

1888-2008: A Celebration of a 120 Year Partnership between The Federal Government and State Veterans Homes

Following the Civil War, a large number of indigent and disabled veterans were no longer able to earn their own livelihood and needed care. While the Federal Government operated national homes for disabled union volunteer soldiers, the total number of veterans needing care was overwhelming. In recognition of this, a number of states independently established State Veterans Homes (SVHs). The first State Veterans Home was established in Rocky Hill, Connecticut in 1864.

The year 2008 marks the 120th anniversary of the first enactment that provided for payment of federal aid (originally about \$100 per year per veteran) to states. On August 7, 1888, federal sharing was formally authorized to help alleviate the burden placed upon states. With the establishment of the Veterans Administration in 1930 to care for an ever-increasing number of veterans, the state programs were expanded to include: three levels of care, increased per diem payments, and, in 1964, the State Home Construction Grant Program was initiated. This program has allowed State Veterans Homes to provide much greater assistance to veterans than states could have provided alone. Project grants are made by the VA, and may not exceed 65% of the estimated cost of construction and the provision of initial equipment for any such buildings. For FY 2008, a total of \$165,000,000 has been appropriated for State Home capital projects. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs oversees and coordinates the State Veterans Home Program through the Office of Geriatrics & Extended Care. VA assures Congress that State Homes provide quality care through inspections, audits and reconciliation of records conducted by the VA Medical Centers of jurisdiction.

The National Association of State Veterans Homes (NASVH) was founded in 1952 because of the mutual need of State Homes to promote legislation at the national level and share problems and experiences common to all State Homes. NASVH's primary mission is to insure that each and every eligible U.S. veteran receives the benefits, services, long term health care and respect which they have earned by their service and sacrifice. The organization also insures that no veteran is in need or distress and that the level of care and services provided by state veterans homes meets or exceeds the highest standards available.

On February 24, 1986, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Veterans Administration and the National Association of State Veterans Homes was signed, formalizing their mutual goal of providing quality care for veterans. The VA assures Congress that state homes provide quality care through inspections, audits, and reconciliation of records conducted by the VA medical center of jurisdiction. States must assure that State operational funds are available to support the specific level of quality of care in each level of care provided.

Today, State Veterans Homes are one of the largest long-term care providers in the United States. In a typical year, State Veterans Homes will furnish nearly seven million days of nursing home care and about 1.5 million days of domiciliary care. There are 135 State Veterans Homes throughout the United States with more than 30,000 total beds. These numbers continue to grow in order to meet the needs of our nation's veterans.