



**Department of
Veterans Services**

**FY2025
Annual Report**

Mike DeWine
Governor

John C. Harris, Jr.
Director



Director's Message

I am honored to serve as the new Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. As a lifelong Ohioan and a career military leader, I step into this role with a deep sense of purpose and an unwavering commitment to the men and women who have worn our nation's uniform. I am grateful to Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly for their trust, their continued investment in Ohio's veterans, and their steadfast support of our mission.

Throughout my 44-year military career, culminating in my service as Adjutant General, I have had the privilege of leading outstanding service members through times of both challenge and triumph. That experience has shaped my understanding of what veterans need to thrive in civilian life – access to quality healthcare, strong educational and employment opportunities, and the respect and support of the communities they've so honorably served.

At the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, our mission is to advocate for veterans and their families, to ensure they receive the benefits they've earned, and foster programs that enable them to live with dignity, security, and opportunity. Under my leadership, we will renew our focus on outreach, collaboration with veteran service organizations, and the expansion of innovative support systems across the state.

We owe our veterans more than gratitude – we owe them action. I am committed to working with local, state, and federal partners to ensure Ohio remains a national leader in veteran care and advocacy.

Ohio, thank you for your continued support of veterans. I look forward to advancing our mission – and continuing to serve those who have served us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John C. Harris, Jr.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Maj. Gen. (U.S. Army, Ret.) John C. Harris, Jr., Director



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Employment

One of our key endeavors is to educate Ohio businesses on military culture, the value of hiring veterans, and ways to identify, incentivize, and retain them through the guidance of the ODVS Veterans Workforce Team. This vital aspect of our department was created in October 2016.

Since its inception, the team has contacted more than 28,000 Ohio businesses and conducted 694 training sessions for more than 7,000 employers. In FY2025 alone, our regional workforce consultants contacted 3,454 employers leading to 1,133 employer engagements. The department also conducted 121 training sessions for 495 employers and at least 2,111 people.

Over the past fiscal year, the Workforce Team has placed more emphasis on engaging veterans at employer events, attending 334 of them in that time frame as well as another 80 benefits-oriented events conducted by both public and private sector organizations.

The Workforce Team also increased its reach through informative face-to-face interactions with those who are about to separate from service and pursue a civilian career. In particular, our team, led by Workforce Manager Gary Allen, attended several transition hiring events at military installations located throughout the continental United States, including trips to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina (July 2024) and Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia (August 2024).

We joined forces with the JobsOhio “Find Your Ohio” team at four separate Career Summits – which were organized by the Department of Defense’s Hiring Our Heroes program – connecting with more than 400 transitioning service members and signing up more than 130 who expressed interest in living and working in Ohio. During these ventures, the team also took time to inform base/post transition office staff of the professional opportunities and support Ohio offers its veterans.





Employment, cont.

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, 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.

Ohio is home to nearly 700,000 veterans, which ranks sixth nationally, and estimates show about 10,000 men and women separate from service and take up residence in the state each year.



Finding out 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](https://www.ohiovets.gov) and [FindYourOhio.com](https://www.findyourohio.com).



The Veterans Workforce Team also serves a key role during ODVS’s employer visits to Ohio businesses that set out to tap into the unique skillsets of military members and veterans. In June 2025, Allen headed to Costa Mesa, Calif., to meet with leadership of Anduril Industries and other workforce representatives to collaborate on ideas to attract more manufacturing and aviation talent into the community.



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 \$200 million in Ohio on vocational rehabilitation and education, including more than \$100 million on tuition and fees through the GI Bill®.

State Approving Agency

The principal role of the 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.

Throughout the fiscal year, SAA continued to meet recently enacted VA requirements for Risk Based Surveys and Supervisory Visits with institutions of higher learning. 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 veteran student records. In federal FY2025, the SAA completed 18 Risk Based Surveys that were selected based on a quantitative review of publicly available data, and 22 Supervisory Visits that were selected at random.



Department of Veterans Services

State Approving Agency



Training & Standards

County Veterans Service Commissioner and County Veterans Service Officer training remained a focus for ODVS throughout FY2025. Five commissioners are appointed in each of the counties by the Court of Common Pleas and oversee the operation of each county office: each serving a five-year appointment and representing five different veterans service organizations. ODVS trained and certified 42 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 Commission is tasked to hire service officers to serve the county veteran population. The State Association for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) trained 67 newly appointed service officers and ODVS recertified or initiated the accreditation of 96 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, 66 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 FY2025. The office works closely with the VA and provides direct support to the CVSOs.

Through the Personal Identity Verification access granted to our liaison office, 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 FY2025, the liaison office staff processed 2,432 requests and continued to maintain the turnaround time of 24-to-48 hours to verify eligibility.



Legislation

The Ohio General Assembly supported veterans in FY2025 by drafting and working to enact several pieces of legislation that pay homage to those who served our country honorably:

Senate Bill 39 – In a show of bipartisan support, Ohio State Senators Terry Johnson (R-McDermott) and Hearcel F. Craig (D-Columbus) introduced this bill, which mandates creation of a veterans' services and benefits poster to be provided to employers at no charge, to be produced by the Department of Commerce via consultation with ODVS and made available to all Ohio employers. It will include information such as

available state benefits, the VA Crisis Line, mental health resources, educational and workforce training opportunities, tax exemptions or benefits, and other key resources for veterans. It passed by a unanimous vote in both chambers and was signed into law by Governor DeWine.

In addition, the passing of **House Bill 96**, the operating budget for the state of Ohio, maintained funding provided through the executive budget to ODVS. It allocates General Revenue Fund (GRF) appropriations to the Department of Veterans Services in the amount of \$59,643,989 for FY2026 and \$59,814,297 for FY2027.

The budget allows for strategic investments in clinician recruitment and modernization planning for the Ohio Veterans Homes while providing ODVS expanded staffing flexibility and the ability to update internal structures within the Homes.





Veterans Homes

The Ohio Veterans Homes, located in Sandusky and Georgetown, stand as enduring symbols of the state’s commitment to honor and care for its military veterans. These facilities provide high-quality, long-term residential care to veterans who have served our country and now require medical, nursing, or rehabilitative support.

ODVS operates both Homes and equips them with a dedicated staff that provides comfort and care – including skilled nursing care, memory care, and independent living – to wartime veterans of many eras.

As the veteran population ages, particularly among those who served during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, the demand for modern, safe, and dignified residential care continues to grow. In response to this need, the state of Ohio has embarked on a significant modernization effort aimed at updating and expanding the capacity and quality of care in both facilities.

The Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky, established in 1888, is the older and larger of the two institutions. Situated on a 99-acre campus in northern Ohio, OVH-Sandusky can accommodate more than 600 veterans across a wide spectrum of care services. It offers skilled nursing care, an independent living unit, and specialized Alzheimer’s and memory care. Over its nearly 140-year history, the Sandusky campus has evolved into a full-service facility staffed by experienced professionals and overseen by both state and federal regulatory agencies, including the Ohio Department of Health and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The sprawling campus features a mix of historic buildings and newer additions, though many of its structures are aging and in need of upgrades to meet comfort, safety, and infection control standards.

OVH-Georgetown, located in southern Ohio’s Brown County, opened in 2003 in response to the growing need for long-term veterans care in the region. The Georgetown facility plays a vital role in the state’s overall strategy, offering 168 beds for veterans in need of skilled nursing care. The Home is designed with a more contemporary layout and, like OVH-Sandusky, has earned a strong reputation for high-quality, compassionate care. It provides a stable, structured environment for the veterans who call it home.



Veterans Homes, cont.

To address ongoing challenges and meet future demands, Ohio has launched a major modernization project aimed at upgrading infrastructure, improving privacy and safety, and expanding service capacity where possible. This project, one of the most ambitious veterans-related capital improvement initiatives in state history, involves extensive renovation and construction work at both Homes, supported by both state and federal funding.

In the 2024-25 Fiscal Year budget, the Ohio General Assembly allocated approximately \$65 million for the modernization of the Ohio Veterans Homes. These funds are designated to match federal grants through the VA's State Home Construction Grant Program, which covers up to 65% of allowable construction costs. In mid-2024, the VA approved Ohio's proposal and placed both Homes on a list of projects approved to receive federal funding; the combined federal and state funding totals \$183 million.

These funds will be used to dramatically improve the physical infrastructure and resident experience at both campuses. The investment reflects a statewide commitment to honor Ohio's aging veterans by providing them with the dignity, privacy, and quality of care they deserve.

At the Sandusky campus, the modernization project will involve the construction of a new 128-bed skilled nursing facility designed to supplement our existing rooms, creating an opportunity for all residents to have private rooms; this will support medical care, enhance resident dignity, and improve infection control. The new building will be equipped with modern mechanical systems, updated medical and safety features, and common areas designed to foster community and social interaction.

Meanwhile, at the Georgetown campus, the project will focus on expanding the facility's bed capacity through two new wings, which will add approximately 88 single-occupancy rooms. The renovation plans also call for upgrades to HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems, along with improved accessibility features and enhanced communal spaces. While not as large in scope as the Sandusky project, the upgrades at Georgetown are equally critical and represent a needed investment in the future of the facility.



Veterans Homes, cont.

Living Life to the Fullest

While most residents are senior Ohioans who require some sort of specialized care, life at the Ohio Veterans Homes is full of vibrancy and camaraderie. Activities are abundant, visitation is encouraged, and each facility often hosts programs that honor, entertain, and engage the hundreds of veterans who live there.

The residents often partake in communal dining, wellness opportunities, and a plethora of community engagements are available to them on a daily basis. Both Homes attract many welcomed guests such as local school-age children, legislators and public officials, members of veterans organizations, and representatives of other state agencies.

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 honor the service of our residents and recognize the lives lost in the past year.

Field trips also are highly anticipated. One of the most notable ones 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.



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 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 Hall of Fame

In keeping with Governor Mike DeWine’s goal of ensuring that Ohio is among the most military-friendly states in the nation, ODVS takes point on a variety of programs that provide resources to veterans and bring light to their amazing accomplishments. One of the most important examples of gratitude is our administration of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame, which was established in 1992.

The list of the hundreds who have been inducted into the Hall since its inception decades ago includes some of the most 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; and many more.

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 also are automatically qualified. The Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Executive Committee, comprised of 13 Ohio veterans including the ODVS Director, annually reviews submitted nominations and selects up to 20 candidates.



Inductees 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.



Hall of Fame, cont.

Members of the 2024 class span 14 Ohio counties and four branches of the United States Armed Forces – the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines – and ranged in age from 39 to 84 at the time of their induction. This class joined 975 Ohio veterans who have been inducted since inception and represent all eras, branches and walks of life.

On Nov. 7, 2024, ODVS hosted the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony at the Fawcett Center on The Ohio State University campus. Hundreds of supporters of the Hall of Fame including Governor DeWine, then-Ohio Adjutant General Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., legislators, and other dignitaries gathered to honor 20 Ohioans for their post-military service.

The event was livestreamed by the Ohio Channel and covered by local and statewide media outlets. Former ODVS Director Deborah Ashenhurst joined the Governor on stage to present medals and plaques to all 19 living honorees and Scott Harris, son of posthumous inductee Billy Harris.

ODVS filmed individual interviews with the living Hall of Famers with those video vignettes debuting on the department’s official Facebook page throughout December and January. Those pieces remain viewable on the ODVS YouTube account and next to the honorees’ bios at OhioVets.gov.

Introducing
the

Class
of
2024

- Kent Anderson, Greene Co.
- Marshall P. Bahr, Columbiana Co.
- Guion S. Bluford Jr., Cuyahoga Co.
- Kenneth L. Bonnell, Union Co.
- Michael W. Carrell, Fairfield Co.
- Joseph G. Fenderbosch, Gallia Co.
- Jason M. Graven, Wood Co.
- Billy M. Harris*, Ashland Co.
- Edward P. Horvath Jr., Cuyahoga Co.
- Richard D. Johnson, Union Co.
- A. Steve Klosowski, Lake Co.
- Mark E. Landers, Montgomery Co.
- David L. Levacy, Fairfield Co.
- Franklin D. LeValley, Clark Co.
- Anthony G. Massoud, Montgomery Co.
- Robert A. McDonald, Hamilton Co.
- J.P. Nauseef, Montgomery Co.
- Brad R. Wenstrup, Hamilton Co.
- JD Wetterling, Warren Co.
- Gerold W. Wilkin, Highland Co.

*Posthumous Award



Women Veterans

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services strives to ensure the voices of Ohio’s women veterans are heard. Our Director appoints a committee of engaged, knowledgeable women veterans to provide advice, counsel, and input on issues, opportunities, and programs impacting Ohio women veterans.

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 and the staging of big events.

FY2025 was highlighted by a few programs that centered on women of service, most notably our annual Ohio Women Veterans Forum. The most recent rendition was titled “Women Veterans Leading the Way” and held March 21, 2025, in the Atrium of the Ohio Statehouse in downtown Columbus. This free lunchtime program was livestreamed at ohiochannel.org.

Then ODVS Director Deborah Ashenhurst – a retired Major General with 37 years of service in the U.S. Army – moderated the discussion, which delved into the panelists’ military service, leadership, and how they have applied the principles learned in the U.S. Armed Forces to their personal and professional lives.

All three participants served honorably in the military and are now “leading the way” as successful entrepreneurs. They are as follows:

- Melodie Cook, Army veteran, CEO/Owner/Operator, Mother Mel’s Wholesome Diner LLC
- Jasmin Hurley, Army veteran, Founder & Practicing Attorney, JH Legal LLC
- Charlynda Scales, Air Force veteran, Founder & CEO, Mutt’s Sauce LLC & OH Taste LLC

Under the leadership of Chair Dr. Dana Robinson-Street and Vice Chair Renee Frey, the WVAC discussed ways to engage women veterans and hosted several “Power Hour” gatherings that encouraged camaraderie, the sharing of women’s health information, networking opportunities, and educational sessions.



Women Veterans, cont.

On June 1, 2025, Robinson-Street and Frey represented ODVS and the women veterans community as volunteers at the JobsOhio Military Outpost at The Memorial Tournament. Located at Muirfield Village Golf Club, the Outpost provided a great rest stop and viewing area for veterans, service members, and their families during the weeklong PGA Tour event.

Later that month, Ohioans celebrated Women Veterans Day at events across the state. In 2019, Governor DeWine signed Senate Bill 77, designating June 12 as Women Veterans Day in Ohio. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 10.9 percent of veterans nationwide, or around 1.7 million, are female. Projections suggest that the percentage of women in the U.S. military will climb over 16 percent by 2042.



ODVS plays a role in educating the women veteran community on opportunities to bring light to their military careers and accomplishments. Throughout FY2025, the department shared information about the Military Women's Memorial, located at the entrance of Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., which honors and tells the stories of women, past and present, who serve our nation. The Memorial is in the midst of a #StriveFor500 campaign, which calls for every state to help register at least 500 military women in 2025. Those who register will have their stories housed in a National Digital Repository – which is at 325,000 entries and growing.

Another way ODVS honors women veterans for their service as well as their contributions after their time in the military is through inclusion in 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.

The bios of these standouts – and every other Hall of Famer – can be found at [OhioVets.gov](https://ohiovets.gov). Many inductees and other Ohio women veterans of great accomplishment were featured in the department's daily social media posts throughout March, which is Women's History Month.



Behavioral Health

Veteran behavioral health and suicide prevention remain high priorities for our department, the administration, and our partners. In Ohio, recent statistics indicate the veteran suicide rate (33.2 deaths per 100,000) is significantly higher than the suicide rate for the general population (18.8 deaths per 100,000).

In 2022 – the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – an estimated 232 veterans died by suicide in Ohio. Between 2017-2022, veteran suicide deaths in Ohio have been estimated to be between 230-270 per year.

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



The best example of these relationships is ODVS leadership of Ohio's Team for the National VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Servicemembers, Veterans, and their Families. The Governor's Challenge Team works in direct partnership with the Veteran and Military Liaison at the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation and is a collaboration

of 48 individuals from across the state. It is comprised of representatives from 20 public and private organizations at the state, federal, and local levels.



Behavioral Health, cont.

This team communicates daily and meets quarterly, providing a platform for Ohio Governor's Challenge Team members to engage and coordinate across sectors as well as with non-profit and private organizations in the provider, behavioral health, and military/veteran communities in support of community initiatives developed by local partner organizations. In FY2025, ODVS formed a smaller State

Coordinating Group that meets monthly in order to provide regular updates and coordination opportunities for lead agencies related to key efforts such as behavioral health provider training, peer recovery supporter training, SAMHSA/VA-provided technical assistance, military initiatives, and training and outreach led by our OSPF partners.

Through the Governor's Challenge, ODVS has facilitated federal technical assistance to statewide and community partners through the SAMHSA/VA Servicemembers, Veterans, and Families (SMFV) Technical Assistance (TA) Center. This TA has included community crisis intercept mapping (CIM) project support, federal analysis of Ohio's veteran population and demographics throughout the state, and the facilitation of Ohio's statewide Suicide Mortality Review initiative to help communities collect the information needed to better understand the underlying conditions that may lead to suicide.

In December 2024, the Crisis Intercept Mapping Team of Erie County, led by the ODVS/OVH Peer Recovery Supporter program, was spotlighted nationally by SAMHSA and the VA for their work in saving the life of a Marine veteran in crisis through the partnership built through the TA process. In March 2025, ODVS requested the TA Center provide a second CIM facilitation project for Butler County in support of a veteran suicide prevention initiative led by the Butler County Veterans Services Commission.

In recent years, the OHIOcares website was established through a partnership between ODVS, OhioMHAS, and ONG. The OHIOcares website (ohiocares.ohio.gov) focused on facilitating access to behavioral health resources to service members, veterans, and their families. This all-important website continues to provide improved opportunities for engagement with local behavioral health providers and community organizations that provide culturally sensitive services and support to Ohio's military and veteran community.



Behavioral Health, cont.

The OHIOcares website also helps behavioral health providers identify opportunities to access free training and education on military and veteran cultural competency through the Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) training program and the Governor’s Challenge PsychArmor Training Portal. SBHP is a collaboration led by the Ohio Brain Injury

Program with support from OhioMHAS, ODVS, and ONG. During FY2025, 403 individuals took part in Star Providers training.

Ohio now has 320 local community providers on the Star Providers registry (starproviders.org/ohio) located in 65 counties. Since Ohio started participating in the SBHP program in 2015, a total of 5,077 individuals have participated in the training.

The Governor’s Challenge PsychArmor Training Portal has provided education resources to more than 100 individuals through 15 available training modules.

In May 2025, the Administrator of ODVS’s Office of Veteran Policy & Programs joined forces with representatives of the Ohio Brain Injury Program and the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation at the National Governor’s Challenge Innovations Conference hosted by the VA and federal SAMHSA in Austin, Texas. The Conference brought together more than 200 veteran and military behavioral health advocates from 47 Governor’s Challenge Teams representing 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. Ohio’s team was asked to make two formal presentations at this year’s conference on best practice programs that originated in Ohio and are being replicated across the country. ODVS led a joint presentation with the states of Utah and West Virginia to share best practices regarding the Purple Star School initiative, and OSPF led a plenary session presentation sharing best practices learned from the Life Side Ohio lethal means safety initiative.





Statewide Collaboration

Our mission is to provide opportunities and resources for our veteran community through advocacy, collaboration, and partnerships. Those efforts were fortified in FY2025 as ODVS was able to align with many state agencies and veteran organizations to honor veterans and address important issues facing them.

On May 28, then-Interim Director Tammy Puff supported JobsOhio's outstanding Salute to Service Brunch at The Memorial Tournament and introduced Assistant Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Matthew S. Woodruff during the program, which also featured remarks from JobsOhio President & CEO J.P. Nauseef, tournament founder Jack Nicklaus, and 2025 honoree Barbara Nicklaus.

Also in May, ODVS again was in full support of the Ohio Military Hall of Fame for Valor Induction Ceremony as that organization welcomed 19 very special Ohioans into the Class of 2025 in a ceremony held inside the Ohio Statehouse Atrium.

Another key partner for ODVS is the National Veterans Memorial and Museum, located just down Broad Street in downtown Columbus.

On Sept. 30, ODVS Director Deborah Ashenhurst joined Ohio Adjutant General Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., Gold Star wife Brittney McCall, and others for the unveiling of Ohio's 14th Gold Star Families Memorial Monument on National Gold Star Mother's and Family Day at NVMM.

Director Ashenhurst also served as keynote speaker for the Ohio State Highway Patrol's 2024 Military Service Award Ceremony on Nov. 12, 2024. On March 21, she delivered the keynote address at OSHP's Cadet Graduation at the Patrol Academy in Columbus.





Collaboration, cont.

In another showing of statewide support on Sept. 10, Director Ashenhurst joined State Senator Hearcel F. Craig, Secretary of State Frank LaRose, State Fire Chief 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.

ODVS also continued to join forces with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and numerous volunteers dressed in holiday attire for Christmas in July celebrations at each of the Ohio Veterans Homes.



On April 23, Director Ashenhurst joined Governor DeWine at the 45th Annual Ohio Governor's Holocaust Commemoration. This stirring program included remarks from Tsach Saar, the Deputy Consul General of Israel in New York, and a conversation between the Director and Dan Hurley, the son of a Dachau concentration camp liberator, historian and author.



photo courtesy Cleveland Jewish News (Courtney Byrnes)



Outreach

FY2025 was a banner year for veteran engagement across Ohio, and Director Deborah Ashenhurst and interim Director Tammy Puff, alongside the dedicated team at the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, was front and center at dozens of events that honored service and strengthened community ties. Here's a snapshot of standout moments:

Changing of the Guard (May 2025)

- Interim Director Puff and the ODVS Columbus staff were honored to join Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel, Gold Star Father Kip Soviak, Ohio Assistant Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Matthew S. Woodruff, National Veterans Memorial and Museum Acting President William Butler, legislators, veterans organization leadership, and other dignitaries in honoring Ohio's fallen and their families during the annual Governor's Wreath Laying ceremony, held May 21 in the Atrium of the Ohio Statehouse.
- On May 23, ODVS Interim Director Puff and new OVH Assistant Superintendent Mary Helton were privileged to participate in a Memorial Day ceremony at our Home in Georgetown, helping honor our fallen and the 32 OVH-Georgetown residents who passed in the last year.
- The Ohio Senate honored the service of former ODVS Director Ashenhurst on May 28. After serving in the Ohio National Guard for 37 years, several (2011-2015) as the Ohio Adjutant General, she fulfilled many key duties and advanced the department as Director from January 2019 to May 2025.
- On May 30, Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr. retired his post as Ohio Adjutant General. Governor DeWine swore him in as ODVS's sixth Director before family, friends, and staff members at the Ohio Statehouse at a special ceremony as duties of Ohio's adjutant general were officially transferred to Gen. Woodruff.





Outreach, cont.

Ohio Veterans Conference

The biennial Ohio Veterans Conference, held Aug. 3, 2024, at the Ohio Union on the campus of The Ohio State University, opened its doors to all Ohio veterans, bringing in hundreds of former service members from across the state for a day of inspiration, connection, and support. A great moment was the keynote address by Brigadier General (U.S. Army, retired) Dr. Rhonda Cornum, whose story of resilience as a POW during the Gulf War continues to inspire service members and civilians alike. Her presence underscored the day's theme of strength through adversity.

With more than 100 exhibitors, attendees had access to a wide range of resources from healthcare and education to employment and legal services. The event also featured breakouts, networking opportunities, and updates on state and federal veteran initiatives.

Ohio State Fair and County Fairs

Held July 24-Aug. 4, 2024, the Ohio State Fair featured Veterans & Military Day on Sunday, July 28, offering resources for veterans and active duty military along with free admission. ODVS hosted an interactive booth inside the Bricker MarketPlace Building, participated in ceremonies, and connected thousands to benefits and services Ohio offers its veterans.

ODVS team members also attended numerous county fairs across Ohio's 88 counties, including the Fairfield County and Allen County fairs. These fairs provided opportunities to spotlight local veteran organizations, promote programs like Purple Star Schools, and inform veterans of benefits they earned by serving.



Resource and Hiring Events

- ODVS had a strong presence at the 8th Annual Veteran and Caregiver Resource Fair at the Chillicothe VAMC, allowing us the opportunity to interact with veterans and VA staff members, and share key information about programs, benefits, and our Ohio Veterans Homes.
- Assistant Director Sean McCarthy was part of an all-star panel at the VA's VetResources Community Network national conference just outside of Dayton.



Outreach, cont.

- Veteran Outreach Program Administrator Christina Helm engaged veterans and their care providers at the Caregiver Resource Fair at the Columbus VA Ambulatory Care Center.
- ODVS attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Wilmington, which offers VA healthcare and services to veterans in the Clinton County area.
- Our department also had a strong presence at the 8th Annual Veteran and Caregiver Resource Fair at the Chillicothe VAMC, allowing us the opportunity to interact with veterans and VA staff members, and share key information about programs, benefits, and our Ohio Veterans Homes.
- ODVS served and participated in the annual Central Ohio Stand Down, which provides key resources, healthcare, haircuts, food, and clothing to veterans in need.
- Director Ashenhurst spoke at the VetOhio Expo, an annual event highlighting vet-owned businesses and vet-friendly organizations at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum.
- Held Sept. 7, 2024, at the Paper District Marina in Sandusky, Ohio, ODVS's Community Family Fun & Wellness Expo provided key resources, networking opportunities, and fun activities for military families and those who support them.

Honoring Ohio's Heroes

- Director Ashenhurst gave words of gratitude at the Ohio Elks Association Fall Reunion, a three-day convention in Dublin, Ohio. The organization, with about 35,000 members in Ohio, aims to improve communities and offers contributions to key sects of society, including veterans.
- Director Ashenhurst was honored to serve as keynote speaker for the Columbus State Community College Veterans Day Commemoration Luncheon.
- Program Administrator Danny Eakins spent Memorial Day in Groveport, impacting the community by sharing his experiences and emphasizing the importance of the holiday in his keynote address.
- Director Ashenhurst presented Herbert Davis with a certificate of appreciation signed by Gov. DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted on his 100th birthday at American Legion Post 218 in Middletown.
- Director Ashenhurst attended WWII veteran Moses Eldridge's 108th birthday event in Columbus.
- Director Ashenhurst was the keynote speaker at a rousing tribute to the red, white, and blue and all who served at Veterans Recognition and Living History Day at Hyatts Middle School in Powell.



Outreach, cont.

- At the “Wall that Heals” display in Delaware, Director Ashenhurst spoke of the sacrifice of the 58,281 names engraved along the 3/4 scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Special Initiatives

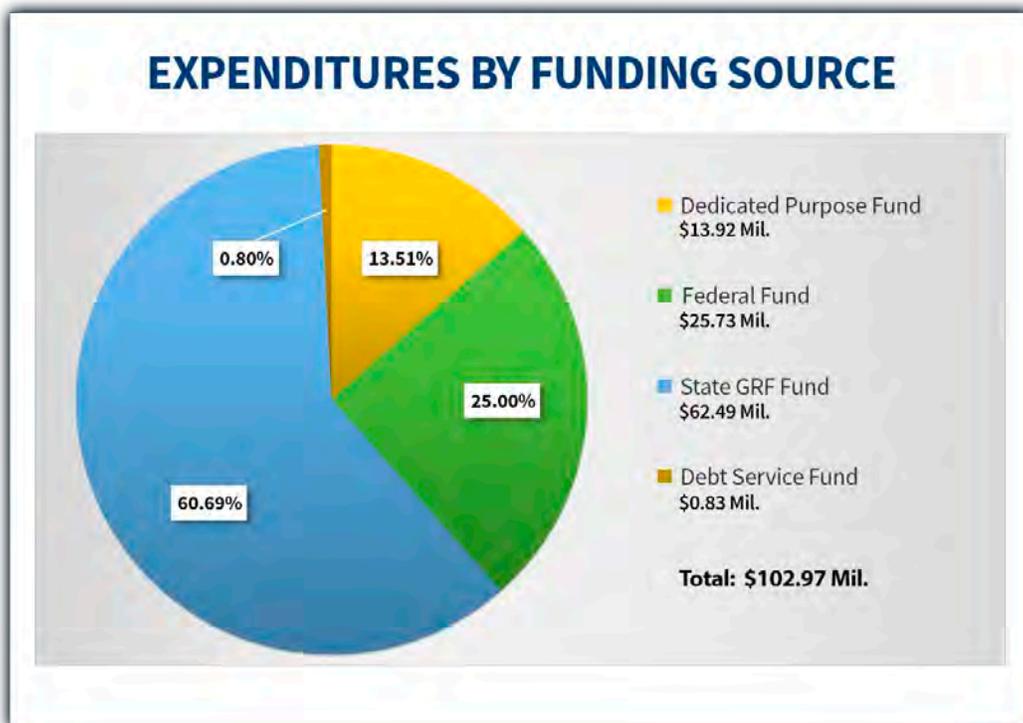
- OVH-Georgetown Executive Secretary Sarah Flint and former ODVS Director Ashenhurst officially presented a cookbook to First Lady Fran DeWine at the Governor’s Residence. The book includes recipes from staff, veterans living in the Homes, volunteers, and the families of former residents.
- Medal of Honor recipient Army Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee visited OVH-Sandusky, shared donuts, and swapped war stories with dozens of residents and staff.
- OVH-Georgetown hosted a “Nature Night” for veterans, their families, and local youth. Josh Pennington, a naturalist for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, brought animal friends for the kids to enjoy, books from Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library of Ohio program were given out along with trail mix snacks, 100-year-old veteran Leola Gray read by the “campfire,” and the evening ended with a fun nature walk on the Memorial Path behind the facility.



- Several residents from the Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky traveled to Progressive Field to take in a Friday night game under the lights in Cleveland. They enjoyed refreshments, hot dogs, and a crowd-pleasing game as the Guardians defeated the Philadelphia Phillies, 6-0.



ODVS Expenditures





Direct Federal Spending

The percentage of Ohio vets who received disability compensation in 2015 was 14.6%. In 2024, it was 27.65%. In the past 10 years, an additional 57,136 Ohio veterans have been connected to disability compensation.

The estimated total amount paid annually by the VA for Disability Compensation in 2015 was \$1,590,710,256. In 2024, the amount was \$3,950,436,659. That's an increase of \$2,359,726,403 in the past ten years.

**Source - VA Annual Benefits Report 2015-2024*

