

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

On behalf of the Commissioners of North Carolina Veterans' Affairs Commission, it is my pleasure to present to the members of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government the Commission's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2019.

The Veterans' Affairs Commission was created by the Executive Organization Act of 1973. For forty-six (46) years, the Veterans' Affairs Commission has provided exceptional services to the many Veterans and their family members in the state of North Carolina. The Commissioners are proud and excited, bringing the Veterans' Affairs Commission from the shadows to full public view as permitted by Session Law 2017-29 (Senate Bill 62: Veterans' Affairs Commission Strategic Plan), which was passed into law by the North Carolina General Assembly.

Working in close coordination with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Veteran's Affairs Commission's Advisory Committee, we began the process of meeting the specific goals as outlined in Senate Bill 62:

Improve accessibility to health, education, training, counseling, financial, and burial benefits and services to veterans and their dependents.

Increasing the satisfaction of veterans and their dependents with benefits and services by meeting their expectations for availability, quality, timeliness, and responsiveness.

Educating and empowering veterans and their dependents through proactive outreach and effective advocacy.

Any other topic related to enhancing benefits for veterans and their dependents.

On behalf of the Veterans Affairs Commission, it is an honor to serve North Carolina's Veterans and their family members.

Sincerely,

Jane Campbell
Chairman, North Carolina Veterans' Affairs Commission

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INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Affairs' Commission of the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs was created in 1973 by Chapter 620 of House Bill 1128, the Executive Organization Act of 1973. The Veterans Affairs' Commission's functions and duties are detailed in North Carolina General Statutes §143B-1220 through 1227 and §143B-1293, as amended by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1977, 1992, 1993, 2015, and 2017.

The Veterans Affairs' Commission is comprised of one representative (appointed by the Governor for a term of 4 years) from each of the North Carolina Congressional Districts, all of whom are Veterans. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Commission are designated by the Governor.

The Veterans Affairs' Commission of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is tasked with making North Carolina the most Veteran friendly state in the nation for the over 728,000 Veterans and their families located throughout the state. The Veterans Affairs' Commission's Strategic Plan uses data collected from internal and external sources to address the specific objectives detailed in §143B-1221.1. Data collected by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is used by the Veterans Affairs' Commission to produce its' annual report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government, as stipulated in North Carolina General Statute.

MISSION

The mission of the Veterans Affairs' Commission of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is to serve North Carolina's over 728,000 veterans, their dependents and/or survivors in all matters pertaining to services offered or managed by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. This number is expected to climb significantly by 2030, due to the accumulated retirements of active duty veterans that are currently serving during the Global War on Terror that has been active since March 2003.

The Veterans Affairs' Commission's responsibilities fall into two categories:

Oversight of:

- The North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program
- The North Carolina State Veterans Homes (and the State Veterans Homes Trust Fund)
- The North Carolina Services Medal

Advise:

The Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs on matters relating to the affairs of veterans residing in North Carolina.

The Veterans Affairs' Commission's mission is executed through close coordination with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the Veterans Affairs' Commission's Advisory Committee. Under current North Carolina General Statutes, the State Cemetery Program is managed by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

FUNCTION

The Veterans Affairs' Commission of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs have the following functions and duties, as delegated by the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs:

To advise the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs on matters relating to the Veterans in North Carolina;

To maintain a continuing review of the operations and funding of existing programs for veterans and their dependents in North Carolina and to make any recommendations to the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs for improvements and additions to those programs to which the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs shall give due consideration;

To promulgate rules and regulations for the awarding of scholarships for children of North Carolina Veterans as provided by North Carolina General Statutes. All rules and regulations not inconsistent with the provisions contained in North Carolina General Statutes heretofore adopted by the State Board of Veterans' Affairs shall remain in full force and effect unless and until repealed or superseded by action of the Veterans' Affairs Commission. All rules and regulations adopted by the Commission shall be enforced by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs;

To promulgate rules concerning the awarding of the North Carolina Services Medal to all Veterans who have served in any period of war as defined in 38 U.S.C. §101. The award shall be self-financing; those who wish to be awarded the medal shall pay a fee to cover the expense of producing the medal and awarding the medal. All rules shall be implemented and enforced by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs;

To promulgate rules and regulations concerning the establishment and operations of North Carolina State Veterans Homes and their respective trust funds; and

To advise the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs on any matter to which the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs for may refer.

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION 2019-2022 STRATEGIC GOALS

Services offered to Veterans and their dependents in the state of North Carolina are separated into two categories, State of North Carolina Veterans Programs and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Programs. State of North Carolina services are offered through the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' Veterans Service Centers. While some of the services offered by the Veterans Services Centers are outside of the functions and duties of the Veterans Affairs' Commission, the Commission, through the Veterans' Affairs Advisory Committee, insures that Veterans across the state are made aware of programs offered by the State through their post or units located in many of North Carolina town and cities.

The Veterans Affairs' Commission established the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan in 2018. The strategic goals and objectives developed in this strategic plan are the road map to be used by the Veterans Affairs' Commission in measuring the accessibility, satisfaction and effectiveness of services provided to Veterans and their dependents through data collected and reported by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Each strategic goal is supported by objectives, which discuss the services offered and how they are delivered and measured. Measurement in all strategic goals will be collected monthly and reported to the Veterans' Affairs Commission quarterly. This annual report summarizes the quarterly reporting.

Strategic Goal 1: Improve Accessibility to Veterans and their Dependents

Accessibility to North Carolina's Veterans and their dependents to all services offered through the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is the primary mission of the Veterans Service Centers. Veterans Service Centers are located across the state and in concert with the County Veteran Service Officers, serve as the gateway to the many services offered to veterans and their dependents by the State of North Carolina and the US Department of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans Service Centers assists Veterans and their dependents with a myriad of information, including burial entitlements; admission to state Veterans' homes and other services - health, education, training, counseling, financial and burial benefits. They provide them with the contact information on a facility or cemetery near their home.

Strategic Goal 1 outlines the expectations that the Veterans Affairs' Commission and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will use to measure, on an annual basis, the improvement of accessibility of services offered by the Department to North Carolina Veterans and their dependents. The Veterans Affairs' Commission, in conjunction with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Center, the County Veterans Service Offices and the Veterans Affairs' Commission Advisory Committee partner and collaborate to improve accessibility of and promote statewide services and benefits available to Veterans and their dependents.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' Veterans Service Centers and the North Carolina County Veterans Service Officer programs hosts numerous events annually, such as the Veteran Stand Downs, the Weekly and Monthly Veterans Coffees, and the Veterans Experience Action Centers. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs also publishes a Resource Guide annually that lists all the Veterans Service Centers in North Carolina, to include their address and phone number, as well as the location and phone number for Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, and other partners that provide services to Veterans.

Strategic Goal 1.1: Improve Accessibility to Healthcare

Summary:

The North Carolina Veterans Affairs' Commission has very limited authority or responsibility for the health care of North Carolina Veterans. The Veterans Affairs' Commission's primary health function is with the residents of the State Veteran Homes. The Veterans Affairs' Commission, through the Under Secretary for Health of the US Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Program Director of the State Veterans Homes Program for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, ensures the skill level of the staff of each veteran's home meets or exceeds the requirements of each resident and, that medical facilities are available to meet any medical emergency that may occur at any state veterans home. The Veterans Service Centers can assist veterans and their dependents in obtaining military health records from the US Department of Veterans Affairs Record Center seeking health care at a VA Medical Center.

Strategies:

Publish a Resource Guide to provide veterans and their dependents with information regarding Veterans Service Centers, County Veterans Service Offices and VA Medical Facilities. This Guide is a valuable tool for North Carolina Veterans with detailed information relating to many services available to veterans and their dependents that include information relating to veterans' health concerns. The Resource Guide is available online at www.milvets.nc.gov. Additionally, copies of the Resource Guide are available at Veterans Service Centers throughout North Carolina, County Veteran Services Offices, local American Legion and VFW posts, and other Veteran Services partners.

Continue to promote the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' Veterans Service Centers, the County Veterans Service Offices and Veterans Service Officers located at Military Bases in North Carolina as the entry point for Veterans seeking to access to the US Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care System and Veterans Benefits Administration.

Continue to advocate for Veteran's healthcare and benefits legislation on the National level through the Veterans Affairs Commission's Advisory Committee's Veterans Service Organizations Legislative Committees. Many of the Veterans Service Organizations have a Congressional Charter which requires them to appear each year and present their organization's priorities and goals and positions on veteran's legislation being considered by Congress. Many of the Veterans Service Organizations are members of the Independent Budget, a document that Congress often refers to in creating legislation in a range of veterans, national security and military quality of life issues.

Continue to collaborate with the Veterans Administration Veteran Integrated Service Network Region 6 office in Durham, North Carolina.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs hosts a monthly Governor's Working Group on Veterans Issues in North Carolina. The event fosters collaboration between the many veteran service organizations in North Carolina and the various North Carolina legislative departments provide support to North Carolina Veterans.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs hosts an annual Training Conference each year. This event provides a venue to conduct formal training on new procedures, new products, and existing

services that Veterans Service Officers must be proficient in so that they can advocate effectively for Veterans. Guest lecturers are invited to present classes. Each VA Medical Center director in North Carolina is invited to attend in order to foster more collaboration between the Veterans Service Officers and the VA community and improve access to provided services.

Measurement:

Success will be measured through data collected from Veterans Service Centers' interaction with Veterans, Veteran's access to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website, and the total number of resource guides distributed.

Strategic Goal 1.2: Improve Accessibility to Education

Summary:

The North Carolina Veterans Affairs' Commission roles in improving accessibility to education fall into two categories: 1) Providing information about and promoting the North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program; and 2) Providing information about the various educational opportunities available to Veterans and Veterans family members by the Department of Veterans Administration, and the North Carolina In-State Tuition Program provided to family members of the US Armed Forces stationed in North Carolina.

Strategies

The North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program, revised in 1967 and amended by subsequent acts of the North Carolina General Assembly, was created in appreciation for the service and sacrifices of North Carolina's war Veterans and concern for their children.

In close collaboration with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Affairs Commission:

- Exercises its authority over the North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program.
- Ensures that all applicants are screened, evaluated and awarded based upon their status.
- Requires each Commissioner to interact with the Boards of Educations within their respective Congressional Districts to provide information regarding the North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program.
- Ensures that all North Carolina qualified high school students are made aware of the scholarship program.
- Provides each high school in the State of North Carolina with a poster from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs with information detailing the residency, qualifying criteria, and submission information for applicants for the State Scholarship Program.
- Lists the North Carolina Institutions currently participating in the North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program
- Leverages and take full advantage of current technology, by providing applicants for the North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program the ability to register and submit their application online via the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs website (www.milvets.nc.gov).
- Uses Quick Connect Bar Codes to connect users (parents and students) directly to application site.

- Maximizes use of social media platforms to provide information to students and parents regarding educational scholarships available to qualified applicants.
- Details information relating to educational tuition assistance programs provided by the US Department of Veterans Affairs is detailed in the Resource Guide.

Measurement:

Success will be measured through data collected on achievement of the strategies listed and the number of student's eligible verses the number of students applying, and the actual number of scholarships awarded. The results of the measured data will be provided to the Veteran's Affairs Commission quarterly.

Strategic Goal 1.3: Improve Accessibility to Training

Summary:

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs hosts a monthly Governor's Working Group on Veterans Issues in North Carolina. This event fosters collaboration between various veterans' service organizations that connects veterans that are looking for training opportunities to organizations that have those opportunities to offer. Additionally, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs conducts training annual to accredit the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' and the North Carolina County Veterans Service Officers. This training updates the service officers of changes in the US Department of Veterans Affairs rules caused by actions of the US Congress, and changes in North Carolina laws enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly. The Veterans Affairs Commission have no authority in the training but is provided a summary of all training conducted.

Strategies:

Publish information directing veterans to the NC Works Website in the Resource Guide.

Educate Veterans Service Officers on available resources.

Measurement:

Training success will be measured through data collected from training sessions conducted by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Data collected will include the number of Veterans Service Officers accredited by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in each training session.

NOTE: Training for veterans, transitioning service members and eligible spouses are offered through the NC Department of Commerce, NC Workforce Development Division. The NC Works Career Centers are located across the state. The US Department of Labor offers training and retraining opportunities for disabled and underemployed veterans. The programs and services offered by the NC Workforce Development Division of the Department of Commerce have no connection to the Veterans Affairs Commission but do have a connection with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Strategic Goal 1.4: Improve Accessibility to Counseling

Summary:

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' Veterans Service Officers provide counseling services limited to Veterans benefits earned. Veterans and their dependents seeking to file a claim for services provided by the US Department of Veterans Affairs' or the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs are counseled by the Department's Veterans Service Officers regarding benefits, documentation required and a pathway to begin the service process.

Strategies:

Publish information on available counseling services in the Resource Guide.

Educate Veterans Service Officers on available services, location and resources.

Partner with the Department of Health and Human Services, and various private and non-profit organizations, to provide counseling as part of "whole health" services.

Measurement:

Success will be measured through data collected from VSCs interaction with Veterans and Veteran's access of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website related to the type of services or information requested.

NOTE: The Veteran's Affairs Commission has no direct involvement in counseling services offered to Veterans in North Carolina. Counseling services are offered to Veterans, and in some cases spouses, by the US Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Centers. Vet Centers are located at several sites across the state, and as mobile units, which permits service to all North Carolina counties. In addition, the US Department of Veterans Affairs offers readjustment and sexual trauma counseling service at the four US Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and numerous community-based outreach centers scattered across the state. The US Department of Veterans Affairs also offers a toll-free, twenty-four (24) hours per day, seven (7) days per week telephone service for veterans considering suicide. Counselors answering the telephone calls will also accept calls from anyone aware of a veteran threatening to commit suicide and will attempt to contact the subject veteran. Counseling for veterans and family members is offered by North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services.

Strategic Goal 1.5: Improve Accessibility to Financial Services/Claims for Benefits and other Services

Summary:

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Centers assist Veterans and family members in filing claims for benefits and other services from the US Department of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans Service Centers also assist veterans with appeals for compensation when there is a disagreement with a rating awarded by the Veterans Benefit Administration. County Veterans Service Officers provides similar services in counties that provides veterans services. Additional financial services are provided by other governmental and private corporations to protect veterans from fraudulent activities by predators and money management. Some of these services are geared toward service members separating or retiring from the US Armed Forces, and others are there for any citizen or veteran who want to avail themselves. The Resource Guide list some of the organizations that provide services to veterans relating to taxes, money management and assistance in times of need.

Strategies:

The Veterans Affairs Commission will continue to advocate for the publication of the Resource Guide.

Provide a link on the Department of Military and Veterans Website to NC Department of the Secretary of State Website to assist veterans in verifying entities conducting solicitations in the state.

Provide a link on the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs Website to the NC Attorney General Website to inform Veterans of scams being conducted in the state, and a site where reports can be filed with the consumer protection division for unsavory conduct by businesses located in the state.

Measurement:

The Division of Veterans Affairs's Veterans Service Centers will collect and report data on the number of claims or other services request received from Veterans or their dependents and processed by each office on a schedule to be determined by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Deputy Director for Veterans Affairs. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Website will be monitored for number of hits redirecting access to the NC Department of Secretary of State and the NC Attorney General Websites.

Strategic Goal 1.6: Improve Accessibility to Burial Benefits

Summary:

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs operates four state veteran's cemeteries; Black Mountain, NC; Spring Lake, NC; Goldsboro, NC and Jacksonville, NC. North Carolina Veterans are interred in the state cemeteries at no cost. Their spouses can be interred with their deceased Veteran for a nominal fee.

The Veterans Affairs Commission has no direct authority, responsibility or oversight over the State Cemeteries Program. The Veteran's Affairs Commission is concerned with the funding for salaries of the employees of the State Veterans Cemeteries. Once one of the State Veterans Cemeteries is at total capacity, it will have to be closed. In order to continue to maintain this facility, additional funding must be appropriated to support the maintenance, since once the facility is closed, it will no longer be staffed by Department of Military and Veterans Affairs employees. The State Veterans Cemeteries Program cannot be self-sustaining with the current burial fees, maintenance costs and salaries without a major increase in the fee charged to inter a qualified spouse with the veteran.

Strategies:

Support an initiative by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to have cemeteries fully staffed at all levels and paid by appropriations.

Offer recommendations for cemetery operations.

Receive burial operational reports regarding cemeteries quarterly from the State Cemetery Program Manager.

Assist the Veterans Service Centers in aiding the family member of the deceased veterans with filing of claims for qualifying survivors with the US Department of Veterans Affairs and obtaining of Form DD 214 or other documents required for burial.

Assist Veterans Service Centers in providing family members assistance with completing the appropriate form for procuring a casket flag for burial when the funeral director performing the last rites fail to do so.

Provide detailed information for Veterans and their family members regarding burial benefits in the Resource Guide.

NOTE: The US Department of Veterans Affairs operates several VA National Cemeteries in the state, providing burial for Veterans from North Carolina and other bordering states. Currently, only the Salisbury National Cemetery is open for casket burials.

NOTE: The US Department of Veterans Affairs provides a burial allowance for deceased veterans buried in a State or VA National Cemetery, a grave marker or bronze medallion for headstones and markers.

Measurement:

Reports from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Cemetery Program Manager will be monitored for the number of Veterans and spouses interred in a state cemetery. Reports from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Centers will be monitored for the number of requests for assistance rendered relating to burial of a Veteran or spouse.

Strategic Goal 1.7: Improve Accessibility to Services for Veterans and Dependents

Summary:

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs offers a wide range of services to Veterans and their dependents. These services include but are not limited to; The North Carolina Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program; State Veterans Homes Residency; Property Tax relief certification; Veteran North Carolina State License plate certification; and, the filing and appealing of VA Disability Claims.

Strategies:

Advocate to include information in the Resource Guide about the above services and other issues that a veteran or dependent may have an interest in.

Inform each Veteran and their dependents of all services available to them in North Carolina through The Veterans Affairs Commission's Advisory Committee and electronic media.

Measurement:

Success will be measured through data collected from Veterans Services Centers interaction with Veterans, Veteran's access of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website, and walk-in clients at the headquarters for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Strategic Goal 2: Increase Satisfaction of Veterans and their Dependents

Increasing satisfaction of Veterans and their dependents with benefits and services offered through the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is a benchmark goal of the Veterans Affairs' Commission in determining the Department's effectiveness in meeting the expectations of services offered and delivered as viewed and reported by our customers.

Strategic Goal 2 outlines the specific areas in which data will be collected, reported and measured on an annual basis by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The Veteran's Affairs Commission and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs currently relies on exit surveys of Veterans for their satisfaction with the services received at the Veterans Service Center. Additionally, each of North Carolina's State Veterans Homes has detailed instructions for completion of customer satisfaction surveys for residents and family members posted in the lobby of each facility. The information includes a letter from the administrator to family members and friends of residents with contact information should anyone have any concerns. Also included is a copy of the North Carolina Bill of Rights for Nursing Homes Residents and the name of the representative from the local Area Agency on Aging.

With appropriate funding, the Veteran's Affairs Commission recommends that the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs develop an online application that will permit veterans to submit surveys online to an encrypted database outlining their level of satisfaction with services provided during their visit to a Veterans Service Center, a State Veterans Home or a State Cemetery. The survey data will be collected during check-in and check-out procedures using an agency provided tablet device. Review the surveys and receive a summary of the level of satisfaction from the leadership of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Integrate this data as a vital part of the Veterans Affairs Commission's Annual Report.

Measurement:

Success will be measured through data collected from Veterans Service Center's interaction with Veterans and Veterans or their dependents response to an online survey on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website.

NOTE: The Veteran's Affairs Commission supports the contracted Nursing Home Management Company in selecting and using the PINNACLE Corporation to document customer satisfaction statistics for each of the state veteran's homes. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will collect, review and act appropriately on any complaints or complements. A summary of the surveys will be provided to the Commissioners during each regular scheduled meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission.

Strategic Goal 2.1: Increasing Veterans and Dependents Satisfaction with Availability of Services Offered

Summary:

North Carolina Veterans and their dependents are well served by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Centers, County Veterans Service Offices and Veterans Service Organizations Service Officers. Most of North Carolina Counties have County Service Officers, some are full-time and some are part-time county employees. Counties without a service officer are served by a Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Center.

Strategies:

Advocate to update the electronic version of the Resource Guide posted to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website on an annual basis and distribute hard copies of the Resource Guide across the State of North Carolina.

Where possible, provide a Quick Link Bar Codes to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website for a direct link to download forms, applications and view specific chapters of the Resource Guide.

Measurement:

Success will be measured through data collected from Veterans Service Centers interaction with Veterans or their dependents response to an online survey on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website and input from the Veterans Affairs Commission's Veterans Advisory Committee.

Strategic Goal 2.2: Increasing Veterans and Dependents Satisfaction with Quality of Services Offered

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs Commission advocates for the highest level of services provided by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' Veterans Service Centers. The Veterans Affairs Commission fully understands that the Veteran Service officer assisting Veterans and or family members filing claims for benefits awarded by the US Department of Veterans Affairs can only be successful if the claimant has collaborative documentation supporting the claim.

Strategies:

Continue to advocate for Veterans and family members with services offered by Agencies of North Carolina State Government as detailed in the Resource Guide, which can be found on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website.

Monitor provision of the best possible advice from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' staff based on experiences gained by working with the US Department of Veterans Affairs and other partners delivering services here in North Carolina.

Measurement:

Success in claims for compensation filed and awarded will be measured through data collected from the US Department of Veterans Administration and with Veterans or their dependents response to an online survey on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' website.

Strategic Goal 2.3: Increasing Veterans and Dependents Satisfaction with Timeliness of Services Offered

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs Commission fully supports the positioning of Veterans Service Officers at the Armed Forces Separation Centers on military installations in the state of North Carolina. These separation centers screen service member being discharged from active duty regarding the filing of claims with the US Department of Veterans Affairs and providing information on services offered to North Carolina Veterans for those service members establishing residency in the state. The Veterans Affairs' Commission also support the efforts of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in positioning of Veterans Service Centers in areas of the state that allow access to Veterans and their dependents residing in counties without a Veterans Service Officer.

Strategies:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission will continue to support the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs efforts to be proactive in providing information pertaining to services to veterans and their dependents through publication of the Resource Guide, both at the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website and in the printed Resource Guide distributed throughout the state.

The Veterans Affairs' Commission will continue to rely on the Veterans Affairs' Commission's Advisory Committee to provide information regarding services offered by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to North Carolina Veterans.

Measurement:

Success in timeliness of services provided to Veterans or their dependents will be measured through data collected from Veterans Services Centers interaction with Veterans and Veterans or their dependents response to an online survey on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website relating to the time that services was requested, and the time service was delivered.

Strategic Goal 2.4: Increasing Veterans and Dependents Satisfaction with Responsiveness to Veterans and Dependents

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission, when presented with a concern from a veteran, family member or a public inquiry, will respond within four business days after the concern is received in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Strategies:

Develop an online application on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website to allow anyone with a concern relating to services under the Veterans Affairs' Commission's umbrella to have the ability to file a complaint or complement online to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Veteran's Affairs Commission Chairman simultaneously.

Monitor maintenance of a record of concerns and complements by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, as well as the response by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Veterans Affairs' Commission for a period of time as required by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs record keeping schedule or until the Veterans Affairs' Commission's Annual Report for the period covered has been provided to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government.

Monitor review of surveys submitted by veterans or family members from the State Veterans Homes, applicants for the Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship or the State Cemeteries, by the appropriate program manager, who will:

Take corrective actions where warranted.

Pass on complementary comments to the state veteran homes, state cemeteries or individuals identified in the survey.

Insure the survey forms are available on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website and make full use of smart technology available for smart-phone and tablets users.

Measurement:

Success in responsiveness to satisfaction of services requested rendered will be measured through data collected from Veterans Services Centers interaction with Veterans and Veterans or their dependents response to an online survey on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website.

Strategic Goal 3: Educate and Empower Veterans and their Dependents

The Veterans Affairs Commission of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is committed to support the efforts of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Centers and other partners in their proactive efforts to promote, educate, and empower Veterans to better understand the services offered to North Carolina Veterans and their dependents.

Strategic Goal 3 outlines current and proposed methods to maintain and improve education and empowerment for Veterans on the services offered to Veterans and their dependents by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The Veterans' Affairs Commission fully supports the efforts of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in its' proactive approach in establishing partnerships with other state agencies. Additionally, the Veterans' Affairs Commission fully supports the mission of the North Carolina Governor's Working Group on Veterans Issues, and the chairmanship of that organization residing with the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs. These partnerships provide for a wider dissemination of programs and services offered by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Strategic Goal 3.1: Educate and Empower Veterans and their Dependents by Proactive Outreach

Summary:

The Veteran's Affairs Commission is committed to using all media sources to ensure that North Carolina Veterans and their family members are aware of the many services offered through the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Currently, the Resource Guide is widely distributed throughout the state by the Veterans Service Centers, Veterans Service Organizations, Homeless Veterans Stand-downs and County Veterans Service Offices.

Strategies:

Continue to provide the Children of Wartime Veteran Scholarship Program Application for online completion and submission. This will be a great benefit to students and their parents applying for the scholarship using smart technology.

Monitor students and parent's ability to scan a quick connect bar code with a smart phone, tablet or computer equipped with a camera and the appropriate application software that will take them directly to the online application.

Insure information related to the classes of scholarship offered and the qualifiers for each class of scholarship is listed with full details for each class.

Insure information is listed for the requirements to maintain the scholarship after the scholarship has been awarded.

Monitor the scholarship application process to ensure that complete scholarship application packets are provided fair and equal review by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Affairs' Commission.

With available funding from the North Carolina General Assembly and expanded support of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' Information Technology team, monitor implementation of social media platforms for outreach to veterans and their family members using the various platforms available today.

Monitor and be prepared to utilize future technologies yet to be developed. This will permit the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to provide information regarding benefits and services offered as needed, when needed and on a platform of the user's choice.

Measurement:

Success in educating and empowering Veterans and their dependents by proactive outreach will be measured through data collected from an online survey on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs' website and data collected from the online application for the Children of Wartime Veteran Scholarship.

Strategic Goal 3.2: Educate and Empower Veterans and their Dependents by Effective Advocacy

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission and the Veterans Affairs' Commission's Advisory Committee are committed to be the voice of North Carolina's Veterans and their dependents on issues controlled or offered by the state. The Veterans Affairs' Commission strongly believes that the most accurate method to rate the effectiveness of our advocacy is the feedback provided by surveys from the customers and users of the services offered and managed by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Strategies:

Monitor development, production, receipt, review and response to surveys submitted online which will require major modifications to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website.

Advocate for support request for additional funding for the increased information technology support that will be required for implementation of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs online surveys.

Utilize the Resource Guide as a tool for Veterans and their family members to utilize to cover a wide range of information and services.

Advocate to support improvements to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website to implement an interactive resource guide to permit users to click on links to the many sites of services offered in the guide. This may require more band width on the state servers which will increase the cost of information technology support to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Measurement:

Success in educating and empowering Veterans and their dependents by effective advocacy will be measured through data collected from online surveys on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website.

Strategic Goal 4: Other Topic Related to Enhancing Benefits for Veterans

The Veterans Affairs' Commission to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, in its' role of advising the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs, has identified four laws in the NC General Statutes requiring a change and/or repeal. These are:

- Repeal North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-1220 (4), the North Carolina Service Medal
- Change North Carolina General Statute § 65 Article 8A, Veterans Cemeteries.
- Change North Carolina General Statute § 143B-1227 (b), Administration and Funding for the Children of Wartime Veterans Scholarship Program
- Change North Carolina General Statute § 143B-1212 and 1214, Personnel and Appropriations of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Strategic Goal 4 outlines the rationalizes why the Veterans Affairs Commission will make these recommendations to the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs and the North Carolina General Assembly.

Strategic Goal 4.1: Review of NC General Statutes for Possible Changes to NCGS 143B-1220

Summary:

North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-1220, (4) first introduced in 1973 required to Veterans Affairs' Commission to promulgate rules concerning the awarding of the North Carolina Service Medal. The award is to be self-financing; those who wish to be awarded the medal shall pay a fee to cover the expense of producing the medal and awarding the medal.

Strategies:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission has adopted the position that it is improper for the state to create an award for its veterans and expect the veteran to pay for their own medal. This process sends a message that the State of North Carolina does not value the service of its' war time veterans. The Veterans Affairs' Commission also realizes that in the past 45 years from its creation, no medal has been designed or produced.

Request the above provisions in North Carolina General Statutes be repealed.

Measurement:

Success in repeal of North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-120, (4) will be evident with the passage of legislation to repeal the North Carolina Service Medal provision of the North Carolina General Statutes.

Strategic Goal 4.2: Review of NC General Statutes for Possible Changes to NCGS 65 Article 8A

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission has reviewed North Carolina General Statutes § 65 Article 8A and finds that none of its sub-chapters indicates involvement of the Veterans Affairs' Commission in cemeteries issues. It has been the practice over the years for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Cemeteries Program Manager to render a report and inform the Veterans Affairs' Commission of the needs for operations of the cemeteries. The Veterans Affairs' Commission has been providing feedback to the Department Military and Veterans Affairs Cemetery Program Manager as issues are presented relating to the appearance, equipment needs and staffing of the state cemeteries.

Strategies:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission believes that the passage of legislation by the North Carolina General Assembly removing funding of the State Veterans Cemeteries staff from appropriations to receipt paid has degraded the cemetery supervisors' ability to provide the level of service and maintenance necessary as a dignified place of burial for our Veterans.

Advocate for the request by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to provide appropriated funding in the amount of \$750,000.00 in recurring funding to transition all employee salaries of the State Veterans Cemeteries from the receipts account to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs appropriated account.

Advocate for the creation of a "Cemetery Trust Fund" exclusively for the operation and maintenance of state veteran's cemeteries. This trust fund will create an account permitting receipts collected for interments to be maintained without regards to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year.

Request the provision in the law which limited the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to four (4) cemeteries be removed.

Measurement:

Success in changes to North Carolina General Statutes § 65 Article 8A will be evident with the passage of legislation to amend the Veterans cemeteries provision of the North Carolina General Statutes.

Strategic Goal 4.3: Review of NC General Statutes for Possible Changes to NCGS 143B-1227(b)

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission has reviewed North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-1227(b). This program is funded through appropriation from the Escheat Fund by the North Carolina General Assembly, or by allocation from the Contingency and Emergency Fund (if appropriated funds are insufficient to cover the full amounts allowable under this provision) which according to OSBM no longer has a balance. What has happened, and continues to happen, is that allowable costs for room, board, tuition, and fees continues to increase at a rate the outpaces the current appropriation. Non-recurring allocations from the Escheat Fund have helped to meet the funding gap generated by this inequity, but in the years that non-recurring allocation has not been approved, students and their families have been left to shoulder the burden of the funding inequity.

Strategies:

Advocate for the establishment of a recurring, appropriated fund that meets 100% of the allowable costs for room, board, tuition, and fees as defined by this provision. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Chief Deputy Secretary will inform the North Carolina General Assembly annually of the funding amount required to support the program as part of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Annual Budget Submission.

Advocate for annual legislative increases by the same percentage as the average percentage increase of room, board, tuition, and fees as approved by the institution.

Measurement:

Success in changes to North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-1227(b) will be evident with the passage of legislation to amend the Children of Wartime Veteran Scholarship Program provision of the North Carolina General Statutes.

Strategic Goal 4.4: Review of NC General Statutes for Possible Changes to NCGS 143B-1212 & 1214

Summary:

The Veterans Affairs' Commission has reviewed North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-1212 & 1214. Since the Secretary for Military and Veterans Affairs has the authority to appoint all employees necessary to carry out the powers and duties of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and appropriations for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs are made from the General Fund of the State of North Carolina, it is imperative that the North Carolina General Assembly approve the appropriation of funds required to support the entire full staffing and the operating expenses for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Strategies:

Advocate for the increase of appropriated funds from the North Carolina General Assembly to a level that supports 100% of the currently assigned personnel in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Chief Deputy Secretary will inform the North Carolina General Assembly annually of the funding amount required to support the program as part of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Annual Budget Submission.

Advocate for annual legislative increases as developed by the North Carolina General Assembly.

Measurement:

Success in changes to North Carolina General Statutes § 143B-1212 & 1214 will be evident with the passage of legislation to amend the Personnel and Funding Program provisions of the North Carolina General Statutes.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

The Veterans Affairs' Commission adopted this strategic plan November 1, 2018. The Veterans Affairs' Commission has completed its first annual review and submitted its first annual report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government November 1, 2019. The Veterans Affairs' Commission shall complete its first update of the strategic plan by November 1, 2022. The Veterans Affairs' Commission shall thereafter update this plan every four years. The Veterans Affairs' Commission shall annually review the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs performance based on this plan and shall annually report the results of its review to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government.