

970079

Performance Report

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY



3 0307 00017 4345

Department of Veterans' Affairs

1996

JK
6135
.A56
1996
Veterans'
Affairs

RECEIVED
JAN 31 1997
LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY
STATE OFFICE BUILDING
ST. PAUL, MN 55155

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
PERFORMANCE REPORT 1996

The mission of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs is to serve Minnesota Veterans, their dependents and survivors, in securing those benefits provided by Federal and State laws. This mission is very important to the 465,000 veterans and their eligible family members numbering nearly one million additional persons. This year these persons have received more than \$750 million in federal veterans' benefits.

This mission is provided to veterans through three major programs: Benefits, Services, and Departmental Operations. Each of these programs has many activities that are very important to those veterans needing assistance from that specific area of concern. A number of these activities have little budget impact or take place on an infrequent basis. We will not address these activities in this summary in detail. Additional information regarding these activities is available from the department upon request.

The department maintains a close working relationship with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers and all Veterans Service Organizations. Veterans in Minnesota receive benefits and services from six Veterans Administration Medical Centers and two Regional Offices. These offices distribute the \$750 million in veterans benefits and services previously mentioned. Every county has a County Veterans Service Officer who assists veterans and their family members in the application for benefits and services. The 116 County Veterans Service Officer's and their assistants provide advocacy services to veterans and their family members. Veterans Service Organizations also assist in these processes, in addition to providing the many valuable programs serving communities throughout the state.

The department has been frustrated in its efforts to develop performance measurements for all programs and activities. This frustration stems from the reliance of our valuable programs and activities upon other persons and agencies in the completion of our jobs. For example, we can easily receive, process and transfer to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs a claim for federal benefits within our current standard of 24 hours. However, because of many program drivers outside our control, the average case takes more than 100 days to process at the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and in some cases may take two years!

Because of these frustrations, we have chosen to supplement our performance report with a customer satisfaction survey. This survey was completed at the University of Minnesota Center for Survey Research. We believe it provides a statistically unbiased review of our services to clients and is very positive. It has also provided us with information regarding programs and activities in which we can improve our service delivery and possible performance measurements for the future.

Program drivers outside the control of the department are numerous. This year numerous changes in federal regulation and scientific evidence have caused significant increases in the demand for service from the Agent Orange Information and Referral division of the Veterans and Grants and Services Program. Recent admissions, by the federal government, that veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf have diseases related to their exposure to radiation, agent orange and other chemicals have affected many veterans and family members. The resulting increase in demand for information and services has resulted in the department's request for additional funding in this division.

Increasing demand for cost effective operations of the state veterans cemetery has also been outside the control of the department. The State Veterans Cemetery activity, in the Operations Program, also requires additional funding to further develop, maintain and operate the cemetery. This additional funding also reduces the reliance upon contract service providers which increases the department's ability to respond to needs of the property in a more timely and cost effective manner.

Executive Summary
Benefits
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

The benefits program exists to assist veterans and/or their dependents in securing subsistence, emergency medical, optical and dental benefits under the State Soldiers Assistance Program. Comprising 34.4% of the department's budget (\$1,710.0) this is the largest program in the department. Subsistence benefits help the veteran and family to meet the daily needs of life during a temporary, (six month or less), period of disability while the applicant cannot pursue their normal occupation. Optical, dental and emergency medical benefits are provided according to fee schedules established by the Department of Human Services. All applicants must meet stringent income and asset guidelines established in department rules.

The State Soldiers Assistance Program can be affected very quickly by changes outside its control. Federal actions eliminating or reducing veterans medical care or increasing the time required for benefits processing have sudden program impact. Eligible veterans denied medical care or prompt payment of benefits turn to the department for assistance in payment of bills. Other program drivers include the creation of "new" veterans by the federal government. "New" veterans are created when Reserve or National Guard personnel are activated to duty by the federal government. The most recent example of this was the activation of more than 4,000 Minnesotans during Operations Desert Storm/Shield. These men and women and their families, if meeting all other rules of the State Soldiers Assistance Program, became potential clients upon their activation to duty.

Counting the number of vendor orders and cash grants processed during a fiscal year can measure the workload in the State Soldiers Assistance Program. Vendor orders and cash grants processed in fiscal year 1993 totaled 5,343 and increased to 6,305 in FY 1994. Fiscal year 1995 changed to 5,111 and in FY 1996 the number was 4,326.

All payments made under the State Soldiers Assistance Program are made to veterans and family members who have met very stringent income and asset guidelines. Therefore, it is very important that the processing of these payments is completed in a timely manner. The department measures performance in this area by auditing cases to ensure that action is taken on complete applications within 48 hours of the receipt of an application that has all required information.

Because of the small number of staff available to process these claims and the program drivers, which exist outside the control of the department, meeting this objective 100% of the time is impossible. In FY 1995 we estimated that we met this goal 95% of the time. The department's goal is to improve this performance to 96% in FY 1996 and to 97% in FY 1997.

The department plans to achieve these targets by increasing the training opportunities available to County Veterans Service Officers and department staff to improve the quality of applications and information submitted on behalf of clients. We will also review application processes to include the simplification of forms. We will also continue working with medical providers to improve the timeliness in which medical information is made available and the quality of information provided.

A new activity measurement is the percentage of County Veterans Service Officers who agree or strongly agree that phone calls to the state benefits and grants program are returned in a timely fashion. In 1995 the University of Minnesota's Center for Survey Research completed a customer satisfaction survey for the department. 48% of the County Veterans Service Officers answered that they "strongly agreed or agreed" that calls were returned in a timely manner. We believe this percentage can be improved and will measure this improvement annually through additional surveys.

The Agent Orange Information and Referral activity has experienced numerous increases on the demand for its services. This demand is generated by forces outside the control of the department. Continuing documentation of veterans, from all eras of service, that were exposed to radiation, agent orange and numerous other chemicals without their knowledge is being discovered. Large numbers of these veterans and their family members are now suffering from the diseases associated with these exposures. The federal government has also passed laws making some of these persons eligible for veterans benefits. Benefit awards will, in some instances, remove people from other programs partially or fully funded by the state. The department must increase the resources available from the legislature to better serve this needy and growing population.

Program activities not measured in the department's report include:

Veterans Preference Enforcement
Vinland National Center
Maintenance of Discharge Records
Veterans and War Orphan Educational Benefits
County Veterans Service Officer Operational Improvement Grants
Information and Referral

While each of these programs is vital to our clientele, they have limited budget impact or staff time required to complete the work. Most of these programs have had static funding levels for many years.

Executive Summary
Services
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

The Services program comprises 46% of the departments budget totaling \$2,282.0 in FY 1996. Goals of the services program include providing guardianship services for a "socially dependent population" and serving as the accredited representative of veterans and their dependents in securing federal benefits.

The department operates two claims offices which are co-located with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Offices in Fargo and St. Paul. These offices provide accredited representation while acting as the claimants power of attorney, to veterans and eligible dependents. Representation is provided during the initial application and subsequent appeals processes to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for federal veterans benefits. Currently, these offices represent approximately 102,000 persons.

The department proposes to measure the number of powers of attorney maintained in our claims office as related to the total veteran population in the state. This ratio provides us with a measurement of the activity level within the claims offices. Currently, the 102,000 persons represented by the department receive 41% of the total veterans benefits payments in Minnesota.

A new measurement of activity in the department's claims offices is the ratio of dollars paid by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs directly to veterans who have assigned their power of attorney to the department as compared to the total dollars paid to all veterans in Minnesota. The department believes that it can continue to maintain these current performance levels in spite of fluctuating veteran populations and a number of program drivers which are outside its control.

The Commissioner is appointed as the financial guardian/conservator of incompetent veterans and their dependents by the Probate Court System, United States Department of Veterans Affairs and/or Social Security Administration. The guardianship activity provides complete and comprehensive financial management of income and assets, to include receipt, investment and expenditure of client funds. Services are supervised by the competent court of jurisdiction, which requires an annual accounting of all assets and expenditures. In many cases, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs also reviews all activities related to management of funds and assets under control of this activity.

The Guardianship activity proposes to personally visit 50% of all clients annually. These personal visits are meant to allow the guardianship advisor to more accurately assess the client's home environment and overall well-being. Unacceptable conditions can dictate additional steps which should be taken to improve the client's living situation. Early intervention, made possible by these visits, can reduce the clients need for institutionalization which often takes place at a significant cost to the taxpayer.

Executive Summary
Departmental Operations
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

The Departmental Operations program is responsible for all administrative services provided to the department and County Veterans Service Officer system. These activities include human resources, purchasing, information systems, financial management and the commissioner's office. As these activities are considered to be part of the normal operation of any state department they are not mentioned in any detail. In addition, the State Veterans Cemetery is part of this program. The Operations program has annual funding of \$973.0 and comprises 19.6% of the departments annual budget.

The continued development and start-up operation of the cemetery has presented many challenges to the department and its existing personnel. The transfer of a cemetery already in full operation did not allow for development of plans and implementation timetables which could have assisted in the provision of appropriate maintenance of grounds and client services. Because of this, many of the actions taken by the department have been reactive in nature and have caused a certain amount of consternation.

The department did apply for and receive a federal matching grant in the amount of \$343,929 that will be combined with state appropriated funds of \$170,000 for construction. Construction is anticipated to be complete in late 1996. Included in the grant program is the construction of a maintenance and storage facility, final development of the roadway system and parking areas, fencing and an irrigation system for current burial areas. These improvements will assist greatly in the appropriate maintenance and operations of the state veterans cemetery.

Each year the department measures activity in the financial management area. The processing of guardianship checks is a significant workload with 9,575 checks being processed in FY 1993 and 8,722 in FY 1994. In FY 1995 this number was 7,195 and changed to 8,140 in FY 1996 .

Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System transactions numbered 7,400 in FY 1995 to 5,931 in FY 1996. Each of these transactions requires multiple actions in the department.

A number of drivers exist, which are outside the control of the department, in the operations program. Changes in workload are generated by the implementation of the state wide systems project and human resources management areas. The financial management and personnel divisions now have increased workloads and training requirements that must be absorbed by current staff.

The current development of the cemetery requires that the department move forward with its plans to be fully self-sufficient in areas of operation and maintenance. This change, while requiring additional state funding, will allow for the release of the department's reliance upon contractual services and outside providers. It will also allow the needs of the cemetery to be met in a more efficient and timely basis.

A new measurement of activity in the program is the percentage of County Veterans Service Officers certified by the department based upon their attendance at training and educational seminars each year. This yearly certification is not a mandatory process, but has been well accepted in the state. Attainment of certification signifies that the County Veterans Service Officer has met the minimum standards of the department for training and education that year. It also signifies that the officer has taken and passed a mandatory test of their skills. We believe the minimum acceptable performance, even though a voluntary program, is 100% certification of eligibles.

AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORT

1996

**VETERANS
AFFAIRS DEPT**

Final Format Prepared : November 25, 1996

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE NO
AGENCY SUMMARY	1
AGENCY EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	5
Program: BENEFITS	6
Program: SERVICES	11
Program: DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS	19
GLOSSARY	23
APPENDIX	24

AGENCY : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT**MISSION**

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will serve Minnesota veterans, their dependents and survivors, in securing those benefits provided by Federal and State laws.

GOALS

- to provide state soldiers assistance program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors
- to process for payment all eligible late bonus claims and maintain and provide veteran discharge records
- to provide state education benefits for eligible state veterans and war orphans
- to provide bronze star grave markers to mark the graves of eligible deceased state veterans
- to provide operational improvement grants to Minnesota county veterans service officers
- to administer an educational and certification program to Minnesota county veterans service officers
- to contract with the Vinland National Center for rehabilitation services for eligible veterans
- to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits
- to provide court/agency appointed fiduciary services to veterans, their dependents and survivors
- to provide information, assistance, referral and counseling services to those veterans exposed to agent orange or other chemical agents or environmental hazards
- to enforce veterans preference statutes

- to coordinate information, referral and sharing of information with collateral agencies

- to develop, operate and maintain the state veterans cemetery

The department is organized in three program areas: (1) benefits (2) services and; (3) departmental operations. These programs all combine to provide state and federal benefits and services to Minnesota's 465,000 veterans and their eligible dependents. The department was created in 1943 to meet the needs of returning World War II veterans. Since its creation, the department has seen numerous additional generations of veterans.

The department maintains a close working relationship with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, (USDVA) the federal agency which is responsible for providing veterans benefits and services which flow from service in the armed forces of the United States. These benefits are received in a variety of forms, primarily in the areas of health care, educational benefits, home loans and financial compensation and pension benefits. The department's two claims offices, located in Fargo and Fort Snelling, represent 102,000 persons in their claims for federal veterans benefits. Minnesota veterans are served by six USDVA health care facilities located within the state and immediately adjacent thereto. During the last federal fiscal year, the total amount of federal veterans benefits received by Minnesota veterans and their families was in excess of 750 million dollars.

The department also works closely with the men and women who comprise the Minnesota County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) system. The 116 CVSOs and assistants, who are employed by each of Minnesota's 87 counties, are the primary point of contact for veterans and their dependents seeking veterans benefits and services. This local source of personal assistance ensures that veterans are fully informed of and assisted with applications for veterans benefits and services. The department fosters and maintains this relationship through personal contacts, training and educational conferences, seminars and meetings. The department also administers a certification process for CVSOs to ensure that they meet and maintain minimal educational and training standards required to adequately assist in the applications process. This application process will be enhanced through the development of a computer network between all functions of the department and the CVSO system. Funding for this program has been made available through the County Veterans Service Officer Operational Improvement Grant Program. This grant program was established by the Legislature to assist CVSOs in modernizing and improving the technology in their offices.

State veterans benefits administered by the department include; State Soldiers Assistance Program, provision of bronze star grave markers to mark the graves of deceased veterans buried in Minnesota, preparation and presentation of late claims for veterans bonus payments to the Joint Claims Committee, provision of educational benefits to veterans and war orphans, maintenance of veterans discharge records, which are required to establish eligibility for veterans benefits, and rehabilitation services to veterans through a contract with the Vinland National Center. Other state benefits administered by the department include providing information, referral and assistance to veterans and their dependents regarding the long term health effects of Agent Orange, and enforcement of those state statutes governing veterans preference.

Since receiving the state veterans cemetery, by act of the Legislature in 1994, the department has applied for and received a federal construction grant. This grant has allowed the department to construct a maintenance/storage facility, fence the property, develop roadways and irrigate current burial sections.

Continued development of the property includes the department's budget initiative, which, if approved, increases biennial funding and allows the cemetery operations to become self-sufficient.

WAYS TO IMPROVE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The Agent Orange Information and Referral activity has experienced numerous increases on the demand for its services. This demand is generated by forces outside the control of the department. Continuing documentation of veterans, from all eras of service, that were exposed to radiation, Agent Orange and numerous other chemicals without their knowledge is being discovered. Large numbers of these veterans and their family members are now suffering from the diseases associated with these exposures. The federal government has also passed laws making some of these persons eligible for veterans benefits. Benefit awards will, in some instances, remove people from other programs partially or fully funded by the state. The department must increase the resources available from the legislature to better serve this needy and growing population.

The current development of the state veterans cemetery requires that the department move forward with its plans to be fully self-sufficient in areas of operation and maintenance. This change, while requiring additional state funding, will allow for the reduction of the department's reliance upon contractual services and outside providers. It will also allow the needs of the cemetery to be met in a more efficient and timely basis.

Date : November 25, 1996

Agency Expenditure Summary

F.Y. 1996

NAME	(in thousands \$)	% of \$	FTE	% of FTE
AGENCY: VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT	\$4,964	100.0%	34	100.0%
PROGRAM: BENEFITS	\$1,709	34.4%	9	26.5%
PROGRAM: SERVICES	\$2,282	46.0%	16	47.1%
PROGRAM: DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS	\$973	19.6%	9	26.5%

Agency : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT

Program : BENEFITS

EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING :

	<u>(\$ in Thousands)</u>	<u>Percent of Department</u>
Total Expenditure	\$1,709	34.43%
General	\$1,709	
Number of FTE Staff:	9	26.47%

GOAL :

- to provide State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors. (MS 197.03)

(MS 197.455)

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES :

The state benefits program exists to aid and assist Minnesota veterans and/or their dependents in securing subsistence, emergency medical, optical and dental benefits under the State Soldier's Assistance Program. Subsistence benefits provide the veteran with financial assistance to meet the daily needs of living during a short (six months or less) period of disability while the applicant cannot pursue his/her normal occupation. Optical, dental and emergency medical benefits are provided according to Department of Human Services fee schedules. All applicants must meet stringent income and asset guidelines, as established in department rules governing this program.

Other activities in the state benefits program which are very important to the veterans and family members served, but which are small in size and have static funding levels are:

Veterans Rehabilitation (Vinland)
Veterans Bonus Claims 96
Benefits Administration
Veteran/War Orphan Education
Agent Orange Information and Referral

PROGRAM DRIVERS :

FEDERAL ACTION. Federal actions that affect the ability of the department to service our client population

include: downsizing of the active military, restrictions upon eligibility for federal veterans benefits, to include health care and unemployment benefits. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has experienced reduced levels of funding, which results in fewer federal veterans benefits being made available and consequently, fewer federal veterans benefits are granted. Budget reductions on the federal level have resulted in fewer staff to process claims, which has increased the amount of time it takes to process claims and has also increased the amount of time it takes for claimants to receive benefits. Eligibility restrictions have resulted in fewer veterans being admitted to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center system. Veterans denied care in federal health care facilities are forced to seek care from private providers. These veterans then turn to the department for assistance with payment of these bills.

DEPENDENT POPULATION. A significant number of clients of the department are dependent upon various government programs at federal, state and county levels. This dependency is due to a number of factors such as: physical disability, limited educational and vocational skills, and subsistence level income, which continues to qualify these individuals for various income assistance programs.

NEW CONFLICTS: Southwest Asia (Persian Gulf War). Some of the Minnesota military personnel involved in Southwest Asia are experiencing physical and psychological problems which will require treatment and intervention long into the future. The primary health concerns of these veterans are multiple chemical sensitivities, exposure to toxic vehicle paint, exposure to oil well fire residue, depleted uranium, and possible chemical warfare agents. Minnesotans continue to serve in the Southwest Asia theater.

- Goal 1** : to provide State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors.
- Objective 1** : to increase the percentage, of County Veterans Service Officers who, when surveyed, answer that they strongly agree or agree that this program returns phone calls in a timely manner by 5% a year.
- Measure 1** : Percentage of County Veterans Service Officers satisfied with the timeliness of returned phone calls

	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>	<u>F.Y.1999</u>	<u>F.Y.2000</u>
Percentage of Satisfaction						
Actual	48%	48%				
Target			53%	58%	63%	68%

DEFINITION :

The provision of benefits to veterans requires many phone calls to County Veterans Service Officers during the development of a case.

DATA SOURCE :

A survey was commissioned by the department and completed by the University of Minnesota's Center for Survey Research. This survey will serve as the base line to measure improvement in satisfaction in this area.

DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE :

The University's survey reported that 48% of respondents agreed with the statement that telephone calls were returned promptly. We believe the number of respondents reporting they strongly agree or agree with this statement can be improved 5% a year.

PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS :

Telephone logs will be maintained by division employees having the voice mail feature. Current policies and procedures will be reviewed with division employees and redrafted if necessary. Management will review telephone logs and voice mail messages to ensure all efforts are being taken to meet this objective.

Follow up surveys will be completed by the department on a regular basis.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE :

Changes in federal regulations can quickly increase the demand for services in this division. The elimination or reduction of current service levels often results in numerous additional calls or personal visits to this division. The small number of staff available also can affect performance in this area if prolonged absences occur.

Goal 1 : to provide State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits to eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors.

Objective 2 : to process 97% of complete State Soldier's Assistance Benefits applications for financial assistance within 48 hours of receipt of a completed application, by 1997.

Measure 1 : % of applications processed that meet this standard.

	<u>F.Y.1993</u>	<u>F.Y.1994</u>	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>
Percent processed						
Actual	unk%	unk%	95%	96%		
Target			97%	97%	97%	97%

DEFINITION :

An application which has all information required to award a claim for benefits will be processed within 48 hours of receipt.

RATIONALE :

This measurement demonstrates the amount of time it takes this program to process a complete application for State Soldiers Assistance Program benefits. These applications are completed by a County Veterans Service Officer and the veteran or dependent of a veteran seeking assistance. Benefits provided are in the form of direct financial assistance with meeting the basic needs of life, such as food, shelter and utilities. A complete application is defined as an application with all required supporting documentation necessary to make a decision to grant or deny the application.

DATA SOURCE :

The data source will be the results of a case management review of financial assistance cases, performed by management personnel. The results of this review will be used to measure performance.

DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE :

The department has attempted to provide direct financial assistance to eligible veterans and their dependents in a timely manner.

Program drivers, outside the control of the department hindered our ability to meet targets in 1995 and 1996.

PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS :

The case management review will provide substantiating information regarding the performance of the division. The department will increase training opportunities for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) to increase the number of applications that are complete when received. Additionally, the department will streamline the application process by simplifying forms, making them easier to complete. We will continue to work with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and other medical providers to decrease the amount of time required to obtain supporting medical documentation, a requirement for obtaining benefits.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE :

Limited staffing available in small agencies such as ours restricts the ability of the department to meet this objective.

Agency : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT

Program : SERVICES

EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING :

	<u>(\$ in Thousands)</u>	<u>Percent of Department</u>
Total Expenditure	\$2,282	45.97%
From Agency Funds	\$1,634	
General	\$648	
Number of FTE Staff:	16	47.06%

GOALS :

- to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits. (MS 197.605 subd. 9)
- to provide court/agency appointed fiduciary services to veterans, their dependents and survivors (MS 197.605 subd 8)

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES :

The department provides accredited representation before the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) adjudication division to ensure veterans and their dependents obtain the full measure of federal veterans benefits to which they are entitled. Those cases which are not resolved in favor of the claimant at the local level are appealed to the Board of Veterans Appeals. If not successful at this level, claims may be pursued to the Court of Veterans Appeals, which is located in Washington, DC. An equal amount of time is expended upon cases which ultimately result in the denial of the benefit sought. However, the department feels strongly that all veterans claims for benefits, whether likely of a successful outcome or not, should be pursued if the veteran so chooses.

The Commissioner is appointed as the financial guardian/conservator of incompetent veterans and their dependents by the Probate Court System, United States Department of Veterans Affairs and/or Social Security Administration. The guardianship activity provides complete and comprehensive financial management of income and assets, to include receipt, investment and expenditure of client funds. Services are supervised by the district court having jurisdiction over the guardianship. The court requires an annual accounting of all assets and expenditures. In many cases, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs also reviews all activities related to guardianship.

Other activities in the Services program which are important to the veterans and family members served, but are small in size and/or have static funding levels are:

VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT**1996 Agency Performance Report**

Guardianship Administration

Claims - Fargo Administration

Claims - Fort Snelling Administration

Guardianship Client Accounts

Bronze Star Grave Markers

Goal 1 : to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits.

Objective 1 : to maintain the current ratio of powers of attorney held by the claims offices, as a percentage of the total state veterans population.

Measure 1 : the percentage of persons represented by Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will equal or exceed 22% of the total veteran population in Minnesota.

	<u>F.Y.1993</u>	<u>F.Y.1994</u>	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>
Total Veterans in state						
Actual	473,700	468,014	464,900			
Total represented by Mn DVA						
Actual	n/a	103,000	102,238			
Performance ratio - %						
Actual	n/a%	22%	22%	22%		
Target					22%	22%

DEFINITION :

The claims offices exist to help veterans and their dependents obtain benefits from the USDVA.

A power of attorney is a USDVA form, signed by a claimant, which gives the MN DVA claims offices the authority to represent that claimant in his or her claim for benefits from the USDVA.

RATIONALE :

The rationale for using this objective measure is that it gives the Department accurate data about the numbers of people served by its Claims Division. This will allow the Department to monitor staffing levels as the total veteran population decreases.

DATA SOURCE :

The data is obtained from two sources. The first source is an annual USDVA report called the "Veteran Population Estimates by State, Age and Period of Service". It lists the current number of veterans living in the state of Minnesota as of July 1st of each year. This report is published about six to eight months after the July date of the report.

The second source of data is from the two claims offices' database program called the Veterans Information Management System (VIMS). It took until December 1995 to enter and update all the necessary data so that valid reports could be generated. Now the claims offices have a highly accurate source of information about the clients they serve. This figure includes dependents represented by the claims office.

DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE :

Prior to December 1995, the department had no accurate measurement of the actual number of people served by the claims offices. The USDVA annual report has been received each year, but the department could only estimate what percentage of those people were served by the claims offices. Therefore, the performance figures for this objective begin with USDVA fiscal year 94.

PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS :

The Claims offices will track all powers of attorney assigned to the claims offices using the VIMS program. This figure will be compared to the total number of veterans in the state of Minnesota as reported by the USDVA. The ratio of powers of attorney to the state's veteran population will be calculated and expressed as a percentage. This figure will be calculated when the USDVA releases its annual report, usually in late December of each year.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE :

DECREASING VETERAN POPULATION: While new categories of veterans are created, such as those from Southwest Asia, the total number of veterans continues to decline both in Minnesota and the nation. This is primarily due to the advancing death rate among veterans. A down sized military means fewer "new" veterans are being created.

Initially it would appear that our claims divisions' workloads would be decreasing. However, as the average age of our veteran population increases, the claims offices face increased demands for benefits and services from older, sicker veterans. This trend is expected to continue.

FEDERAL ACTIONS: The USDVA has restricted access to health care benefits and other services. Veterans who establish USDVA benefits for compensation do not need to meet stringent income and net worth requirements. Therefore, many older veterans are now attempting to establish eligibility for service connection many years after their service.

Goal 1 : to provide representation to veterans, their dependents and survivors in securing federal veterans benefits.

Objective 2 : to maintain the current amount of United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) compensation and pension dollars received by the people represented by the claims offices expressed as a percentage of the total USDVA compensation and pension dollars coming into the State of Minnesota.

Measure 1 : The ratio of United States Department of Veterans Administration dollars paid to Minnesota residents will equal or exceed 41% of the total represented by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs.

	<u>F.Y.1993</u>	<u>F.Y.1994</u>	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>
VA \$ to MN residents (Numbers In Thousands)						
Actual	\$247,520.0	\$245,152.7	\$254,371.8			
VA \$ to MN residents represented by MN DVA Claims Offices						
Actual			\$105,272.3			
Performance Ratio expressed in %						
Actual	n/a%	n/a%	41%			
Target				41%	41%	41%

DEFINITION :

The Claims Offices exist to help veterans and their dependents get compensation and pension benefits from the USDVA.

RATIONALE :

The rationale for using this objective measure is that the amount of money received by the people served by the claims offices is a measurement of the effectiveness of the offices and a reliable indicator of the impact of those offices on the quality of life of the people they serve. Without representation, people often do not know what USDVA benefits they may be eligible for, and they certainly are not aware of how to effectively prepare an appeal for denied benefits.

DATA SOURCE :

The data is obtained from two sources. The first source is an annual USDVA report called the "Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures". It lists the total USDVA dollars received by residents of the state of Minnesota in five areas, one of which is "Compensation and Pension." This is the figure used in this objective. The USDVA's fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30. This report is often not available until the first of the calendar year following the USDVA fiscal year.

The second source of data is from the two claims offices' database program called the Veterans Information Management System (VIMS). Reports will be generated to coincide with the USDVA fiscal year so that the dollar amounts will be for the same time periods. This figure does NOT include the amount of retroactive benefits received by the people represented.

DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE :

Prior to December 1995, the department had no accurate measurement of the actual number of people served by the claims offices. The USDVA annual report has been received each year, but the department could only estimate what percentage of those people were served by the claims offices. Therefore, the performance figures for this objective begin with USDVA fiscal year 94.

PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS :

The claims offices will prepare annual reports of the total amount of compensation and pension received by the people they represent. This figure will be compared to the USDVA's report for the comparable period of time. The ratio will be calculated and expressed as a percentage. The calculation will be performed when the USDVA releases its annual report of expenditures.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE :

DECREASING VETERAN POPULATION: While new categories of veterans are created, such as those from Southwest Asia, the total number of veterans continues to decline both in Minnesota and the nation. This is primarily due to the advancing death rate among veterans. A down sized military means fewer "new" veterans are being created.

Initially it would appear that our claims divisions' workloads would be decreasing. However, as the average age of our veteran population increases, the claims offices face increased demands for benefits and services from older, sicker veterans. This trend is expected to continue.

FEDERAL ACTIONS: The USDVA has restricted access to health care benefits and other services. Veterans who establish USDVA benefits for compensation do not need to meet stringent income and net worth requirements. Therefore, many older veterans are now attempting to establish eligibility for service connection many years after their service.

Goal 2 : to provide court/agency appointed fiduciary services to veterans, their dependents and survivors

Objective 1 : To personally visit with 50% of the guardianship clients annually.

Measure 1 : Percent of clients visited annually.

	<u>F.Y.1993</u>	<u>F.Y.1994</u>	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>
Actual Performance						
Actual		20%	49%	49%		
Target					50%	50%

DEFINITION :

Personal visits with clients is defined as: the guardianship staff will meet personally with the individual client, preferably in their homes, at least once during the fiscal year. The visits will review the current role of our guardianship services, determine clients' current well being and give clients an opportunity to address their concerns.

RATIONALE :

This personal contact should allow the guardianship division to be better informed of the client's mental and physical health, the client's ability to meet his/her own needs and what if any community involvement is required. This pro active approach should result in an early intervention and possibly prevent the need for emergent intervention, hospitalization, or possible confinement.

DATA SOURCE :

These visits will be distinguished from routine client contact (i.e. client stopping in office to pick up checks, visit with staff, etc.), in that this visit will be conducted as an interview and a written report will be made and kept on file. Issues raised or noted will be addressed in the written report. A potential crisis situation will be brought to the attention of the division manager, with appropriate action being taken.

DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE :

The very nature of being under court appointed Guardianship/Conservatorship indicates that these individuals are vulnerable and at high risk for community intervention, by social services agencies, law enforcement, emergency medical and institutional care. The division staff typically visits clients in response to emergency issues and problems. The division staff feels that a pro active visiting schedule would improve services to the clients and could reduce those incidents that require crisis intervention.

PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS :

The division will establish a monthly schedule of personal interviews either at the client's home, in the office or at a designated site. Staff will provide a written report and will address any issues noted. Division staffing and budget will be reviewed and adjusted to meet this objective.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE :

Geographic factors. A few of the clients prefer a transient life style, which can make personal contact with that client difficult. In addition many clients live outside the Minneapolis\St. Paul metropolitan area. This can impact the division's staff time and budget. Ultimately the personal preference regarding lifestyles and living conditions rests with the individual client, thereby making personal contact sometimes difficult to achieve.

Agency : VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPT

Program : DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS

EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING :

	<u>(\$ in Thousands)</u>	<u>Percent of Department</u>
Total Expenditure	\$973	19.60%
From Special Revenue Funds	\$106	
General	\$867	
Number of FTE Staff:	9	26.47%

GOAL :

- to administer an educational and certification program to Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers (MS 197.609)

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES :

The Departmental Operations Program of the department is responsible for all human resource and Sema4 actions, all Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) transactions, and the Management Information System support for the department's four offices, as well as the 87 County Veterans Service Offices throughout the state. This area also provides the accounting functions for the Guardianship Division through daily processing of client checks, balancing of accounts and monthly bank reconciliation.

The operation program assumed additional responsibilities when the State Veterans Cemetery was created. The department has completed the transfer of the site from the association which conceived and initiated this cemetery. The department has applied for and been awarded a federal grant for continued development of the property. Included in this action were a maintenance building, fencing, final development of the road system and irrigation of current burial areas. The department budget plan allows the cemetery operation to reduce its dependency on contract service providers.

County Veterans Service Officers are certified by the department based upon their attendance at training and educational seminars each year. This certification is not a mandatory process but has been well accepted in the state. Attainment of certification signifies that the County Veterans Service Officer has met the minimum standards of the department for training and education that year. It also signifies that the officer has taken and passed a mandatory test of their skills.

PROGRAM DRIVERS :

Increased activities of the other department programs has increased the work load of the financial management function of the department's operational programs. Outside of the department drivers included the new Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) which places demands on the department in all areas of the state wide accounting operations. This will require that the financial management division undergo additional training in the areas of human resource management, processing of transactions and accounting procedures.

Goal 1 : to administer an educational and certification program to Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers

Objective 1 : to ensure that 100% Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers meet certification standards annually.

Measure 1 : Percentage of County Veterans Service Officers that meet the standards required for certification.

	<u>F.Y.1993</u>	<u>F.Y.1994</u>	<u>F.Y.1995</u>	<u>F.Y.1996</u>	<u>F.Y.1997</u>	<u>F.Y.1998</u>
Percent meeting standards						
Actual		98%	99%	100%		
Target		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

DEFINITION :

There are 88 County Veterans Service Officers. The measure is the percentage of those that meet the certification established under MS 197.60.

RATIONALE :

The certification process for Minnesota County Veterans Service Officers has been established under MS 197.605. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers have established the criteria for Certification. The criteria is based on the attendance at various training programs/conferences designed to keep the CVSO versed in and up to date in veterans laws and benefits. These criteria have been adopted into a policy and procedure for use by the department and the association. The CVSO must earn a minimum number of training points and satisfactorily pass the annual CVSO Test to become certified.

DATA SOURCE :

The Department maintains individual records of those 'earned points' and advises each CVSO of their point totals. Certificates are awarded to those CVSO's who meet the established criteria.

Certification is an indication that the CVSO has attended the required number of training programs and has satisfactorily passed the annual CVSO Test. Certification is also required if a CVSO is to be awarded a grant through the Veterans Service Office Grant Program.

DISCUSSION OF PAST PERFORMANCE :

Since the certification program was established in 1987, the department has not been able to certify every eligible CVSO annually. In FY96 certification was awarded to 100% of the eligible CVSO's. The department wishes to meet this performance each fiscal year.

PLAN TO ACHIEVE TARGETS :

The department will continue to meet with the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers to develop training programs, so that all CVSO's have the opportunity to meet the certification criteria. The department will monitor the individual CVSO point totals and advise each CVSO of their progress. The department will develop additional training opportunities, to ensure there is ample opportunity for CVSOs to earn points and be prepared for the CVSO test.

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE :

Reductions in County budgets can affect the CVSOs ability to attend training sessions.

GLOSSARY

**COUNTY VETERANS
SERVICE OFFICERS
(CVSO)**

County employees who administer veterans benefits from various sources (i.e. federal, state, etc.)

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

A government agency providing various federal benefits and services.

**VETERANS
INFORMATION
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
(VIMS)**

A database program used by the claims offices to enter and update necessary data so reports and other information can be accurately generated.

APPENDIX

AGENCY : VETERANS AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF

AGENCY PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the 1996 Performance Report began shortly after the 1995 legislative session with a continuing review of those measurements developed in our first report. This process has included staff at all levels and continued through this date.

The planning process for the 1996 report included all staff of the department. Staff involved included representatives covered under the Commissioners Plan, AFSCME, MAPE, Middle Management and Confidential Plan bargaining units, as recognized by the Department of Employee Relations. Initial discussions focused on the measurements already developed, our performance in each area and program drivers which affected our success. Additionally, discussions included development of new measurements to be included in this report as well as measurements that could be utilized internally to document performance and assist in future planning.

As discussed in the 1994 report, the department did complete a customer satisfaction survey. This survey was contracted through the University of Minnesota Center for Survey Research. This process was completed in late 1995 and has provided the department with significant information from the clientele we serve. A new performance measurement is included in this report based upon the results of this survey. The department provides services to our many veteran clients through numerous activities and we believe their indication of satisfaction is a true indicator of our performance.

CHANGES SINCE 1994 REPORT

Changes from the 1994 report include a minor revision in the measurement in the Services Program, Guardianship Activity and two new performance measurements. These new measures are in the Benefits Program; Benefits Division and the Services Program; Claims Activity.

The minor revisions in the Guardianship activity measurement is simply a more detailed definition of the clientele served and home visit. Little or no effect on the actual measurement of performance is anticipated by these definitional changes.

A new performance measure has been added to the Benefits and Services Program, State Benefits Activity. This measure is a result of the recent customer satisfaction survey completed by the University of Minnesota Center for Survey Research. This survey indicated that 48% of the County Veterans Service Officers in Minnesota agreed or strongly agreed that telephone calls, left on voice mail, are returned promptly. The department's plan is to improve this level of satisfaction 5% per year.

APPENDIX

Another new performance measure has been added to the Services Program; Claims Activity. This measurement of activity is the ratio of dollars paid by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs directly to veterans who have assigned their power of attorney to the department as compared to the total dollars paid to all veterans in Minnesota. The department believes it can maintain these current performance levels in spite of fluctuating veterans populations and program drivers outside its control.

The last new performance measure for the department is in the Operations Program. The department is charged with the responsibility of training, educating and maintaining a certification process for County Veterans Service Officers. The department will measure the per cent of County Veterans Service Officers who attain certification annually. Currently, 100 per cent of County Veterans Service Officers have successfully completed the minimum qualifications for certification. We believe that we will continue to attain this percentage in the future.