



Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Cultivating community connections
– empowering Georgia’s veterans
and their families to flourish.

June 2024

ECHOES FROM NORMANDY: REFLECTIONS ON THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

On June 6, 1944, nearly 160,000 Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy, France to liberate Western Europe and defeat Nazi Germany. It was the largest invasion ever assembled and created a path for victory during World War II. Over 4, 000 troops were killed in the ensuing battles, including 2,501 Americans.

On June 6, 2024, thousands of veterans, friends and families, and international leaders gathered to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

Among the veterans in attendance were nine members of Congress from several states, including Georgia’s 6th district U.S. Congressman and Marine Corps veteran Rich McCormick. The group honored the bravery and spirit of the WWII soldier and veterans through a parachute jump.

Using a few of vintage planes which flew American paratroopers over the beaches of Normandy 80 years ago, the group paid homage to the unyielding courage of those jumping into untold danger on June 6, 1944.



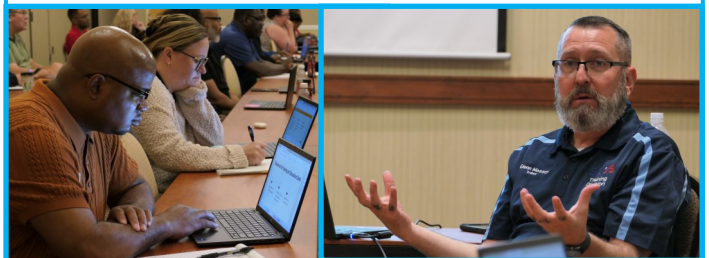
SHARPENING SKILLS: GDVS COMPLETES ANNUAL TRAINING

Georgia’s veterans and families can rest assured their claims and appeals are in good hands after another successful annual training.

All GDVS veteran service and appeals officers met for a training retreat from June 3–7, 2024.

Staff were divided into small groups for focused learning sessions and discussions with our highly qualified training staff. They were also able to meet with representatives from the National Veterans Legal Program to learn more about the best practices to file successful claims.

GDVS staff complete 40 hours of training annually with in-person, hybrid, and digital classes offered throughout the year. They complete the year’s courseload with a comprehensive exam to maintain their VA accreditation.



VA ADDS 3 NEW CANCERS TO PACT ACT PRESUMPTIVE LIST

On Friday, June 14, 2024, VA announced a new policy and the inclusion of 3 new cancer types in the list of presumed service-connected disabilities due to military environmental exposure under the PACT Act.

The new cancer types are male breast cancer, urethral cancer, and cancer of the paraurethral glands.

This policy establishes presumptions of service connection for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans who deployed to Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and the entire Southwest Asia theater of operations, which includes Iraq.

Any veteran who has or previously had one of the listed cancers any time during or after military service may be entitled to compensation benefits dated back to the signing of the PACT Act on August 10, 2022.

VA will review previously filed claims from impacted veterans and their survivors which were denied.

Veterans enrolled in VA health care can obtain cancer screenings and treatment at VA facilities. Contact your provider if you need a screening.

If you have or had one of these conditions, contact your local GDVS office for help filing a claim. Find your local office at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/field-offices>.



WOMEN VETERANS FIND QUALITY, COMPREHENSIVE CARE AT VA

For 48 years, women have been an integral part of our nation’s armed forces. Today, they are the fastest growing veteran population living in the U.S.

Recently, VA shared data noting a significant increase in women veterans choosing to enroll in VA health care.

Between May 2023 and May 2024, more than 53,000 women veterans signed up to receive healthcare services. 2,937 women veterans in Georgia enrolled, which makes Georgia 5th in the nation for the greatest number of new enrollments.

The increase in enrollment also includes an expansion of services dedicated to women veterans, including breast cancer screening, mammograms, maternity care coordination and more.

VA’s Office of Women’s Health oversees these dedicated care services. At every VA health care system, there is now a Women Veterans Program Manager to help coordinate and provide access to the specialized care women veterans need.

VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH AND HOUSING SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE HOSTS FIRST MEETING

In a recent Senate Study Committee on Veterans Mental Health and Housing, Georgia lawmakers received an overview of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, the department’s current war veterans home program, and testimony from individuals on the availability and status of mental health care programs for veterans in Georgia.

During the inaugural committee meeting, GDVS Commissioner Dr. Patrica Ross briefed members on how the state currently serves veterans at two war veterans homes. While VA recognizes a need to care for 1,975 veterans in Georgia, the GDVS homes in Milledgeville and Augusta currently only serve about 400.

Neighboring states with lower veteran populations have, on average, 5 veteran war homes. A study completed in 2022 identified potential sites for new veterans war homes, which included Waycross, Dahlonega, and Gwinnett County. These areas have large veteran populations and construction would be funded in part by the federal government.

Numerous studies have found that one in five veterans suffer from chronic stress,

which can lead to depression and a higher rate of suicidal ideation. Additionally, veterans are susceptible to housing and food insecurity at a higher rate than the overall population.

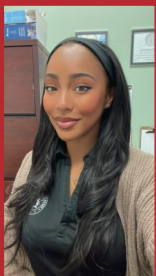
Dr. Brian Moore, Director of the AMES Research Center at Kennesaw State University, shared data with the committee ranking Georgia as 48th in the nation in access to behavioral health care services.

The state has made strides in addressing some of the challenges.

In 2022, the GDVS added a Suicide Prevention and Outreach coordinator to help connect veterans with mental health resources. The Veterans Mental Health Services Grant, first established in 2023 and recently renewed with additional funding, has enhanced programs which provide mental health care services in several areas of the state. The GDVS also recently joined the Behavioral Health Coordinating Council.

The Senate Study Committee has a set deadline of December 1, 2024, to make recommendations on how to improve mental health and housing services for veterans.

GET TO KNOW YOUR VSO: CHRISTINA WILLIAMS



Christina Williams, veteran service officer and GDVS Lawrenceville office manager, wants Georgia veterans to know that she is here to help in any way she can.

Williams, who served for eight years in the Marine Corps and attained the rank of sergeant, understands the importance of veterans and families having vital information on state and federal benefits.

“I want to make sure each veteran that comes into my office leaves with more knowledge than they came in with,” said Williams.

When not at work, she is passionate about spending quality time with her family and two children, who always make her smile. She also enjoys working out and going on adventures to new parks.

Her advice to new and future VSOs?

“Keep learning how to successfully help people and above all else, treat everyone how you want to be treated.”

BRIDGING THE GAP: GDVS ADDS TRANSITION AND EMPLOYMENT COORDINATOR



The Georgia Department of Veterans Service recently established a new coordinator to support the needs of service members, veterans, and their families as they transition into the civilian workforce.

Whether ending military service, being released from incarceration, or simply moving to Georgia after retirement, the Transition and Employment Coordinator can help connect those in need to resources for employment or entrepreneurship.

GDVS Appeals and American Legion service officer Raven Holstick was selected from a robust group of candidates for the new position and will start charting new paths for veterans seeking employment opportunities.

Included among her duties is identifying eligibility for programs and services through partner organizations such as Workforce Boards, Work Source Georgia, and other employment and education resources. She will also forge relationships with organizations and spread awareness of these programs through outreach events and career fairs across the state.

Holstick hopes to “make a meaningful impact in the lives of veterans as they transition into civilian life.”