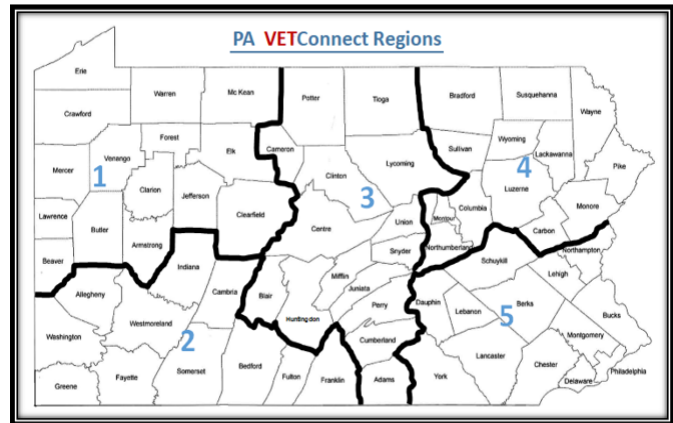




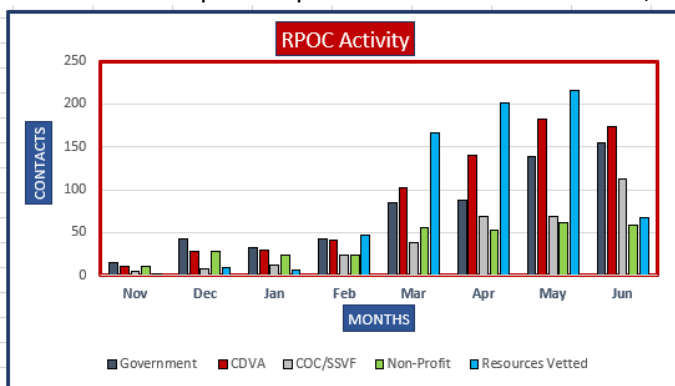
PA VETConnect is an exciting new Regional Outreach Initiative by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Bureau of Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach. A pathway to a better means of serving Pennsylvania’s nearly 800,000 veterans, the objectives of PA VETConnect are simple: determine the needs of veterans, find resources that meet those needs, and connect veterans with the right resources. Additionally, PA VETConnect will assist service members with reintegration into Pennsylvania communities following their military service. Through PA VETConnect, veteran advocates have access to our information and referral (I&R) tool, compiled

specifically to improve the lives of service members, veterans, and their families. This I&R tool is populated with valuable networking information thanks to extensive interagency coordination and partnerships with community organizations spearheaded by the DMVA.

The first phase of PA VETConnect has a three-year implementation plan, but much work has already been accomplished. Through PA VETConnect, the commonwealth was divided into five regions, enabling DMVA to better determine the regional needs of veterans as well as identify and create partnerships with local community resources and providers that can serve veterans and their families, some of which may not be traditionally thought of as veteran services or programs. Once identified, and vetted, the provider information can be entered into a resource database which is available to all County Directors of Veterans Affairs (CDVAs), Veteran Service Officers & Specialists and any other veterans advocate for quick and easy reference.



Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOC) are working in each of the five regions as our “Boots on the Ground” individuals who support the outreach team throughout the region, establish and maintain working relationships with community leaders and local/regional organizations, Veteran Service Organizations, local/county/state government agencies, and other community partners to gather information, and identify resources to facilitate the delivery of services to veterans and their beneficiaries. As of the end of June 2020, the RPOCs have compiled impressive numbers of contacts, connecting with 443 federal, state or local government



officials, connecting with the local CDVAs 533 times, and connecting with non-profit organizations and community leaders 255 times. Through various surveys and meetings with CDVAs across the commonwealth, RPOCs have identified the following as the main unfilled veterans’ needs: Transportation, Homelessness/lack of affordable housing, Mental Health/Suicide Prevention and Employment. The work they perform can vary from day-to-day, but there are many success stories that demonstrate their dedication to serve.

The following are examples of the relationship building and collaboration these team members are making in service to the veteran’s community:

- RPOC R1 interacted with the Forest County CDVA who was assisting the county with recent elections and was not in his office. Together they assisted a veteran who was suffering from cancer and needed

transportation assistance while staying in Pittsburgh for medical treatment. Through the I&R tool they were able to find transportation providers and financial resources to assist the veteran during this critical time of treatment.

- RPOC R2 worked with a justice-involved veteran on a housing/care matter involving Allegheny County CDVA and Allegheny County Prison. The veteran was not eligible for admission to the Pennsylvania Veterans Homes based on various factors. Through this collaborative effort the veteran was transferred to another long-term care home in his area.
- RPOC R3 learned of an unfortunate situation for a family via a collaborative group listserv. A 2-yr-old girl died unexpectedly during routine surgery and this lower-income family could not pay for the burial/funeral. This case was not veteran-related, but the RPOC used what she knew through her community contacts to connect the family with resources that assisted with funeral expenses.
- RPOC R4 continues to work towards identifying a county within the region to connect with Together with Veterans (TWV) and received a positive response from at least one county. This USDVA-funded program enlists rural veterans and their local partners to join forces to reduce veteran suicide in their community. There will be a continued effort to explore areas within the commonwealth to partner and assist in this program.
- RPOC R5 connected with a local PA Link Coordinator and staff from the Lancaster VET Center to assist a veteran with a Veterans Temporary Assistance (VTA) grant application. This interaction allowed for intergovernmental collaboration, provided an opportunity for the RPOC to educate others about DMVA programs, and the veteran was approved for the VTA grant within three days.

Our unique I&R tool is a major element of this program and is available to CDVAs and other veteran advocates to facilitate the delivery of the best possible services to veterans and their beneficiaries, not just in a specific county, but anywhere throughout the commonwealth. Resource areas include employment, homelessness, mental wellness, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, and dozens more. This I&R tool has the flexibility to connect veterans, service members and their dependents to the programs and services they need regardless of the municipality, county or region where they reside. Through this tool, advocates can more easily assist veterans in locating organizations or resources throughout the state that offer programs and services geared to specific needs. As of June 2020, there are over 1,400 resources within the I&R tool that provide some type of service to veterans, their families or surviving spouses, and over 100 additional resources that are currently being vetted.

As of June 2020, approximately 250 veteran advocates have access to the I&R tool, which currently includes DMVA staff, CDVAs and their staff, as well as social workers within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers throughout the commonwealth. We continue to enhance the I&R tool and work towards a one-stop-shop solution consistent with the Governor's Customer Service Transformation initiative.

The DMVA realizes that a program of this magnitude can only be successful with the cooperation of our community partners, especially those who work every day to improve the lives of veterans. We are thankful to all such organizations and ask for their continued support in aiding our veterans.

For additional information please contact Joel Mutschler, Director of Veterans Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach, at 717-861-8771 or jomutschle@pa.gov.