

NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM



Our largest endeavor in fulfilling the DAV's mission is our National Service Program. In 110 offices throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico, we employ a corps of approximately 260 National Service Officers (NSOs) and 34 Transition Service Officers (TSOs) who counsel and represent veterans and their families with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense and other government agencies.

Veterans need not be members to take advantage of our assistance, which is provided free of charge. With outlays of \$43,434,188 in 2009, these direct services make up the largest item in our budget for program activities. Between January 1, 2009, and December 31, 2009, our NSOs and TSOs, all wartime service-connected disabled veterans, represented nearly a quarter of a million veterans and their families in their claims for VA benefits, obtaining for them nearly \$4.5 billion in new and retroactive benefits.

NSOs function as attorneys-in-fact, assisting veterans and their families in filing claims for VA disability compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pensions, death benefits, employment and training programs. They provide free services, such as information seminars, counseling and community outreach. NSOs also represent veterans and active duty military personnel before Discharge Review

Boards, Boards for Correction of Military Records, Physical Evaluation Boards, the Disability Transition Assistance Program, the Transition Assistance Program and other official panels.

Our NSOs are highly trained professionals and skilled experts in developing and prosecuting veterans' claims through in-depth reviews of medical histories, in conjunction with application of current law and regulations. They also review rating board decisions, informing veterans and their families of the appeals process and of their appellate rights.

The extensive preparation required for these essential services provided by NSOs begins with a 16-month on-the-job training program, which provides the foundation for new trainees. Trainees are instructed by tenured supervisory NSOs. The National Service staff at National Service and Legislative Headquarters administers and monitors the program and the instructors.

NSOs also undergo a comprehensive Structured and Continuing Training program designed to keep them up to date on changes to the laws and regulations affecting veterans' benefits. The DAV is the only veterans service organization to have a training program certified for college credit by the American Council on Education.

In addition to these training programs, supervisory staff and selected NSOs from field offices across the country receive specialized instruction in management and leadership development. The goal is to produce the most highly trained representatives possible to serve veterans and their families.

NATIONAL APPEALS OFFICE

The Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) is the highest appellate level within the VA responsible for the final decision concerning entitlement to veterans benefits. About 95 percent of the claims before the board involve disability compensation issues. Our highly skilled National Appeals Officers serve appellants in the preparation of written briefs for BVA review and conduct formal hearings before Veterans Law Judges. We maintain the largest staff of any advocacy group, representing more than 31 percent of all cases decided by the BVA in 2009.

Operation Enduring Freedom—Combat medic prepares for flight, TF 325 Med, Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. Illustration by Lt. Col. Olga B. Simons, BSC and Lt. Col. John Stea, MC, FS

JUDICIAL APPEALS OFFICE

We have maintained our leading position among service organizations representing veterans, their dependents and survivors before the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. In July 2008, we implemented a long-anticipated plan to utilize the services of carefully selected law firms to provide pro bono representation to some DAV clients at the veterans court. Through the combined efforts of DAV and its first partner law firm, 140 veterans received free representation before the court in 2009. We added another law firm to this team in late 2008. As a result, an additional 160 veterans were able to benefit from this valuable representation in 2009.



National Service Officer
Michael Michelotti

Transition Service Officer Marvin LeDay speaks with soldiers preparing to end their military careers. DAV Service Officers provide critical guidance and representation for military members, disabled veterans, survivors and family members.



TRANSITION SERVICE PROGRAM

For those servicemembers making the all-important transition back into civilian life, DAV participates in Transition Assistance and Disabled Transition Assistance programs. Due to a generous grant provided by the GE Foundation, we have been able to increase our staff of Transition Service Officers.

Our TSOs provide benefits counseling and assistance to servicemembers filing initial claims for VA benefits at more than 100 military installations throughout the country. By filing compensation claims at separation centers where service medical records and examination facilities are readily available, we are able to provide prompt service to these future veterans. Over the last year, our TSOs conducted 3,136 formal presentations to 86,130 transitioning servicemembers. During that same time they filed 26,207 claims for VA benefits. Counsel and representation for active duty servicemembers during their transition was provided through the military's Disability Evaluation System. We devoted approximately \$2.1 million to this program in 2009.

MOBILE SERVICE OFFICE PROGRAM

By literally putting our service offices on the road, assisting veterans where they live, DAV is increasing their accessibility to benefits. With 10 specially equipped Mobile Service Offices (MSOs) visiting communities across the country, this outreach effort generates a considerable amount of claims work from those veterans who may not otherwise have the opportunity to seek assistance at our National Service Offices.

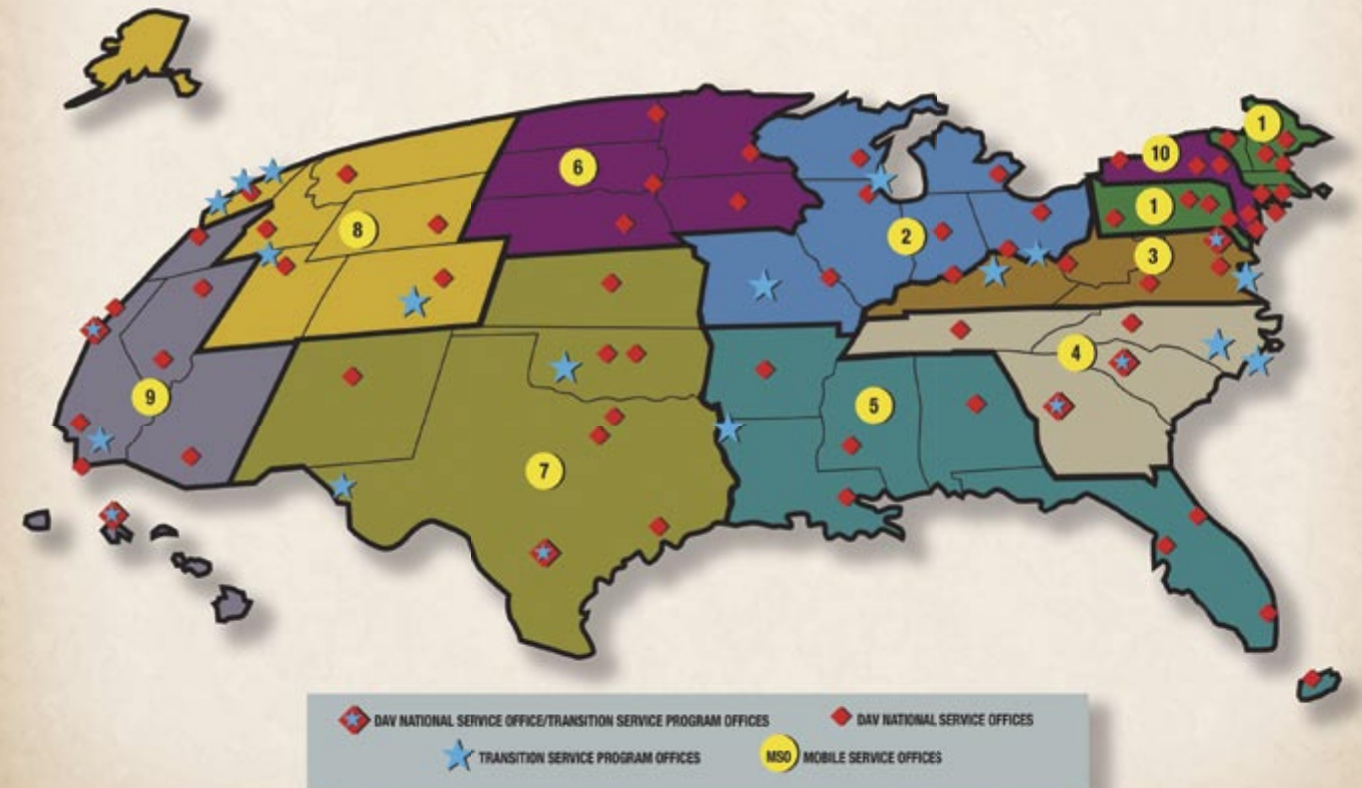
During 2009, our MSOs traveled more than 114,056 miles, visiting 727 cities and towns. Our NSOs interviewed 18,647 veterans and other potential claimants. The Harley-Davidson Foundation in August 2006 pledged \$1 million over four years to partner with the DAV to form the Harley's Heroes® program. During 2009, the MSOs visited 168 Harley-Davidson dealerships as part of this program. Nearly \$750,000 was expended for the Mobile Service Office program in 2009.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The National Service Department has the cooperation, support and assistance of Department and Chapter Service Officers across the country. Each receives the training and information necessary to assist those we serve. Our Department and Chapter Service Officer Certification Training Program guarantees the vitality and growth of our local service programs. This provides an environment where our Hospital Service Coordinators, Department and Chapter Service Officers and volunteers work together for the common goal of service to disabled veterans. In 2009, DAV trained and certified 1,542 Department and Chapter Service Officers in 40 states.

During 2009, we conducted 39 Information Seminars at various Chapters across the country, with 4,251 individuals in attendance. These Information Seminars provide the opportunity for veterans to discuss VA benefits with our NSOs in their own community, give Chapters an opportunity to recruit new members and encourage their involvement.

Since 2006, DAV NSOs have offered services at other community-based events, including participation with state and county fairs, air shows, Major League Baseball, the National Football League and NASCAR.





2nd Annual Timeout for Veterans Health in Washington, D.C.

Dana Liesegang was barely out of Navy basic training when her neck was broken as a result of a violent crime. The medically retired veteran considers herself lucky because her injury could easily have left her completely paralyzed from the neck down. She says participation in the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic opened up a new realm of possibilities.

WOMEN VETERANS

In historic numbers, women are serving our country with pride, patriotism and honor equal to their male counterparts. But women veterans use VA health care facilities and other earned benefits in lower numbers than their male counterparts. As a result, we advocate for women veterans on a variety of fronts. We have organized top-level forums designed to bring women veterans and government policymakers together to openly address topics of concern.

We are involved in the congressionally chartered VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. In addition, our own Women's Advisory Committee, primarily made up of women veterans from across the country, meets annually at our National Convention. We actively seek out and recruit women veterans for our National Service Officer corps.



TSO Tabitha L. Lyles



National Service Officer Joseph Braun assisting a veteran.

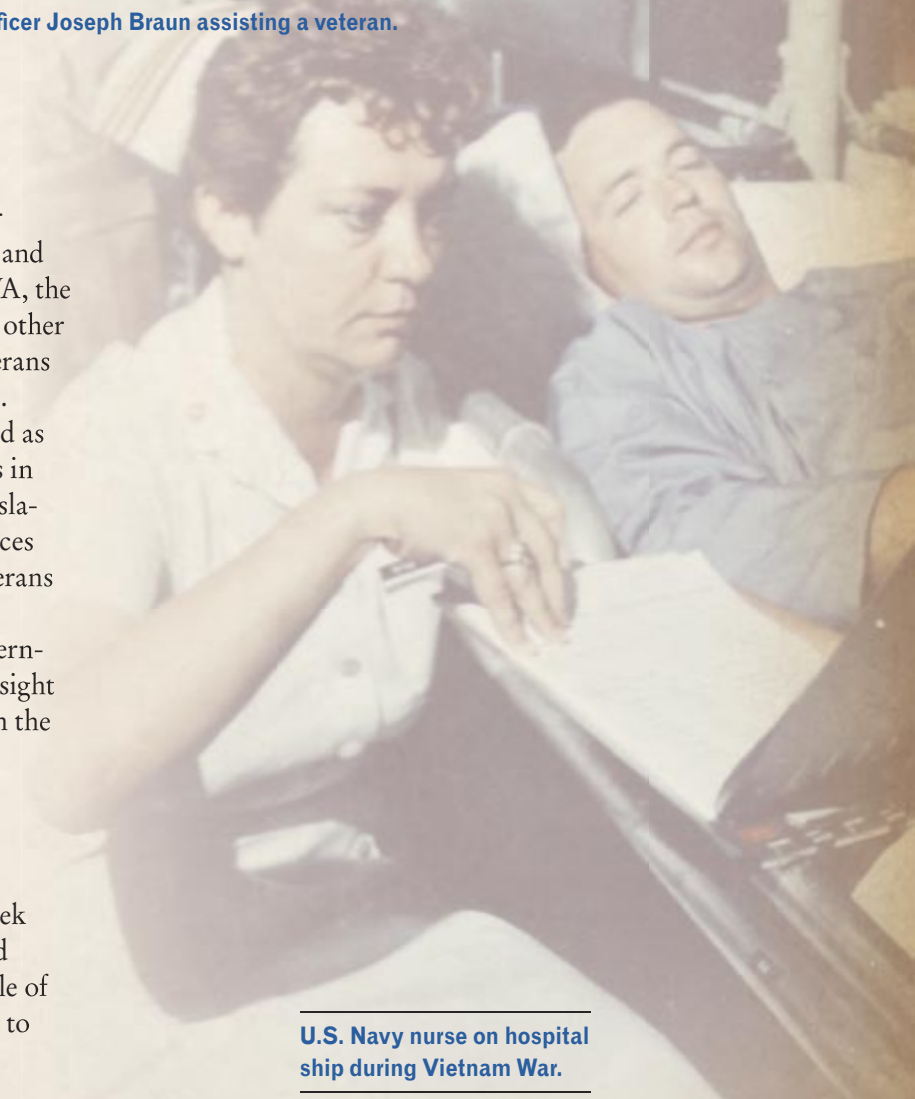
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Our National Service Program is responsible for the organization's employment-related program and works alongside the Department of Labor, the VA, the Office of Personnel Management, Congress and other government agencies to ensure that disabled veterans are treated fairly and equitably in the work force.

Historically, disabled veterans have not fared as well as non-disabled veterans and other workers in the job market. Our primary goal is to seek legislation and policies to enhance programs and services provided by the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, the Office of Personnel Management and other government agencies. Our active involvement and oversight ensure disabled veterans get fair consideration in the job market.

HOMELESS VETERANS

The DAV's Homeless Veterans Initiative is to seek legislation and policies to enhance programs and services to help homeless veterans break the cycle of poverty and isolation and move from the streets to self-sufficiency. Many of our Departments and Chapters are actively involved in the homeless initiatives in their respective communities as well.



U.S. Navy nurse on hospital ship during Vietnam War.