



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

History of the Department of Veterans Affairs Part 10

VA's commitment to caring for veterans, spouses, survivors and dependents is long lasting: The last dependent of a Revolutionary War veteran died in 1911; in May 2006, three children of Civil War veterans were still drawing VA benefits.

Of the 24.3 million veterans alive at the start of 2006, nearly three-quarters served during a war or an official period of conflict. About a quarter of the nation's population, approximately 63 million people, are potentially eligible for VA benefits and services because they are veterans, family members or survivors of veterans. VA's fiscal year 2005 spending was \$71.2 billion, including \$31.5 billion for health care, \$37.1 billion for benefits, and \$148 million for the national cemetery system.



*Veterans Day ceremony at
Arlington National Cemetery*

In fiscal year 2005, VA provided \$30.8 billion in disability compensation, death compensation and pension to 3.5 million people. About 3 million veterans received disability compensation or pensions from VA. Also receiving VA benefits were nearly 560,000 spouses, children and parents of deceased veterans. Among them are approximately 159,000 survivors of Vietnam-era veterans and 257,000 survivors of World War II veterans.



*Indiana University Pres. Herman B. Wells
welcomes new students enrolled with
their G.I. Bill benefits in 1946.*

Since 1944, when the first GI Bill began, more than 21.3 million veterans, service members and family members have received \$72.8 billion in GI Bill benefits for education and training. The number of GI Bill recipients includes 7.8 million veterans from World War II, 2.4 million from the Korean War and 8.2 million post-Korean and Vietnam era veterans, plus active duty personnel.

Since the dependents program was enacted in 1956, VA also has assisted in the education of more than 700,000 dependents of veterans whose deaths or total disabilities were

service-connected. Since the Vietnam-era, there have been approximately 2.3 million veterans, service members, reservists and National Guardsmen who have participated in the Veterans' Educational Assistance Program, established in 1977, and the Montgomery GI Bill, established in 1985.

In 2005 alone, VA helped pay for the education or training of more than 336,000 veterans and active-duty personnel, 87,000 reservists and National Guardsmen and 74,000 survivors.

VA's health care system has grown from 54 hospitals in 1930 to 157 medical centers in 2005, with at least one in each state, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. More than 5.3 million people received care in VA health care facilities in 2005, a 29 percent increase over the 4.1 million treated just four years earlier.



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VA operates more than 1,300 sites of care including nearly 900 ambulatory care and community-based outpatient clinics, 136 nursing homes, 43 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, nearly 90 comprehensive home-care programs, and more than 200 Veterans Centers

where approximately 2 million veterans have been served since the first center opened in 1979. In 2005 alone, Veterans Centers handled more than 1 million visits by nearly 133,000 veterans and members of their families.

VA manages the largest medical education and health professions training program in the United States. VA facilities are affiliated with more than 105 medical schools, 55 dental schools and more than 1,200 other schools across the country. Each year, about 83,000 health professionals are trained in VA medical centers. More than half of the physicians practicing in the United States had some of their professional education in the VA health care system.

VA's medical system also serves as a backup to the Defense Department during national emergencies and as a federal support organization during major disasters.

VA conducts an array of research on some of the most difficult challenges facing medical science today. VA is a world leader in research areas such as spinal-cord injury, amputation care, prosthetics, blind rehabilitation, aging, women's health, AIDS, Agent Orange exposure, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues.

VA researchers played key roles in developing the cardiac pacemaker, the CT scan, radioimmunoassay and improvements in artificial limbs. The world's first liver transplant in the was performed by a VA surgeon-researcher. VA clinical trials established the effectiveness of new treatments for tuberculosis, schizophrenia and high blood pressure. The "Seattle Foot" developed in VA allows people with amputations to run and jump.



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In 2005, VA supported approximately 3,800 researchers — more than 80 percent of whom are practicing physicians — at 115 VA medical centers. Funding for VA research is nearly \$400 million with another \$341 million from VA's medical care account supporting research efforts. Funding from non-VA sources, such as the National Institutes of Health, other government agencies and pharmaceutical companies, contributes an additional \$800 million to VA research.

VA research achievements have not only benefited veteran patients but have contributed to medical science as a whole. Two VA researchers — Rosalyn Yalow and Andrew Schally — shared the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1977. They top a long list of VA researchers who have been recognized for their advances in medicine and science.

In 2006, VA hired 100 Global War on Terrorism veterans to inform other returning veterans of VA services available to help deal with the stress of combat, including professional readjustment counseling for war trauma, family readjustment counseling, and other social readjustment problems. Already, they are averaging more than 13,000 outreach contacts each month with returning Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans and their families.

From 1944 — when VA began helping veterans purchase homes under the original GI Bill — through May 2006, VA issued more than 18 million VA home loan guarantees, with a total value of \$892 billion. In fiscal year 2005 alone, VA guaranteed 165,854 loans valued at \$25 billion and, at the beginning of fiscal year 2006, had 2.3 million active home loans reflecting amortized loans totaling \$202.1 billion. VA's specially adapted housing programs helped about 587 disabled veterans with grants totaling more than \$26 million in 2005.



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VA programs provide \$1.1 trillion insurance coverage.

VA directly administers six life insurance programs and supervises the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and the Veterans' Group Life Insurance programs. These programs provide \$1.1 trillion in insurance coverage to 4.5 million veterans, active-duty servicemembers, reservists and Guardsmen, plus 3 million spouses and children.

In 2005, the VA life insurance programs returned \$462 million in dividends to 1.5 million veterans holding some of these VA life insurance policies, and paid an additional \$2.1 billion in death claims and other disbursements. In 2005, traumatic injury protection was added to insurance benefits to provide benefits ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000 to seriously injured service members during recovery.

While the proportion of veterans among the nation's homeless is declining, VA provides medical care, benefits assistance and transitional housing to more than 100,000 of them each year. VA has made more than 300 grants for transitional housing, service centers and vans for outreach and transportation to state and local governments, tribal governments, non-profit community and faith-based service providers.

VA maintains national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico as a final salute and lasting tribute to those who have served in America's armed forces. In 1973, the Department of the Army transferred 82 national cemeteries to VA. By 2005, that number had grown to 123.

In 2005, VA national cemeteries conducted more than 93,000 interments, provided nearly 364,000 headstones or markers for veterans' graves and approximately 488,000 Presidential Memorial Certificates to veteran's next of kin and loved ones to commemorate honorably discharged, deceased veterans. Since 1973, the department has provided more than 9.2 million headstones and markers. Additionally, VA has awarded more than \$258 million for the development, expansion or improvement of 63 state veterans cemeteries. In 2005, nearly 21,000 veterans and family members were buried in those cemeteries.



Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego, Calif.

More than 92 percent of the approximately 236,000 employees on VA's rolls in 2006 work in the health care area. Among all departments and agencies of the federal government, only the Department of Defense has a larger work force.

No discussion of the Department of Veterans Affairs would be complete without discussing the invaluable contributions of the thousands of dedicated volunteers who contribute their time and effort every day of the year to bring companionship and care to hospitalized veterans. In 2005 alone, more than 94,000 volunteers in VA's Voluntary Service (VAVS) donated 13 million hours of service. For more information on VAVS and examples of what can be done in 13 million hours, see the May/June edition of *Vanguard* magazine, available on the Internet at:

<http://www.va.gov/opa/feature/vanguard/index.asp>.

Primary statistical source: "Facts About the Department of Veterans Affairs," which can be found on the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/opa/fact/>.

VA operates hundreds of medical facilities, issues millions of checks for education, disability and pensions, and supervises 123 national cemeteries. With approximately 236,000 employees, VA is America's second largest federal agency. When eligible dependents and survivors are included, approximately 63 million people -- about one-quarter of the nation's population -- are eligible for VA benefits and services. On July 21, 2005, VA celebrated 75 years of serving America's veterans. VA is providing this 10-part "History of the VA" to help observe this 75th Anniversary year.