



# Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

Department of Veterans' Affairs

700 Summer St NE  
Salem, OR 97301-1285

SERVING  
OREGON VETERANS  
SINCE 1945

December 12, 2014

TO: Karen Quigley, Director of Legislative Commission on Indian Services

FROM: Cameron Smith, Director of Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs

RE: 2014 Government-to-Government Report

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

#### **2014 Government-to-Government Efforts and Goals**

ODVA has established an ongoing and meaningful consultation and collaboration with the nine federally recognized Oregon Native American Tribes in the delivery of state and federal veteran services and benefits.

In 2014, ODVA worked hard to strengthen and build closer relations between the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), tribal governments and other key federal, state, private and non-profit partners to effectively serve Native American veterans across Oregon.

Our recent efforts focused on two important goals: facilitating increased access to health care and promoting access to the full range of services and benefits veterans are entitled to through peer to peer advocacy and veteran service training.

#### **Tribal Veterans Representative (TVR) Training**

Linking VA decision makers and stake holders to tribal leadership, ODVA supported and promoted the VA's Office of Tribal Government Relations annual training conference for Tribal Veterans Representatives (TVRs). This training event is put on for tribes within the Western Region including Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California and Nevada. The event was hosted by the Smith River Rancheria Indian Tribe September 18<sup>th</sup> in California.

Approximately 8 TVRs and veteran advocates from Oregon participated in the event. Training covered a wide range of topics including VA benefits, VA social services access on the reservations, and training on Native American Direct Loans (NADL). The NADL is an underused VA benefit that assists veterans with housing needs within Native American lands.



### **Reimbursement Agreements**

Through the VA's Office of Tribal Government Relations, the VA's Chief Business Office, and Indian Health Service and Tribal Health Partners, reimbursement agreements to further cover tribal veterans' health needs have been implemented in Oregon. The purpose of this agreement is to reimburse facilities for direct care services provided to eligible Native American veterans. In the previous year, 36 Oregon veteran claims were received and reimbursements in the amount of \$11,310 were paid. As of August of this year, 39 Oregon veteran claims have been received and reimbursements in the amount of \$62,070.86 have been paid for care through this agreement.

### **Government-to-Government Relations and Support**

The Oregon Native American communities have a long and rich history of honoring and supporting all veterans. According to the VA's *2012 American Indian and Alaska Servicemembers and Veterans Report* it is estimated that 3,403 Native American veterans reside in Oregon, representing 2.2 percent of Oregon's total veteran population.

Tribal veterans have one of the highest records of military service per capita of any ethnic group. Throughout the nine tribes, ODVA continues to see strong partners eager to assist tribal veterans and their families in improving the quality of their lives – economically, socially and health-wise – through ensuring access to VA health care systems and all state and federal benefits. ODVA is also committed to developing strong relationships with the current TVRs and the County Veteran Service Officers to assist in connecting Native American veterans with the benefits they have earned.

Working in partnership with the Federal VA's Tribal Government Representative, ODVA assisted the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in their efforts to gain recognition as a formal veterans service organization. In November of this year, ODVA also attended a working group meeting with Tribal Representatives, VA Tribal government liaison and a staff attorney from the VA's Office of General Counsel. During this meeting, discussion centered on ODVA's role of assisting the Umatilla Tribe by providing training and claims support to their Tribal Veterans Representative. ODVA will draft a MOU to formalize our partnership with the Umatilla Tribe to work directly with the TVR on claims submission and technical assistance with appeals.

Below are highlights of 2014 events that ODVA participated in to support positive and ongoing government-to-government relations:

- **February 2014** – Provided testimony to the Legislative Commission on Indian Services on ODVA's mission and organization as well as how to increase Tribal Government awareness of veteran services in Oregon.
- **March 2014** – The Siletz Tribal Charitable Contribution Fund provided \$2,000 in funds for the Oregon Women Veterans Conference to assist in promoting awareness outreach to the 131 female Native American veterans in Oregon.
- **May 2014** – Attended a workshop to promote awareness of Tribal Government history and best practices as well as understanding how to work more effectively with Tribal Governments.
- **July 2014** – Attended Veterans Tribal Summit in Grand Ronde. Supported event by providing staffing and resource materials to help raise awareness of veteran benefits available to Native American veterans. Provided keynote speech on strengthening ODVA and Tribal Government partnerships.

- **September 2014** – Included a tribal blessing of the second Oregon Veterans’ Home in Lebanon dedicating it as a place of health and healing for all aging veterans.

While ODVA is proud of our federal, state and tribal government efforts to serve tribal veterans, we also recognize no single agency or organization can wholly address the diverse needs across native lands. We look forward to continued partnerships and collaboration across governments, agencies and other essential partners who serve all veterans in the delivery of state and federal veteran services and benefits.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cameron Smith  
Director