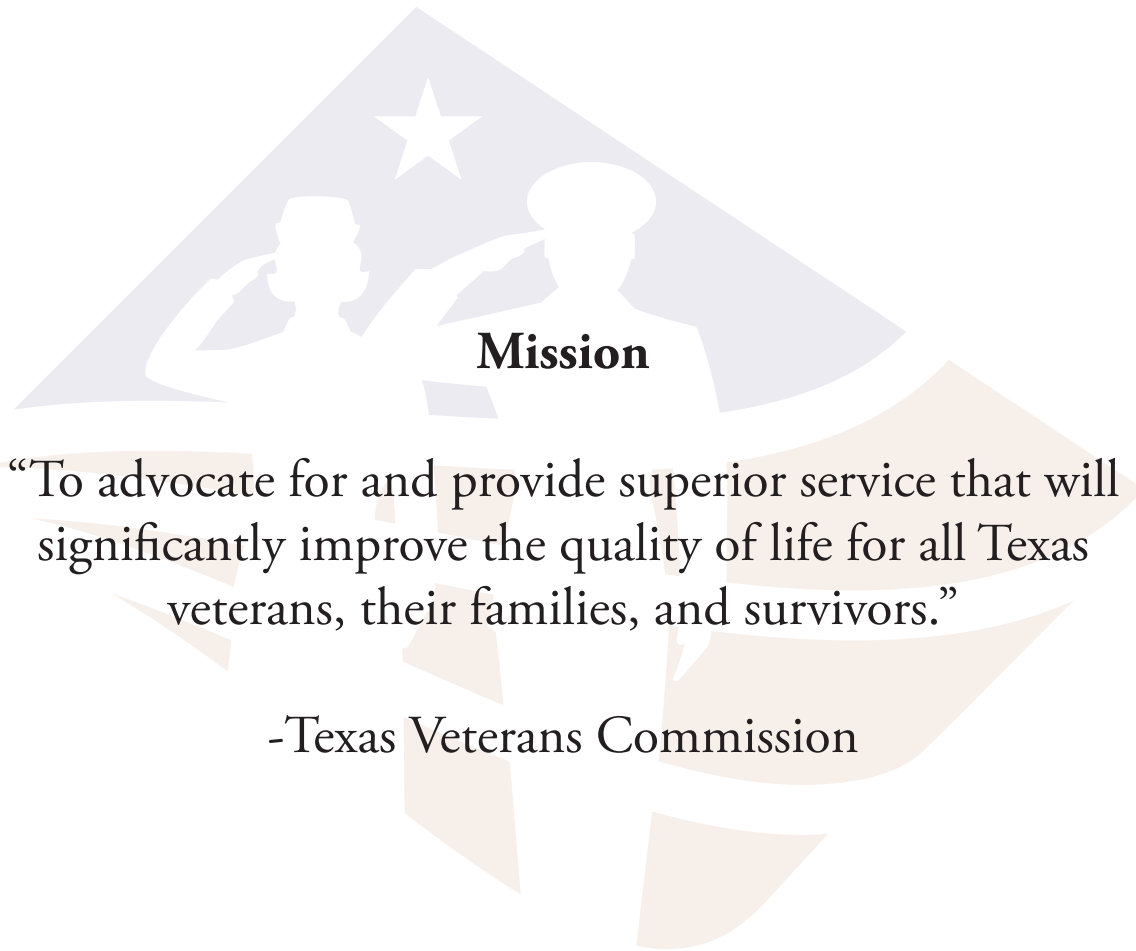


Texas Veterans Commission Programs & Impacts



FY 21-22 Biennial Report





Mission

“To advocate for and provide superior service that will significantly improve the quality of life for all Texas veterans, their families, and survivors.”

-Texas Veterans Commission

**TEXAS VETERANS
COMMISSION**

Letter from the Chairwoman

Welcome to the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC)! There is no denying the challenges we have faced over the past few years - as individuals and communities, as an agency and workplace. We met those challenges and made the necessary adaptations to the changing world in order to continue serving the needs of veterans, their families and survivors.

The pandemic accelerated positive changes within TVC to improve efficiency, accessibility, and convenience. We provided virtual services to veterans throughout the state and now have the ability to provide life-changing services to populations who previously may have lacked access, especially in rural counties. As a result of these changes, the agency is more versatile than ever providing services in-person and remotely based upon the needs of the veteran.

Many services were affected by the agency's digital transformation. Veterans can schedule appointments online to start the claims process and sign forms electronically. Employment's case management is now consolidated into one platform saving staff time to assist more veterans. New veteran-owned businesses have increased due to new legislation and process automation allowing them to start their businesses sooner.

These innovations provide insight to how the agency has modernized our service delivery. Therefore, I'm proud to present TVC's achievements presented in this FY 21-22 Biennial Report. It is a representation of the dedicated women and men who make up the Texas Veterans Commission. We are motivated by the veterans we serve, and it's been that way for over 90 years.

Sincerely,



Laura Koerner
Chairwoman

Customer Service & Core Values

The Texas Veterans Commission strives to provide exemplary customer service to veterans, their families, and survivors through its core values:

Professionalism - Perform duties to the highest standard and provide superior customer service in every program.

Integrity - Provide fair, honest, and objective advocacy in an ethical manner while displaying the highest standard of conduct, on and off duty.

Compassion - Demonstrate care, concern, and understanding in every encounter with veterans, their family members, and survivors.

Commitment - Uphold and be dedicated to carrying out the mission of the agency.

Teamwork - Work together in a positive and productive manner to accomplish the mission of the agency.

In summary, when we endeavor to meet these standards, together we will succeed in providing exceptional service which will improve the well-being of all Texas veterans and their families.

Thank you for your continuing dedication to duty.



Thomas P. Palladino
Executive Director

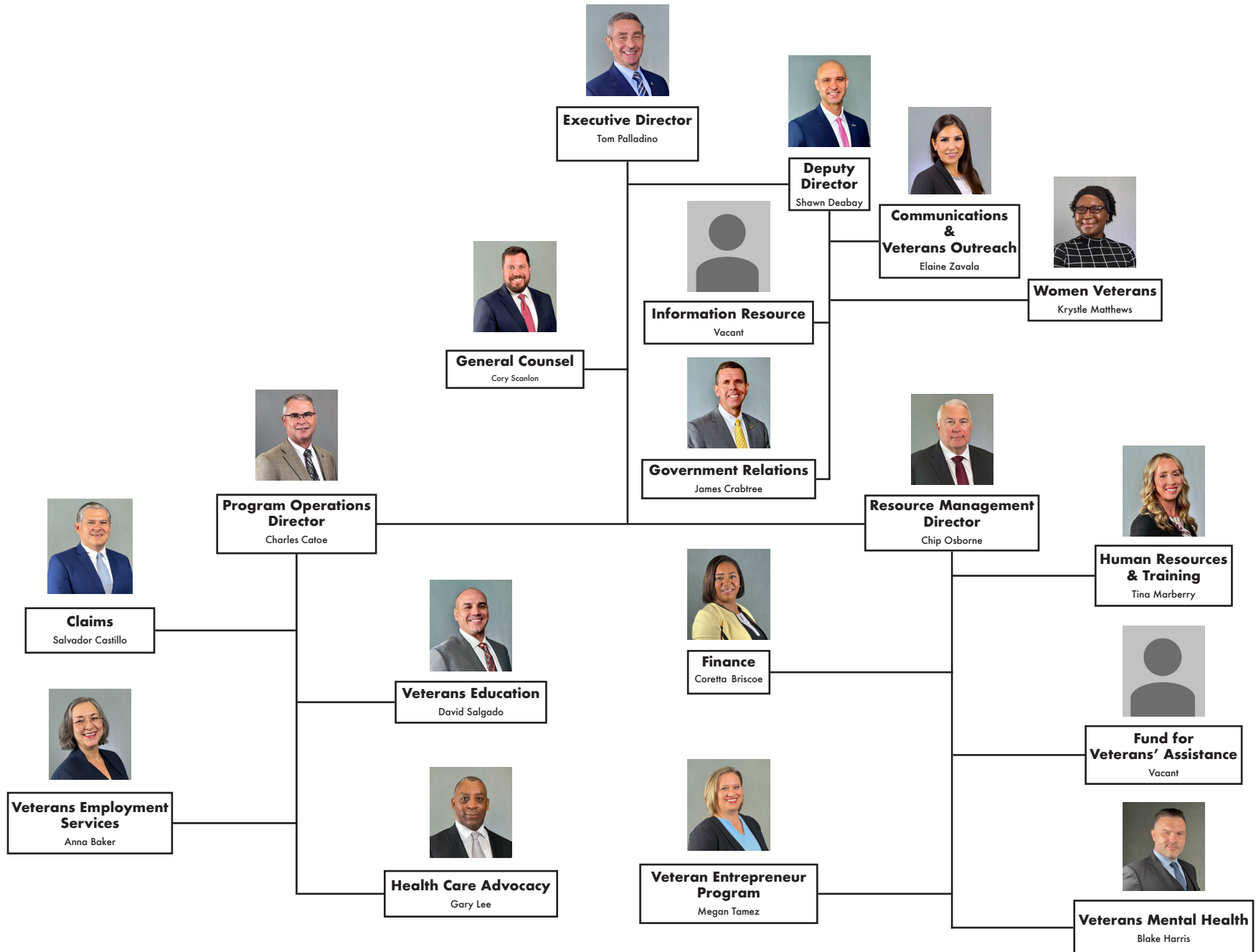
Our Governor and Commissioners



Shown is the Governor of Texas and the Texas Veterans Commission Commissioners. At the top is Texas Governor, Greg Abbott. From left are Chairwoman and Navy Veteran Laura Koerner, of Fair Oaks, Texas. Vice Chair and Air Force Veteran Kimberlee Shaneyfelt, of Dallas, Texas; Commission Secretary and Army Veteran Mary Dale, of Cedar Park, Texas; Army Veteran Kevin Barber, of Houston, Texas; Marine Corps Veteran Mike Hernandez, of Abilene, Texas.

Texas Veterans Commission

Organizational Chart



Claims Services in Texas

New Claims Offices

In 2020, the Texas Veterans Commission opened claims offices in ten more cities across Texas. The new claims offices, with additional staff and funding were approved by the Texas Legislature in the 2019 session, to expand services to under served areas. The new locations include Texarkana, Del Rio, Abilene, Seguin, Paris, Palestine, Borger, El Paso, Beeville, and San Antonio to better serve our veterans, their dependents, and survivors.

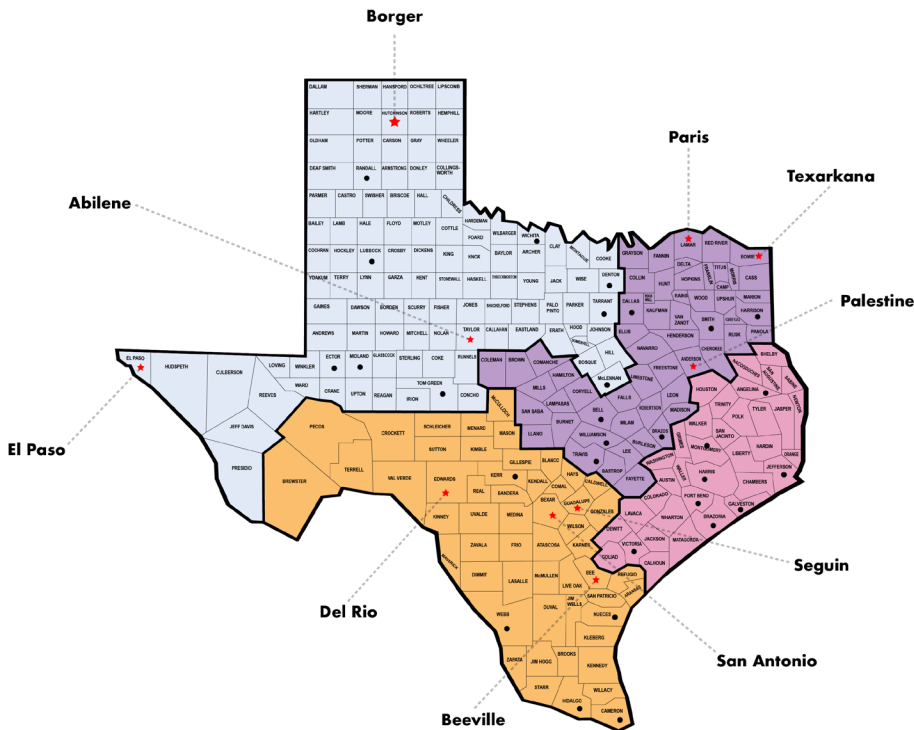
Online Claims Appointments

The Claims Department continues to implement practices developed when COVID 19 lock downs were initiated. TVC now offers phone appointments which enable veterans to talk with any Claims Benefits Advisor (CBA) in the state. Through digital software, veterans may request an appointment either by phone, or in person. Whether in person or on the phone, the CBA can file disability claims, appeals, pensions, survivors benefits and dependent compensation. TVC can also represent veterans in appeals actions, virtually, without having to travel to the VA regional office. TVC has completed over 51,000 appointments since November 2021.

Retroactive Payments

In Fiscal Years 21 and 22, TVC, in conjunction with Veteran County Service Officers (VCSOs) who are accredited by TVC, filed Veterans Compensation, Veteran Pension, Widow (widower's) Pension and Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims which led to awards amounting to over \$9.2 billion.

Our Claims Benefit Advisors also work to find solutions for veterans who have been denied disability benefits. Shared experiences and expertise often lead to claims being resolved in the veterans' favor and retroactive payments being awarded. Disability payments and pensions can be life changing for veterans, their families, and their survivors.



Map of new TVC Claims offices

Supporting Veteran Education

What is the Veterans Education Department?

The Veterans Education Department (Vets Ed) helps veterans, and their families use VA GI Bill® and Hazlewood Act benefits for education and employment goals. Vets Ed approves education programs, vocational training, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships for GI Bill® benefits. Vets Ed works with Texas public colleges and universities to ensure Hazlewood tuition exemptions are provided to eligible veterans and family members. Vets Ed provides veterans and families with information and resources, explaining their benefits, and the education and training opportunities available within the state.

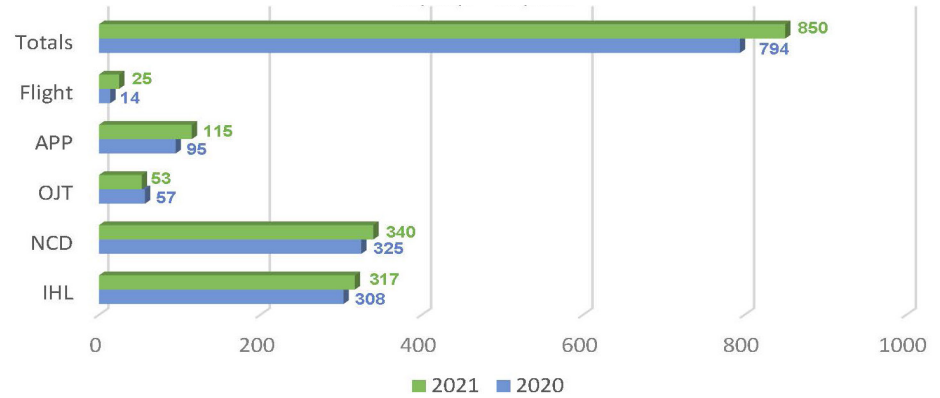
Veterans Education Excellence Recognition Award

In 2022, 17 institutions of higher education from around Texas were honored with the first ever Veteran Education Excellence Recognition Award (VEERA). Authorized by the Texas Legislature, VEERA recognizes public universities and colleges that provide excellence in education and related services which significantly contribute to the academic success of student veterans and military-connected students. TVC provides three levels of recognition: gold, silver, and bronze.

Hazlewood Act Training for School Certifying Officials

The Education Services Team met with over 300 school certifying officials during the annual Texas Association of Collegiate Veterans Program Officials (TACVPO) conference and provided them with information updates, best practices, and quarterly updates of the Hazlewood Act manuals. In FY2022, three webinars with 100 attendees each were administered to provide new certifying officials Hazlewood Act training. The webinars were such a success they have been requested again in FY2023.

Active Educational Facility Count FY21-FY22



Graph shows the Active Educational Facility count from FY2021 - FY2022 (calendar years 2020-2021). Active Facilities have certified at least one veteran or dependent to use Chapter 1606, 30, 33 or 35 GI Bill® benefits during the calendar year.

Employment Services for Veterans

What is Veteran Employment Services?

Veterans Employment Services (VES) assist veterans with finding long-term and meaningful employment by conducting job matching services for employers and providing individualized career services to veterans with significant barriers to employment at American Job Centers, VA facilities, and military installations throughout Texas. VES has offices located in 75 cities across the great state of Texas.

Salesforce to Work In Texas Project

VES in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission and Geo Solutions, completed a 5-month project to transition case management documenting, from Salesforce to the Work in Texas (WIT) platform. The transition increased efficiency and productivity by eliminating double entry tracking of services by Disabled Veteran Outreach Program staff in WIT and Case Management in Salesforce. The transition was complete on July 1, 2022, the beginning of the Jobs for Veterans State Grant program year. Approximately, 110 career advisors were trained to make the transition, which will allow staff to see more veterans and increase quality time with them. Additionally, in FY24, we will see an approximate cost savings of \$100k by eliminating the need for Salesforce licenses.

American Legion Career Fairs

Since September 2020, the Texas Veterans Commission has partnered with the American Legion and Texas Workforce Commission to hold one hybrid and five virtual career fairs. The virtual aspect allows job seekers to interact with public and private sector employers across the state, the nation, and overseas. Active duty and transitioning service members stateside and overseas attended VES and TWC hosted virtual workshops teaching employers and job seekers how to virtually interact.



Veterans Employment Services staff conducting outreach at a Veterans Job Fair. From left; Rural Veterans Career Advisor (RVCA), T.J. Robie; Veterans Career Advisor (VCA), Dale York; Veterans Career Advisor, James Juarez; and Veterans Employment Liaison (VEL), Joshua Pinson.



Scan for Stevens Amendment

Empowering Texas Veterans

What is the Veteran Entrepreneur Program?

The Veteran Entrepreneur Program (VEP) provides veteran entrepreneurs and their families with the small business tools needed to start or grow their businesses. Each VEP business consultant is a veteran, business owner, and MBA graduate dedicated to each veteran's success.

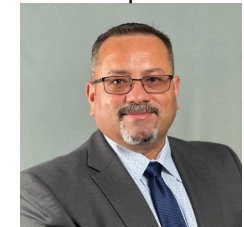
Veteran Verification Letter

Approved by the 87th Legislature on June 16th, 2021, the Veteran Verification Letter (VVL) for New 100% Veteran-Owned Businesses (VOB) went into effect on January 1st, 2022, and goes through December 31st, 2025. The VVL allows veterans to register a new 100% veteran-owned business through the Secretary of State, waiving the registration fee and certain Franchise Taxes for the initial five-year period.

The VEP has seen an increase in newly formed veteran-owned businesses since January 1st, estimating 20,000 plus verifications through 2025.

TVC Veteran-Owned Business Logo

The VEP created the Veteran-Owned Business (VOB) Logo (pictured below) for all veteran-owned businesses, with the veteran being the majority owner with at least 51% ownership. Once verified, the VEP provides the business owner with a jpeg and letter to proudly display and use in marketing.



Shown is the Veterans Entrepreneur Program team. From top is, Director Megan Tamez. From left to right are Business Consultants, Christina Mortel; Greg Shigamasa; and Jose Sanchez.

Grants for Veteran Services

Millions Raised for Veterans

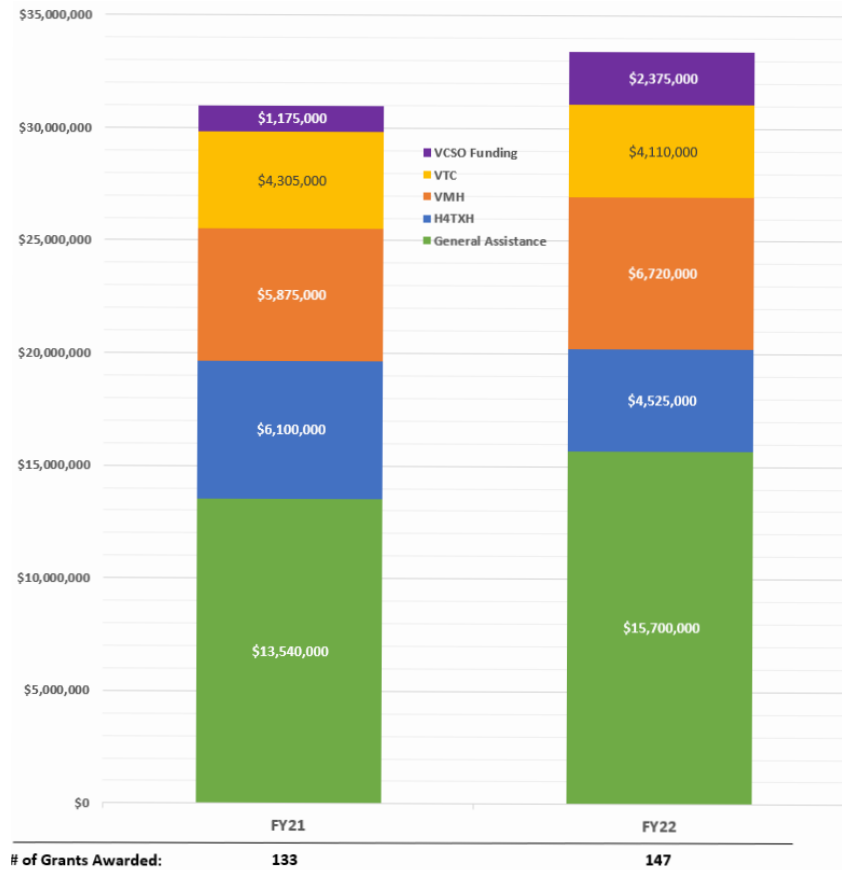
In Fall 2021, the Texas Lottery celebrated 13 years of scratch off games designated to support veterans. Since November 2009, the Texas Lottery has raised more than \$147 million for Texas Veterans Commission's (TVC) Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) Grants.

The public supports FVA grants through the purchase of Veterans' Cash lottery tickets, and donations through select state agencies. Texans may also elect to donate when registering or renewing Texas Driver's Licenses or Licenses To Carry through the Department of Public Safety, Texas Vehicle Registrations through the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles or your county tax office, and purchasing a Hunting/Fishing License through private retailers or the Texas Department of Parks & Wildlife.

Fund for Veteran's Assistance Grant Awards

In FY22, TVC awarded 69 General Assistance grants totaling \$15,700,000, including Financial Assistance, Pro Bono Legal Services, and Supportive Services. Seventeen (17) Housing 4 Texas Heroes grants were awarded totaling \$4,525,000, including Home Modification and Home Repair services. Thirty (30) Veterans Mental Health grants were awarded totaling \$6,720,000, including Clinical Counseling Services and Peer-Delivered Services. Twenty (20) local governments were awarded Veterans Treatment Court grants totaling \$4,110,000. Eleven (11) local governments were awarded Veterans County Service Office funding totaling \$2,375,000.

FVA FY21 - FY22 Awarded Grant Funding



Graph of FVA Grant History for FY21-FY22

Advocating for Texas Veterans

What is the Health Care Advocacy Department?

The Texas Veterans Commission Health Care Advocacy Department (HCAD) provides Texas veterans seeking health care at VA clinics and hospitals with alternatives through which patients can seek solutions to problems, concerns, and unmet needs.

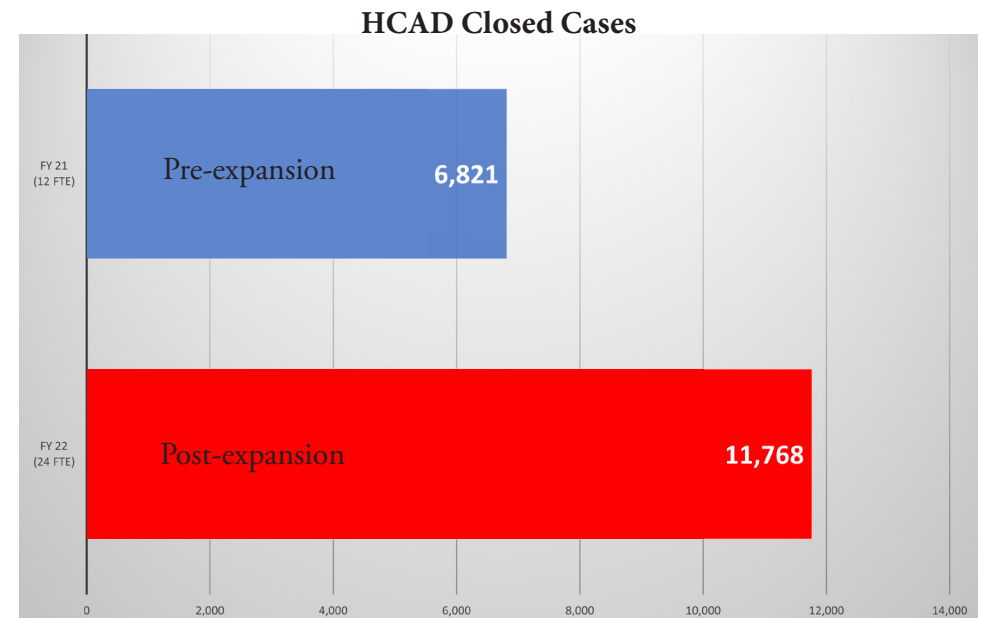
In 2021, the Texas Legislature expanded the number of HCAD offices from 12 to 24. The expansion of HCAD is critical to providing VA health care accessibility to rural veterans that face challenges to receiving such care. Many of these veterans live in areas not near to VA medical facilities. Many also incur financial difficulties with travel arrangements to and from their appointments. HCAD Advocates not only assist veterans with finding resolutions to these concerns, but they also conduct outreaches in rural areas to inform veterans and their families about VA health care processes and protocols, and their veteran benefits in general.

Enhancing Quality of Life for Texas Veterans

HCAD assists Texas veterans with their VA health care concerns and educates them on Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policies and procedures. The department serves to enhance the quality of life for Texas veterans by helping them enroll in the VA health care system, correcting their appointment issues, resolving stress-inducing billing issues, explaining the facts of the CHOICE Program, the MISSION Act, and much more.

Increase in HCAD staff and Closed Cases

When the Texas Legislature increased the number of Health Care Advocates in 2021, it also set higher performance measures for HCAD, which were exceeded. During Fiscal Year 2021-2022, HCAD closed over 11,700 cases after helping veterans resolve medical care issues. Additionally, HCAD saved veterans a combined total of over \$410,100 by resolving issues with the VHA and non-VHA billings.



Graph of HCAD closed cases pre and post statewide expansion going from 12 to 24 Health Care Advocates.

Mental Health Initiative

What is the Veterans Mental Health Department?

The Veterans Mental Health Department (VMHD) is focused on ensuring access to competent mental health services for service members, veterans, and their families. VMHD accomplishes this task by providing training, certification, and technical assistance across Texas and by connecting veterans directly to local services. VMHD also works with federal, state, and local partners to address veteran mental health needs including suicide prevention, veteran homelessness, military cultural competency, justice involvement, military-related trauma, women and rural veterans, and peer services. Across all programming, VMHD has the broadest definition of veteran regardless of discharge status, branch of services, or having served one day or a career.

Homeless Veteran Initiative

To address the overlap between mental health needs and advanced risk for homelessness, VMHD has launched the Homeless Veterans Initiative. This program is aimed at preventing veteran families from entering homelessness by improving access to local, state, and national resources.

Veteran Suicide Prevention Program

To help strengthen TVC's efforts to reduce veteran suicide in Texas, VMHD has developed the veteran suicide prevention program aimed at providing training and technical assistance relevant to suicide prevention efforts. Special attention is placed on suicide screening/assessment, gate-keeping, lethal means safety, intervention/crisis management, postvention, and evidence-based practices. Through this program, VMHD also works with national, statewide, and local initiatives and efforts to reduce veteran suicide.



The Veterans Mental Health Department Team.

From the top center, Blake Harris, Director; far left, Terri Williams, Justice Involved Veteran Program Manager; left enter, Cynthia Gray, Justice Involved Veteran Program Manager; Top Right Center, Arlene Perez, Peer Services Manager; Far right, Manuel Recendiz, Platform Coordinator; left center, Mary Margaret Bracken, Staff Services Officer; Middle Center, Don Hipp, Provider Coordinator; right center, Amber Batha, Homeless Veteran Coordinator; bottom right, Anthony Bustos, Homeless Veteran Coordinator; and bottom center, Jessica Del Rio, Veteran Suicide Prevention Coordinator.

Reaching Women Veterans

What is the Women Veterans Program?

The Women Veterans Program (WVP) bridges the gap between Texas women veterans and the services and benefits they have earned. The program serves the largest women veteran population in the nation and ensures that the women veterans of Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services.

Making the Difference

WVP has grown over the past few years. The addition of three Women Veterans Coordinators has tremendously increased the program's reach across the state. Increasing the reach of the program has been instrumental in serving the estimated 200,231 women veterans of the state as well as collaborating with many more federal, state, county, municipal, private, nonprofit, and veteran service organizations. The WVP's collaborations serve to identify existing resources for women veterans, assist in improving existing resources and services, create new resources and services, and increase awareness of the needs of women veterans. Additionally, the WVP serves to educate and inform women veterans of their benefits and services as well as advocate on their behalf.

Women Veterans Day 5-K Run/Walk

On Women Veterans Day 2022, Women veterans all over the state participated in local community activities. In Austin, TVC and the Disabled American Veterans, sponsored a Women Veterans Day 5K. Veterans, active duty, reservists, and veteran supporters joined us in celebrating 74 years of women in the Armed Services.



Texas Veterans Commission and participants at the startline of the Women Veterans Day 5-K Run/Walk held at Camp Mabry, Texas, June 4, 2022.

Communicate, Educate, and Support

Communications and Veterans Outreach

The Texas Veterans Commission's (TVC) Communications and Veterans Outreach (Comms) Department's mission is to provide awareness, engagement, outreach, and resource information of services provided by the TVC and Veterans County Service Officers (VCSO). The department aims to ensure Texas veterans, their family members, and survivors are aware of the benefits and services earned through military service.

Social Media

Comms uses various social media platforms to engage veterans and their families to connect with the TVC for services. In 2020, Comms introduced paid ads in Facebook to target content to specific veteran friendly audiences.

Trekking with TVC

"Trekking with TVC" is a Facebook Live series that showcases TVC Grantees, Veteran County Service Officers, Peer Service Coordinators, and other organizations that offer services, jobs, and benefits to Texas veterans. TVC Communications, Eric N. Alvarado, visits with Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and partners all around the state of Texas.

The Voice of Texas Veterans

"The Voice of Texas Veterans" radio show, created by TVC Communications, Multimedia Specialist, Julia Conner has expanded from Central Texas area radio stations to now include station programming in Bryan, Corpus Christi, and the Rio Grande Valley. The show also airs on TVC social media as a podcast each week enabling listeners to tune in from anywhere, at a convenient time. The show can be heard on 7 platforms including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Music.



The Voice Of Texas Veterans host, Julia Conner and Trekking with TVC host, Eric N. Alvarado.

Veteran Support in Texas Counties

Training and Support

Veteran County Service Officers (VCSOs) are the main point of contact in their county for providing services to Texas veterans and their families. Texas Veterans Commission provides training to VCSOs in VA disability claims and pension processing, spousal and dependent benefits and other veteran services. Veteran County Service Officers receive 24 hours of training to initially become VA accredited. VCSOs are required to attend TVC approved training and successfully complete testing on an annual basis to maintain VA accreditation.

The services of the Veteran County Service officer are completely free. Not only are they skilled in processing claims, they are well informed about community resources that provide aid and comfort to veterans and their families. Most Veteran County Service Officers are veterans themselves.

State law requires counties with populations of 200,000 or more to have a Veteran County Service Officer, but many smaller counties also appoint them. Of the 254 Texas counties, there are 242 Veteran County Service Officers.

Funding Awarded

In Fiscal Year 2022, 15 local governments were awarded Veterans County Service Officers funding from the Fund for Veterans' Assistance Grant Program totaling \$2,275,000, including Priority Service Categories of Financial Assistance and Supportive Services.



Nueces County Veteran Services Administrative Secretary, Diana Acosta and JJ De La Cerda, the Nueces County Veteran Service Officer.



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info@tvc.texas.gov

Texas Veterans Commission
1801 Congress Ave., Suite 14.100
Austin, TX 78701