

Report Highlights



Veterans Services

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
Performance Audit • September 2022 • 2170P

OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

C O L O R A D O

Key Concern

The Division of Veterans Affairs (Division) and the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs (Board) do not sufficiently plan for, supervise, and support veterans services, which are largely provided by county veterans service officers (VSOs).

Key Findings

- Federal and state laws require the Division to provide training to VSOs, but the Division's approach is inadequate. Roughly one-third of VSOs responding to our survey said their initial training was too complex, too late, or had gaps in the content. With training, VSOs can be accredited to represent veterans and directly submit their claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), thus helping veterans obtain the benefits they qualify for in a timely way.
- Sensitive veteran data may not be fully protected. We found that the Division does not ensure that users of its case management system, VetraSpec, have appropriate access to the system. For example, the Division does not regularly monitor access and we found that some users did not access the system for between 3 months and 7 years, so their access may not be needed. Also, the Division has not ensured that VetraSpec complies with Colorado Information Security Policies or submits the results of a System and Organization Controls (SOC) evaluation.
- The Division distributes semiannual payments to support county VSOs, but we found that 80 percent of the \$69,000 the Division approved to pay the 9 counties we sampled from July 2020 to December 2021 was not fully supported by county reports requesting the payments. Further, we found significant differences in the effective hourly rates counties receive for their VSOs, with rates ranging from \$8.65 to \$55.38 per hour.
- Some data indicate that the statutorily-intended uniformity in veterans services provided across the state is lacking. VSOs in one area told us that veterans often have to wait more than 2 weeks for assistance, while other areas had no wait times. Also, the ratios of veterans to state and county VSOs varies widely across the state, from 10,000:1 in the Denver Metro region to less than 3,000:1 in all other regions. The Division has not defined the concept of uniformity or designed policies or processes to accomplish it.
- The Division and Board lack strategic planning and processes to guide their operations, which could help them identify and pursue needed resources and fulfill their duties. Situations the Division may have addressed more quickly through planning processes include an unfulfilled 2009 statutory directive to create a clearinghouse of veterans service information and fulfilling resource needs for the Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado (cemetery). For the Board, written policies and procedures could help it leverage its annual reports and fulfill its charge to make policy recommendations.

Background

- The first state program to assist veterans was created in 1947 and today resides within the Division, advised by the Board. The Division offers assistance through county- and state-employed VSOs who help veterans obtain the benefits they earned through their military service. The Division also has veteran-related grant programs and operates a veterans cemetery and resource center, both in Grand Junction.
- As of September 2021, there were about 388,000 veterans living in Colorado. The Division and Board report that, on average each year between 2019 and 2021, VSOs helped veterans file 10,500 benefit claims with the VA; the Division and Board awarded \$1.7 million in grants to about 55 veterans service organizations; and the cemetery interred 326 veterans and their family members.
- VSOs help veterans obtain various benefits, such as VA pensions, disability compensation, medical care, and education assistance, as well as other state benefits and resources.

Recommendations Made

27

Responses

Agree: 27

Partially Agree: 0

Disagree: 0