



## Helping Military Veterans With Their Transportation Needs

By Jaime Rall

Today, about 23 million Americans are military veterans. Many need reliable, affordable and accessible transportation choices to get to work and school, visit family and friends, and receive medical care and community services. At the same time, a host of societal and demographic changes have led to specific mobility challenges for veterans. For example, many older World War II and Korean War veterans no longer drive, yet may require transportation to ongoing medical care. In addition, they often are the core volunteers on which many veterans' transportation programs depend.

### Did You Know?

- Many of America's 23 million veterans face transportation mobility challenges.
- States help veterans access transportation by, among other things, coordinating services, funding programs, providing transportation, and reducing fees and taxes.
- Recent federal initiatives include a new grant program, the Veterans Transportation Service and a national online dialogue.

Meanwhile, younger veterans are surviving battlefield injuries that were fatal in previous wars and that require continuing therapeutic care. Today, the ratio of injuries to fatalities is 16 to 1—five times greater than during the Vietnam War. Of the 1.8 million people who served in Iraq or Afghanistan, 360,000 have traumatic brain injuries. Twenty-six percent of those who have served since 2001 have a service-connected disability, compared with 14 percent of all veterans.

Veterans also are more at risk than the general population for unemployment, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression and suicide. These men and women need access to jobs, training, social services, mental health care and social activities; however, 40 percent of them live in rural areas, where both community services and transportation are less available.

A common misconception is that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and volunteer driver programs meet all veterans' transportation needs. Although valuable, these limited programs focus mainly on medical transportation, leading to the need for more comprehensive mobility services.

State-Level Interagency Coordination  
Concerning Veterans' Transportation



■ Includes veterans in transportation coordination efforts  
 ▨ Includes transportation in veterans' services coordination efforts  
 □ Has had a stand-alone interagency task force on veterans' transportation  
 Source: NCSL, 2012.

## State Action

All levels of government and many non-governmental organizations play a role in addressing veterans' transportation needs. Activities vary widely from state to state, however.

**Coordination.** A growing number of states are attempting to better coordinate diverse programs across different agencies to be more efficient and make programs easier to use. In 27 states and the Northern Mariana Islands, state-level interagency councils work to coordinate transportation services. At least 12 of these councils include veterans' representatives. Other states have coordinating councils that focus broadly on veterans' services; of these, California and New Jersey include transportation stakeholders. In addition, Colorado, Massachusetts and Oregon have had stand-alone interagency task forces to specifically address veterans' transportation concerns.

**Funding.** At least 13 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands have special trust funds or other dedicated funds that have been or can be used to support veterans' transportation needs. Idaho's Veterans Transportation Fund, for example, provides vouchers to veterans in wheelchairs for transportation to medical appointments. At least 14 states and Puerto Rico fund veterans' transportation programs through other means such as legislative appropriations or departmental budgets.

**Transportation Programs.** Some states play a direct role in providing transportation to veterans. New Jersey has coordinators in each county who arrange free rides for veterans to medical appointments and other services. North Dakota provides five vans on scheduled routes to the Veterans' Affairs hospital in Fargo; the service is paid for in part by the state veterans' postwar trust fund.

**Reduced Fees and Taxes.** Many states waive or reduce certain vehicle-related fees and taxes for eligible veterans. These include driver's license fees (seven states); vehicle registration charges (31 states); vehicle taxes (16 states); fees for special veterans' license plates (27 states); and fees for disability placards (four states). Eligibility rules vary, but may include veterans with qualifying disabilities, Congressional Medal of Honor recipients or former prisoners of war.

**Other State Roles.** States play many other roles in helping veterans get the transportation they need. Among them are: ensuring that veterans receive free or reduced transit fares; waiving tolls; offering special parking privileges; employing veterans' advocates; encouraging veterans to participate in local coordination activities; initiating studies; and joining multi-state initiatives.

## Federal Action

In addition to traditional roles, such as reimbursing eligible veterans for transportation to medical appointments, the federal government has recently initiated new activities to support transportation for veterans. Since 2011, the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) has awarded \$63.6 million in discretionary grants to make it easier for veterans, service members and military families to learn about and arrange for local transportation. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs launched its Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) in 2010 to provide, enhance and coordinate transportation to Veterans' Affairs medical centers. This spring, the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility and the U.S. Department of Defense sponsored a National Online Dialogue on Veterans' Transportation to generate ideas about how to strengthen transportation choices for veterans who have served their country.

## NCSL Contacts and Resources

Jaime Rall  
NCSL—Denver  
(303) 856-1417

Alice Wheet  
NCSL—Denver  
(303) 856-1558

NCSL Military and Veterans' Affairs webpage

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