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Redesigned program assists homeless and at-risk Wisconsin veterans

(MADISON) – The Veterans Assistance Program (VAP) operated by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) has undergone a successful redesign to offer improved services to homeless and at-risk veterans.

"The goal of the VAP is to assist homeless veterans, and those at-risk of being homeless, to receive rehabilitative services needed to obtain steady employment, job training, counseling, affordable housing, and the skills to sustain a productive lifestyle," said WDVA Secretary John A. Scocos.

"The VAP has helped thousands of homeless veterans. By redesigning the program, the department can more successfully focus on assisting all veterans -- including veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom -- by providing more effective services, leveraging finite resources to assist veterans in need, and reducing costs."

"The recent transition of operational control at the VAP-Southern Center in Union Grove is a positive step forward in the successful redesign," said Scocos. "The program continues to serve the homeless veterans of southeastern Wisconsin. In part, it is working so well for program participants due to the support of the southeastern Wisconsin veterans organizations and local communities and governments."

Established in 1994 through the collaborative efforts of the WDVA and the VA Medical Centers in Wisconsin, the Veterans Assistance Program is designed to break the cycle of homelessness and help veterans transition into the mainstream of society. The program also helps to prevent homelessness by providing job training and referrals to unemployed or underemployed veterans who otherwise might end up living on the streets.

In recent months, the department reorganized the VAP by consolidating formerly contracted sites to direct state management. The reorganized sites include Fort McCoy (August 2004), King (September 2004), and most recently, Union Grove (February 2005).

(more)

Operational control of the VAP sites had been contracted with non-profit service providers who have implemented the WDVA program model and policy and procedure guidelines. However, recent program evaluations of the non-profit service providers showed poor accounting practices, increased recidivism, and decreased graduation rates.

"We owe it to our veterans, and we owe it to taxpayers to ensure the program works effectively," said Scocos.

Since the inception of the Veterans Assistance Program, over 5,200 veterans have been served through residential treatment programs. Following the reorganization, the FY06 operating costs are estimated to be 24% less than the previous year.

The three VAP sites operated by the WDVA have a capacity of providing residential services for up to 70 homeless veterans, including 14 at Fort McCoy, 26 at King, and 33 at Union Grove. Veterans enter the VAP via referral by a County Veterans Service Office or through a self-referral directly to the program site. Veterans who require medical treatment prior to placement are referred to the VA or other agency, or are aided by contracted clinicians at the sites.

The WDVA is currently assessing potential VAP sites in Milwaukee and at the Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled in Chippewa Falls.

The Union Grove campus also hosts the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery, and the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove.

For additional information on the Veterans Assistance Program, visit the WDVA web site, at www.dva.state.wi.us, or contact Charles Piper, VAP Program Manager, at 1-800-WIS-VETS (947-8387).