



# MDVA Update to House Veterans Affairs Committee

Brad Lindsay | Commissioner

Eric Meittunen | Deputy Commissioner for Veterans Healthcare

Ben Johnson | Interim Deputy Commissioner for Programs & Services and Legislative Director

# Current Minnesota Dept. of Veteran Affairs Leadership

- Brad Lindsay, Commissioner
  - Appointed by Gov. Walz on Dec. 20 after serving as acting commissioner since last March
- Eric Meittunen, Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Healthcare
  - Appointed on May 24
- Ben Johnson, Interim Deputy Commissioner of Programs & Services
  - Serving concurrently with Legislative Director role since October 16

# New Facilities

- State Veterans Cemetery – Redwood Falls
  - Dedication ceremony: August 19, 2023
- Three new Veterans Homes
  - Goal is to admit 20 to 24 residents and then pause for VA recognition survey
  - Will plan to pursue CMS certification application in the next 6 months
  - Preston opened to residents on January 3, 2024
  - Montevideo on January 22, 2024
  - Bemidji on February 13, 2024
  - Dedication celebrations planned after session ends at each location



# Veterans Homelessness

- 545 Veterans found safe, permanent housing in 2023.
- 255 Veterans on the Homeless Veterans Registry currently experiencing homelessness (as of 2/7).
- Request for an official recognition from the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) for a declaration of functional zero for the Hennepin County Continuum of Care (CoC). 9 of 10 CoCs declared functional zero.
- MN Veterans Entering Stable Tenancy (MNVEST)
  - \$3.5 million allocated
  - 120 Veterans currently receiving subsidy
- Veterans Supportive Housing Options
  - 130 rental units secured
  - 48% decrease in chronic or long-term homelessness
- SOAR program awarded Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence for innovation in ending Veterans Homelessness by USDVA.



# 100 years of the State Soldiers Assistance Program

- Established in response to the needs of Veterans returning home from World War I. Early on, SSAP provided basic assistance with medical treatment and for the general maintenance of disabled Veterans.
- Has since grown and evolved to meet the needs of our state's Veterans. Services now include housing, financial assistance, education financial assistance, short-term disability, dental and optical assistance, and disaster relief.
- The Veterans Relief Grant (previously Special Needs Grant) is a one-time grant available for Veterans who have an emergency need like replacing a furnace.



# 9/11 Service Bonus

- Still accepting new applications through the end of June.
- Since July 2022
  - 25,707 applications submitted
  - 21,550 Applications approved
  - \$22.8 million provided (increments of \$600, \$1,200 and \$2,000)
- Currently receiving less than 100 applications per week and processing bonus within 2 business days.

## POST-9/11 SERVICE BONUS



# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vietnam War

- Commemoration taking place at Mall of America June 13-15
  - Main ceremony on Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> (Flag Day) in mall rotunda
- Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum displays
- Replica of Vietnam Wall
- Documentaries in movie theater
- Resource booths



# Suicide Prevention

- Hiring of the Veterans Community Health Navigator Director
- The state observed Suicide Prevention and Awareness Day in Bemidji on Oct. 7
- Free gun locks available through MDVA and County Veteran Service Officers via USDVA partnership
- Focus areas
  - Asking the questions (ATQ)
  - MN Veteran Suicide Prevention Collaborative
  - Lethal Means Safety
- Goals of State Plan
  - Improve, expand, and coordinate the suicide prevention infrastructure
  - Prevent Minnesotans from having suicidal experiences and improve the lives of all those who are struggling, so they know they are not alone, help is available and healing is possible



# Other Veterans Healthcare updates

- Veterans Homes in Fergus Falls and Luverne named 'Best Nursing Homes' in January by U.S. News and World Report
- Healthcare [staff] Recruitment and Retention remains our priority – with a comprehensive strategic plan that will allow for more resident admissions
- Domiciliary Working Group submitted report to the legislature on Jan. 16
- New Administrators at 5 Minnesota Veterans Homes
  - Bemidji, Hastings, Minneapolis, Montevideo and Preston



# Thank you!