



**Department of
Veterans Services**

FY2024

Annual Report

Mike DeWine
Governor

Deborah
Ashenhurst Director





Director's Message

Serving veterans in our state is a great privilege and one with a broad reach, especially considering Ohio is blessed to have nearly 700,000 former service members, the sixth-highest figure in the country. Veterans comprise nearly 7% of the statewide population, which also is above average, and the number of women veterans in Ohio ranks eighth nationally.

With so many military members separating from service and returning to Ohio, it is our duty, at the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS), to serve them and their loved ones in a variety of ways. Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted have made it clear they want Ohio to be the most veteran-friendly state in the nation – and our department truly takes that challenge to heart.

One way we do that is to provide comfort and care to wartime veterans at our Ohio Veterans Homes, located in Sandusky and Georgetown. The FY2024-2025 budget, signed by Governor DeWine with the support of the Ohio General Assembly, appropriated \$65 million to modernize both facilities. With VA matching funds, we will construct new spaces and renovate existing facilities with the goal of achieving single occupancy rooms for our residents.

ODVS also was awarded another \$9.5 million to sustain the Ohio Veterans Bonus program, which sunset for Afghanistan-era veterans in August 2024. We made every effort to ensure that all eligible military members past and present received their well-earned bonus in appreciation of their service.

We also provide access to effective healthcare and behavioral health options, and I'm proud of the work we are doing to connect veterans and their families to these all-important services, including joining forces with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Ohio National Guard to manage the OHIOcares program (ohiocares.ohio.gov).

Our Veterans Workforce Team trains Ohio's military-friendly businesses on best practices on right-hiring and retaining men and women with military backgrounds. The team continues to find ways to engage those about to separate from service so they can see all the advantages Ohio offers to those who served.

We continue to manage the federally funded State Approving Agency, which enables veterans to maximize GI Bill® benefits, and strengthen vital relationships with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) across our state. In November 2023, we inducted another outstanding class into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame by recognizing 20 selfless Ohioans.

We are fortunate to live in such a patriotic state where the administration, legislature, and the public all value service and fully support our efforts to serve our veterans and their families. At ODVS, our mission is to provide opportunities and resources for our veteran community through advocacy, collaboration, and partnerships. Thanks to you, we are striving toward that every day.

Sincerely,

Maj. Gen. (U.S. Army, Ret.) Deborah Ashenhurst, Director

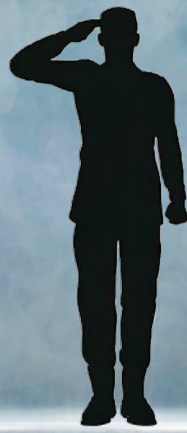


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Employment



The ODVS Veterans Workforce Team leads the agency's efforts in one of our key endeavors: educating Ohio businesses on the values of military culture, the benefits of hiring veterans, and ways to retain these individuals in the workforce.

Since its inception in 2016, the team has contacted more than 25,000 employers and conducted 573 training sessions for more than 6,500 employers. In FY2024 alone, our regional workforce consultants contacted 3,791 employers leading to 1,047 employer engagements.

The department conducted 123 training sessions for 885 employers. More than 3,600 people attended these training sessions – more than doubling the same figure from the previous year.

In March 2024, ODVS brought aboard Gary Allen as its new Workforce Team Manager. Allen is a Technical Sergeant in the Ohio Air National Guard, has seven years of experience in state government as a Human Resources professional, and has served as an adjunct professor in business at Sinclair Community College and in Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs.



Under Allen's leadership, the Veterans Workforce Team also has put more emphasis on engaging veterans at employer events, attending 277 of them in FY2024 and also attending 79 more benefit events for veteran employees.

In addition to conducting regular trainings and engaging many of the more than 8,300 military-friendly businesses in Ohio, the Workforce Team continued to join forces with partners such as OhioMeansJobs, the Ohio National Guard, JobsOhio, Hiring Our Heroes, the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, and chambers of commerce from across the state for a variety of outreach events. The team also participated in numerous resource fairs and similar events that centered on relaying information regarding benefits earned as a result of military service.



Employment, cont.

As part of these efforts, our team ventured to several military installations across the country to attend Hiring Our Heroes resource fairs and speak directly to soon-to-be transitioning service members about the many advantages Ohio can offer to veterans and military-connected families. In fact, in FY2024, the Workforce Team attended five such transition events and conducted follow-ups with 320 veterans.

Ohio is home to nearly 700,000 veterans, which ranks sixth nationally. Estimates show that about 10,000 men and women separate from service and take up residence in Ohio each year. Finding out that Ohio is among the best states for military benefits and support, VA healthcare, cost of living, job opportunities, and recreation and entertainment was eye-opening for participants, who were directed to websites such as OhioVets.gov and FindYourOhio.com.

The Veterans Workforce Team also serves a key role during ODVS's visits to Ohio businesses that are tapping into the unique skillsets of military members and veterans.

On May 6, 2024, in recognition of In-Demand Jobs Week, the Workforce Team joined Director Ashenhurst at the Ohio State Highway Patrol Academy to recognize the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Veterans comprise more than 35% of the Patrol's workforce, serving in all ranks of OHSP. During the visit, Allen gave remarks, Director Ashenhurst led a panel discussion with veterans in OSHP, and ODVS team members toured the facility. Also attending were two prominent veterans – Dept. of Public Safety Director Andy Wilson and Col. Charles Jones, Superintendent of the Patrol.

At the close of In-Demand Jobs Week on May 10, ODVS paid a visit to Radiance Technologies in Beavercreek, just outside of Dayton. Radiance Technologies is a contractor that tests and makes equipment for the Department of Defense in support of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and also boasts a veteran workforce of roughly 35% veterans. Director Ashenhurst commended the company's commitment to veteran employment.

On May 13, 2024, Director Ashenhurst and Allen headed to the University of Dayton's Digital Transformation Center, a research center and testing site for equipment that supports Wright-Patterson AFB. There, they shared best practices on attracting and developing veteran talent.



Higher Education

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services is the Ohio agency for the federally funded Veterans Educational Programs office, which oversees the State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Training. Last federal fiscal year, the VA spent more than \$250 million in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation and education, including more than \$80 million on tuition and fees through the GI Bill®.

State Approving Agency

The principal role of the State Approving Agency is to promote and safeguard quality education and training programs for all veterans and their dependents, and to ensure education and training opportunities meet the changing needs of veterans. There are more than 700 approved Ohio institutions where veterans and their dependents are able to use their GI Bill® educational benefits.

Each year, the VA contractually requires the State Approving Agency to review these programs offered by institutions for validity and to perform compliance surveys (audits) of institutions predetermined by the VA.

In an effort to reduce administrative burden on education and training facilities, the VA and SAA reduced the number of Risk Based Surveys required to be conducted in FY2024 and re-implemented the Supervisory Visit model. Risk Based Surveys consist of a comprehensive review of financials, enrollment, recruiting, student outcomes, and student files, while a Supervisory Visit entails verification of accreditation status, enrollment limitations, approval status, and a review of three student records. In federal FY2024, the SAA completed 17 Risk Based Surveys that were selected based on a quantitative review of publicly available data, and 24 Supervisory Visits that were selected at random.



Training & Standards

County Veterans Service Commissioners and County Veterans Service Officer training remained a focus for ODVS throughout FY2024. Five commissioners are appointed in each of the counties by the Court of Common Pleas and oversee the operation of each county commission. Service officers are hired by each county to serve the veteran population. ODVS trained and certified 41 newly appointed Veterans Service Commissioners on duties and responsibilities per the Ohio Revised Code. All 440 commissioners received training throughout the year with both in-person and online training events. The commissioners receive five-year appointments through the county court of common pleas and represent five different veterans service organizations.

The Ohio State Association for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) trained 43 newly appointed service officers and ODVS recertified or initiated the accreditation of 60 service officers with the VA. More than 300 service officers were trained both online and in-person to retain their certifications. All CVSOs must be veterans with honorable service and are employed by the counties. Each County Veterans Service Commission is required to employ at least one CVSO. Lastly, during the fiscal year, 103 accreditation requests were granted with various service organizations on behalf of service officers, allowing veterans to be represented by organizations of their choice during the claims process.

Veterans Affairs Regional Office

ODVS's liaison office at the Cleveland Veterans Affairs Regional Office provides direct assistance to counties with claims that need immediate attention or special management through partnership with the Veterans Affairs Regional Office. Our liaison office staff was able to assist with several thousand requests from both county veterans service officers and constituents throughout Ohio during FY2024. The office works closely with the VA and provides direct support to the CVSOs.

The Department continues to partner with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to verify eligibility for those applying for the disabled veterans and former POW five-year free license with the Division of Wildlife. During FY2024, the office continued to maintain the turnaround time of 24-to-48 hours to verify eligibility.



Legislation

In FY2024, Ohio lawmakers introduced a few key pieces of legislation that directly affect Ohio veterans.

Senate Bill 225, introduced by Ohio Senator Kristina Roegner and signed into law by Governor DeWine, designates September 22 as Veterans Suicide Awareness and Prevention Day. Estimates show that as many as 16 to 22 veterans die each day by suicide in the United States.

This legislation recognizes the importance of not only awareness, but also pursuing prevention, and aligns the date with the nationally recognized suicide prevention month – September.

House Bill 250, introduced by Representatives Jessica Miranda and Tracy Richardson, and signed into law by the Governor, renames the “Military Enlistment Seal” to the “Military Seal.” This legislation also establishes new pathways for high school students to earn the seal. In addition to meeting the state’s minimum curriculum requirements, continuing law generally requires high school students to demonstrate competency in math and English language arts and earn at least two diploma seals to qualify for a high school diploma. The Military Seal will be one of two state-prescribed seals that can count toward graduation.





Veterans Homes

ODVS oversees two state-run facilities for wartime veterans, Ohio Veterans Homes, which are located in Sandusky and Georgetown. Dedicated staff at each of the Homes provide first-rate healthcare and support to former military members.

The Sandusky facility, originally known as the Soldiers and Sailors Home, has been in operation for more than 135 years. Today, it is a 427-bed nursing home facility in Erie County. Two levels of care are offered: standard care for those veterans in need of any intermediate level of care, and special care for veterans with Alzheimer's disease and

other types of dementia. The home opened in 1888 to care for veterans of the Civil War and has been in continuous operation since. The Domiciliary offers 206 beds and necessary medical care to eligible veterans who need medical care but who are capable of living independently.

The Ohio Veterans Home in Georgetown opened 21 years ago and offers a 168-bed nursing facility level of care. Two levels of care are offered: standard care for veterans in need of any intermediate level of care, and special care for veterans with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. The home opened in 2003 and is located in the scenic countryside of Brown County.

Together, these two facilities support up to 801 residents and employ a staff of approximately 950. Both homes encourage a community environment and provide around-the-clock care. Activities are abundant, visitation is encouraged – with certain precautions – and each facility often hosts programs that honor, entertain, and engage the hundreds of veterans who live there.

Among the outdoor amenities at Georgetown are a carillon, a sheltered pavilion, a walking track, and a wooded walking path that features memorial stones with the names of former residents.

Meanwhile, the 99-acre campus in Sandusky includes a pavilion, enclosed grounds, and is noteworthy for its well-kept and historic cemetery where more than 4,000 veterans have been laid to rest. The cemetery is Ohio's only state-owned veterans cemetery.



Veterans Homes, cont.

New Leadership

In April 2024, ODVS welcomed Ohio native and longtime healthcare administrator Terry Holecek as the new Superintendent of the Ohio Veterans Homes. Holecek is an Ohio-licensed nursing home administrator and health services executive, serving in top roles for national long-

term care, senior living, and home care organizations for more than 25 years.

“(Terry) is a dedicated professional and proven leader,” ODVS Director Deborah Ashenhurst said. “Providing quality care and comfort to our resident veterans is an important part of our mission and I expect Terry to continue with emphasis on person-centered care and continuous improvement for our staff and residents.”

Holecek is the 32nd OVH Superintendent in history. He replaces Ross Matlack, who officially took the role in April 2021 and resigned in early 2024.

One of Holecek’s early tasks will be to oversee a vigorous multiyear construction project that will modernize both facilities and provide more privacy for the hundreds of veterans who live there.



Living Life to the Fullest

With residents once again able to engage in communal dining and activities, and volunteers often on hand to brighten both Homes, special programs have returned in earnest. Holidays are a warm time and attract many welcomed guests such as local school-age children, legislators and public officials, members of veterans organizations, and representatives of other state agencies.



Veterans Homes, cont.

Each year, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction provides a much-anticipated Christmas in July celebration that begins with a ceremony for the residents and includes gifts, games, in-room visitation, and a lively bingo session. The Homes also conduct stirring Memorial Day programs that pay tribute to the service of our residents and recognize the lives of those lost in the past year.

Field trips are among the many enjoyable outlet for residents. One of the most notable is a summer day trip from OVH-Georgetown to the compound of a local military family on the southern edge of Ohio for an entire afternoon of fun in the sun. The campground provides an idyllic setting as the veterans enjoy a cookout lunch, boat rides along the Ohio River, fishing, relaxation, music, games and much more. This new tradition began in the summer of 2021.



OVH residents experience a unique camaraderie and opportunities to seek wellness, advancing our mission of “Serving Those Who Served” by providing comfort and care to our amazing Ohio veterans.





Veterans Hall of Fame

Since its inception more than three decades ago, the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame has come to be known as the ultimate honor for Ohioans who have made major contributions to society following their military service.

The 2023 class of inductees includes 10 Ohioans who served in the Vietnam War era, five who served in the Gulf War era, two from the Korean War era, one who served in World War II, one who served in Iraq and Kosovo, and several who served across multiple eras. This outstanding group of former service members hails from 14 Ohio counties and four military

branches, bringing the total number of inductees – including Medal of Honor recipients – to 974.

The list of the hundreds who have been inducted into the Hall includes famous sons and daughters of the Buckeye State: six U.S presidents including Ulysses S. Grant; astronauts John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, and Kathryn Sullivan; legendary coaches Woody Hayes and Paul Brown; Oscar-winning actors Clark Gable and Paul Newman; Vietnam War nurse Sharon Lane; restaurateurs Dave Thomas and Bob Evans; Dr. Henry Heimlich; pitcher Bob Feller; World War I ace Eddie Rickenbacker; civil rights activist Sara Harper – the list goes on and on.

*Introducing
the*



**Class
of
2023**

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- Darrin M. Adams, Shelby Co.
- Michael L. Close, Franklin Co.
- Carolyn L. Destefani, Greene Co.
- Terry A. Johnson, Montgomery Co.
- Donald J. Keehan*, Lorain Co.
- Paul M. Keller, Greene Co.
- John C. Looker, Warren Co.
- Lester L. Lyles, Montgomery Co.
- Laurel A. Mayer, Greene Co.
- Charles E. McGee*, Cuyahoga Co.
- Timothy E. McMonagle, Cuyahoga Co.
- Michael P. Monahan, Clermont Co.
- Jack L. Patterson, Coshocton Co.
- Heath M. Robinson*, Fairfield Co.
- Stephen L. Rosedale, Hamilton Co.
- David L. Scheffler, Fairfield Co.
- Donald P. Scott, Mahoning Co.
- Purcell Taylor Jr., Warren Co.
- Bruce K. Thorn, Franklin Co.
- Robert A. Walkup, Williams Co.

*Posthumous Award



Hall of Fame, cont.

However, inductees into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame don't need to be household names – and the honor is not an indicator of heroism on the battlefield. Instead, those who lived in Ohio for at least one year, served honorably in the military, are of high moral character, and have made significant contributions to their community are eligible.

Medal of Honor recipients are automatically qualified. The Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Executive Committee, comprised of 13 Ohio veterans, annually reviews submitted nominations and selects up to 20 candidates.

The traditions of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame were on full display as Governor DeWine and Director Ashenhurst honored the 2023 class at a November 9 induction ceremony at the Ohio State University's Fawcett Center.

An audience of hundreds filled the auditorium, the ceremony was live-streamed on [ohiochannel.org](https://www.ohiochannel.org) and broadcast statewide. Many distinguished guests, including previously inducted Hall of Famers, were on hand as the impressive class was revealed.

In addition, ODVS filmed individual interviews with 15 of the 17 living inductees and those video vignettes debuted on the department's official Facebook page throughout December 2023 and January 2024. Those pieces remain viewable on the [ODVS YouTube account](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...) and next to the honorees' bios at www.OhioVets.gov.

The members of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame are honored with a bronze plaque in a permanent display near the Ohio Statehouse at the Vern Riffe Center for Government and the Arts, 77 S. High St., Columbus, Ohio. During FY2024, ODVS also added a new ADA-compliant kiosk to the display that features class listings, official bios, and background information on the Hall of Fame.





Women Veterans

One of the many objectives of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services is to ensure the voices of Ohio's women veterans are elevated.

Ohio is home to nearly 67,000 women veterans and ODVS's Women Veterans Coordinator works in collaboration with members of the Ohio Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC) on year-round outreach.

Director Ashenhurst appoints a committee of engaged, knowledgeable women veterans to provide advice, counsel, and input on issues, opportunities, and programs impacting Ohio women veterans. These committee members are not part of the department's senior staff but come from a variety of backgrounds and military branches to serve women veterans across the state. During FY2024, the WVAC expanded its reach by adding "Power Hour" gatherings that encouraged camaraderie, the sharing of women's health information, networking opportunities, and educational sessions such as visits to Motts Military Museum and the National Veterans Memorial and Museum.

The committee enjoyed its first full fiscal year under new leadership with Dr. Dana Robinson-Street serving as Chair and Renee Frey as Vice Chair. Robinson-Street served for 25 years in the U.S. Navy and presently is an Urgent Care Provider and Hybrid Telemedicine Provider of an acute care/urgent care clinic which serves the residents of central Ohio. Frey retired from the U.S. Air Force and Ohio Air National Guard in May 2021 after 32 years of military service. She currently is employed at the Defense Logistics Agency in Columbus.

Most notably, this year's Women Veterans Forum, dubbed "Sharing Our Stories," was held on March 27, 2024, in downtown Columbus. Hosted annually during Women's History Month, this year's event centered on military experiences, paths to leadership, and how veterans can apply the principles learned in the U.S. Armed Forces to their personal and professional lives.



Women Veterans, cont.

The Forum featured the stories and insights of four women veterans who now serve in state government:

- Kimber Heim, Air Force veteran, Realty Specialist Manager for the Ohio Department of Transportation
- Lisa Martinez, Marine Corps veteran, Hearing Authority for the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services
- Jackie Masters, Army veteran, Payroll Administrator for the Ohio Department of Administrative Services
- Tiffiany Meeks, Army veteran, State Highway Patrol Lieutenant for the Ohio Department of Public Safety

Also, on June 12 – Women Veterans Day in Ohio – Director Ashenurst and several ODVS team members were grateful to attend a dedication ceremony at the Dayton VA Medical Center as the women’s clinic there officially was renamed in honor of legendary U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams Earley, a trailblazing force for equality in the military who commanded the all-black female 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion during World War II.



ODVS honors women veterans for their service as well as their contributions following their time in the military. This includes the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame, which specifically recognizes outstanding achievement and service to others following time served in the Armed Forces. Since its inception in 1992, the Hall of Fame has inducted 75 women, including 2023 honoree Carolyn L. Destefani, an Air Force veteran from Greene County.

The bios of these standouts – and every other Hall of Famer – can be found at www.OhioVets.gov. Many inductees and other Ohio women of great accomplishment were featured in the department’s daily social media posts throughout Women’s History Month.



Mental Health

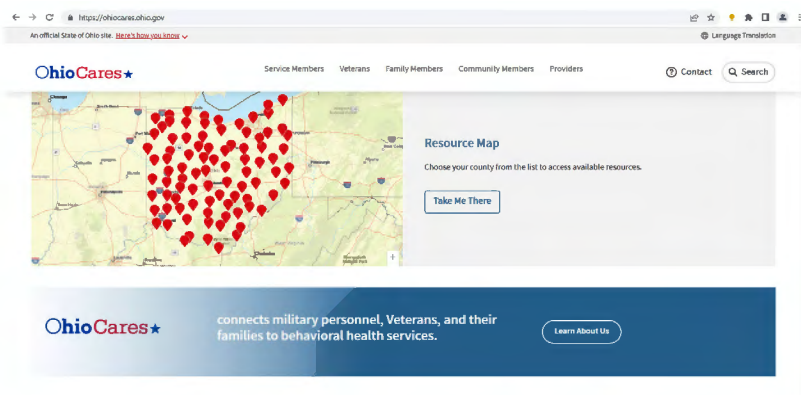
Veteran suicide prevention remains a high priority for our department, the administration as a whole, and many behavioral health partners. In Ohio, recent statistics indicate the veteran suicide rate (33.9%) is significantly higher than the suicide rate for the general population (18.6%).

In 2021 – the most recent data available from the VA – 242 veterans died by suicide in Ohio. Between 2017-21, veteran suicide deaths in Ohio consistently has stayed between 230-270 per year.

In addressing mental health issues and supporting initiatives that serve former service members and their loved ones, ODVS collaborates with a wide array of partners including administration leadership, state legislators, community organizations, and state agencies such as the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and the Ohio National Guard (ONG).

In recent years, the Governor’s Office and the OHIOcares Executive Committee – originally formed by ODVS, OhioMHAS, and ONG – established the OHIOcares website (www.ohiocares.ohio.gov) focused on facilitating access to mental health resources to service

members, veterans, and their families. This all-important website continues to provide improved opportunities for engagement with local mental health providers and community organizations that provide culturally-sensitive services and support to Ohio’s military and veteran community.



OHIOcares expanded the Executive Committee to enlist critical support and input from the VA, the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, and the Ohio Governor’s Challenge Team. These partners moved forward with the creation of the OHIOcares Statewide Workgroup, providing a platform for engagement and collaboration with government organizations at the



Mental Health, cont.

federal, state, and local levels, as well as non-profit organizations in the mental health provider and military/veteran communities in support of two identified priority workgroups: Provider Engagement Workgroup and Community Engagement Workgroup.

The Provider Engagement Workgroup focuses on building partnerships, the foundations for which have been established through Ohio's ongoing participation in the Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) program and the Ohio Governor's Challenge Team.

SBHP is a collaboration led by the Ohio Brain Injury Program with support from OhioMHAS, ODVS, and ONG. During FY2024, 339 individuals took part in Star Providers training. Ohio now has 329 local community providers on our Star Providers registry located in 65 counties. Since Ohio started participating in the SBHP program in 2015, a total of 4,674 providers have participated in the training.

The Ohio Governor's Challenge Team facilitates provider training through the Governor's Challenge PsychArmor Training Portal, which has provided resources to more than 100 individuals through 14 available training modules.

The Community Engagement Workgroup has supported local activity in two key pilot projects in Erie County and Greene County. The Erie County project is a collaboration between ODVS; OhioMHAS; the VA; the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board of Erie County; and a local non-profit provider. This project trains certified veteran peer supporters who assist veterans with mental health and addiction recovery needs at OVH and is moving beyond Erie County to build a statewide network of certified veteran peer supporters. Peer supporters are trained and certified in using their lived experience to help others impacted by mental illness or substance use disorders.

In FY2024, this program trained 44 new peer supporters, building a network of 156 trained peer supporters located in 47 of Ohio's counties.



Mental Health, cont.

The Greene County project is a collaboration led by the Greene County Veterans Services Office with support from OhioMHAS; the VA; the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Clark, Greene and Madison Counties; ODVS; and a local non-profit provider. This project identifies veterans coming into the local CVSO for financial aid and other services who may be demonstrating signs of mental health distress and facilitates on-site support and respectful transfers to additional mental health and addiction services in the community through the VA or local providers.

In June 2024, the Administrator of ODVS's Office of Veteran Policy & Programs joined forces with representatives of OhioMHAS, ONG, and the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation at the National Governor's Challenge Innovations Conference hosted by the VA and federal Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration in San Diego. The Conference brought together more than 200 veteran and military behavioral health advocates from all 55 Governor's Challenge Teams representing all U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

Participants had the opportunity to attend sessions on innovative programs and practices at the federal, state, and local levels as well as network with colleagues from other parts of the country. The conference allowed the Ohio representatives to make presentations that educated attendees on the OHIOcares initiative to support behavioral health services for Ohio's active duty service members, veterans, and their families.



Statewide Collaboration



Our mission is to provide opportunities and resources for our veteran community through advocacy, collaboration, and partnerships. Those efforts were fortified in FY2024 as ODVS was able to align with many state agencies to honor veterans and address important issues facing them.

One such project allowed us to team with the Department of Administrative Services to highlight dozens of veterans who work in various capacities of state government. At the outset of November, which Governor DeWine declared as Hire-A-Veteran Month, an array of photo boards featuring 98 such veterans were installed in the main lobby of the Rhodes Tower in downtown Columbus.

Another collaborative effort of note occurred on March 12, 2024, as ODVS helped pay tribute to students in grades 11 and 12 from across the state who have decided to serve our country. That morning, Director Ashenurst joined Ohio Second Lady Tina Husted; the Ohio Adjutant General, Major General John C. Harris Jr.; and many other distinguished guests at the annual All-Ohio U.S. Armed Forces Career Commitment Celebration. The event was held at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in downtown Columbus.

Maj. Gen. Harris guided the students through the Oath of Enlistment, swearing in more than 75 students across the state who have committed to attend a service academy or enter active duty service, the Reserve, or the National Guard. The All-Ohio U.S. Armed Forces Career Commitment Celebration is hosted by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and receives support from ODVS, the Ohio National Guard, and the military community.

ODVS also continued to join forces with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and numerous volunteers for Christmas in July events at each of the Ohio Veterans Homes. On July 13, 2023, at a ceremony held in the Great Room of the Ohio Veterans Home in Georgetown, an Elvis impersonator kicked off the festivities and was quite a hit with the residents. Director Ashenurst spoke passionately about the value of service and the need to honor those who wore the uniform of our nation to the gathering of wartime veterans of many eras. After the program, which also included a rousing U.S. Armed Forces Medley, several volunteers dressed



Collaboration, cont.

in holiday attire passed out gifts to the residents and provided more prizes during an enjoyable bingo session.

On July 27, the balmy weather outside did not stop the residents from ringing in some winter cheer at the Christmas in July celebration at OVH-Sandusky. ODRC Deputy Director Charles V. Bradley served as Master of Ceremonies and was joined on stage by Director Ashenhurst for a similar program in the Great Hall. Once again, numerous volunteers provided enjoyment for the residents as they opened presents, played bingo, and enjoyed a picnic lunch.



In May, 17 of Ohio's military heroes were honored during the 25th annual induction ceremony for the Ohio Military Hall of Fame for Valor (OMHOF), which honors those who received medals for valor while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Standing before a packed-in crowd in the atrium of the Ohio Statehouse, Governor DeWine shared words of gratitude as Director Ashenhurst and Gen. Harris placed medals on the inductees and handed others to representatives of the seven warriors inducted posthumously. Four were killed in combat.

On May 8, Director Ashenhurst joined Governor DeWine at the 44th Annual Ohio Governor's Holocaust Commemoration. This touching program included remarks from Chihiro Sugihara, who shared the story of his grandfather serving as consul in Lithuania and defying orders to save more than 6,000 Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution by issuing transit visas through Japan. Sonia Milrod, who is the daughter of Holocaust survivors, also shared her family's story.

An annual summer event that draws a large veteran presence is the Memorial Tournament just outside of Dublin. On June 5, 2024, Director Ashenhurst attended the annual Salute to Service Day brunch at Muirfield Village Golf Club, which honors veterans, active duty military members, and Gold Star families on the eve of the first round of the Memorial Tournament. That star-studded event featured golf legend and tournament founder Jack Nicklaus; Ohio State football coach Ryan Day; Second Lady Tina Husted; JobsOhio President & CEO JP Nauseef; Gen. Harris; Medal of Honor recipient Bob Patterson; and 20 Gold Star family members.



Outreach

Throughout FY2024, Director Ashenhurst and many other team members were able to engage the community and honor service at a plethora of veteran-centered public events. This, of course, includes the Ohio State Fair, county fairs, resource and hiring fairs, veterans organization programs, and many other events.

During the 2023 Ohio State Fair, ODVS team members greeted veterans and military families and disseminated key information at a booth inside the Bricker MarketPlace. The display area included a map to indicate the hometown

of veteran visitors, cards and military insignias for children to color for residents at the Ohio Veterans Homes, and an interactive kiosk loaded with information on the Ohio Veterans Hall

of Fame. On several days of the Fair, ODVS was joined by representatives of nearby County Veterans Service Offices and the Franklin County Recorder's office, who were able to provide veteran fairgoers with military IDs.



Separately, Director Ashenhurst participated as a panelist during the Boundless Freedom program at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. This event serves as a kickoff to the weekend's Adaptive Sports Connection competition for veterans who face physical challenges.

On September 7, the Director joined State Senator Hearcel F. Craig, State Representative Tracy Richardson, State Fire Marshal Kevin Reardon and other dignitaries and volunteers in placing 2,977 flags, one for each victim of the 9/11 attacks, on the west lawn of the Ohio Statehouse.



Outreach, cont.

On October 31, members of the ODVS team provided resources and important information to veterans in need at the Central Ohio Stand Down, held at the Columbus Convention Center. The annual event is a massive “thank you” to those who served but are in need of some assistance. It includes free food, clothing, outerwear, footwear, medical screenings, legal aid, job opportunities, blankets, beverages, and more.

A Very Special Time of Year

The Stand Down led into the month of November – a time of year when ODVS outreach efforts hit high gear. Ohio is always at the ready to honor men and women of service and their families – and that is perhaps never more evident than in the days on and around Veterans Day.

A breakdown of some of the key November events in which ODVS played a role include:

- **Ohio Veterans Art Exhibition in Riffe Center in Columbus –**

Our department had the privilege of showcasing the works of dozens of veteran artists from across the state at the Ohio Veterans Art Exhibition Grand Opening Gala. The event was co-hosted by our partners at the Ohio Arts Council (OAC). Offering remarks were Director Ashenhurst, Cat Sheridan and Justin Nigro of the OAC, and Kurt Reichert, who along with veteran artists Matt Porter and Veronica Shields served as a juror for the 36-piece exhibition.

- **Hometown Heroes Game at Nippert Stadium in Cincinnati –**

Director Ashenhurst joined our partners at JobsOhio to help honor military members during the University of Cincinnati vs. Central Florida game on the UC campus.

- **Rock Ceremony at The Ohio State University in Columbus –**

The Director attended this solemn event as central Ohio community members gathered to pay their respects to those who have given their lives in service to our country. The ceremony included an address to The Reserve Officer Training Corps, a 21-gun salute, the playing of “Taps,” and the laying of a wreath at the memorial rock.

- **Veterans Employee Network Group at Rhodes Tower in Columbus –**

The Director offered remarks during a Lunch & Learn panel discussion hosted by the Ohio Attorney General’s office. The event focused on how veterans and active-duty personnel can best care for their own mental health, as well as how civilians can better support military members and their families.

- **Veterans Appreciation at Ohio Department of Natural Resources Headquarters in Columbus –**

ODVS Assistant Director Sean McCarthy chatted with ODNR Director Mary Mertz to share stories of his service, shed light on key state resources for veterans, and thank the dozens of ODNR employees who are veterans for their service.





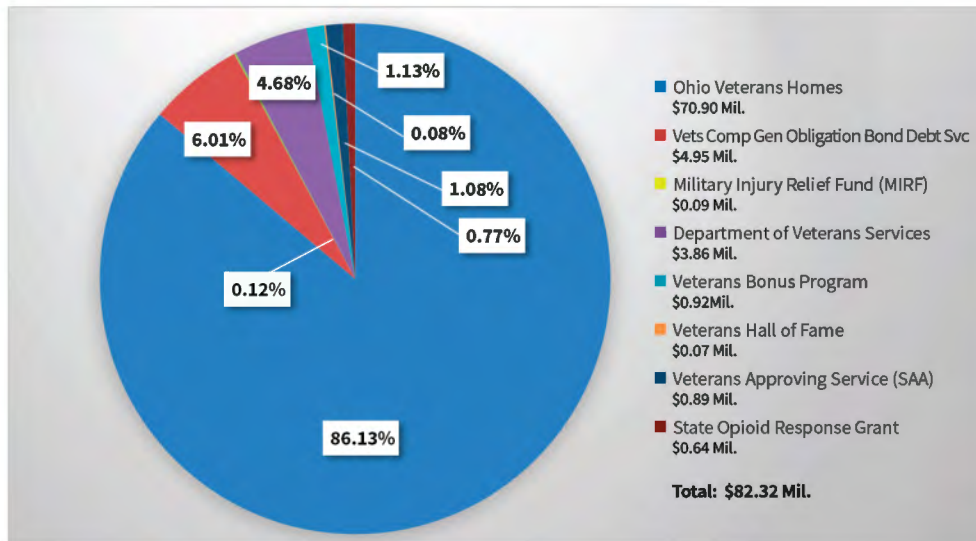
Outreach, cont.

- **Public Policy Symposium at Ohio Statehouse in Columbus –**
Assistant Director McCarthy supported this Inter-University Council-sponsored event, which featured a discussion on how public universities can better serve military-connected students.
- **Blue Jackets Heroes Game at Nationwide Arena in Columbus –**
The Director represented the department at the Columbus Blue Jackets' annual game dedicated to military service.
- **Seneca County Veteran of the Year Program in Tiffin –**
Assistant Director McCarthy presented a proclamation from Governor DeWine to honorees at this annual dinner program.
- **Veterans Day Salute at OhioHealth Headquarters in Columbus –**
Director Ashenhurst addressed a packed crowd to bring light to the value of military service and commend the leading healthcare provider on its consistent hiring of veterans.
- **Veterans Appreciation Ceremony at Deer Run Elementary in Dublin –**
ODVS's Samantha Erickson, who served for 12 years in the Air Force, participated in this school program to honor service.
- **Veterans Appreciation Luncheon at the Madison County Senior Center in London –**
ODVS's Danny Eakins, Administrator for the Office of Veteran Policy and Programs and an Army veteran, visited with the attendees and thanked them for their service.
- **Veterans Day Ceremony at Columbus School for Girls in Bexley –**
Director Ashenhurst answered questions from CSG students and shared with them stories from her 37-plus years in the Army.
- **Veterans Day Ceremony at Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky –**
Director Ashenhurst and OVH Superintendent Ross Matlack welcomed keynote speaker and State Senator Theresa Gavarone, who joined the administrators in thanking the residents for their service and shared the story of her uncle who bravely served in World War II.
- **Veterans Day Ceremony at Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Cleveland –**
The Director addressed a gathering at the iconic downtown monument and touched on the importance of recognizing American sacrifice and service.
- **Crawford County Veterans Hall of Fame Dinner in Bucyrus –**
Director Ashenhurst joined local dignitaries in helping to honor outstanding veterans in the community.
- **AMVETS Post 2256 Veterans Appreciation Meal in Circleville –**
The Director offered remarks and detailed available benefits during this luncheon to honor area veterans.
- **135th Anniversary Celebration at the Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky –**
Volunteer Services Coordinator Kimberly Lewallen emceed the morning program, which included remarks of gratitude from Director Ashenhurst and Ohio State Representative D.J. Swearingen.
- **Veterans Day Luncheon at Church of the Resurrection in New Albany –**
Assistant Director McCarthy thanked veterans in attendance for their service and outlined department initiatives.

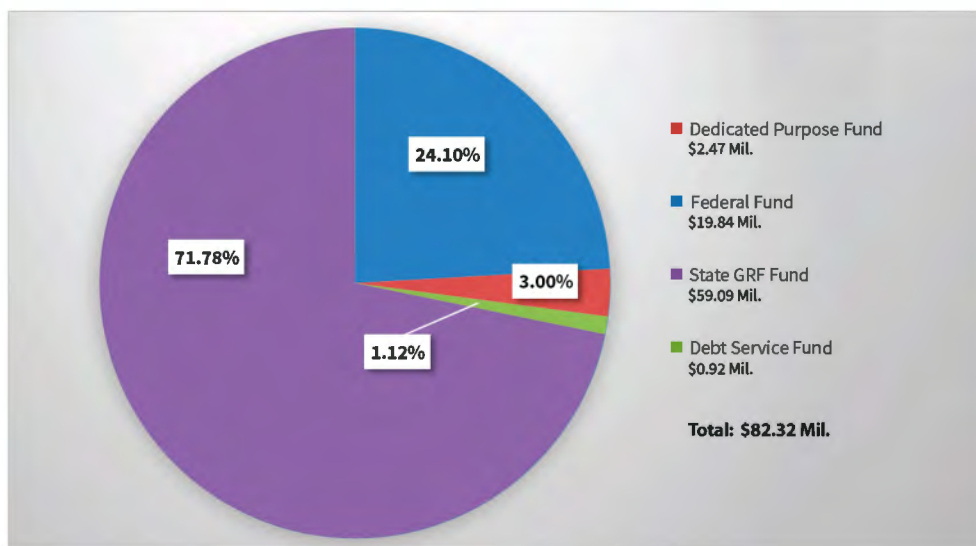


ODVS Expenditures

EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM



EXPENDITURES BY FUNDING SOURCE





Direct Federal Spending

