



LAKESHORE REGIONAL ENTITY

# VETERAN NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

FISCAL YEAR 2024  
SUMMARY

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# INTRODUCTION

The Veteran Navigator (VN) role was established to connect veterans and military families of all branches, eras, and discharge types to various federal, state, and local resources. These resources are designed to provide comprehensive support for issues related to mental health, substance use disorders, housing, and other unique circumstances that may impact veterans.

Since the LRE's VN program began in fiscal year (FY) 2017, the regional VN has actively engaged veterans and military families throughout the region. This engagement has provided crucial support and empowered community partners to address their needs.

The VN role includes four primary functions: outreach, support, referral network, and expertise. This report provides information about activities within each function.

- 1. **Success Stories** .....page 3  
Highlighted success stories for each quarter FY24.
- 2. **Outreach and Support** .....page 4  
Engage in outreach activities to reach veterans. Work with individual veterans to assess their needs, connect to services, and address challenges that may negatively affect their health and well-being.
- 3. **Referral Network** .....page 6  
Establish a robust referral network to assist veterans in accessing services and support to meet their needs.
- 4. **Recommendations**.....page 7  
Next steps for the VN role during FY25.
- 5. **Abbreviations**.....page 8

# SUCCESS STORIES

## Quarter 1

- Helped a female veteran who is struggling with chronic pain and severe mental health get connected with a VSO to file a claim.
- Aided a female veteran to find resources to care for her adult disabled child.
- Supported an elderly veteran couple in finding an appropriate lawyer to work through a financial lawsuit.

## Quarter 2

- Abetted a female veteran who is legally blind to connect with her local VA clinic and acquire adaptive equipment for a better quality of life.
- Boosted a combat veteran's confidence in seeking mental health treatment and provided resources to assist in finances, home repair, and local VSO to increase disability rating.
- Navigated a veteran through resources for homelessness, MH/SUD, education, and legal needs to achieve a better quality of life.

## Quarter 3

- Advocated for an elderly veteran with dangerously high cholesterol levels to attain a lift chair to assist in mobility, relieve sciatic pain and physical activity, achieving a 70lb weight loss and better health.
- Relieved a veteran with mental health stress by providing legal resources to remove his 6-month-old infant from an unsafe environment quickly and safely, vastly improving mental health concerns for the veteran.
- Assisted a veteran with multiple needs (VSO, VA, claim appeal, and VPS) to improve quality of life and mental health through financial relief and healthcare eligibility.

## Quarter 4

- Advised a female veteran with a brain tumor and other service-connected ailments to navigate through the VA healthcare system to get the healthcare she needed, improving overall mental wellness.
- Accompanied a suicidal veteran to navigate internal VA and external resources to achieve a better quality of treatment for their TBI and depression.
- Championed the Ottawa County Crisis Intervention Team to get a veteran emergent mental health care safely to prevent self-harm and harm to others.

# OUTREACH

The VN participates in community events and collaborative groups that allow them to connect with veterans in the community. This outreach aims to raise awareness through the VN and to interact with veterans to increase their comfort level by contacting the VN for support. These events often raise funds to support veteran needs.

Throughout FY 24, the VN participated in 91 community outreach events for veterans. Some examples are as follows:

## Quarter 1

- Community Partner Meeting - Connected with 20 veterans and community partners to discuss upcoming events and resources for veterans.
- Ottawa County Resource Fair – Connected with 13 veterans and advocates to discuss the VN services and other resources available at the fair.
- West Michigan Veteran’s Engagement 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Veterans Family and Friends Conference – Connected with 15 veterans to discuss the VN services and network with other community partners.

## Quarter 2

- Folds of Honor Gala - Connected with 26 veterans during a fundraiser for scholarship funding for veterans killed in action to put their children through college.
- Michigan Army National Guard Join Service Ball – Connected with 45 veterans and active service members at a community engagement event.

## Quarter 3

- Armed Forces Thanksgiving Luncheon—Connected with 36 veterans and attended a community event honoring those who served or are still serving.
- Wounds of War Conference – Connected with 16 veterans during the conference.
- Ottawa County Crisis Intervention Resource Fair— Connected with 5 veterans and local law enforcement, educating them on the VN program and how to work with veterans through a crisis.

## Quarter 4

- Ottawa County Veteran’s Standdown Event - Connected with 60 veterans for an event that provides resources and benefit connection.
- Kent County Homeless Veteran’s Stand Down – Connected with 55 veterans for an event that provides resources to prevent veteran homelessness.

# SUPPORT

The primary role of the VN is to provide individualized support to veterans and military families. The VN works with individual veterans and military families to assess their needs, assist them in connecting to services, and help them address challenges that negatively affect their health and well-being. In addition, the regional VN works with the local VNs at HealthWest and West Michigan Community Mental Health Services to coordinate services as appropriate.

During FY24, the VN provided services to 95 veterans, providing services to residents from every county in the region. Below are some specific categories needing support and navigation to applicable resources.

County	# Served	Male	Female	MH Challenges	SUD Challenges	Unemployed	Homeless	Suicidal Ideation
Allegan	11	10	1	10	1	1	1	1
Kent	49	37	12	49	9	13	3	15
Muskegon	12	7	5	12	2	1	1	5
Ottawa	19	14	5	19	5	4	5	6
Lake	3	2	1	3	0	0	0	1
Mason	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Oceana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total:</b>	95	71	24	94	17	19	10	28



# REFERRAL NETWORK

To support veterans and their families in accessing support and resources, the Veteran Navigator works to identify, review, and build relationships with organizations that can support the needs of veterans and military families. This includes establishing strong working relationships with publicly funded systems for behavioral health services, other local providers of services such as housing and transportation, and developing partnerships with volunteer groups that support veterans. These relationships allow the VN to coordinate warm-handoff referrals to services and increase the referrals to the VN for additional support from these organizations.

During FY24, 74% of individuals served were self-referred to the VN Program. Top referrals made by the VN during FY24 included:



**39**

Referrals to the VA



**59**

Referrals to VSO



**19**

Referrals to Employment Resources



**30**

Referrals to Housing Resources



**17**

Referrals to Transportation



**9**

Referrals to Educational Resources



**21**

Referrals to Legal Resources



**40**

Referrals to Peer Support Groups

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The VN seeks to understand local military families' needs and service gaps to determine programming priorities. Based on data collected for veterans served during FY24, the following issues have been identified for consideration:

## **Outreach for Female Veterans**

In FY24, female veterans comprised 25% of individuals served through the VN program. While this aligns with national rates of veterans (females comprise 20% of the veteran population), research demonstrates that female veterans are the fastest-growing group, and outreach should be done accordingly.

## **Need for Legal Resources**

In 2021, 76% of low-income Veteran households reported a civil legal problem, and 44% experienced at least five civil legal problems (Justice.gov, 2021). The VN program was challenged with finding appropriate legal resources for the 22% of veterans served. We recommend partnering with legal clinics and law firms to increase referrals from and to various legal needs as appropriate.

## **Identify Military/Veteran Family Resources**

Although the prevalence of intimate partner violence among veterans is challenging to identify, a recent study found it is a topic of concern within the veteran population (Kwan, 2020). The VN reported requests for information on domestic violence resources. Additionally, the VN provided emotional support for veterans navigating complex relationships between spouses or with family. We recommend identifying organizations specializing in relationships and fostering a referral process for relevant resources.

## **Relationships with Veteran specific organizations**

This year, partnerships with Hero's Corner and Essential Patriot provided additional support for individual veterans. For example, these organizations hosted numerous events and provided supplies to low-income and homeless veterans. As these organizations can provide support for unique veteran needs, ensuring an ongoing partnership with organizations dedicated to meeting veteran needs will be beneficial.



# ABBREVIATIONS

- LRE – Lakeshore Regional Entity
- VN – Veteran Navigator
- VA – Veteran Affairs
- VSO – Veteran Service Officers
- MH – Mental Health
- SUD – Substance Abuse Disorder