



HANDBOOK FOR
DAV VAVS
REPRESENTATIVES
AND DEPUTY
REPRESENTATIVES



KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO
AMERICA'S VETERANS

Forward

We need your help in continuing to provide the best care and treatment for our ill and injured veterans. We need your help not only because our doctors and nurses are extremely busy applying the best of their knowledge but also because our veterans need the personal warmth and friendliness only you as a volunteer can bring them.

What better assurance can veterans have than our interest in getting them well and having someone from their community volunteer to help them? In return, what better satisfaction can you get than to know you have helped veterans adjust to their new surroundings or you have helped them become, once again, well and productive citizens? Our health care staff is looking forward to working with you on behalf of our veteran patients.

—**Office of the Under Secretary for Health,
Department of Veteran Affairs**

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Commonly Used Acronyms

- HSC – Hospital Service Coordinator
- PTSD – Post-traumatic stress disorder
- LVAP – Local Veterans Assistance Program
- TN – DAV’s Transportation Network
- VA – Department of Veterans Affairs
- VAVS – VA Voluntary Service program
- VS – Voluntary Services



The Why

When it comes to patient care, it's easy to look at the roles doctors, nurses and other hospital staff fill and assume those are the only ones that matter.

A volunteer's role matters just as much.

Volunteers at VA medical facilities are critical members of a patient care team. They provide a personal touch that "cannot be underestimated, as anyone who has been in a vulnerable situation can attest," Drs. Femida Handy and Narasimhan Srinivasan wrote in their study on the benefits of hospital volunteers. The vital roles volunteers play "support services that contribute to the added comfort and happiness of patients, their families and visitors."

The practice of compassion volunteers perform perfectly complements the practice of medicine. They balance the clinical nature of medical care with friendliness, compassion and warmth. The effectiveness of the VA's world-class medical resources is diminished without world-class volunteers. Anxiety levels come down and quality of life goes up as they provide a touch of home, a feeling of belonging and a bond with the outside world.

The VA recognizes this importance and invests significant resources in the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS), giving those who want to volunteer a way to be a part of individualized patient services.

Getting well matters more when a patient has the desire to live a healthy, fulfilling life. Volunteers are the ones who often instill that desire.

Our Goals

DAV has had a long relationship with the VAVS. Over nearly eight decades, DAV has contributed millions of volunteer hours to patients in VA health care facilities. We want to contribute millions of hours more.

To do that, DAV must have a vibrant presence in VA facilities. We need to recruit new volunteers, retain existing volunteers and educate the public on what we do.

When our volunteers are present, staff, patients, their families and the public see DAV putting deeds behind the words we say. They all have a chance to learn about our mission of keeping our promise to America's veterans. Volunteering through DAV is one of the most publicly visible ways we do that.

The VA operates the largest network of health care facilities and domiciliaries in the United States. It also operates many Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and Vet Centers. Our presence at these locations allows us to continue to have representation in the veteran community. This matters because we need to ensure DAV's voice is strong when it comes to decisions that affect the care and quality of life of veterans under the VA's care. If our visits become more infrequent or our volunteer numbers decline, we risk damaging a relationship we've worked for decades to bolster.

Be the support for **veteran patients**, their **families** and **visitors**.



History of the VAVS

DAV was at the initial meeting to take part in forming a plan for Veterans Administration volunteer activities. At the VA's request, DAV and other national veterans and welfare organizations met with representatives of the Veterans Administration Central Office in Washington, D.C., on April 8, 1946. They discussed the coordination and integration of community and voluntary assistance in hospitals and domiciliaries.

The meeting resulted in a plan to create the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) to coordinate volunteers to assist hospital staff. It also laid the groundwork for the VAVS National Advisory Committee, which is composed of national representatives of the participating organizations. This committee advises the VA and is a partnership for planning and administering the program. The plan also included establishing VAVS advisory committees at the health care facility level.

Under the VAVS, veterans and welfare organizations work in partnership with the VA to effectively use community volunteer resources. The VA gets valuable assistance, and in turn, participating organizations can send volunteers knowing their contributions are worthwhile through the VAVS National Advisory Committee's guidance.

The committee has taken on projects, conducted studies and developed recommendations that call for specific action from participating organizations. This aspect of the committee's work is beyond the normal function of an advisory committee, and it's unusual for a federal agency to permit outside groups to help plan and operate a program. But it's this partnership and collaboration that makes VAVS so effective.

Volunteers who participate in this program range from teenagers to senior citizens. Most volunteers belong to veterans service and fraternal organizations, which collaborate with the VAVS through their organizations' VAVS representatives. Other volunteers participate in the program by directly contacting the voluntary service program manager at a VA health care facility. No matter how they arrived at the VA, their contributions have unquestionably improved the quality of care and treatment for veterans.

The Role of a DAV VAVS Volunteer

There is a continuing need for onboarding new volunteers in VA health care facilities because of the important role they play.

As mentioned earlier, volunteers assist in providing patients with normal, healthy interactions with the community that help maintain or restore the confidence of patients. They bring an extra level of service to the care and treatment of veteran patients that cannot be provided by paid staff regardless of the staff's size and effectiveness. There are many opportunities for volunteers in VA health care facilities, including:

- Escorting patients to and from clinics.
- Helping with the clinical preparation procedures and patient-motivation activities in the physical therapy clinic.
- Serving as activity leaders and assistants, instructors and guest speakers in recreation activities.
- Helping patients with socialization and therapeutic activities.
- Coordinating volunteer efforts for special activities
- Instructing and leading group discussions in educational therapy.
- Assisting with magazine cart, library circulation and processing.
- Serving as an information desk receptionist
- Serving as escorts, ushers, organists or vocalists for chapel services
- Preparing displays and assisting patients in menu selections in nutrition and food service.
- Preparing resources or socializing with patients in occupational therapy.

The VAVS program manager at the nearest VA health care facility will be able to discuss all available opportunities with prospective volunteers.



How the VAVS Works

All VA health care facilities have quarterly VAVS committee meetings. Committee members include one representative and up to three deputy representatives from each organization taking part in a particular VA facility's program. They work with health care staff to plan the best use of community volunteer resources. These committee members are also the link between the VA facility and all chapters, units or posts of each member's organization that's involved in VAVS.

Before each committee meeting, the chairperson usually confers with the chief of each health care service (for example, the chief of nursing service) to identify a particular need for volunteer assistance. Those service chiefs outline what volunteers are to do, the number of volunteers needed, the qualifications of the volunteers and when they are needed.

These needs are then brought to the attention of the VAVS representatives at the committee meetings. Each representative relays this information to the chapters or units within their organization to help recruit the right volunteers needed to fill the assignments.



How to Become a DAV VAVS Volunteer

There's a volunteer opportunity for everyone at DAV. Even if someone only has a few hours to spare, their individual talents and gifts can positively affect veterans. With that in mind, working as a DAV VAVS volunteer does require some extra considerations and steps.

Step 1: Qualification Assessment

These are the basic qualifications of a DAV VAVS volunteer:

- A willingness to accept health care facility standards of conduct and supervision
- A sincere interest in helping people
- A sense of responsibility to the community and the individuals in it
- Enjoyment in new and meaningful experiences
- The ability to work with people on a team
- Tact, patience, congeniality, warmth and kindness
- The physical ability to perform volunteer work
- A sense of pride in serving others

Step 2: Information Call

Call the local DAV VAVS representative for information about the program and the opportunities for participation at an area facility. Prospective volunteers may also contact their local VAVS program manager, who is a VA employee, directly. But prospective volunteers should keep in mind that they must let that program manager know that they want their time to be credited to DAV in order to be considered a DAV volunteer.

Step 3: Talk It Over

The DAV VAVS representative will talk with prospective volunteers about their interests and skills to help properly place them for volunteer opportunities. They will share which assignments are currently available and in need of support. They will also discuss a volunteer's placement with the VAVS program manager to help find the best fit. Prospective volunteers and the DAV representative will make the final decision on an area where they can contribute based on their interests and the needs of veterans at the facility.

Step 4: Orientation

All volunteers at VA health care facilities will receive appropriate orientation for their assignments. During orientation, they will receive an introduction to the VA

facility and its care and treatment programs for veterans.

The purpose of the orientation is to provide:

- Knowledge of the policies, functions and objectives of the VA health care facility.
- An understanding of the nature and significance of the program.
- An understanding of the fundamental principles and methods of volunteer assistance in VA health care facilities.
- Discussions on the proper approach and attitude needed while working with different types of patients at the VA health care facility.
- The role of a volunteer.

Step 5: Take a Place on the Team

Following orientation, volunteers are ready to assume duties as DAV volunteers. Volunteers take instruction from doctors, medical professionals and staff who know the patients' health care needs, abilities and capabilities to participate in activities.

As a member of the health care team, volunteers will gain the respect of their fellow team members by:

- Knowing and observing all facility rules and regulations.
- Being dependable in all assignments.
- Reporting on time and staying until the assignment is complete.
- Following instructions of staff members.
- Being kind and friendly to all patients.
- Avoiding emotional or personal involvement in patients' problems.
- Remembering that all personal information learned about a patient is confidential.
- Performing a needed service in a pleasant and efficient manner.

VA health care providers are grateful for volunteer support through DAV and want to see volunteers succeed in their roles and thrive as members of the health care team.

Volunteers will find that the VA health care staff will:

- Assign volunteers to a needed job.
- Give helpful on-the-job instruction.
- Strive to ensure volunteer job satisfaction through personal supervision.
- Discuss any matters concerning a volunteer's assignment.

Apprenticeship

Volunteers are considered apprentices on the team until they have completed a minimum of 10 hours of probationary volunteer service. During this period, they will receive additional orientation and necessary on-the-job instruction from the staff member in charge of the program to which they are assigned. After completing their apprenticeship, volunteers are considered fully functioning members of the health care team.

Recording Hours

It is very important that volunteers tell their VAVS program manager that they want their hours credited to DAV. Several other organizations provide volunteers to the VAVS, so they must be clear about which organization they represent to be appropriately recognized for their contributions.

Regular scheduled volunteers are individuals who accept a designated assignment on a regular schedule at a minimum of four times a year. The VAVS program manager will provide regular scheduled volunteers with individual cards to record their hours.

Occasional volunteers, those who volunteer less than four times a year, are welcomed and can also credit their hours to DAV.

Your individual talents and gifts can **positively affect veterans**. So take the steps to become a volunteer.



VAVS Health Care Facility Advisory Committee

The VA relies on each facility's VAVS advisory committee to provide advice on participation in volunteer programs at a local level. Organizations, including DAV, serving as member agencies of VAVS select their own representatives for these committees.

This is a high-visibility role, so it is essential that the individuals selected to represent DAV represent the organization well. It is not an overstatement to say that the measure of the success of DAV's participation in VAVS programs is largely based on the caliber of the individuals selected as VAVS representatives and deputy representatives on advisory committees.

These committee meetings, which occur four times a year, drive the volunteer activities at a particular VA health care facility and keep the committee chairperson informed of participating organizations' ability to provide volunteers to meet a facility's needs.

What comes out of these meetings is what's relayed to participating organizations' members and volunteers by committee representatives. A solid line of communication between the committee representatives and their organizations is the foundation of a successful volunteer program.

Responsibilities of DAV National VAVS Representatives

DAV has a representative on the VAVS National Advisory Committee. DAV's national commander is the appointing authority for the national VAVS representative position.

The national VAVS representative may choose to select a deputy national VAVS representative to serve.

These individuals advise the committee on DAV's plans and abilities to assist the VAVS on a national level. They establish guidelines and inform DAV representatives on facility VAVS advisory committees as well as national, state and local officials of our organization about the VAVS and our participation in it.

DAV's national representatives attend the annual national VAVS committee meeting and serve on subcommittees to which they may be appointed.

They also supervise and control the activities of DAV's VAVS representatives at VA health care facilities across the country. They receive and solicit recommendations for appointments to these positions and certify those

local-level appointments. They also keep interested parties informed of decisions and supervise and record reports submitted by DAV VAVS representatives.

Responsibilities of the State VAVS Chairperson

Each DAV department commander may recommend to the national VAVS representative the name of an individual to be certified as the state-level VAVS chairperson. Those appointed as state VAVS chairperson will be responsible for coordinating the VAVS program within the department and educating DAV chapters and Auxiliary units on their responsibilities to the VAVS.

The state VAVS chairperson's responsibility is also to ensure that a VAVS representative properly covers each VA health care facility within the state. They should recommend to the national VAVS representative the name(s) of prospective representatives to fill any vacancies.

The state VAVS chairperson is also responsible for ensuring each VAVS representative in their department submits a Monthly Activities Report to the national VAVS representative. The chairperson should encourage DAV department and chapter officials as well as members in their state to understand the importance of complete cooperation with the VAVS representative, both financially and in the work they do.

The chairperson is encouraged to visit each VA health care facility in the state at least once a year in order to evaluate DAV's participation in the facility's VAVS program.

They should organize and conduct a VAVS session at their department's convention and encourage attendance by VAVS representatives, deputies and associates, as well as all department and chapter officers and members who wish to attend.

Responsibilities of VAVS Representatives

Each organization serving as a member agency of the VAVS selects its own representatives for the local VA medical facility's VAVS advisory committee.

For DAV, the state VAVS chairperson may recommend someone to the national VAVS representative for appointment to these positions. When there is no VAVS chairperson in a department, the department commander may make the recommendation. Where there is no department organization in a state, the national commander is the recommending official for the appointment.

As stated earlier, this is a high-visibility, critical role that much of DAV's success in the VAVS is built upon. The work VAVS representatives do goes beyond attending the quarterly VAVS advisory committee meetings. They are DAV's liaison between their chapters and members and the VA health care facility they serve.

The VAVS representative advises the facility VAVS advisory committee on DAV's ability to participate in the local VAVS program. They pass the needs of the VAVS program along DAV members and chapters in their area, and they coordinate DAV volunteers' participation in the program while keeping the VAVS program manager informed.

A DAV VAVS representative must:

- Be able to organize the efforts of the members and volunteers of our organization.
- Show effective leadership.
- Have the time and interest to devote to committee work.
- Have a clear understanding of the goals of the VAVS.
- Effectively explain to the chairperson of the facility VAVS advisory committee the work they believe DAV is best suited to do in the program.
- Communicate to potential volunteers the concept of the VAVS and the purpose underlying our organization's participation in a program.
- Have the support of our membership and the officials of our organization.

Deputy VAVS Representatives

VAVS representatives may select up to three deputy representatives to assist them or work in their absence. Upon the selection of the deputy, the VAVS representative should notify the national representative as to the name and address of the appointee for certification purposes.

Selecting at least one deputy is encouraged.

When deciding whom to select, a representative may consider someone from a different area than their own. Representatives should exercise good judgment in this selection process, because they and their deputies must work together in complete cooperation.

Associate VAVS Representatives

If a VA health care facility in one state has jurisdiction over a certain portion of the territory of a neighboring state, an associate VAVS representative may represent the neighboring state on the facility's VAVS advisory committee.

Associate representatives may participate and contribute to all deliberations in these meetings. However, they will have no voting power. The representative from the state where the VA health care facility is located will cast DAV's vote.

Recommendation for the appointment of an associate representative is made by the neighboring state VAVS chairperson or, if none exists, by the department commander. The tenure of this position will run in a similar time frame as the VAVS representative.

Further Information for VAVS Representatives and Deputy Representatives

Term of Appointments: Appointments are for a two-year calendar term unless circumstances dictate a successor should be appointed. For example, the term of an individual appointed on April 3, 2023, will expire at the end of the second full calendar year, Dec. 31, 2025. The expiration date of a deputy will be the same date as the representative under whom they would serve. The appointment of a replacement representative, deputy or state chairperson will be only for the unexpired term.

Approval of Appointments: All appointments are subject to approval by the national VAVS representative.

Monthly Activity Reports: DAV National Headquarters must receive a VAVS Representative Monthly Report each month. This report reflects the representative's leadership and interest in DAV. National Headquarters cannot get a true picture of the extent of DAV's



participation from just the individual facility's VAVS advisory committee meeting minutes.

DAV compiles and presents to the annual national convention an overall report that reflects the extent of participation and service our national organization has provided to the VAVS. This annual report should, as closely as possible, show how many volunteers have participated in the VAVS and the approximate total amount of volunteer hours credited to our organization. This would include not only the hours of the representative and deputy but all volunteers. We should also show the approximate amount of monetary contributions to our program.

Additional report forms can be secured from the Office of the National VAVS Representative at:

DAV National Headquarters
860 Dolwick Drive
Erlanger, KY 41018

Identification Card: The representative and deputy representative are entitled to receive a DAV National Headquarters ID card. This is in effect only so long as their term is in effect. The card should be destroyed or returned to headquarters if and when it becomes void.

Uniform: Representatives are authorized to wear a national cap with the appropriate lettering indicating thereon whether they are a "VAVS representative" or a "VAVS deputy representative." Caps may be ordered from National Headquarters. If and when representatives are no longer a certified, the cap should no longer be used.



Certificate of Merit: To show our appreciation for service to our organization, we have been authorized in certain instances to award National Certificates of Merit. For a representative to qualify, three basic factors must be met:

- **Term of Service:** They must have served at least two years as a VAVS representative.
- **Attendance at local VAVS meetings:** VAVS meeting reports must reflect that our organization has been represented, either by the representative or deputy, in at least 75% of the meetings annually.
- **Reports of Participation:** National Headquarters must receive a VAVS Representative Monthly Report each month of a representative's appointment.

Expenses: National Headquarters cannot make available any monetary benefits, either for participation in the program or reimbursement of expenses incurred in the performance of representative duties. Funds may be made available by departments through their annual budget to be expended within the VAVS.

To arrive at a sound figure within the budget, first consider all the income that will be available for this service. Then, consider the number of VA health care facilities within the department and prorate the amount to be disbursed to the VAVS representatives. In this manner, all funds available for department VA health care facility services are controlled and dispensed through the department.

In some instances, chapters within the area of the VA health care facility may make certain funds available. Ideally, the VAVS representative, through whom all participation is coordinated, knows at all times to what extent they may be able to commit DAV's financial participation.

How to Recruit Volunteers:

- Make personal contact with prospective volunteers.
- Be able to describe assignments available at the VA health care facility.
- Know about DAV and the VA health care facility and be able to give accurate information.
- Bring prospective volunteers to the VA health care facility for an interview with the VAVS program manager, because all VAVS volunteers must be scheduled through the VA Voluntary Service Office.
- Inform volunteers that orientation and on-the-job training will be provided and is a requirement for volunteer service.
- Keep the public aware of the need for and accomplishments of volunteers.

Department Responsibilities

DAV departments are responsible for ensuring the utmost cooperation among volunteers, chapters, units, members and the VAVS representative. Departments should understand that the national VAVS representative is the certifying official in DAV's organizational structure and any suggested recommendations for changes should be made to them. Departments should urge each chapter to contribute as generously as possible to the VAVS, particularly in service through volunteers. If possible, departments should have certain working funds available to be utilized by VAVS representatives, where and when needed, to enable them to carry out their responsibilities.

Chapter Responsibilities

Local chapters are responsible for ensuring cooperation between the department and VAVS representatives, particularly in providing volunteers to participate in the VAVS. This allows for greater participation of DAV in the program locally and on a national level.

The primary responsibilities of chapters are:

- Providing volunteers to VAVS representatives as needed.
- Arranging available funds to help operate the program.
- Publicizing and disseminating information about the VAVS.
- Participating as a group, chapter or unit in special or regularly scheduled events.
- Utilizing the services of the VAVS representative and VA health care facility officials by inviting them to attend their meetings to provide information about the VAVS.
- Coordinating all participation at the local VA health care facility through the VAVS representative.

National Service Officer Responsibilities

National service officers give invaluable assistance to the VAVS and our organization by emphasizing widespread participation by DAV members. If they are available, they should visit chapter and other meetings to speak about the importance of participating in the VAVS.

MISSION STATEMENT

We are dedicated to a single purpose: empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. We accomplish this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them, fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill, and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

This mission is carried forward by:

- Providing free, professional assistance to veterans and their families in obtaining benefits and services earned through military service and provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies of government.
- Providing outreach concerning its program services to the American people generally, and to disabled veterans and their families specifically.
- Representing the interests of disabled veterans, their families, their widowed spouses and their orphans before Congress, the White House and the judicial branch, as well as state and local government.
- Extending DAV's mission of hope into the communities where these veterans and their families live, through a network of state-level departments and local chapters.
- Providing a structure through which disabled veterans can express their compassion for their fellow veterans through a variety of volunteer programs.



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