survivors, disability and retirement benefits as everyone else.

A person's Social Security benefit depends on earnings, averaged over a lifetime. Generally, the higher your earnings, the higher your Social Security benefit. Under certain circumstances, special earnings can be credited from your military pay record for Social Security purposes. The extra earnings are for periods of active duty or active duty for training. These extra earnings may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit and are added to your earnings record when you apply for Social Security benefits.

To learn more about Social Security for people who have served in the military, read a copy of our

publication, Military Service and Social Security. You can find it online at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10017.html or call us at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) to ask us to mail a free copy to you.

Each and every day, the brave men and women of our nation's armed forces serve us. Social Security salutes everyone who serves.

*By Kristen Alberino
Social Security Public Affairs Specialist in Quincy, MA*

Mass DOT Offering "Veteran" Designation on License or ID

The Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) began offering Massachusetts veterans the option to have the word "Veteran" appear on their driver's license or ID card, starting in January 2012. The "Veteran" designation is intended to increase awareness about available resources and benefits. The feature will provide valuable information to first responders and will help the Department of Veterans' Services notify veterans of benefits they are eligible to receive.

To have the "Veteran" Indicator added to your license or ID card, you will need to visit an RMV branch with your DD 214 (discharge). There is no additional cost for the "Veteran" designation, as long as it is added during an individual's license renewal process. Standard license renewal and duplication fees apply.

Please do not try to complete this transaction online. You can complete your driver's license renewal as an online transaction, but the Veteran's Indicator will not appear on your License or ID. For more information, go to: www.mass.gov/rmv and for renewal forms go to <http://www.mass.gov/rmv/forms/license.htm>.

****The "Veteran" Indicator cannot be added through an online transaction.****

New Law Change Increases Insurance Coverage For Veterans

WASHINGTON (Jan. 10, 2012) - Some Veterans covered under the Veterans Group Life Insurance program (VGLI) now have the opportunity to increase their coverage to the current maximum coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program.

"Currently, 70 percent of the Veterans covered under VGLI are under age 60, have less than \$400,000 of coverage, and will greatly benefit from this law change," said Allison A. Hickey, Department of Veterans Affairs under secretary for benefits.

Under the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, enacted on Oct. 13, 2010, Veterans can increase their coverage by \$25,000 at each five-year anniversary date of their policy to the current legislated

maximum SGLI coverage, presently, \$400,000.

To date, approximately 21 percent of eligible Veterans have taken advantage of this opportunity, resulting in nearly \$113 million of new coverage being issued.

The VGLI program allows newly discharged Veterans to convert their SGLI coverage they had while in the service to a civilian program. Before enactment of this law, Veterans could not have more VGLI than the amount of SGLI they had at the time of separation from service.

For example, those who got out of the service prior to Sept. 1, 2005, when the maximum SGLI coverage was \$250,000, were limited to \$250,000 in VGLI coverage.

Now on their first five-year anniversary, these Veterans can elect to increase their coverage to \$275,000. On their next five-year anniversary, they can increase the coverage to \$300,000, and so forth.

The additional coverage can be issued regardless of the Veteran's health. To be eligible to purchase this additional coverage, the Veteran must:

- Have active VGLI coverage,
- Have less than the current legislated maximum coverage of \$400,000,
- Request the additional coverage during the 120-day period prior to each five-year anniversary date, and
- Be less than 60 years of age on the five-year anniversary date of his or her coverage.

Eligible Veterans are notified of this opportunity a week before the start of the 120-day period prior to their anniversary date, and twice more before the actual anniversary date.

For more information about VA's Insurance Program or other VA benefits, go to www.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000. Veterans are also encouraged to visit VA's web portal eBenefits - Insurance.

VA News Release

**PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES
21% DECREASE IN VETERAN HOMELESSNESS**

Commonwealth launches innovative pilot with federal VA
to help end veteran homelessness.



Left to right: Francisco Urena, VSO, City of Boston; Senator Michael F. Rusb, Joint Committee on Veterans & Federal Affairs; C. Andrew McCawley, President & CEO, New England Center for Homeless Veterans; Vincent Kane, Director (HUD-VASH) Dept. of Veterans Affairs; Dennis Culhane, PhD, Director of Research (Homelessness), Philadelphia; Laura Zeilinger, Director National USICH; Liz Rogers, Executive Director, MA USICH; Henry Kettell, Public Housing Div, HUD; Coleman Nee, Secretary, MA Department of Veterans' Services

BOSTON - Thursday, January 5, 2012 - The Patrick Murray Administration today joined officials from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness to announce a new report showing homelessness among veterans in Massachusetts has dropped 21 percent since January 2011, nearly twice the rate of reduction nationally. The Administration today also launched a new federally funded pilot program that will serve 50 chronically homeless veterans in the Boston Metro area.

"We are ending homelessness among veterans," said Governor Deval Patrick. "Today, thanks to the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Murray, our Department of Veterans' Services and our federal partners, we are seeing significant progress. But we must keep going to ensure that the men and women who have served our country in uniform have access to all the benefits their service has earned them."

"By working across agencies and in partnership with many advocates and service providers, Massachusetts continues to make great strides in providing resources for our military servicemen and women," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray, chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services and chair of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness. "We welcome

this great news, but there is plenty more work to be done. Our Administration will continue to work with local, state and federal partners to help individuals and families, including our veteran population, transition to affordable and stable housing."

Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Secretary Coleman Nee delivered the announcement today with VA officials at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans. The findings come from the 2011 supplement to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report, which was prepared by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Officials from the VA credited innovative programming, a committed network of providers and Massachusetts' strong benefits system for veterans as contributing factors to the Commonwealth far exceeding the national rate of decline in veteran homelessness.

The Patrick-Murray Administration's new pilot program will supplement these efforts by offering comprehensive, peer-to-peer services to 50 chronically homeless veterans receiving HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers in the Boston area. The Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention (SHARP) initiative, to be administered by DVS, will offer peer support, mental health services, psychiatric evaluation and linkages to emergency shelter to veterans recently placed in supportive housing at a veteran-centric facility. The team will also identify and enroll new homeless veterans in the HUD-VASH program.

Through a \$323,000 grant from the VA, the initiative will rely on an existing network of veteran service providers dedicated to supporting homeless veterans. Using these new funds, DVS has contracted for four peer support specialists, one substance abuse counselor and one psychiatrist to provide care coordination services. The Commonwealth has also established working agreements with the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea, HopeFound, the Lynn Housing Authority, the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, the Pine Street Inn, St. Francis House and Veterans' Northeast Outreach Center in Haverhill to identify veterans and work with DVS to move the veterans toward supportive housing.

The SHARP program is a collaborative effort between the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services; the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; VA New England Health Care System (Network 1); the National Center for Homelessness Among Veterans; the VA Health Center in Bedford; the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative; the University of Massachusetts Medical School; and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Since 2009, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and HUD have worked with more than 4,000 community agencies across the country to successfully house 33,597 veterans in permanent, supportive housing with dedicated case managers and access to high-quality VA health care. In Massachusetts, DVS works with the VA and more than 30 contracted providers to offer emergency beds, transitional beds and permanent beds on VA campuses and elsewhere. The Commonwealth also applied for and was awarded 1,035 HUD-VASH vouchers between 2008 and 2011. The VASH program combines Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA, which offers these services for participating veterans at VA Medical Centers and community-based clinics. Massachusetts anticipates an additional 225 vouchers in FY12.

"We've got a sacred duty to keep faith with those who have worn the uniform of our country. There's

nothing more fundamental than making sure they a roof over their heads and the services they need so that the bravest Americans who have given so much aren't sleeping on the streets of Massachusetts," said Senator John Kerry. "The Patrick-Murray Administration has been ambitious in combating homelessness among veterans and I believe that effort is showing results we can build upon."

"The announcement of the new pilot program to battle chronic veteran homelessness in Boston is welcome news," said Senator Scott Brown. "Our heroes should never be denied the housing, social or medical assistance they need to get back on track. We owe our veterans in Massachusetts and across the nation these kind of comprehensive, community-based programs that help them move forward in life and eventually secure and maintain meaningful employment."

"Our veterans deserve the very best services that we can offer," said Congressman Stephen F. Lynch. "I commend Governor Patrick for making our veterans and their families a priority. With programs like the SHARP initiative, Massachusetts continues its commitment to our veterans, ensuring they receive the services and support they need."

"This initiative reflects Massachusetts' unparalleled commitment to supporting veterans," said Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. JudyAnn Bigby. "The peer-to-peer approach has been extremely effective in other veterans' initiatives, and this new partnership will help support veterans transitioning back into civilian life. We appreciate the strong support and generous funding that the VA has provided to Massachusetts to support this important work."

"Massachusetts leads the nation in providing benefits and services to our veterans and their families," said Secretary Nee. "By coordinating the resources of federal, state, local and not-for-profit entities working with veterans, we have been able to serve more people, establish better outcomes and maximize public dollars to their fullest potential. Fully utilizing all existing resources as well as employing new methods, such as peer-to-peer outreach and Housing First initiatives, will help us dramatically reduce the number of homeless veterans in Massachusetts in the year ahead."

"We are extremely grateful for our partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and so many other expert community and federal organizations," said Craig Coldwell, MD, Director of Mental Health Services at the VA New England Healthcare System. "Ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans requires full collaboration. Together we are dramatically advancing our systems of social support and health care to deserving veterans and their families."

"The progress in Massachusetts exemplifies how increased investments combined with a smarter, collaborative, and more targeted approach is the critical path to ending homelessness," said Barbara Poppe, Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. "The significant progress made is attributable to the tremendous partnership between the state of Massachusetts, the VA, HUD and key stakeholders. This type of partnership is exactly what President Obama envisioned upon receiving Opening Doors."

"The New England Center for Homeless Veterans is honored to host today's kickoff and be part of the SHARP Team," said Andrew McCawley, President and Chief Executive Officer of the New England Center for Homeless Veterans. "The leadership of Massachusetts' Department of Veterans Services in conjunction with Federal agencies has made this a reality. The Program demonstrates how

collaboration and innovative support services can meet the needs of Veterans."

Ending homelessness, particularly among veterans, is a top priority of the Patrick-Murray Administration. Governor Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Murray have instituted a number of policy changes, new collaborations and strategies to accomplish this mission. DVS funds more than 30 shelter and transitional housing non-profit organizations, providing housing services to eligible veterans ranging from Emergency Homeless Shelters, group residences, to Single Room Occupancy quarters. In addition, the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness is leading a five-year strategic plan to end homelessness in the Commonwealth by 2013. Chaired by Lieutenant Governor Murray, the Council established a veterans' subcommittee designed to address the specific needs of homeless veterans in Massachusetts.

New address for the National Personnel Records Center

National Personnel Records Center
1 Archives Drive
St Louis, MO 63138-1002
USA

The majority of personnel have moved to the new location and the military personnel records are in the process of moving. The entire move should be completed by the end of the Summer of 2012.

As a reminder, ALL retirees and Honorably Discharged veterans should ensure that their family knows the location of their military Separation Document (DD Form 214 from 1950 to present and WD (War Department) Form 53-55 and other variations prior to 1950). Note that registering a copy at the county court house may make that document a public record. Separation Documents issued after 1969 may contain a Social Security Number which could be used for identity theft. Storing the Separation Document in a safe deposit box may make it difficult to retrieve immediately upon the death of the retiree or honorably discharged veteran. The better storage locations are:

1-Fire safe in a secure location of the house (not in the bedroom, as this is where most thieves search first). Be sure spouse/NOK knows the location and has key/combination.

2-In a watertight food container (Glad, Tupperware, etc.) in the refrigerator. Most refrigerators are fire resistant. Additionally, a refrigerator is heavy enough to fall through the floor of a building into the cooler part of the fire in the basement and better survive. Finally, a refrigerator is large enough to be easily located in the ash and rubble of a fire or other serious incident. (As a bonus, everyone has a refrigerator, not everyone has a fire resistant storage box). Be sure to inform your spouse and relatives where to locate your Separation Document - and any other important papers.

As a reminder, the preferred method of submitting a request to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) is via the Internet. Please note that in some cases using a browser other than Internet Explorer may create problems with data entry. As you know, the NPRC provides copies of documents from military personnel records to authorized requesters. Our web-based application will provide better service on these requests by eliminating our mailroom processing time. Also, since the

requester will be prompted to supply all information essential for us to process the request, delays that occur when we must go back for more information will be minimized. You may access this application at:

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>

This improved on-line request process should be used INSTEAD OF Standard Form 180 for requests from the veteran or the veteran's next of kin, if possible. Your assistance with this initiative will allow us, and you, to better serve the needs of our veterans. If you do not wish to use the Internet, you should use Standard Form 180. You should print Standard Form 180 as you need it, not in advance because the form is periodically revised and updated. It should not be available on your web site. You can have a link to the NPRC web page.

The link is:

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html>

Since the Standard Form 180 is updated periodically, it is NOT recommended that large quantities be printed/photocopied and stocked.

The form will be updated with the new address within six months. The US Postal Service will forward mail if requests are mailed to the old location until February 2012.

By: National Archives and Records Administration

Annual VSO Training Seminar

The Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) and the Massachusetts Veterans Service Officer Association (MVSOA) conducted the annual Joint Commonwealth Wide Training Session from March 5 through March 8, 2012 at the Four Points Sheraton in Leominster.

Over 220 VSOs from across the Commonwealth attended the four day training. Topics discussed at training ranged from new VA initiatives, DVS collaborative with Massachusetts Broadband Institute on the coming web portal, to completing annuity applications. Attendees were greeted with welcoming remarks from Secretary Coleman Nee, Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzarella, and State Representative Dennis Rosa. Additionally, attendees had access to over 10 vendors over the four days.

The training was highlighted by a formal dinner on Wednesday night. At the dinner Secretary Coleman Nee was proud to present annual awards: VSO of the Year, Administrative Assistant of the Year, and the inaugural Service District of the Year. This year's winners were: David McPhillips, VSO of the Year; Rebecca Bovat, Administrative Assistant of the Year; accepting for the North Quabbin Service District, Neil McGuirk and Bill Meehan for Service District of the Year.

VA Announces Changes to Emergency Care Payment Policy

WASHINGTON (January 12, 2012) - The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today a change in regulations regarding payments for emergency care provided to eligible Veterans in non-VA facilities.

"This provision helps ensure eligible Veterans continue to get the emergency care they need when VA facilities are not available," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The new regulation extends VA's authority to pay for emergency care provided to eligible Veterans at non-VA facilities until the Veterans can be safely transferred to a VA medical facility.

More than 100,000 Veterans are estimated to be affected by the new rules, at a cost of about \$44 million annually.

VA operates 121 emergency departments across the country, which provide resuscitative therapy and stabilization in life-threatening situations. They operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. VA also has 46 urgent care units, which provide care for patients without scheduled appointments who need immediate medical or psychiatric attention.

For more information about emergency care in non-VA facilities, visit www.nonvacare.va.gov.

VA Press Release

HELPING COMMUNITIES SERVE VETERANS



Left to right: Gerry Eaton, VSO Whitman; Bill Bennett, Authorizer; Hazel Pryce-Bourramane, Chief Authorizer; Keith Jones, Director of Operations; Debra Kenney, Secretary of the Plymouth County Treasurers Collectors Association; Mary Beth Aarter, President of the Plymouth County Treasurers Collectors Association; Joe Colantoni, VSO Abington.

On January 25, 2012, Kenn Turner, Deputy Secretary Admin. and Finance; Keith Jones, Director of Operations; Hazel Pryce-Bourramane, Chief Authorizer; and Bill Bennett, Authorizer attended the Plymouth County Treasurers' meeting. DVS was asked to speak on the role of the municipal Treasurer in the Veterans Benefit & Services (VB&S) under Chapter 115. This is a regular business and training meeting for the Treasurers and financial staff of Plymouth County.

The presentation was open to all Treasurers, their financial staff and the community VSOs. There were about 50 attendees for the presentation. Keith Jones gave an hour-long PowerPoint presentation with a question and answer period. All of the DVS staff answered questions from the attendees during the presentation. The initial presentation covered the basics of the certification process that moved into an area that is seldom covered - problem resolution.

The overall response from the attendees was exceptional. The Treasurers responded that this is a training that was necessary to assist them in the completion of their job.

After the presentation, the DVS staff answered questions from the various attendees. Questions ranged from how to log into Web-VSMIS to who has access to personal records.

The DVS contingent as a whole enjoyed the opportunity to meet face to face with the people who provide and process Veterans Benefits & Services directly to the veterans in the community.

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Set for Massachusetts

WASHINGTON - More than 3,000 Veterans across the country have begun entering local competitions for the 2012 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, scheduled for Oct. 8-14 in Boston.

"The Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to providing therapeutic solutions that go beyond traditional physical medicine," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival provides an artistic avenue for the physical, mental and emotional healing of our Nation's heroes."

The competition, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the American Legion Auxiliary and Help Hospitalized Veterans, includes 53 categories in the visual arts division that range from oil painting to leatherwork to paint-by-number kits. In addition, there are 120 categories in the performing arts pertaining to all aspects of music, dance, drama and creative writing.

"The American Legion Auxiliary's sole purpose is to support Veterans, military, and their families, and this year we are focusing on honoring the service of Veterans who make our Auxiliary membership possible," said American Legion Auxiliary National President Kris Nelson. "We are proud and humbled to be able to participate in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival as just one way we can show our support."

Mike Lynch, President and CEO of Help Hospitalized Veterans, echoed her sentiments. "As a long-time national co-presenter of this annual event, we again look forward to a program that inspires all who witness the shining talents of America's Veterans, who remain motivated regardless of their health challenges."

The competition is open to Veterans enrolled at a VA medical center, outpatient clinic, or who reside in a state Veterans home. An eligible Veteran may compete at only one VA facility per year. Veterans may submit an entry in creative writing, dance, drama or music categories with a Veteran or group from another VA facility, but still must officially enter through their home VA facility.

Veterans submitting an entry must work with a staff person from the VA facility where they are enrolled. All required forms must be completed and postmarked to the National Chairperson no later than April 1 in order for Veterans to be eligible to compete at the national level. Specific division information, rules, and category descriptions are available in the 2012 competition handbook available on the Festival website at www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov or through local VA recreation therapy or voluntary service offices.

The national judging process occurs during the months of April, May and June. Selected medal-winning Veterans from the national competition will be invited to participate in the National Veterans

Creative Arts Festival. Those receiving an invitation to the Festival will be notified in late June via the VA staff contact person by June 20, 2012.

This year, the VA Boston Healthcare System hosts the event which will feature an art exhibit of all the first-place art entries from the national competition on display at the Quincy Marriott Hotel on Tuesday, Oct. 9. The program will culminate on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 14, with a gala stage show performance at the Cutler Majestic Theatre in downtown Boston.

VA News Release

SAVE TEAM RECEIVES SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARD

Our SAVE Team, funded by the Department of Public Health, received an award from the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention at a ceremony in the State House Hall of Flags on February 6, 2012. SAVE was also recognized for their continued outreach after the devastating tornadoes in June of 2011. Their outreach at that time resulted in 34 referrals for assistance.

Last summer DVS/SAVE received a letter from General Peter Chiarelli, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, a strong advocate for suicide prevention in the military, complimenting us on our program which serves as a national model. SAVE has reached out to over 1200 Veterans and family members in FY12 with 234 links and referrals to date.

The Peer Model used so successfully by SAVE has formed the basis for our new program: Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention (SHARP) to combat homelessness.

**GOVERNOR PATRICK AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MURRAY
HONOR U.S. ARMY VETERAN, DVS EMPLOYEE KEVIN LAMBERT
DURING CABINET MEETING**



Governor Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Murray honor U.S. Army veteran and recently appointed Director of Special Populations for the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) Kevin Lambert during a ceremony at their weekly cabinet meeting. (Photo credit: Megan Dhalival / Governor's Office)

BOSTON- Friday, February 17, 2012 - Governor Deval Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray today honored U.S. Army veteran and recently appointed Director of Special Populations for the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) Kevin Lambert, during a ceremony at their weekly cabinet meeting. Following a 16-month tour of duty in Iraq, in which he suffered multiple injuries that led to his medical discharge, Lambert, a U.S. Army specialist, chose to continue his call to service by assisting other veterans who make the often difficult transition back to civilian life.

"As a Commonwealth, we have worked hard to provide services for veterans, and for that we are recognized as a leader nationally," said Governor Patrick. "Today we are honoring Kevin, for not only heroically serving our country but for returning home and graciously continuing that service to his fellow servicemen and women."

"When I meet veterans and military families across the Commonwealth, I often hear how Kevin Lambert helped a friend, son, daughter, brother, or sister and in many cases even saved a life," said Lieutenant Governor Murray. "Kevin is a war hero who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to help his fellow military servicemen and women, and his dedicated service is a model for others to follow."

In his new role at DVS, Lambert has pioneered multiple veterans' outreach efforts that have received national recognition. His newest endeavor, known as the Statewide Homelessness and Reintegration Program (SHARP), focuses on peer support and outreach for veterans seeking assistance for a multitude of issues including, homelessness, substance abuse, judicial system issues and reentry from incarceration.

Lieutenant Governor Murray serves as chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services and works with DVS to ensure that Massachusetts remains a national leader in support, outreach and benefits to our veterans. As part of its mission, DVS works to secure federal compensation and other benefits for eligible veterans and administers needs-based benefits program through veterans' service officers across Massachusetts. It also provides state funding to organizations offering homeless shelter, transitional housing, and outreach services to veterans.

NEW FACES AND NEW RESPONSABILITIES

New Faces

Matthew McKenna joins DVS as the new Director of Communications & Intergovernmental Affairs. Matthew previously worked for the State Senate for 9 years where he served as District Director and Chief of Staff for a high profile Boston district. He is a 15 year member of the Army National Guard, where he has served as a Medical Sergeant, Infantry Team Leader, and most recently a UH-60 Blackhawk Pilot. Matthew is an OEF veteran where he served as an Infantry Team Leader assigned to a Provincial Reconstruction Team.

Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention (SHARP):

Christopher (Chris) Doyle is an Operation Desert Storm era Army Veteran where he served as an Infantryman and Paratrooper. He has an Associates' degree in human services from Quincy Junior College and attends Salem State University.

Gidelina (Lina) Pineda is a U.S. Army Veteran of OIF/ OEF and also serves with the Massachusetts Army National Guard. Lina has spoken on women veterans' issues at several conferences throughout the state.

Gabriel (Gabe) Nutter is an U.S. Army Veteran of OIF where he served as a Cavalry Sergeant. Gabe has a degree in Criminal Justice from Franklin Pierce University.

Donald (Don) Purington is a Veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and served two tours in Iraq. He attends the University of Massachusetts where he is studying psychology with a concentration in PTSD.

Dr. Alexandra Accardi is our part time Psychiatrist for SHARP. Alex has an extensive background in behavioral health. She is also a Colonel in the Massachusetts National Guard where she serves as

the State Surgeon.

Brad Tofias is our Full Time Substance Abuse Counselor who will assist veterans in the program with treatment and counseling when needed.

Housing Specialists monitor and assist with oversight of the housing providers:

Jay Hill, recently retired VSO from Falmouth, will be assisting with the areas south of Boston. (Part-time position)

Linn Torto, who has extensive housing experience working many years for the Commonwealth, will be assisting with the areas north of Boston. (Part-time position)

SAVE

Thomas Hannon will be serving part time as the Clinical Advisor to the SAVE Team. Tom served as a Navy Corpsman in Viet Nam and was the Lead Clinician at the Boston Vet Center.

New Responsibilities:

Evan Makrinikolas is now the DVS Training and Compliance Officer. This is a critical role in the Department with the increased emphasis on compliance in the communities as well as the increased need for training due to the frequent changes in benefits and services.

Hazel Pryce Bourramane has assumed the duties of the Chief Authorizer. In her new position she oversees the entire Operations Staff and the reimbursement process for the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns. Hazel has been with DVS for 15 years, and has worked 11 of those years in the Operations Department. She is imminently qualified to take on this role and we look forward to the experience and perspective she will bring to this function.

Claire Makrinikolas was promoted to Manager of the Housing Department at DVS expanding her role to include the SHARP Team which provides a harm reduction model approach to 50 chronically homeless veterans. Claire started at DVS as a Housing Specialist in 2001 and has provided oversight of a 10 million dollar annual budget earmarked to veteran homeless and outreach providers throughout the Commonwealth.

Kevin Lambert was recently promoted to Director of Special Populations. See article above.

SAVE THE DATE
4th Annual Conference for Women Veterans

Come join us on **June 16, 2012** from 9am-3:30pm at **Bristol Community College,**
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REGISTER TODAY:

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Department of Veterans' Services

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