

A close-up, low-angle shot of an American flag waving in the wind. The flag is the central focus, with its stars and stripes clearly visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset or sunrise, with warm orange and yellow light. Other flags are visible in the background, slightly blurred.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES

THE
BLUF

Bottom Line Up Front

OFFICE OF ENGAGEMENT
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2025

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A Message from the Assistant Secretary




As I considered what to share with you this quarter, I was struck by the number of meaningful observances ahead—from Gold Star Spouses Day in April to Memorial Day in May. This season invites us to pause, reflect, and recommit ourselves to those who serve. Each day carries deep significance. Gold Star Spouses Day (April 5) honors those who have lost a loved one in service—a reminder of the profound sacrifices made by military families. Memorial Day calls on us to remember those who gave their lives to protect our

freedoms. These aren't just dates on a calendar—they are moments to honor service and renew our shared commitment to veterans and their families. And while these national days of remembrance are vital, so is the daily work happening in our communities—much of it because of you. Thank you to our Veterans Service Officers and community partners. Whether you're guiding someone through benefits, organizing a remembrance event, or simply showing up for a

veteran in need, your work makes a real difference. We see it, and we're grateful. As we enter this season of reflection, let's continue to lift up the voices of veterans and ensure they know we're here for them—not just on special days, but every day.

Cory R. Ahonen
Assistant Secretary for
Engagement & Outreach

**This season invites us to pause,
reflect, and recommit ourselves
to those who serve.**



QUARTERLY RECAP



Aligning the VA and the Community Around the Veteran



Assistant Secretary Kara Solomini, Gina Rada and MVSOA President Jason Main

Serving Those Who Served at the New England Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC)

EOVS was proud to join our veteran partners in serving over 800 veterans from across New England during the two-day VEAC!

Veterans received personalized, one-on-one assistance with VA benefits, health care, claims, and more—right on the spot. It was an incredible opportunity to collaborate, connect, and deliver real-time solutions to those who have served.



Freedom isn't
what's given
to me, it's in
my soul.

Brigadier General Woodhouse



Brigadier General Enoch "Woody" Woodhouse

Black History Month Conversation with Brigadier General Enoch "Woody" Woodhouse

Thank you to Deputy Secretary Andrea Gayle-Bennett and Brigadier General Enoch "Woody" Woodhouse for sharing their reflections on Black history and the meaning of service. **To view the interview, visit EOVS' [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) pages.**

General Enoch "Woody" Woodhouse took part of EOVS' "*Many Faces of Veterans*" Exhibit in 2022. **To read his story visit: [Mass.gov/info-details/the-many-faces-of-veterans](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/the-many-faces-of-veterans).**



**Honorably
Serving
Those Who
Served Us**



Governor Maura Healey and VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento

EOVS Welcomes VFW National Commander to Massachusetts

EOVS was honored to join Governor Maura Healey in Revere to welcome VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento to Massachusetts during the 125th anniversary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

For over a century, the VFW has been a powerful voice for veterans—championing their benefits, support, and recognition. We’re proud to stand alongside them in service to those who served.



**Women make our
military stronger.
Women make
America stronger.**
Governor Maura Healey



Governor Maura Healey, Secretary Jon Santiago, Deputy Secretary Andrea Gayle-Bennett, 3-5-0 Girls CEO Mel Bloom, and women veterans commemorate March 19 as Edith Nourse Rogers Day

Honoring Women's Military Legacy: WAC Uniform Exhibit and Edith Nourse Rogers Day

In celebration of Women's History Month, EOVS partnered with the Governor's Office and 3-5-0 Girls to unveil a special Women's Army Corps (WAC) uniform exhibit in Governor Healey's office, on display through March 27. The collection, spanning WWII to 1978, honors the legacy of Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, a trailblazer for women in the military. On March 19, Governor Healey signed a proclamation recognizing Rogers' leadership in advancing opportunities for women in uniform.



Spring 2025 Updates





*Do you know an unsung hero serving veterans?
Help us spotlight them!*

2025

ACTS OF SERVICE

EOVS is celebrating individuals and organizations making a difference in the veteran community.

[SUBMIT THEIR STORY TODAY](#)

EOVS Benefits and Annuities: Your Benefits Are Increasing!

For the first time in 17 years, eligible 100% disabled veterans, Gold Star parents, and Gold Star spouses are receiving an increase to the state's annual annuity benefit. In February 2025, recipients received an initial payment of \$1,250. Starting August 2025, the full \$2,500 annual benefit will be distributed each year moving forward.

Learn More:

mass.gov/info-details/massvets-veteran-financial-benefits



MassVets Benefits Estimator: New Tool to Support Your Work

This quarter we launched a new MassVets Benefit Estimator—a user-friendly tool designed to help you assist veterans and their families in determining potential eligibility for Chapter 115 benefits in just a few clicks. We encourage you to share the estimator with veterans during intake or benefits counseling sessions. It's a quick way to estimate monthly financial assistance and guide conversations around next steps.

Access the Estimator: vets.mass.gov

Women Veteran's Network

2025 DEBORAH SAMPSON AWARD

Now Accepting Nominations!

The Deborah Sampson Award recognizes a Massachusetts woman veteran who has demonstrated exceptional leadership, service, and advocacy for fellow women veterans.

The deadline to submit nominations is April 25, 2025.

For more information, visit mass.gov/wvn



WOMEN VETERANS RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

Legacy of Service

June 17, 2025, 11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

The Beechwood Hotel
363 Plantation Street
Worcester, MA 01605

Register to attend:
<https://bit.ly/4iHnmqu>

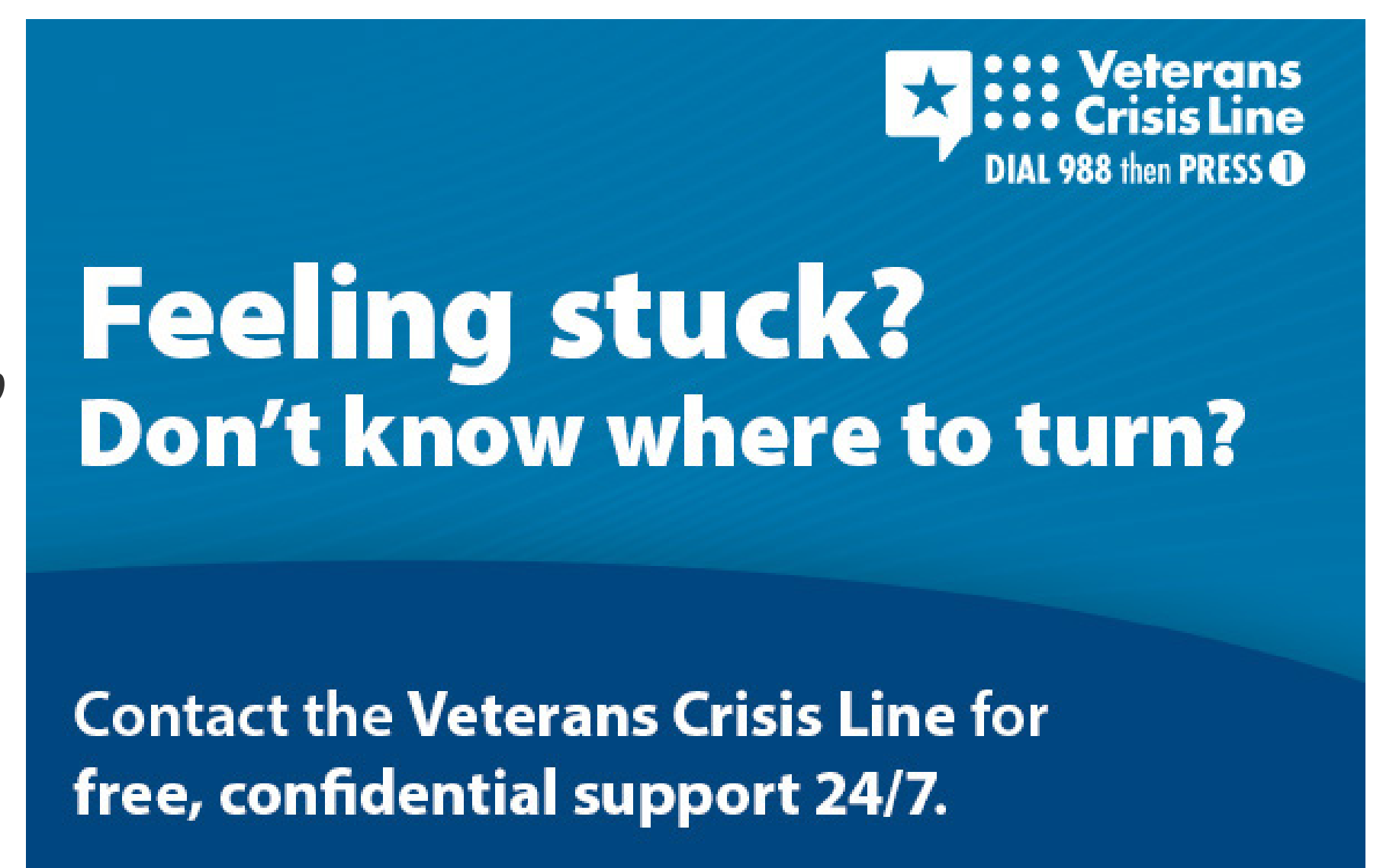


Statewide Advocacy for Veterans Empowerment (SAVE)

SAVE connects veterans with peers to access benefits and services that support their mental health and help them transition positively back to civilian life. Visit mass.gov/vets to learn more.

Supporting and Empowering Reintegration for Veterans Equality (SERVE)

SERVE focuses on assisting justice-involved veterans, offering tailored support through a dedicated team of veterans, family members, and others in the veteran community. Visit mass.gov/vets to learn more.



Veteran Education, Employment, & Training (VEET)

The VEET Office helps veterans in Massachusetts connect with employment, training, and educational opportunities. Visit mass.gov/veet to learn more.



Get Veteran Ready Business (VRB) This program aims to educate businesses across the state about the value of hiring and retaining veterans and spouses. Join the 10 businesses that have already certified!

The Student Veterans Council (SVC) met for the first time in November. This group of engaged and proactive leaders seek to improve the educational experience for their fellow veterans.

End Veteran Homelessness (EVH) Campaign

One-Year Highlights | March 2024 - March 2025

OVERVIEW

Launched in March 2024, EVH is the largest investment in veteran housing and services in state history—a \$20M initiative co-led by the Executive Office of Veterans Services and the Executive Office of Housing and Liveable Communities. The campaign brings together providers, housing leaders, and local partners to address homelessness head-on and with urgency.



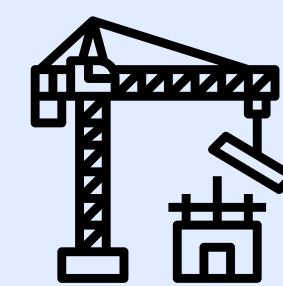
HOPE- Homelessness Outreach to Placement Effort

- 496 veterans enrolled
- 90+ placed in permanent housing
- \$314K+ in financial aid to 244 families



Supportive Services for Housing Stability

- 100K+ services for 9,000 veterans
- 7K+ mental health sessions
- 1,900+ employment services



Capital Investments in Veteran Housing

- 36 units completed
- 330+units in pipeline (2025)
- 82 units planned (2026+)



Provider Empowerment and Training

- 6 technical trainings
- 75 staff trained
- 9 organizations supported in housing development

Visit Mass.gov/HEROS to learn more

EOVS Staff Spotlight:

Erik Mayberg, *Legislative Director*



I have been working in state government for over ten years, with the bulk of that time in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. While there, we helped secure funding for local veterans organizations and connected veterans with services and support in the district.

At EOVS, I handle all things government related. That includes working on policy, the budget, and legislation, while working directly with the Governor's Office, state and federal agencies, the Legislature, and elected officials across cities and towns in Massachusetts. I

work closely with all parts of EOVS—from our incredible Communications and Engagement teams to our Programs and Benefits Team, Legal Counsel, and our Veterans' Homes—and do my best to keep our relationships across state government strong.

Every day, I'm focused on making sure Massachusetts stays ahead of the game when it comes to veterans' benefits, that EOVS is receiving proper state resources, and that veterans' voices are heard at every level of government.

Something I don't talk about often is that my grandfather served during World War II, and I have family members from overseas who serve in the military. Getting to work in this space is incredibly meaningful to me, and I'm thankful every day to be a part of the EOVS community.

When I'm not working, I'm usually on the hunt for the best slice of pizza in the world and then desperately trying to work that off by playing pick-up basketball or pretty much any sport I can jump into.

**I'm focused on making sure
Massachusetts stays ahead of the game
when it comes to veterans' benefits.**





EOVS Awards & Citations Process

Attentions VSO's: Please be advised that all Memorial Day proclamations will be issued one week prior. A digital copy will also be sent for your convenience.

EOVS Citation

Criteria:

- Birthdays over 100
- Couples celebrating their 50th or later wedding anniversary
- Retirements, including military service
- Outstanding services or deeds that surpass a Certificate of Achievement.
(subject to review)

EOVS Certificate of Achievement

Criteria:

- For outstanding achievements that have significantly advanced veteran services or welfare;
- For innovative contributions that have made a substantial impact on the veteran community—beyond the scope of a Certificate of Appreciation.
(subject to review)

EOVS Certificate of Appreciation

Criteria:

- For exceptional service or support to veterans over a significant period, demonstrating a strong commitment to improving their lives.

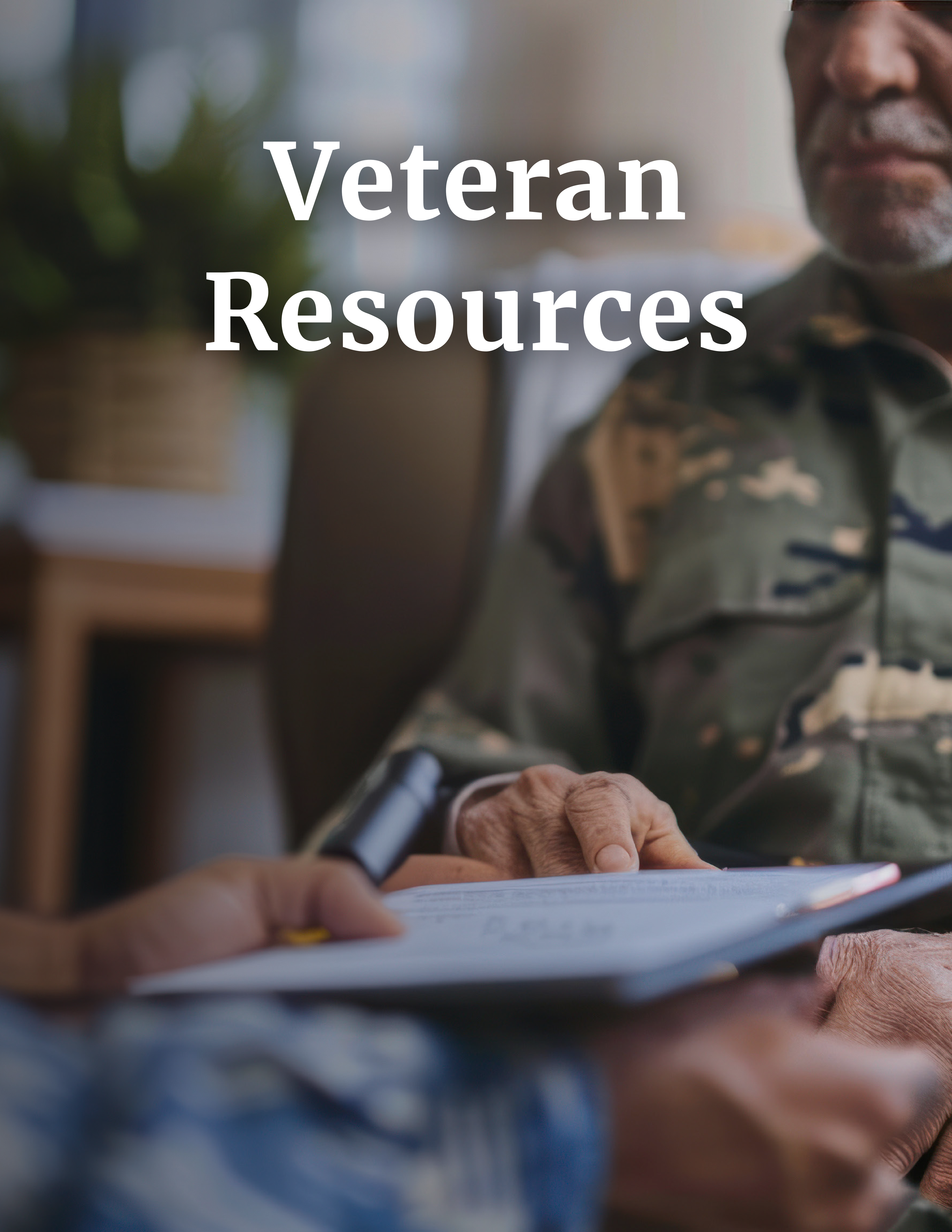
To make a formal request, visit:

[Mass.gov/EOVS-Citation](https://www.mass.gov/EOVS-Citation)



Please make your request at least 21 business days prior to the deadline

Veteran Resources





Eligibility for VA Health Care

This guide provides step-by-step instructions for applying, including the required documents for veterans and service members.

[Learn More](#)



Massachusetts VA Locations

Headlamp provides ex-military personnel with personalized mentorship, resources, and professional development opportunities through its advanced intelligence tools designed to match veterans' military-acquired skills with high-demand civilian jobs, primarily within the biotech industry.

[Learn More](#)



VA Connected Care

Virtual care is an easy and accessible way to communicate with VA physicians and other health care providers, such as nurses, social workers, and medical assistants.

[Learn More](#)



Urgent Care and Retail Clinics in Massachusetts

This tool provides a filterable database to help the public find urgent care and retail clinic locations in their community that offer specific services, service times, or accept their insurance type. Urgent care centers and retail clinics are for mild illnesses and minor injuries.

[Learn More](#)



Department of Veteran Affairs Veterans Crisis Line

The Veterans Crisis Line connects veterans in crisis, along with their families and friends, to qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders. This service is available 24/7 via a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text message.

Contact 800-273-8255



Suicide Prevention Coordinators at MA VA Medical Centers

VA Boston System

- Leslie Wright, Ph.D.: (857) 364-3611
- Julie McCarthy, LICSW: (774) 826-3024
- Brittney Stedman, Psy.D.: (774) 826-3459

Bedford VA

- Rebecca Dreifuss: (781) 687-2176

Leeds (Northampton) VA

- Jillian Hynek: (413) 584-2112

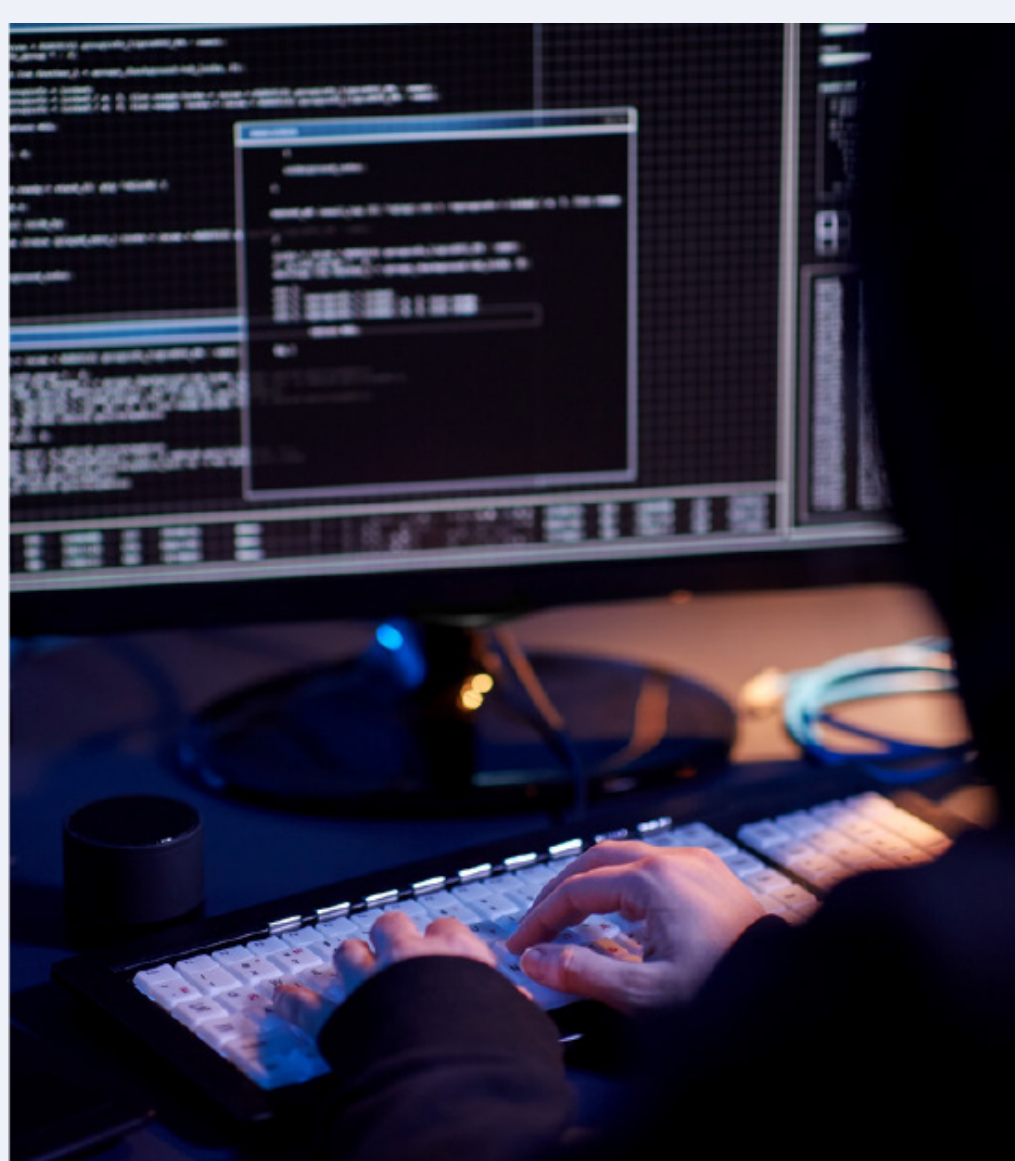
Learn More



VA Boston Medical Foster Home

VA Boston's new Medical Foster Home program offers veterans needing 24/7 care an alternative to nursing homes or assisted living facilities. The program matches veterans with approved caregivers who welcome them into their homes. Veterans may also receive assistance applying for VBA benefits to help cover costs.

Contact 617-435-4362



V Safe

As you know, Veterans and their families are popular targets for financial fraud. Scammers may try to defraud you through misleading emails, texts, cold calls, or online ads. Find resources about fraud targeting you. Know the signs of a scam, get advice about what to do, and learn how to report scams and identity theft.

Learn More



Free Community College

The MassReconnect and MassEducate programs can cover the full cost of tuition and fees for all eligible students, plus additional allowances for books, supplies, and other college costs based on income level.

[Learn More](#)



Student Veterans of America® (SVA)

Student Veterans of America® (SVA) elevates the academic, professional, and personal development of veterans in higher education through chapter programs and services, outcomes and impacts research, and advocacy at every level.

[Learn More](#)



Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)

The Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) is a comprehensive education benefit offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to veterans and servicemembers who served after September 10, 2001. This program provides financial support to help individuals further their education and career goals by covering various expenses.

[Learn More](#)



Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)

VR&E valuable resource provided by the VA to assist veterans and servicemembers with service-connected disabilities in preparing for, finding, and maintaining suitable employment. The program offers job training, employment accommodations, resume development, career counseling, and educational assistance.

[Learn More](#)

EDUCATION



Headlamp

Headlamp provides ex-military personnel with personalized mentorship, resources, and professional development opportunities through its advanced intelligence tools designed to match veterans' military-acquired skills with high-demand civilian jobs, primarily within the biotech industry.

[Learn More](#)

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



Veteran Walk-In Flu Clinics

Veterans enrolled in VA health care can receive free flu shots during any scheduled appointment. Walk-in clinics are only available during the designated days and times

[Learn More](#)



Smoking Cessation

Want to be tobacco-free? The VA can help!

Quitting smoking is the single most important thing a person can do to improve their health.

[Learn More](#)



100% Service-Connected? You May Be Eligible for a Reimbursement

Since the HERO Act signing, veterans with a 100% service-connected disability no longer need to pay for a driver's license or vehicle registration. If you paid either fee at the RMV after that date, you may qualify for a reimbursement.

[Apply Now](#)



DAV Transportation to Veterans

The DAV operates a fleet of vehicles around the country to provide free transportation to VA medical facilities for injured and ill veterans. Use the DAV Hospital Service Coordinator Directory to contact your nearest HSC for information or assistance.

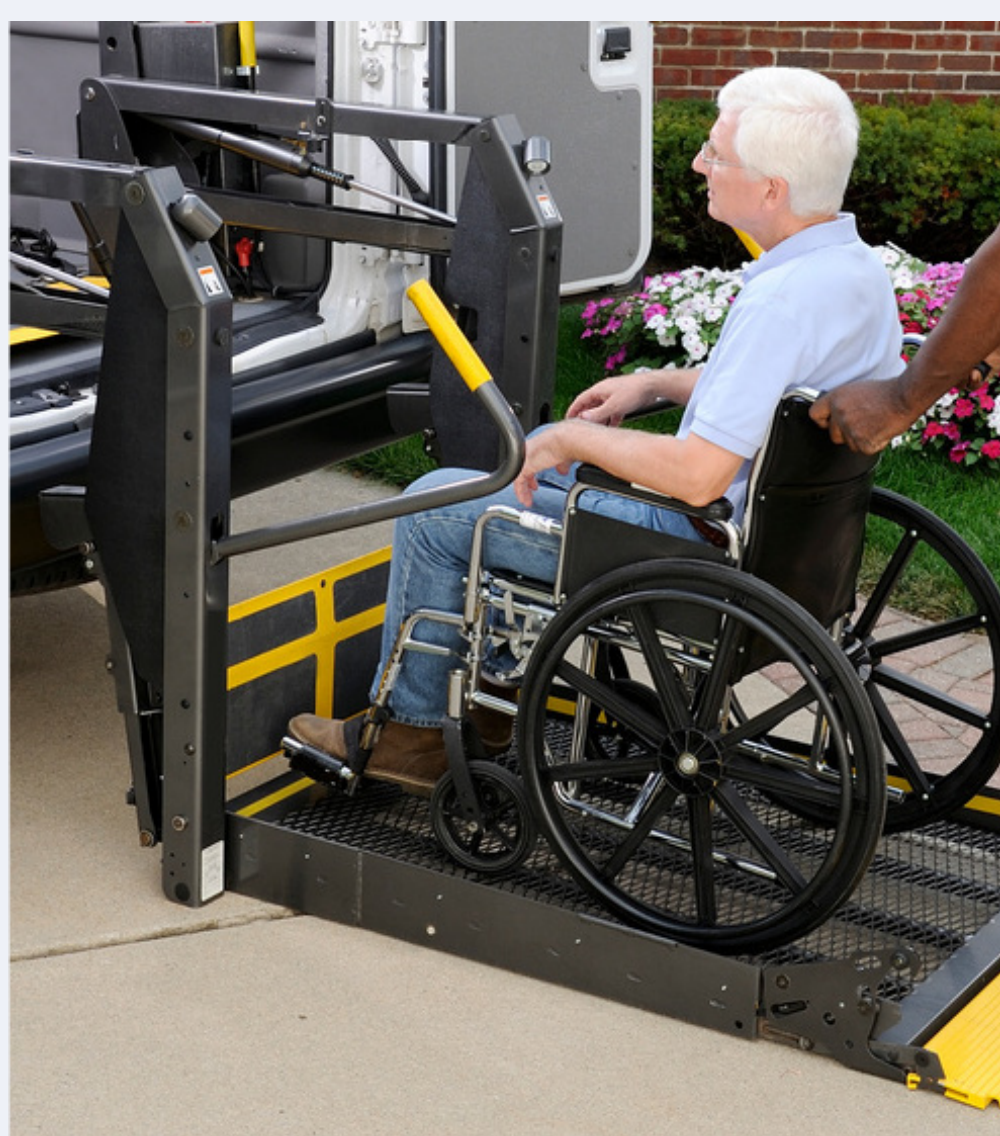
[Learn More](#)



DPH Health Care Transportation Resources

Transportation services may be available in Massachusetts to help you get to local or long-distance medical appointments.

[Learn More](#)



Veteran Transportation Resources

Access a full list of transportation services in Massachusetts to help veterans get to medical appointments, jobs, and other destinations.

[Learn More](#)



The Women Veterans Transitional Residence at New England Center and Home for Veterans (NECHV)

Provides women veterans the option for a safe, women-only living space with dedicated case managers and addiction counselors experienced in the complexities of Military Sexual Trauma (MST), PTSD, and other concerns related explicitly to women veterans.

[Learn More](#)



Housing Outreach to Placement Effort (HOPE)

The HOPE Campaign is an outreach and housing counseling program to provide outreach, service coordination, and housing placement to homeless veterans across all of Massachusetts.

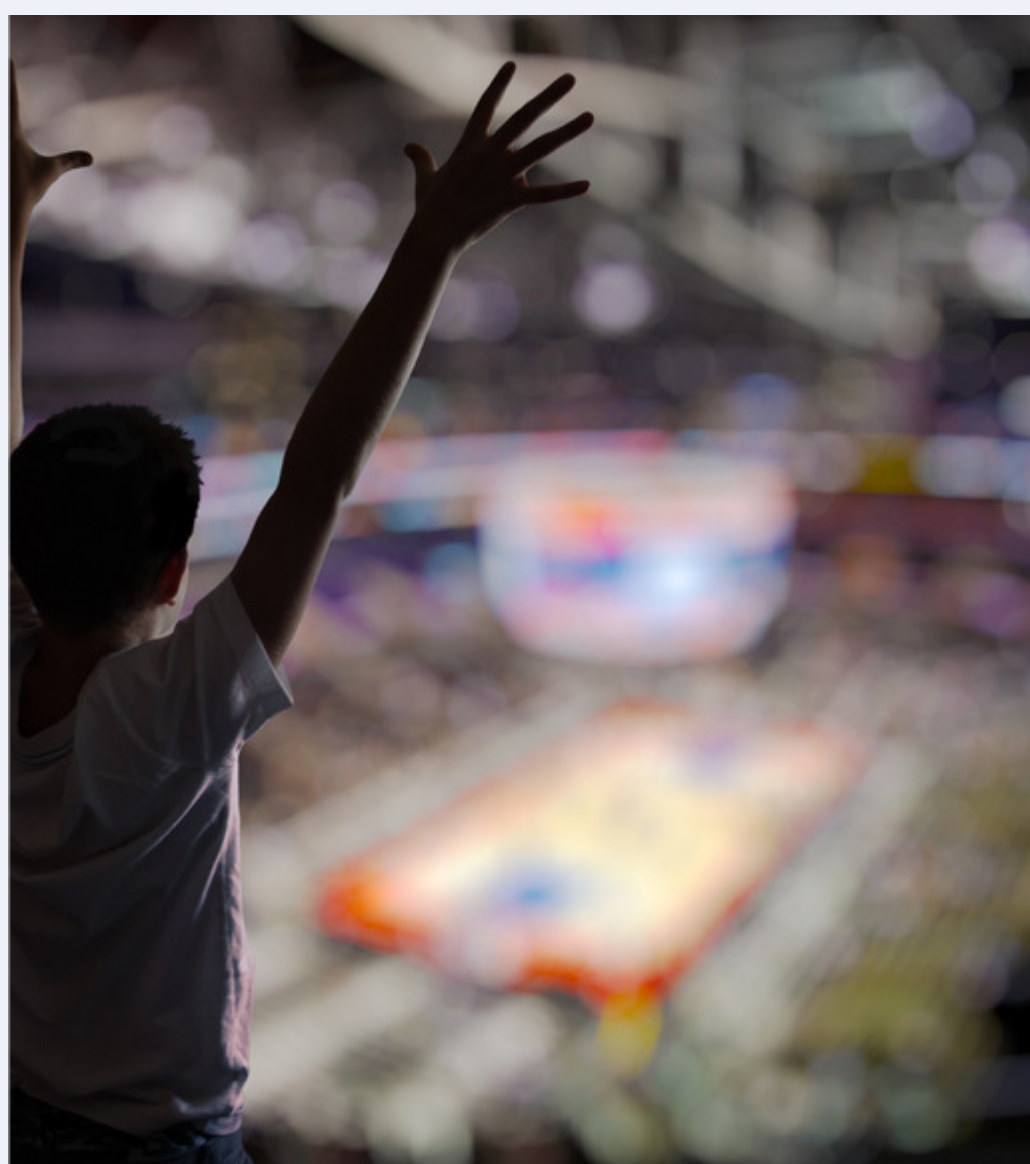
[Learn More](#)



Unmet Needs Grant

The Unmet Needs Grant helps active-duty service members (including activated Guard/Reserve members) and their families dealing with unexpected financial difficulties due to deployment or other military-related activity or injury. The program provides financial assistance of up to \$2,500 to assist with daily necessities. No repayment is required.

[Learn More](#)



Free Tickets for Veterans

The Veteran Tickets Foundation's "Tickets for Troops Program" provides free tickets to active servicemembers for major sports events, leagues, promoters, organizations, and venues.

[Learn More](#)



Service Dog Program - Clear Path for Veterans New England

Clear Path's Service Dog Program supports veterans with PTSD, TBI, and MST by pairing them with trained service dogs to build confidence, independence, and wellbeing. Community members can also get involved through the *Canine Raiser* Program.

[Learn More](#)



K9s for Warriors - Service Dogs for Veterans with PTSD

K9s for Warriors provides trained service dogs to Veterans with PTSD, TBI, and MST, helping them regain independence and improve quality of life through trusted companionship and support.

[Learn More](#)



After the Mission

After the Mission connects veterans with mentors for free guidance on employment, education, VA benefits, and financial stability. No one should have to navigate it alone.

[Learn More](#)



DVNF GPS Program

The Disabled Veterans National Foundation offers grants up to \$1,000 to help Veterans facing temporary financial hardship cover rent, mortgage, or essential utilities.

[Learn More](#)

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