



Veterans Listening Posts 2009



Joint Report by the Missouri Veterans
Commission and Veterans Service Partners
regarding the needs of Missouri's Veterans

Presented to: Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon, Governor

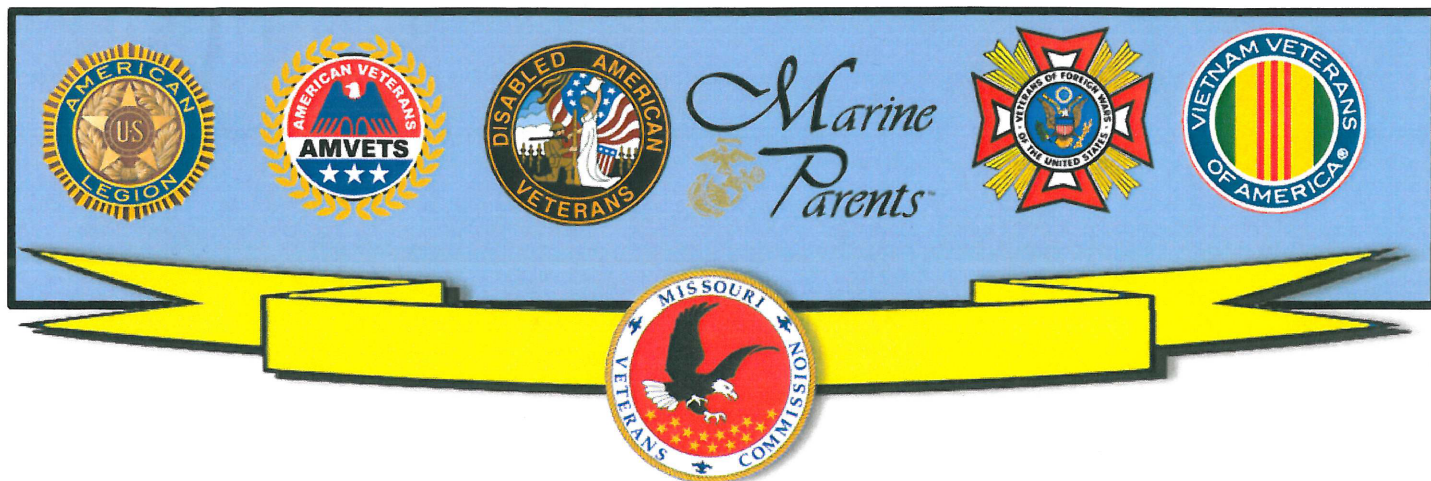
Supported by:

Missouri Association of Veteran Organizations (MAVO)

Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission (MMPEC)

Missouri National Guard

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Governor Nixon:

The Missouri Veterans Commission along with partner organizations American Legion, AmVets, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), and Marine Parents, with the support of the Missouri National Guard, Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, is pleased to present the partnership's report on the needs and concerns of Missouri's Veterans.

Realizing that by working together we create a stronger voice for Veterans than if we worked individually, the partner organizations travelled throughout the State of Missouri hosting Listening Posts to hear what Missouri's Veterans had to say. The partner organizations hosted a total of twenty-one Listening Posts around the state, hearing from nearly 1,500 Veterans and their family members.

We, the representatives of the partner organizations working together as one voice, submit this report to you for your review and consideration. We hope that the information learned from these Listening Posts and the recommendations enclosed in this report will guide and provide ideas on how to best serve those who have served the great State of Missouri and our Nation.

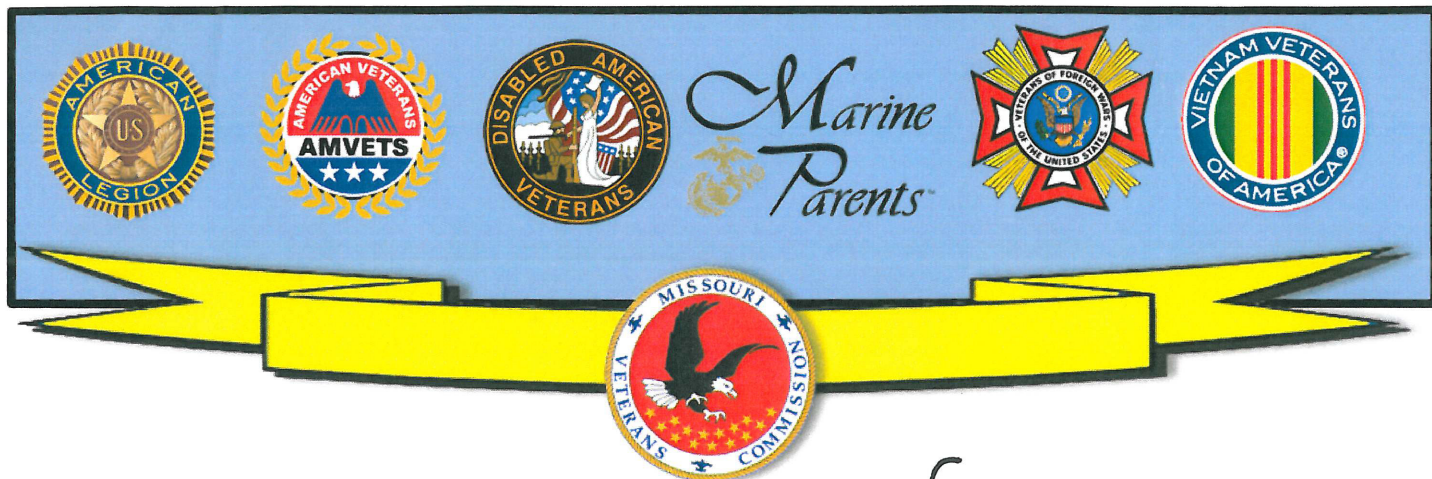
cc: Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder
Senator Charlie Shields, President Pro Tem
Representative Ron Richard, Speaker of the House

Larry D. Kay, Executive Director
Missouri Veterans Commission

John D. Comerford, Chairman
Missouri Veterans Commission

Charley Goodin, Commander
Department of Missouri
American Legion

Roy E. Clark Jr., Commander
Department of Missouri
AmVets



Harold P. Menzel

Harold P. Menzel, Commander
Department of Missouri
Disabled American Veterans

Tracy Della Vecchia

Tracy Della Vecchia
Founder and Executive Director
MarineParents.com, Inc.

Jessie Jones

Jessie Jones, Chairman
Missouri Association of Veteran Organizations
(MAVO)

Dalton Wright

Dalton Wright, Chairman
Missouri Military Preparedness & Enhancement
Commission (MMPEC)

BG Stephen L. Danner

BG Stephen L. Danner
The Adjutant General
Missouri National Guard

David J. Morgan

David J. Morgan, Commander
Department of Missouri
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

George R. Newell

George Newell, President
Missouri State Council
Vietnam Veterans of America

James R. Floyd

James R. Floyd, Director
VA Heartland Network VISN 16
United States Department of Veteran Affairs

David Unterwagner

David Unterwagner, Director
St. Louis VA Regional Office
United States Department of Veteran Affairs

George H. Gray, Jr.

George H. Gray, Jr., Director
South Central VA Healthcare Network VISN 16
United States Department of Veteran Affairs

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Executive Summary

Our twenty-one Listening Posts were designed so that the Missouri Veterans Commission, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Missouri National Guard, the Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission (MMPEC) the member organizations of the Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations (MAVO), and the benevolent organization Marine Parents could assess the needs and concerns of Missouri's Veterans. Even with a broad spectrum of Veterans of different ages, eras, genders, urban, and rural areas, there were common issues that came out of the Listening Posts. We looked at these issues in three areas: what we learned from Veterans, what we learned from Focus Issue Speakers, and what we learned looking in the mirror.

What we learned from Veterans:

Knowledge of all available state and federal benefits is a primary concern of all Veterans and their families. Many Veterans do not know what benefits are available, what the requirements are to receive those benefits, and that some benefits are dependent on the type of military service the Veteran accomplished (i.e., regular service, National Guard, Reserve). Another primary concern is access to benefits. Rural and urban Veterans see issues with transportation to VA hospitals and clinics. Newer Veterans are interested in education, job training, and specialized healthcare for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), but tend to not seek out Veteran Service Organizations, Veterans Service Officers, or others for assistance.

Veterans were also appreciative of the Listening Posts. Veterans would like the Listening Posts to continue in some format so they can continue to gain a better understanding of local, state, and federal benefits.

What we learned from Focus Issue Speakers:

At each Listening Post a speaker was invited to talk about a focus issue relating to Veterans, deployed service members, and their families. From the speakers, Veterans and the Listening Post partners learned about Veterans healthcare, medical needs, and transportation for health care. We also learned about other Veterans benefits like education, pensions, and state specific benefits. Other speakers talked of issues and concerns facing deployed service members and their families including: frequent deployments, transitioning back into civilian life, homeless veterans, job concerns after demobilization, and challenges contacting returning Guard and Reservists.

What we learned looking in the mirror:

The Listening Post partners also looked within ourselves to see what we could do differently and better to serve Missouri's Veterans. A close partnership between our organizations creates a stronger voice for Veterans than working separately. Together, we are integral to the success of reaching and educating Veterans, their families and employers and we must understand one another's vision, mission and goals. Especially with today's economic downturn, we can no longer afford to move forward with anything less than one voice.

Recommendations:

After reviewing what was learned from the three perspectives, some general recommendations were made to better serve Veterans, deployed and Active Duty Service Members and their families. A guide of Missouri's State Veterans Benefits needs to be developed and distributed. Legislative action is needed to maintain viability of the Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund. A Veterans Outreach Task Force needs to be established by the Missouri Veterans Commission, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, and the Veterans Service Partners to coordinate outreach strategies. A Joint Veterans Benefits Task Force between the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, the Missouri Veterans Commission, and the Veterans Service Partner Grants recipients also needs to be established to coordinate and streamline Veterans Service Officer training and claims submission. Finally, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) sponsors and their partner agencies should continue to coordinate appropriate messages to both deploying and returning service members and their families.

What We Learned: From Veterans

The Listening Post partners heard over 500 questions from Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, family members, employers, and interested members of the public. Based on these questions, the following needs, concerns, and issues are what we learned from Veterans.

VA Health Care/Medical Needs

- **Access to and Enrolling in VA Health Care**
 - o Veterans want ALL Veterans to be able to enroll in VA Health Care. Veterans are upset by what they see as arbitrary and complicated eligibility requirements for enrolling.
 - o Veterans have concerns about the wait time to see a VA Health Care professional and the wait to see a fee based provider outside the VA Health Care system.
 - o Veterans often don't understand the policies and procedures on when, why, and how they are sent or referred to a fee based provider outside the VA health care system.
 - o Veterans lack awareness of their ability to apply for VA Health Care at any time after their time of service, thinking there is a time limit upon deactivation. A common question is when is the best time to enroll.
 - o Veterans would like VA to expand coverage to include spouses and dependents.
 - o Veterans want dental care added to general VA Health Care benefits.
 - o Veterans want more VA Hospitals in Missouri.
 - o Veterans are concerned about transportation to VA Health Care locations, especially in rural areas and when appointments are scattered over multiple days.
 - o Rural Veterans have concerns if they have a medical emergency and have no way to get to a VA Hospital.
 - o Veterans are often unaware of the limitations of services provided by a CBOC compared to a VA Hospital and are unaware that CBOCs cannot provide emergency care.
 - o Veterans want the VA to issue VA Medical/Healthcare ID cards to Veterans in the VA health care system.
- **Pharmacy Services**
 - o Pharmacy refill times seem excessive.
 - o Veterans are unaware of the requirements to be able to use VA pharmacy services.
- **Community Base Outpatient Clinics (CBOC)**
 - o Veterans are often unaware of the limitations of services provided by a CBOC compared to a VA Hospital.
 - o Veterans would like psychiatric services at CBOCs.
 - o Veterans are interested in increased telemedicine usage in CBOCs.
 - o Veterans are highly receptive to VA increasing access to healthcare, especially by opening more CBOCs throughout Missouri.
- **Vietnam Veterans are often unaware of and lack an understanding of qualifiers when new presumptive conditions are announced. Many Vietnam Veterans don't understand the benefit of being on the VA's Agent Orange registry.**

What We Learned: From Veterans

- **Gulf War Veterans are often unaware of and lack an understanding of qualifiers when new presumptive conditions are announced.**
 - o Many Gulf War Veterans do not know about the Gulf War Registry.
 - o Because Gulf War Syndrome is difficult to define, Gulf War Veterans feel healthcare professionals dismiss or ignore Gulf War Syndrome tests, diagnosis, and claims.
- **Veterans in Southwest Missouri get frustrated by the boundary divisions between Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 15 and 16 which splits Southwest Missouri (VISN 16) from the rest of the state (VISN 15).**
- **Veterans in Northern Missouri get frustrated by the boundary divisions between Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 15 and 23 which splits parts of Northern Missouri (VISN 23) from the rest of the state (VISN 15).**
- **National Guard and Reservists have concerns that their Protected Health Information disclosed to the VA will be shared with their Command.**
- **National Guard and Reservists do not have a clear understanding of eligibility requirements for VA Health Care.**
- **Veterans are concerned about how current healthcare legislation will affect their VA Health Care benefits.**

VA Benefits

- **Claims application**
 - o Veterans are concerned about having timely resolution of claims.
 - o Veterans in general have a perception that all claims are initially denied and they must then contest and appeal to get their benefits.
 - o Veterans in general are unaware or don't understand why they should have an accredited Veterans Service Officer assist in processing benefits claims.
- **Access to VA Benefits**
 - o Veterans want ALL Veterans to be able to access VA benefits. Veterans are upset by what they see as arbitrary and restrictive eligibility and income requirements for claims.
 - o Veterans lack awareness of their ability to apply for VA benefits at any time after their time of service, thinking there is a time limit upon release from active duty. A common question is when is the best time to apply.
- **Veterans and their eligible family members are often unaware of and lack an understanding of the benefits they are eligible for and the requirements needed to access those benefits, especially:**
 - o Widow and Widower Pensions.
 - o Aid & Attendance.
 - o Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

What We Learned: From Veterans

- **National Guard and Reservists do not have a clear understanding of eligibility requirements for VA benefits.**
 - Eligibility issues regarding Title 10 and Title 32.
 - Better explanation of Priority Group 8.
 - Concerns their claims will be shared with their Command.

Veterans Education Issues

- **Veterans are unaware of all available education benefits from both state and federal sources.**
- **GWOT Veterans do not understand the new benefits available in the Post 9/11 GI Bill.**
- **Non-GWOT Veterans want to know how the new GI Bill affects their benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill.**
- **Veterans want to be able to use their military education and experience as equivalent credit in higher education.**
- **Veterans want free college education for themselves and their families.**

TRICARE Health Insurance

- **Veterans, National Guard, Reservists, and Active Duty Service Members and their families are not fully aware of :**
 - The purpose of TRICARE.
 - Eligibility requirements for TRICARE and who is covered by TRICARE.
 - What health care providers accept TRICARE.
- **TRICARE participants are concerned about future funding for TRICARE and how the current healthcare legislation will affect TRICARE coverage.**

Women Veterans Issues

- **Women Veterans want female providers at CBOCs and VA Clinics.**
- **Women Veterans have multiple concerns about Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).**
 - Concerns over the stigma and fear of reporting MST.
 - Dealing with PTSD associated with MST.
 - Single female parent child care issues as it relates to MST/PTSD.
- **Women Veterans are concerned about the lack of homeless shelters for female Veterans.**

What We Learned: From Veterans

Missouri Veterans Commission (MVC) Issues

- **Veterans in Missouri are concerned about MVC funding in the current economic situation.**
- **Missouri State Veterans Homes**
 - o Medical benefits and how they are cost-free/paid/pro-rated for the resident Veteran are not completely understood by Veterans and families.
 - o Resident Veterans and their families are not aware or do not understand the new VA requirements for Veterans residing in a State Veterans Home.
 - o Most Veterans are unaware of the cost and requirements to live at a Missouri State Veterans Home.
 - o Veterans have concerns over the waiting time for admission to a Veterans home.
 - o Veterans want more Veterans Homes in the state, especially in metro areas, as well as expanding the current Veterans Homes.
 - o Veterans want assisted living.
- **Missouri State Veterans Services Program**
 - o Veterans in general are unaware or don't understand why they should have an accredited Veterans Service Officer assist in processing benefits claims.
 - o Veterans would like an increase in the funding for the Veterans Service Grants Program.
 - o Veterans are frustrated at the length of time taken to process a claim.
- **Missouri State Veterans Cemetery Program**
 - o Most Veterans are unaware of the value and benefits of pre-certification and burial at a Missouri State Veterans Cemetery.
- **More information should be available for incarcerated Veterans and homeless Veterans.**
- **Veterans are concerned about the solvency of the Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund.**

State Veterans Benefits

- **Veterans are more aware of their federal benefits than they are of their state benefits.**
- **Veterans who retired from the military are unaware of or are unclear how the state income tax on pensions are being phased out.**
- **Many Deployed Active Duty service members, Guard & Reservists are:**
 - o Unaware of or do not understand fully the education benefits provided in the Missouri Returning Heroes Act.
 - o Unaware of or do not understand fully the workforce and job benefits provided in the Missouri Hero at Home program.
 - o Unaware of or do not fully understand the benefits provided by the Missouri Military Family Relief Fund.
 - o Unaware or do not fully understand state law regarding child care issues and deployed service members.

What We Learned: From Veterans

- **National Guard and Reservists are often unaware or do not fully understand the state benefits available to them.**
- **Deployed and returning Guard and Reservists are often unaware of or do not understand fully the benefits provided at a Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.**
- **Veterans want more state benefits such as free license plates, hunting license, and fishing license.**
- **Veterans employed by the state want a 2-year credit for military service calculated into their state retirement.**
- **Veterans do not have a method to know what cities participate in the free metered parking for certain Veterans.**
- **Veterans want the State Veterans Memorial Grant Program, which was a 50/50 matching grant program to build or restore veteran, military, or war monuments & memorials in Missouri, re-established.**

Deployment Concerns

- **Parent & Child issues**
 - Deployed single parents have concerns over child custody.
 - Deployed single parents would like parenting classes & child care.
 - Deployed single parents lack awareness of current state laws relating to child custody.
- **Demobilization issues**
 - Upon returning from deployment sometimes there are delays in receiving separation papers.
 - VA Hospitals do not receive all demobilization information.
 - Warrior Transition Units are sometimes not notifying VA of incoming Veterans.
 - Upon returning from deployment, many face unemployment issues and want to know what assistance is available.
 - Guard and Reservists have concerns about how medals and badges are awarded as it can affect their future VA benefits.
- **Employer issues**
 - Deployed Guard & Reservists want more employer education on the deployed employee's legal rights.
 - Deployed Guard & Reservists want the laws that protect them to have more teeth.
 - Deployed Guard & Reservists want more benefits for employers to entice them to hire members of the Guard and Reserve.
- **Returning injured soldiers will need assisted living among their peers & appropriate health care.**

What We Learned: From Veterans

PTSD & Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Issues

- **The families of and those diagnosed with PTSD and/or TBI:**
 - o Have concerns over PTSD & TBI diagnosis, claims, programs, and benefits.
 - o Want to know where to go for PTSD & TBI assistance.
 - o Want transition services for TBI after acute medical care/inpatient rehab to outpatient/in-home care and rehab.
 - o Want counseling for PTSD & TBI sufferers and their families (dealing with kids, spouse, etc.)

Veterans Transportation Issues

- **Veterans in both rural and urban settings are concerned about the difficulties in finding transportation to and from VA Hospitals and CBOCs.**
- **Veterans are concerned about traveling long distances to and from a VA Hospital or CBOC for appointments on different days instead of having all appointments on one day.**
- **There is a need for drivers for Disabled American Veteran (DAV) transportation vans.**
- **The number of DAV transportation vans needs to be increased throughout the state.**

Reserve & Guard issues

- **Separated Guard and Reservists, once returned from active duty, tend to “get lost.”**
 - o There needs to be a method to maintain contact.
- **Many National Guard and Reservists do not have a clear understanding of eligibility requirements for VA Health Care and VA Benefits.**
- **National Guard and Reservists, either those deployed or those not deployed, are often unaware of or do not fully understand the state benefits available to them.**
- **Deployed and returning Guard and Reservists are often unaware of or do not understand fully the benefits provided at a Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.**
- **National Guard and Reservists want expanded military leave to cover increasing military training requirements.**
- **National Guard members have questions and concerns about requirements for retiring from the Guard.**

What We Learned: From Veterans

- **Reservist-only issues include:**

- o Contacting and maintaining contact with Reservists who have been attached to units outside of Missouri, especially when they return from a deployment.
- o Benefits provided to Reservists under Title 32 and Title 10, especially during the transition from one title to the other.
- o Reservists' TRICARE benefits are not the same as regular active duty service members.
- o Establishing a single point of contact for Reservists in the State of Missouri.
- o Establishing Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program central points of contact for Reservists in the State of Missouri.

Veterans Service Organizations

- **Younger/Newer Veterans:**

- o Don't see the value in joining a Veterans Service Organization.
- o Don't understand the purpose of Veterans Service Organizations.
- o Are unaware of which Veterans Service Organization is best suited for their needs.

- **There is no central place providing the requirements to join the various Veterans Service Organizations.**

- o Many Veterans do not know what percentage of VA service connected disability they need to have to join the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

- **There is the perception that Veterans Service Organizations work at cross-purposes with each other.**

Veterans in the Workforce

- **Jobless returning Veterans are concerned about receiving training for employment after returning from active duty.**

- **Jobless returning Veterans want to know if they are covered by unemployment upon returning if they don't have a job.**

- **Many Veterans don't understand what Veterans Preference is in regards to job applications.**

- **Many Veteran entrepreneurs want to know what benefits are available to them to start a business.**

- **Many Veterans and employers want specific incentives to hire and keep drilling Guard and Reservists in the workforce.**

What We Learned: From Veterans

Outreach Concerns

- **There are concerns that soldiers who do not take immediate advantage of their benefits fall through the cracks, especially returning National Guard and Reservists.**
 - Many don't understand the value of Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program events.
- **There is concern for how to get returning Veterans to file with the VA as soon as possible.**
- **Veterans in general are unaware or don't understand the need to use an accredited Veterans Service Officer (VSO), or what a VSO's responsibilities and duties are to the Veteran.**
- **Many don't know what the definition of a Veteran is to access their benefits.**
- **There is a need to know what state and federal government is doing for homeless Veterans.**
- **There is a need to know what the state is doing for incarcerated Veterans.**
- **Better public information is needed regarding Veterans suicide prevention.**
- **Better public understanding is needed on the difference between the Missouri Veterans Commission and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.**

Miscellaneous Concerns of Veterans

- **Veterans want a full service Vet Center, VA Hospital, and CBOC in every major city.**
- **Many Veterans want to know how to determine their Veterans status if their records were destroyed in the 1973 St. Louis fire.**
- **Many Veterans want Assisted Living either through the state or federal government.**
- **Veterans want to know how to get copies of their military records or how to change or correct those records.**

What We Learned: Focus Issue Speakers

Each Listening Post featured a focus issue speaker who talked about issues that impact Veterans, Active and Deployed service members, and their families. Partner organizations, and attendees of the Listening Posts learned about the following:

Health Care/ Medical Needs

- **VA Inpatient Services**
 - o Proper orientation into the VA Health system is vital to patient satisfaction and continuity of care.
- **Telemedicine**
 - o Increasing healthcare access, especially to Veterans in rural areas, through telemedicine is a priority in each CBOC.
- **Rural Health Access**
 - o Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) are being opened throughout the State of Missouri to provide primary care and mental health care access to Veterans in rural areas and work in conjunction with telemedicine.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
 - o Education, recognition, referral, and treatment plans for Veterans are critical to service member transition and health care along with educating their families and employers.
- **Vet Centers**
 - o Counseling, including grief and bereavement counseling, military sexual trauma, post traumatic stress, and dependency issues to name a few, is available to Veterans as well as their families. Although a part of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Vet Center records are kept separately and they do not share information without written consent of the Veteran. This is a critical factor for service members not wanting to share their Protected Health Information with their Command.

Transportation

- **Veterans Transportation**
 - o The partnership between the VA and Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is critical in order to access grants, provide for donations for vans, and recruit qualified drivers.

Education

- **GI Bill and VA Education Benefits**
 - o One of the main concerns for Desert Storm and Global War on Terror (GWOT) Veterans is education benefits. There are other forms of VA education benefits which include Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab), Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program, Montgomery GI Bill, Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP), and the Post 9-11 GI Bill, which is GWOT-centric.

What We Learned: Focus Issue Speakers

- **Student Veteran Transition Issues**
 - o Student Veterans groups are critical in assisting Veterans in transitioning from military structure to university structure especially during the first semester.
- **Standardized Recognition for Military Training, Education, and Experience**
 - o All public centers for higher learning need standardized baselines which recognize and provide Veterans with college credit for military training, education, and experience.

Veteran Benefits

- **Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission (MMPEC)**
 - o Focus is on minimizing the effects of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), while making Missouri a military and Veteran friendly state and emphasizing economic and educational initiatives.
- **Widow/ Widowers Pension**
 - o Identify widows and widowers of Veterans who may now be within financial eligibility to receive a VA Widow/Widowers pension.
- **Non-Service Connected Pension**
 - o Identify Veterans who have served during a war-time period and could now be within financial eligibility to receive a VA Non-Service Connected Pension.
- **Global War on Terror (GWOT) Veterans**
 - o VA facilities have OEF/OIF Coordinators to help GWOT Veterans transition and access VA healthcare and understand their state and federal benefits.

Military Branch Concerns

- **Missouri Air Guard**
 - o Concerned that Service Members, their families and employers are significantly impacted by repetitive deployment rotations.
- **Marine Concerns**
 - o GWOT Veterans will not seek out support from Veteran Organizations, these Organizations must come to them and focus their resources to assist in individual transition.
- **Army Reserve**
 - o Reserve units are often times geographically dispersed, and some find themselves attached to units outside of the state. Reserve soldiers do not have access to the same benefits at National Guard and Active Duty soldiers and if they are attached to a unit in another state, the soldier is not aware of their Veteran benefits as a resident of Missouri.

What We Learned: Focus Issue Speakers

Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund (VCCITF)

- **VCCITF**
 - o Funding for Missouri Veterans Commission core programs is in jeopardy. The VCCITF is key to the continued viability of these programs.

Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations (MAVO)

- **MAVO**
 - o MAVO is a state organization comprised of members of the various Veterans Service Organizations in Missouri. MAVO works to present legislation to benefit Veterans and as a method to inform and coordinate plans and actions between the different veterans service organizations.

Community Awareness and Support and Transitioning Back Into the Community

- **Community Awareness**
 - o The synergy created by shared goals and objectives does not end with a Veterans' military service. As service providers, Veteran Service Partners need to cohesively speak with one voice in order to promote a successful Veteran centric agenda.
- **Homeless Veterans**
 - o The VA has made homelessness a priority initiative and its goal is to eradicate Veterans homelessness within 5 years. St. Louis and Kansas City, for the past 25 years, have held annual Stand Downs which have been successful but have not made an impressionable impact in getting Veterans off the streets and into long-lasting employment.
- **The Mission Continues**
 - o The Mission Continues provides fellowships to align the hopes and dreams of wounded GWOT Service Members with a productive future through community service and re-training. The goal is for communities to realize that our injured Veterans are an asset, not an inconvenience.
- **Transition**
 - o For every 1 month of deployment there is a 3 month period of readjustment transition back into the community. This process impacts not only the Veteran and family, but also the employer. Veteran Service Partners must work together and reach out to meet the needs of the new Veterans while continuing to support the needs of Veterans prior to 9-11.

What We Learned: Focus Issue Speakers

Employment

- **Tax Credits**
 - o Missouri should consider matching deployment tax credits the federal government has made available for employers and employees.
- **Deployments and Military Service**
 - o Missouri should consider allowing 2 years of military service towards a Veterans state retirement and allowing them to purchase up to 3 years of military service, interest free, toward state retirement.
 - o Propose stronger support for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) and Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

What We Learned: Looking in the Mirror

Throughout the course of the twenty-one Listening Posts, the Listening Post partner organizations took this opportunity to look at themselves objectively to see what could be done better or different in the future either as a group or as individual organizations.

Partner Organization Group Observations

- **The partner organizations realized the high value the Listening Posts afforded them as a group and as individual organizations.**
 - o The Listening Posts provided visibility as well as positive public relations to the Veterans and the public. The most important value however, was the trust and relationships that were built by each organization going out and interacting with the Veterans on an individual basis at the Listening Posts.
- **The partner organizations work better together rather than separately.**
 - o Working together on outreach initiatives enables partner organizations to craft joint messages and coordinate and target limited resources to specific ends. A key item for all partners to remember is that defined lanes of expertise and knowledge need to be maintained to remain coordinated.
- **The federal Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the state Veterans Services Program, and Veterans Service Organizations need to come together to craft a joint Veterans Benefits Program in Missouri.**
 - o Key to this effort would be the standardization of training for Veteran Service Officers (VSO's) across organizations, emphasizing the quality of the claims submitted to VBA as opposed to the quantity of claims submitted, and better/more training in benefits outreach and presentations.
- **All the partner organizations noticed that to reach the younger GWOT era Veterans, joint strategies will be needed.**
 - o Information must be pushed out to this era of Veterans to compel them to visit a Veterans Service Officer and enroll in the VA health care system.
 - o The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) remains a “best practice” way to capture National Guard and Reservists prior to discharge.
 - o The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) remains a “best practice” way to capture regular service members prior to discharge.
- **There is a need to have a comprehensive state resource guide for Veterans.**

What We Learned: Looking in the Mirror

Partner Organizations Individual Observations

- **The Missouri Veterans Commission (MVC) should coordinate with other state agencies who have services and benefits that impact Veterans.**
- **MAVO, the Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations, is ideally situated to coordinate Missouri's Veterans Service Organizations, especially in regards to coordinating legislative agendas.**
 - o Veterans Service Organizations had the most well informed Veterans attending the Listening Posts.
 - o Veterans Service Organizations need to create new strategies to entice younger Veterans to join their organizations.
- **The VA Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is recognized as the Veterans health expert among the partner organizations.**
 - o All partners need to refer to the VHA regarding all medical primary, tertiary, specialty, and outreach issues and initiatives.
 - o The VA's CBOC expansion initiative has been very well received and successful at increasing healthcare access for Missouri's Veterans.

Recommendations

Based on the information gathered from what we learned from our Veterans, our Focus Issue Speakers, and looking in the mirror, the following general recommendations are made to better serve Veterans, Deployed and Active Duty Service Members and their families:

Missouri Guide to Veterans Benefits

The Missouri Veterans Commission should champion the development and dissemination of a Missouri Guide to Veterans Benefits.

Missouri Veterans Outreach Task Force:

A Missouri Veterans Outreach Task Force needs to be established by the Missouri Veterans Commission, the Veterans Service Partners, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to coordinate and implement strategies for:

- Women Veterans Outreach
- Minority Veterans Outreach
- Incarcerated Veterans Outreach
- Homeless Veterans Outreach
- Student Veterans Outreach
- Specific War Era Outreach (i.e. GWOT, Gulf War, Vietnam)
- Other Veterans initiatives as identified

Joint Veterans Benefit Task Force:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Missouri Veterans Commission, and the Veterans Service Partner Grants Program should establish a Joint Veterans Benefits Task Force to:

- Provide standardized training for Veterans Service Officers
- Develop and implement a Veterans Service Information Officer Program
- Develop a method to track quality of claims submitted by Veterans Service Officers
- Develop a method to “fast track” ready to rate claims
- Review incentives for Veterans Service Officer claims submissions to VBA

Recommendations

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP):

Sponsors of the YRRP's (i.e. National Guard) should continue to work with partner agencies to ensure that proper coordinated messages are provided to both deploying and returning service members at appropriate times.

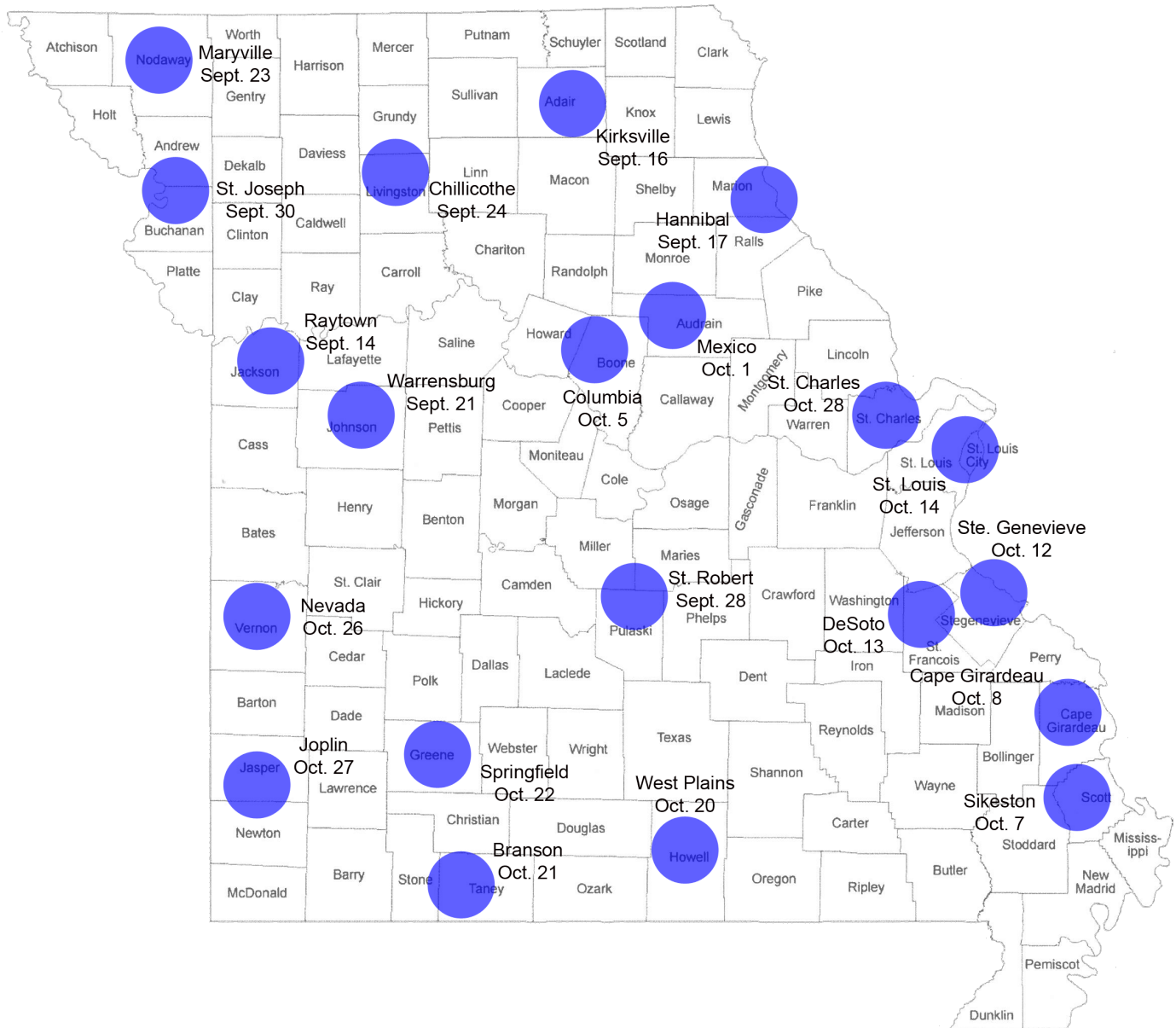
Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund (VCCITF):

The Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund (VCCITF) was created per section 313.835, RSMo. The VCCITF is used for construction, maintenance and repair of the Veterans Homes and Veterans Cemeteries. It also funds the operations of the Veterans Cemeteries and funds the Veterans Service Officer Grant Program. The statute also requires the VCCITF to be used to maintain the solvency of the Home Fund. Originally, the VCCITF annual revenue was approximately \$30 million from the Gaming Commission Fund, but has been legislatively reduced to the current amount of only \$6 million annually.

Starting in FY 1996 the VCCITF began receiving transfers from the Gaming Commission Fund and the cash balance of the fund approached \$80 million by June 30, 1999. Since FY 2000, Home Fund solvency issues and several law changes have occurred that threaten the viability of the fund which included: \$47.6 million in transfers to the Home Fund for solvency, \$15 million to repair the Liberty Memorial, \$3.5 million for a Veterans Memorial Grants program, over \$1.4 million for medals and medallions, \$5.6 million to construct outpatient clinics at six Veterans Homes, and \$1 million a year for Veterans Service Officer Grants. Currently the balance of the VCCITF is almost \$18 million.

The VCCITF is key to the continued viability of Veterans Commission Programs. Legislative action is needed to maintain solvency of this Fund. We recommend expanding the statutory use of the fund to include the Veterans Services Program to provide a dedicated funding source for the program. We also recommend increasing the annual transfers from Gaming Commission Fund from \$6 million to \$17 million to balance annual revenues with annual expenditures to include construction (\$10 million), cemetery operations (\$3 million), Veterans Service Officer Grants (\$1 million), and the Veterans Services Program (\$3 million).

Appendix A: Listening Post Dates & Locations



The twenty-one Listening Posts throughout Missouri had an average attendance by Veterans, family, and other interested parties of 71 people, with the highest attendance of approximately 150, and the lowest approximately 50.

The average length of the Listening Posts were 3 hours.

Partner Organizations Contributed:

- Facilities
- Refreshments
- Public Service Announcements for radio
- Outreach support
- Flu Shots for Veterans

Appendix B: Focus Issue Speakers & Topics

Dr. James Sanders
Chief of Staff, KC VA Medical Center
Acting Chief Medical Officer for the VA Heartland Health Care Network
Topic: VA Telemedicine

Larry Daniels
State Adjutant - Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
Topic: Veterans Transportation

Paula Fleming
US Department of Veterans Affairs VISN 15, Rural Health Consultant
Topic: Rural Health Access

Senator David Pearce
State Senate District 31
Commissioner - Missouri Veterans Commission
Topic: Missouri Military Preparedness Enhancement Commission (MMPEC) and State Benefits

Stanton Nickens
St. Louis VA Regional Office - Assistant Education Officer
Topic: GI Bill and VA Education Benefits

Dr. Thomas Martin, Ph.D.
University of Missouri
Topic: Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD ...Signature Injuries of the Global War on Terror

Colonel Mike Pankau
Vice Commander, 139th Airlift Wing
Topic: Missouri Air Guard Issues

Keith Widaman
Former Staff Sergeant - USMC
Topic: Marine Issues Faced on Transition

Carol Watson Fleischer
Interim Director - Student Veterans Center, University of Missouri
Topic: Veterans Education Transition Issues

Colonel Jack Jackson (Ret) USMC
Missouri House of Representatives 2002 - 2006
Topic: Creating Community Awareness

Susie Owens
Family Nurse Practitioner
BC
Facilitator JJP
US Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Topic: VA Inpatient Services

Dr. Anne Sobel, M.D., Major General (Ret)
University of Missouri
Topic: Long Distance Learning for Veterans and their Families

Jeremy Amick
Assistant Director, Missouri US Department of Labor, Veterans Employment & Training Service
Topic: Veterans Employment & Access to Resources/Benefits to Employers/Unemployment Issues

Dr. Mark Corson, (BG) US Army Reserve
Maryville University
United States Army Reserve
Topic: Army Reserve Issues

John Eckhoff
Veterans Services Manager, St. Louis County Veterans Services
Topic: Homelessness, Non-Service Connected VA Pension, and Access to Entrepreneurship Resources

Colonel Gary Gilmore
Missouri National Guard State Chaplain
Topic: Transition Issues to and from Civilian to Military Life

Janet Schinner
St. Louis Regional VA Office
Topic: Widows/Widowers/Non-Service Connected Pension

Gary Collins
Licensed Social Worker, St. Louis Missouri Vet Center
Topic: Vet Centers

Don Gosha
OEF/OIF Manager, St. Louis Regional VA Office
Topic: GWOT Compensation and Pension Benefits

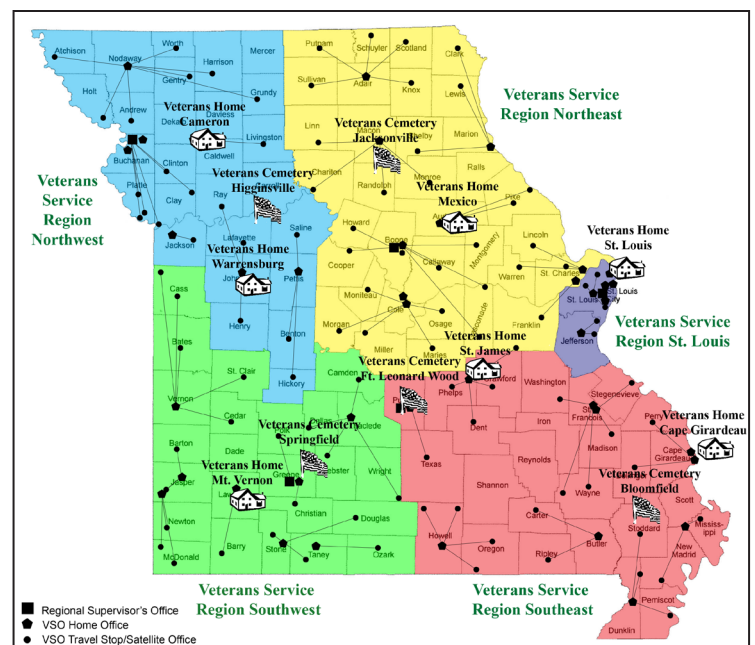
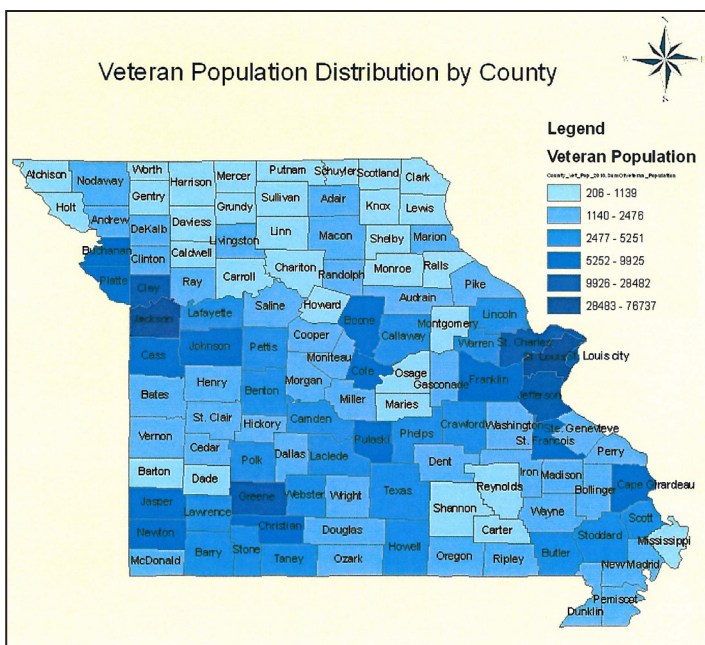
Deana Jackson Moore, LNSW
Telehealth & Rural Access Manager
US Department of Veterans Affairs VISN 16 Clinical Assistance Program Office
Topic: Rural Health

Eric Greitens, Ph.D.
Chairman & CEO, The Mission Continues
Senior Fellow at the Truman School for Public Affairs, University of Missouri
Topic: The Mission Continues

Dewey Riehn
Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations (MAVO)
Topic: Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations (MAVO) and Veterans Commission Capital Improvement Trust Fund (VCCITF)

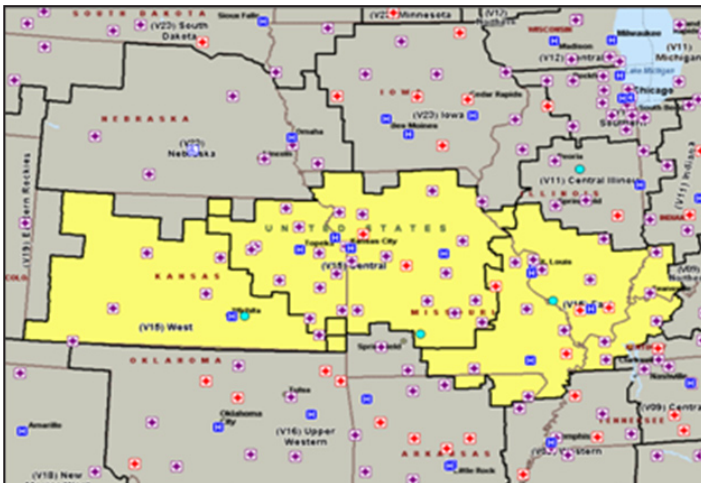
Appendix C: Missouri Veterans Fact Sheet

- There are approximately 523,000 Veterans in Missouri, including Guard and Reserve Veterans.
- Approximately 10% of Missouri's Veterans are receiving earned federal benefits and approximately 20% of Missouri's Veterans are enrolled in VA Health Care.
- As of September 30, 2009 (federal fiscal year-end) an estimated \$840,000,000 in federal benefits were paid to Missouri's Veterans and Widows from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This amount is 10 times more than what it was in fiscal year 1999.
- Accredited Veterans Service Officers from the Missouri Veterans Commission and the Veteran Service organizations are responsible for bringing in 71% percent of the \$840,000,000 in federal VA benefits to Missouri.
- Approximately \$2 billion is annually brought in to Missouri's economy through medical care, education, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guaranty, VA compensation and pension benefits and service connected death benefits.
- Missouri's seven state Veterans Homes have a total 1,350 beds which are full and the waiting list for admission is over 1,300 Veterans.
- Missouri's five state Veterans Cemeteries cover a total of 526 acres, have interred over 7,500 Veterans, and are expected to remain open for interment anywhere from year 2050 to 2200 depending on the location.

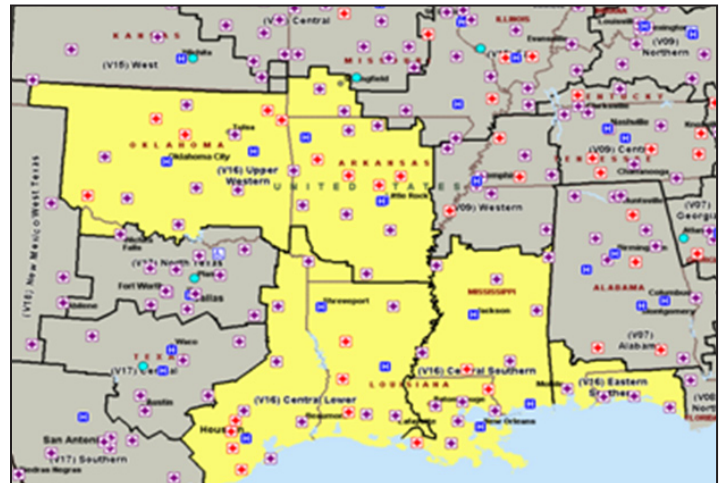


Appendix C: Missouri Veterans Fact Sheet

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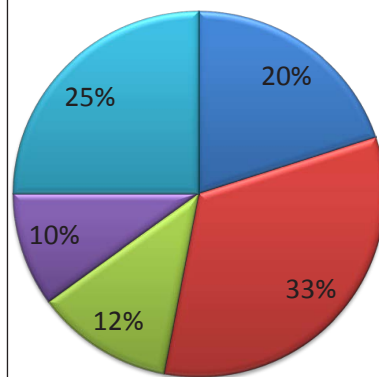


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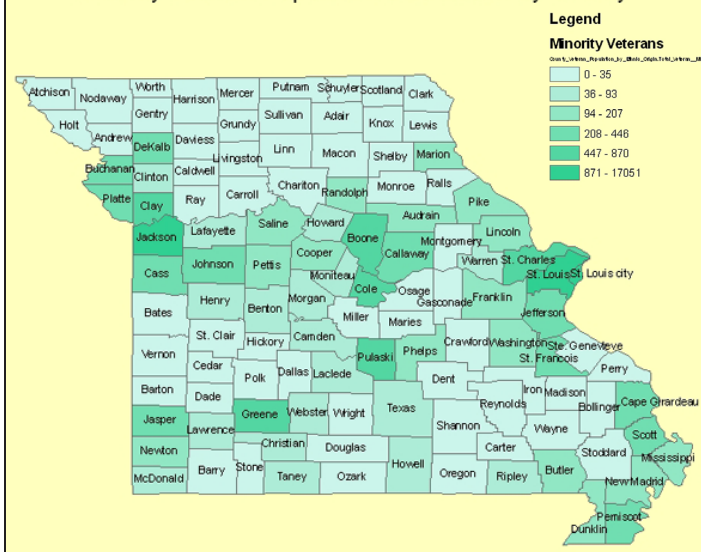
Missouri Veterans By Era

(some overlap between eras)



- Gulf War Era (108,951)
- Vietnam Era (176,377)
- Korean Conflict (63,032)
- World War II Era (55,672)
- Peacetime Veterans (136,389)

Minority Veteran Population Distribution by County



Female Veteran Population Distribution by County

