



ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

# Volunteer for Veterans



**FULFILLING OUR PROMISES**  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

## Welcome New DAV Volunteer

On behalf of DAV, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and welcome you to the DAV volunteer team. Thank you for your time, thank you for your devotion and thank you for your commitment to help the ill and injured veterans we serve.

In reading this handbook, you have taken the first step in empowering our veterans to live high-quality and fulfilled lives. With your selfless commitment to help our ill and injured veterans, we will continue to successfully fulfill DAV's mission, which was envisioned in 1920 by Judge Robert S. Marx.

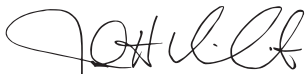
Judge Marx founded DAV on the solid faith that people just like you would gladly volunteer to help our service men and women who sacrificed to serve our great nation.

By enlisting as a DAV volunteer, you will no doubt experience immeasurable personal satisfaction as you encounter many veterans who are in need of the compassion and dedication that you can offer.

Your time, commitment and dedication will not go unappreciated. The collaboration and work you are involved in will leave lasting memories that cannot be erased from the hearts you touch.

In this handbook you will find a wealth of information that you should find helpful in understanding the volunteer opportunities and the vital role that you play in supporting DAV's mission.

With sincere gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Kleindienst', written in a cursive style.

John Kleindienst

National Voluntary Services Director

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## Commonly Used Acronyms

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

# Volunteer Programs

DAV proudly serves our nation's ill and injured veterans through a variety of unique volunteer programs. DAV is proud of the devotion and support we receive from our volunteers. It's those dedicated individuals who make our volunteer programs so successful.

Each year, volunteers are called upon for a commitment of their time and talents. And each year, they come through magnificently, not only meeting every new challenge, but by going well beyond everyone's expectations. The task may seem difficult, the obstacles insurmountable...yet our DAV, DAV Auxiliary, corporate and youth volunteers have proven their true resolve. We can count on them to be there—when and where they're needed—getting the job done right.

## VA Voluntary Service Program

Our nation's heroes at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, nursing homes and clinics need volunteers. As a DAV volunteer, you can assist veterans, their families and caregivers through the VA Voluntary Service Program (VAVS) by sharing your time and talents to perform a wide range of duties that convey your gratitude and respect for their service in a substantive and important way.

Volunteer support for those who served can be as basic as being a buddy to a veteran during rehabilitation, while some tasks would require highly technical and professional skills. All DAV volunteers gain meaningful experiences by empowering veterans to live healthy and fulfilled lives. Hours performed through the VAVS Program must be credited to DAV for you to be considered a DAV volunteer and be eligible for DAV recognition.



## History of VAVS

On April 8, 1946, at the invitation of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs, representatives of several national veterans and welfare organizations met in Washington, D.C., with representatives of the Veterans Administration Central Office staff. They discussed the plan for the coordination and integration of community and voluntary assistance in hospitals and domiciliaries.

DAV was represented at that initial meeting to take part in forming a plan for Veterans Administration volunteer activities. The meeting resulted in the creation of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program, under which volunteers would assist hospital staff by supplementing the individualized patient services.

The plan also called for creation of the VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee, composed of national representatives of the participating organizations. The committee advises the Veterans Administration Central Office staff and is a partnership for the planning and administration of the program. The plan also established VA Voluntary Service Advisory Committees at the health-care facility level.

Under the VAVS program, veterans and welfare organizations work in conjunction with the VA to develop the effective use of community volunteer resources. Additionally, these organizations enjoy worthwhile participation in the VAVS program through the VAVS National Advisory Committee.

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 considered to be far beyond the normal functions of an advisory committee. DAV knows of no other federal agency that permits outside groups to participate in the planning and operation of a program, as is done in VAVS.

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. The VAVS program assists professional staff in the healing and rehabilitation of ill and injured veterans. This joint effort of staff and volunteers assists veterans during the treatment, healing and recovery processes.

Volunteers in no way replace staff members, but they do provide a service beyond the scope of the medical

center staff—a touch of home, a feeling of belonging, a bond with the outside world and help instilling a desire in the individual patients to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

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 organization's VAVS Representatives. Other volunteers participate in the program by directly contacting the Voluntary Service Program Manager at a VA health care facility.

Since the establishment of the VAVS program, countless volunteers have contributed millions of hours to patients in VA health care facilities. Volunteer service has contributed to the expansion of services and improved the quality of care and treatment for veterans. This is indeed an outstanding record of unselfish and dedicated service to America's veterans.

## **You as a DAV VAVS Volunteer**

There is a real and continuing need for volunteer assistance in VA health care facilities. Volunteers assist in providing patients with normal, healthy interactions with the community that help maintain or restore the confidence of patients.

Volunteers bring an extra service to the care and treatment of veteran patients that cannot be provided by paid staff, regardless of its size and effectiveness. There are several various opportunities for volunteers in VA health care facilities.

The following are a few traditional ways you can assist as a DAV volunteer in a VA facility:

1. Escorting patients to and from clinics.
2. Coordinating volunteer efforts for special activities.
3. Magazine cart, library circulation and processing assistance.
4. Information desk receptionists.
5. Serving as escorts, ushers, organists or vocalists for chapel services.
6. Instructing and leading group discussions in educational therapy.
7. Preparing displays and assisting patients in menu selections in nutrition and food service.
8. Cutting stencils, issuing tools and supplies and socializing with patients in occupational therapy.

- The VAVS Program Manager at your nearest VA health care facility will be able to discuss all available volunteer opportunities with you.

All VA health care facilities have a VAVS Committee. Committee members include one VAVS Representative and up to three Deputy Representatives for each organization taking part in the VA facility's program. As a member of the VAVS Committee, each Representative is the link between the VA facility and all chapters, units or posts of the member organization involved in VAVS. In addition, VAVS Representatives work with health care staff to plan the best use of community volunteer resources.

At each VAVS Committee meeting, the need for volunteer assistance is brought to the attention of the VAVS Representatives. Each Representative then brings this information to the attention of the various chapters or units within their organization in order to help in recruiting the right volunteers for the assignments to be filled.



# How you can become a DAV VAVS Volunteer

## STEP ONE: TEST YOURSELF

Do you meet the basic qualifications of a DAV volunteer?

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



## STEP TWO: INFORMATION CALL

Call your DAV VAVS Representative for information about the program and the opportunities for your participation at that facility. You may also contact the VAVS Program Manager directly, but please keep in mind that you must let the Program Manager know that you want your time to be credited to DAV (in order to be considered a DAV volunteer).

## STEP THREE: TALK IT OVER

The DAV VAVS Representative will be pleased to discuss with you your interest and proper placement in the VAVS Program. The DAV VAVS Representative will discuss assignments that are currently available



and in need of volunteers. They will also discuss your placement in the program in relation to your interests and capabilities with the Program Manager.

You and the DAV representative will make the final decision on an area where you can contribute, based on your interests and the needs of veterans in your facility.

## **STEP FOUR: ORIENTATION**

All volunteers at VA health care facilities will receive appropriate orientation for their assignments. During orientation, you will receive an introduction to the VA facility and its care and treatment programs for veterans. The basic purpose of the orientation is to provide you with the following information:

1. Knowledge of the policies, functions and objectives of the VA health care facility.
2. An understanding of the nature and significance of the VAVS Program.
3. An understanding of the fundamental principles and methods of volunteer assistance in VA health care facilities.
4. Discussions on the proper approach and attitude needed while working with different types of patients at the VA health care facility and your role as a volunteer.

## **STEP FIVE: TAKE YOUR PLACE ON THE TEAM**

Following your orientation, you are ready to take your place on DAV's volunteer team through VAVS. Volunteers take instruction from doctors, medical professionals and staff because they know the health care needs of the patients, their abilities and their capabilities to participate in activities.

### **Your Fellow Team Members**

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

1. Knowing and observing all facility rules and regulations.
2. Being dependable in all your assignments.
3. Reporting on time and staying until your assignment is completed.
4. Following instructions of the staff member to whom you have been assigned.
5. Being kind and friendly to all patients.
6. Avoiding emotional or personal involvement in patients' problems.

7. Remembering that all personal information you may learn about a patient is confidential.
8. Performing a needed service in a pleasant and efficient manner.

### **The VA Health Care Facility Staff**

VA health care providers are grateful for your support through DAV. The relationships developed between volunteers and staff are important. You'll find that the VA health care staff will:

1. Assign you to a needed job.
2. Give you helpful on-the-job instruction.
3. Strive to ensure your job satisfaction through personal supervision.
4. Discuss with you any matters concerning your volunteer assignment.

### **Apprenticeship**

You will be considered an apprentice on the team until you have completed a minimum of 10 hours of volunteer service. During this period, you will receive additional orientation and necessary on-the-job instruction from the staff member in charge of the program in which you are assigned. After completing your apprenticeship, you will begin a career of volunteer service as a regular member of the health care team.

### **Recording Hours**

It is very important that you indicate to the VAVS Program Manager that you wish to credit your hours to DAV. There are several organizations in which volunteers can credit their hours, and the VAVS Manager has no way of knowing which organization to credit your hours if you do not inform them.

Regular Scheduled volunteers are individuals who accept a designated assignment on a regular schedule (for a minimum of at least four times a year). Regular Scheduled volunteers are provided with individual cards to record their hours. Occasional volunteers (volunteering less than four times a year) are welcomed and can also credit their hours to DAV.



## DAV Transportation Network Program

In 1987, a government program that provided travel reimbursement for ill and injured veterans was discontinued. Recognizing that many veterans would be left without care, DAV and its Auxiliary took on a new challenge and created the DAV Transportation Network.

For more than a quarter of a century, Transportation Network volunteers have provided free rides for our nation's heroes who are receiving medical care at VA facilities nationwide.

More than 190 DAV Hospital Service Coordinators facilitate the efforts of volunteer drivers who transport hundreds of thousands of veterans annually in vehicles donated through DAV.

Volunteers are vital to the operation of the Transportation Network.

Transportation Network duties, responsibilities and rules can vary from one VA medical facility to another. Below is a general list of possible driver duties, responsibilities and rules:

*(Remember: these roles, responsibilities and rules may vary at VA medical facilities. This is just a general example.)*

1. Volunteers will provide transportation only to veteran patients and outpatients as approved by the Hospital Service Coordinator and/or Chief of Voluntary Services or other assigned supervisor.
2. All passengers must be cleared prior to being transported.

3. Transportation will be limited to those veterans who are able to independently transfer to and from the vehicle.
4. When using personally owned vehicles, the volunteer is responsible to make sure their automobile insurance and inspection stickers are always up to date.
5. The volunteer must check in at the HSC office or other assigned office upon arrival and sign the volunteer log.
6. Transportation volunteers will enter in and receive volunteer credit from the time they start each trip from their home until the actual time of completion of the round trip.
7. The volunteer must follow a direct route between the veteran's home and the VA facility. Deviations from a direct route or stops for personal business are not allowed.
8. Volunteers must consider safety as the top priority and should conform to all parking and traffic laws. Vehicles without handicap plates are not authorized to park in areas reserved for handicapped parking. Continued and gross violations of the speed laws will not be tolerated and will be cause for removal from the program. As always, speeding tickets are the responsibility of the driver, and neither the VA nor DAV will accept tickets for payment.

Remember—As a DAV volunteer driver, you have been charged with the responsibility for the lives of our veterans.

## **Local Veterans Assistance Program**

The Local Veterans Assistance Program (LVAP) was established to facilitate and recognize volunteer initiatives that improve the lives of our nation's ill and injured heroes. The program empowers individuals to find and develop new ways to use their skills and talents to support the service and sacrifice of our veterans and their families. By providing resources, assistance or help with everyday needs, volunteers allow these veterans and their families to enjoy the best quality of life possible.

LVAP initiatives are managed by state-level DAV departments. Individual volunteers and groups may report their time for a variety of activities to the appropriate DAV department official.

Referenced below are just a few examples of how volunteers, DAV chapters, Auxiliary units and corporations can share their skills, talents, professional abilities and time in ways that benefit veterans.

- Work to support DAV departments and chapters.
- DAV-specific outreach efforts.
- Fundraising efforts (Forget-Me-Not and other approved fundraisers).
- Direct assistance to veterans, widows/widowers or families, such as yard work, home repairs, grocery shopping, respite care for caregivers, etc.
- Offering pro bono professional services or using a skill or trade to provide training or support to veterans, their families or DAV entities.
- Support activities for homeless veterans.
- Involvement in community activities that support and encourage veterans.

## Recognition

At DAV, we realize the value of our volunteers. Even though you are volunteering, we realize the amount of dedication that goes into your commitment to help us serve our ill and injured veterans. We want you to know how much we appreciate your commitment, which is why we have developed a unique volunteer recognition program for the hours of service our volunteers provide. We wouldn't be able to accomplish the great things we do every single day without you.

In addition to our volunteer-recognition program, DAV also recognizes youth volunteers with a prestigious scholarship program and recognizes exemplary DAV and DAV Auxiliary members through a distinguished award program.



## Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship

The Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship Program was created to honor outstanding young volunteers who are active participants in the VAVS and LVAP. The scholarships are awarded to deserving young men and women who have generously donated their time and compassion to sick and injured veterans in their communities.

Youth volunteers can earn up to \$20,000 to be used toward any accredited institution of higher learning, including universities, colleges, community colleges and vocational schools.

The DAV Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship, named after the late Secretary of Veterans Affairs and former DAV leader, provides scholarships to volunteers age 21 or younger who have volunteered a minimum of 100 hours through the DAV Voluntary Service Program or DAV's Local Veterans Assistance Program. Eligible hours must be credited to DAV.

## George H. Seal Memorial Trophy

The George H. Seal Memorial Trophy recognizes an outstanding DAV and Auxiliary volunteer each year who volunteer through the VAVS Program. These volunteers' activities closely reflect the values that characterized the life of the late National DAV VAVS Representative George H. Seal.

For nearly 40 years, this award has become one of the most esteemed honors presented at DAV's annual National Convention. VAVS Program Managers throughout the nation are each encouraged to submit nominations for DAV and Auxiliary volunteers. These nominations are then thoroughly evaluated by an independent committee. The volunteers selected by the committee are brought to the DAV National Convention for the award presentation.



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# VOLUNTEER FOR VETERANS

DAV has introduced an online tool to help fuel the organization's volunteer efforts: a web-based community called Volunteer for Veterans, found at **volunteerforveterans.org**. This platform makes it easy for individuals to give back by crowdsourcing volunteer opportunities through a searchable online database. Anyone in the U.S. can sign up and volunteer. Meanwhile, veterans and caregivers who are in need of assistance can sign up and create volunteer opportunities for volunteers.

Volunteer opportunities are based on location. Once a volunteer inputs their ZIP code into the search bar, a map will show all the volunteer opportunities available in that area. As you become more familiar with specific volunteer needs within your community, you can input those opportunities to help bring other volunteers on board to help fill vacancies.

You are encouraged to log in to the site and create a profile. You can also help spread the word about Volunteer for Veterans in your community by sharing with veterans, or other volunteers to help promote the site. Be sure to check back often, as the site will update continuously with new information and new volunteer opportunities.

**volunteerforveterans.org**



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Email [vavs@dav.org](mailto:vavs@dav.org)

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TO VOLUNTEER, GET HELP OR DONATE, VISIT:

**[VOLUNTEERFORVETERANS.ORG](http://VOLUNTEERFORVETERANS.ORG)**

