



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Veterans' Affairs

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December 19, 2018

TO: Danny Santos, Director of Legislative Commission on Indian Services  
FROM: Kelly Fitzpatrick, Director of Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs  
RE: 2018 Government-to-Government Report

The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) is pleased to submit this report to Governor Kate Brown and the Legislative Commission on Indian Services in accordance with ORS 182.162-182.168 (SB 770).

## 2018 Government-to-Government Efforts and Goals

ODVA has an established and valuable collaboration with the nine federally recognized Native American Tribes across Oregon in the delivery of state and federal services for our veterans. In 2018, ODVA continued this work to build and strengthen closer relations between tribal governments and key federal, state, county and other partner organizations to better serve Native American veterans across Oregon.

ODVA's continued efforts across the veteran services system have focused on three important outcome areas for Oregon's Native American veterans:

- Target advocacy and access to veteran services
- Increase access to healthcare and social services
- Promote and participate in good government-to-government relationships to help shape the priorities of veteran services available to tribal veterans

## Advocacy and Access to Veteran Services

Through our Statewide Veteran Services, ODVA is the center of gravity for veterans seeking to access their veteran benefits. Our focus is on benefits counseling, claims and appellate representation, and certification and training of veteran service officers. We continue to build a strong advocacy system for all veterans, and recognize that there continue to be specific groups of underserved veteran populations including tribal veterans.

During the 2017 Legislative Session, the Legislature passed HB 2891 which established the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Veterans Services Grant and allocated \$550,000 in grant funding for the 2017-19 biennium. In the spring of 2018, fifty-nine grant proposals were received and of the 10 proposals that were funded by the committee, two grant recipients were providing services benefiting Native American tribes in Oregon.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde received a grant totaling \$8,688. A large majority of the funds helped to purchase a portable X-Ray machine to assist medical and dental volunteers who provide services on their land. The remaining funds helped promote their annual two-day veterans summit in July and implement two new workshops (Impact of PTSD and Sharing Stories to Heal) as well as Native Wellness Activities.

The Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest (NARA) received a grant totaling \$74,990 to provide culturally specific street outreach to the urban Native American population. Outreach efforts include case management, assistance navigating VA benefits, access to health and mental health care,

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addiction treatment, housing placement, vocational services, and other assistance outreach such as SNAP and Social Security. To date because of this grant, three veterans have been placed in permanent housing, including one who had been chronically homeless.

In 2017 ODVA partnered with the Native American Rehabilitation Association (NARA) to identify tribal veterans who are living in the Portland urban area. This partnership includes Multnomah County Veterans services, Federal VA and non-profits housing and social work agencies to ensure Tribal Veterans have access to VA benefits, County Emergency Housing Assistance from the state Emergency Housing Assistance fund. The grant proposal was a direct result of ongoing partnership efforts to identify the needs of veterans in the state.

Further, in December 2018, ODVA presented at the annual NARA Tribal Veteran Summit in Portland. Deputy Director Mitch Sparks, who has long-been a leading voice in tribal veteran relations in Oregon, spoke with attendees about the best practices for tribal veteran advocacy on reservations and urban settings.

In recognition and honor of the service and sacrifice of Oregon veterans who are Native Americans, legislation in 2017 (SB 80) directed ODVA to provide aid and assistance to federally recognized Indian tribes in Oregon with regard to programs and services for Native American veterans overseen by the tribes. The legislation also codified efforts of the federal VA's Office of General Counsel, supporting accreditation of tribal veterans representatives in Oregon.



**ODVA Deputy Director Mitch Sparks meets with Warm Springs Tribal Council Chair Eugene Greene Jr. to finalize the memorandum of understanding earlier this year.**

As a direct result of that work, in October 2018 ODVA and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that will enable the tribal government to establish the state's first-ever tribal veteran service office. Once established, the tribal veteran service office will operate as a county veteran service office, providing direct services to tribal veterans under ODVA's power of attorney. Like all county veteran service officers, the tribal veteran service officers will be trained and certified through ODVA.

This is the first state-tribal partnership of this kind in Oregon history.

While these initiatives are currently being established, ODVA continues to invite all Tribal Veteran Representatives (TVR's) to ODVA's annual Veterans Service Officer Training

Conference and provided individual training. TVR's are trained tribal veterans who act as a liaison between veterans and the federal VA.

ODVA provided training on benefits available to veterans, their families and survivors, and the development and submission of claims for those earned benefits. In addition, training on long term care needs and issues for tribal veterans was given to address the emergent need of our ageing veteran population. Several other government entities participated, offering information and updates on a variety of subjects, such as substance abuse and mental health services, Social Security benefits, education benefits, Vet Centers, and VA Regional Office updates.

### **Access to Healthcare and Social Services**

In 2017, ODVA was the only state department of veterans' affairs in the nation that was invited to participate in an executive work group with the federal VA Office of Tribal Government Relations to plan the largest nation-

wide outreach efforts for Indian Nations. ODVA was instrumental in focusing target areas for this outreach based on known gaps in services and lack of representation on tribal lands.

Through 2018, Oregon focused on identifying and assisting veterans across Indian Country with presumptive disabilities and veterans who may have non-compensable disabilities (VA pension claims) and barriers to federal VA benefits to tribal veterans and their families. Reaching these veterans has an immediate and positive impact on the lives of hundreds of previously unreached Oregon tribal veterans and their spouses.

Through the federal VA's Office of Tribal Government Relations, Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal Health Partners (THP), reimbursement agreements have been implemented to further cover tribal veterans' health needs. ODVA will continue to advise the federal VA through the Office of Tribal Government Relations to increase the use of Indian Health Clinics the full spectrum of medical and behavioral health services to tribal veterans.

**Good Government-to-Government Relations**

ODVA is also continuing to work with the federal VA's Office of General Counsel, the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla, and others within Oregon to support the now implemented rule allowing tribal governments to have their own power of attorney in representing claims for veterans before the federal VA. As the subject matter expert, ODVA is offering input to the proposals, as well as providing training and support to our tribal partners.

Finally, in the 2019-21 Governor's Budget, Governor Kate Brown supported permanent funding for a position at ODVA to provide training and advocacy specifically for tribal veterans and to partially fund tribal veteranservice offices in support of tribal veterans receiving assistance on their own land. Ultimately, the goal is to establish tribal veteran advocacy that mirrors the network of County Veteran Services Offices across the state.

ODVA is proud of our efforts to serve and honor tribal veterans. We recognize that no single agency or organization can wholly address the diverse needs across native lands. Throughout the nine tribes, ODVA will continue to build strong partnerships to assist tribal veterans and their families in improving the quality of their lives – economically, socially and health-wise – by ensuring access to the veteran resources and benefits.

We look forward to continued collaboration across governments, agencies and other essential partners who serve all veterans in the delivery of state and federal veteran services and benefits.

Respectfully,



Kelly Fitzpatrick  
Director