

# WDVA



## Strategic Plan



*Serving Those Who Served,  
now and into the future!*

## Director's Message

I am pleased to share your WDVA's Strategic Plan for 2023-2026. This document is an accumulation of months of work to prioritize and align our resources to fulfill our mission of Serving Those Who Served. The Strategic Plan serves as our roadmap and guide to ensure we deliver results for Veterans and their families. The strategic plan does not contain our operational work, but it helps us to better prioritize growth within our agency and to visualize our path forward as we care for the Veterans of Washington State.

The goals and objectives outlined in this plan complement the Governor's strategic framework and our vision of improving the quality of life for Veterans and their families. This plan highlights four goals areas:

- *Save and transform lives*
- *Respect, empower, & inspire everyone*
- *Be a leading state for Veteran service delivery and outcomes*
- *Operate effectively & efficiently*

Each goal is supported by two objectives, which lay out how we will measure success. Our strategies describe how we will achieve success and are high-level actions that each of our divisions will plan, implement, and monitor over the next four years. We will engage in regular reviews to ensure we continue to move forward, and we will adjust as necessary. Along the way, you will see how your work is connected to the strategic goals. You will see articles on our website and V-Net, hear stories in the All-Staff Town Hall, and see visuals in your work areas that show how we are measuring our collective successes.

Our strategies were selected by listening and engaging with the Veterans community and employees. Over for the next four years we will focus our service delivery to:

- *Connect rural Veterans to their earned benefits, medical and mental health services*
- *Service Members, Veterans, and Military Family Member suicide prevention*
- *Assistance for Veterans without homes and homelessness prevention*
- *Sustainability of our programs and services*
- *Retention and recruitment of our most important asset, our employees (You!)*

Success of this plan relies on the combined efforts of many individuals. Thank you for taking the time to read, understand, and ask questions. I am looking forward to your partnership in Serving Those Who Served.

Sincerely,

*David, Puente Jr.*

*Director*



*David Puente Jr.  
Director, WDVA*



# Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs

## Strategic Plan 2023-2026

*WDVA's Vision: Improving the quality of life for Veterans and their families*

*WDVA's Mission: Serving those who served*

Your WDVA exists to connect veterans and their family members to the benefits and services they earned through their military service. WDVA offers:

- *Long-term care in our four State Veteran Homes (the Washington Soldiers Home, the Washington Veterans Home, the Spokane Veterans Home, and the Walla Walla Veterans Home) for honorably discharged veterans, spouses of residents, widows of eligible veterans, and Gold Star Parents.*
- *Claims assistance and counseling services for veterans and their family members.*
- *Honors for veterans in their final resting place in our State Veterans Cemetery.*
- *Housing resources in our Transitional Housing Program and through other support and preventative programs.*

### *The WDVA Way:*

The WDVA way serves as a reference to each employee as we carry out our work. We are accountable to each other and our customers to ensure that these values are present in all our actions.



**We value each other**



**We cultivate a healthy, inclusive & safe workplace**



**We are honest, professional & transparent**



**We listen to understand & speak with intent**

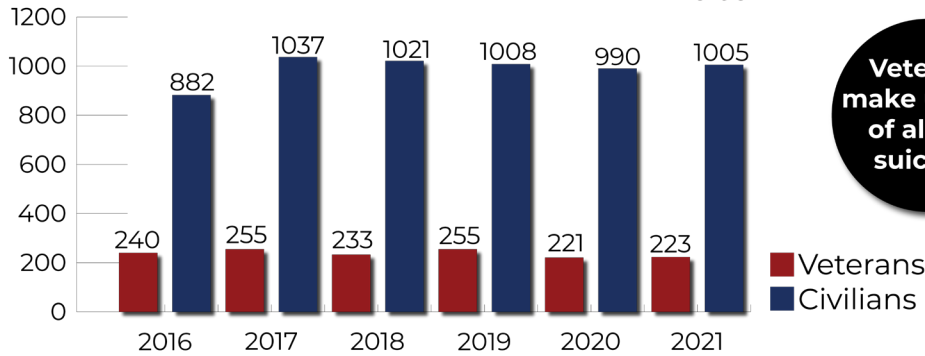
# Goal 1: Save and Transform Lives

**Objective 1.1 Focus on health, growth, well-being, connectivity, and purpose, resulting in a 20% reduction in suicide among veterans by 2025.**

## Why this is important

Suicide is a growing public health issue affecting Washington Service Members, Veterans, and military families. Veteran and military communities are at an increased risk of suicide due to unique life experiences, culture, and environmental stressors. In Washington State, Veterans make up over 18% of all suicides in 2020 while only representing 7% of the population in that same year. The Washington State Governor’s Challenge team and the larger Service Member, Veteran, and Military Family (SMVF) Suicide Prevention Advisory Committee was created in 2020 with the goal of using a collaborative public health approach to reduce suicide in Washington State by 20% by 2025. WDVA, along with fellow agencies and organizations continue to plan and implement prevention strategies.

### Data

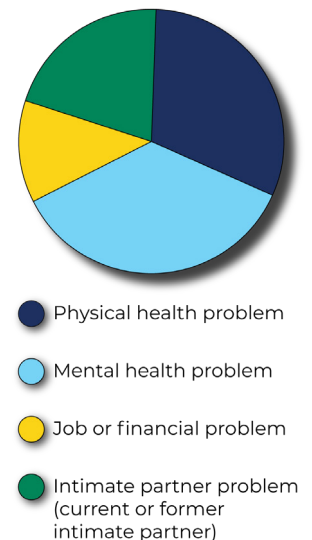


Age Group	Veteran	Civilian
18-34	65%	32%
35-54	61%	43%
55-74	65%	40%
75+	81%	49%
Total	69%	62%

### Strategies

- ◇ Mitigate risk factors and enhance protective factors for each program with Counseling and Wellness.
  - Training on the theory of suicide
  - Developing and implementing strategies
- ◇ Increase the number of Veterans and family members participating in Counseling and Wellness programs.
  - Increasing outreach events
  - Improving the website so it is easier to navigate
  - Improving and increase advertising
- ◇ Maximize resources to Veterans.
  - Improving and increasing peer support programs
  - Educating providers and the community on resources for veterans
- ◇ Continue to grow community-based and governmental partnerships.
  - Outreach to new resources for veterans.
  - Maintain current relationships with partnerships.
- ◇ Develop a behavioral health team.
  - Provide training to WDVA staff on support and debriefing versus counseling.

**Known Preceding Crisis/Event for Veteran Suicide Deaths**  
(WA State: Years 2016-2021 combined)



## **Objective 1.2 Place 80 veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness in permanent housing by October 2024.**

### **Why this is important**

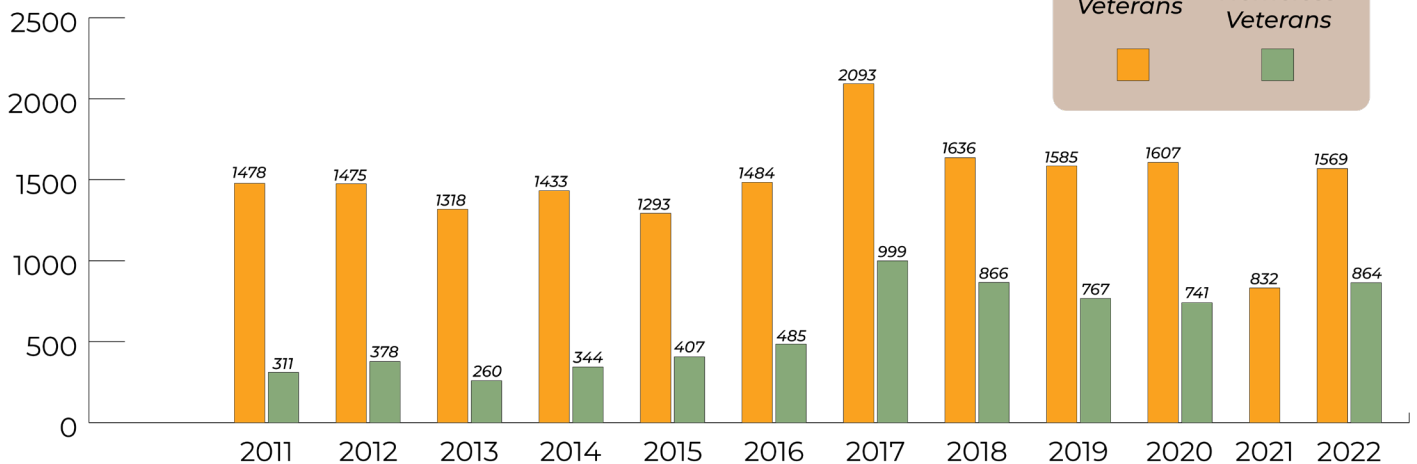
WDVA directly supports the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary's goal for permanent placement through the National Placement Challenge to house 38,000 veterans. This objective ties directly into work we are doing through our Transitional Housing, Veteran Innovations (VIP), and King County Financial and Housing Support Services Programs. In FY 2022, the WDVA Transitional Housing Program (THP) had 110 VA Grant and Per Diem (GPD) beds and 20 Contract Residential Shelter beds, serving 155 veterans. During the year, 52 Veterans were permanently housed (34 through Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), 6 through Section 8, and 12 through other resources without subsidized housing). Last year the VIP helped 24 Veterans retain permanent housing and the King County Financial and Housing Support Services Program provided services to an additional 28 veterans.

WDVA's extraordinary employees provide compassionate and wholistic care through individualized Veteran case management and wrap around services resulting in successful employment, connection to public benefits, family reintegration, and permanent housing.

### **Data**

WDVA uses the official Point in Time data published by the Washington State Department of Commerce. The Point in Time count includes all persons staying in temporary housing programs

#### **Veterans Experiencing Homelessness**



(sheltered count) and places not meant for human habitation (unsheltered count).

### **Strategies:**

- ◇ Work with Commerce and local organizations to improve capacity for serving veterans experiencing homelessness.
- ◇ Expand capacity of the Transitional Housing Program by offering medical recuperative care.
- ◇ Expand other preventative services to prevent veterans from experiencing homelessness

## **Goal 2: Respect, empower, and inspire everyone**

**Objective 2.1 Reduce the yearly employee turnover rate from 24% to 15% and fill 90% of positions by FY2025.**

### **Why this important**

Employees are WDVA's greatest asset and critical to achieving our mission. Retaining our skilled and knowledgeable employees is fundamental to growing our organizational effectiveness and efficiency and serving Veteran's and their families.

The staffing shortage in our four Veterans Homes is so severe that we are only able to operate at an overall 73 percent census (140 of our 517 beds are empty). Prior to the COVID pandemic that spurred the nursing shortage, particularly in long-term care, WDVA Veterans Homes had nearly 96 percent of its beds filled. WDVA has a waiting list of veterans and qualified family members in each of our four Homes but cannot staff to the level necessary to provide adequate care, primarily due to the Nursing Assistant-Certified (NAC) shortage.

### **Data**

- In FY2023 the turnover rate for WDVA was 24%. Recruiting and onboarding employees is a significant cost to the agency.
- The point in time vacancy rate during March 2023 was approximately 20%, meaning that only 80% of positions were filled. This directly impacts WDVA's ability to deliver quality services Veterans and their families.

*The Nursing Assistant-Certified (NAC) classification accounts for 62% of the Homes Program's direct care staff. Below are the NAC Vacancy Rates across WDVA's Homes Program:*

<b>NAC Vacancy Rate</b>	<b>FY2019</b>	<b>FY2020</b>	<b>FY2021</b>	<b>FY2022</b>
<b>WDVA</b>	42%	28%	30%	33%

### **Strategies**

- ◇ Ensure employees are onboarded successfully.
- ◇ Continue involvement in the healthcare training partnerships.
- ◇ Identify areas in the agency with lower turnover rates to learn what they are doing right and share with others.

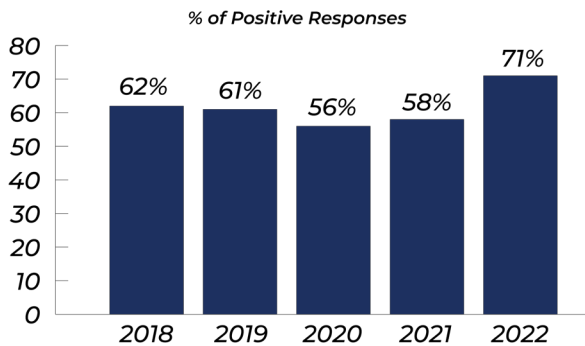
**Objective 2.2 Team members will experience an even greater sense of cooperation, teamwork and belonging in the workplace, as evidenced by a 10% increase in employee engagement feedback by 2026.**

### **Why this is important**

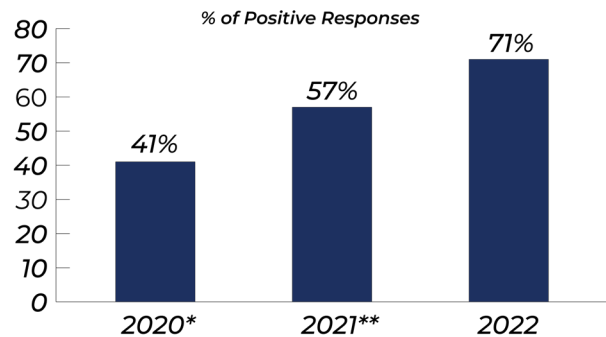
Decades of research confirms that organizational performance and employee engagement are connected. Plainly put, to have a performing organization, you must have employees that feel respected, valued, trusted, and recognized for their contributions. WDVA is focused on creating a sense of belonging throughout our organization. By strengthening our employee experience, we will strengthen our customer experience.

### **Data**

**“A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my workgroup.”**



**“My agency encourages belonging in the workplace.”**



\*2020 My agency sets the expectation for inclusion by embedding it in everyday interactions.

\*\*2021 My agency encourages inclusion in the workplace.

### **Strategies**

- ◇ Use feedback provided by employees in the annual statewide Employee Engagement Survey to identify gaps and engage in projects to close gaps.
- ◇ Leverage and continue to implement strategies in the WDVA Diversity Equity and Inclusion and State Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) plans. Operationalize effective strategies.
  - Ensure every employee can develop and excel in their career and recognize and reward high performers.
  - Build a results-oriented DEI strategy based on actionable data.
  - Select and implement DEI best practices that would be most effective at WDVA.
  - Ensure talent acquisition practices consistently provide equal opportunity and strive to close representation gaps at all levels.
  - Maintain a diverse leadership pipeline including a framework for holding managers accountable for actively promoting career development and advancement opportunities for their employees.
  - Provide clear, consistent, and regular messaging of the DEI vision and actions being taken to achieve desired outcomes.
  - Foster a work environment without barriers to opportunity, where all employees feel welcomed, valued, respected, and engaged, and can effectively participate and bring their unique talents, skills, and perspectives.

## Goal 3: Be the leading state in Veteran service delivery & outcomes

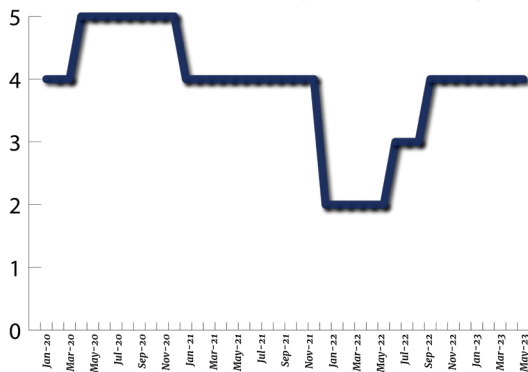
Objective 3.1 All State Veteran Homes achieve and sustain a Medicare 5-Star quality measure rating by 2026.

### Why this is important

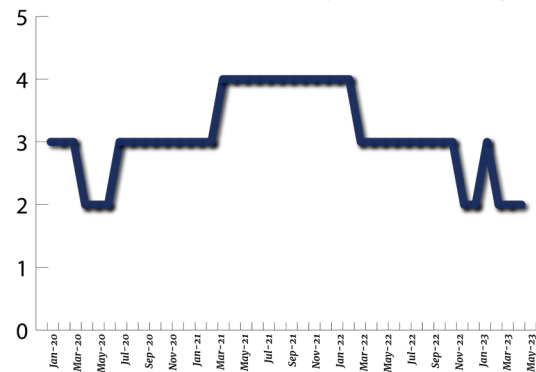
WDVA offers long-term care in four state veteran homes for honorably discharged veterans, spouses of residents, widows of eligible veterans, and Gold Star Parents. Our State Veterans Home Residents trust us with their care, and trust that we will treat each Resident with the dignity and respect they deserve. The Medicare 5-Star quality measures are tools that help us quantify our healthcare processes, outcomes, patient perceptions, and organizational systems related to our ability to provide high-quality care to our residents. These are a set of industry measurements that we can use to benchmark against others to ensure the highest quality of care. Improving and sustaining high quality healthcare guarantees our ability to offer this service into the future.

### Data

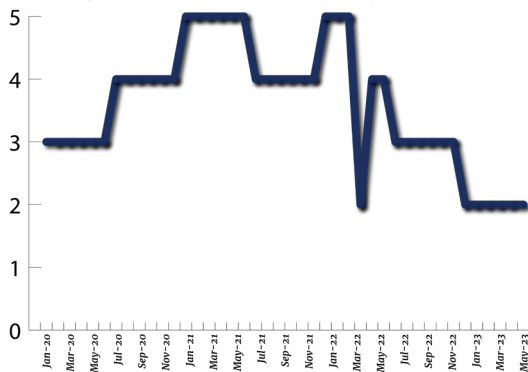
Spokane Home Quality Measure Rating



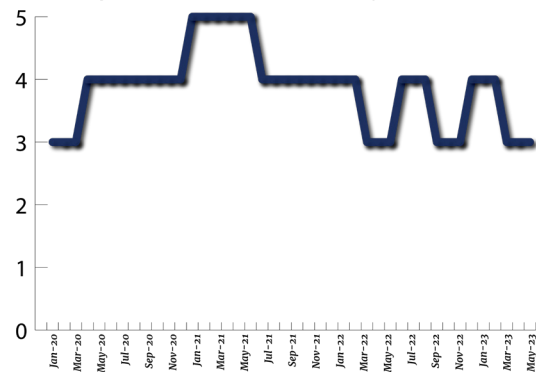
Walla Walla Home Quality Measure Rating



Washington Veterans Home Quality Measure Rating



Washington Soldiers Home Quality Measure Rating



### Strategies

- ◇ Incorporate change management principles into the use of quality measures reports.
- ◇ Incorporate staff and resident improvement ideas into problem solving efforts.
- ◇ Regularly provide and review data with staff and stakeholders to ensure milestones for improvements are visible and recognized.



**Objective 3.2 Increase the percentage of WA state Veterans connected to their earned disability compensation benefit from 28% to 33% by 2026.**

**Why this is important**

WDVA’s Veterans Service Offices and the statewide referral service are staffed with qualified Service Officers to assist Veterans and family members in accessing benefits to which they may be entitled; including;

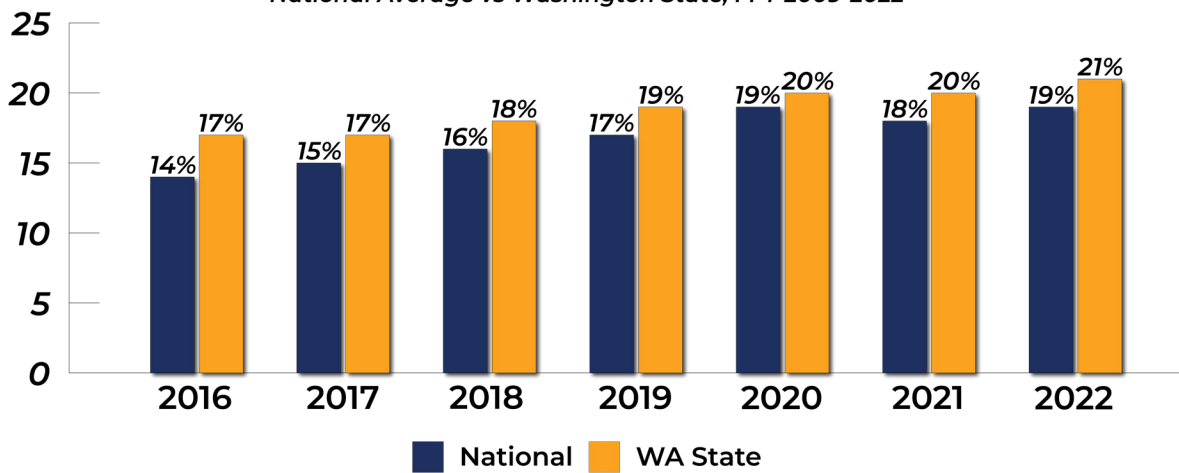
- VA Service-Connected Disability Compensation
- VA Nonservice-connected Pension
- VA Survivors Dependency and Indemnity Compensation
- VA Survivors Pension
- VA Health Care Benefits
- Other Federal, State or County Benefits

Using a case management approach, our staff attend to the needs of the individual and their families by providing counseling and referral services in a holistic fashion. The 2022 Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act represented one of the largest veterans’ healthcare and benefit expansions in history. This means that more of our Veterans qualify for benefits or increased existing benefits.

**Data**

**Percent of Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation & Pension**

*National Average vs Washington State, FFY 2009-2022*



**Strategies**

- ◇ Place Veteran Service Officer resources strategically in regions experiencing service gaps.
- ◇ Establish a peer to peer mentoring service for counties, specifically focused on rural counties.
- ◇ Address the Limited Technology Access for Veterans in Rural Counties through a Department of Commerce Digital Navigator Grant. Outreach and technology access has been an ongoing issue for our Veterans and their families that live in the rural areas.

## Goal 4: Operate effectively and efficiently

**Objective 4.1 Cultivate a culture of accountability and transparency by sharing our performance data from all divisions at least annually by 2026.**

### *Why this is important*

At WDVA we measure what matters. While each of our divisions has performance measures, we see an opportunity to integrate performance management into operations by placing a greater focus on sharing and using data to collaboratively problem solve. In 2022, 51% of employees could agree with the statement, “I know how my agency measures success.” While teams may see their own data, we need to increase transparency across the agency. This objective focuses on WDVA’s journey to breakdown silos.

### *Strategies*

- ◇ Have each division identify key performance indicators and involve subject matter experts in that work. Use lessons learned from past performance management activities to inform the future.
- ◇ Include the “why” behind each piece of data selected so it’s clear why that data contributes to a division’s story.
- ◇ Use this data to focus on improvements and give recognition. Include a feedback loop back to employees and customers so people know how we are doing.



## ***Objective 4.2 All programs use a standard process to demonstrate operational sustainability of services by 2026.***

### ***Why this is important***

Operational sustainability creates continuity in the services we offer to Veterans and their families. This builds trust between WDVA and customers, and also ensures we are able to evaluate our return on investment to ensure we are making the best decisions within our limited resources. Ensuring sustainability means that we are generating, evaluating, and maintaining data to continually monitor the quality of services, including matching our organizational capacity with service delivery. This supports our employees by ensuring we accurately address workload and other resource impacts of any new or expanded service delivery.

### ***Strategies***

- ◇ Complete a current state assessment and identify gaps in process needed to demonstrate operational sustainability of services.
- ◇ Create, implement, and refine a standardized process that allows WDVA to secure resources to meet the needs of customers and ensure sustained operational capacity.
- ◇ Continue to implement the One Washington project. A complete enterprise resource planning system combines business functions (finance, procurement, budget, HR, and payroll) across an organization's main resources – its people, money, information, and assets – and provides decision makers with real-time enterprise information.