

VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT

2023-2024

Hello to all members of the VFW Auxiliary, Department of Illinois. I am very happy to be serving as your Veterans and Family Support Chairman this year. Please know I am here for each member to answer questions and help in any way I can. If you can't find links, need to know where information can be found, or question how to report an event or activity; I'm only a call, text, or email away. Please stay connected with me this year and let me know how I can be of assistance to you. If you have special events related to this program that you would like me to attend let me know.

The Veterans and Family Support (VFS) Program is at the center of all we do for our Veterans and their families. In this program, we show what it means to be a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary as we embrace the theme of National President Carla Martinez, ***Banding Together for our Veterans***. We can band together with the VFW to provide the services and support needed. This program is multi-faceted and designed so that any Auxiliary, large or small, can provide services that our Veterans and their families have earned. In keeping with Department President Lynn Smith's theme, we can **Be a Warrior** for those that most deserve it!

This year, our primary focus for this program will be divided into three categories:

- Veterans and Military Support Programs and National Veterans Services
- National Veterans Service Suicide Prevention
- Mental Health Awareness

NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE-VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS AND VETERANS AND MILITARY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Through this segment of our VFS Program, we can ensure our Veterans are aware of aid available to them and their families--at no cost. These are not handouts;



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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ **VFW National Veterans Service**
- ✓ **VFW Veterans & Military Support Programs**
- ✓ **Assist Veterans, Service Members, and their families**
- ✓ **Promote Veteran & Military Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness**



these are services the Veterans have EARNED through their sacrifice for our country!

National Veterans Service (NVS) – VFW Service Officers (VSO)

The VFW National Veterans Service provides a nationwide network of nearly 300 VFW Service Officers who help Veterans navigate the Veterans Affairs system. These service officers are highly skilled and educated to ensure our Veterans (whether VFW members or not) are able to file claims for:

- Disability compensation
- Rehabilitation and educational programs
- Pension and death benefits
- Employment and training programs

Through the NVS program, we ensure Veterans receive the quality care they deserve from VA health care. Some of the services they are eligible to receive include:

- Hospital care – we are fortunate to have many extraordinary health care providers in Illinois
- Outpatient care
- Specialized health care for female Veterans
- Alcohol and drug dependency treatment
- Medical evaluation for disorders associated with military service, exposure to Agent Orange, radiation, burn pits, and other environmental hazards

As an Auxiliary, we can help connect Veterans to those who can provide assistance. Know who your Service Officers are in your area. Know what kinds of services can be provided and share information with others you come in contact with.

Donations to support **Veterans Service Officers** can be made online or by mail.

Donate online at vfw.org/ways-to-help, select “National Veterans Services”, and click “Contribute.”

Donate by mail by sending funds to the VFW earmarked for “Veterans Service Officer”, Mail check to:

VFW National Headquarters, ATTN: NVS, 406 W. 34th Street, 11th Floor, Kansas City, MO 64111

VFW Veterans and Military Support Program

This category contains programs initiated by the VFW and includes Military Assistance Program (MAP); Unmet Needs, and the VFW "Sports Clips" Help A Hero Scholarship" The programs shown serve active-duty and recently discharged military.

Military Assistance Program (MAP) helps VFW and Auxiliaries connect with local military units. Funds are provided for Posts, Districts, and Departments to provide morale-boosting functions such as send-offs, homecomings, and other get-togethers. Your Auxiliary and Post can Adopt-a-Unit and even receive reimbursement for care packages sent to our service members.

You can receive guidelines and additional information by contacting the VFW Veterans and Military Support Office at 816-756-3390.

Unmet Needs can provide grants of up to \$1,500 for soldiers serving on foreign soil and their families when they are facing unexpected financial needs. Money can be paid directly to a creditor for home or car repairs, insurance, utility bills, mortgage, rent, or even food and clothing. More information on this program can be found at vfw.org/assistance/financial-grants.

VFW Sports Clips Help a Hero Scholarship Program awards scholarships of up to \$5,000 to qualifying Veterans and service members to help with educational expenses. More information on this program can be found at vfw.org/student-veterans-support.

Donations to these important programs can be made online or by mail.

Donate online at vfw.org/ways-to-help, select "Veterans & Military Support", and click "Contribute."

Donate by mail by sending funds to the VFW earmarked for "VMS", Mail check to:

VFW National Headquarters, ATTN: VMS, 406 W. 34th Street, 9th Floor, Kansas City, MO 64111

Upon receipt of your donation, the Veterans of Foreign Wars leadership will determine where your donation can make the biggest impact and designate funds for that area.

VETERANS AND MILITARY SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

You can make a difference in the life of a Veteran or their family by educating yourself and others on the warning signs of suicide. It is extremely heartbreaking to know that many of our service members return home broken in ways we may not see. Fortunately, there are ways to connect those in need with available services through the Veterans Crisis Line. Know the four ways for our Veterans to connect to services they need:

- Call 1-800-MyVA411 to access all VA Departments,
- Call 988 and Press 1,
- Chat online at veteranscrisisline.net, or
- Send a text message to 838255

Calls are confidential and someone is available 365 days a year, 24/7. To make sure you have quick access to the crisis number, add it to your contacts. You never know when you will be the one to bring a Veteran the relief and support needed.

Another way to provide support is by purchasing the Auxiliary Suicide Awareness Prevention Pin from the VFW Store. When someone asks about the pin you can tell them about the suicide crisis faced by our Veterans and the concern and support provided by our Auxiliaries. WE can make a difference!

MENTAL WELLNESS SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

More than 16 Veterans commit suicide each day. Is that number lower than reported a few years ago? Yes. Is it an acceptable number? NO! Work is still needed to provide the support and assistance needed to help our military. More work is needed to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health. There are many resources that can help with this challenge. Be aware of them and share this information with your Auxiliary members and others in your community.

VFW Mental Wellness Campaign - vfw.org/assistance/mental-wellness

The Campaign on Change Direction - Changedirection.org

Give An Hour – giveanhour.org

Patients Like Me – patientslikeme.com/join/vfw

One Mind – onemind.org

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation – elizabethdolefoundation.org

Help Heal Veterans (Therapeutic Craft Kits) – healvets.org

Veterans Voices Writing Project – veteransvoices.org

Throughout this year, I want every Auxiliary and each member to provide **CARE** for our Veterans and their families through the support of the Veterans and Family Support Program. How do we provide **CARE**?

Connect Veterans with those who can assist them

Act on behalf of Veterans and their families

Reach out to Veterans with information on eligible benefits

Educate yourself and others on ways to support our Veterans and their families.

We can **Band Together for our Veterans** and **Be a Warrior** for all who have proudly served the United States of America!



DEPARTMENT AWARDS

Auxiliary Awards

1. A citation to every Auxiliary that is reported in all parts of the Veterans and Family Support Program by December 31, 2023.
2. An award to the Auxiliary with the most outstanding activity and/or event that supports Veteran, military, and family caregivers. Report due to Department Chairman by April 15, 2024.
3. An Award to the Auxiliary with the most outstanding activity and/or event that increases awareness of military suicide and mental health. Report due to Department Chairman by April 15, 2024.
4. An award to the Auxiliary Chairman with the best promotion of the Veterans and Family Support Program in the Auxiliary meeting. Report must be mailed to Department Chairman within 30 days of the promotion and received by April 15, 2024.
5. An award to the Auxiliary or Auxiliary member who best demonstrates the actions to **CARE** for our veterans and their families. To be determined by a compilation of reports submitted throughout the year.

District Awards

1. A citation to each District Chairman who has 100% of his/her Auxiliaries in the District reported in all parts of Veterans and Family Support by December 31, 2023.
2. An award to the District Chairman with the best promotion of the Veterans and Family Support Program in a District Meeting. Report must be received by the Department Chairman within 30 days of the meeting, but no later than April 15, 2024.

NATIONAL AWARDS

Awards for Auxiliaries

1. Most outstanding activity and/or event to increase awareness of military suicide and mental health.

- Citation to every Auxiliary that hosts an activity and/or event to increase awareness of military suicide and mental health. Entry form required and available in MALTA Member Resources. Auxiliaries must send the entry form to their Department Veterans and Family Support Chairman by March 31, 2024, for judging.

Citations will be mailed directly to participating Auxiliaries from National Headquarters.

- Citation and \$25 to one Auxiliary in each of the four Conferences that hosts the most outstanding activity and/or event to increase awareness of military suicide and mental health.

Citations will be mailed directly to participating Auxiliaries from National Headquarters and money will be deposited into Auxiliary account after National Convention.

2. Most outstanding activity and/or event to increase support of veterans, service members, and their families.

- Citation to every Auxiliary that hosts an activity and/or event to increase awareness of military suicide and mental health. Entry form required and available in MALTA Member Resources. Auxiliaries must send the entry form to their Department Veterans and Family Support Chairman by March 31, 2024, for judging.

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