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John A. Scocos Column: Veterans Outreach & Recovery Program

As the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs continues to look at more opportunities to assist veterans with mental health issues, one program that continues to grow and continues to be a success is the Veterans Outreach & Recovery Program (VORP).

In the fall of 2014, the department partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and received a \$1.2 million dollar three year SAMHSA Grant to provide mental health and substance abuse treatment to homeless, chronic homeless or at risk of homeless veterans. An additional \$1.2 million was received in order to expand services for a second and third year.

This funding allowed the department to set up services in seven regions of the state consisting of 49 counties. A total of nine staff was hired with six staff providing direct case management services to veterans, one staff member providing assistance for veterans to sign up for Social Security disability, one administrative staff member and one DHS staff serving as a clinical coordinator who provides diagnosis for veterans enrolled.

Program staff work to locate veterans who may be homeless or at risk. If after assessment the veteran has mental health and/or substance abuse issues, then the program provides funding to connect the veteran to mental health professionals and other related resources. Staff will then address all of the veterans needs and when appropriate connect them with other resources – housing, employment, benefits, etc.

Program eligibility is very simple – the veteran must be homeless or at risk of homeless, have a need for mental health and/or substance abuse services, and have served in the military, regardless of discharge status.

The program is fully staffed as of December 2015 and as of February 15th of this year the staff have made contact with 180 different organizations, met and assisted 106 veterans resulting in 37 currently enrolled veterans in the VORP Program.

We are proud of all we do to serve America's best when they return home. Our veterans deserve the opportunity to achieve their post-military aspirations and we are here to assist them.

Please contact us with any questions at 1-800-WIS-VETS or www.WisVets.com.

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(John A. Scocos is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)