



2015

## Veterans Task Force: Year in Review





# **Multnomah County Veterans Task Force: Year in Review - 2015**

## **Background**

There are an estimated 44,378 veterans who reside in Multnomah County, more than any other county in the State of Oregon. This diverse group represents service men and women from four different generations who bring a variety of assets, needs, and perspectives to this community. The Veterans Task Force was established in April, 2010, through passage of Board of Commissioners Resolution No. 2010-037. This advisory group was charged with locating and assessing the services provided by Multnomah County to veterans, locating barriers, and identifying opportunities for change and improvement of services.

Chaired by Commissioner Diane McKeel, the Task Force is comprised of representatives from multiple county departments and select community groups and organizations with expertise in the levels and types of assistance provided to veterans. There is strong collaboration among service providers in Multnomah County, so task force presentations include briefings on county programs as well as services available in the community and partnership opportunities between agencies.

## **Veterans Task Force Workplan**

The Task Force's 2015 workplan focused on multiple issues impacting veterans that were identified in the Multnomah County Community Covenant<sup>1</sup>, with a different issue as the focus of each month's meeting. These issues included: Accessing Benefits, Criminal Justice, Education, Employment, Families, Health Care, Housing, Mental Health & Addiction, Suicide Prevention, and Women's Services. Additionally, the Task Force selected three focus areas for projects or policy initiatives during the year: promoting employment opportunities for veterans, stabilizing stand down events in the County, and strategies to support children and military families in school.

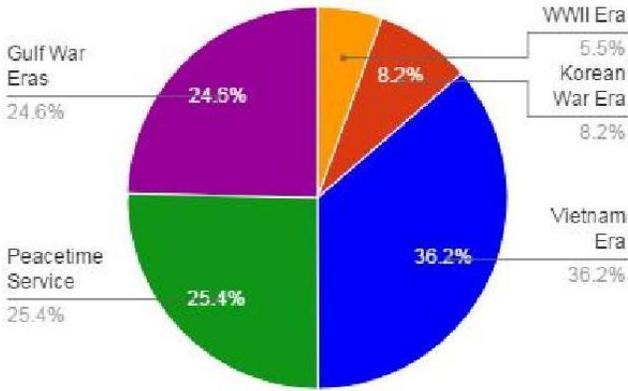
---

<sup>1</sup> Community Covenant with Veterans and Military Families. (2013, November 7). Retrieved from <https://multco.us/file/30474/download>.

# Veterans Data

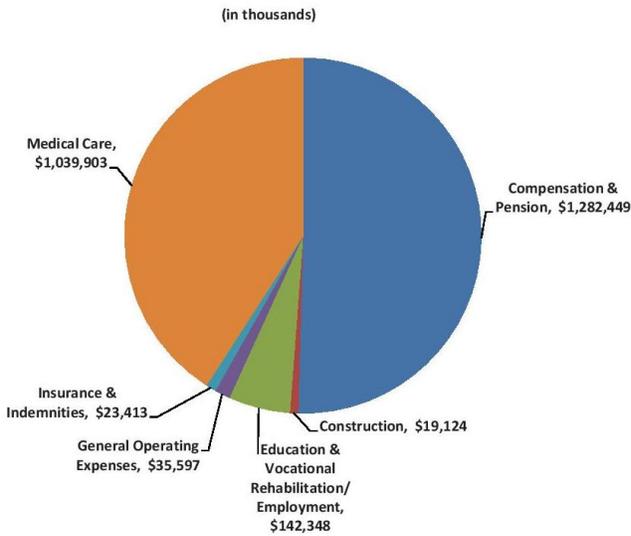
## State of Oregon Veteran Statistics

### Percentage of Oregon's Veterans by Era Served



Source: Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs 2015 Annual Report

### FY13 VA Expenditures Oregon = \$2.5 Billion

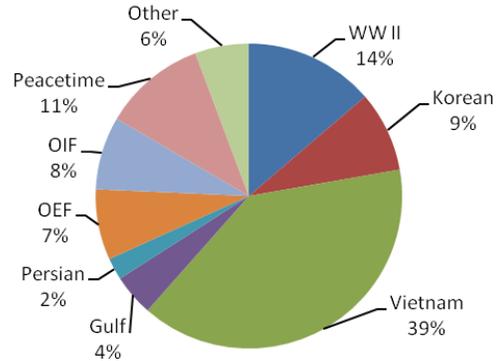


Source: VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

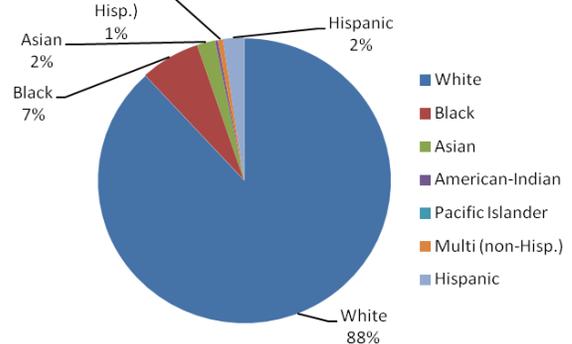
## Multnomah County Veteran Statistics

This data was collected during 2015 from voluntary phone surveys of veterans who contacted the County Veterans Service Office.

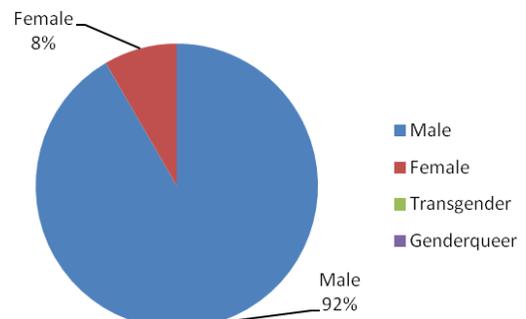
### Period of Service (n=387)



### Race (n=347)



### Gender (n= 380)



## Veterans Task Force Accomplishments

- Facilitated a panel discussion about issues that military families with school-aged children experience, and helped develop partnership between Oregon National Guard and Gresham-Barlow School District to support children in military families.
- Continued participation in the Home for Everyone “Operation 424” initiative to end veteran homelessness in Multnomah County. Using resources from the federal and local level, this initiative is working to build system capacity to reach “functional zero”, meaning that the system has adequate capacity to offer permanent housing options for all veterans who become homeless. Task Force briefings included an overview of the strategic plan at the March meeting, a presentation on outreach efforts to landlords at the August meeting, and in November the Landlord Response Team described their role recruiting and retaining landlords and Operation 424 provided an update on efforts to house all 690 identified homeless veterans by the end of the year. The initiative exceeded this goal, and housed a total of 695 homeless veterans.
- Led discussion about barriers and action steps to support veterans who don’t meet eligibility criteria for benefits or services. Primary groups identified in discussion included Army and Air National Guard and Reserves who were not hurt or federally activated for deployment, soldiers not deployed 180 days, and veterans who were dishonorably discharged. Task Force considered proposals for ways to prioritize this population for other programs they may be eligible for, and will continue to explore this issue.
- Legislative briefing and updates on proposed legislation at the state and federal level.
  - Presentation on all bills introduced during 2015 Oregon Legislative Session identified as having an impact on veterans. Discussion of potential impacts on services and on veterans in Multnomah County, with updates by Association of Oregon Counties Veterans Services Committee staff and Commissioner McKeel, Committee Co-Chair.
  - Regular updates on federal issues related to veterans services, as identified by the National Association of Counties Veterans and Military Service Committee. Specific issues included continued funding and flexibility for housing programs, implementation of the e-benefits program, and changes to VA Choice Card program.

- Advocated for enhanced County Veterans Service Office programming.
  - In the County's Fiscal Year 16 budget the County Veterans Service Office added a new Veteran Resource Guide position to assist veterans in navigating different systems to access services and benefits.
  - Outreach in the community has increased, with more office hours and meeting appointments available for veterans countywide.
  - From January through early December, 2015, the office filed 814 new power of attorneys (POA) claims. That is over a 250% increase in POAs from 2014. In addition, the office has started to identify homeless veterans and worked with 180 veterans in need of housing.
- Presentations to promote awareness of available services. Specific presentations included:
  - Director Cameron Smith presented an overview of ODVA's 2015 Annual Report, with highlights from the past year of work, demographic trends among Oregon's veterans, and information about new policy positions for LGBT and women veterans.
  - Overview of the VA's Veterans Choice Program: *Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014*, program eligibility, services, and contacts for additional information.
  - Presentation from VA Portland Health Care System on quarterly town hall events, update on Fisher House construction at the Vancouver campus, and anticipated services at the new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) opening in Fairview in 2016, which will triple the size of the former East Portland location and provide up to 30,000 appointments annually.
  - Lines for Life and the Military Helpline, which provides immediate, confidential support to veterans and their families, and an additional presentation on the Youth Line teen-to-teen crisis support hotline.
  - Central City Concern's women veteran's Grants & Per Diem program to promote housing permanence, increased employment or economic stability, and improved self-determination.

- Impact NW's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) outreach and services for women veterans, providing rent assistance, support groups, moving expenses, child care, clothing, and more for female veterans.
- Multnomah County's Community Justice Veterans PO Project, through which the Sheriff's Office and the VA identify veterans who come into the jail and veterans currently under supervision. Community Justice has assigned at least one probation and parole officer at every field office as a point person for other POs working with veterans.
- Overview and update of the Multnomah County Veterans Docket's first year of operations.
- Unlimited Choices presented on the Adapt-a-Home and Mend-a-Home programs for low-income individuals to get critical home repairs or adaptations.
- Literature opportunities for veterans, including the Veteran Writing Project 2-day workshop for beginning and intermediate-level writers, and the Lioness Writing Program 3-part workshop for women veterans with an interest in writing.
- Portland State University Veterans Resource Center's role on campus and services available to students who have served in the military.
- Multnomah County's veteran's preference training for managers and supervisors.
- Do Good Multnomah's Veteran Shelter program opening on Veterans Day to house up to thirteen veterans every night this winter.
- Veteran homeless outreach efforts in the community, with presentations by Transition Projects and the VA Community Resource and Referral Center.

## Review of Priority Focus Areas from 2015 Workplan

In the 2014 Year in Review, the Task Force selected three key focus areas to work on. These priorities were to promote employment opportunities for veterans, stabilize stand down events in Portland and East County, and support military families with school-age children. The Task Force had presentations and developed action items on each of these prioritized policy areas.

1. Promote Employment Opportunities for Veterans: Through their service and training, many veterans develop valuable transferrable skills, teamwork and work ethic that makes them strong candidates for employers. In addition, there are services and incentives available to employers who hire veterans, such as training, salary support, and tax credits.
  - Promoted greater awareness and access to employment programs through presentations by Bureau of Labor and Industry apprenticeship and training programs for veterans with GI Bill benefits, the VA's Compensated Work Therapy program, Easter Seals Homeless Veterans Reintegration program, and the Portland Habitation Center job training program.
  - Developed an Employment Speaker's Bureau to promote employment opportunities for veterans. Materials included a contact list of business associations around the county, and a one-page document with information about assets that veterans bring to the work place and resources for employers to connect with candidates and access training or salary incentives. A Task Force member followed up at a subsequent meeting with feedback from her presentation to a business group, with particular emphasis on the value of referral information for businesses who want to hire a veteran but didn't previously know how to find candidates.
2. Advocate for sustainable funding and coordination of Stand Down events in Portland and East Multnomah County.
  - Received regular updates, conducted outreach, and supported in coordination of two separate Veterans Stand Down events in Multnomah County, September 11<sup>th</sup> in Portland and October 17<sup>th</sup> in Troutdale.

- Transition Projects presented at the May meeting about their ongoing role coordinating the Portland Stand Down, partnerships with the East County Stand Down organizers and local organizations, and integration of the homeless veteran registry into the event. Key ongoing needs to make these events sustainable are fundraising, volunteers, and transportation.
3. Support military families with school-age children: Coordinate resources and strengthen partnerships with schools to better identify children from military families and improve their access to resources.

- The Task Force convened a panel at the April meeting to discuss challenges that military families experience and opportunities for community partnerships to support their children in school. Panelists included Gresham Barlow School District Superintendent Jim Schlachter, Ms. Kelly Hokanson from the Oregon National Guard, Ms. Janna Marshall from the Oregon Army National Guard, and Ms. Tami Davis from the Oregon Air National Guard.

Identified barriers included school personnel not knowing which kids are in military families - either because they don't self-identify or because students transfer schools; concern that labeling kids "military connected" could be stigmatized as a deficit rather than an asset; limited data collection at this time and lack of a centralized location that it could be accessed by school employees; and students go to a trusted adult to talk about issues with - often a teacher, counselor, classified staff, coach, or someone else - so training would be most valuable for all staff rather than one targeted group.

Opportunities that emerged from this discussion were exploring a partnership between the Oregon National Guard Child and Youth Program and Gresham Barlow School District, training opportunities to offer schools and other youth programs, modeling partnerships that schools have with other local organizations to adapt to programs serving military families, and explore additional training opportunities for parents about how to advocate and to whom at the school.

## **Focus Areas for 2016**

The Veterans Task Force will continue to meet on a monthly basis and follow the schedule for Community Covenant focus areas. Over the next year, the Task Force has identified several priority items to focus on:

1. Collecting local data with demographic information of veterans contacting the County Veterans Service Office. There is some data available at the statewide and federal level but information for Multnomah County is limited. The Task Force will work with the Veteran Service Office to collect data, identify ways to track and report it, and strategically use this information for future policy recommendations.
2. Continue focus on education and developing partnerships to support children in military families. Task Force will explore what the current partnerships look like, consider other resources that should be involved, and identify opportunities to expand to other school districts beyond the current pilot at Gresham Barlow.
3. Continue focus on employment, with an emphasis on data collection. Task Force specifically identified events, including the number of local job fairs and Stand Down events, veterans attending, employers involved, and jobs hired at or following those events. Another focus within employment is workforce and job development programs, and strategic opportunities to support the employment goals of job fairs or Stand Downs as well as the permanent housing goals for Home for Everyone's initiative to end veteran homelessness.

**2016 Meeting Schedule**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Focus Area</u></b>
January 4 <sup>th</sup>	Health Care
February 1 <sup>st</sup>	Mental Health and Addictions, state legislation
March 7 <sup>th</sup>	Women's Services
April 4 <sup>th</sup>	Families
May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Suicide Prevention
June 6 <sup>th</sup>	Criminal Justice
July 11 <sup>th</sup>	Date & Focus Area To Be Determined
August 1 <sup>st</sup>	Education
September 12 <sup>th</sup>	Employment
October 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Accessing Benefits
November 7 <sup>th</sup>	Housing
December 5 <sup>th</sup>	Year in Review