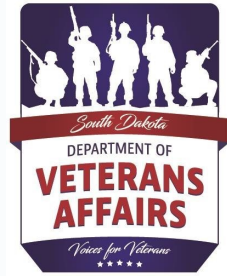


South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



2021 Annual Report



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Leadership



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Vision and Mission

Vision

Ensuring excellence, integrity, advocacy, accountability, collaboration, and respect is carried through in everything we strive to do and accomplish for veterans and their families.

Mission

Provide comprehensive care and quality service to veterans and their families, regarding health care, education, disability benefits, long-term care, and burial honors by providing professional customer service and care.

Secretary's Office

The Office of the Secretary drives the Department's overall strategy, long-range planning initiatives, and oversees the operation of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA).

SDDVA is an agency of state government created for the purpose of advising, counseling, and assisting veterans and their families in receiving their rightful benefits under the vast and complex framework of federal and state regulations.

We are extremely proud of the South Dakotans, and all who have honorably served our country over the centuries.

Providing quality and effective service to veterans and their dependents is, and always will be, our number one mission. In doing so, we pledge to stay current and adjust quickly and carefully to new laws, be diligent in their application, and continually improve our efficiency in service to veterans and their dependents.

We draw on the rich history of American veterans and their unique contributions to our nation for inspiration and direction.

We are committed to open and effective communication that builds trust and improves performance.

Operation CARS (Calling All Returning Servicemembers), continues to be an opportunity for us to reach out to all servicemembers leaving active duty and thank them for their service, and make them aware of the programs and services available to them to assist in their transition back into civilian life.



Secretary's Message

On behalf of the entire team at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, I am pleased to present this year's annual report.

The report highlights the outstanding accomplishments of our superb team of dedicated professionals and the unmatched support we receive from our county, tribal, state and federal partners. Helping to connect our veterans, their families, and survivors with earned services, benefits, and support are the over 100 men and women of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. They play a major role in the direct infusion of more than \$842 million annually for veterans in South Dakota's economy through federal compensation, education, pension benefits, and VA medical services.

Our Veteran Service Officers (VSO) are experts in helping veterans navigate the complex systems of federal, state, and local benefits and resources available to them.

Our mission is to provide the highest quality of care and compassion to those who served and sacrificed to protect us. We strive to do what is right and in the best interest of our veterans.

The Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home continues to provide the highest quality of care to our heroes. Our team's approach is to encourage active participation from our medical staff, support staff, as well as volunteers and families throughout the community. We value our employees' dedication and commitment to work in an environment with mutual respect and accounta-

bility while affording exceptional and undivided care. We will continue to evaluate and collaborate with family to ensure our veterans are granted the care they deserve. Our veterans took pride in serving our country while protecting us and our rights. We take pride in providing a comfortable place that our veterans can call home.

Our state veterans cemetery opened in June of this year and is the first federally funded, state-owned, and operated, veterans cemetery in South Dakota. This 60-acre property offers a picturesque setting in northeastern Sioux Falls. It will provide burial spaces for over 28,000.

Burial sites at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery include casket gravesites, cremation gravesites, a columbarium for cremated remains, and a scattering garden.

These examples demonstrate our commitment to ensuring South Dakota remains the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.



Funding Sources and Expenditure Detail

EXPENDITURE DETAIL:

Veteran's Affairs	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Personal Services	\$ 6,027,616	\$ 8,062,876	\$ 8,189,771	\$ 7,756,833	\$ 8,512,170	\$ 8,990,362
Operating Services	\$ 3,613,569	\$ 3,468,481	\$ 3,622,198	\$ 3,846,246	\$ 4,456,610	\$ 4,743,459
	<u>\$ 9,641,185</u>	<u>\$ 11,531,357</u>	<u>\$ 11,811,969</u>	<u>\$ 11,603,079</u>	<u>\$ 12,968,780</u>	<u>\$ 13,733,821</u>

Veteran's Benefits	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Personal Services	\$ 1,197,449	\$ 1,245,782	\$ 1,313,496	\$ 1,309,476	\$ 1,517,434	\$ 1,513,417
Operating Services	\$ 483,204	\$ 478,584	\$ 512,933	\$ 490,013	\$ 533,082	\$ 540,729
	<u>\$ 1,680,653</u>	<u>\$ 1,724,366</u>	<u>\$ 1,826,429</u>	<u>\$ 1,799,489</u>	<u>\$ 2,050,516</u>	<u>\$ 2,054,146</u>

Veteran's Home	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Personal Services	\$ 4,830,167	\$ 6,817,094	\$ 6,876,275	\$ 6,447,357	\$ 6,994,736	\$ 7,396,562
Operating Services	\$ 3,130,365	\$ 2,989,898	\$ 3,109,265	\$ 3,206,232	\$ 3,773,406	\$ 4,130,627
	<u>\$ 7,960,532</u>	<u>\$ 9,806,992</u>	<u>\$ 9,985,540</u>	<u>\$ 9,653,589</u>	<u>\$ 10,768,142</u>	<u>\$ 11,527,189</u>

Veteran's Cemetery				FY19	FY20	FY21
Personal Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 80,383
Operating Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,122	\$ 152,489
	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ 150,000</u>	<u>\$ 150,122</u>	<u>\$ 232,872</u>

FUNDING SOURCE:

Veteran's Affairs	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
General Funds	\$ 2,490,440	\$ 4,009,421	\$ 4,113,689	\$ 4,367,050	\$ 4,614,862	\$ 4,569,676
Federal Funds	\$ 1,200,628	\$ 3,051,237	\$ 3,232,545	\$ 3,370,389	\$ 3,767,556	\$ 3,812,742
Other Funds	\$ 5,950,117	\$ 4,470,699	\$ 4,465,735	\$ 3,865,638	\$ 4,512,160	\$ 4,560,385
	<u>\$ 9,641,185</u>	<u>\$ 11,531,357</u>	<u>\$ 11,811,969</u>	<u>\$ 11,603,078</u>	<u>\$ 12,894,578</u>	<u>\$ 12,942,803</u>

Veteran's Benefits	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
General Funds	\$ 1,517,246	\$ 1,573,088	\$ 1,620,231	\$ 1,624,607	\$ 1,819,155	\$ 1,819,155
Federal Funds	\$ 162,425	\$ 149,379	\$ 183,053	\$ 173,554	\$ 215,227	\$ 215,227
Other Funds	\$ 983	\$ 1,898	\$ 23,145	\$ 1,327	\$ 61,012	\$ 61,012
	<u>\$ 1,680,654</u>	<u>\$ 1,724,365</u>	<u>\$ 1,826,429</u>	<u>\$ 1,799,488</u>	<u>\$ 2,095,394</u>	<u>\$ 2,095,394</u>

Veteran's Home	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
General Funds	\$ 973,194	\$ 2,436,333	\$ 2,493,458	\$ 2,592,442	\$ 2,645,669	\$ 2,600,483
Federal Funds	\$ 1,038,204	\$ 2,901,858	\$ 3,049,493	\$ 3,196,835	\$ 3,552,329	\$ 3,597,515
Other Funds	\$ 5,949,134	\$ 4,468,801	\$ 4,442,590	\$ 3,864,311	\$ 4,451,148	\$ 4,306,865
	<u>\$ 7,960,532</u>	<u>\$ 9,806,992</u>	<u>\$ 9,985,541</u>	<u>\$ 9,653,588</u>	<u>\$ 10,649,146</u>	<u>\$ 10,504,863</u>

Veteran's Cemetery	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
General Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,038	\$ 150,038
Federal Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 192,508
	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ 150,000</u>	<u>\$ 150,038</u>	<u>\$ 342,546</u>

Who We Served in 2021

There are 629 living World War II Veterans in South Dakota.

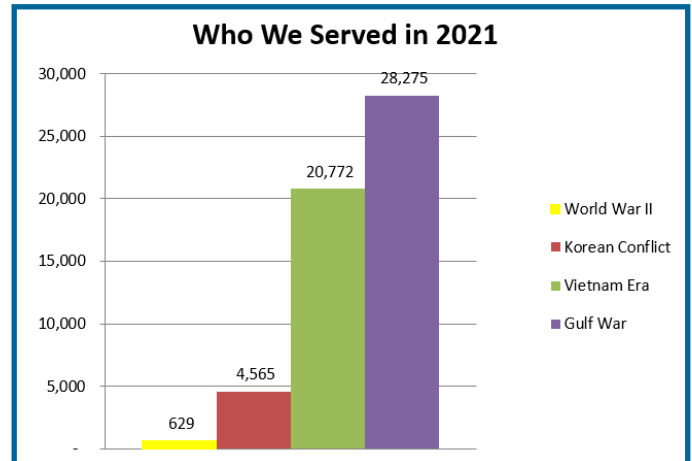
There are 4,565 living Korean War-era Veterans in South Dakota, who served from 1950 to 1955.

There are 20,772 living Vietnam-era Veterans in South Dakota, who served from 1961 to 1975. SDDVA has seen an increase in disability claims filed on behalf of Vietnam Veterans due to the manifestation of acute diseases brought on by exposure to Agent Orange.

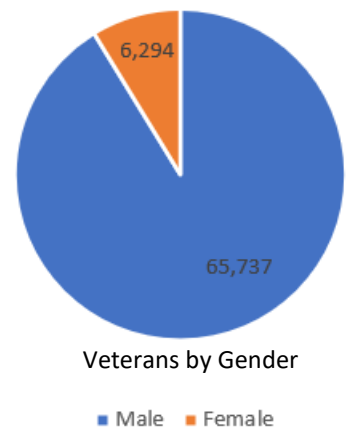
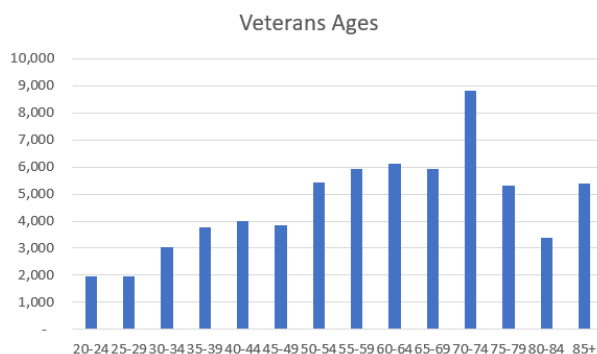
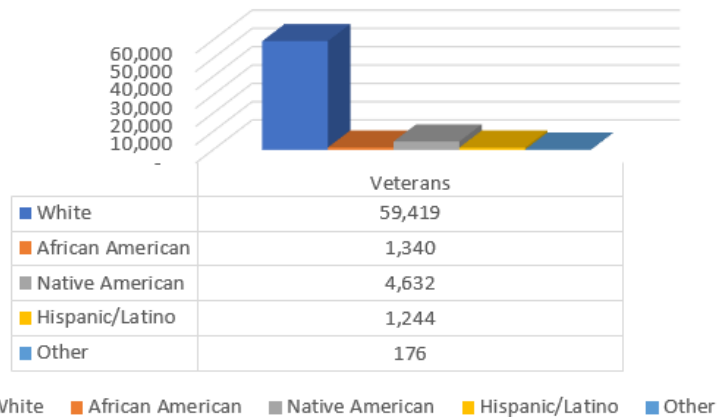
There are 28,275 living Gulf War-Era and pre-9/11 Veterans in South Dakota.

There are 13,073 living post-9/11 Veterans in South Dakota. Our returning veterans, much like the Greatest Generation of World War II, are seeking employment, housing, and education opportunities for themselves, their spouses and families.

There are 12,932 living Peacetime Veterans in South Dakota. They served honorably during a unique and relatively conflict-free time in our history.



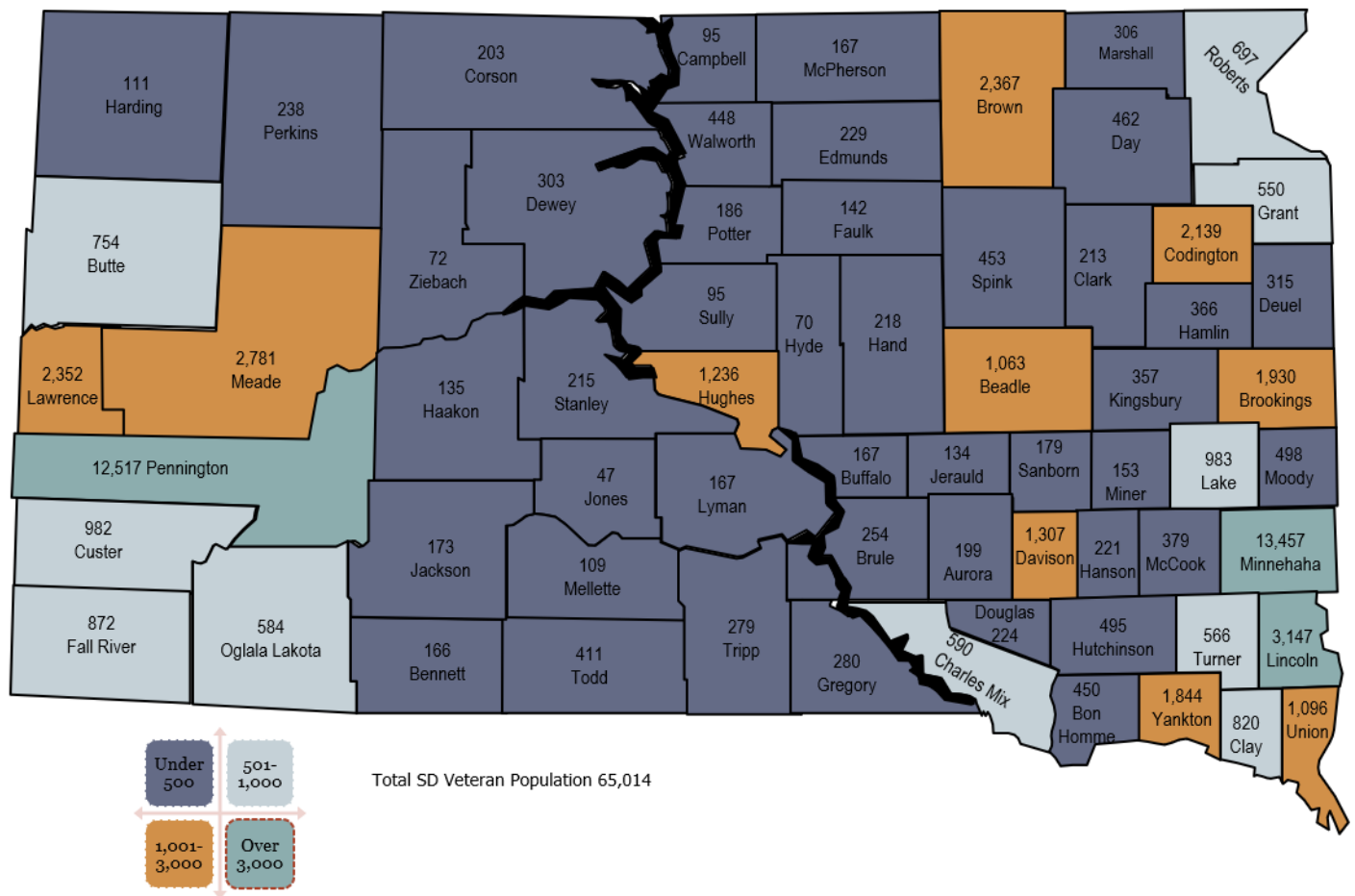
Veterans by Race



Veteran Count

Veterans are one of this country’s most valuable assets and SDDVA is on the front line of providing assistance to over 65,000 veterans and their families within our borders and countless additional veterans and their families from all over.

2021 SD VETERANS BY COUNTY



Legislative Highlights

- Revised certain provisions regarding revenues generated by and donations to the State Veterans Cemetery. (SB 180)
- An appropriation from general funds of \$1,500,000 was made for road improvements leading to the State Veterans Cemetery. (SB 181/SB 64)
- An appropriation from general funds of \$400,000 was made to continue funding of the veteran's bonus program. (HB 1020/SB 64)
- Modified resident tuition requirements for veterans and armed forces personnel and family members. (HB 1057)
- Secured one-time general funds of \$150,000 for security system for State Veterans Home. (SB 64)
- Secured one-time general funds of \$88,534 and federal fund authority of \$164,420 for nursing capacity items for State Veterans Home. (SB 64)
- Secured one-time general funds of \$60,000 for sprinkler system for State Veterans Cemetery. (SB 64)
- Secured authority for use of federal funds of \$163,800 and other funds of \$88,200 for balcony enclosure and construction of pergola at State Veterans Home. (SB 64)
- Secured authority for use of federal funds of \$98,150 and other funds of \$52,850 for staff/employee housing at State Veterans Home. (SB 64)
- Secured authority for other funds of \$269,190 for solar panels at State Veterans Home. (SB 64)



Claims Division

Located in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office in Sioux Falls, the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs claims office provides comprehensive care and quality service to veterans and their families. Our team consists of two managers, seven state veterans service officers and a claims examiner. Their primary responsibility is to assist veterans, their dependents, and their county and tribal partners in building, filing, tracking, and appealing claims for disability compensation, nonservice-connected pension, death benefits, education, and healthcare. This team works directly with the decision resources in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office to expedite claims and to influence, through proactive advocacy, the most positive outcome for our veterans and their dependents.

With the Veterans Benefits Administration changing to electronic filing, our team has taken an active role in working side-by-side with the VA to troubleshoot and develop policies and procedures to ensure South Dakota veteran's claims are processed correctly and quickly as changes are made. In 2021, South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs opted in to receiving veteran notifications from VA electronically. This allows immediate access to important developments, helps the VA with their significant mail backlog, and gets South Dakota veteran's claims processed quicker than other states and organizations. It also saves our taxpayers a significant amount of money on paper, postage, and wages.

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to create challenges to meet with our veterans. We continued seeing veterans at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance building in Sioux

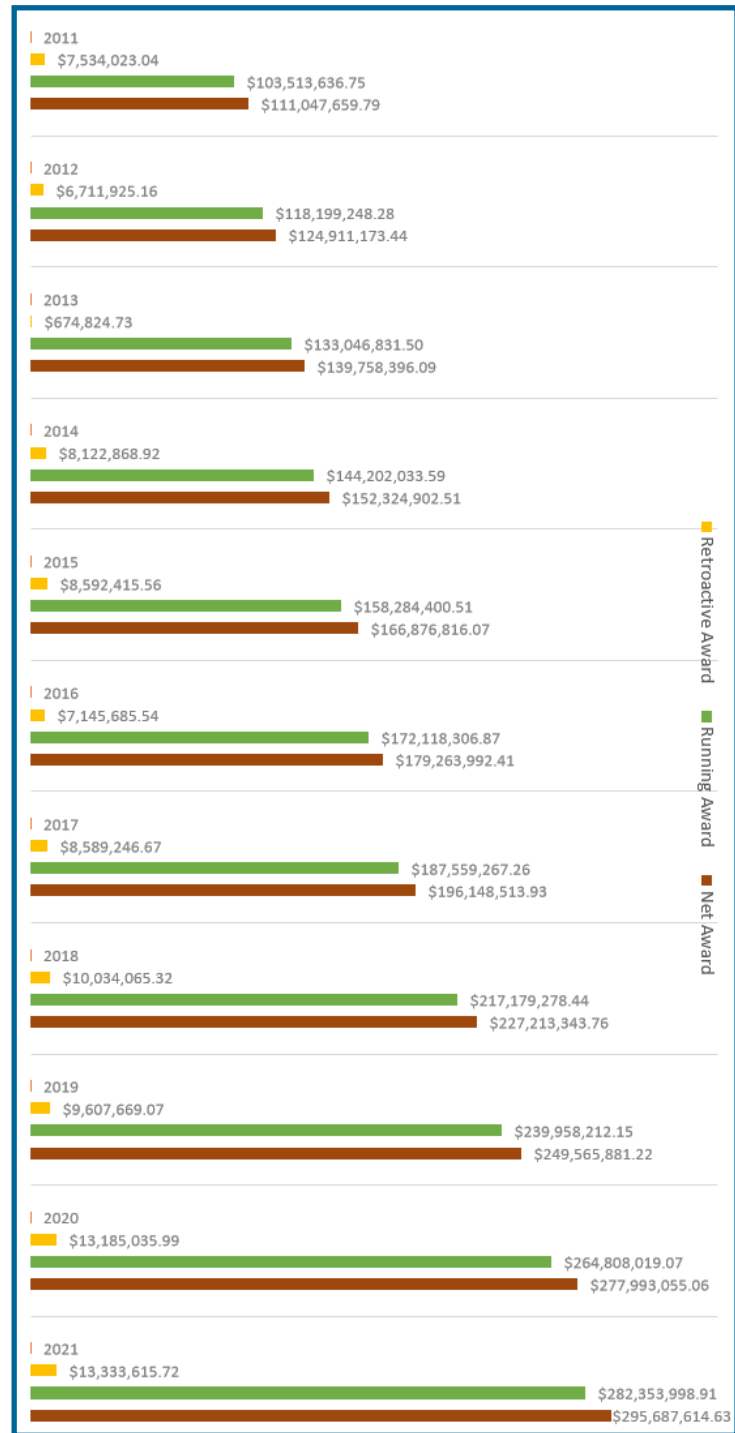
Falls throughout the year to ensure they were able to have face-to-face interactions with a veteran service officer. The VA began allowing veterans to come back into the VA Regional Office building in February 2021. We were able to conduct 1,434 in-person interviews, nearly doubling the year prior. Our county and tribal partners also overcame the challenges we faced and contributed largely to the 6,887 individual claims submitted through our office. The VA made great advances in recognizing more presumptive disabilities from exposure to Agent Orange by adding hypothyroidism, Parkinsonism, and bladder cancer. The new conditions along with all the new claims by Blue Water Navy veterans led to 465 claims being completed for South Dakota veterans and over \$7,000,000 in net awards. Those veterans who were previously denied service-connection received over half a million dollars in benefits. On August 5th the VA began recognizing three presumptive disabilities for veterans who served in Southwest Asia. Claims just started coming in for rhinitis, sinusitis, and asthma. South Dakota veterans have seen an 83.3% grant success rate thus far for these new conditions, and anticipate many more claims over the next year.

In addition to filing claims, our team takes an active role in the training of fellow department staff and the county and tribal veterans service officers on the ever changing federal rules, regulations, and programs. Training includes two mini conferences, a three-day annual conference, virtual trainings throughout the year and weekly updates.

Economic Impact

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently operates the National Work Que (NWQ) as their claims' management and processing tool. This places claims in a "cloud" environment and they are worked at numerous VA Regional Offices. The aim of the NWQ is to reduce the claims backlog and processing times nationally. SDDVA vowed to treat and provide an outstanding level of customer service and expertise to all veterans served and claims processed. With many county, state, and national service offices closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Department, as well as county and tribal veterans service officers, assisted veterans throughout the country who were unable to acquire assistance in their regions.

Through the efforts of our employees, our county and tribal veterans service officers, and other partners; the Department saw significant gains in the sum of benefits that clients we assisted and represented received. With yet another record-breaking year, South Dakota veterans received a total benefit of over \$295 Million in 2021. We are seeing an influx in one-time retro payments in 2021 due to the implementation of the Blue Water Navy Act which granted presumptive disabilities to those who served off the shores of Vietnam. Total 2021 retroactive payments for South Dakota were approximately \$13.3 Million. Running awards were \$282.3 Million. Economic studies indicate these monies turn over between three to seven times in a community. Our team continues to seek ways to expedite the claims filing process and provide the best customer service for our clients.



Appeals

The VA appeals process is complex, lengthy, and comes with its own set of laws, rules, regulations, and processes. Appeals are ever-changing, and our Department works diligently to remain knowledgeable of the current and future steps of the program so we can advise claimants we represent with their best course of action. Our team assists claimants in preparing appeals, as well as developing arguments for their case up to and including hearings before or with the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). We monitor the appeal through every step and make sure that deadlines are met, and proper evidence is submitted within the VA's designated timeframes.

Our claimants can have three BVA options. They may elect a hearing with a board judge, submit evidence for the judge to review, or have a judge review the file as it stands.

As of January 1, 2022, we have only 55 veterans awaiting a hearing as compared to 90 on January 1, 2020. Eleven of those hear-

ings are part of the sun-setting legacy appeals process. In 2021, we worked on over 200 pending appeals a month.

With the backlog of hearings cleared, we were able to shift from a reactive approach to a proactive approach to appeals. In the past, the procedure was to wait three to seven years for a hearing to be scheduled. The shift in 2021 was to do a complete case review and summary immediately after submitting the request to the Board of Appeals. This allowed the Appeals Specialist to reach out to the county or to the veteran and let them know what evidence could be gathered to strengthen their case prior to the hearing. Appeals Modernization Act appeals are estimated to take between two to four years to complete. It is a better service to our veterans to let them know what to gather in support of their appeal during the interim time rather than wait until the hearing date to let them know what their case is missing.

Benefits Division

Field Service Officers (FSOs) travel the state assisting, training, and working closely with all 66 counties and nine tribes in the state of South Dakota. Training and ensuring everyone is familiar with laws, policies, and procedures is part of our meetings with the county and tribal veteran service officers. This team works to provide the veterans of South Dakota the most up-to-date information regarding benefits.

They assist veterans in obtaining medical treatments, prescriptions, prosthetic devices, benefit checks, veterans preference, and disseminating veteran data.

As with state veteran service officers, the FSOs meet and assist veterans and their families with any and all benefit questions they may have. This team also assist with outreach measures such as Yellow Ribbon events, VA stand downs, job fairs, Veterans Day programs, Congressional forums, State Fair, Memorial Day programs, federal department of VA events, and community events.

Calling All Returning Services Members (CARS) is a program that the SDDVA uses to reach out to South Dakota residents returning from Active Duty. This is an opportunity for us to provide them with a heartfelt welcome home, contact information to their local county or tribal veterans service officers or our office information, and answer any questions they may have on their transition back home.

SDCL 33A-1-30 and 33A-1-31 establishes a reimbursement program for the Department to provide financial assistance to counties and tribes in paying the salaries of county veterans' service officers.



In 2021, 53 counties and four tribes made application for and met the requirements as addressed in statute for a total reimbursement of \$170,625.



Education and Employment Programs

In 2021, the Department added four new On-the-Job Training programs to the existing 355 approved On-the-Job Training and Apprenticeship programs. A total of 185 veterans used their GI Bill® for employment with 50 active firms and 60 active programs. In schools, there were 2,655 students using their GI Bill® for education benefits.

In South Dakota, we help connect veterans and family members with educational benefits and resources to succeed in college or within an On-the-Job Training or Apprenticeship program. We support the success of veterans, current military members, and their families that are using benefits at South Dakota colleges and universities. We provide comprehensive information about benefits and resources, as well as work closely with college and university staff to ensure all veterans or family members using benefits are getting the most of their benefits. We assist in administering various federal and state education benefits to veterans and their families. Those programs include:

- GI Bill® (Chapter 1606, 30, 31, 33, & 35)
- On-the-Job-Training and Apprenticeship Programs
- Free tuition for veterans
- Free tuition for children of veterans who died during service
- Free tuition for dependents of POW/MIAs
- Reduced tuition for SD National Guard members
- Free tuition to children or spouses of SD National Guard members who have been disabled or killed in the line of duty
- Honorary high school diploma.

Veterans can choose to use their GI Bill® from 35 institutes of higher learning (colleges and universities), 20 non-college degree institutions (high schools, welding schools, and trade schools), and two flight training schools.

Our Department serves as the state approving agency (SAA). As such, we promote and safeguard quality education and training for veterans, ensure greater educational and training opportunities to meet the changing needs of veterans, and protect the GI Bill® resources available for those programs by assisting the VA in preventing fraud, waste, and abuse in the administration of the GI Bill®.

Headstone Setting Fees

South Dakota Codified Law (Chapter 33A-5 Burial of Veterans) contains a provision that allows for a payment toward the permanent setting of government issued headstones or markers placed at the graves of deceased veterans. The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs oversees the Headstone Setting Fee program in which \$100 is paid toward the setting of a flat bronze marker issued by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or for the placement of a government issued granite or marble marker. The setting fee is paid only if the veteran was a South Dakota resident prior to entering active-duty service or for the year prior to passing away. The setting fee application must be submitted to SDDVA within one year from the date the marker was permanently set, and the form must be approved by a county or tribal Veterans Service Officer. In 2021, the department paid over \$26,700 in \$100 setting fee stipends to veteran's families, and to individuals, businesses, and entities for the placement of VA markers at our heroes final resting places.

Burial Allowance

Chapter 33A-5 also allows for a \$100 payment toward the funeral of a veteran or veteran's spouse if the estate of the veteran, the veteran's spouse or veteran's immediate family are unable to defray the burial expenses. Like the headstone setting fee, applicants must apply for the burial allowance payment within a year of the date of burial; and the veteran must have been a citizen of South Dakota for at least a year before entering military service or preceding death.

Funeral Honors

Federal law mandates that military funeral honors be conducted for eligible veterans if requested by the family. The ceremony is one final way to express appreciation for the service they gave to our country. SDDVA pays \$50 per rite to veterans' service organizations who perform honor guard ceremonies. The stipends are disbursed quarterly. In 2021, the Department paid a total of \$56,250 for 1,125 ceremonies. In the six years since the SDDVA funeral honors program has been open; over 120 veterans service organizations have filed for payments.

Homeless Veterans

The South Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium is a statewide organization made up of service providers, individuals, city/county governments and state government agencies and works to address homelessness in the state. SDDVA is a member of the Consortium and is focused on the issue of homelessness among the veteran population. The SDHHC meets quarterly and organizes an annual Homeless Summit. In addition, the Consortium completes a statewide homeless count and survey each year. Visit the Consortium's website <https://www.sdhda.org/housing-for-the-homeless> for details.



Bonus

Since 2004, the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs has administered the current Veterans/Active Duty Bonus Program. Some of the comments we've received from service members and veterans who have applied and received payments include: "Always good news to have money on the way". "I wanted to say thanks to you again for helping me navigate these waters," and "I am glad to know we have people like you on the team helping veterans out there." Those are some of the comments that the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs has received from servicemembers and veterans who have applied for and received payments through the SDDVA Bonus Program. According to 2021 article on The Military Wallet website, South Dakota is one of only seven states currently awarding a bonus for military service (<https://themilitarywallet.com/state-military-veterans-bonuses/>).

Although the state has paid a bonus for service in other war-time periods in the past; SDDVA currently awards a bonus for qualifying service between August 2, 1990, and December 31, 1992, of up to \$500 and a stipend of up to \$500 for certain service types from January 1, 1993, through a date to be determined. The maximum payment for active duty in areas not considered hostile is \$240. Some servicemembers and veterans who haven't received a full \$500 with past applications can apply again to receive the remaining balance of their bonus (up to the \$500 max) if they have a service-connected disability awarded through the US Department of Veterans Affairs of 10% or more.

In Calendar Year 2021, SDDVA paid 223 bonus checks for a total of \$82,960. To be eligible for the program, applicants must meet various qualifications; including that they must have been a legal South Dakota resident for six months or more prior to the start of their active duty. Those who have been discharged from service must have an honorable character of service.

To learn more about the South Dakota Bonus Program or to find the application, visit the Bonus page on the SDDVA website at <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/benefits/State/Veterans%20Bonus.aspx>

Public Affairs

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Communications team strives to help the agency build relationships and improve communications with strategic audiences; informing and promoting veteran-related initiatives that support and further our goals.

A key objective is strengthening relationships and increasing engagement with stakeholders and improving awareness of and participation in SDDVA services.

The Department's website (vetaffairs.sd.gov) is designed to offer veterans a centralized clearinghouse of valuable resources accessible from anywhere in the world. The Department has a mobile website, making it easier for veterans to access information from their smartphones or tablets.

2021 Stats:

Total website hits	2,169,514
Average hits per day	5,943
Total visitors	279,932

The Department disseminates a weekly newsletter electronically to entities within our veteran network. This newsletter and job postings can be found at: (<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/publicaffairs/News%20Updates.aspx>).

In addition to our press releases, the Department distributes a monthly column to the media on issues relating to veterans.

The Department maintains a statewide web calendar at: (<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/publicaffairs/upcomingevents.aspx>).

The public affairs office also, actively participates in the legislative process by tracking all veteran-related bills introduced, along with committee hearings, during each legislative session, updating department staff daily and partners weekly.

We continue to use social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to share our messages.

We offer a variety of publications and materials to keep media, veterans, and the general public up-to-date on veteran's issues around the state and nation - from legislative reports, to media contacts, newsletters, press releases, photos, annual reports and more.



www.facebook.com/SDDVA/
twitter.com/sd_DVA
[Instagram.com/sd-DVA](https://www.instagram.com/sd-DVA)

South Dakota Veterans Cemetery

The South Dakota Veterans Cemetery is the first federally funded, state-owned, and operated, veterans cemetery in South Dakota. The cemetery was established through a federal grant from the National Cemetery Administration totaling approximately \$6.9 million.

The cemetery serves veterans and their dependents throughout the state and around the country, as there is no state residency requirement to be interred in the cemetery. This 60-acre property is located along Interstate 90 just north of Sioux Falls. Property for the cemetery was donated to the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs by the City of Sioux Falls. Ultimately, it will provide spaces for over 28,000 burials.

Burial sites at the Cemetery include casket gravesites, cremation gravesites, a columbarium for cremated remains, scattering garden and a memorial wall.

On May 31, 2021, the first Memorial Day event and ribbon cutting was held at the cemetery. On June 4, 2021, burial operations began at the Cemetery.



From June through December of 2021, 276 burials have been completed. Burials include:

- 120 burials in Section 2 (cremated remains)
- 35 burials in Section 3 (casket remains)
- 120 burials in the Columbarium
- one scattering of ashes
- one memorial wall marker.

Special events held at the cemetery in 2021 included: Memorial Day, ribbon cutting, Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride, 9/11 20-year anniversary, and Wreaths Across America.



Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home

The Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home (MJFSVH) is staffed with caring and dedicated professionals who provide quality long-term care services, rehabilitative, and social services to each resident.

Our goal is to ensure that each resident experiences the highest possible quality of life, every day. Additionally, our Home is supported by dedicated volunteers from local communities, veterans service organizations and fraternal organizations who provide many additional supporting services and activities which enhances the lives of our residents. We are indebted to our volunteers and offer our appreciation.

MJFSVH is subject to the regulatory standards of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the South Dakota Department of Health and undergoes annual licensure inspections by both agencies in areas of resident care, quality, and safety.

In 2021, MJFSVH was awarded the Western Dakota Tech “Exceptional Business Partner” and received an overall five-star rating from Medicare. The Medicare rating is based on health inspections, staffing, and quality of resident care measures.

A variety of on-and-off-site recreational and social activities are provided to encourage active minds, bodies, and spirits, for veterans pursuing

their fullest potential. There is no shortage of life enrichment options.

We focus on health of the whole person – intellectual, social, occupational, spiritual, emotional, and physical wellness.

A pergola and gazebo were added to encourage more outdoor activities for the residents. Also, rooms in the independent living area were upgraded to be nursing care ready. Additional electronic and computerized equipment was provided to the residents to use for games and communicating with relatives.

In 2021, MJFSVH was in its third year of receiving the VA Nursing Grant to improve nurse recruitment/retention which has proven to be a valuable resource. We continue to offer sign on bonuses for some medical staff and have been assisted in growing our nursing staff by using the Build Dakota Scholarships and a donation provided by Arlyn Reinert.



Suicide Awareness

In the summer of 2019, Governor Noem tasked state agencies to develop a statewide suicide prevention strategic plan. Together, South Dakota's Departments of Health, Social Services, Education, Tribal Relations, Veterans Affairs, and Agriculture, as well as the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Health Board formed a work group and developed South Dakota's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

The development of the strategic plan included review of the prior work related to suicide prevention and review of national strategies. A framework including guiding principles, goals, objectives and strategies was created and finalized.

Key objectives and strategies center around prevention, intervention, and postvention with the main goal to reduce suicide deaths in South Dakota.

SDDVA and its multi-state agency sub-workgroup meets monthly to work on priority strategies.



Key accomplishments to date include: data dashboards on the website (<https://sdsuicideprevention.org/>), key messaging within agencies media platforms and communication channels, and resiliency training.



Next steps include partnering with healthcare facilities, increased training, providing targeted outreach, developing more resources materials, and growing partnerships with other state and community leaders and providers.

The SD Suicide Prevention website serves as the main source of information. And to help with consistent and aligned messaging, an interagency communication plan was developed. The plan includes messages, social media posts, posters, toolkit items and outreach promotional materials.

Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications

The South Dakota Departments of Veterans Affairs, in partnership with the Department of Military, Department of Transportation and Governor Kristi Noem, coordinated the South Dakota Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication Program. To date, 18 bridges have been dedicated honoring 21 heroes.

This program affords South Dakota the opportunity to dedicate state bridges to South Dakotans who died while in active service or who are missing in action.



Naming South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen gives us the opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect—to honor the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation.

The Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication Committee meets in April and selects six heroes to honor and six bridges to dedicate each year. Dedication of the bridges are held May through November.

South Dakota has more than 3,000 veterans that made the ultimate sacrifice. Although these heroes are no longer with us, their memories live on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life.



Partners—County/Tribal Veterans Service Officers

Our County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers (CTVSOs) serve as the store front for the Department and have the local contact with veterans and their families. Today it is an effective network of 64 trained CTVSOs. The CTVSOs ensure veterans and their dependents have access to the benefits they have earned. CTVSOs are not supervised by the Department; however, the Department provides training, certification, accreditation, counseling, and outreach to the CTVSOs. The CTVSOs are part of the team!

Aurora—Ron Falor	Jackson—Terry Deuter
Beadle—Taylor Jans	Jerauld—Craig Bennett
Bennett—Don Larson	Jones—Gary Sletto
Bon Homme—Eric Elsberry	Kingsbury—Gary Schumacher
Brookings—Courtney VanZanten	Lake—Matt Pillar
Brown—Aaron Walberg	Lawrence—Jesse Ketzner
Brule—Ron Falor	Lincoln—Susan Irons
Buffalo—Vacant	Lower Brule Sioux Tribe—Vacant
Butte—Robert Wagner	Lyman—Gary Sletto
Campbell—Lester Goehring	Marshall—David Daberkow
Charles Mix—Jerry Seiner	McCook—Brian Havard
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe—Robert Dunsmore	McPherson—Samantha Boshard
Clark—Darin Lewis	Meade—Eric Pearson
Clay—Drew Gunderson	Mellette—Clinton Rasmusson
Codington—Todd Rose	Miner—Tim Reisch
Corson—Kevin Dyda	Minnehaha—Kathy Richardson
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe—Bonnie St. John	Moody—Jerrick Charles
Custer—Todd Fish	Oglala Lakota—Jerlene Arredondo
Davison—Craig Bennett	Oglala Sioux Tribe—Shawnee Red Bear
Day—Kevin Bohn	Pennington—Thomas Vallette/Robert Borries
Deuel—Dennis Evenson	Perkins—Bridget Keller
Dewey—Kevin Dyda	Potter—Donald Herricks
Douglas—Fred Kuil	Roberts—Angela Beacom
Edmunds—Barb Schaefer	Rosebud Sioux Tribe—Orlando Morrison, Sr.
Fall River—Dan Cullen	Sanborn—Craig Bennett
Faulk—David Huss	Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate—Geri Opsal
Grant—Scott Malimanek	Spink—Steve Wollman
Gregory—Dale Reber	Standing Rock Sioux Tribe—Manaja Hill/David Harrison
Haakon—Terry Deuter	Stanley—Janet Beck
Hamlin—David Schaefer	Sully—Janet Beck
Hand—Dave Johnson	Todd—Ronald Valandra
Harding—James Pickett	Tripp—Milton Douglas
Hanson—Craig Bennett	Turner—Thomas Sparrow
Hughes—Janet Beck	Union—Wade Tompkins
Hutchinson—Glenn Hartman	Walworth—Vacant
Hyde—Dave Johnson	Yankton—Cody Mangold
	Yankton Sioux Tribe—Dennis Rucker
	Ziebach—Jeremy Holien

County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers Association

The South Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association (SDVSOA) is an organization consisting of County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers across the state.

The primary purpose of the SDVSOA is to promote and further the work of all County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers in the State of South Dakota and to ensure that all of the State's veterans and/or their families are reached and receive the care and benefits to which they are entitled. Current board members are as follows:

Officers of the CTVSO Association:

President—Aaron Walberg (Brown County)

Vice President—Craig Bennett (Davison, Hanson, Jerauld, and Sanborn Counties)

Secretary-Treasurer—Fred Kuil (Douglas County)

Judge Advocate—Dennis Evenson (Deuel County)

District 1—Courtney VanZanten (Brookings County)

District 2—Samantha Boshard (McPherson County)

District 3—Cody Mangold (Yankton County)

District 4—Jesse Ketzner (Lawrence County)

District 5—Geri Opsal (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate)



Partners—South Dakota Veterans Council

The purpose and objectives of the South Dakota Veterans Council are to develop a statewide, intelligent, aggressive, and serviceable Council for the purpose of promoting all activities found to be for the good of all veterans and their dependents and to provide a practical means by which veterans service organizations throughout the state can effectively contribute to the betterment of all veterans.

The South Dakota Veterans Council is comprised of the following Congressionally chartered veterans' service organizations: American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America. Membership consists of three members from each veterans service organization.

Council Leadership:

President—Connie Johnson (Military Order of the Purple Heart)

Vice President—Kevin Hempel (American Legion)

Secretary/Treasurer—Marty Pennock (Disabled American Veterans)

Judge Advocate—Terry Hawk (Vietnam Veterans of America)





Partners—Veterans Service Organizations

South Dakota is fortunate to have immense groups of people that have dedicated their energy to improving the lives of veterans and their families. Veterans Service Organizations are the backbone of veteran’s rights for our state and the nation.

Collectively they provide advocacy, educate veterans on benefits, lobby Congress and legislators, and provide a network for veterans. SDDVA works closely with these congressionally chartered veterans service organizations.

Air Force Sergeants Association
American Legion
American Legion Auxiliary
AMVETS
Disabled American Veterans
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary
Korean War Veterans Association
Marine Corps League
Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the Purple Heart
National American Indian Veterans
National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs
National Guard Association of South Dakota
National Guard Enlisted Association
National Guard Enlisted Association Auxiliary
Non-Commissioned Officers Association of America
Paralyzed Veterans of America
The Retired Enlisted Association
U.S. Submarine Veterans Inc
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary
Vietnam Veterans of America

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

Here to serve those who served.

Department Message

The primary mission of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is to advocate with purpose and passion for veterans and link them to superior services, benefits, and support. Our team is at the forefront of the most demanding challenges confronting our state's veterans and their families, regardless of what era they served in.

As is the case with all of our state agencies; our people truly make a difference. For the team at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, it truly is a privilege and an honor to serve our veterans and their family members. Our team labors tirelessly to ensure that the State of South Dakota preserves our reputation as "a veteran friendly state."

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

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Pierre, SD 57501-3100
605.773.3269
605.773.5380 (fax)

Sioux Falls Administrative Office
SD Military Heritage Alliance Bldg.
Suites 406 and 407
1600 W. Russell Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57104-1330
605.360.4173

Sioux Falls Claims Office
c/o VA Regional Office
2501 W. 22nd Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57105-1305
605.333.6869
605.333.5386 (fax)

South Dakota Veterans Cemetery
25965 477th Avenue
Sioux Falls, SD 57104-6519
605.277.8094

Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home
2500 Minnekahta Avenue
Hot Springs, SD 57747-1129
605.745.5127

