

December 6, 2022

TO: Honorable Governor Kate Brown
Patrick Flanagan, Director of Legislative Commission on Indian Services

FROM: Kelly Fitzpatrick, Director of Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

RE: 2022 Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs
Government-to-Government Report

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

ODVA greatly values its relationships with Oregon's nine federally-recognized Tribal Governments. Over the last several years, ODVA has worked collaboratively with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to help ensure that tribal veterans have access to state and federal benefits they have earned as a result of their military service. As an agency, we recognize the importance of listening and learning from the Tribes as we strive to serve Native American veterans in a meaningful and more culturally responsive manner.

Military Service of Native Americans

Native Americans have served in the U.S. military in every major conflict for over 200 years. They historically serve at the highest rate per capita of any ethnicity. Today, almost 20% of all Native American service members are women, compared to the approximately 15% of all other service members who are women.

It is estimated that around six thousand Native Americans enlisted during World War I, in addition to the over 6,500 draftees. More than forty-four thousand served during World War II. An estimated ten thousand Native Americans served in the Korean War, and, soon after, more than forty-two thousand are believed to have served in Vietnam between 1960 and 1973.

Regrettably, the exact number of Native Americans who have served in the U.S. Military throughout its history is uncertain; ethnic demographic data for "American Indians" was not collected in military documents until more recently. Additionally, the Tribal Termination Act of the 1950s, which terminated tribal sovereignty and relocated tribal people to urban areas, also hindered the service of many Native Americans from being counted as such. Other challenges have continued around accurate reporting of ethnicity throughout the various branches of service. For example, the U.S. Army does not recognize "multi-racial" as a category, as other services do.

ODVA's Government-to-Government Policy

ODVA acknowledges and respects the sovereignty of each of Oregon's nine Tribal Nations, and seeks to support tribal veterans in obtaining their earned federal and state benefits in a culturally specific manner that honors their service as well as their tribal heritage.

Attached to this letter is ODVA's Government to Government policy adopted pursuant to ORS 182.164. ODVA has recently established a new five-year strategic plan that identifies the

agency's goals and objectives. As part of that effort, ODVA will update its Government to Government policy to ensure these two important strategic documents are consistent with each other and to establish processes that will better enable ODVA to identify opportunities for collaboration with Tribes and their members on programs to benefit tribal communities, continue to promote the excellent communication ODVA has with the Tribes, and to continue our positive government-to-government relations.

ODVA's Government-to-Government Leadership Team

ODVA takes great pride in its role of developing and implementing programs that affect tribal veterans. The principle officials at ODVA who are responsible for developing and implementing such plans are:

- Kelly Fitzpatrick, Director
- Sean O' Day, Deputy Director
- Sheronne Blasi, Strategic Partnerships Division Director
- Ana Potter, Aging Veteran Service Division Director
- Jay De Fillipo, Legislative Director

ODVA is also in the process of recruiting for the agency's Tribal Veteran Coordinator position. When hired, this individual will play a key role in expanding ODVA's outreach to the Tribal Nations across Oregon.

ODVA's Government-to-Government Process and Efforts

ODVA is committed to maintaining and growing our valued partnerships with Oregon's sovereign Tribal Nations in the delivery of state and federal benefits and services for our tribal veterans. ODVA is committed to identifying and reversing the impacts of historical and ongoing systemic racism towards Native Americans. ODVA applies an equity lens when reviewing and developing policies and programming, and understands how the traumas of systemic racism can be intensified by one's military service.

2022 Government-to-Government Achievements

In 2022, ODVA continued to build and strengthen relations between tribal governments and key federal, state, county and other partner organizations to better serve Native American veterans across Oregon.

Tribal Veteran Coordinator

ODVA undertook extensive efforts to hire a Tribal Veteran Coordinator, who in turn will work with tribal veterans to connect them with their earned federal and state benefits while advising the Director of ODVA on tribal veteran matters. The position unfortunately remains vacant, but ODVA is continuing its recruitment efforts to fill this important role.

Funding and Support of Tribal Veteran Service Offices

As in previous years, in 2022, ODVA provided pass-through funding to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Indian Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, in support of their Tribal Veteran Services Offices. These funds help expand and enhance Tribal Veteran Services, including support for the Tribal Veteran Services Officer (TVSO), who work directly with tribal veterans

and their families. Among other things, TVSOs assist veterans and their eligible dependents in applying for earned U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.

During 2022, Tribal Veteran Service Officers diligently worked to ensure that despite the pandemic, tribal veterans had access to applying for and receiving their earned benefits. Outreach and services were adapted to meet the needs of tribal veterans. A few examples include:

- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde – hosted numerous events to draw in veterans and share information about benefits and other resources. One such event was a fishing trip, that also promoted comradery among veterans in an outdoor setting.
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation – advertised veteran services several times in the local tribal newspaper, participated in a Vietnam Veterans Day outreach video that was shared with tribal members, and actively participated in ODVA’s Campus Veterans Summit.
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation – participated in regular food distribution events for the community, and assisted with the coordination of non-emergent medical transportation for veterans to their VA appointments.
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Indian Reservation - prioritized outreach in the Tribe’s community centers, for mental health, substance abuse, social services and housing programs.

Statewide Training and Outreach Focused on Tribal Veteran Needs

In 2022, ODVA’s Statewide Veteran Services training team partnered with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) Office of Tribal Government Relations, and the Washington Department of Veterans’ Affairs, to co-host the annual Tribal Veteran Representative conference. This year’s host Nations were the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

The 134 participants from across numerous states and the following Tribal Nations, were provided valuable training and information to support tribal veterans and their families:

- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Nation
- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
- Confederated Tribes and Band of the Yakama Nation
- Nooksack Indian Tribe
- Yurok Tribe
- Duwamish Tribe
- Grand Portage Band
- Spokane Tribe of Indians

To better support TVSO’s and County Veteran Service Offices with only one Veteran Service Officer (VSO), ODVA provided remote, bi-weekly meetings to support those VSOs. Those meetings provide opportunities for single-office TVSOs to discuss specific cases, share ideas on outreach, and receive assistance from long-time VSOs.

With the return to some in-person events and meetings in mid-2022, ODVA was honored to attend and participate in veterans' events hosted by Tribal Nations. These events brought together tribal leaders, tribal veterans, partnering agencies and advocates, in support of tribal veterans and their families.

Improving Access to Healthcare and Other Services

ODVA regularly participated in the quarterly SB 770 Health and Human Services Cluster meetings sharing information and providing updates to Cluster Participants on (1) the work of TVSO program and funding, (2) the USDVA benefits and programming such as the recently passed PACT Act, (3) information on new programs from other state agencies, and (4) additional funding opportunities from ODVA in support of tribal veterans. ODVA also attended the Annual Tribal and State Summit, in order to learn more about contemporary challenges facing Tribal Nations, and how state agencies can continue to assist Tribes in overcoming some of those challenges.

ODVA partnered with other state agencies to promote new programming impacting tribal veterans. Most recently, ODVA's Communications team worked collaboratively with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) on messaging and outreach on OHA's new Veterans Dental Program. Beginning in January 2023, this program will provide free dental services to veterans meeting certain income criteria.

Also, in 2022, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation was a recipient of ODVA's Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation grant. The Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation grant program is administered, in partnership with ODVA, by the Oregon Department of Transportation, to provide rides free of charge for tribal veterans to healthcare and behavioral health appointments and other related services. These rides are invaluable to ensuring veterans have access to their earned care.

Conclusion

ODVA is proud to honor the service of Oregon's tribal veterans. We commit to listening, learning, and striving to build strong partnerships with the Tribal Nations. We look forward to continuing to assist tribal veterans and their families in improving the quality of their lives – economically, socially, mentally and physically – by ensuring access to the veteran resources and benefits they have earned.

Respectfully,



Kelly Fitzpatrick
Director

CC: Dustin Buehler, Governor's Tribal Affairs Policy Advisor