

A Commitment To Those Who Serve

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A Commitment To Those Who Serve

Governor Christie Has a Strong Record of Support for NJ Military Members, Veterans And Their Families

Today, Governor Christie joined the leaders of Deborah Heart and Lung Center and Cooper University Health Care in kicking off their HeroCare Connect program – a partnership that will provide access to comprehensive quality medical care for active duty military members, veterans and their families.

The HeroCare Connect program will offer healthcare in more than 75 medical specialties, at more than 100 conveniently located community medical offices. This partnership will ensure care to veterans who access their primary care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Those who put their lives on the line to protect and serve New Jerseyans, as well as their families who make tremendous sacrifices, will now receive enhanced healthcare services they deserve.

Under Governor Christie's leadership, state government continues to support more than 413,000 military veterans who live in New Jersey with successful programs and services.

Honoring Our Commitment To Those Who Serve

Honoring our commitment to those brave men and women who have worn our uniform is one of our solemn duties and the Christie Administration has committed to our state's veterans and their families, both on the employment front and in other ways. Since taking office, the Governor has:

- Signed the "New Jersey Tuition Equality for America's Military (NJTEAM) Act" in March 2015, providing in-state tuition at New Jersey public institutions of higher education to military veterans and certain family members living in New Jersey.
- Signed legislation requiring Professional Boards to Provide Waivers or Exemptions for Licensure for Veterans. The Governor signed A-2882 into law in May 2013, which requires a professional or occupational board that issues a license or certification to give credit toward its requirements for licensure or certification for training, education, or experience received by an applicant while serving as a member of the Armed Forces.
- Signed legislation for a program that awards high school diplomas to veterans who dropped out to serve in Korea and Vietnam.
- Signed legislation that strengthens the support network for military families after the death of a service member.
- Signed legislation in January 2011 creating the Gold Star Families license plate to honor the families of members of the military killed in action for their sacrifice.

Expansion Of The Veterans Haven Program

In September 2012, the Christie Administration expanded the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) successful Veterans Haven program to provide access to veterans in the northern part of the state in addition to the southern part of the state, doubling the capacity. The Veterans Transitional Housing Program – Veterans Haven – is a facility for homeless veterans. After being medically evaluated at a VA Medical Center, eligible veterans participate in a long-term program focusing on psychological, social and vocational rehabilitation.

The Veterans Haven facilities provide vocational counselors to help veterans become employment ready, social workers for those in need of individual counseling, on-staff nurses to assist veterans in need of medication and healthcare coordination.

- Since opening in 2012, Veterans Haven North, located in Hunterdon County, has successfully guided more than 80 percent of its population into more stabilized lives and permanent residency.
- Since 2010, the number of beds for homeless veterans has more than doubled to 175 with an expansion of Veterans Haven South in Winslow Township and the creation of Veterans Haven North in Glen Gardner.
- The Veterans Haven facility in Camden County has helped nearly 2,500 homeless veterans since opening in 1995.
 - o Three out of every four veterans who complete the program remain off the streets for good and return to purposeful lives.
 - o Currently Veterans Haven South has an 84 percent success rate.
 - o The facility underwent a 20,000-square-foot expansion to serve an additional 44 homeless veterans.

Interagency Council on Homelessness

In April 2012, Governor Christie signed Executive Order 92 creating the Interagency Council on Homelessness to combat homelessness as part of the Administration's commitment to protecting the most vulnerable New Jerseyans. The Council released its final report on December 31, 2014.

The Homelessness Council recommended an ongoing working group, which includes leadership from state departments, including the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, as well as public members from homelessness service providers. The Working Group is tasked with implementing recommendations in the Council's report, including the need to better serve homeless veterans in New Jersey.

Recommendations to improve services for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness included:

- At first point of entry, homeless veterans will be directed to a state Veterans' Service Officer for counseling regarding financial benefits.
- The Council will work with The NJ Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and the regional Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) to improve services for the state's veterans.
- The Department of Community Affairs will continue to apply for and administer HUD-VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers.

Stand Down

Community Hope, DMAVA, and the Department of Labor Workforce Development work throughout the year to host Stand Down events, which help our Homeless Veteran population. DMAVA's events take place twice each year, one in the Southern part of the State and one in the Northern part of the State. These events typically provide services to 800 veterans annually. These events provide veterans with access to basic physical needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical support as well as social services, veteran benefits, employment assistance, addiction counseling and legal services.

- Stand Down is a military term used when service members are removed from combat to rehabilitate and rest. Today, Stand Downs are grass roots, community-based intervention programs to help homeless veterans battle life on the streets.
- The Christie Administration has regularly hosted and participated in veteran-focused events including Stand Downs, dozens of veteran employment fairs and conferences designed to help employers connect with veteran services. The administration also has joined with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion and other sponsors to support "Hiring Our Heroes" events, as well as helping to connect military personnel with quality career and training opportunities in the building and construction trade.

Helping Veterans Transition To The Workforce

Furthering the Administration's commitment to New Jersey's military veterans, Governor Christie made available \$250,000 for the state fiscal year 2017 for the Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) program. The program is designed to honor active, reserve, and National Guard military personnel by transitioning them into solid, family-sustaining careers in one of the state's 15 affiliated building and construction trades.

- Helmets to Hardhats is a national program to help National Guard, reserve, retired and transitioning active-duty military members connect to quality career and training opportunities in the construction industry.
- The New Jersey H2H program is run by the New Jersey Building and Construction Trades Council in partnership with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.
- Since its inception, New Jersey's Helmets to Hardhats Program has helped place more than 800 service men and women into accredited apprenticeship programs within the Building Trades.

Allocated Funds To Allow For Continued Operations Of Vets4Warriors Program

In July 2015, Governor Christie announced that the Vets4Warriors Program, operated by Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, would be able to continue operations with State support. The announcement followed news that the U.S. Department of Defense might discontinue federal funding for the program. New Jersey's

Fiscal Year 2016 budget included **\$8 million** to ensure and expand access to health care for veterans in our State; a portion of those funds was used to support the Vets4Warriors program.

- The Vets4Warriors Peer Support Line, which is available 24/7 and toll-free to all active duty, Reserve and National Guard members, is staffed entirely by veterans. The unique structure of Vets4Warriors allows individuals to receive support in a completely confidential, personal, non-threatening way from other veterans, who know the challenges of military life and the rigors of the transition to civilian life, since they have lived through it themselves.
- Since its inception in December 2011, Vets4Warriors has made over 200,000 veteran contacts and has continuously employed over 40 New Jersey veterans.

Providing Temporary Professional/Occupational Licensure To Qualified Non-Resident Military Spouses

In 2014, Governor Christie signed into law a bill providing temporary professional or occupational licenses for qualified nonresident military spouses. This law allows nonresident military spouses who are actively practicing in their professional field to continue working while their loved one is stationed in New Jersey.

Dedicated Resources To Help New Jersey Veterans Find Work

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) has worked to connect veterans and employers as our heroes transition back into the civilian labor market. One-Stop Career Center staff are trained in meeting the unique needs of veterans. For those veterans with significant barriers to employment, dedicated staff provide individual career and job placement services to qualified veterans using a case management approach to service delivery. In addition, LWD has redoubled its efforts to provide quality service and focus through veteran-specific job fairs and hiring events. Facilitating these hiring events and working with employer customers are a cadre of Veterans Business Representatives.

Operation Hire A Jersey Hero & Hiring Our Heroes Job Fairs

In 2012, Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno joined Administration officials and business leaders to launch the Operation Hire a Jersey Hero Symposium at Prudential's headquarters in Newark, an event focused on promoting job opportunities for veterans by connecting employers with state resources available to support the hiring of veterans. The Christie Administration created the symposium series after hearing from Garden State employers who sought information on how to recruit veterans and how military skills can be translated into civilian employment.

Through various state departments and outside partners, employers seeking to employ a veteran are offered a wide variety of resources including:

- Registered apprenticeship programs;
- Funds for on-the-job training;
- Tax credits;
- Customized and literacy training grants; and
- Veteran referral resources.

Securing Employment And Housing Opportunities For New Jersey Veterans

In 2013, Governor Christie signed into law two bills aimed at supporting businesses owned by or that employ veterans and helping secure affordable housing opportunities for veterans.

- S-527/A-1133 authorizes local governments to establish a local public contract set-aside program for business enterprises with majority ownership or control by veterans, or that agree to hire veterans for said contract work.
- S-829/ACS helps secure affordable housing opportunities for veterans by allowing veterans to be given preference in accordance with an agreement between a developer and municipality.

Training Today's Heroes To Be Tomorrow's Teachers

In 2012, Acting Governor Guadagno signed legislation creating a pilot program to assist post-9/11 veterans transition into teaching careers. The legislation created a 36-month teacher preparation pilot program at Richard Stockton College, called the VE Teach Program, for veterans who served in the armed forces on or after September 11, 2001.

- Veterans who successfully completed the program received a bachelor's degree and satisfied the requirements to apply for a certificate to teach grades kindergarten through eight, and in certain secondary education fields.
- Tuition for eligible students was covered entirely by the federal "Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act," which provided 36 months of tuition benefits.

Providing Assistance To Veterans And Their Families

Reinforcing his commitment to New Jersey's veterans, National Guard members and their families, Governor Christie signed legislation that creates and enhances assistance tools that provide financial support and peer counseling services.

Veteran to Veteran Peer Support Program: Through legislation signed in 2010 by Governor Christie, there has been an annual appropriation for the telephone hotline, 1-866-VETS-NJ4 (1-866-838-7654), coordinated by UMDNJ-University Behavioral HealthCare and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

- This 24-hour toll-free peer support telephone helpline provides access to a comprehensive network of mental health professionals specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and other emotional and psychological disorders.
- The peer counselors are trained in other veterans' issues that range from marriage and family life to substance abuse and stress management. All services are free, confidential and available seven days a week.

In January 2016, furthering his administration's commitment to New Jersey's veterans and military personnel, Governor Chris Christie took action on 12 legislative measures designed to assist both active military members and veterans, along with their families.

- S-172/A-2276 (Whelan, Beach/DeAngelo, Quijano) - Exempts disabled veterans and Purple Heart recipients from payment of municipal parking meter fees when their vehicles bear a disabled veteran's or Purple Heart license plate or placard issued by New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission
 - S-2972/A-4465 (Van Drew, Cruz-Perez/Andrzejczak, Tucker, Benson) - Requires DMAVA assist and mentor veterans through the criminal justice system
 - A-1667/S-2155 (Johnson, DeAngelo, Andrzejczak, Mukherji, Pintor Marin/Van Drew, A.R. Bucco) - Permits a child whose parent or guardian is ordered into active military service to remain enrolled in the school district where the child's parent or guardian resided prior to active military service
 - A-2935/S-1325 (Andrzejczak, Lagana, Webber, Mosquera, Lampitt/Van Drew, A.R. Bucco) - Authorizes property tax deferral for deployed military personnel
 - A-2299/S-239 (Andrzejczak, Benson/Van Drew, Stack) - Requires municipalities to exempt 100 percent disabled veterans from construction permit surcharge fees for improvements to promote living unit accessibility; appropriates \$20,000 for municipal reimbursements
 - A-3552/S-2636 (Mazzeo, Andrzejczak, Mukherji, Benson/Beach, Van Drew) - Creates financial planning assistance program for disabled veterans and their caregivers
 - A-3554/S-2606 (Mazzeo, Andrzejczak, Mukherji, Benson, Danielsen/Beach, Cruz-Perez) - Increases the income eligibility cap to receive respite care for certain veterans
 - AS for A-3750/S-2569 (Lampitt, Tucker, Andrzejczak, Singleton, Mosquera/Beach, Allen) - Requires Adjutant General to create informational webpage for women veterans (www.nj.gov/military/veterans/women)
 - A-4148/S-2731 (Andrzejczak, Benson/Van Drew, Beach) - Provides an excused absence on Veterans Day for pupils who participates in certain activities for veterans or active duty members of United States Armed Forces or New Jersey National Guard
 - A-4323/S-2952 (DeAngelo, Lagana, Muoio, Benson/Beach, Whelan) - Expands timeframe for renewal of driver's license, registration, and inspection by military personnel and immediate family members under certain circumstances.
 - AJR-117/SJR-85 (Tucker, Holley, Vainieri Huttel/Beach, Whelan, Madden) - Urges Congress to restore funding to Vets4Warriors veteran suicide hotline
- S-2145/A-631 (Van Drew, Madden/Moriarty, Burzichelli, Tucker, DeAngelo, Danielson, Mukherji) - Authorizes hiring preference for veterans in non-civil service jurisdictions

On August 1, 2016, Governor Christie signed S-855/A-2088 (Stack, Beach/Mukherji, Tucker, Zwicker, Lampitt, McKnight, Downey), which requires Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs to promulgate rules and regulations providing for veterans' affordable housing assistance preference.

Healers To Heroes

Healers to Heroes is a partnership between the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and The Medical Society of New Jersey that assists service members who would like to talk to doctors who themselves are Veterans. The Doctors provide an initial counseling service and then make recommendations for treatment.

Joint Military And Family Assistance And Reintegration Center

Through National Guard funding, DMAVA operates a statewide network of Family Assistance Centers. These centers support the families of deployed Soldiers and Airmen during unforeseen emergencies and financial hardships. Staff at the centers work in tandem with the volunteers at the 34 unit-affiliated Family Readiness Groups across the state.

The crown jewel of this effort is the on-site Joint Military and Family Reintegration and Assistance Center at the Bordentown Armory to serve military members from all the Reserve Components and their families from across the state. The program helps deployed troops make the transition from Soldier to Citizen. DMAVA secured \$3 million in federal money to launch this effort. Those funds also will pay to operate the local family assistance center, which helps Soldiers and their families with deployment-related issues. The Center works with not only Federal Agencies, such as Military One-Source, but State agencies are represented as well, such as the Department of Labor, the Department of Education and a State Senator's office.

Assistance offered at this facility includes:

- Family Assistance
- Family Readiness
- Child & Youth Services

- Survivor Outreach Services
- Military & Family Life Consultants
- Personal Finance Counselor

Allowing For Easier Access To Services For New Jersey Veterans

In 2013, Governor Christie signed legislation requiring the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC), upon submission of satisfactory proof, to indicate a veteran status on a driver's license or identification card. The legislation allows for easier access to services and incentives for veterans by conveniently identifying them as a former member of the Armed Forces. It builds on the "County Identification Cards for Veterans Act" signed by Governor Christie in 2012 that empowered county officials to create identification cards for resident veterans.

Veteran Outreach/Veteran Service Officers

DMAVA proudly provides a statewide network of 16 Veteran Service Offices covering all 21 Counties in the State. These Service Offices offer outreach and assistance to Veterans and their spouses to ensure they receive all their State and Federal benefits to which they are entitled.

The DMAVA Veterans Service Officers who staff these offices have steadily increased the amount of federal Veterans Administration benefits received by New Jersey Veterans in each of the past six years, from \$72 million in Fiscal Year 2009 to \$173 million in Fiscal Year 2016. That represents a 140.3 percent increase in benefits during a period when the number of veterans in New Jersey declined.

At least once a month these Service Officers set up a kiosk in malls throughout the state to reach our New Jersey Veterans. These outreach events are kicked off by a New Jersey State Medal Ceremony where the NJ Distinguished Service Medal, NJ Meritorious Service Medal, NJ Vietnam Service Medal, NJ Korean Service Medal and the NJ POW/MIA Medal are awarded to our State Veterans.

Administrator of the Courts and Office of Attorney General

The "Veterans Criminal Justice Initiative" links Veteran offenders with services and benefits to which they are entitled to receive.

State Parole Board

The State Parole Board launched the Veteran Offender Reentry Initiative in 2011 in conjunction with the NJ Department of Corrections to ensure that veterans involved in the justice system receive appropriate benefits and services by identifying all inmates, parolees and probationers that have served in the US military and connecting them with services such as peer mentoring programs and employment opportunities. In FY16, the initiative partnered with numerous organizations including the American Legion, DMAVA, county prosecutors' offices, and several privately funded event sponsors to host veteran-centered events including the Regional Veterans Resource and Opportunity Fairs, veteran intervention and diversion efforts in partnership with the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Office, the Housing Our Heroes forum series, and the Sansone Auto Mall's Military Assistance Training Program. The Veteran Offender Reentry Initiative also operates a statewide hotline service (609-777-0181) that offers referrals and assistance to any veteran involved in the criminal justice system, serving nearly 300 individuals since its inception.

State Veteran Homes

Comprehensive services and a deep concern for the residents go hand-in-hand at New Jersey's three state-operated veteran nursing homes. Around-the-clock medical and nursing care is provided by a full-time staff of physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and trained nursing assistants. Rehabilitative services, such as occupational and physical therapies, speech therapy, and recreational activities are provided under the direct supervision of licensed therapists. A wide range of other medical services also are offered.

Purple Heart Memorial Highway

Honoring America's bravest military servicemen and women, Acting Governor Guadagno signed legislation designating a portion of State Highway Route 42 in Camden and Gloucester Counties as the "Route 42 Purple Heart Memorial Highway." There are currently more than 2,600 members of the Military Order of the Purple Heart's New Jersey chapter.

Assisting Veterans With The Costs Of Post-Secondary Education Or Vocational Training

In June 2012, First Lady Mary Pat Christie established the Heart of a Hero scholarship program through her New Jersey Heroes initiative to help military service members pursue a post-secondary education, vocational training, or a Master's degree. The Heart of a Hero Scholarship program gives civic minded New Jerseyans who have served our state and country another resource to draw upon in order to make their higher education and career goals a reality. Since 2012, New Jersey Heroes has awarded scholarships to more than 40 military service members, totaling \$250,000.

Ensuring That All Veterans Receive A Proper Burial

Continuing the Christie Administration's efforts to provide all veterans with a dignified resting place, Lt. Governor Guadagno and the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in June 2015

participated in the 21st New Jersey Mission of Honor (NJMOH) Committal Ceremony, which interred the cremated remains of 10 veterans at Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Wrightstown.

NJMOH is a non-profit that works with hospitals, funeral homes, crematoriums, veterans' homes and other organizations to identify and inter the remains of veterans that have been unclaimed since cremation. NJMOH has reunited almost 300 veterans' remains with their families and interred 213 veterans' remains. These veterans include recipients of the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and other commendations.

Free Copy of Veterans Death Certificate

This measure requires the State Registrar of Vital Statistics to issue one free copy of a deceased veteran's death certificate to the veteran's legal representative or authorized family member.

Authorizing Veteran Identification Cards To Serve As Proof Of Status For Driver's Licenses

In August 2015, Governor Christie signed legislation authorizing certain county veteran identification cards to serve as proof of status for veteran designation on driver's license or identification card.

Bolstering Opportunities for Service Members and their Families

In October 2015, Governor Christie signed legislation creating the Military Dependents Scholarship Fund Act to provide college scholarships to the spouses and children of those killed, missing in action or disabled in Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn.

Governor Christie signed legislation creating the Stolen Valor Act, which makes unauthorized use of military uniforms, medals, or insignias to obtain benefits a third degree crime. Governor Christie also signed legislation creating a state contract set-aside program for businesses owned and operated by disabled veterans.

Improving Access To Healthcare for Veterans

In December 2015, the New Jersey Department of Health announced \$5.5 million in grants to implement programs and innovations that will improve health care for veterans and their families throughout the state. The grants will be used to leverage and expand existing programs addressing the primary care, behavioral health, and social service needs of veterans.

DOH Telehealth Initiative

The New Jersey Department of Health recently awarded a \$290,000 grant to Virtua Health to provide telehealth services for veterans, enabling them to remain at home and have video conferences with health care providers for certain medical conditions. As of February 1, 2017 Virtua now offers primary and behavioral health visits conducted via online technology to assist veterans who need access to healthcare services but may face mobility or transportation challenges.

Press Contact:
Brian Murray
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000