
VA Office of Tribal Government Relations Newsletter ~ Summer 2021

Greetings!

Welcome to the summer edition of the VA Office of Tribal Government Relations newsletter. It is hard to believe that we are already half-way through 2021. Our team hasn't slowed down much in recent months, even though our work remains "virtual."

On a national front, VA has been participating in regular interagency (along with HHS and USDA) health committee meetings in a concerted effort to strengthen the federal-tribal relationship as part of the White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNA). We will keep our readers updated on this effort as it advances and as we move towards the White House Tribal Nations Summit which will be held later this year. In other news, VA provided briefing updates to the National Indian Health Board Executive Committee and to the National Congress of American Indians Veterans Committee.

In mid-June, our team coordinated a national webinar focused on enrollment and eligibility for VHA health care, specifically for Urban Indian Organizations. On the tribal consultation front, senior VA leadership has been reviewing input from recent VA tribal consultation sessions held during April and May, with agency updates forthcoming later this summer. The call for nominees to serve on the VA Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs opened and closed and the selection committee will be working on final appointments by the end of August.

The tribal government relations specialists have kept a steady pace as well. Terry Bentley, our tribal government relations specialist who covers the VA Western Region, provided a regional update to the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Veterans Committee during their meeting in May. Shortly thereafter, she coordinated a collaboration between the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) and the VHA Portland to host a regional WebEx webinar focused on military sexual trauma (part of a 3 part behavioral health series, the 3rd installment will focus on mindfulness and is scheduled for September 2). She looks forward to further collaborating with Grand Ronde again in a few weeks for a virtual VA benefits claims event to be held July 21-22, 2021. Then, on July 27, she's scheduled to offer a VA briefing update to the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board. Looking ahead, we remain hopeful that travel will begin to open up, and plans are currently in the works for Terry to provide a national/regional VA/tribal affairs update to senior officials attending the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs meeting scheduled to be held in Reno, NV on September 13.

Looking to the Southwest, Homana Pawiki, who works with tribes in the Four Corners states (AZ, NM, CO and UT) provided support for virtual outreach including (but not limited to): May 12, 2021 - VA OTGR Webex Wednesday "VA Native American Direct (Home) Loan Program" and June 9, 2021 VA OTGR Webex Wednesday "Domiciliary Care in the VA." These Webex presentations are recorded and made available to access on the VA OTGR website www.va.gov/tribalgovernment. If you cannot find the topic you are looking for, don't hesitate to email us at: tribalgovernmentconsultation@va.gov and we'll be happy to help find what you need.

Homana also provided assistance and support to five virtual Veterans benefits claims events held across the Navajo Nation (Crownpoint, NM; Shiprock, NM; Fort Defiance, AZ; Chinle, AZ; Tuba City, AZ) on June 8, 15, 22, 29, 13, 2021. The events were supported and coordinated in partnership with the VA Albuquerque Regional Office, the VA Phoenix Regional Office and the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration. Veterans and Family members of Veterans submitted VA Claims at Navajo Nation Agency offices of the NNVA which were then virtually supported by the VBA Regional Offices.

Coming up this week, on July 8, from 9 am to 11:30 am, the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc. Area Agency on Aging, Region 8 (ITCA-AAA) Public Benefits Outreach Project (PBO), is hosting a 2.5-hour overview of VA Programs and Services featuring speakers from VBA, VHA, VA OTGR, Arizona Department of Veterans Services. This event should be thorough and informative, so if you can tune in, I recommend checking it out.

Meanwhile, our tribal government relations specialist who works with tribes in the Southern Plains and Southeastern United States, Mary Culley, stayed very busy. Some highlights included: hosting a three-part Tribal Women Veterans Services summer series session which launched on June 1st. The topics included: Marrying Military and Traditional Culture followed by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Sex Trafficking. This series has been well attended and the audience has been engaged and interactive. If you haven't been able to participate, plan to tune in to the upcoming session and coming up on July 13, Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence.

On June 23rd, the VA Chief of Staff, Tanya Bradsher, offered welcoming remarks to the first ever Center for Women Veterans Tribal Women Veterans Roundtable discussion that Mary was heavily involved with planning. The virtual session was also well attended. Mary is reviewing the issues raised and will be working with VA colleagues to determine next steps from a communications and outreach perspective. The OTGR national and regional WebEx webinars have very much been an "all hands" effort by the team, however, each specialist takes turns being the lead. Mary hosted the OTGR/FEMA Covid-19 Funeral grant program WebEx session, which was very interactive and included a lot of important information for families struggling with losses resulting from the pandemic along with funeral costs incurred during what has been in many respects an unprecedented sad year of loss.

Out in the upper Midwest, Peter has coordinated two WebEx Wednesday webinars: Tribal Veteran Courts/Veteran Justice Outreach and Native Veteran Federal Employment. He also collaborated with the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe in Wisconsin for its virtual claims clinic in May. He has been assisting with the development of VA's Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs, which is on track to have its first convened meeting this September. The selection process for this important advisory committee is currently underway and there will be more updates to follow soon. Peter has also been tasked with representing OTGR on the VA/White House Task Force on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) and he is also currently crafting a training module to provide VA's Office of General Counsel with an overview of Indian law, tribal sovereignty and tribal consultation. Lastly, he assembled the newsletter you're about to read.

Speaking of which, we have another information-packed newsletter for you, so I won't hold up your reading any longer. Wishing all of our readers a safe, healthy and enjoyable summer and please stay in contact with our VA tribal government relations team along the way. We always look forward to hearing from you.



Stephanie Birdwell
Director, VA OTGR



Articles or links to non-Federal services are provided solely as a service to our readers. They do not constitute an endorsement of these organizations or their programs by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and none should be inferred. VA is not responsible for the content of the individual organization web pages found at these links nor the information provided on these events by organizations or individuals.

VA's Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs (ACTIA)

Here's the new ACTIA Charter. For a pdf copy, go to [this LINK](#) or email:Peter.Vicaire@va.gov

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
CHARTER OF THE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AND INDIAN AFFAIRS

1. **OFFICIAL DESIGNATION:** Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs.
2. **AUTHORITY:** The Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs (Committee) is a statutory committee established as required by the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315) and 38 U.S.C. §547. The Committee operates in accordance with provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, as amended, 5 U.S.C. Appendix 2.
3. **OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES:** The Committee provides advice and guidance to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters relating to Indian tribes, tribal organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and Native American Veterans.
4. **DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES:** The Committee serves in an advisory capacity and advises the Secretary on ways the Department can improve the programs and services of the Department to better serve Native American Veterans. The activities of the Committee include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Identify for the Department evolving issues of relevance to Indian tribes, tribal organizations and Native American Veterans relating to programs and services of the Department;
 - Propose clarifications, recommendations and solutions to address issues raised at tribal, regional and national levels, especially regarding any tribal consultation reports;
 - Provide a forum for Indian tribes, tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations, Native Hawaiian organizations and the Department to discuss issues and proposals for changes to Department regulations, policies and procedures;
 - Identify priorities and provide advice on appropriate strategies for tribal consultation and urban Indian organizations conferring on issues at the tribal, regional or national levels;
 - Ensure that pertinent issues are brought to the attention of Indian tribes, tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations and Native Hawaiian organizations in a timely manner, so that feedback can be obtained;
 - Encourage the Secretary to work with other Federal agencies and Congress so that Native American Veterans are not denied the full benefit of their status as both Native Americans and Veterans;
 - Highlight contributions of Native American Veterans in the Armed Forces;
 - Make recommendations on the consultation policy of the Department on tribal matters;

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- Support a process to develop an urban Indian organization confer policy to ensure the Secretary confers, to the maximum extent practicable, with urban Indian organizations; and
 - With the Secretary's approval, conduct other duties recommended by the Committee.

Not less frequently than once each year, the Committee shall submit to the Secretary and the appropriate committees of Congress such recommendations as the Committee may have for legislative or administrative action for the upcoming year.

Not less frequently than once every two years, the Committee shall submit to the Secretary and the appropriate committees of Congress a report describing the activities of the Committee during the previous 2 years.

5. **OFFICIAL TO WHOM THE COMMITTEE REPORTS:** The Committee reports to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs through the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA).

6. **AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING THE NECESSARY SUPPORT:** VA is responsible for providing the funding, organization, and logistical support and resources. Within VA, support for the Committee shall be furnished by OPIA.

7. **ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS AND STAFF-YEARS:** Annual operating cost for the Committee is estimated at \$400,000 per year and 2 full-time equivalent staff to support the Committee. All members will receive travel expenses and a per diem allowance in accordance with the Federal Travel Regulations for any travel made in connection with their duties as members of the Committee. Members shall serve without pay.

8. **DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICER:** The DFO, a full-time VA employee, will approve the schedule of Committee meetings. The DFO or alternate will be present at all meetings, and each meeting will be conducted in accordance with an agenda approved by the DFO. The DFO is authorized to adjourn any meeting when they determine it is in the public interest to do so.

9. **ESTIMATED NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS:** The Committee shall meet in-person with the Secretary, or the Secretary's designee, not less frequently than twice each year and hold conference calls as necessary.

10. **DURATION:** The Committee is exempt from Section 14 of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. Appendix 2) and will not automatically terminate after a period of 2 years.

11. **TERMINATION:** The Committee is authorized by law for an indefinite period of time and, therefore, has no termination date.

12. **MEMBERSHIP and DESIGNATION:** The Committee shall be comprised of 15 voting Members selected by the Secretary from among individuals nominated as specified under the subsection below and shall be designated as Special Government Employees:

A. **APPOINTMENT AUTHORITY:**

- i. At least one member should come from each of the 12 service areas identified by Indian Health Service and said member must be nominated by Indian tribes or tribal organization from that service area.
- ii. At least one member of the Committee represents the Native Hawaiian Veteran community nominated by a Native Hawaiian Organization.
- iii. At least one member of the Committee represents urban Indian organizations nominated by a national urban Indian organization.
- iv. Not fewer than half of the members are Veterans, unless the Secretary determines that an insufficient number of qualified Veterans were nominated.
- v. No member of the Committee may be an employee of the Federal Government.

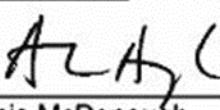
B. **TERMS/VACANCIES:** A member of the Committee shall be appointed for a term of 2 years. If a vacancy occurs, it shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment within 180 days. Additionally, a member may be reappointed for one additional term at the Secretary's discretion.

13. **SUBCOMMITTEE(S):** With the DFO's approval, the Committee is authorized to establish subcommittees to perform specific projects or assignments consistent with this Charter. The Committee Chairperson shall notify the Secretary, through the DFO, of the establishment of any subcommittee, including its function, membership and estimated duration. Such subcommittees may not work independently of the chartered Committee and must report their recommendations and advice to the full Committee for full deliberation and discussion. Subcommittees have no authority to make decisions on behalf of the parent Committee nor can they report directly to VA.

14. **RECORDKEEPING:** Records of the Committee shall be handled in accordance with General Records Schedule 6.2 or other approved agency records disposition schedules. Those records shall be available for public inspection and copying, subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

15. **DATE CHARTER IS FILED:**

Approved:


Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Date

9/23/21

Bill Would Provide Better Education Benefits to Native American Veterans

Here's an [article by Karli Goldenberg](#), which ran in Military.com on June 2, 2021.



The Haskell Indian Nations University Veterans Color Guard presented the colors at Riley's Conference Center during a National American Indian heritage month observance Nov. 16, 2016 at Fort Riley, Kansas. (U.S. Army/Sgt. Dana Moen)

A bill sponsored by a Marine veteran in Congress could bring Department of Veterans Affairs benefits closer to Native American veterans at Tribal Colleges and Universities, or TCUs.

The Native VetSuccess at Tribal Colleges and Universities Pilot Program Act, [H.R. 2878](#), passed the House and was referred to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on May 19. The bill would increase funding for the Veteran Technology Education Course, or VET TEC, program; bolster student veteran housing benefits; and enable partnerships between the VA and nonprofit organizations, states, tribes and localities to fight veteran homelessness.

Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., reintroduced the bill in the House on April 28, along with co-sponsors Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D.; Rep. Tom O'Halleran, D-Ariz.; and Rep. Tom Cole, R-Oklahoma.

"H.R. 2878 helps us keep our promise to Native veterans, a group that has fought for this country in every war since the American Revolution," Gallego, a Marine Corps combat veteran and member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a statement after the bill passed that chamber. "I am proud to have worked across the aisle to assemble this legislative package to help improve access to economic and educational opportunities for veteran communities. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to get it signed into law."

Approximately 14,627 active-duty service members identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, according to a [2019 demographics report](#) from the Defense Department. O'Halleran told Military.com that Native American vets have played a vital role in the U.S. military.

"Our veterans have done so much for our country, and Native Americans have had the highest level of participation in our military on a per capita basis throughout America's history," he said. "We need to acknowledge that, but the best thing we can do for our veterans is to make sure they're highly educated and help them and their families out."

O'Halleran represents Arizona's 1st Congressional District, where 22.3% of residents are Native American, according to 2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau. "We have veterans that have to travel five hours one way to get care and then turn around and go five hours back in the same day," O'Halleran told Military.com. "Even with the added funding that we've seen, it still hasn't gotten to a level where a veteran, whether on tribal lands or in rural America, is getting treated the same as a veteran in urban environments. They need to be able to get the benefits that they deserve."

Native American veterans face unique challenges as they transition from military to civilian life, Johnson said in a statement to Military.com. "Currently, at TCUs, there is no specific programming to help Native Veterans make the transition from active duty to college life," he said. "By expanding the already successful VetSuccess on Campus program to TCUs, Native veterans will be able to access on-campus benefits assistance and counseling that other veterans currently benefit from."

Johnson said he decided to co-sponsor the bill because "educational ... programs are critical to the long-term success of our Native veterans." Moving forward, O'Halleran said that the government "needs to understand that they have to get out there" and proactively reach out to Native veterans.

"There's a fairness issue, and we need to make sure that people start to understand that we have to reach out to our veterans. You can't just sit in Phoenix or Tucson and say, 'Oh, we have a hospital here, or we have a program here,'" he said. "We need to continue down the path of treating our veterans in these tribal and rural areas to the same level as we treat people in the rest of America."



U.S. Department
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 27, 2021

VA plans expansion of benefits for disability claims for conditions related to certain toxic exposures

*New evaluation process to be applied in identifying future
presumptive conditions*

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today two major decisions related to presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange and particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia.

Agent Orange

VA will begin implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), adding three conditions to the list of those presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. Those conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism.

“Many of our Nation’s Veterans have waited a long time for these benefits,” said **Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough**. “VA will not make them wait any longer. This is absolutely the right thing to do for Veterans and their families.”

VA will apply the provisions of court orders related to *Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, which may result in an earlier date for entitlement to benefits for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Vietnam War era Veterans and their survivors, who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions, will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim. VA will send letters to impacted Veterans and survivors.

Particulate Matter Exposures

The Secretary recently concluded the first iteration of a newly formed internal VA process to review scientific evidence to support rulemaking, resulting in the recommendation to consider creation of new presumptions of service connection for respiratory conditions based on VA’s evaluation of a National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine report and other evidence. VA’s review supports initiation of rulemaking to address the role that particulate

matter pollution plays in generating chronic respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis, for Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War and/or after September 19, 2001, or in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War.

"VA is establishing a holistic approach to determining toxic exposure presumption going forward. We are moving out smartly in initiating action to consider these and other potential new presumptions, grounded in science and in keeping with my authority as Secretary of VA," said Secretary McDonough.

VA is initiating rulemaking to consider adding respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, sinusitis, and rhinitis, to the list of chronic disabilities, based on an association with military service in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the covered periods of conflict. VA will conduct broad outreach efforts to reach impacted Veterans and encourages them to participate in the rulemaking process.

For more information, visit our website at [Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures - Public Health \(va.gov\)](#). If you have questions contact Susan.Carter2@va.gov, Randal.Noller@va.gov and Tatjana.Christian@va.gov.

VA Reimburses Over \$137 Million to Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal Health Programs (THPs)

Tribal health programs interested in entering into a reimbursement agreement with VA for serving veterans should send an initial note of interest to: tribal.agreements@va.gov

VA-IHS/THP Reimbursement Agreements Through April 2021

Executive Summary				
	Apr 2021	FY20	FY21 YTD	Since Program Inception
Disbursed	\$2,609,940.33	\$18,477,790	\$13,982,042	\$137,372,326
Unique Veterans	2,560	5,246	5,718	12,988
Inpatient Claims	47	2,557	1,981	7,432
Outpatient Claims	5,788	55,145	32,605	382,477
Total Claims	5,835	57,702	34,586	389,909

	IHS/THP APR 2021	
	IHS	THP
Claims	2202	3633
Unique Veterans	952	1583
Disbursed	\$716,027.35	\$1,893,912.98

Remembering Lori Piestewa This Memorial Day: “All Give Some, Some Gave All”

Here's an article by Levi Rickert, which ran in [Native News Online](#) on May 30th, 2021.

Memorial Day weekend is the unofficial kickoff of summer. With the more relaxed guidelines for Covid-19 from Centers for Disease Controls (CDC) families and friends will get together for backyard cookouts and other celebrations for this Memorial Day.



Spc. Lori Piestewa

Memorial Day is much more than a time of celebration. Memorial Day is a federal holiday when we remember those fallen warriors who lost their lives for the country. It is said that giving your life for your country is the ultimate sacrifice. Memorial Day is a day to remember those warriors who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Throughout American history, American Indians and Alaska Natives have proudly served and died for the United States of America. According to the Oxford Companion to American Military History, American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest record of military service per capita compared to any other racial/ethnic group in the United States.

Remarkably, before American Indians became citizens of the United States in 1924, during World War I (July 28, 1914 – November 11, 1918), some 12,500 American Indians served in the armed forces. They fought for freedom when they weren't even citizens of this country. Almost two-thirds of American Indians who served did so in the infantry, where they won widespread praise for bravery and achievement. Almost five percent of American Indian combat soldiers lost their lives, compared to one percent of American forces overall.

This Memorial Day I remember Spc. Lori Piestewa, a Hopi tribal citizen, who was the first female American soldier to die in the invasion of Iraq. She is also remembered as the first American Indian

woman to die for the United States. Deployed from Fort Bliss in Texas, she had only been in Iraq for five weeks. Spc. Lori was only 23 years old when she gave her life in 2003. She left behind two young children.

For several years, Terry Piestewa, Lori's father and a Vietnam veteran, wore a cap that read: "All give some, some gave all." In the immediate years after Piestewa's death, tribal communities across Indian Country celebrated her life and death. At first, her family found the memorials in her honor difficult at first. As time passed, the family found the memorials and tributes to Lori beneficial.

"Now that it's been going on a while, it's been helping us to heal," her father said. "And it helps our grandchildren to know their mother, because when you're that young, you don't know your parents when they leave. Through what is happening to us, our grandchildren are getting to know their mother quite well. They know that there are a lot of people out there still thinking about their mother."

So, on this Memorial Day, please take time to remember and honor those fallen warriors who gave all. It is part of the healing process.

Interior: Alaska Native veteran land process to proceed

Here's an article which ran in [AP News](#) on May 18, 2021. For questions related to the Alaska Native Vietnam Veterans land allotments, email: Peter.Vicaire@va.gov.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Alaska Native Vietnam War veterans can continue applying for federal land allotments, including on lands under review by the Biden administration, according to the U.S. Interior Department.

The department last month said it was halting plans advanced during the Trump administration that proposed opening 28 million acres in Alaska to mineral development and for land selections. It cited issues including "inadequate review of potential impacts on subsistence hunting and fishing," and said the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which falls under the department, would "engage the public" and consult with tribes. The decision called for a two-year delay.

Members of Alaska's congressional delegation raised concerns with possible land allotment delays. The department later said it would accept applications from Native veterans seeking lands in the area during the two-year review. Tyler Cherry, a department spokesperson, [told](#) the Anchorage Daily News Monday allotments can be awarded before the review is complete. Lands are available for selection until late 2025.

Some veterans have said that lands being made available are difficult to access or outside their cultural homelands. The program seeks to fulfill promises made under the 1906 Alaska Native Allotment Act, which allowed Alaska Natives to apply for up to 160 acres of land.

Tribal HUD-VASH Case Manager: Interview

Here's an interview with Pamela Sparks, providing some insight into VA's Tribal HUD-VASH Program



Pamela Sparks, LCSW, LADC
Tribal HUD-VASH Case Manager

Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System
Muskogee, Oklahoma

How long have you been employed by VA?

I've been with VA for four years now.

Tell us about your job at VA. Describe a few of your duties and how long you have been in this.

My current position is at the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System as a Tribal HUD-VASH case manager for Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Tribal HUD-VASH started as a demonstration project back in 2015 to offer permanent housing and supportive services to Native American Veterans who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Our Tribal HUD-VASH team serves in multiple roles including providing community-based outreach, serving as a liaison to the Muscogee Tribe, and most importantly providing intensive case management and supportive services to our members of the Muscogee tribe who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. I've been on this team since October 2016 and, today, I work with 25 Veterans and their families.

How do you help to prevent and end Veteran homelessness? Are these actions connected to your work at VA or independent of it? How many Veterans do you think have been impacted by your contributions?

When I was in college studying to be a social worker, I was introduced to a quote by President Theodore Roosevelt. He said, "No one cares how much you know, until they see how much you care".

In October 2016, I was so excited to begin a new journey and a new path in my life working at the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System with people experiencing homelessness. Despite my years of study, I quickly learned that this new adventure would require "additional learning" in order to be prepared and equipped to tackle the unique challenges that the Native American Veteran community faces. The approach I take to prevent and end Veteran homelessness with the Muscogee Tribal Nation is three-fold:

Listen.

Learn.

Be Present.

The rippling impact that this program has on a Veteran's life starts with the very first contact. Most often this is a simple phone call with the Veteran, a family member, a friend or a Tribal leader. This call creates an instant and lasting connection between VA and the Veterans. To date, counting our outreach connections and active supportive housing services, our HUD-VASH team has helped over 75 Native American Veterans.

Tell us about what inspired you to become involved in helping to end Veteran homelessness.

My inspiration and for serving Native American families through the Tribal HUD-VASH program comes from a natural connection to my own Native American heritage. My father, an Army Veteran and Cherokee Nation citizen, received his health care through Tribal and VA services. Being his primary care giver has opened my eyes to the vulnerabilities and risks our elder Veterans face. I was always impressed with the care and attention he received from his VA primary care providers and this ability to help was a natural draw for me to join the Tribal HUD-VASH team.

Additionally, I have found this role to be a unique opportunity to meet my own personal and professional goals. Continuous learning is part of my "self-care" strategy, so working with people who are vulnerable and experiencing homelessness seemed like a worthwhile way to grow.

Tell us about the greatest challenge you faced in your efforts to end Veteran homelessness and how you overcame it.

Early on, I discovered and often said to my supervisor, "This is the most character-building job I have ever had." I have welcomed the challenges and the opportunities to grow as an individual and a practitioner. Maintaining self-care and keeping my "empathy tank full" has proved to be a big challenge for me.

To overcome, is a daily process of practicing self-care. I love the daily encouraging words sent out by our VA Chaplin as well as the learning opportunities and skill building in the TMS modules. I often browse the catalog for something new to improve and stay encouraged. Our Muskogee Tribal VASH and HUD-VASH Team are key factors as well. Every task is met with full support from all. Also, the Veterans, they have given me a valuable gift by their willingness to let me grow and learn. They make me want to do my best for them daily. They are gracious, encouraging; even in their most interesting moods, I get to see their heart to still serve God and Country, even today.

What advice would you give to other VA employees who are interested in helping homeless and at-risk Veterans?

There was a line in a recruiting public announcement I remember seeing years ago. It read, "It's not just a job, it's an adventure."

With Tribal HUD-VASH, we walk alongside people who feel they are broken, vulnerable, and disconnected. We see their deepest inner struggles and pain only to then witness the power they have to overcome and reconnect. Step by step.

This is an awesome privilege.

My advice for potential candidates is to remember this: You can't give what you yourself don't already have. So, invest highly in your own self-care. Stay teachable, accountable, and correctable. Most of all, rejoice over the smallest of victories to embrace what each new day brings.

In many ways, Tribal HUD-VASH is the most rewarding position I have had as a social worker.

What else would you like us to know about your efforts to end Veteran homelessness?

I feel very blessed and grateful to be a part of the team here in Muskogee. We work well here because of our team-focused leadership and program structure that goes beyond the typical coworker relationship.

I'll leave you with one more saying: "It's a big job, but many hands make light work." The Team and our medical center leadership's support has been exemplified from day one and has allowed me to "put my own mask on and tend to my family needs" when needed.

If you know a Veteran who is homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless, refer him or her to the nearest VA Medical Center, where Homeless Coordinators are ready to help. Most VA Medical Centers are also staffed with Community Employment Coordinators, who can assist Veterans exiting homelessness with identifying potential job opportunities.

Veterans and their families can also call 1-877-4AID-VET to get connected to VA services.

Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma Air National Guard break ground on housing addition for Cherokee veterans in Tahlequah

Here's an April 5th article which ran in the Anadisgoi. [Access the article through the link](#) for more pictures.



Members of the Oklahoma Air National Guard, Army National Guard, Navy Reserve and Air Force Reserve Command were on hand for the groundbreaking of a Cherokee veterans housing initiative in Tahlequah Monday along with, center from left: Master Sgt. Mitchell Sisco, Innovative Readiness Training program operations manager; retired Brigadier General Brent Wright; Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr.; and Deputy Principal Chief Bryan Warner. The participating military units will provide personnel to construct the 21 new homes as part of the U.S. Department of Defense Innovative Readiness Training program.

TALEQUAH, Okla. — The Cherokee Nation and Oklahoma Air National Guard broke ground Monday at the future site of 21 new homes for eligible Cherokee veterans and their families. The project is part of the Cherokee Veterans Housing Initiative through the U.S. Department of Defense Innovative Readiness Training program. Plans for the new Mige Glory Addition include a total of 21 new homes over the next three years, with the first seven new single-family subsidized homes to be built in the first year along with the necessary infrastructure to support the housing addition.

Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said it was exciting to be at the groundbreaking ceremony Monday surrounded by construction equipment and pipes already in the ground. It is expected that housing pads and framing will be visible in the coming months.

"We know that the need for improving housing in Northeastern Oklahoma is great and that the need for our Cherokee population is even greater," Chief Hoskin said. "We should do everything we can to serve our Cherokee veterans, because they have served us and this great Nation. That's where this housing project comes into play. It could be that our veterans are currently living in housing that just doesn't meet their needs and these homes will better meet that need. We also know there are jarring statistics on veteran homelessness, and that is why we focused on this project over the past few years. Disproportionally, Native veterans are among the homeless veteran population and the more we can do in the area of housing, whether it's emergency rental assistance or this type of long-term housing solution, the better, and we should keep focusing on solutions for this problem. Partnering with these military units, we have the tools and talent to make a big difference."

The Oklahoma Air National Guard, the Army National Guard, the Navy Reserve and the Air Force Reserve Command will provide personnel to construct the new homes as part of the Innovative Readiness Training program. The IRT program provides hands-on, real-world training during the construction process, allowing joint military units an opportunity to improve their deployment readiness.

Master Sgt. Mitchell Sisco, operations manager for the IRT program and a Cherokee Nation citizen from Tahlequah, has worked with the Cherokee Nation to kick off the project. Sisco said he approached the Cherokee Nation about establishing a veterans housing addition through the IRT program after completion of a similar project in Montana in 2016.

"This is a wonderful example of how the military and civilians can work together to help out for a good cause," Sisco said. "The Innovative Readiness Training program has multiple missions: we have construction, medical, cyber, and all kinds of missions where we can go out into the civilian world and leverage our military training requirements with our community partners' requirements to get tangible benefits for them. We have many other construction, medical, and cyber missions throughout the U.S. and its territories."

The Cherokee Nation provided the 30 acres for the project, and the Housing Authority of the Cherokee Nation will provide materials and other basic services for construction of the new homes. The Housing Authority will manage the property and in the future, will open the application process to Cherokee veterans. The Cherokee Nation Office of Veterans Affairs and Cherokee Nation Emergency Management department are also providing support for the project. The new housing addition will be named in honor of the late Cherokee Nation Tribal Councilor Mige Glory, who served in the U.S. Army after being drafted at the age of 18. Glory served as a clerk for the 122nd Evacuation Hospital in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. [Download additional photos](#)

Groups seek recognition at Native American museum veterans memorial

Here's an article by Dana Hedgpeth, which ran in the [Washington Post](#) on April 24, 2021

A group that represents Public Health Service officers who have assisted during natural disasters, in overseas fights against Ebola and recently on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic is seeking recognition on a veterans memorial at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, arguing its members were unfairly left out.

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service alleges that when the design was completed years ago for the National Native American Veterans Memorial, the USPHS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps should have been included.

The memorial, which opened in November, includes the seals of the Navy, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard and Marine Corps. The lawsuit, filed in March in U.S. District Court in D.C., seeks to have the seals of the commissioned officers' groups added.

Not being on the memorial makes public health service members who are Native American feel "marginalized, unimportant, disposable and forgotten," said retired Navy Capt. Jacqueline Rychnovsky, who is also executive director of the Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service. A spokeswoman for the museum said it had no comment.

About 280 Native Americans and Alaskan Natives serve in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. They make up about 6 percent of the corps and represent the highest percentage of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives of the other uniformed services, according to U.S. service statistics.

Public health service and NOAA corps members have a history of service dating to World War I. They serve as doctors, nurses, scientists and engineers in assignments overseas and on tribal reservations. Many have also cared for those sick with the coronavirus and administered the vaccine.

Rear Adm. Brandon Taylor, who has served in the USPHS for more than 23 years and is a member of the Seneca-Cayuga Nation in Oklahoma, said many Native American tribes view their "citizens who have served in the armed forces as warriors."

"We may not carry weapons, but we fight," Taylor said. "We are public health warriors. We fight in the silent war against disease, and we fight every day to promote, protect and advance the health and safety of our nation." Not being recognized on the American Indian museum's memorial, Taylor said, was "very disheartening." The suit says the exclusion of Public Health Service and

NOAA commissioned corps veterans reinforces a misconception that the two branches “are not ‘the real military,’ continuing the stigma” they say their members often face.

Rychnovsky, a member of the Osage Nation of Oklahoma, said Native Americans who have served in the two corps “have earned the right to be acknowledged on the memorial alongside their sister services.” Not including them, she said, is “an egregious oversight and unequivocally discriminatory.”

She also said there is enough space at the memorial to add two more plaques. Still, officials said, any changes to the memorial might not be easy.

The American Indian museum memorial was created through an act of legislation passed in 1994. It was meant to honor Native Americans, Native Hawaiians and Native Alaskans who served in the armed forces.

The memorial features a 12-foot, stainless steel circle balanced on a carved, stone drum. The circle is meant to represent “the hole in the sky where the creator lives,” according to Harvey Pratt, a Cheyenne and Arapaho member who designed the memorial. It includes plaques to honor the five armed forces. When the NMAI memorial legislation passed, the Public Health Service and NOAA corps weren’t specifically included in the legislation’s wording, officials said.

Kevin Gover, who was then director of the museum, wrote in a 2019 letter that the legislation to create the memorial mentions the five armed forces but “does not mention the Commissioned Corps.” Officials with the Commissioned Corps said they filed the suit after letter-writing campaigns to congressional leaders, officials at the Smithsonian Institution and the museum.

In 1917, the Public Health Service was made part of the nation’s military forces during World War I, with members detailed to the Coast Guard, Navy and Army, according to the Military Coalition, which represents several military service groups. More than 600 of its officers served with the Coast Guard and some of them were on cutters that were “lost to enemy action” in World War II, according to the coalition.

Members of the NOAA Corps also served in World War II in a variety of roles, including as artillery and reconnaissance surveyors, as well as engineers. Rear Adm. Kevin Meeks, a member of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma who served for 32 years in the Public Health Service, said not being included in the memorial was disheartening. He wrote in a letter to museum officials: “We may not be an armed service, but we are on the front lines of protecting our country against disease and injury every day.”

Poem: “A Veteran is like Nature”

Here's a poem written by Vietnam Veteran George Bennett Sr. It ran in the [Juneau Empire](#) on May 19, 2021

Just like nature, you have to respect a veteran.

Nature can change in a heartbeat, so can a veteran, so you have to prepare yourself to deal with both.

Nature can be warm and gentle, so can a veteran.

A veteran like a Pacific salmon has endured many storms, and yet return to his home turf.

Like the bear, a veteran knows where he/she came from.

Like the mountains, even though it could be covered with clouds, a veterans always stands tall.

When we walk in the forest, we are aware of our surroundings, what is in the forest, the sounds and the smell. We have to be aware of the veterans mind, body and soul.

To walk with a veteran, and to thank them, just like thanking nature to all she offers for us to live, so does the veteran, he/she has offered their life for this great country of ours, so that we can live in peace.

It is our job to take care of mother nature, as she will always take care of us, now it is our turn to take of the veteran(s).

— George J. Bennett Sr.



Ben Hohenstatt / Juneau Empire File George Bennett Sr., seen in this July 2020 photo, served in Army's 25th Infantry Division during the Vietnam War.

Voice from the past: Northern Cheyenne combat vet reconnects with long-ago platoon buddy

Here's an article written by Paul Hamby of the [Billings Gazette](#). It ran on April 11, 2021.

Laura Rockroads was in bed at her Busby home in 1970 when she heard a knock at the door. The mother of three answered each knock with "enter" in Northern Cheyenne. The door opened; a face she hadn't seen in a year peered in. It was her son.



Army veteran Thomas Rockroads Jr. served in Vietnam. The medals and ribbons displayed on a rack pinned to his uniform show that during his time in service he earned the Bronze Star for valor, Combat Infantry Badge and National Defense Service Medal. LARRY MAYER, Billings Gazette

Thomas Rockroads Jr., now 72, returned home from combat in Vietnam before he was even legally allowed to vote. In spite of her rheumatoid arthritis, Laura sprang from the couch and yelled. The two had last seen each other in Billings, as Thomas boarded a 747 to begin his deployment. They had parted then with a Northern Cheyenne song that, 52 years later, the Bronze Star recipient still sings.

"My mother used to tell me different stories, and there was one that got me to go into the military. There was a Cheyenne camp, and there was a young man that was leaving the village...And it's a true story, it's not a Hollywood story. This young man had a female friend, a girlfriend so to speak, and he was riding away. As he was riding away, he stopped on horseback and turned around. He sang a song... 'If I'm not back, I might come back by fall time when the leaves start to fall...And if I don't come back by spring, when the buffalo shed their fur, that means I'm gone from the face of the Earth,'" Rockroads told The Billings Gazette.



Thomas Rockroads Jr., in paratrooper training at Fort Benning, Ga.
LARRY MAYER, Gazette Staff

Rockroads' story has been etched into cyberspace, on newsprint and in the U.S. Congressional record. And, it was his contribution to the "Vietnam Voices" that turned up in a search by one of his old platoon members. It led Dennis Joanethis, a former private first class in the 173rd, to hold another reunion with Rockroads that was also decades overdue.

"Anybody that hasn't been in heavy-duty combat, you can't communicate. You can't talk about things you experienced: death, survival mode for 365 days...I got really emotional when my buddy, Dennis called me on the phone after Vietnam Voices. I was hoping that somehow, somehow, one of my comrades, brothers in battle, would reach out," said Rockroads, whose lineage contains veterans spanning back more than a century.

In the 1880s, his great grandfather James Rockroads put on a uniform of the United States military to serve as a scout for Gen. Nelson A. Miles. Three generations later, his great-grandson would do the same before guerrilla warfare training in Puerto Rico, and then on to the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

Thomas Rockroads grew up in a home that had been in the family for generations. It sits in a lonely part of the reservation several miles outside Busby. As a 6-year-old, Thomas began attending school, his father taking him to the bus stop by horseback or by sleigh. Although at the time, the Rockroads home had no electricity or plumbing, the family fed itself on what they could hunt and harvest. Elk, antelope, plums and turnips were coupled with essentials like sugar and flour from the general store. Before he ever stepped foot in a recruiter's office, Rockroads already knew how to make a bland government ration of beef and rice palatable.

"They lived a real conservative way of life, my parents, and I think that's kind of what put me through in Vietnam. I wasn't too choosy, so to speak, and that's the way they raised me...The C-

rations, that's like rations that I remember getting at home. You had to cook them so that they would be tasty," he said.

Rockroads came of age learning to speak Northern Cheyenne fluently. While he picked up traditional songs from his mother, he also developed a taste for rock 'n' roll. He formed a band with three others, the Cheyenne Night Raiders, that would later become the Lancers. Although he could play rhythm guitar, the teenage Rockroads opted to fill in percussion on the band's covers of the Kinks, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones on a drum set made of an old ironing board and aluminum pot lids. He used chokecherry branches as drumsticks.



Thomas Rockroads Jr. says it's easier to talk about combat experiences with other combat veterans. "You can't talk about things you experienced: death, survival mode for 365 days...I got really emotional when my buddy, Dennis called me on the phone...." Contributed photo

A photo framed by his mother's bead work shows Thomas in his junior year at what was then Tongue River Boarding School, his dark hair sculpted and eyes behind thick, black glasses à la Buddy Holly. The same year that he stood for his high school photo, he hitchhiked to Hardin to find the Selective Service office.

Deployment

With uncles who parachuted into wars in Europe and Korea, Rockroads maneuvered his way into Army Airborne School, then into a unit bound for combat. In September 1969, the teen rock and roller from Busby was an infantryman dropping into the Tiger Mountains of Vietnam.

A month into his tour, he watched a helicopter leave a hillside with the remains of two men, radio-telephone operators killed by a suspected 105 mm howitzer round rigged to explode. Rockroads held one of the men while he took his last few breaths.

"The next morning, we couldn't find (a soldier named) Reyes. On the other side of the hill, they found two ribs about six inches long. When the medevac came in, that's what they took," he said. That same morning, Pfc. Dennis Joanethis, who became known as "the Greek," walked onto the same hillside. His first assignment as a new platoon member was to drop off two personnel files at a first aid station.

"I come over carrying these 201 files, and the medic says, 'They must have been those two guys from last night.' Thomas was with these guys when they got killed, and so those two guys were the first two guys that I knew coming into the company," said Joanethis, who arrived at Delta Company in October 1969.

Until the end of his tour, comforts were few for Rockroads and the rest of his company. Those comforts came in the form of packages of pemmican and fry bread sent by his parents, and the top 40 hits broadcast by Armed Forces Vietnam Network in the early morning.

Rockroads and Joanethis fell into a battle rhythm that had them patrolling the area around seven villages during the day, passing out C-rations and cigarettes to the local Vietnamese who asked for them. At night, they prepared ambushes for the North Vietnamese Army.

During his first patrol, assigned as point man, Rockroads killed an NVA soldier. In the soldier's rucksack, he found orders to the 22nd NVA regiment, medicine, a stethoscope, an M16 and a Sony transistor radio.



Thomas Rockroads Jr. and his platoon patrolled an area near seven Vietnamese villages, occasionally passing out C-rations and other items. Contributed photo

"When my parents sent me different dried meat and food, pemmican and corn balls, I always managed to pray and give to the spirits the way we did growing up. So to me, playing in a rock and roll band, that radio I think it came to me in a way...I would listen to that radio and the songs that came to that radio station, a lot of those songs we used to play. It just made my day," Rockroads said. "You know The Animals? 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place?' That was pretty much our anthem."

Almost a year to the day after he stepped foot into Vietnam, Rockroads was back in the states. He left in a haze of yellow, red and white created by smoke bombs tied to the tail rotor of the helicopter that carried him out of the Central Highlands.

There's no official record of how many Northern Cheyenne men and women served in Vietnam. Incoming paperwork for the U.S. military labeled almost every enlisted Indigenous person who didn't say otherwise as "Hispanic," "Mongolian" or simply "Other," according to one study of the men who served in the war. Rockroads, who left the Army with no physical wounds, knows at least three tribal members who went overseas the same as him, and died in combat. Their names are on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Rockroads visited the memorial in the late '80s. He found their names, took several steps away from the memorial, turned and saluted. He'd have to wait several more years before receiving an official diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder. His parents saw symptoms in their son as soon as his return to their home in 1970.

"When my parents knew that there was something wrong with me, knew I couldn't sleep, and would get up in the middle of the night toward morning and walk. I'd stay gone for a couple days and just walk, or being agitated or just jumpy. That's when they had several ceremonies going on as part of what's called the Native American Church.

"The organization deals with God's love, care and hope and charity, those are the four main characteristics...We use peyote as a sacrament. The hippies, they think you get a high from it, but that's not what it is. It's a sacrament," Rockroads said.

Reconnecting

While Rockroads received treatment through both the VA and traditional ceremonies, Joanethis spent 45 days in a course designed to treat PTSD. Although his stay came nearly 40 years after his return from Vietnam, Joanethis said the catharsis from his stay at the New Jersey VA hospital spurred his decision to reconnect with Rockroads and the rest of those who he served with in the 173rd. With a manifest that came to him courtesy of his old platoon sergeant, his search has helped in contacting 12 men over the past decade.

"You forget the faces, but you never forget the names...I couldn't believe it when I saw the Rock as a part of that 'Vietnam Voices,'" he said.

Joanethis, who lives in South Carolina, has connected with members of the 173rd during official reunions and over the phone. It was 2021, more than 50 years since the two met in Vietnam, when the Greek and the Rock spoke. Their first conversation led to an exchange of memories. Joanethis said he's managed to collect photographs of men and places that Rockroads hasn't seen in five decades.

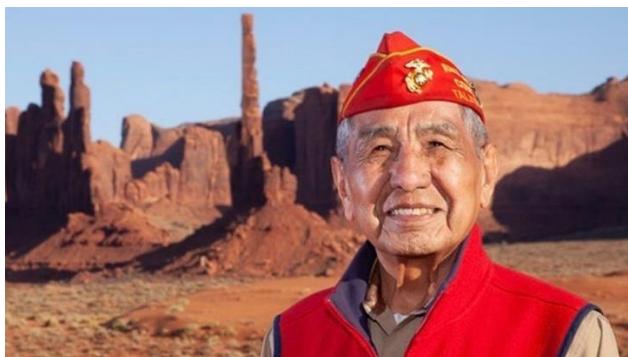
During that first conversation, the two recalled Reyes and a second soldier named Shipley, the RTOs killed only a month into Rockroad's deployment to the Tiger Mountains. Rockroads will never forget Shipley's face during his last few moments of life, and Joanethis remembered his name.

Joanethis mailed a photo to Rockroads, in which the two are standing alongside five others. Behind them is the jungle of the Central Highlands, and in front a Viet Cong flag. Rockroads can't say whether all the men in the photo even made it out of Vietnam alive, but having it now and looking at it is its own kind of catharsis.

"I prayed that I would be able to find my brothers. I would pray in the sweat lodge, and at the Sun Dance, or the peyote meeting or fasting... I guess you don't ever mention you want to die, that's not in our culture, but just coming from the standpoint of what I know, now that I've finally got to talk to my buddy from 50 years ago, I feel like my life's complete," Rockroads said.

Navajo Code Talker on legacy, VA care, COVID-19 vaccine

Here's an article by Mary Dillinger, Public Affairs Officer, Northern Arizona VA Health Care System. It ran in the [VA Insider on May 19, 2021](#).



Navajo Code Talker and USMC Veteran Peter MacDonald. More than 400 Navajo Code Talkers served during WWII and only four are still living. Marine Corps Veteran Peter MacDonald is one of those four. He continues to share his story and experience as a Navajo Code Talker.

MacDonald served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1944 – 1946. After joining the Corps, he was sent to training with other Navajo service members. The training was hard and they were sent to a top-secret Navajo Code Talker school to memorize more than 600 code words. The code talker language was unbreakable even though enemies tried for two years to decipher.

Instrumental in enemy surrenders

MacDonald went to Guam with the 1st Marine Brigade and later was transferred to the 6th Marine Division. His task was to report to north China where one million Japanese soldiers were refusing to surrender. The code talker language was unbreakable even though enemies tried for two years to decipher. The soldiers eventually surrendered on October 25, 1945, and MacDonald and his unit were discharged a year later.



Peter MacDonald in uniform during his time in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Of the four Navajo Code Talkers with us, two live in New Mexico and two in Arizona. MacDonald says they all keep in touch. They still recall some of their code words and the men they served with.

Code Talker museum to communicate Navajo culture

The Navajo Code Talkers history is important not just to Navajo Veterans, but to other service members. To commemorate their legacy, there will be a Navajo Code Talker Museum built near Tse Bonita, New Mexico, on the Arizona side near Navajo Nation. COVID-19 has postponed the ground-breaking.



MacDonald receives COVID-19 vaccine at the Tuba City VA clinic.

The museum will be an educational, living museum, focusing on children, the next generation and the generations to come. The museum will help all learn about the Navajo language, the culture and especially the resilience and determination of the code talkers during the war. The museum will also focus on the Navajo way of life and their values. "The hope is that the museum will bring together all walks of life to learn how the code talkers were able to use their language to bring peace, liberty and freedom," said MacDonald.

Recommends everyone get vaccine

MacDonald resides on the Navajo reservation and receives his care at the Tuba City VA Clinic. He recently received his COVID-19 vaccine and strongly recommends everyone get their vaccine as well. "This particular virus is deadly, especially here on the Navajo lands where more than 1,000 people have died from it," he says.

MacDonald thinks people should be wearing masks, maintaining their distance and avoiding crowds. He says these are the weapons we have to get rid of this virus and we need to use them. "Navajo is a very family related society and we miss one another but if we follow these rules and get vaccinated, we will be able to see each other sooner and not spread the virus further."

"If an old man like me can do it without any side effects, you can too," says MacDonald.

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi Reintroduces Resolution Recognizing the Eagle Staff as The First Flag of The Sovereign Native American Tribal Nations

Here's a press release which ran on Congressman [Krishnamoorthi's website](#) on April 16, 2021

WASHINGTON – Today, [April 16, 2021] Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi reintroduced his resolution to recognize the Eagle Staff as the first flag of the sovereign Native American tribal nations and encourage programs promoting its cultural significance. The Eagle Staff, often carried by Native American veterans, consists of a shepherd's staff wrapped in either otter skin or buffalo skin and eagle feathers.

"Our Native American communities have suffered, especially during this pandemic, and this recognition of a significant tradition and symbol I hope send a message of love and support to them," said Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi. "We are lucky to have the Trickster Cultural Center in my district. For generations, the Eagle Staff has represented the Native American communities, and it is long overdue for the United States

Government pay its respects in this way. This flag represents tribal sovereignty, unity, and tradition, and the strength of the Native American community makes the entire United States stronger."

"This is a proud day to share the history of the Native American Veterans' way to honor those who have given their lives for this country with Eagle feathers," said Joe Podlasek, CEO of the Trickster Cultural Center for Native American art and an enrolled member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe tribe. "Sharing this historic fact of the Eagle Staff does not take away from the Flag of the United States but rather adds to the prehistory and values of the First People of these lands, Native American Veterans/Warriors.

With Native American having the highest percentage per capita of any other race of people to serve historically at 22%, for the United States Military and using our language to win some of the most important wars in United States history, shows our respect for the Country and protecting the homelands and holding our values of the Eagle Staff at the same time. Thank you for your support."

The text of the resolution is available [here](#).

COVID-19 housing project aims to help homeless Vets on Blackfeet Reservation

Here's an article from John McGill of the [Glacier Reporter](#), which ran on June 9, 2021.

What began as a plan to provide temporary housing for folks needing to be isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic has turned into an opportunity for Veterans to work their way back into civilian life on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Blackfeet Veterans Alliance Director Leo Pollock explained the Blackfeet Tribe and Incident Command purchased four self-contained trailers from a company in Canada as temporary isolation units when COVID-19 broke out nationally. However, as the pandemic subsided and vaccines were administered to the vast majority of Reservation residents, the trailers began to be seen as an answer to Veterans returning after having served their country.

"Even now, Veterans go back to living with their grandparents or mom and dad, especially those who are single," Leo said. "It's kind of a culture shock where they've been independent and now they're back to living like a little kid."

Finding employment post-service can be challenging as well, he noted, depending on the type of training received during their time in the military. "Some skills translate well," he said, "like leadership skills – that translates well to any job."



Blackfeet Veterans Alliance Director Leo Pollock shows off one of the kitchens inside a temporary housing unit aimed at returning Veterans. The temporary housing units near Blackfeet Community Hospital come complete with an outdoor barbecue as well as many creature comforts for returning Veterans. Landscaping and such are on the menu for the four housing units destined to serve returning Veterans as they transition to civilian life

The trailers themselves are located near Blackfeet Community Hospital. “We will be looking for help to create an improved road into the units and create better groundwork around the trailers,” he said, “as well as having stoops or handicap ramps installed to create a safer handicap accessible residence. We will also look to have a security fence established around the premises.”

The trailers are fully furnished and come complete with an outdoor barbecue, stove, refrigerator and two flat-screen TVs. All that is needed for a Veteran to move in would be clothing, pots and pans and dishes. The trailers are set up as duplexes so the four units can house up to eight Veterans at a time.

And as Leo emphasizes, the aim is to put Vets on a path toward homeownership, using the dwellings as a stepping stone to accumulate capital in a secure situation. “This will give us time to better understand what assistance will be available to Veterans from Manpower as well as any other Veteran Affairs programs,” he said. “We will slowly transition when feasible to having Veterans Affairs assist us in transitioning from a Blackfeet Housing voucher to using the Tribal HUD-VASH vouchers to continue with rental assistance. As we continue to find viable means to support our Veterans, we will also be working with programs to find permanent housing solutions for our Blackfeet Veterans.”

At present, Leo and the Veterans Alliance are building a list of eligible Veterans and have received some questions about the project. At the same time, they are wrapping up details around the units to make them entirely ready for occupancy – from completing small projects to arranging insurance.

Vouchers from Blackfeet Housing and later from HUD VASH monies will pay the rent on the units for the Veterans, leaving them only responsible for utilities and food.

“Rent will be used to pay for the maintenance, upkeep, beautification of the area for our tenants and assist with on-site staffing needs,” Leo said. “Utilities will be responsibility of the tenant. However, we will work with the Tribal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to assist them in keeping the cost of utilities down.”

VHA/IHS Memorandum of Understanding Report

Click on the image below or [HERE](#) to access the annual report which was released in May 2021. If you have trouble accessing it, email Peter.Vicaire@va.gov for a copy.



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
and
Indian Health Service
Memorandum of Understanding
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2020**

Prepared by:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Rural Health

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Indian Health Service

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Tribal Government Relations

May 2021



AI/AN Veteran Cemeteries Report

Click [HERE](#) or on the image below to access the report online. If you have trouble accessing it, email Peter.Vicaire@va.gov for a copy.

American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans: Burial Ceremonies and Customs In U.S. National Cemeteries

A Report Presented Through the
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials,
to the
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington D.C.

By

Joey Strickland and Ed Saunders
Members, Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials
May 7, 2019



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 13, 2021

VA to readjudicate Veteran and survivor claims for possible herbicide exposure

WASHINGTON — Veterans who were previously denied service connection for an [herbicide related presumptive condition](#) due to lack of in-country Vietnam service will have their claims automatically readjudicated by VA.

The department began readjudicating claims in April for Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War but were denied for one or more herbicide related conditions on the basis that military service was not performed on the landmass of the Republic of Vietnam or on its inland waterways.

“Readjudication means VA will review the evidence of record and provide replacement decisions in the cases of Veterans who were previously denied service connection benefits,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “We have the proper resources in place to meet the needs of our Veteran community and will ensure all eligible Veterans’ and their survivors’ claims are examined thoroughly and fairly.”

The review also applies to eligible survivors of deceased Vietnam-era Veterans and is part of the Veterans Benefits Administration’s implementation of the Nov. 5, 2020, U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California [decision](#) to readjudicate previously denied claims as applied in [Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

VA will determine if benefits can now be paid retroactively based on the Veteran’s presumption of herbicide exposure through [Public Law 116-23, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019](#). The court’s decision requires automatic readjudication in such cases without requiring a new claim, and potentially paying benefits to the estates of deceased Veterans.

More information is available regarding VA disability benefits based on [Agent Orange exposure](#).

###

American Indians in the 45th Infantry Division

Here's an article from Denise Neil, Executive Director of the 45th Infantry Division in Oklahoma City, OK. It ran on November 27, 2020 in the [National WWII Museum website](#).

Since its inception, Native Americans from the tribes of Oklahoma have served in the National Guard with pride and honor. During World War I, Colonel A. W. Bloor, commander of the 142nd Infantry, 36th Division, tested and deployed a code, using the Choctaw language in place of regular military code. Many of the Choctaw [code talkers](#) were members of the Oklahoma National Guard. Bloor would give his orders to the Indians in English. They would translate them into Choctaw for transmission, after which the message would be retranslated into English. It was an effective communication device and a practice that continued during World War II.



Oklahoma Native American Guardsmen dressed in their regalia at Camp Bowie, Texas, 1917. Courtesy of the 45th Infantry Division Museum.

After the First World War, the National Guard was reorganized under the National Defense Act of 1920. The legislation had far-reaching effects on the Oklahoma National Guard. The act led to the formation of the 45th Infantry Divisions, which comprised of National Guard units from Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. With a high percentage of Native people living in these states, the 45th's Indigenous ranks continued to grow. Even the shoulder-sleeve patch and distinctive unit insignias for the division were steeped in Native American iconography.

Among the Indigenous soldiers serving in the Oklahoma National Guard were young men who had attended the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School in Oklahoma. The boarding school system for Native Americans was fraught with problems, including cultural genocide. However, the military discipline employed by school administrators did prepare students for service in the Armed Forces. Furthermore in Oklahoma, C Company, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division, was located on the Chilocco campus. Many of the Indigenous soldiers from Oklahoma that served in World War II were members of the 180th, including Medal of Honor recipients [Ernest Childers](#) (Muscogee-Creek) and Jack Montgomery (Cherokee). Even the famed World War II cartoonist Bill Mauldin was influenced by the Indians serving with the 45th Division. Mauldin's military career began with the 45th. His cartoon character Willie was inspired by fellow soldier, Rayson Billey, a Choctaw Indian from Keota, Oklahoma.

The 45th Division was called into federal service in September 1940 to train for possible US engagement in World War II. At the time, there were approximately 2,000 Native Americans representing 50 tribes serving in its ranks. Training first at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the 45th's ranks slowly began to swell with non-guardsmen from across the country. By the time the Thunderbirds reached Fort Devens, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1942, the division consisted of men from 47 states. However, that did not mean that the impact of American Indian soldiers was diminished. Still, before they proved their mettle in battle, they had to overcome stereotypes and racist attitudes while training stateside.



Dave Cummings (Muscogee-Creek) Fort Devens, 1942. Courtesy of the 45th Infantry Division Museum.

After the division left Fort Sill to train at Camp Barkeley near Abilene, Texas, the Native Americans serving with the Thunderbirds attracted little notice. However, in Massachusetts, and later New York, the Native American soldiers were met with trepidation by the local community. As Sergeant Don Robinson wrote in his book *News of the 45th*,

There can be little doubt that the perceptions of Native Americans were formed through pop culture representations in the movies and dime store novels. However, rather than shrink from view, the Native Americans took the opportunity to educate the public about Indigenous culture and put to rest the notions that they were "blood-thirsty savages."

Indigenous Thunderbirds from Oklahoma and New Mexico made dance regalia, drums, and flutes. They began to perform ceremonial songs and dances at schools for Boy Scout troops, at churches, and other civic institutions, as well as USO shows and war bond rallies. The performances captured the imagination of many and ultimately led communities to understand Native American culture better. By the time the Thunderbirds left for Sicily's shores in June 1943, the Indian dancers had performed for an estimated 400,000 people. The local newspapers did not miss an opportunity to report on this unique form of entertainment, and the New Englanders gained a newfound respect for the Native American soldiers of the division.

While the dancers performed, the division's Native Americans also excelled in their military training. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson observed Chauncey Matlock (Pawnee) instructing soldiers in the use of bayonets. He stopped to compliment him. Remarking that Matlock was the "finest instructor in bayonet practice, I have ever seen." The Indigenous Thunderbirds also excelled in rapidly rising through the ranks. Major Lee Gilstrap of the division noted that "The Indians make such fine soldiers. We have Indian officers holding ranks as high as lieutenant colonel."

The American Indians of the 45th Infantry Division left their mark on New England. They also made an impression overseas during the division's 511 days in combat. Three of the division's eight Medal of Honor recipients were Native Americans. Ernest Childers, C Company, 180th Regiment, was honored for his exceptional bravery near Oliveto, Sicily, on September 21-22, 1943. Jack Montgomery, I Company, 180th Regiment, was recognized for his heroic efforts at Anzio near Padiglione on February 22, 1944. Van T. Barfoot (Mississippi Choctaw), I Company, 157th Regiment, received his Medal of Honor for actions near Carano, Italy, on May 23, 1944.

Although the Navajo code talkers' wartime exploits are well-known, they were not alone in the use of their Native language in America's military. The Pawnee code talkers transmitted, received, and encrypted sensitive tactical messages in the Pawnee language. Seven of the nine Pawnee code talkers served with the 45th Infantry Division. Staff Sergeant Frank Davis, Sergeant Brummett Echohawk, Sergeant Grant Gover, Staff Sergeant Phillip Gover, Staff Sergeant Chauncey F. Matlock, Sergeant Harold W. Morgan, and Master Sergeant Floyd E. Rice were formally recognized for their

WWII contributions in 2013 when they received the Congressional Gold Medal. They were inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame in 2015.



Portrait of Phillip Gover (Pawnee), WWII Code Talker, by fellow Thunderbird Brummett Echohawk (Pawnee). Courtesy of the 45th Infantry Division Museum.

When World War II came to an end, the 45th Infantry Division once again faced reorganization. The Thunderbirds were no longer a multi-state entity; instead, the division would solely represent the Oklahoma National Guard. Native Americans remained a vital part of their ranks. Some men served in both World War II and Korea. O.T. Autry (Muscogee-Creek) began his service with the 45th, serving with the 189th Field Artillery Battalion. During the Korean War, he was commander of the 189th. His service to the Oklahoma National Guard spanned 34 years. He worked his way up the ranks to become the division artillery commander and obtained the rank of brigadier general. His outstanding and heroic service earned him the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, two bronze arrowhead for amphibious landings, and 10 battle stars for campaigns in the two wars.

Like Autry, Hal Muldrow (Choctaw) began his military career in the field artillery during World War II. He was the commander of the 45th Infantry Division field artillery during the Korean Conflict. Muldrow was promoted to major general in 1952 and was the commander of the 45th Infantry Division, Oklahoma National Guard until his retirement in 1960. During his career, he was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster, American Defense Medal; EAME Theatre Ribbon with eight battle stars, Legion of Merit, United Nations Campaign Service Medal, Korean Campaign Service Medal with three bronze battle stars, and the Korean Presidential Unit Citation. The 45th Infantry Division was deactivated in 1968; however, their lineage and honors are carried on within the Oklahoma National Guard units. Oklahoma's Indigenous citizens, men and women, continue to serve their state and their country with distinction.

To learn more, please visit the [*45th Infantry Division Museum*](#).



Improving Cultural Competency when Serving American Indian/Alaska Natives

Presented by

CAPT R. Andrew Hunt, MSW, LICSW

Duration: 1.5 hours

There is no fee for this program.

Release Date: June 1, 2021

Expiration Date: May 31, 2024

Media Format

Prerecorded online video and online quiz.

Description

This course provides a framework for working in cross-cultural settings, and a purposeful approach to understanding and adapting practices for cultural differences in American Indian/Alaska Native communities. The course will describe the cultural competence model developed by Cross, et all, which defines cultural competence as "the state of being capable of functioning in the context of cultural differences." Cultural competence is a commitment of individuals and agencies to engage in the ongoing developmental process of moving along the cultural competence continuum. The presentation will review the content of SAMHSA's Culture Card: a guide to build cultural awareness as a tool in the process of ongoing cultural competence.

Objectives/Outcomes

By the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Define the term "cultural competence" and identify the five elements of the cultural competence model.
2. Examine one's own culture and reactions to cultural differences.
3. Utilize the American Indian/Alaska Native Culture Card as a resource to build cultural awareness.

Target Audience

All members of the healthcare team.

Content Skill Level

Beginner

Beginner level courses introduce learners to a content area; include information about a condition, treatment method, or issue; and involve learning and comprehending content.

WEBINAR: Women Veterans

Click [HERE](#) or on the flyer below to access the recorded webinar. The password is: OTGRWebex@2021



EFFECTIVELY UNDERSTANDING and ASSISTING WOMEN VETERANS' SENSITIVE and UNIQUE NEEDS on a DISABILITY CLAIM

Discuss sensitive issues associated with a woman Veteran's disability claim on healthcare such as gynecological, mental health, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and numerous health needs, concerns, and issues related to the claims process.

Objective: To help those who provide service and assistance to women Veterans on how to understand, assist, and allow Veterans and Veterans Service Representatives the knowledge and understanding of the various disability claims and types of questions to ask. The presentation will provide specific guidance and information Service Officers and Veterans can utilize when pulling information together and submitting as part of the claims process.

Heather served in the US Marine Corps. Upon retirement she earned a Bachelor's of Science and Master's Degree in Social Work. She has worked for the Department of Veteran Affairs for over 10 years.



Heather McKibben

Supervisory MST Coordinator, Muskogee Regional Office (VBA)

She is the supervisor of the Public Contact Team and the coordinator for VA benefits for tribal, minority, and women Veterans. She is the OEF/OIF manager, the suicide prevention and MST coordinator.

3/24/21 Wednesday, 3:00 pm ET; 2:00 CT; 1:00 pm MT; 12:00 pm PT, 11:00 am ALASKA

You can join via Computer, Phone Audio, and Webex Mobile App

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

If you have questions or require special accommodations, contact Mary Culley, Mary.Culley@va.gov, 405-626-3426

WEBINAR: VA Education Programs

Click [HERE](#) or on the flyer below to access the recorded webinar. The password is: tRfRMN3@



VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Office of Tribal Government Relations

VA OTGR WEBEX WEDNESDAYS Website: <http://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/>

Presentations on American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans Topics

VA EDUCATION 101



Terry E. Warren
Education Service
Stakeholder Engagement
Team Chief
VBA

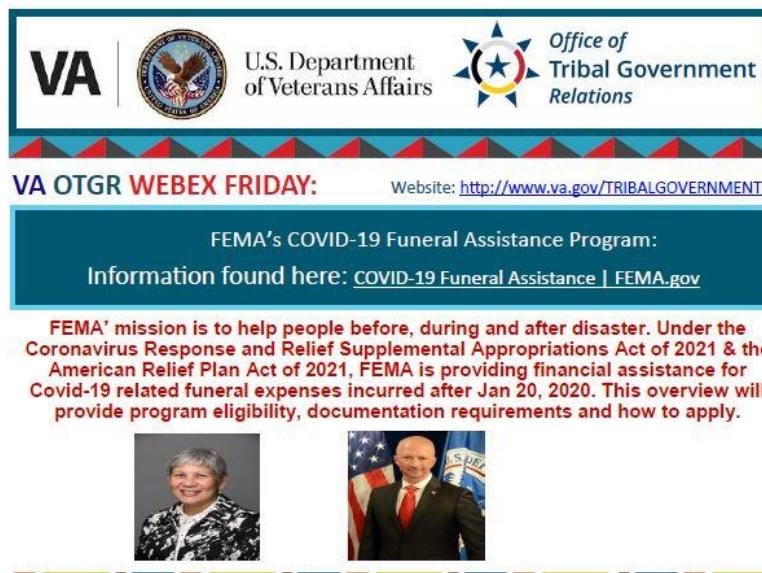
Terry is currently the Team Chief with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Education Service Stakeholder Engagement Team at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). He administers a national stakeholder campaign for education benefits and services provided to Service members, Veterans and their beneficiaries, as well as outreach to Congress, schools, and Veterans Service Organization (VSO) stakeholders. He began his employment with the VA in 2016 as an analyst with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Office of Economic Opportunity, working Veterans transition and employment issues. Originally from San Francisco, California, Terry is a 30-year Veteran of the United States Air Force and retired Chief Master Sergeant.

EDUCATION SERVICE PROVIDES BENEFITS AND RESOURCES TO HELP SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES TO HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR EDUCATION GOALS. LEARN ABOUT:

- GI Bill Mission & Goals
 - GI Bill Impact & Highlights
 - GI Bill History & Future State
 - COVID-19 Updates
 - VRRAP
 - Public Law 116-135, Isakson-Roe Act
 - VET TEC & Rogers STEM Scholarship
 - Resources & Questions
-

WEBINAR: FEMA Covid-19 Funeral Assistance

Click [HERE](#) or on the flyer below to access the recorded webinar. The password is: **AuVaU2g***



VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Office of Tribal Government Relations

VA OTGR WEBEX FRIDAY: Website: <http://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/>

FEMA's COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Program:
Information found here: [COVID-19 Funeral Assistance | FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov/covid-19-funeral-assistance)

FEMA's mission is to help people before, during and after disaster. Under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 & the American Relief Plan Act of 2021, FEMA is providing financial assistance for Covid-19 related funeral expenses incurred after Jan 20, 2020. This overview will provide program eligibility, documentation requirements and how to apply.



WEBINAR: VA Domiciliary Care

Click [HERE](#) or on the flyer below to access the recorded webinar. The password is: **dJZrj8D?**



VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Office of Tribal Government Relations

VA OTGR WEBEX WEDNESDAYS Website: <http://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/>

Presentations on American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans Topics
DOMICILIARY CARE in the VA

As part of the Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs (MH RRTPs), VA's Domiciliary Care programs provide residential treatment for Veterans experiencing mental health and substance use concerns while also addressing needs such as unemployment and homelessness. You will learn about the history of the VA's Domiciliary Care program, the services available in the MH RRTPs, and how to learn more about MH RRTP services.



WEBINAR: VA Native American Direct (Home) Loan - NADL

Click [HERE](#) or on the flyer below to access the recorded webinar. The password is: TrAEHd7@

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Relations

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Presentations on American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans Topics

VA Native American Direct Home Loan (NADL) Program

VA's NADL program allows eligible Native American Veterans to buy, build, or improve a home on federal trust land. NADL can also be used to possibly refinance an existing loan to reduce your interest rate. Learn from NADL specialists and a recipient to see if you qualify and how to apply.

WEBINAR: VHA/IHS MOU

Click [HERE](#) or on the image below to access the recorded webinar. The password is: YeeuF5Jm@35

IHS MOU Webinar-20201209 200... ↓

**U.S. Veterans Health
Administration & Indian Health
Service Memorandum of
Understanding (VHA-IHS MOU)
Tribal Consultation**

Thomas Klobucar, PhD, Benjamin Smith, Stephanie Birdwell and Elizabeth Brill, MD
December 9, 2020

  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

7th Annual National
Gathering of American
Indian Veterans: We
Invite All Veterans



<https://bit.ly/3fAj3xD>

July 16th-18th 2021

- Friday: Evening Veterans Conference
- Saturday: Veterans Conference and Powwow
- Sunday: Powwow, Wellbriety, and AA Meeting
- General Public Welcome All Weekend

Location: Cantigny Park

15151 Winfield Road. Wheaton, IL, 60189

Check out our website for more details
www.tricksterculturalcenter.org



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Office of
Tribal Government
Relations

ROBERT R.
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Kenneth
Young
Center

Veterans Day 2022



Photo: Alan Karchmer for the National Museum of the American Indian

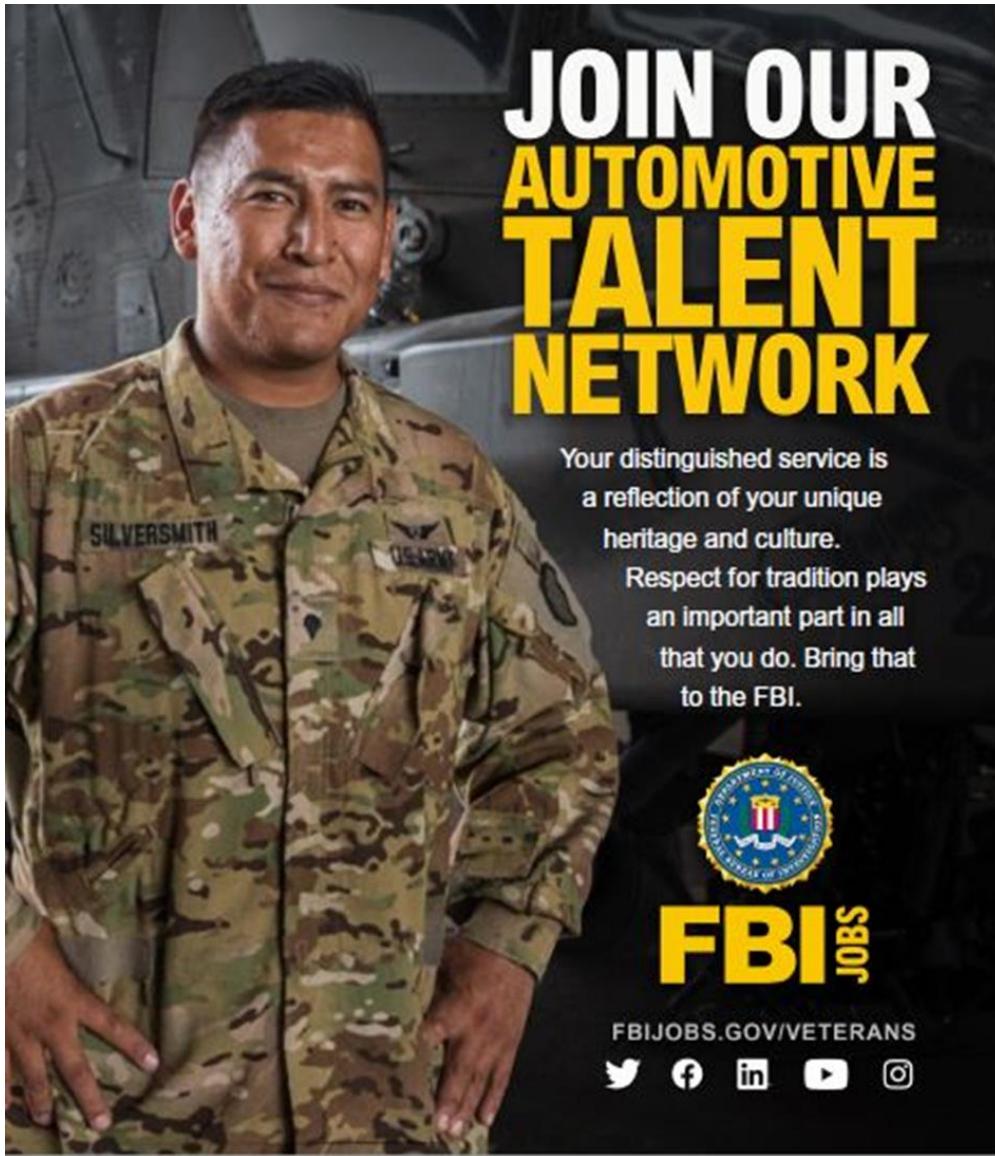
We are pleased to announce that we have rescheduled the National Native American Veterans Memorial Dedication Ceremony and Veterans Procession for November 11, 2022.

We look forward to welcoming you in 2022 to the museum grounds to honor American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native veterans.



While we could not gather as planned to dedicate the memorial in 2020, we were able to mark its opening with a video message and several virtual programs on and around Veterans Day last year.

We will share additional details about the events with email updates and information on our website. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to NNAVMDedication@si.edu with any questions.



JOIN OUR AUTOMOTIVE TALENT NETWORK

Your distinguished service is a reflection of your unique heritage and culture. Respect for tradition plays an important part in all that you do. Bring that to the FBI.

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FBIJOBS.GOV/VETERANS





News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

21-057

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 14, 2021

VA establishes 120-day task force on inclusion, diversity, equity and access

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough established a 120-day task force April 1 to conduct a whole-of-VA review and to design and implement a holistic and integrated VA mission on inclusion, diversity, equity and access.

VA strives to provide quality care and services to all Veterans regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity but [a 2019 Government Accountability Office report](#) reveals that Veterans from underserved communities continue to face barriers to accessing VA health services.

"Systemic barriers that underserved communities face many times negatively impact Veterans," said McDonough. "In order to overcome many of these barriers, VA must tap into its vast diversity and use it as a major source of strength. The implementation of this task force will help the department become the inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible team our Veterans, their families, survivors and caregivers deserve."

The task force is charged with providing concrete and actionable recommendations addressing inclusion, diversity, equity and access to the secretary no later than July 31, and will focus on five objectives:

1. Ensure execution of requirements outlined in [Executive Order 13985](#) and any other subsequent and relevant Executive Orders.
2. Examine and develop VA's strategic mission, goals and objectives on inclusion, diversity, equity and access.
3. Conduct a whole-of-VA review of policies, programming, training and strategic communications for workforce and Veterans' initiatives.
4. Identify opportunities to leverage data to inform and operationalize inclusion, diversity, equity and access.
5. Develop institutional access points for underserved communities to establish strategic partnerships with VA.

Led by the Chair, Deputy Chief of Staff and White House Liaison Chris Diaz — additional members of the task force include:

- Assistant Under Secretary for Health and Clinical Services Kameron Matthews M.D.
- Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations Cheryl Rawls.
- Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer Barbara Morton.
- Executive Director for Investigations/Acting Deputy Executive Director Hansel Cordeiro.
- Executive Director of the National Center for Organizational Development Maureen Marks, Ph.D.
- Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Melissa Bryant.
- Senior Advisor to the Secretary and Veteran Service Organizations Liaison Ray Kelley.
- Acting Executive Director for the Center for Minority Veterans Dennis May.
- Acting Executive Director for the Center for Women Veterans Elizabeth Estabrooks.
- Chief of Staff at the Office of Enterprise Integration Shana Love-Holmon.
- Clinical Implementation Lead for PRIDE Tiffany Lange, Psy.D.
- Executive Director for the Center for Innovation Ryan Vega, M.D.
- Executive Director for Human Capital Management Lisa Thomas, Ph.D.
- Special Counsel Tahmika Jackson, J.D.
- Director of the Office of Tribal Government Relations Stephanie Birdwell.
- Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy White House Liaison James Anderson (facilitator).

The task force recommendations will aim to eliminate barriers so that all veterans have equal treatment and experiences when interacting with VA. More to follow at the conclusion of the 120-day period.

###

OTGR Central Region

(IA; MI; MN; MT; ND; NE; SD; WI; WY)



VETERANS SUICIDE AWARNESS RIDE

13-15 JULY, 2021

"Never Quit On Life"

13 July • KLND Radio Program

6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. • Local Veterans and Representatives from Department of Veterans Affairs.

14 July • Sitting Bull Monument, SD and Cannonball, ND

Horseback Riders depart • Meals will be provided.

15 July • All Nations Veterans Cemetery

The Vietnam Vets Legacy Vets Motorcycle Club to meet at Prairie Knights Casino (West parking lot) at 11:00 a.m.

ALL Riders Welcome (no registration) 12:00 p.m. Kickstands up.
Horseback Riders & Motorcycle Club arrive.

1:00 p.m. • Veterans Stand Down & Meal.

Motorcycle Club Ride Coordinator

- John Pretty Bear, ph. 701.455.0886

Horseback Ride Coordinator from Sitting Bull Monument

- Phil Bird Horse, ph. 605.845.2123

Horseback Ride Coordinator from Cannonball

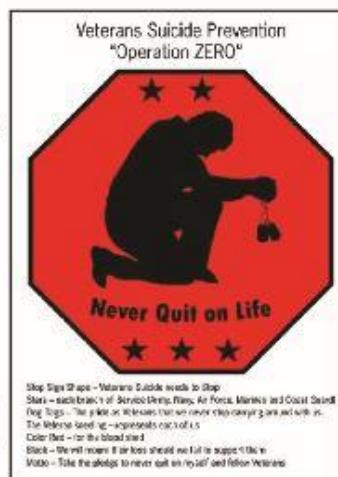
- Volney Fast Horse, ph. 701.426.8737

For more information please call 701.854.8564



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Veterans and their families



OTGR Southern Plains Region
(KS; OK; TX)



OK WOMEN VETERANS

HerStory Project

OK Sisters in Service Legacy Project
Walk a Mile in Her Boots - OSU Art Project
State of Oklahoma Veteran Registry



ODVA Women Veterans Program
Email: okwomenvets@odva.ok.gov
Phone 405-523-4020, 405-523-4023
Website: vets.oklahoma.gov

OKLAHOMA WOMEN VETERANS

2021 Series of Zoom Presentations

Lunch & Learn-30 Minutes

Time: 12:30pm -1:00pm Central Time

Veteran Benefits & Health Care

Feb 23 Disability Claims
Mar 2 MST, Gynecological
Mar 9 Appeals, Supplemental Claims
Mar 23 Presumptive Claims
Apr 6 VR&E (Veteran Readiness & Employment)
Apr 13 Unemployability
Apr 20 Burial Benefits
May 4 OKC VAHCS Women Veterans Program Manager
May 18 OKC VAHCS My HealtheVet Coordinator
June 8-Dr. Betty Mosley Brown - "A Historical Walk Through the Generations of Women Veterans"
July/August - NONE

September 14 & 28 - Eastern OK VAHCS

**ALL PRESENTATION SLIDES CAN BE FOUND ON ODVA WEBSITE:
VETS.OKLAHOMA.GOV**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92914310181?pwd=U2UwZGx5ZW5OYjRBUDIzSDI0WXFidz09>

Meeting ID: 929 1431 0181 Passcode: ODVA

VBA SERIES- PROVIDED BY THE VA REGIONAL OFFICE,
MUSKOGEE OK; VHA SERIES- PROVIDED BY VARIOUS
VHA PROGRAMS

HOST BY THE ODVA WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM
EMAIL OKWOMENVETS@ODVA.OK.GOV
405-523-4020



OTGR Southwest Region

(AZ; CO; NM; UT)

APPLY FOR VA BENEFIT CLAIMS WEB CAMERA SESSION

Veterans and Widows of Veterans can now apply for VA disability compensation or pension claims at our office.

Using web camera technology, an Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Benefits Officer will speak directly with you to apply for VA claims.

Please bring a copy of your military discharge document (DD Form 214); an ID card; social security card; marriage and/or divorce documents; birth and/or death certificates; and any financial award letters.

Who: Veterans and Widows of Veterans

How: Call (928) 734-3461 or 734-3462 to schedule an appointment.

Where: Hopi Veterans Services office

Tribal Complex DATS Building, First Floor
Kykotsmovi, AZ.

Why: To qualify for the VA benefits you earned!



**Thank you for your service.
Now let us serve you.**



APPLY FOR YOUR VA BENEFITS TODAY!



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN
AFFAIRS &
NAVAJO NATION VETERANS
ADMINISTRATION
VA CLAIMS EVENT AT THE FOLLOWING
NAVAJO NATION VETERANS' AGENCY
OFFICES:**

Crownpoint	Shiprock	Fort Defiance	Chinle	Tuba City
Tues. 06/08/21	Tues. 06/15/21	Tues. 06/22/21	Tues. 06/29/21	Tues. 07/13/21
830am-3:30pm	830am-3:30pm	830am-3:30pm	830am-3:30pm	830am-3:30pm
(505)786-2030	(505)368-1013	(928)871-7307	(505)674-2224	(928)283-3030
(505)371-8467	(505)371-8467	(505)371-8467	(505)371-8467	(505)371-8467

Please bring your DD-214, ID card, SS#, Marriage Certificate (if applicable), & important documents.

Call your agency office or Central office to set up an appointment before the date of the event.





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Substance Use Disorders Treatment Program
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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Phoenix VA Health Care System

OTGR Western Region

(AK; CA; ID; NV; OR; WA)



Annual BIPOC Paddling Clinic

August 12-16, 2021

American River, Sierra Nevada, CA

Free Paddling-Camping Trip for Active Duty/Military Veterans

Native Veterans please join service members and veterans for a week of healing, camaraderie, paddling and camping along the American River in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. Indigenous, Black, People of Color, and Two Spirit veterans/active duty welcome to apply, including disabled veterans with adaptive paddling needs. All expenses paid by Veterans Affairs Adaptive Sports Grant and TRR, an all volunteer veteran-run 501(c)(3).

Contact: Carmen Skarlupka, Coordinator, Four Corners-NM, Team River Runner, email: carmen.skarlupka@teamriverrunner.org or call text: (970) 880-1257. Carmen is a Navy Veteran living in Ignacio.

Warriors on the River to Recovery



 U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs