



Annual Tribal Consultation Report – FY2019

Agency Overview

The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) is the single state administered veteran services agency for Arizona with the overarching goal of championing the provision of veteran services. The department is an advocate for service members, veterans and their families, and provides the following services to Arizona veterans: short and long term skilled nursing home care in two State Veterans' Nursing Homes located in Phoenix and Tucson (two new homes, in Flagstaff and Yuma, are scheduled to open in 2021); burial in State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries; preparation and submission of claims for disability and pension to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), completion and submission of applications for DVA burial and death benefits, healthcare, education and home loan benefits; approval of GI Bill funding for approved institutions of higher learning; administration of state and federal grant funding and initiatives that address veteran homelessness, employment, mental health and suicide prevention.

Tribal Liaison

The Department created a Tribal Liaison position in 2014 in accordance with the Executive Order 2006-14. The Tribal Liaison is responsible for facilitating state-tribal consultation for the 22 Arizona tribes, and is tasked with developing a robust network of service provision, consultation, and education of State and Federal benefits amongst the military veterans and their families residing on tribal lands. The current ADVS Tribal Liaison representative is R. Scott Fincher, Assistant Deputy Director – Veterans' Services Division.

Tribal Government Consultation Policy

The Department is committed to working with the American Indian Tribes to enhance military veteran services for service members, veterans and their families. The establishment of Tribal Government Consultation Policy ensures that ADVS engages in open, continuous and meaningful collaboration, consultation and services provision with Arizona Tribal Nations. ADVS continues to promote open dialogue, garnering feedback for creating a consultation policy. The ADVS website link for the Tribal Government Consultation Policy can be found here:

<https://dvs.az.gov/about>.

The Department conducted a total of 40 reservation specific outreach trips to tribal communities to enhance the provision of service delivery by reaching American Indian veterans living in remote locations throughout the state. The Department also participated in two American Indian veteran summits, two Pow Wow's, six stand downs, five Tribal Liaison round table meetings and two Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA) meetings, as well as additional tribe specific meetings. In all, the Department provided direct services and/or information to over 5,822 American Indian veterans and their families, an increase of over 2,100 American Indian veterans served compared to FY18.

Previous ADVS accreditation of tribal Veteran Service Officers (VSO's) has not proven effective and therefore the Virtual VBC program has served to fill the gaps. A challenge has been lack of Internet in rural areas. Another challenge for ADVS is the ability to build cultural rapport with members of various tribes, as many American Indian veterans and family members have had poor experiences with different government agencies and may not be willing to participate in future services. ADVS understands this and advocates to empower American Indian Veterans and their families by working together to help Arizona's tribes become accredited through the Department of Veterans Affairs to file their own claims with a tribal VSO. Another challenge was the immense distance between the different rural communities and local available services. Many American Indians faced a lack of transportation or ability to travel to neighboring service providers. ADVS has asked their Advisory Committee to complete a state-wide transportation needs assessment, to include tribal communities. The results may shed light on transportation needs on tribal land and



Annual Tribal Consultation Report – FY2019

and open up opportunities to seek grants that address this issue with a goal of providing more services better. The department has also processed 274 Native American Veterans Income Tax Settlement Fund (NASF) applications to date. The NASF was established on July 1, 2016 and ends on December 31, 2019. The NASF was created to refund Arizona income tax erroneously withheld from Native Americans who served in the military while claiming tribal land as their domicile. The NASF is available to assist surviving spouses or personal representatives if the veteran is deceased.

More information about these accomplishments is outlined in the chart and major accomplishment section below:

Goal	Objective	Activity and Performance Measure
Visit specific reservations for outreach opportunities	Educate on federal, state and ADVS resources and benefits	From October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019 ADVS staff have visited 15 specific Arizona tribal reservations for this fiscal year
Increase the number of outreach work assignments to Tribes in Arizona	Provide more direct services with regards to claim submissions to VA for service related disabilities	From October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019 ADVS staff have been in contact with 5,822 American Indian Veterans and their families, indicating a 37.0 % increase.
Connect with American Indian Veterans and their families in the rural communities of Arizona	Create a tool that will more efficiently connect ADVS with rural tribal communities	From October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019 ADVS has continued to work on new locations for the Virtual Veteran Benefit Counselor sessions statewide and have been able to assist rural American Indian Veterans and their families with claim submissions.

Major Accomplishments

The Department works closely with the Tribes and specifically their Veterans Affairs departments. This fiscal year has seen a 37.0 % increase in the direct services provided to American Indian Veterans and their families, and the Department has been able to target 15 specific reservations. The Department has continued processing the NASF applications, and as a result has been able to serve more American Indian Veterans and their families. By expanding the Virtual Veteran Benefit Counselor sessions statewide, the Department has connected with Arizona's rural tribal communities, bringing them new services and education.

For questions and more information, please contact:
 R. Scott Fincher, Assistant Deputy Director and ADVS Tribal Liaison
 602.234.8432
rfincher@azdvs.gov