

**VA**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# News Release

Office of Public Affairs  
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Sep. 9, 2015

## VA More Than Triples Volunteers in Facilities Nationwide through Summer of Service

*Department Welcomes New Volunteers, Strategic Partnerships to Better Serve Veterans*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that the 2015 Summer of Service initiative, which [launched in May](#), has exceeded the goals set for community volunteers serving Veterans and the development of new partnerships to reach Veterans and their family members. VA's Summer of Service mobilized approximately 300,000 citizens across the country to honor the nation's sacred commitment to caring for Veterans.

"Community by community, state by state, VA and the country came together to serve those who have served this nation. I am incredibly proud of the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who came into VA facilities to stand alongside our hard-working employees to help America's Veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. "At VA, we know that there is more work to do to serve America's heroes. We cannot do it alone. This summer, the American people recognized our vital role caring for those who have borne the battle and joined us in this sacred mission. Committed employees and volunteers, and strong partnerships, are the cornerstone of our efforts to transform this Department into one that Veterans and all citizens can be proud of."

The Summer of Service built upon the Department's existing partnerships to grow the number of individuals and organizations serving Veterans in their communities. VA facilities nationwide worked closely with their Congressional partners, Veterans Service Organizations, Mayors and local communities, private sector and non-profit organizations, and VA employees in unprecedented ways to support VA's commitment to care for those who "have borne the battle" and their families.

Through VA's outstanding volunteer program, the Department engaged approximately 300,000 volunteers around the country, far exceeding our goal of 100,000 volunteer connections. Through the work of Veterans Service Organizations and other community/civic groups, supplemental services and programs were made available for America's Veterans.

In May, VA committed to growing our partnerships with new MOUs and expanding current agreements to reach more than 15,000 Veterans and family members. VA's new, reenergized, and expanded partnerships, with NASCAR, the United States Tennis Association, PsychArmor and many others, reached 40,683 Veterans and their family members, nearly tripling our goal.

As part of VA's Summer of Service, the Department committed to holding VA Open Houses in VA facilities across the country to spur increased local engagement and welcome members of the community interested in supporting the needs of Veterans. Over the course of the summer, VA held more than 130 open houses across the system.

This year, VA has made progress on the many challenges we face in delivering care and benefits to Veterans and their families, completing more than 61.5 million appointments between July 1, 2014 and July 31, 2015 – an increase of 2.36 million more appointments than were completed during the same time period in 2013-2014. VA created over 2.7 million authorizations for Veterans to receive care in the private sector between August 16, 2014, and August 15, 2015, a 21-percent increase in authorizations when compared to the period ranging from August 2013 to August 2014. The backlog of disability claims (claims pending more than 125 days) is 93,674 as of September 7, an 85-percent reduction from its peak of 611,000 claims in March 2013 and the lowest ever in VA's history since 2007, when VA started measuring the backlog.

In an effort to improve the Veteran's customer service experience, VA has begun the most comprehensive re-organization in its history. The initiative, [called MyVA](#), has been guided by ideas and recommendations from Veterans, employees and stakeholders.

VA takes its commitment to care for the Nation's Veterans and their families very seriously, and encourages communities to stay engaged in serving Veterans:

- Look for VA at community events and engage our employees and partners.
- Call your local facility to find out what you can do to help.
- Check out VA on [Vantage Point](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), and join us in caring for America's Veterans.

To volunteer at a VA medical facility or national Cemetery, visit <http://www.volunteer.va.gov>. To join VA full-time, visit <http://mycareeratva.va.gov> or <http://www.usajobs.gov>.

###