

**American Legion Auxiliary
Department of Indiana
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation
Programs Action Plan
2021-2022**

What is this program and why do we have it?

The Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation program promotes our mission to enhance the lives of veterans, military, and their families.

What can you do?

1. Assist in activities that help homeless veterans.

Ideas for the Member and Units:

- Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your department and offer to assist that coordinator in responding to requests for assistance from homeless veterans or homeless veteran service providers.
- Crochet or purchase hats, scarves, or mittens to be distributed to homeless veterans.
 - Contact the homeless veteran coordinator at the VA health care system nearest you to explore what the unit or you can do to help homeless veterans in your community.
- Contact your local VA health care center to see if they participate in the VA Project CHALENG. Project CHALENG for Veterans enhances the care for homeless veterans provided by your local VA and its surrounding community service agencies.
 - See if they need personal care items to give to homeless veterans.
 - Make sure they are well stocked with coffee and snacks.
- Contact your local post chairman and offer your assistance if requests for help come through the Legion's Family Support Network (FSN).
- Raise funds for local American Legion posts to help veterans and their families through the Family Support Network for veterans at risk of losing their housing or homeless veterans transitioning to permanent housing.
 - Make payments of overdue rent, utility payments or deposits and security deposits.

- Host or volunteer at homeless veterans' stand downs, events where homeless veterans receive free goods and services such as haircuts and medical exams.
- Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters, transitional housing projects and permanent housing projects in your community and identify the organization's volunteer and in-kind contribution needs, including:
 - Meal preparation and serving
 - Clothes collection and distribution
 - Assembly and delivery of hygiene kits, buddy baskets
 - Purchasing or securing household items or furniture
- Reach out to specific homeless veterans, such as residents of projects mentioned above to provide her/him practical, social, and moral support.
- Compile "blessing bags" to be given to the local homeless shelters to distribute to homeless veterans. They can also be given to police departments or other organizations that deal with the homeless veteran population.
- Create a "Tree of Warmth" by collecting scarves, mittens, hats and attaching them to a tree in a location the homeless frequent. Include a sign that says, "Please Take if Needed," "Free if Needed," or something similar.

2. Support rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts, and hobbies.

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)

NVCAF is the national, annual competition and festival that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's veterans after disease, disability or life crisis. As the national presenting sponsor, the American Legion Auxiliary should strive to increase monetary support by encouraging departments to sponsor fundraisers that will contribute to the increased awareness and support of this program.

The American Legion Auxiliary Department of Indiana Creative Arts Chairman will have more information and details on how you can help with this program.

Ideas for the Member and Units:

- Obtain and become familiar with the ALA Guide for Volunteers.
- Help your unit and department earn recognition at National Convention through donations to support VA Creative Arts Festivals. Volunteer individually, with a fellow member, or as a unit at a local Creative Arts Festival.
 - Raise funds to support this worthy cause through raffles, bake sales, etc.

- Identify arts, crafts and hobby projects targeted to veterans (such as writing, oral history recording, visual and performing arts, quilting, and gardening). A unit may organize a project of its own or introduce a unit to veteran arts, crafts, and hobby projects already operational in the community.
 - Contribute donated supplies to help supplement visual veteran artists' needs for their projects.
 - Contact department chairman or your local VA hospital coordinator for a list of items.
 - Donate, through department, funds that help local veterans attend state and national Wheelchair Games, Veterans Creative Arts Festivals, Paralympics, etc.
 - Volunteer in the Arts and Crafts department at your local VA facility
3. **Help The American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.**

Ideas for the Member:

- Take part in a veteran job fair by organizing or working at an informational table. Other opportunities include helping implement a Legion-sponsored job fair and/or co-hosting a Legion Family information table at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation-sponsored job fair. Additionally, Auxiliary members may initiate and host a job fair for veterans in their community.
- Serve as a career e-mentor for women veterans.
- Volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, specifically if a house build is supported by The American Legion.

Ideas for the Unit:

- Host an informational table at a local job fair.
 - Support the Legion by helping host a local job fair at your post home.
 - Help organize a job fair. This can be done in conjunction with a stand down.
4. **Enroll Auxiliary members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers to serve veterans and their families at VA health care facilities.**

Ideas for the Member:

- If you live near a VA facility, become a regular VAVS volunteer, and invite others to become VAVS volunteers with you.
 - VA medical centers
 - State veteran homes
 - Fisher houses
 - Other VA health care locations
- Send notes and provide supplies to support those who volunteer at VA facilities
- Track all your volunteer hours. Enter all your VAVS hours into the VAVS tracking system. Note: VA Healthcare facilities volunteer hour tracking system is different from the tracking utilized for ALA hour bars. Please consult department.
IMPORTANT Record ALL hours spent on VA&R, Service to Veterans and Indiana Veteran's Home activities. The dollars spent on these activities is equally important.
 1. Carry a small notebook with you to track your activities month by month. This will make reporting much easier.
 2. At Unit meetings get everyone who volunteers together and total up the hours and dollars month by month. This will make reporting much easier.
 3. At District meetings poll the units and total up the hours and dollars month by month. This will make reporting much easier.

5. There isn't a VA hospital close to our community? Find opportunities for Auxiliary members to serve veterans in your area. These hours will count toward your Service to Veterans pin and hour bars.

Service to Veterans recognizes volunteers who provide service to veterans who provide service to veterans, servicemembers and their families outside a VAMC. Volunteers conduct projects and work for military/veterans and/or families from their homes and in their communities. Service to Veterans volunteers maintain their own recordkeeping and dollars spent. The Service to Veterans pin has been designed to reflect the work of those who volunteer in their communities and at home for veterans. Hour bars, which attach to the pin, are also available to earn. More information may be in the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers available online for download at www.emblem.legion.org.

The American Legion Auxiliary Department of Indiana Service to Veterans Chairman will have more information and details on how you can help with this program.

Ideas for the Member:

- Read the *Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers*
- Sew quilts for the Quilts of Valor Foundation. For more information, please visit www.qovf.org.
- Help a veteran use the internet
- Supply postage for local veterans in rest homes or assisted living facilities.
- Organize transportation for veterans to assist them with essential errands or medical appointments; many live far from a VA facility and shouldn't be driving if they don't feel well.
- Contact the Legion Service Officer at your post and offer to be on the list of people to call when a military family needs help.
- Buy school supplies, throw a baby shower, or send care packages to military kids who are headed to collage.

Ideas for the Unit:

- Become the catalyst to find needs and encourage members to help veterans in their community.
- Provide hospitality for a job fair for veterans.
- Coordinate with local quilt shops to help your unit sponsor a quilting event in support of Quilts of Valor.
- Contact members, including those who never or only occasionally attend meetings and events and invite them to participate for specific limited duration projects that would help area veterans.
- Coordinate with your PR chairman to tell the community what work your unit members are doing for veterans.

6. **Transitioning back to civilian life is one of the biggest challenges veterans face today. Educate yourself about resources so you can help veterans face today. Educate yourself about resources abut resources so you can help veterans across all their VA benefits, not just health care. Work with your local American Legion Post Service Officer.**

Ideas for the Member:

- Coordinate with local American Legion posts to identify the local Service Officer or see list at www.legion.org/serviceofficers.
- Help eligible veterans attain benefits through referrals.

- Encourage eligible veterans to use the VA health care system and its services, including hospitals, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Vet Centers, etc.
- Participate in and encourage veterans and their family members to participate in town-hall meetings organized by The American Legion in advance of the Legion's System Worth Saving site visits to VA health care systems: www.legion.org/systemworthsaving.
- **Resource:**
VA Health Care Hotline for women veterans 1-855-VA-Women (1-855-829-6636); explore.va.gov/health-car

Ideas for the Unit:

- Invite the local, county or state Service Officer to be the guest speaker at a unit/department event.

7. Assist and support caregivers of veterans.

Ideas for the Member:

- Familiarize yourself with:
 - The services of the VA caregiver support program
 - The Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network.
- Become A:
 - Veteran caregiver peer support trainer or volunteer.
 - Legacy Corps AmeriCorps member if the Legacy Corps project is offered in a state or locality near you.
- Volunteer as a VA Voluntary Service volunteer support caregiver if the VA health care system closest to you offers such volunteer opportunity.

Ideas for the Unit:

- Familiarize your unit and community with the services of the VA caregiver support program.

Additional Information:

Welcome Home Celebrations

Help your local VA health care system in supporting returning servicemembers and their families in the community. VA supports this initiative by providing information about the opportunities available to them through the VA. Every VA health care system sponsors welcome home celebrations in their facilities and community.

National Salute to Veterans

The initiative salutes America's heroes, the more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. Armed Services who are cared for every day in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14 annually.

Additional Resources You Can Use

1. Homeless Veterans Coalition www.nchv.org
2. "How to Sheets" www.legion-aux.org
3. Quilts of Valor: www.govf.org
4. VA Homeless Programs www.va.gov/homeless/
5. HUD Homeless Assistance Program
https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/homeless/programs
6. On-Call: Handbook for Homeless Veterans and Service Providers
www.Legion.org/publications/168493/homeless-veterans-handbook
7. The American Legion Auxiliary Veterans Creative Activities Action Guide www.legion-aux.org
8. The American Legion Family Support Network www.legion.org/family
9. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov
10. The national VA & R Committee Facebook group, search ALA Veteran Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R)
11. Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A guide for Volunteers (available through emblem sales) or download online at www.legion-aux.org
12. Elizabeth Dole Foundation www.elizabethdolefoundation.org
13. Hiring Our Heroes [Hiring Our Heroes | U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation \(uschamberfoundation.org\)](http://Hiring Our Heroes | U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (uschamberfoundation.org))
14. e-Mentor Program [Our Community – eMentor \(ementorprogram.org\)](http://Our Community – eMentor (ementorprogram.org))
15. The American Legion and Habitat for Humanity Volunteer involvement toolkit
www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/habitat.pdf
16. VA Caregiver Support www.caregiver.va.gov
17. Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network www.milvetcaregivernetwork.org

VA&R Reporting

At the National level, Creative Arts and Service to Veterans are included in VA&R. There is also no Veteran's Home chairman so those activities are included under VA&R. Anything you, your Unit, and/or District does for Creative Arts, Service to Veterans, and Indiana Veterans Home can and should be reported under VA&R. Please report activities in both places.

Mid-Year Reports

Each **Unit Chairman** should submit a narrative report to your district chairman by **December 1, 2021**.

Each **District Chairman** should submit a narrative report to me by **December 15, 2021**.

Combine the Unit reports and tell me everything they are doing to work collaboratively with the American Legion to build the VA&R program.

Annual Reports

Each **Unit Chairman** shall submit a narrative report along with your annual report form to your district chairman by **April 15, 2022**.

Each **District Chairman** shall submit a narrative report along with your annual report form to me no later than **April 27, 2022**.

As part of your narrative report, please include answers to the following questions:

1. How did the units participate in the caregiver support program?
2. Describe any exceptional efforts members made in earning their Service to Veterans hours.
3. What assistance did units give at a stand down in your department?
 - a. What did units learn about hosting a stand down?
 - i. What went well; what would they do differently?

PLEASE INCLUDE PICTURES & NEWSPAPER ARTICLES WITH YOUR NARRATIVE REPORT

Taking the time to share a favorite story about the positive impact you or someone you know has had on our mission is worth doing! It helps us tell the world **Who We Are, What We Do, and Why We Matter**. Just three simple steps to add your part to our Department success story:

1. Please follow instructions as you fill out any National Awards Cover Sheet.
2. Provide details/examples about the activity as outlined in the award's materials and guidelines section.

National Report and Awards Cover Sheet, deadlines, and VA&R committee contact information may be found on the VA&R committee page on the national website, www.legion-aux.org.

National Unit Award: Most Outstanding VA&R Program

Presented to: One Unit in each division

Materials and guidelines:

- Narrative report including any pictures and newspaper articles
- Deadline for entries must be sent to me no later than **May 27, 2022.**

Department Award: Nancy Gunning Monetary Award

Presented to: The District reporting the best hands-on activities held at a VA or state hospital facility

Materials and guidelines:

- Narrative report including any pictures and newspaper articles
- Deadline for entries must be sent to me no later than **May 27, 2022.**

Chairman Personal Awards:

Presented to: The Unit that submits the best narrative report on work accomplished with homeless veterans

Presented to: The Unit that submits the best year-end VA&R narrative report

Presented to: The District that submits the best year-end VA&R narrative report

Presented to: The Junior or Junior Unit that submits the best narrative report on work accomplished following the VA&R program.

Materials and guidelines:

- Narrative reports including any pictures and newspaper articles
- Deadline for entries must be sent to me no later than **May 27, 2022.**

*Department and Personal Awards will be presented at Department Convention – July 2022.

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