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## **Employment Services and Supports Available to Veterans with Disabilities through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Other Federal Agencies**

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Michael West\*

John Kregel

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**\*Corresponding author's contact information:**

WIPA National Training Center  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Email: mdwest@vcu.edu

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# Table of Contents

Acronyms .....	v
Abstract .....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Employment Services and Supports Through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.....	3
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program.....	3
Special Employer Incentive Program.....	5
Center for Veterans Enterprise .....	6
Veterans Retraining Assistance Program .....	7
Assessment of VA Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	7
Employment Services and Supports Through the U.S. Department of Defense .....	10
DoDVets .....	10
Army Wounded Warrior .....	10
Air Force Wounded Warrior .....	11
Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment .....	12
NAVSEA Wounded Warrior Project .....	13
Operation Warfighter .....	14
Assessment of DoD Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	14
Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the U.S. Department of Labor.....	16
Veterans Workforce Investment Program.....	16
American Job Centers .....	17
Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program.....	18
Local Veterans' Employment Representatives .....	18
Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program .....	19
Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program.....	20
CareerOneStop .....	21
America's Heroes at Work.....	22
ReaLifelines.....	22

Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act.....	23
My Next Move for Veterans .....	24
Assessment of DOL Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	24
Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the Rehabilitation Services Administration .....	26
Vocational Rehabilitation.....	26
Assessment of RSA Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	26
Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the Small Business Administration .	28
Small Business Administration District Offices .....	28
Small Business Development Centers.....	29
Office of Veterans Business Development .....	30
Veterans Business Outreach Centers.....	30
Assessment of SBA Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	31
Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the Social Security Administration .	32
Social Security Work Incentives .....	32
Ticket to Work.....	33
Assessment of Social Security Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	33
Other Cross-Agency Employment Services and Supports for Veterans .....	35
VetSuccess.....	35
American Job Center .....	36
National Resource Directory .....	36
Wounded Warrior Tax Credit.....	37
Assessment of Other Cross-Agency Services and Supports for Veterans .....	38
Conclusions.....	39
References.....	41

## Acronyms

VOW	Veterans Opportunity to Work
DoD	Department of Defense
DOL	Department of Labor
VR&E	Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment
SEI	Special Employer Initiative
VRAP	Veterans Retraining Assistance Program
SDVOSB	Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses
VA	Veterans Affairs
OFT	On-the-job training
CWT	Compensated Work Therapy
IT	Incentive Therapy
SW	Sheltered Workshop
TW	Transitional Work
SE	Supported Employment
TR	Transitional Residence
CVE	Center for Veterans Enterprise
OSDVU	Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business utilization
VOSB	Veteran-Owned Small Business
GAO	U.S. General Accounting Office
OIG	VA's Office of the Inspector General
RCT	Randomized Control Trial
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SCI	Spinal Cord Injuries
TAU	(Treatment as Usual)
AW2	Army Wounded Warrior Project
AFW2	Air Force Wounded Warrior Project
WWR	Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment
OWF	Operation Warfighter
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
WIA	Workforce Investment Act
DPN	Disability Program Navigator
DVOP	Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program
VETS	Veterans Employment and Training Services
LVERs	Local Veterans' employment Representatives
HVRP	Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program
HUD	Housing and Urban Development
VWIP	Veterans Workforce Investment Program
IVTP	Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program
AH@W	America's Heroes at Work
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
CAP	Corrective Action Plan
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
SBA	Small Business Administration

SCORE	Service Corps of Retired Executives
CDC	Certified Development Company
OSBDC	Office of Small Business Development Centers
OVBD	Office of Veterans Business Development
VBOCs	Veterans Business Outreach Centers
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SGA	Substantial Gainful Activity
TWWIA	Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act
BPAO	Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach
WIPA	Work Incentives, Planning and Assistance
TTW	Ticket to work
EN	Employment Network
VETS	Veterans Employment and Training Service
NRD	National Resource Directory
MOC	Military Occupation Code
MOC/MOS	Military Occupation Code or Specialty Code
WWTC	Wounded Warrior Tax Credit
WOTC	Work Opportunities Tax Credit

## Abstract

The number of military personnel incurring disability in current military conflicts is the highest in over three decades. Since 2001, over 1.6 million service members, Reservists, and National Guard have been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern nations. As noted by Lew et al. (2007), advances in medical innovations and body armor have enabled 90 percent of soldiers to survive injuries that would have likely been fatal in previous wars, but many service personnel survive with serious physical and psychological disabilities.

The federal government has recently responded to the growing number of service members with disabilities in several ways. President Obama has signed executive orders to improve federal government hiring of veterans and to require federal agencies to contract with veteran owned agencies. The 2011 American Jobs Act added tax credits to employers hiring veterans with service connected disabilities. That same year, the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act was passed and signed into law. The VOW Act provides additional tax credit and training funds for unemployed veterans to prepare them for employment.

Many federal agencies will be involved in the implementation of these initiatives. Employment services and supports for veterans with disabilities are primarily provided by the VA, but the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Labor (DOL) also operate programs specifically targeting veterans with disabilities. Veterans also access other employment service programs that target all individuals with disabilities or persons in need of specialized support to obtain employment.

This report provides an overview of federally-funded employment services and supports that can be accessed by veterans with disabilities, including those designed to meet the needs of the disabled veteran population specifically, the veteran population in general, and the disability population in general. The purpose is to present a comprehensive cataloging and review of all employment resources that veterans with disabilities can access in pursuit of wage and self-employment.

Employment services and support programs are identified in seven major areas: Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Defense; Department of Labor; Rehabilitation Services Administration; Small Business Administration; Social Security Administration; and Cross-Agency initiatives. In each instance, we provide an overview of each program, describe the eligibility criteria, and identify the types of services provided. We then discuss available information related to program participation and performance, as well as the results of any evaluations of each program.

The review identified 27 programs across eight agencies. The programs varied widely in terms of purpose, eligibility criteria and intensity of services. Consistent with previous findings, the programs that we reviewed lacked detailed information on program participation and treatment effectiveness. As a result, we found that many agencies lacked the evaluation information necessary to modify and improve program performance.

The review also identified a number of promising programs. Rigorous evaluations of supported employment programs operated by the Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) supported employment programs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and spinal cord injury (SCI) have documented the effectiveness of this service. These studies have identified a highly replicable evidence-based model that can be expanded throughout the VR&E service network.

Employment services for veterans with disabilities are hindered by a lack of basic information on program participation, performance outcomes, and veterans' satisfaction. In general, the review found that many of the federal programs have little or no readily available data regarding the numbers of veterans with disabilities served or their employment outcomes. Lack of sufficient data does not allow rigorous evaluations of program effectiveness. Finally, multiple reports have documented a lack of coordination within and between federal agencies related to existing veterans employment services. Poor coordination has led to duplicated efforts, confusion on the part of those in need of assistance, and poor outcomes.

## Introduction

The number of military personnel incurring disability in current military conflicts is the highest in over three decades. Since 2001, over 1.6 million service members, Reservists, and National Guard have been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern nations. As noted by Lew et al. (2007), advances in medical innovations and body armor have enabled 90 percent of soldiers to survive injuries that would have likely been fatal in previous wars, but many service personnel survive with serious physical, psychological, and emotional disabilities.

The federal government has recently responded to the growing number of service members with disabilities in several ways. On November 9, 2009, President Obama signed Executive Order 13518, Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government, establishing the Veterans Employment Initiative. The Initiative outlines a comprehensive approach to improving employment opportunities for veterans by the Federal Executive Branch and established targets for hiring veterans, including those with disabilities. In the first full year of the Initiative, the Executive Branch hired the highest percent of veterans in 20 years (28.3%). In addition, 7.7 percent of new hires that year were veterans with disabilities (U.S. Office of Personnel and Management, 2013).

In September 2011, President Obama established specific measures in the American Jobs Act relevant to veterans, granting tax credits of up to \$5,600 to firms that hire unemployed veterans. The plan also includes a Wounded Warriors Tax Credit, which provides a separate tax credit of up to \$9,600 for businesses that hire veterans with service-related disabilities who have been unemployed for a minimum of six months.

That same year, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act was passed and signed into law. The aim of this legislation is to provide seamless transition to civilian life for service members, expand education and training opportunities for veterans, and provide tax credits for employers who hire veterans with service-connected disabilities (the Special Employer Initiative, or SEI). It also created a new program, the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) that provides up to 12 months of vocational retraining assistance to veterans.

These initiatives add to a large and growing number of federal programs that assist veterans, including those with disabilities, to become reemployed following discharge, either through education, training, hiring incentives, self-employment, online resources, and direct hiring at the federal level. The array of options that are available to them can be daunting and confusing to the veteran.

In June, 2013, President Obama also signed Executive Order 13360, which requires heads of federal agencies to provide opportunities for Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) increase their share of federal contracts and subcontracts. The statutorily mandated

prime and subcontracting goal for SDVOSB participation government wide is not less than 3 percent of all federal contract dollars each fiscal year. In addition, VA established an agency-specific goal for SDVOSB participation of 7 percent.

Many federal agencies will be involved in the implementation of these initiatives. Employment services and supports for veterans with disabilities are primarily provided by the VA, but the DoD and DOL also operate programs specifically targeting veterans with disabilities. Veterans also access other employment service programs that target all individuals with disabilities or persons in need specialized support to obtain employment.

In this report, we provide an overview of federally-funded employment services and supports that can be accessed by veterans with disabilities. We have included those that were designed to meet the needs of (a) the disabled veteran population specifically, (b) the veteran population in general, (c) the disability population in general, and (d) any job-seeker regardless of veteran or disability status. In this way, we endeavored to conduct a comprehensive cataloging and review of all employment resources of which veterans with disabilities could access in pursuit of employment. We have also included those resources that are designed to lead to self-employment as well as wage employment.

# **Employment Services and Supports Through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

## **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program**

### *Overview*

In addition to monetary and health benefits, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) also offers a variety of vocational services to veterans who experience disability. The VR&E Program assists veterans who have service-connected disabilities to obtain and maintain suitable training and/or employment. This program is also referred to as the Chapter 31 program since it was authorized by Congress under Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 31.

The program developed service plans for 28,000 veterans in FY 2011 (Collins, 2012). FY 2012 cost estimates included \$516 million for service cost, \$433 million for subsistence allowances, and \$204 million for administrative costs. In 2012, the program served approximately 120,000 individuals at a cost of over \$900,000 (GAO 2013a).

### *Eligibility*

The VR&E program is not available to every veteran with a disability, but only to certain individuals who meet very specific eligibility criteria. Active duty service members are eligible if they:

- Expect to receive an honorable discharge upon separation from active duty,
- Obtain disability rating of 20 percent or more from the VA, and
- Apply for VR&E VetSuccess services (described further in this report).

Veterans are eligible if they:

- Have received, or will receive, a discharge that is other than dishonorable;
- Have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10 percent, or a memorandum rating of 20 percent or more from the VA; and
- Apply for VR&E services.

VR&E uses the term “unemployable” in reference to veterans awarded 100 percent disability compensation. However, veterans rated as 100 percent disabled may receive VR&E employment services under the Special Program for Unemployable Veterans. The VA continues to pay 100 percent disability compensation until the veteran has worked continuously for at least 12 months.

VR&E services are only available to eligible individuals for a certain period of time referred to as the basic period of eligibility. The basic period of eligibility in which VR&E services may be used is 12 years from the date of separation from active military service, or the date the veteran

was first notified by VA of a service-connected disability rating. The basic period of eligibility may be extended if a veteran is determined to have a serious employment "handicap."

### *Description of employment services and supports*

Depending on their individual circumstances, veterans will work with their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to select one of the following five tracks of services:

1. **Reemployment with Previous Employer:** This option is designed for those individuals who wish to return to work with a former employer. Services under this option may include advice about reemployment rights, consultation with the employer, work adjustment services, job accommodations, job modifications, short-term training, licensure and certifications.
2. **Rapid Access to Employment:** This option is designed for those veterans who already possess most of the necessary skills to compete for suitable employment opportunities and wish to obtain employment as soon as possible. Services under this option may include short-term training, licensure, certifications, job readiness preparation, resume development, job search assistance, job accommodations, and post-employment follow up.
3. **Self-Employment:** This option is designed for individuals who have limited access to traditional employment, need flexible work schedules, or need a more accommodating work environment due to their disabling conditions or other life circumstances. Services under this option may include analysis of the viability of a business concept, development of a business plan, training in the operation of a small business, marketing and financial assistance, and guidance on obtaining adequate resources to implement the plan.
4. **Employment through Long Term Services:** This option is designed for those individuals who need specialized training and/or education to obtain and maintain suitable employment. Services under this option may include on-the-job training (OJT), apprenticeships, post-secondary education such as college, vocational or technical school, internships, job shadowing, work monitoring, work study, and public-private job partnering.
5. **Independent Living Services:** This option is designed for individuals whose disabilities are so severe that they are currently unable to pursue an employment goal. These individuals may need rehabilitation services to live more independently and to increase their potential to return to work. Services under this option may include independent living skills training, assistive technology, services at special rehabilitation facilities, and connection to community-based support services.

One of the main means of achieving these outcomes is the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program. CWT endeavors to match and support work ready veterans in competitive jobs, and consult with business and industry regarding their specific employment needs. In some locations CWT is also known as Veterans Industries. CWT is administered by the Veteran's Health Administration rather than the Veterans Benefits Administration and services are typically delivered out of VA medical centers. CWT consists of five different programs as described below:

1. **Incentive Therapy (IT)** is a pre-employment program that provides a diversified work experience in the VA medical center for veterans who exhibit severe mental illness and/or physical impairments. IT services are provided at approximately 95 VA medical center locations. IT can extend for an indefinite period of time, as clinically appropriate, and may consist of full- or part-time work at nominal tax-exempt remuneration. Each participant in the IT program has an individual treatment or service plan, case manager and treatment team to monitor services.
2. **Sheltered Workshop (SW)** programs are operated in approximately 35 of CWT locations. SW provides an opportunity for work hardening and assessment in a simulated work environment. Work in SW is paid on a piece rate basis and is tax-exempt. The average length of stay is generally four to six months based on the veteran's Individual Treatment Team and Service Plan.
3. **Transitional Work (TW)** is a pre-employment vocational assessment program that operates in the VA medical center and local community businesses. TW participants are screened by vocational rehabilitation staff, assessed and matched to a work assignment for a limited time as deemed clinically appropriate. TW work assignments are supervised by work site staff, and impose the same job expectations as are experienced by non-CWT workers in the organization or company. By federal law and regulation, there is no employer-employee relationship between the VA CWT program and participating veterans, businesses, or organizations.
4. **Supported Employment (SE)** consists of competitive employment with therapeutic supports integrated into treatment. The focus of SE is to assist veterans with serious mental illness or catastrophic disabilities to gain access to meaningful competitive employment. When there is a co-occurring mental health diagnosis, limited SE services may be available on a case-by-case basis to veterans with spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury. Veterans perceived to have significant barriers to competitive work are able to engage in full and part-time employment with appropriate supports and workplace accommodation. SE follow-up may continue indefinitely, but generally participation and supports are phased out after the veteran is able to maintain employment independently.
5. **Transitional Residence (TR)** is a work-based Psychosocial Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program offering a therapeutic residential setting for veterans involved in CWT. The TR program provides a rehabilitation-focused residential setting for veterans recovering from chronic mental illness, chemical dependency and homelessness. TR provides a bridge between hospitalization or intensive outpatient treatment and successful community reintegration.



## Special Employer Incentive Program

### ***Overview***

The Special Employer Incentive (SEI) program was authorized under the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. The aim of the program is to provide eligible veterans with disabilities with practical, hands-on training and experience in participating businesses through modifications to the Work Opportunity Tax Credits for employers. The program attempts to offset the additional costs incurred by employers during the initial training phase of employment, the reduced productivity during the early stage of employment, and any accommodations or supports provided to assist the employee. It is anticipated that the veteran's employment will continue after an initial six month period of support.

### ***Eligibility***

SEI is limited to veterans who are participating in the VR&E program, and therefore meet the VR&E eligibility criteria described previously.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

Employers who hire eligible veterans receive a number of financial incentives, including reimbursement for 50 percent of the veteran's salary for up to six months, and reimbursement for tools, equipment, uniforms, and accommodations. Employers also receive support during training and follow-up. Veterans benefit from the increased likelihood of obtaining and maintaining employment due to the employer incentives, and immediate income and employee benefits.



## **Center for Veterans Enterprise**

### ***Overview***

The Center for Veterans Enterprise (CVE, VetBiz.gov) is administered by the VA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDVU). CVE assists with verification of a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) or Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) in order to be eligible to compete for federal contracts.

### ***Eligibility***

Veterans who served in active duty and were discharged with other than dishonorable status are eligible for services. Both disabled and non-veterans with disabilities can access the VetBiz.gov website.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

Services for veteran business owners include the following:

- Providing information about verification as a VOSB or SDVOSB;
- Providing assistance in obtaining initial and renewal verifications;
- Investigating and seeking prosecution of fraudulent VOSBs and SDVOSBs;
- Directing veterans to resources for starting and growing a business; and
- Assisting public and private purchasers in locating VOSBs and SDVOSBs.



## **Veterans Retraining Assistance Program**

### *Overview*

The Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) was created in 2011 by the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. VRAP offers up to 12 months of training assistance to unemployed veterans. The program was limited to 45,000 veterans from July 1, 2012, through September 30, 2012, and is limited to 54,000 participants from October 1, 2012, through March 31, 2014.

### *Eligibility*

Veterans must meet the following eligibility criteria to be eligible for VRAP assistance:

- Are at least 35 but no more than 60 years old;
- Are unemployed on the date of application;
- Received an other than dishonorable discharge;
- Are not eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g., the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, VR&E services);
- Are not in receipt of VA compensation due to "Individual Unemployability;" and
- Are not enrolled in a federal or state job training program.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The sole purpose of VRAP is to provide eligible veterans with training to facilitate re-entry into the civilian labor market. Participants must be enrolled full-time in a VA-approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an Associate Degree, non-college degree, or a professional certificate, and train the Veteran for a high demand occupation. In contrast to the G.I. bill, in which payments are made directly to the educational program, the VRAP makes payments directly to the veteran. Support is available for a period of one year.

## **Assessment of VA Employment Services and Supports for Veterans**

A recent report from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO, 2013a) found that timely processing of disability claims is a continuing challenge for the VA. The report indicates that this

is in some part due to increased numbers of claims being filed, but also due to internal issues with the design and implementation of the program. Sufficient information is not available to determine whether the delays in disability determination also postpones entry into VR&E or causes veterans with disabilities to attempt to access employment assistance through other means, such as the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation system.

A second issue with VR&E services is a lack of positive employment outcomes for service-veterans with disabilities. A 2004 VR&E Task Force Report stated, “VR&E’s best efforts regarding employment of veterans have resulted in only 10 percent of those participating in the VR&E program obtaining employment,” and further stated, “Despite the tens of thousands of VR&E program participants in a given year, the number of veterans rehabilitated by obtaining a job or achieving IL goals has averaged only about 10,000 a year for several years” (VA VR&E Task Force, 2004). A GAO report (2005) the following year found that the VA had not prioritized returning veterans with service-connected disabilities to the workforce, instead emphasizing education over employment.

In 2007, the VA’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of VR&E service outcomes. Prior to that audit, the VR&E had reported a successful rehabilitation rate of 73 percent. The audit found that VR&E had not included in their success rate calculation those veterans who had dropped out of the program prior to services or those veterans who failed to complete their rehabilitation program, which constituted the majority of VR&E participants. The OIG included those veterans and calculated a success rate of 18 percent. A survey of over 10,000 former VR&E participants conducted by Abt Associates (2008) found that the primary reasons for not completing their rehabilitation program were personal or medical reasons, dissatisfaction with their program or counselor, and having located a job. When asked what VR&E could have done to keep them in their program, veterans more frequently reported better communication, more accommodation for individual needs, and better financial assistance.

The Congressional Research Service (Collins, 2012) analyzed available VR&E data and found that rehabilitation rates averaged approximately 15-20 percent from FY 08 - FY 11. The program defines a successful rehabilitation as veterans who have completed the components of their individual service plan and obtained employment or completed an independent living program. Of 9,862 veterans rehabilitated through the program in FY 2011, 75 percent were placed into employment, with 25 percent completing an independent living program. Of those placed into employment, 76 percent were in professional, technical, or managerial occupations.

With regard to the CVE, GAO studies over the past few years have found that some businesses have been fraudulently registered and verified as VOSBs and SDVOSBs. Most recently, the GAO reported that the VA has improved the verification operations and addressed program weaknesses, but continues to face challenges in establishing a stable and efficient program to verify firms on a timely and consistent basis (GAO, 2013b). For example, in 2011 the verification process averaged over 130 days; in 2012, it had been reduced to an average of 85 days. In addition, while fraudulent VOSB and SDVOSB applications continue to be received and verified, the rate of false verification is being progressively reduced (GAO, 2012).

As of March 1, 2013, over 103,000 applications had been submitted for VRAP and over 86,000 had been approved. Thus, the program is rapidly reaching its legislated threshold. No information was found regarding program completion or subsequent employment rates.

Rigorous evaluation data is available on the VR&E supported employment program, one of the five types of CWT. Davis et al. (2012) conducted a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of supported employment with a group of veterans with PTSD. They found that veterans in the treatment group that received supported employment services was 2.7 times more likely to obtain employment. The authors concluded that the intensive, structured services provided through the supported employment approach effectively met the support needs of the veterans with significant PTSD.

Ottomanelli and her colleagues (2012) conducted a large, multi-site RCT that compared supported employment (SE) outcomes for veterans with SCI with those served by a treatment usual intervention sites (TAU-IS) and observational sites (TAU-OS). Results revealed that while overall employment rates were relatively low, veterans in the SE group were significantly more likely to be employed than those in the TAU groups (25.9% SE, 10.5% TAU-IS, 2.3% TAU-OS). Subjects in the SE group averaged significantly less per week in earnings than subjects in the TAU-IS group (\$233.9 vs. \$267.3) but significantly more than those in the TAU-OS group (\$233.9 vs. \$150.0). Veterans in the SE group worked significantly more hours per week (22.0) than those in the TAU-IS group (17.0), but not those in the TAU-OS group (16.0). The authors concluded that future research should focus on factors such the integration of supported employment services within the medical rehabilitation setting and examine the timing of service delivery for maximum effectiveness.

# **Employment Services and Supports Through the U.S. Department of Defense**

## **DoDVets**

### ***Overview***

DoDVets (<http://godefense.cpms.osd.mil/veterans/>) is administered by the U.S. Department of Defense and provides a gateway for veterans (including those with disabilities) to link with employment services, resources, and support.

### ***Eligibility***

Any veteran is eligible to access DoDVets services.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

The DoDVets website provides links to federal resources related to employment following service, such as the Feds Hire Vets, Heroes at Work, and Operation Warfighter. Career counseling is also provided via live chat.



## **Army Wounded Warrior**

### ***Overview***

The Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2) is the official U.S. Army program that assists severely wounded, ill and injured soldiers, veterans, and their families, wherever they are located, regardless of military status. Soldiers who qualify for AW2 are assigned to the program as soon as possible after arriving at the Warrior Transition Unit (WTU). AW2 supports soldiers and their families throughout their recovery and transition.

### ***Eligibility***

In order to be eligible for AW2, soldiers must suffer from wounds, illness, or injuries incurred in the line of duty after September 10, 2001 and meet one or more of the following conditions:

- Receive or expect to receive at least a 30% rating from the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) for one of the conditions listed below:
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  - Severe traumatic brain injury (TBI)

- Severe loss of vision/blindness
  - Severe hearing loss/deafness
  - Fatal / incurable disease with limited life expectancy
  - Loss of limb
  - Spinal cord injury
  - Permanent disfigurement
  - Severe burns
  - Severe paralysis
- Receive a 30% rating or greater for one Veterans Affairs Scheduled Rating Decision (VASRD) as rated by the Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) in any other Special Category (SPECAT)/ Enabling Care (EC) or combat/combat-related condition; **OR**
  - Receive a combined 50% IDES rating for any other combat/combat-related condition.

***Description of employment services and supports***

Upon enrollment in AW2, each soldier is assigned an AW2 Advocate, who helps the Soldier get through the Wounded Warrior Lifecycle, fostering the Soldier's independence. AW2 Advocates are located at military treatment facilities, primarily Army installations and VA facilities, and provides personalized local support on a wide range of issues and resources including:

- Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board guidance;
- Benefit information;
- Continuation on Active Duty (COAD)/Continuation on Active Reserve (COAR) support;
- Career guidance and education opportunities;
- Coordination with government agencies, such as the VA and DOL; and
- Information on local resources for employment and independence.



**Air Force Wounded Warrior**

***Overview***

The Air Force Wounded Warrior (AFW2) program assists injured or ill Air Force service members to remain in active duty if feasible, and if not, transition to civilian life and careers.

***Eligibility***

An eligible Airman is one who has a combat/hostile-related injury or illness requiring long-term care that may require a Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board to determine

fitness for duty. This includes: A combat/hostile-related injury resulting from hazardous service or performance of duty under conditions simulating war or through an instrumentality of war. The Air Force has no minimum disability rating requirement for the AFW2 program.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

The AFW2 website serves as a portal for information targeted to injured soldiers, and Air Force members in particular. The AFW2 program coordinates with the Air Force Survivor Assistance Program and Airman & Family Readiness Centers (A&FRC) to ensure Airmen receive professional support and care from the point of injury, through separation or retirement, for life. The services provided include:

- Advocating for services on Airman's behalf;
- Coordinating with the closest A&FRC to ensure wounded warriors receive face-to-face, personalized services;
- Providing professional services such as transition assistance, employment assistance, moving assistance, financial counseling, information and referral, and emergency financial assistance;
- Assisting in integrating Airmen and their families back into their local communities;
- Connecting Airmen and their families with the Joint Family Support Program in each state; and
- Coordinating benefits counseling and services provided by the DoD, VA DOL, and other helping agencies.



## **Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment**

### ***Overview***

The Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR) provides and facilitates non-medical assistance to wounded, ill, and injured Marines, sailors attached to or in support of Marines units, and their family members throughout all phases of recovery.

### ***Eligibility***

The most seriously wounded, ill, or injured Marines are joined to WWR if their medical conditions will require treatment in excess of 90 days. Requests for assignment to a WWR element can be initiated by the parent command, medical officer, medical case manager, WWR Detachment Officer-in-Charge, or the WWR Operations section. Requests must include:

- An endorsement from the Marine's parent command
- A recommendation from the Unit Medical Officer/Primary Care Provider
- Medical Case Manager Comments

Any active duty, Reserve, retired, or veteran Marines is eligible, regardless of whether a Marine is wounded on the battlefield or during training, injured in an accident, or suffering from an illness.

***Description of employment services and supports***

The WWR provides comprehensive care from the point of injury or illness to return to duty or community reintegration. Care and assets include, but are not limited to:

- Recovery Care Coordinators who work with the Marine to develop a Comprehensive Recovery Plan, identify needs and goals, provide benefits information, and perform other functions to facilitate recovery;
- District Injured Support Coordinators who assist the Marine to transition from active duty to veteran status;
- Processing Traumatic Service members' Group Life Insurance claims and Special Compensation for Assistance With Daily Living claims;
- Providing legal assistance in the disability evaluation process;
- Assisting with health maintenance through the Warrior Athlete Reconditioning Program; and
- Reserve-specific assistance, through WWR's Reserve Medical Entitlements Determination Section.



**NAVSEA Wounded Warrior Project**

***Overview***

The Naval Sea System Command (NAVSEA) operates a Wounded Warrior (WW) program for wounded, injured and ill members of the U.S. Navy.

***Eligibility***

Any Service member of the U.S. Navy who is seriously wounded, injured, or ill is eligible.

***Description of employment services and supports***

The NAVSEA WW provides services and supports similar to those of WWR, AW2 and AFW2, including advocacy, transition support, and information and referral, and other needed services.



## **Operation Warfighter**

### ***Overview***

Operation Warfighter (OWF) provides internship opportunities in federal agencies for wounded, injured, or ill Service members to augment their employment readiness. These internships help to build the interns' resumes, explore their employment interests, obtain on-the-job training, and gaining valuable federal government work experience. OWF programs are located on military bases across the U.S., with four sites having a dedicated OWF Coordinator. The length of an internship is approximately 20 hours per week for three to five months, and service members receive military salaries for the duration of the internship.

### ***Eligibility***

Eligible participants include recovering active-duty service members and National Guard and Reservists currently in a medical hold status.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

The following process is used to develop federal internships for veterans:

1. Service member obtains medical and command approval from his or her recovery team and chain of command, certifying that they are ready and able to participate in OWF.
2. An OWF Coordinator assists in identifying an internship opportunity based on the service member's interests and capabilities.
3. Once a placement is agreed on, the Operation OWF works with the recovering service member and the employer to obtain security clearances, workplace accommodations and transportation assistance, if needed.
4. The OWF, along with the service member's recovery team, stays in contact with the recovering service member and the employer throughout the placement to collect monthly feedback and ensure that there is no negative medical impact to the service member.

## **Assessment of DoD Employment Services and Supports for Veterans**

While no information was located related to use of DoDVets, performance data are available for some of the DoD Wounded Warrior projects. In 2011, the Air Force commissioned the RAND Corporation to conduct a survey of AFW2 current and past participants. Of the 872 enrolled Airmen, 459 responded (52.6%). Approximately 80% of respondents self-reported having either a major depressive disorder (MDD) or PTSD. While the respondents were generally satisfied with AFW2 services they had received, approximately 40% reported that they had experienced unmet mental health needs in the prior year. Key findings from this survey are available at [www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-131009-068.pdf](http://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-131009-068.pdf)

In April 2014, AW2 celebrated ten years of service to Army service members. Information obtained from the AW2 website indicates that AW2 and its component programs had served over 24,000 soldiers and veterans. Only anecdotal evidence of success was located for AW2, WWR, and NAVSEA WW.

According to a fact sheet from Military One Source ([www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil)), as of November 2013 OWF has placed more than 2,000 service members in internships with more than 105 different federal agencies and sub-components. However, only about 15% of participants have transitioned into federal positions. Internships are available in a wide range of areas, including human resources, security, operations and administration.

# **Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the U.S. Department of Labor**

## **Veterans Workforce Investment Program**

### *Overview*

The Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) is administered by the DOL Veterans Employment and Training (VETS) and provides a range of employment and reintegration assistance for veterans. VWIP projects are grant-funded annually and may be operated by non-profit organizations, city or county agencies (including Workforce Investment Boards), and other organizations.

### *Eligibility*

Veterans (both disabled and non-disabled) who served in active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized, and have a discharge status other than dishonorable are eligible for VWIP services.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

VWIP projects emphasize assisting veterans to complete industry-recognized training programs, receive occupational credentials and certifications, and improve their overall competitiveness in the workforce. They also emphasize collaboration with other employment resources, such as American Job Centers, veteran employment specialists, veteran service organizations, and so forth.

Specific services and supports that VWIPs provide include the following:

- Outreach and project awareness activities;
- Intake and assessment;
- Case management;
- Mentoring;
- Training activities;
- Job development, placement, and retention services; and
- Creation of community linkages.



## **American Job Centers**

### ***Overview***

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) established several programs and services that are administered through American Job Centers (AJCs, formerly known as One-Stop Career Centers). These include adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs, Wagner-Peyser employment services, veterans' services, as well as vocational adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs. AJCs, are funded and administered by the DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA). These centers are designed to provide a full range of assistance to job-seekers in a single setting.

### ***Eligibility***

American Job Centers are available to any citizen age 16 or older who is seeking employment, including transitioning service members, veterans, veterans with disabilities, and service-connected veterans with disabilities. AJCs are required to provide veterans priority of service before customers who are not veterans. ETA and VETS jointly issued Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 10-09 to the workforce system in November 2009 that set forth guidance on "Implementing Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in all Qualified Job Training Programs Funded in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)."

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

American Job Centers offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services. Customers can visit a center in person or connect to the center's information through a PC or kiosk remote access. Information is also provided to the consumer regarding the local labor market, high growth job sectors in the local economy, and assistance with skill transferability from military experience to civilian employment. ETA has also provided grant funds, training, technical assistance, and taken numerous other actions to improve physical, programmatic, and communication access for individuals with disabilities in the public workforce system since the implementation of the WIA in 1998. ETA also hosts Workforce3One (or soon to be WorkforceGPS) with a Disability and Employment Community of Practice ([www.disability.workforce3one.org](http://www.disability.workforce3one.org)) that includes extensive information and resources which are pertinent to the employment and workforce engagement of disabled veterans. There have been numerous other initiatives addressing veterans, including disabled veterans, employment and workforce needs that have underway for the last several years and involved extensive coordination and collaboration between ETA, VETS, DOL's Office of Disability and Employment Policy, the VA, and DOD.



## **Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program**

### ***Overview***

The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) is administered by the DOL VETS. DVOPs provide direct services to veterans enabling them to be competitive in the labor market. The DOL provides grant funds to each state's employment service to maintain DVOP specialist positions in the state. There are currently about 1,400 DVOP specialists nationally. DVOP specialists are most often located in AJCs. About one-quarter are stationed full- or part-time in locations other than employment service offices, such as veterans' outreach centers of the VA, state or county veterans' service offices, community-based organizations, and military installations.

### ***Eligibility***

In order to be eligible for DVOP services, a veteran must have served in active duty, have a discharge status other than dishonorable, and be eligible to receive compensation from the VA based on disability rating, or be eligible but for the receipt of military retirement pay. Emphasis is placed on serving those with service-connected disabilities. A spouse of a veteran may also be eligible for services under certain circumstances, such as if the spouse has a service-connected disability or died as a result of a service-connected disability.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

DVOP specialists develop employment and training opportunities for veterans, with special emphasis on veterans with service-connected disabilities. DVOP specialists provide direct services to veterans enabling them to be competitive in the labor market. They provide outreach and offer assistance to disabled and other veterans by promoting community and employer support for employment and training opportunities, including apprenticeship and on-the-job training available through WIA. DVOP specialists also serve as case managers for veterans enrolled in federally-funded job training programs and other veterans with serious disadvantages in the job market. DVOP specialists are available to those veterans and their employers to help ensure that necessary follow up services are provided to promote job retention.



## **Local Veterans' Employment Representatives**

### ***Overview***

As with DVOP specialists, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) are typically located in AJCs and provide assistance to veterans seeking employment. LVERS conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans, and generally assist veterans to gain and retain employment. LVER staff conduct seminars for employers and job search workshops for veterans

seeking employment, and facilitate priority of service in regard to employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans by the employment service delivery system.

***Eligibility***

Veterans must have served in active duty for and have a discharge status other than dishonorable to be eligible for LVER services. All veterans are able to access LVER services, regardless of disability status.

***Description of employment services and supports***

LVERs are responsible for monitoring and facilitating the provision of all services to veterans furnished by employment service agencies, including:

- Counseling, testing, and identifying training and employment opportunities;
- Monitoring job listings from federal contractors to see that eligible veterans get priority in referrals to these jobs;
- Monitoring federal department and agency vacancies listed at local state employment service offices and preliminary processing of complaints from veterans about the observance of veterans' preference by federal employers;
- Promoting and monitoring the participation of veterans in federally-funded employment and training programs;
- Cooperating with the Department of Veterans' Affairs to identify and aid veterans who need work-specific prosthetic devices, sensory aids or other special equipment to improve their employability; and
- Contacting community leaders, employers, unions, training programs and veterans' service organizations to be sure eligible veterans get the services to which they are entitled.



**Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program**

***Overview***

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) is administered by VETS and provides a range of employment and reintegration assistance for homeless veterans. HVRP projects are grant-funded annually and may be operated by non-profit organizations, city or county agencies (including Workforce Investment Boards), hospitals, and other organizations. VETS funds projects in both Urban and Non-Urban categories, and also funds HVR projects specifically serving the needs of homeless female veterans.

## ***Eligibility***

Veterans who served in active duty days and have a discharge status other than dishonorable are eligible for HVRP services. Veterans with and without disabilities can access HVRP services. However, similar to the homeless population in general, a large proportion of homeless veterans will have disabilities or other serious employment challenges such as substance abuse, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). For example, among homeless veterans served by HUD/VA Supported Housing programs, 60.2 percent have substance abuse disorders, 42.2 percent have a serious psychiatric diagnosis, and 26.7 percent will have a dual substance abuse/psychiatric diagnosis (Perl, 2013).

Veterans must also be homeless at the time of enrollment; veterans who are risk of becoming homeless are not eligible. “Homeless” is defined as:

- Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;
- Living in supervised public or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living arrangements;
- Residing in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided; and
- Having a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

## ***Description of employment services and supports***

Each HVRP is unique in its service design and practices; however, common program elements include job placement and retention services, job training, counseling, mentoring, supportive services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment, supportive housing, and other forms of assistance to facilitate the reintegration of homeless veterans into the labor force.



## **Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program**

### ***Overview***

Also administered by VETS, the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP) provides supportive services to eligible incarcerated veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless following release. The intent of the program is to provide direct services through a case management approach that leverages federal, state and local resources. Incarcerated veterans are connected with appropriate employment and life skills support as they transition from correctional facilities into the community. As with HVRP and VWIP, projects are grant-funded annually.

### ***Eligibility***

To be eligible for enrollment as a participant by an IVTP project, an individual must have been recently incarcerated and/or must be transitioning from an institution incarceration and a veteran. “Incarcerated” includes those who are within 18 months of release from a correctional institute and those who have been released within the prior six months. “Veteran” is defined as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

IVTP projects provide comprehensive services for targeted veterans with a focus on employment. Some of the services offered include:

- Job search assistance
- Career counseling
- Classroom training
- Life Skills support services
- Job placement and follow-up activities



## **CareerOneStop**

### ***Overview***

CareerOneStop ([www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)) is a website administered by ETA. The Veterans ReEmployment page ([www.careeronestop.org/ReEmployment/veterans/default.aspx](http://www.careeronestop.org/ReEmployment/veterans/default.aspx)) is designed to assist veterans to transition from military to civilian employment. Although open to all veterans, the site has links to resources for disabled and female veterans, and is available in English and Spanish.

### ***Eligibility***

Any veteran can access the CareerOneStop Veterans ReEmployment website.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

For veterans, CareerOneStop offers the following online informational services:

- Matching military job skills to civilian careers;
- Accessing additional education or training;
- Locating assistance with transitioning from military to civilian life;
- Health care, unemployment, housing, and other benefits;
- Helping employer locate job-seekers who are veterans; and
- Listing open positions by locality.



## **America's Heroes at Work**

### *Overview*

America's Heroes at Work (AH@W; [www.americasheroesatwork.gov](http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov)) is a web portal designed to educate employers and workforce development systems and encourage training and hiring of veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

### *Eligibility*

Because it is designed for employers and the workforce development system, there are no eligibility requirements for veteran participation.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The AH@W website links to information and tools to help returning service members and veterans living with TBI and/or PTSD succeed in the workplace - particularly service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Specific sections of the website provide the following:

- Common employer questions regarding TBI and PTSD;
- Fact sheets and reference guides;
- Presentations and training tools;
- Links to other resources related to veterans with disabilities; and
- A Veterans Hiring Toolkit

## **ReaLifelines**

### *Overview*

Operated by VETS, ReaLifelines is an online resource directory for veterans (located at [www.dol.gov/elaws/vets/realifelines/menu.htm](http://www.dol.gov/elaws/vets/realifelines/menu.htm)). It provides information and access to contact information for local resources to assist transitioning service members.

### *Eligibility*

Any veteran may access the ReaLifelines website and resources.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The heart of the ReaLifelines website is the Employment and Career Transition Advisor. Areas of the Adviser menu include:

- Finding a new job;
- Returning to my pre-service employer;
- Working for the federal government;
- Job accommodations to perform my job;
- Benefits and other support services; and
- Assistance for family members.

## **Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act**

### *Overview*

The Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) is administered by DOL's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). VEVRAA requires covered federal government contractors and subcontractors to take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment specified categories of veterans protected by the Act and prohibit discrimination against such veterans. In addition, VEVRAA requires contractors and subcontractors to list their employment openings with the appropriate employment service delivery system, and that covered veterans receive priority in referral to such openings. Further, VEVRAA requires federal contractors and subcontractors to compile and submit annually a report on the number of current employees who are covered veterans. OFCCP is working extensively with other DOL agencies, including ETA, to provide technical assistance and information that facilitates implementing the requirements of VEVRAA which establishes benchmarks for federal contractors in their hiring and retention policies/procedures.

### *Eligibility*

Covered veterans under VEVRAA were service members, any part of whose service was during the period August 5, 1964 through May 7, 1975, who served on active duty for a period of more than 180 days and were discharged or released with other than a dishonorable discharge, or was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability. "Vietnam era veteran" also includes any veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

VEVRAA, with some exceptions, covers most federal contracts of \$100,000 or more. Contractors have the obligation to refrain from discrimination in employment against protected veterans. The regulations also require all covered contracts and subcontracts to include a specific equal opportunity clause. VIVRAA also requires contractors and subcontractors to list most employment openings with an appropriate employment service delivery system, such as the state workforce agency job listings. Contractors and subcontractors are also required to make reasonable accommodations for known physical or mental limitations of qualified individuals with disabilities, unless providing an accommodation would create an undue hardship. In addition, covered contractors and subcontractors are required to take all necessary actions to ensure that no one attempts to intimidate or discriminate against any individual for filing a discrimination complaint. Additional details regarding VEVRAA are available at: <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/vevraa.htm>.

## **My Next Move for Veterans**

### *Overview*

My Next Move for Veterans ([www.mynextmove.org/vets/](http://www.mynextmove.org/vets/)) is a portal for veterans on the My Next Move website administered by the ETA. My Next Move is a set of tools to assist individuals to obtain more information about careers by searching for keywords, industries, and interests.

### *Eligibility*

Anyone seeking information about careers can access My Next Move. My Next Move for Veterans is designed for use by those exiting service.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

Using O-Net, an ETA-sponsored job/career resource tool, job-seekers are provided with information about specific career fields, including an overview of duties and required knowledge, skills and interests. My Next Move for Veterans links veteran job seekers to the O-Net database using keyword searches, browsing by industry, and searching for civilian jobs that are similar in nature to military occupational classification.

## **Assessment of DOL Employment Services and Supports for Veterans**

In recent years policy and programmatic modifications such as Disability Program Navigators and the Disability Employment initiative have improved the rates at which individuals with disabilities utilize AJCs. In 2010, 617,314 individuals with disabilities registered as job seekers for services. Between 2006 and 2010, the number of registered job seekers with disabilities increased by nearly half (49.5%) (Butterworth et al., 2012).

While DVOP specialists and LVERs are valuable resources in assisting veterans to return to employment, the program has been hampered by limited reliable outcome data. A 2006 GAO reported findings from a survey of state VETS directors related to the DVOP and LVER programs. Several state directors reported that performance data from local offices are not available, limiting federal oversight and weakening state level accountability. The report also noted a lack of coordination among Labor agencies in monitoring and sharing information gathered on program performance. A follow-up GAO report (2007) stated that questions had been raised about whether the available performance information for the DVOP/LVER programs accurately reflects services and outcomes for veterans.

A survey by Abt Associates (2008) of over 10,000 veterans with disabilities who were former VR&E participants found that 8.2 percent had made contact with a DVOP specialist. The report also indicated that in the year from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004, 59,000 veterans with disabilities received services from either DVOP or LVER staff. Over 29,000 (53%) of those veterans became employed, with 77 percent of employed veterans continued to be employed six months later. Thus, the six-month success rate was approximately 40 percent.

The HVRP, VWIP, and IVTP projects are grant-funded and outcome-based. Grantees are held to high standards for assisting veterans locate, obtain, and keep jobs. In their proposals, grantees establish goals for placements, retention up to three calendar quarters, and costs per client, and submit information to VETS quarterly. A corrective action plan (CAP) must be taken when a grantee fails to achieve at least 85 percent of program goals. Because the grants are funded annually, grantees who consistently fail to meet their goals can be defunded. VETS routinely posts aggregated performance data for the HVRP, VWIP, and IVTP projects and, in one report related to best practices, by grantee.

A recent report by the Labor OIG (September 30, 2010) found that in the 2008-2009 program year, only 31 percent of HVRP clients obtained and retained employment for the three-quarter follow-up period, with 60 of 89 grantees underperforming (i.e., failing to achieve 85 percent of program goals). Moreover, 82 percent of underperforming grantees were not placed on a CAP and 30 percent received renewal funding. While economic conditions during the time frame of the study may account for difficulty in locating jobs for veterans, the OIG report found that adequate controls and oversight were not in place and VETS policies related to underperforming grantees were not consistently being followed.

Evaluative information for other DOL-funded services and supports are not currently available.

# **Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the Rehabilitation Services Administration**

## **Vocational Rehabilitation**

### *Overview*

The Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U. S. Department of Education funds Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State Grants, matched by the states, to help individuals with disabilities become gainfully employed. Funds are distributed on the basis of a formula that takes into account state population and per capita income. State VR agencies provide services to over one million people annually, with over 600,000 completing services and having their cases closed in each fiscal year.

### *Eligibility*

Any individual who has a severe physical or mental impairment which seriously limits one or more functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome is eligible for VR services. States must give priority to individuals with the most significant disabilities, if unable to serve all those eligible. Those with the most severe disabilities would be those whose disabilities are such that they can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The State/Federal VR program provides a wide range of services, including:

- Vocational evaluation,
- Counseling and guidance,
- Work adjustment,
- Education and vocational training,
- Job placement, and
- Post-employment services.

## **Assessment of RSA Employment Services and Supports for Veterans**

Veterans with disabilities have consistently represented approximately 4 percent of all VR cases (Abt Associates, 2008; R. Cimera, personal communication, March 31, 2013). Status 26 closure rates (successful rehabilitation) for veterans with disabilities tend to be slightly lower than for non-veterans, as shown in the table below.

**Participation and Outcomes of Veterans in  
State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs**

<b>FY</b>	<b>Veteran Caseload Percent</b>	<b>Status 26 Rate (Veterans)</b>	<b>Status 26 Rate (Non-Veterans)</b>
2009	4.2%	27.9%	30.9%
2010	3.8%	27.0%	28.2%
2011	3.7%	29.8%	30.4%

# **Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the Small Business Administration**

## **Small Business Administration District Offices**

### *Overview*

The Small Business Administration (SBA) provides resources for individuals who own or desire to start a small business. While the SBA website ([sba.gov](http://sba.gov)) provides general information regarding the services and resources the agency provides, direct services are delivered through SBA's regional offices.

### *Eligibility*

Anyone considering starting a small business or currently owning a small business (including veterans) may access SBA services. To be eligible for a Patriot Express loan guarantee (described below), an individual must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Veteran, including service-disabled veteran, or
- Active duty service member eligible for the military's Transition Assistance Program;
- Reservist or National Guard;
- Current spouse of any of the above;
- Widowed spouse of a veteran or service member or veteran who died during service or of a service-connected disability.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The SBA provides information and resources for entrepreneurs and small business owners. The SBA website includes short courses on starting and managing a business. In addition to online resources, the SBA also sponsors local workshops. In many communities, these workshops are contracted to chapters of the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), community colleges, and other organizations.

Banks and other lending institutions offer a number of SBA Guaranteed Loan Programs to assist small businesses. While SBA itself does not make loans, it does guarantee loans made to small businesses by private and other institutions. For veterans and spouses of veterans, the SBA recently initiated the Patriot Express Loan Program, which can be used to fund most business purposes, including start-up costs, equipment, inventory, business expansion, disaster recovery, and preparing the business in the event of possible deployment.

In addition to the Patriot Express Loan, the following types of loan guarantees are available:

- The *7(a) Loan Program* is the SBA’s primary program to help start-up and existing small businesses obtain financing when they might not be eligible for business loans through normal lending channels. The name comes from section 7(a) of the Small Business Act. 7(a) loans are the most basic and most commonly used type of loans. They are also the most flexible, since financing can be guaranteed for a variety of general business purposes.
- The *Microloan Program* provides small, short-term loans to small business concerns and certain types of not-for-profit child-care centers. The SBA makes funds available to specially designated intermediary lenders, which are nonprofit community-based organizations. The maximum loan is \$50,000, but the average is approximately \$13,000.
- The *CDC/504 Loan Program* is a long-term financing tool, designed to encourage economic development within a community. The 504 Program accomplishes this by providing small businesses with long-term, fixed-rate financing to acquire major fixed assets for expansion or modernization. A Certified Development Company (CDC) is a private, nonprofit corporation which is set up to contribute to economic development within its community. CDCs work with SBA and private sector lenders to provide financing to small businesses.



## **Small Business Development Centers**

### ***Overview***

The SBA’s Office of Small Business Development Centers (OSBDC) funds 63 Centers with more than 900 points of service. SBDCs are authorized under Section 21 of the Small Business Act and provide an array of services and supports to entrepreneurs and small business owners. SBDCs are most frequently hosted within universities and community colleges. In addition, the SBA funds 100 Women’s Business Centers that perform essentially the same functions as the OSBDCs.

### ***Eligibility***

Any nascent entrepreneur or small business owner (including veterans) may access SBDC services. Female veterans may access services through the Women’s Business Centers.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

SBDCs are statutorily required to provide the following services:

- On a non-fee basis, provide confidential counseling, consultation, and advising in such areas as pre-start up planning, expansion, and other areas;
- Assisting with technology transfer, research, and development;

- Assisting rural businesses in start up or expansion;
- Expert assistance in export and international trade;
- Implementing business plans to respond to the closure of military bases;
- Assistance with regulatory compliance; and
- Meeting specific informational needs of customers.

In addition, SBDCs are expected to support the SBA’s mission by providing, either directly or contractually entrepreneurial development, government contracting assistance, access to capital and other SBA programs, and assistance in reaching underserved markets.



## **Office of Veterans Business Development**

### ***Overview***

The SBA’s Office of Veterans Business Development (OVBD) aims to maximize the availability, applicability and usability of all administration small business programs for veterans, Service-Disabled Veterans, Reserve members, and their dependents or survivors. OVBD is responsible for liaison with the veteran business community, policy analysis and reporting, acting as an ombudsman for veterans in Small Business Administration programs, providing business training, counseling and assistance, and overseeing the federal procurement programs for Veteran and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned small businesses.

### ***Eligibility***

Any veteran may access OVBD resources.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

The OVBD website links veterans to information business start-up and management targeted to veterans, such as entrepreneurial “boot camps” (including the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities), locations of local resources such as Veterans Business Development Centers (described below) and SCORE chapters, SBA loan programs, and others.



## **Veterans Business Outreach Centers**

### ***Overview***

The SBA’s Veterans Business Outreach Program is designed to provide entrepreneurial services to eligible veterans owning or considering starting a small business. The program funds 16 Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs) covering all U.S. geographic regions.

### ***Eligibility***

VBOCs serve veterans (including disabled and service-disabled veterans), Military Reserve Component members, and discharging service members eligible for participation in the Transition Assistance Program.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

VBOC services include the following:

- Pre-business plan workshops dealing with the major issues of self-employment;
- Concept assessment to assist veterans in assessing their entrepreneurial needs and requirements;
- Assistance with preparation of a business plan;
- Comprehensive feasibility analysis;
- Mentoring; and
- Other business development services as needed.

### **Assessment of SBA Employment Services and Supports for Veterans**

Despite the number of self-employment services and resources for veterans offered through the SBA, information is unavailable regarding the numbers of veterans who utilize these services or how successful they are in terms of businesses started and maintained. A search of the SBA and GAO websites and the Web located no reports or other information regarding the involvement of veterans or individuals with disabilities in its programs or the outcomes from their involvement. SBA's annual performance and financial reports do not break out veterans services.

# **Employment Services and Supports for Veterans Through the Social Security Administration**

## **Social Security Work Incentives**

### *Overview*

Veterans who have a disability may also be eligible for disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (Social Security). There are two programs that provide assistance to disabled individuals, one of which is Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). SSDI is funded by the Social Security tax fund, so individuals who qualify as disabled under the above criteria must also have sufficient work credits in order to qualify for payments. In most instances, eligibility for SSDI also entitles the individual for Medicare. In the case of need-based Supplemental Security Income (SSI), there are no work requirements because the program is financed through general tax revenues and not by the Social Security tax. In order to qualify for SSI, individuals must be less than 65 years old, be legally blind or disabled, and have individual assets amounting to less than \$2000. Eligibility for SSI most often entitles the individual to Medicaid coverage.

### *Eligibility*

Eligible veterans must have a permanently medically-verifiable impairment, or suffering from a condition that has lasted, or is expected to last, more than 12 calendar months. In addition, eligibility is based on whether or not a claimant's disabling condition prevents the individual from achieving substantial gainful activity (SGA), currently \$1040 a month for non-blind applicants averaged over three months, and \$1740 per month for blind applicants (2013, adjusted annually). The condition must not only prevent the claimant from performing the duties of his or her previous employment, but also make it impossible to find a new line of work due to age, education, or impairment.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The rules and regulations of the SSI and SSDI programs often discourage beneficiaries from working and increasing their income. For three decades, Congress and the Social Security Administration have encouraged SSI and SSDI beneficiaries to attempt to enter or increase participation in the workforce through work incentives. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TWWIA) strengthened the work incentives, created the Ticket to Work program designed to provide increased employment services for beneficiaries, and also established a network of Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach (BPAO) programs (later renamed Work Incentive Planning and Assistance or WIPA) to provide information to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries to help them better understand the impact of earnings on their benefits and information regarding work incentives.



## **Ticket to Work**

### *Overview*

Social Security's Ticket to Work (TTW) program is a free and voluntary program available to people ages 18 through 64 who are blind or have a disability and who receive SSDI or SSI benefits. The goals of the Ticket to Work Program are to: (1) offer beneficiaries with disabilities expanded choices when seeking service and supports to enter, re-enter, and/or maintain employment; (2) increase the financial independence and self-sufficiency of beneficiaries with disabilities; and (3) reduce and, whenever possible, eliminate reliance on disability benefits.

Under this program, eligible beneficiaries with disabilities who are receiving monthly cash benefit payments are entitled to participate by signing up with an approved service provider of their choice. This can be an Employment Network (EN) or a State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. In essence, a “ticket” is a performance-based voucher that offers EN payments on the basis of earnings and benefit outcomes. VR agencies, but not ENs, may alternatively receive cost-reimbursement payments if the beneficiary achieves SGA-level earnings for at least nine-months, under a payment system that was in place before TTW.

### *Eligibility*

Any SSI or SSDI beneficiary between the ages of 18 and 64 who have disabilities may participate in the Ticket Program.

### *Description of employment services and supports*

The EN/State VR agency, if they accept the Ticket assignment, will coordinate and provide appropriate services to help the beneficiary find and maintain employment. These services may be training, career counseling, vocational rehabilitation, job placement, and ongoing support services necessary to achieve a work goal.

## **Assessment of Social Security Employment Services and Supports for Veterans**

Over the past 25 years, the number of SSI and DI beneficiaries has steadily grown due to an array of demographic, labor force, and policy factors (Congressional Budget Office 2010). Moreover, historically, only about six percent of new DI beneficiaries eventually leave the disability rolls due to work and many of them return to the rolls after a short period (Liu and Stapleton 2011). Similar findings hold for adult SSI entrants (Ben-Shalom et al., 2012).

Work incentives were designed to encourage work-capable beneficiaries to attempt or increase employment and reduce the burden on the Social Security Trust Fund and general tax revenues. Social Security has developed multiple work incentives within its program rules to assist beneficiaries with making the transition to employment. Analysis of Social Security data indicates that a very small number of SSI and DI beneficiaries are using work incentives to increase work activity and earnings (Liu & Stapleton, 2011). The BPAO/WIPA program has been developed to increase awareness of work incentives among Social Security disability beneficiaries (Kregel & O'Mara, 2011). For veterans with disabilities who receive both VA and Social Security disability benefits, the interaction of these programs and the effect of increased earnings on benefit status can be confusing and require the support of a specially trained work incentives counselor (Kregel, 2011).

The impact of the TTW program on the employment outcomes of Social Security beneficiaries has been modest. Early participation rates in Phase I states were less than anticipated but rose steadily in the latter years of the roll-out (Thornton et al., 2007). A recent study by Schimmel and Stapleton (2011) examined suspension of disability benefits due to work for the years 2002 through 2006. Less than one percent of beneficiaries experienced their first suspension in each year, but more were in non-suspension at least one month. Ticket to Work participants were more likely to have a first suspension than non-Ticket participants, but most of those who had a suspension were not Ticket participants, reflecting low Ticket use as a means for entering the workforce. A recent, rigorous impact analysis of this period found that TTW increased service enrollment of new SSDI-only beneficiaries under age 40, but found no evidence of an impact on suspension or termination of benefits in the 48 months after their Tickets first become available (Stapleton et al., 2013). Schimmel et al. (2013) found a substantial increase in beneficiary and provider participation after regulatory changes implemented in 2008. Employment outcomes of participants appear to have declined somewhat after the regulatory changes, but this might well be due to the recession.

In addition, veterans with disabilities appear to be underrepresented in both the Social Security disability programs and Ticket users. Livermore, Hoffman, and Bardos (2012), citing data from the 2010 National Beneficiary Survey, reported that 3.1 percent of all Social Security disability beneficiaries and 1.1 percent of Ticket users were also receiving VA benefits.

## Other Cross-Agency Employment Services and Supports for Veterans

### VetSuccess

#### *Overview*

VetSuccess ([www.VetSuccess.gov](http://www.VetSuccess.gov)) is a partnership between the VR&E program and the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) program. VetSuccess is a comprehensive employment program assisting service members and Veterans with service-connected disabilities to enter career civilian employment and achieve maximum independence in daily living.

#### *Eligibility*

Veterans are eligible for VetSuccess assistance if they served in active duty, have a service-connected disability, and were discharged with other than dishonorable status.

#### *Description of employment services and supports*

A main component of the VetSuccess program is its website: [VetSuccess.gov](http://VetSuccess.gov). This website provides a comprehensive integrated Intra/Internet-based data network that is designed to have the effectiveness and efficiency of a virtual single stop employment center. [VetSuccess.gov](http://VetSuccess.gov) was developed to enhance program management capabilities through state of the art tracking and reporting capabilities. It is capable of managing and simplifying employment services activities used by veterans, VR&E staff, and other Service Providers. [VetSuccess.gov](http://VetSuccess.gov) provides users with:

- Nationwide accessibility
- Self-service capability
- Reporting capability
- Online program orientation and resource capabilities
- Online case management
- Online job readiness resources
- Integrated service delivery and training



## **American Job Center**

### ***Overview***

The American Job Center ([jobcenter.usa.gov](http://jobcenter.usa.gov)) is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, the General Services Administration, Small Business Administration, and the White House. The web portal provides a single, on demand access point for key federal programs and critical local resources to help people find a job, identify training programs, and tap into resources to gain skills in growing industries.

### ***Eligibility***

Any citizen of working age is eligible to access the Center's resources. The website has a separate portal for veterans and for businesses seeking veterans as employees.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

The primary services offered through the American Job Center is assisting individuals to locate information and resources such as the DOL-funded American Job Centers described previously and resources specializing in serving job-seekers with disabilities. The site also serves to connect job-seekers with employers.



## **National Resource Directory**

### ***Overview***

The National Resource Directory (NRD) is a joint product of the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs. This website ([www.NationalResourceDirectory.gov](http://www.NationalResourceDirectory.gov)) provides information to veterans, service members, wounded warriors, and their families and caregivers in such areas as veterans benefits and compensation, educational opportunities, transitioning to civilian life, and local support services for veterans.

### ***Eligibility***

Any veteran may access this web-based resource.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

The NRD hosts the Veterans Job Bank. The Veterans Job Bank provides veterans with a central source for identifying veteran-committed employment opportunities and assists America's employers in identifying qualified veterans. The Veterans Job Bank returns job opportunities based on search criteria entered by the user. Powered by a Google search, jobs are drawn from various job boards that have posted or specifically tagged jobs for veterans. Users can search the

Veterans Job Bank by keywords, locations, and military occupation code (**MOC**) or specialty code (**MOS**).



## **Wounded Warrior Tax Credit**

### ***Overview***

The Wounded Warrior Tax Credit (WWTC) is an extension of the Work Opportunities Tax Credit (WOTC) that provides special tax credits to employers hiring eligible individuals from targeted groups, such as individuals who are recipients of public benefits, Vocational Rehabilitation clients, ex-felons, etc. The tax credit program is a collaboration of the U.S. Department of Labor and the Internal Revenue Service. The WOTC is largely marketed to employers through state workforce development agencies and local providers of employment assistance.

### ***Eligibility***

Businesses hiring unemployed veterans were previously eligible to receive the WOTC. Eligible veterans for WWTC tax credits are those who (a) will be entitled to compensation for a service-connected disability, (b) will be hired within one year of discharge or release from active duty, (c) have been unemployed at least 6 months in the year ending on the hiring date, (d) served on active duty (not including training) in the U.S. Armed Forces for more than 180 days or have been discharged or released from active duty for a service-connected disability, and (e) had not had a period of active duty (not including training) of more than 90 days that ended during the 60-day period ending on the hiring date.

### ***Description of employment services and supports***

Tax credits enable participating employers to reduce their income tax liability by receiving partial credit for salaries of new hires from the targeted groups, including unemployed veterans and service-disabled veterans. The tax credit employers can claim depends on the target group of the individual hired, the wages paid to that individual in the first year of employment, and the number of hours that individual worked. There is also a maximum tax credit that can be earned.

If the individual works at least 120 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 25 percent of the individual's first year wages, up to the maximum tax credit. If the individual works at least 400 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 40 percent of the individual's first year wages, up to the maximum tax credit. The maximum tax credit for veterans is \$5,600 per hire, and \$9,600 for veterans with disabilities per hire.

## **Assessment of Other Cross-Agency Services and Supports for Veterans**

The American Job Center and the Veterans Job Bank are currently in beta testing. No evaluative information was located for VetSuccess, the National Resource Center, or the WWTC. We were unable to find information regarding the number of veterans who accessed these supports or who were ultimately hired as a result.

## Conclusions

This review has described a myriad of federal programs that assist service members and veterans, both disabled and non-disabled, in locating employment training, jobs, and self-employment. We have identified a number of hands-on services that are promising:

- Programs operated by the DOL VETS negotiate clear, measurable goals with grantees and have policies in place to address low performance. VETS also routinely makes available public aggregated performance data describing the outcomes of its veterans programs. Although the Labor OIG audit (2010) found deficiencies in oversight and corrective measures in the HVRP program, VETS has committed to corrective actions to improve employment services to veterans served by its programs.
- The VA Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which provides assistance to veterans through enrollment in community colleges and technical training programs, has been proven to be in demand and, as of this report, likely to meet its legislatively mandated capacity.
- Rigorous evaluations of VR&E supported employment programs for veterans with PTSD and SCI have documented the effectiveness of this service. These studies have identified a highly replicable evidence-based model that can be expanded throughout the VR&E service network.
- DoD Wounded Warrior Programs are having impacts not only on training and employment, but reintegration into social and recreational outlets.

We have also identified a number of issues within these programs that hinder employment efforts for veterans with disabilities and should be addressed. Among them are these:

- Delays in eligibility determination for disability benefits by the VA delay entry into rehabilitation programs as well as receipt of benefits and other support needs. These delays may be detrimental to veterans with disabilities, particularly those recently disabled, in that early rehabilitative intervention tends to improve employment and independence outcomes (Fraser, Wehman, & Target, 2011). In addition, delays by the VA may lead some veterans to use other means to obtain services, such as the state VR system.
- Delays in verification and unacceptable rates of fraud in SDVOSB and VOSB verifications cost veteran-owned businesses substantial amounts of federal, state, and local contract dollars (GAO, 2013b). Recent efforts have been successful in reducing the rate of fraudulent claims, which will improve the overall outcomes of the program.
- Many of the federal programs have little or no readily available data regarding the numbers of veterans with disabilities served or how well they achieved their employment goals. Better and more transparent reporting of evaluation data is needed for informing

policy and decision-making by veterans with disabilities related to pursuing employment or entrepreneurial goals (GAO, 2014).

- The lack of sufficient evaluation data and fragmentation of services makes it extremely difficult to determine the unmet service needs of veterans with disabilities. As noted by a report of the RAND Corporation (Osilla & Van Busum, 2012) and others (U.S. GAO, 2012; Vogel, November 18, 2011), there is a lack of coordination within and between federal agencies related to existing veterans employment services. Poor coordination has led to duplicated efforts, confusion on the part of those in need of assistance, and poor outcomes. Currently, it is not possible to determine the number of veterans unable to access employment services from programs that are best able to meet their specific services needs.

Employment services for veterans with disabilities are plagued by a lack of basic information on program participation, performance outcomes, and veterans' satisfaction. A multi-agency comprehensive audit and review of all employment services and support programs that serve veterans with disabilities would improve program effectiveness. In instances where little or no evaluation information is available, formal evaluation studies should be completed. As a result of the review, ineffective programs should be modified or eliminated, duplicate programs should be consolidated wherever possible, and rigorous evaluation protocols should be developed to examine the effectiveness of veterans' employment services. As opposed to starting new service programs, the veterans with disabilities would benefit from better coordination, implementation, and documentation of existing ones.

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