



OFFICE OF SURVIVORS ASSISTANCE

Fiscal Year 2011 Report



Advocating for Survivors of America's Veterans

September 30, 2011

PURPOSE

The Office of Survivors Assistance Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Report describes the progress and accomplishments made toward fulfilling its mission to ensure that Survivors are knowledgeable of and have access to applicable benefits and services under the law. This report is also designed to inform Department leadership of the program's performance during FY 2011.

BACKGROUND

President Lincoln's immortal words, delivered in his Second Inaugural Address more than 140 years ago, best describes the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and inherently, the mission of the Office of Survivors Assistance.

*"To care for him who shall have borne the battle,
and for his widow, and his orphan..."*

The Office of Survivors Assistance was Congressionally mandated in October 2008, by Public Law 110-389, Title II, Section 222 (Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008) to serve as a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by VA to Survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and Survivors and dependents of deceased members of the Armed Forces. OSA serves as the primary advisor to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters related to policies, programs, legislative issues, and other initiatives affecting Veterans' Survivors and dependents.

OSA honors the commitment made to our Veterans and Servicemembers by ensuring that surviving spouses, children and parents of deceased Veterans and Servicemembers have access to applicable benefits and services under the law. OSA also serves as an advocate for their special needs in the policy and programmatic decisions of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

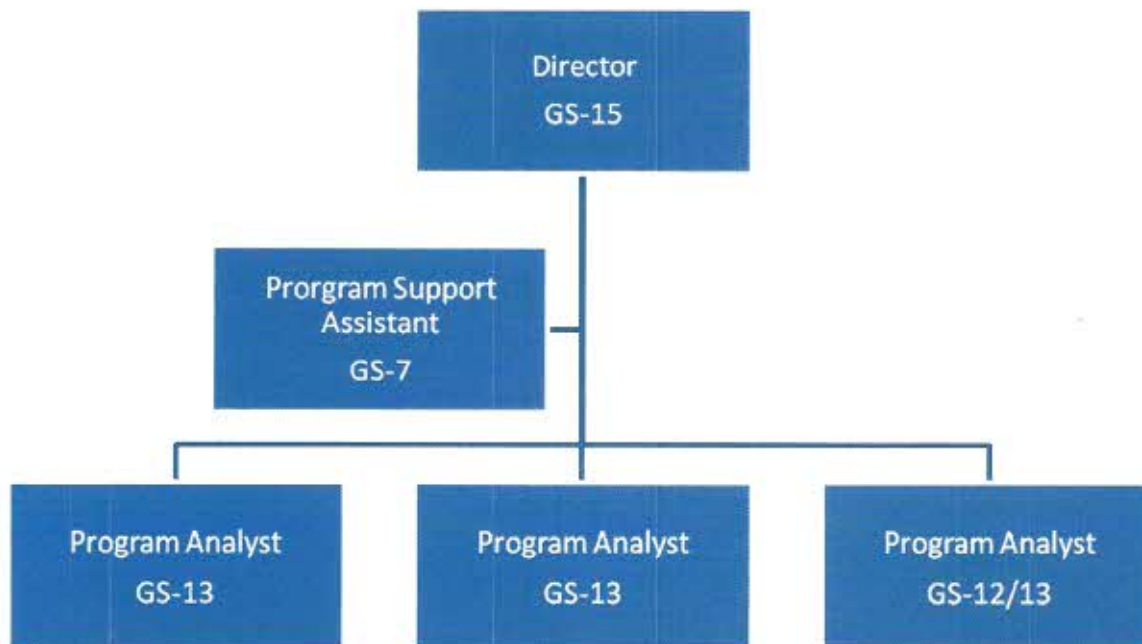


There are an estimated 35.2 million dependents (spouses and dependent children) of living Veterans residing in the U. S. and Puerto Rico. There are over 530,000 Survivors and dependents receiving VA Survivor benefits in the U. S. and Puerto Rico [2011 Congressional Submission]

“Taking care of Survivors is as essential as taking care of our Veterans and military personnel,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. “By taking care of Survivors, we are honoring the commitment made to our Veterans and military members.” - September 29, 2008

ORGANIZATION

The Office of Survivors Assistance was originally allocated 5 full time employees (FTE) based on estimated resource requirements in the FY 2010 operating plan. In November 2010, a Director was hired to complement the current staff of two Program Analysts, both GS-13s. One of the Program Analysts, who was detailed to another organization, retired in July 2011. The two remaining positions, a Program Analyst, GS-12/13 and a Program Support Assistant, GS-7, were vacant and not filled during the fiscal year. Below is the organizational chart for FY 2011:



The Office of Survivors Assistance (www.va.gov/Survivors/) supports the transformation of the Department into the 21st century by being *people-centric, results-driven and forward-looking*. With the VA Strategic Plan as the cornerstone of this transformation, OSA's accomplishments complement the Department's strategic goals, integrated objectives and strategies.

VA Strategic Plan Refresh Fiscal Year 2011 – 2015

Strategic Goal:

Improve the quality and accessibility of health care, benefits, and memorial services while optimizing value

Integrated Objective 2: Educate and empower Veterans and their families through proactive outreach and effective advocacy

Integrated Strategies:

2(a) – Use clear, accurate, consistent and targeted messages to build awareness of VA's benefits among our employees, Veterans and their families, and other stakeholders

2(b) – Leverage technology and partnerships to reach Veterans and their families and advocate on their behalf

2(c) – Reach out proactively and in a timely fashion to communicate with Veterans and their families and promote Veteran engagement

2(d) – Engage in two-way communication with Veterans and their families to help them understand available benefits, get feedback on VA programs, and build partnerships with them as our clients

Major Initiative: Enable 21st century benefits delivery and services

Outreach to our Nation's Survivors is vital to OSA's mission to increase awareness, education and accessibility of VA benefits and services to Survivors and dependents. To accomplish this, OSA educates and empowers Survivors and dependents through outreach and effective advocacy. OSA developed and produced communications materials and products that used clear, accurate, consistent and targeted messages to build awareness of VA's Survivor benefits among our employees, Veterans and their

families, and other stakeholders [2(a)] to engage in two-way communication with Veterans and their families to help them understand available benefits, get feedback on VA programs, and build partnerships with them as our clients [2 (b)/(d)] during outreach events and activities, leveraging technology where appropriate. OSA continues to employ specific and targeted outreach activities by reaching out proactively through various approaches in a timely manner to communicate with Veterans and their families and promote engagement [2(c)]. OSA collaborates and partners with internal and external organizations to increase awareness of survivor benefits by conducting briefings at diverse forums, conducting and supporting joint outreach initiatives.

The Office of Survivors Assistance constantly seeks previously unexplored avenues to better serve Survivors and their dependents. OSA must identify itself in a distinctive way so that it can be recognized as the leader in providing information on survivor benefits and services provided by VA in multiple formats to accommodate the diverse and changing needs of Survivors.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF VETERANS

The Department of Veterans Affairs embarked upon the 2010 National Survey of Veterans (NSV) to help plan its future programs and services for Veterans. While past NSVs have been conducted under the general authorization of U.S. Code Title 38, Section 527, the 2010 National Survey at the direction of Public Law 108-454, Section 805, included the requirement of VA to assess beneficiary awareness of VA benefits and services. It also instructed the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit a report to Congress on the current level of awareness not only for Veterans, but also for: Active Duty Servicemembers; Demobilized National Guard and Reserve Members; Family Members and Surviving Spouses. For more information on the 2010 National Survey of Veterans, please visit:

<http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SurveysAndStudies/NVSSurveyFinalWeightedReport.pdf>

The National Survey of Veterans provides a snapshot profile of the Veteran population allowing VA to: follow changing trends in the Veteran population; compare characteristics of Veterans who use VA benefits and services with those of Veterans who do not; study VA's role in the delivery of all benefits and services that Veterans receive; and update information about Veterans to help the Department develop its policies.

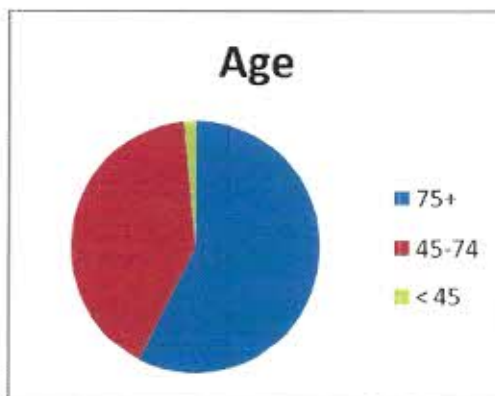
The National Survey of Veterans defines surviving spouses as those living in residential households in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Spouses who were institutionalized, homeless, or residing outside the U.S. were not covered by the 2010 NSV. The 2010 NSV surviving spouse data were post-stratified by using counts from VA databases on the number of surviving spouses receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). While the exact number of surviving spouses of Veterans has yet to be estimated, approximately 326,000 surviving spouses receive DIC.

Note: The 2010 NSV was conducted using a mailed, self-administered questionnaire. The address-based sampling (ABS) was used for surviving spouses with the rationale that there are no complete sampling frames available for this population at VA or the Department of Defense (DoD). Therefore, the NSV does not capture the total population of Survivors.

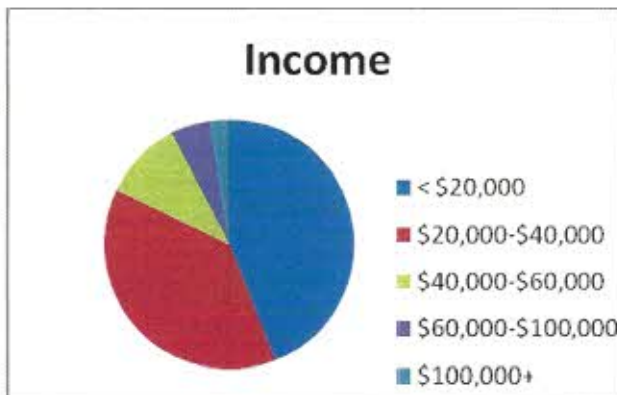
Surviving Spouses: A Demographic Profile

Demographics Identified in the NSV:

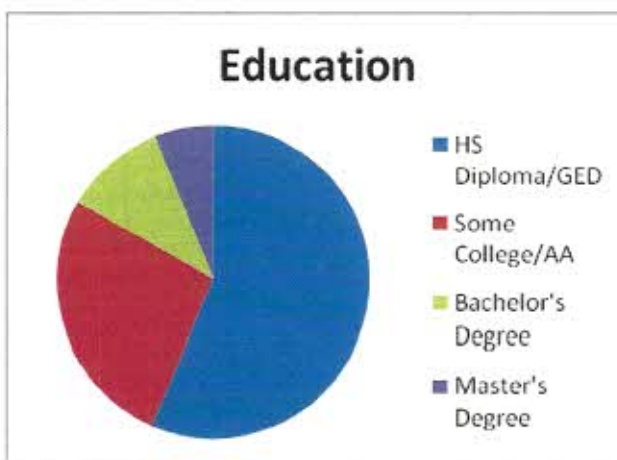
- ❖ 95.8% - Non-Hispanic
- ❖ 90.3% - White
- ❖ 99.2% - Female
- ❖ 98.5% - over 45 years of age
 - 58.2% - 75+
 - 40.3% - 45-74
 - 1.5% - 45<



- ❖ 6.5% - have dependent children
- ❖ 84.1% - are not in the workforce/not looking for work
- ❖ 71.0% - own home
- ❖ 44% - income less than \$20,000 per year
 - 38.1% - \$20,000-\$40,000
 - 10.2% - \$40,000-\$60,000
 - 5.2% - \$60,000-\$100,000
 - 2.5% - \$100,000+



- ❖ 56.4% - High School Diploma/GED or below
 - 26.9% - Some college credit or AA
 - 10.6% - Bachelor's Degree
 - 6.1% - Master's Degree or greater



Awareness and Outreach

- ❖ 17.1% - reported receiving information about VA benefits and services in the past year
- ❖ 37.4% - willing to use Internet to obtain information about VA

Education and Training

- ❖ 2.5% - used VA education or training benefits
- ❖ 40.9% - unaware of VA education or training benefits

Home Loans

- ❖ 51.3% - used VA Home Loan Guaranty Program
- ❖ 35.5% - used because of favorable interest rate
- ❖ 46.3% - did not use VA Home Loan Guaranty Program because not aware of it
(of those who ever had a home loan, but not a VA home loan)

PARTNERSHIPS

Since World War I, surviving spouses have organized to serve our Nation's heroes and show their support to this great Nation by serving in various capacities. Some of the purposes of these organizations include: perpetuate the memory of those whose lives were sacrificed; maintain the ties of fellowship born of that service; extend assistance to other surviving spouses and their children; and assist surviving spouses in understanding and obtaining benefits. Since 1917 with the founding of the American War Mothers, many other survivor organizations have been established. In November and December 2010, the Office of Survivors Assistance expanded its partnerships to include all survivor organizations to move forward its mission of ensuring that all Survivors are aware of and have access to all applicable benefits and services under the law.

Below is the current list of organizations OSA works with. OSA will partner with organizations that may be established in the future. *(Date in parenthesis is organization date)*

- ❖ **Gold Star Wives of America** (www.goldstarwives.org) is an organization of military widows/widowers whose spouse died while on active duty or from service connected disabilities. (1945)
- ❖ **American Gold Star Mothers** (www.goldstarmoms.com) is an organization of mothers whose sons or daughters served and died that this world might be a better place in which to live. (1928)
- ❖ **American War Mothers** (www.americanwarmoms.org) members are mothers of children who have served or are serving in the Armed Services during a time of conflict. (1917)
- ❖ **Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.** (www.bluestarmothers.org) provides support for active duty service personnel, promotes patriotism, assists Veterans organizations, and is available to assist in homeland volunteer efforts to help our country remain strong. (1942)
- ❖ **Society of Military Widows** (www.militarywidows.org) serves the interests of women whose husbands died while on active military duty, of a service-connected illness, or during disability or regular retirement from the armed forces. (1968)
- ❖ **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors** (www.taps.org) is 24/7 tragedy assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the circumstance of the death. (1994)
- ❖ **Veterans' Widow(ers) International Network, Inc.** (www.vetsurvivors.com) provides help and support to all Veterans' Survivors either receiving benefits or on the waiting list. (1995)
- ❖ **National Association of Military Widows (NA)** serves the interests of women whose husbands died while on active military duty, of a service-connected illness, or during disability or regular retirement from the armed forces. (1975)

- ❖ **American Widow Project** (www.americanwidowproject.org) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the new generation of those who have lost the heroes of yesterday, today and tomorrow, with an emphasis on healing through sharing stories, tears and laughter.....Military Widow to Military Widow. (2006)



In addition to the survivor stakeholder organizations listed above, the Office of Survivors Assistance continues to expand and foster new partnerships with external organizations to promote knowledge of survivor benefits, exchange resources and conduct joint outreach events. These partnerships allow OSA the opportunity to work with organizations representing various interests and to further increase knowledge about VA benefits and services available to Survivors.

- ❖ **Department of Defense Casualty and Mortuary Affairs** (<http://osd.dtic.mil/mapcentral/casualty.html>) provides help to the grieving families of deceased military personnel and the ceremonial paying of respect at their memorials provide the final demonstration of our Nation's gratitude to those who faithfully defended our country in peace and war.
- ❖ **US Army National Survivor Outreach Service** (www.myarmyonesource.com) provides dedicated and comprehensive support to Survivors of Active Duty, Reserve, Army National Guard and Retirees. Survivor Outreach Services demonstrates the Army's commitment to Families by providing support and standardized services to Active, Reserve and Army National Guard families.

- ❖ **Fort Belvoir Survivor Outreach Service** (www.myarmyonesource.com) is the local, installation level of the overarching US Army National Survivor Outreach Service.
- ❖ **National Funeral Directors Association** (www.nfda.org) is a worldwide resource and advocate across all facets of funeral service dedicated to information, education and advocacy.
- ❖ **National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization** (www.nhpco.org) is a charitable organization advocating for the needs of people facing life-limiting illness and is the world's largest and most innovative national membership organization devoted exclusively to promoting access to hospice and palliative care and to maintaining quality care for persons facing the end of life and their families.
- ❖ **National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association** (www.nfdma.org) is a membership association of professional funeral directors and morticians and embalmers dedicated to promoting the common professional and business interests of its members.
- ❖ **National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs** (www.nasdva.org) is the State Department or Agency designated as the "Office of Prime Responsibility" for veteran services and programs.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

The Office of Survivors Assistance communicates benefits and services available to Survivors in multiple formats such as traditional media techniques, online tools and technology. OSA also works with internal and external organizations to include this information in their communications materials.

In November 2010, OSA began leveraging technology and creating communications materials and products as a first step in launching its comprehensive outreach campaign. In **December 2010**, OSA used the **Internet's scrolling marquee** to re-introduce the Office of Survivors Assistance to VA. Once reintroduced, OSA continued the momentum with an article in the **January/February 2011 Edition** of the **Vanguard Magazine** to reach employees across the country.

Also in **December 2010**, OSA embarked upon an aggressive **redesign of its Web site** to create a more user-friendly and comprehensive site, providing one-stop information services to the survivor community and others seeking information on VA benefits and services available to Survivors and dependents. The redesign of the Web site is on-going as OSA regularly updates it with current, valuable information.

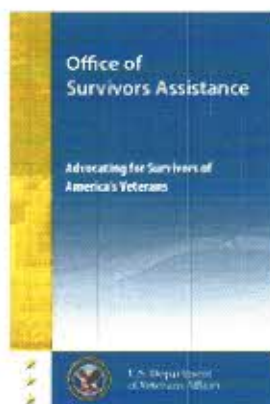
In addition to with working on internal communications and messaging, OSA also worked with external organizations such as the **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)** to help increase awareness of the office to the survivor community. TAPS published an article on OSA in its **March 2011** magazine, which proved an immediate success, dramatically increasing the number of hits to the OSA Web page. OSA continued to work with other partners to publish information in various formats. In **July 2011**, the **National Funeral Directors Association** monthly magazine included an article on OSA. Also in **July 2011**, the **National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization** featured OSA as its **Web site Featured Highlight**, another opportunity where technology was leveraged.



Understanding the need to communicate information to diverse audiences, OSA further expanded its use of technology by employing **social media in May 2011**, specifically, the **VA Blog and Facebook** (Page 22). This was a great step for the technology generation; however OSA realized there were mature Survivors who did not have access to or knowledge of technology, requiring information in a more hands-on format, such as printed materials.

In **May 2011**, OSA, through the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, distributed its article to the **National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs**, reaching the State level, and subsequently, the local Veterans Affairs Offices throughout the country.

OSA designed and created communications materials and products to distribute at outreach events and activities. One of the most successful products was the **outreach brochure (May 2011)**, which to date, 6,712 (May 1 - September 30) have been distributed to internal and external organizations throughout the country.



OSA proactively sought alternative options to printing brochures and created a **PDF version (July 2011)** that could be accessed on an individual's desktop. Brochures could then be printed on an as-needed basis. OSA included **marketing products (July 2011)** as part of its outreach toolkit as "take ways" for customers to have OSA information at their finger tips.

OSA collaborated with the Office of the Secretary's Strategic Communications Group and the Veterans Health Administration's Employment Education Services to create a **Survivor Educational Video (July 2011)**. This video featured Survivors who are currently using benefits and services offered by VA. The video was introduced on the **Internet Scrolling Marquee** and then on **YouTube**, leveraging technology to reach a large and diverse audience. This video is also shown on The Pentagon Channel.

OSA continues to work with its internal partners within the Department to ensure information about survivor benefits and services is included in all appropriate communications and messaging. The **Veterans Benefits Administrations, Philadelphia VA Regional Office and Insurance Center (VAROIC)**, and OSA worked together to determine changes that could be made to ensure that Survivors, Veterans, current Servicemembers, and family members were aware of VA benefits and services Survivors and dependents may be eligible for.

In **August 2011**, the Philadelphia VAROIC took several actions that accomplished this important goal to include:

- ❖ The VAROIC **amended its template letter (VAF 20-5851)** which is sent to every beneficiary reflecting the exact amount of the insurance award along with other information about the claim to include a new message insert that states:
 - Did You Know?
 - If you are a surviving spouse, parent or child of a Servicemember or Veteran, you may be eligible for survivor benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Go to www.va.gov/Survivors/ to learn about additional information to which you may be entitled.
- ❖ The **Office of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (OSGLI)**, which administers the life insurance policies for current Servicemembers, their families, and recent Veterans, **placed** the above language in its forms and letters.
- ❖ The **VA Insurance updated its Web site** to include a paragraph similar to the above statement and a link to the Office of Survivors Assistance.
- ❖ The **Philadelphia Pension Management Center**, which processes and administers the VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Program, **amended its letters** to include a statement that reads:
 - To learn about additional VA benefits for Survivors, please visit www.va.gov/Survivors/.

The Office of Survivors Assistance also partnered with the **Veterans Health Administration Mobile Vet Centers**. Vet Center staff advised OSA that those seeking assistance from the Mobile Vet Centers inquired about information on Survivor benefits and services. OSA provides outreach materials (printed and via technology) to meet the needs of customers and has a link on the Vet Center's Web site.



COLLABORATIVE INTERAGENCY OUTREACH

As the Office of Survivors Assistance continued its aggressive outreach campaign, it focused on collaborative outreach events with various Federal, State and local agencies as well as Veterans' service organizations, faith-based and community organizations and other stakeholder groups to promote the awareness of benefits and services that Survivors may be eligible to receive. OSA participates in outreach events by providing informative presentations, serving as panel members, facilitating events, conducting conference calls, and hosting exhibit booths. Each event provides an opportunity to educate or refresh current Servicemembers, retired Veterans, National Guard and Reserve Members, survivor service groups, Veterans' service organizations, funeral and hospice and palliative care industries on Survivor benefits and services. OSA has been invited by organizations to participate in events that educate audiences on survivor benefits and services.

OSA continuously seeks to expand its reach to new organizations to increase awareness of benefits and services for Survivors and dependents. Below are the collaborative interagency outreach events OSA participated in during the past year along with the capacity it served in:

- ❖ **Presentation** - Department of Defense Casualty Advisory Board (Fort Knox, KY) – February 2011
- ❖ **Panel Discussion** - National Guard Bureau Transition Assistance Advisors Training Conference (Atlanta, GA) – February 2011
- ❖ **Attendee** - US Army Chief of Staff Survivor Advisory Work Group (San Antonio, TX) – April 2011
- ❖ **Presentation** - Gold Star Wives Middle Atlantic Chapter Surviving Spouses Benefits Seminar (Arlington, VA) – April 2011
- ❖ **Booth** - US Army Survivor Outreach Service Survivor Services Day (Fort Belvoir, VA) – May 2011
- ❖ **Booth** - Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors 17th Annual Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp (Arlington, VA) – May 2011
- ❖ **Keynote Speaker** - American War Mothers 87th Mother's Day Ceremony (Arlington National Cemetery) – May 2011

- ❖ **Speaker** - National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association (Washington, DC) – June 2011
- ❖ **Facilitator** - US Army Survivor Outreach Services Survivor Training (Fort Belvoir, VA) – June 2011
- ❖ **Presentation** - Gold Star Mothers Conference (Nashville, TN) – June 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call** - National Guard Bureau Transition Assistance Advisors – July 2011
- ❖ **Support** - US Army National Survivor Outreach Services Training Conference (OSA providing tabletop exhibit/brochures; facilitated NCA staff to attend) – July 2011
- ❖ **Attendance** - Department of Labor Women's Bureau Launch of Trauma Informed Care for Women Veterans Facing Homelessness (Arlington National Cemetery) – July 2011
- ❖ **Presentation** - Gold Star Wives Convention (St. Louis, MO) – August 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call** - US Army Survivor Outreach Services NE Region – August 2011
- ❖ **Presentation/Booth** - VA Open House (New Orleans, LA) – August 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call** - US Army Survivor Outreach Services Central Region – September 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call Update** - Department of Labor Women's Bureau – September 2011
- ❖ **Booth** - VA Outreach and Town Hall Meeting for State Tribes of Virginia (Fredericksburg, VA) – September 2011
- ❖ **Participation/Attendance** - American Gold Star Wives Weekend Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War (Washington, DC) – September 2011
- ❖ **Attendance** - The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 60th Anniversary (Arlington, VA) - September 2011
- ❖ **Attendance** - Congressional Black Caucus Veterans Braintrust (Washington, DC) - September 2011

OSA's partnership with the **Department of Defense** was strengthened in **December 2010** with the inclusion of two important components that would have a major impact on outreach - the **United States Army Survivor Outreach Service** and the **National Guard Bureau Transition Assistance Advisor Program**.

The **US Army Survivor Outreach Service (SOS)** was established in October 2008, the same time the Office of Survivors Assistance was established. SOS is an Army-wide program that provides dedicated and comprehensive support services to Survivors of deceased Soldiers. It also provides access to support, information, and services closest to where the Survivor resides. OSA's outreach with the SOS program began with a presentation at the **Department of Defense Casualty Advisory Board (February 2011)** as many Casualty Advisory Board members were new and not aware of the office's existence. OSA was requested to participate in the **US Army Chief of Staff's Survivors Advisory Work Group (April 2011)**. OSA is repeatedly invited to participate in SOS events to provide training sessions, presentations and conference calls. OSA has been requested to participate in the **2012 US Army Survivor Outreach Service Annual Training Conference**.



The **National Guard Bureau Transition Assistance Advisor (TAA) Program** provides information and assistance to National Guard members and their families in understanding and obtaining VA benefits and services. A Transition Assistance Advisor is located at each of the State Joint Forces Headquarters to serve as the statewide point of contact/coordinator for easy access to VA benefits and to provide assistance in accessing these entitlements.

In **February 2011**, OSA participated in its first outreach event with the **National Guard Bureau Transition Assistance Advisors Annual Training Conference**, serving as a panel member on survivor benefits. In **July 2011**, the TAA program requested OSA

provide an update via **Conference Call**, with other calls conducted on an as-needed basis. OSA has again been invited to participate in the **NGB Transition Assistance Advisors Training Conference in January 2012**.



COLLABORATIVE INTRA-AGENCY OUTREACH

As one of the Department's most recent additions, OSA recognizes that it must work closely with its intra-agency partners to strengthen and promote integrated outreach efforts to ensure that Servicemembers, Veterans, their families, Survivors, caregivers and others are aware of and have access to VA benefits and services for Survivors. OSA leverages each outreach opportunity to further expand its message. OSA believes if the attendee does not need the information; they will likely know someone who would find it beneficial. Once Survivors have become aware of this information, it is hoped that they will apply for benefits and services for which they are eligible.



The Office of Survivors Assistance looks forward to extending partnerships and collaborations within VA to better serve our Veterans, their families and Survivors. Below are the collaborative Intra-agency outreach events OSA participated along with its role:

- ❖ **Participant** - Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Round Table (Las Vegas, NV) - February 2011
- ❖ **Meet and Greet** - Center for Women Veterans Advisory Committee on Women (VACO) – March 2011
- ❖ **Panel Discussion** - Center for Minority Veterans Minority Veterans Advisory Committee Meeting (VACO) – April 2011
- ❖ **Attendance** - Center for Minority Veterans Minority Veterans Advisory Committee Town Hall Meeting (Springfield, VA) – April 2011
- ❖ **Table** - Public Service Recognition Week 2011 (VACO) – May 2011
- ❖ **Speaker** - Center for Minority Veterans Minority Veterans Program Coordinators Biennial Training Conference (Dallas, TX) – June 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call** - VHA Social Workers – June 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call** - VHA Care Management Team – June 2011
- ❖ **Conference Call** - VBA Education Benefits with Survivors – June 2011
- ❖ **Briefing** - Center for Women Veterans Advisory Committee on Women Veterans (Washington, DC) – July 2011
- ❖ **Presentation** - Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Round Table (Chicago, IL) – July 2011
- ❖ **Presentation** - Center for Women Veterans National Training Summit (Washington, DC) – July 2011
- ❖ **Attendee** - Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs National Outreach Conference (Boston, MA) – August 2011
- ❖ **Participant** - Office of Policy and Planning's VA Strategic Planning Conference Academy (Washington, DC) – August 2011

ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

OSA distributes its communications materials on an on-going basis to various internal and external organizations as requested. As previously stated OSA, created a PDF version of the brochure for desktop accessibility and printing on an as-needed basis. OSA's projects that as more organizations become familiar with our organization, we will receive additional requests for information and materials. Organizations that have received brochures (printed and/or PDF) are listed below:

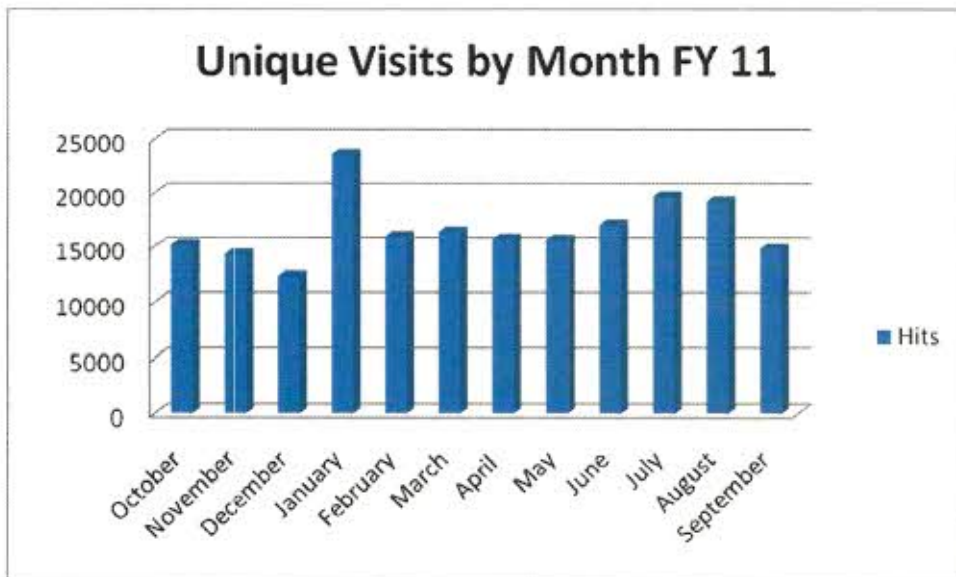
- ❖ Chaplains Meeting (Hampton, VA) – May 2011
- ❖ National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators (Madison, WI) – May 2011
- ❖ Delaware Valley Chapter of Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge (Philadelphia, PA) – May 2011
- ❖ Virginia National Guard Survivor Outreach Service (Richmond, VA) – May 2011
- ❖ District of Columbia National Guard Survivor Outreach Service (Washington, DC) – May 2011
- ❖ Gold Star Wives 6th Annual Congressional Reception (Washington, DC) – May 2011
- ❖ Congressional Members (Washington, DC) – May 2011
- ❖ US Army National Survivor Outreach Program (San Antonio, TX) – May 2011
- ❖ National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (Washington, DC) – May 2011
- ❖ National Funeral Directors Association (Washington, DC) – May 2011
- ❖ VA Office of Veterans Service (Honolulu, HI) – May 2011
- ❖ Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (Washington, DC) – June 2011
- ❖ Indiana Womens Veterans Program (Evansville, IN) – June 2011
- ❖ Virginia Department of Professional Health – Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers (Richmond, VA) – June 2011

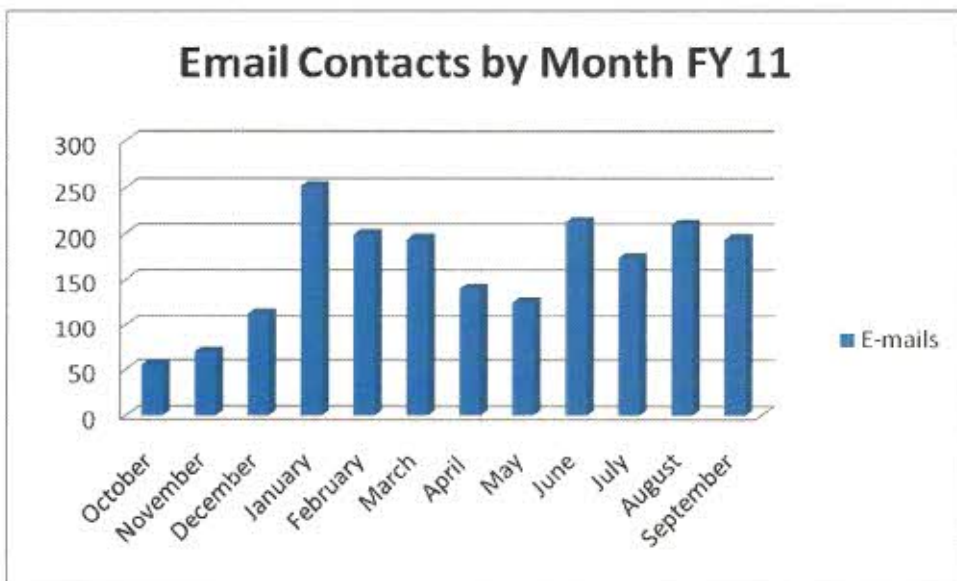
- ❖ American GI Forum Conference (Albuquerque, NM) – July 2011
- ❖ Center for Women Veterans General Distribution (Washington, DC) – July 2011
- ❖ Black Caucus Police Jury of Louisiana - Empowerment Summit (Lafayette, LA) – July 2011
- ❖ Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Conference (National Harbor, MD) – July 2011
- ❖ US Army Survivor Outreach Program National Training Conference (Orlando, FL) – July 2011
- ❖ Clinton County Veterans Affairs (DeWitt, IA) – July 2011
- ❖ Great Lakes National Cemetery (Holly, MI) – July 2011
- ❖ West Virginia National Cemetery (Grafton, WV) – July 2011
- ❖ National Association for Black Veterans (Washington, DC) – July 2011
- ❖ African American Veterans and Families (Washington, DC) – July 2011
- ❖ National Association of Black Military Women (Washington, DC) – July 2011
- ❖ Military Chaplains Association of the US (Arlington, VA) – July 2011
- ❖ American Coalition for Filipino Veterans (Jacksonville, FL) – July 2011
- ❖ Hispanic War Veterans of America (Alexandria, VA) – July 2011
- ❖ Special Operations Warriors Foundation (Tampa, FL) – August 2011
- ❖ USAA Office of Community Affairs (San Antonio, TX) – August 2011
- ❖ Fort Wainwright Survivor Outreach Service (Fort Wainwright, AK) – August 2011
- ❖ Australian Department of Veterans Affairs Meeting with VA (Washington, DC) – September 2011

WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

OSA took several strides to increase its presence within VA web communications during the fiscal year. As a tool, the Internet is unprecedented in its scope of information and ease of access. To maximize its efficacy as an outreach tool for Survivors, beginning in early FY 11, OSA performed a total overhaul of its Web site and Internet outreach materials. This process included a total redesign to improve the user experience, navigation, content and accessibility. The resulting web traffic for the fiscal year has proved these efforts valuable. The charts and figures below demonstrate OSA's patterns over the year by month:

- ❖ 200,064 unique visits to the OSA Web site
- ❖ 316,355 separate page views
- ❖ 1,939 emails to the OSA address





Data for each category is consistent through the year, with a spike in January 2011. This is due to the re-introduction of OSA to VA via the VA Internet Scrolling Marquee (December 2011) and the inclusion of an article in the Vanguard January/February 2011 edition. In addition to the redesign of the OSA web page, OSA made forays into other social media tools used by VA. These efforts include guest blogs on the VA Blog page, multiple postings on the VA Facebook page and Twitter feed, as well as content developed for the VA's YouTube page. Each endeavor has resulted in increased

contact with content consumers and stakeholder groups. These efforts have helped to make OSA the second most visited subsidiary office within the Office of the Secretary behind only the Center for Women Veterans.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Office of Survivors Assistance has made progress in expanding outreach efforts over the past fiscal year however; it must continue to take a comprehensive review of the organization and strategically prepare for the changing demographics and expectations of the survivor community to ensure that we continue providing quality services. OSA will identify opportunities for improvement and continue to build on the current momentum while seeking new opportunities to better meet the needs of Survivors and their dependents. Some of OSA's opportunities for improvement are listed below:

- ❖ Work with the Office of Policy and Planning, Data Governance and Analysis Office, to develop internal data capabilities to collect and analyze demographic information on Survivors to help identify areas where more targeted outreach efforts need to be deployed and the possible expectations. This internal capacity would allow OSA the ability to make data-driven decisions, ensuring effective outreach.

- ❖ Evaluate and analyze trends of the survivor population based on the 2010 National Survey of Veterans, Activity Duty Servicemembers, Demobilized National Guard and Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses, to develop innovative outreach strategies to reach those who are currently not aware of or receiving VA benefits to which they may be entitled.

- ❖ Create a workforce and succession plan to attract, develop and retain a highly qualified, diverse and talented people to meet the current and future needs of the organization. This structure does not currently exist within the office.
- ❖ Partner with the Department of Defense and the Veterans Benefits Administration, Benefits Assistance Service, to create outreach opportunities for encouraging Survivors (enrolled in DEERS) to enroll in e-Benefits.

The Office of Survivors Assistance will continue to explore untapped resources and organizations and develop innovative ways to provide effective outreach to Survivors. OSA will continue partnering with Administrations and Staff Office to provide an integrated, holistic approach to providing information and services to the survivor community.



Office of Survivors Assistance Staff - FY 2011:

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