

Veterans

Keeping Our Commitment

Department of Veterans Affairs

This Administration has made a strong commitment to honor and serve California's three million veterans, just as they bravely served our country. The Administration is committed to assuring that well-run and easily accessible state programs will be available to all eligible veterans.

The Governor has kept his commitment to veterans:

- Chapter 894, Statutes of 1999, created an Inspector General for the Department of Veterans Affairs who is responsible for reviewing the operation of veterans homes and other veterans programs.
- Chapter 511, Statutes of 1999, created a Deputy Secretary of Veterans Homes to oversee the existing and proposed veterans homes.
- The Governor appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force, comprised of noted veterans and healthcare experts. The Task Force is charged with reviewing and making recommendations on ways to improve the quality of health care provided in California's veterans homes.
- The Governor also signed legislation (Chapter 728, Statutes of 1999) placing a \$50.0 million bond measure on the March 2000 ballot for the purpose of making improvements to existing veterans homes, and constructing new ones. Up to three new veterans homes could be constructed with the proceeds from the bond.
- Chapter 810, Statutes of 1999, created a Governor's Commission on Veterans Homes. The commission is responsible for making recommendations regarding possible sites for new veterans homes.
- The 400-bed Chula Vista Veterans Home will open in April 2000. This will be the third state veterans home in operation and, when fully occupied, will bring the total number of California veterans home residents to over 1,800.

These events signal the Administration's preparation for the substantial population of Vietnam-era veterans who will reach retirement age in the coming years.

In addition to preparing for the future, the Administration is committed to assuring that our veterans homes provide top quality care. In recent years, the existing Veterans Homes of California have been criticized for substandard care by State and federal licensing agencies. The Governor has committed that this will not be the case under his Administration. The Veterans Homes of California must honor veterans by providing environments in which they can live out their years with dignity, companionship, and quality health care.

The Administration proposes improvements to the Barstow and Yountville Veterans Homes to ensure that residents receive top-notch nursing and medical care; that each resident's quality of life is enhanced by plentiful activities and rich experiences; and that the physical plant of each veterans home is meticulously maintained and stocked with state-of-the-art equipment. The Governor's Budget proposes an additional \$23.9 million (\$13.2 million General Fund, \$5.2 million special funds, \$4.1 million federal funds, \$1.4 million reimbursements) for improvements which include the following:

- **Recruitment and retention incentives for patient care staff**—Qualified and dedicated patient care staff are essential to each veteran's physical and mental well-being. The Administration proposes increased funding for salary differentials, student loan repayments, and housing assistance for specified patient care staff in Barstow and Yountville.
- **An emphasis on continuous training and quality assurance**—Ensuring that patient care providers are able to draw from a wide range of training and support resources will result in improved patient care and a more confident medical staff. A program-wide quality assurance team will be complemented by on-site training and nursing quality assurance teams. Information services support and an on-line reference library will also be provided to nurses and physicians.
- **Enhanced activities and program expansions**—Residential settings rich in recreational and rehabilitative activities will provide home members with ample choices for learning and leisure. Additional art, music, rehabilitation, and recreation therapists will join the veterans home staff to provide an array of activities in which home members can participate. The Administration also proposes a pilot program for Barstow residents with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- **Facility maintenance and capital outlay improvements**—Each veterans home stands as a practical, "working" monument to the men and women who selflessly risked their lives to protect our freedom. Beautification and upgrades to the physical plants of the veterans homes ensure that these facilities will be utilized and enjoyed by generations of veterans to come. Proposed projects include the creation of a secured "wandering" area for dementia patients in Barstow, special repairs and improvements to the Yountville cemetery and chapel, and conversion of an existing building in Barstow to a Residential Care Facility for the Elderly.

Military Department

State Honor Guard expenses—California has the largest population of veterans in the nation. The Governor believes that these men and women who have served their country with distinction should be afforded the opportunity to receive proper military burial honors. The Budget includes \$1.3 million General Fund and 27 temporary help personnel years for California National Guard assistance at funerals for deceased veterans. The Military Department will establish two-member regional teams to render military honors.