



# The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Dept. of Veterans' Services  
February, 2024

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## State Senate Unanimously Confirms Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera as DVS Cabinet Secretary

New Mexico Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera was unanimously confirmed by the New Mexico Senate on February 11 as the next cabinet secretary for the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS). He had been serving as the agency's acting cabinet secretary since being selected last September by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to fill the vacant position.

"Brig. Gen. Herrera has already demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to military service," said Gov. Lujan Grisham. "The Senate's unanimous confirmation speaks to his ability to tackle the issues affecting veterans and to ensure they receive the services they deserve."

"Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera has over 34 years of military service to the New Mexico National Guard. He is a man all about service and serving," said State Sen. Harold Pope, Jr., a U.S. Air Force veteran who sponsored Secretary Herrera's nomination in the senate. "New Mexico's veterans will now have a secretary undergoing a transition to civilian life himself, one who understands what enlisted troops have been through because he's been there, and one who understands the sacred promise New Mexico has to take care of our veterans. I look forward to working together with DVS to carry their mission forward."

Secretary Herrera's parents both served in the U.S. Navy. His father was a Vietnam veteran. The native of Nambe in northern Santa Fe County has completed nearly 35 years of service to our state and nation. He enlisted in the New Mexico Army National Guard as a private first class in 1989 as a member of the 515th Maintenance Battalion in Santa Fe, and earned his officer's commission through the Officer Candidate School class 33-91. He earned a Bachelor's of University Studies with emphasis in Education from the University of New Mexico, and a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from the United States Army War College. He was awarded an Executive Certificate for completing the General and Flag Officer Homeland Security Executive Seminar, May 2023 at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the dedicated people of our department in enhancing veterans' services," said Secretary Herrera, who is also the deputy adjutant general of New Mexico. "I am committed to working tirelessly to foster a network of understanding and ensure the veterans of New Mexico receive the recognition, care, and support they deserve."



DVS Secretary Jamison Herrera (2nd from right) moments after his unanimous confirmation in the state senate on February 11. With him is State Sen. Harold Pope (far left). In front of the secretary is his wife Ellen. Flanking him are his sons Nick (2nd from left) and Jason.



## DVS to Host Veterans' Community Quarterly Briefing Feb. 28 in Albuquerque

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) will present its first quarterly veterans briefing of the year on February 28 in Albuquerque at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial, at 1100 Louisiana Blvd. SE. Veterans, and representatives from veterans' service providers and community service agencies are invited to attend this briefing from 9 a.m. to noon at the Memorial's conference room. DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison A. Herrera and other DVS staff will provide an update on agency news and plans for the year. Representatives from the New Mexico VA Health Care System and the Albuquerque VA Regional Office will be invited to provide

updates on VA news and to answer any VA-related questions. In addition to providing an update on veterans' issues, the briefing is an excellent networking opportunity for veterans and service providers agencies and organizations.

## Veterans Advisory Council to Hold Next Public Meeting Mar. 13 in Truth or Consequences

The Governor's Veterans Advisory Council (GVAC) will host its next quarterly meeting on March 13 at the New Mexico State Veterans Home in Truth or Consequences, at 992 South Broadway. The meeting will be from 9:00 a.m. - noon.

The GVAC is made up of veterans and individuals with expertise in veterans' issues. It meets at locations throughout the state seeking input from veterans to help it make recommendations to DVS for improving its service for veterans and their families. Veterans, family members, and the public are invited to attend to share their concerns and provide input.



DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera (*top/center, at podium*) addresses the veterans' advisory council (*at left*) at a council meeting last December in Albuquerque.

### Follow DVS on Facebook & Instagram!

In addition to *The Guardian*, the DVS website, and direct emails, DVS has a Facebook and Instagram account—both of which feature stories and information not always disseminated by the three aforementioned sources. Make sure you regularly log on to these two social media sources for more information!

*DVS Facebook Account*



[NMDVSHHealthCare2015](https://www.facebook.com/NMDVSHHealthCare2015)

*DVS Instagram Account:*



[NewMexicoVeterans](https://www.instagram.com/NewMexicoVeterans)

## DVS to Make February & March Veterans' Benefits Outreach Visits

DVS staff are scheduled to make the following veterans benefits outreach stops during the remainder of February and then in March at the locations listed below. Veterans or their eligible dependents can drop by to get information about or help with filing VA claims, applying for state veterans benefits, or assistance with any other issues a veteran needs help with. Please bring a copy of your DD-214, which is needed for filing all veterans' benefits claims.

Throughout the year, veterans or their eligible dependents can always make an appointment with any VSO at any DVS office for in-office or virtual assistance. Please go to the last two pages of this newsletter for office locations and VSO contact information.

### February

| City/Town      | Date    | Venue/Address                              | Hours     |
|----------------|---------|--|-----------|
| Albuquerque    | Feb. 26 | North Valley Senior Center/3825 4th St. NW | 9am-130pm |
| Durango (CO)   | Feb. 29 | Durango CBOC/1970 East 3rd Ave.            | 8am-2pm   |
| Eunice         | Feb. 15 | Eunice Public Library/1003 Avenue N        | 9-11:30am |
| Farmington     | Feb. 28 | Farmington CBOC/3605 English Rd.           | 8am-2pm   |
| Jal            | Feb. 15 | Jal Public Library/100 East Utah Ave.      | 1-3:30pm  |
| Las Vegas (NM) | Feb. 22 | Las Vegas CBOC/624 University Ave.         | 8am-2pm   |
| Lovington      | Feb. 22 | Lovington Public Library/115 Main St.      | 9-11:30am |
| Santa Fe       | Feb. 23 | Santa Fe CBOC/5152 Beckner Rd.             | 8am-2pm   |
| Santa Rosa     | Feb. 21 | David Flores Veterans' Ctr./720 Lake Dr.   | 10am-2pm  |
| Silver City    | Feb. 15 | Silver City CBOC/2940 Leslie Rd.           | 8am-1pm   |
| Tatum          | Feb. 22 | Tatum Public Library/323 E. Broadway       | 1-3:30pm  |

### March

|                       |         |  |              |
|-----------------------|---------|--|--------------|
| Albuquerque           | Mar. 3  | Kirtland AFB                                 | 9am-1:30pm   |
| Albuquerque           | Mar. 7  | Bear Canyon Senior Ctr./4645 Pitt St. NE     | 9am-1pm      |
| Albuquerque           | Mar. 12 | Highland Senior Center/131 Monroe St. NE     | 10am-2pm     |
| Albuquerque           | Mar. 19 | UNM Vet Resource Ctr./608 Buena Vista Dr. NE | 9am-3pm      |
| Albuquerque           | Mar. 26 | CNM/900 University Blvd. SE                  | 8am-2pm      |
| Bernalillo            | Mar. 29 | Bernalillo Sr. Center/801 Rotary Park Rd.    | 1030am-230pm |
| Cuba                  | Mar. 20 | Cuba Senior Center/16 W. Cordova St.         | 9am-1pm      |
| Deming                | Mar. 13 | Deming Food Bank/4045 Overhill Dr. NW        | 10am-2pm     |
| Deming                | Mar. 27 | Deming Senior Center/800 South Granite       | 10am-2230p   |
| Eagle Nest            | Mar. 22 | Eagle Nest Senior Ctr./151 Willow Creek Dr.  | 9am-2pm      |
| Española              | Mar. 13 | Española CBOC/105 S. Coronado Ave.           | 8am-1pm      |
| Roswell               | Mar. 28 | Nat'l Guard Armory/1 W. Earl Cummings Loop   | 8am-5pm      |
| Ruidoso               | Mar. 6  | Ruidoso Community Ctr./501 Sudderth Dr.      | 9am-2pm      |
| Taos                  | Mar. 14 | Taos CBOC/1353 Paseo del Pueblo Sur          | 8am-1pm      |
| Truth or Consequences | Mar. 4  | TorC CBOC/1960 North Date St.                | 9am-2pm      |

### The following are weekly outreaches on the following days of the week:

|                       |          |                                       |         |
|-----------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Albuquerque           | M, W, Th | VA Hospital/1501 San Pedro Drive SE   | 9am-4pm |
| Albuquerque           | M & W    | VA Regional Office/500 Gold Ave SW    | 9am-4pm |
| Santa Fe              | T & Th   | Santa Fe Vet Center/2209 Brothers Rd. | 8am-2pm |
| Truth or Consequences | Wed.     | State Veterans Home/992 S. Broadway   | 9am-4pm |

# Upcoming Veterans Property Tax Exemption/Waiver Service Days

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) will host veterans property tax exemption & waiver service days in March and April in the communities listed below.

| City/Town   | Date    | Venue/Address   | Hours                         |
|-------------|---------|---|-------------------------------|
| Socorro     | Mar. 12 | Free Help For Veterans Bldg.<br>705 N. California                     | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.               |
| Los Alamos  | Mar. 16 | American Legion Post 90<br>1325 Trinity Dr.                           | 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.              |
| Raton       | Mar. 21 | Colfax County Assessor's Office<br>230 North 3rd St.                  | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.               |
| Roswell     | Mar. 28 | New Mexico National Guard Armory<br>1 West Earl Cummings Rd.          | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.               |
| Aztec       | Apr. 2  | San Juan County Assessor's Office<br>100 South Oliver Drive/Suite 400 | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.               |
| Albuquerque | Apr. 6  | <i>(location to be announced)</i>                                     | <i>(time to be announced)</i> |
| Santa Fe    | Apr. 11 | Santa Fe County Fairgrounds<br>3229 Rodeo Rd.                         | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.               |
| Las Cruces  | Apr. 25 | Doña Ana County Assessor's Office<br>845 North Motel Blvd.            | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.               |

Veterans and unmarried widows of veterans can stop by for assistance with filing for the veterans' property tax exemption, which is a \$4,000 reduction off the taxable value of a veteran's New Mexico property assessment.

Veterans rated at 100% permanent-and-total, service-connected disabled can file to waive their property tax payment. Unmarried widows of these service-connected disabled veterans can also apply for this waiver.

Applicants for the exemption or waiver must bring a copy of one of the following documents to show proof of veteran status: DD-214, NOAA form 56-16, or PHG form 1867.

You must also bring one of the following to show proof of residency: a valid NM driver's license, voter registration card, or your latest income tax return. You will not be able to file for the exemption or waiver without proof of veteran status or residency at your home.

DVS staff can also answer questions about or help file VA health care claims or apply for state veterans' benefits. You can also file for lost or misplaced DD-214 forms.

Of course, you can also contact any DVS field office at any time of the year to apply for the exemption or waiver by mail. Please call (505) 827-6300 or [nmdvs.info@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:nmdvs.info@dvs.nm.gov) for help.



## DVS/VBOC to Host Upcoming *Boots to Business* Intro to Entrepreneurship Classes in ABQ

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)—the veterans business development division of the New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services—is presenting two “Boots to Business: Reboot” training classes in Albuquerque in February.

The first class is February 15-16 at the National Guard Armory from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Albuquerque New Mexico National Guard Armory, at 600 Wyoming Boulevard NE, Room 230B for current and former New Mexico National Guard members who are interested in starting their own business or growing an existing operation. It is also open to spouses and widows of Guard members.

The following week, the VBOC will present a two-day “Boots to Business” class at Kirtland AFB February 20-21 from 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the base’s Airman & Family Readiness Center, at 1451 4<sup>th</sup> Street SE--Bldg. 20245/Suite 126. This is similar to the class taught the previous week, but instead of focusing on still-serving service members, it is geared towards veterans.

These free two-day introduction to entrepreneurship courses teach key elements of small business ownership, techniques for evaluating the feasibility of business concepts, and the steps needed to develop an all-important business plan—a “must” for anyone looking to start or expand a business. *Re-boot* classes also guide active service members through the process of seeking assistance while they are still serving.

There will also be an introduction to a broad spectrum of entrepreneurial business concepts, how to access resources available for obtaining start-up or expansion capital, technical assistance, and how to pursue federal contracting opportunities.

To register for these classes, please go to the national Boots to Business calendar at <https://sba.my.site.com/s/reboot-course-information> . Click on “Log in” and then “Create an Account”. Once an account is created, select either the February 15-16 class in Albuquerque or the February 20-21 classes at Kirtland AFB to complete enrollment.

For more information, contact VBOC Business Advisor Austin Walker at [a.walker@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:a.walker@dvs.nm.gov) or (505) 469-8501.

# COMPACT Act / PACT Act Outreach



## Presented by:

**New Mexico VA Health Care System  
Albuquerque Regional VA Benefits Office  
New Mexico Dept. of Veteran Service**

## Sponsored by:

**Pueblo of Zuni - Zuni Veterans Program**

**\*A presentation about the COMPACT Act that offers veterans & former service members free emergency suicide care when needed, no matter where they are.**

**\*A presentation about the new PACT Act law that expands VA benefits and health care to Vietnam, Gulf, and Iraq/Afghanistan War veterans suffering from exposure to "Agent Orange," burn pits, and other toxic substances while in service.**

**20 new "presumptive" conditions have now been added to VA's treatment eligibility list.**

**When: Thursday, February 29, 2024**

**Time: 1pm - 4pm**

**Where: Pueblo of Zuni Wellness Center**

**31 Pincion St.**

**Zuni, NM 87327**

**VA Representatives will be on hand to help file a claim,  
Toxic Exposure Screenings and VA Healthcare  
Enrollment**



**For more information, call the Zuni Veterans Program at:  
(505) 782-7280/7281/7124**





## Healing America's Heroes to Provide Equine/Fishing Therapy Programs in SE New Mexico

DVS and the non-profit veterans' service organization *Healing America's Heroes* are presenting free three-day equine and fishing mental health retreats in Hobbs the week of April 11-17.

The retreats are divided into two separate events—one for women Veterans, and one for men. Each session focuses on equine and fishing therapies for treating veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

These non-traditional horseback and fishing therapy programs place veterans in calming and relaxed environments. Nationwide, non-traditional therapies have helped treat many veterans looking for non-medicinal treatments for behavioral health issues.

Lodging will be provided at the Baymont by Wyndham Hotel at 3510 Central Drive in Hobbs. Transportation will be provided to and from the hotel and the therapy programs, which will take place at locations in Lea County. Breakfast will be provided by the hotel. Free transportation from the locations will be provided for free lunches and dinners at local restaurants. A DVS VSO will be there to answer questions about filing VA claims or applying for state veterans' benefits.

Though the retreats are free, registration is required and can be done on the [Healing America's Heroes website](#). DVS staff will be there to answer question about other VA or state veterans' benefits.



### Healing America's Heroes

Healing America's Heroes is a 501(c)-3 non-profit agency that utilizes equine and piscatorial/fishing recreational therapy programs for veterans and first responders suffering from PTSD, MST, or TBI. These non-traditional programs promote physical, emotional, and psychological healing by connecting participants with nature and animals.



## Dates Set for Spring & Summer Honor Guard Conferences

the dates and venues have been set for this year's two annual honor guard training conferences in New Mexico.

The Spring 2024 Honor Guard Training Conference will be on April 26—once again in Las Cruces at the Sonoma Ranch Golf Course (1274 Golf Club Rd) from 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.

The Fall 2024 Honor Guard Training Conference will be on August 23—again in Albuquerque at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial (1100 Louisiana Blvd. SE) from 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Breakfast and lunch will be provided at both conferences, courtesy of AARP New Mexico.

These annual training conferences are presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, the New Mexico National Guard, and AARP New Mexico to provide guidance and training for the state's all-volunteer honor guards representing veterans' service organizations that render honors at the funerals of veterans throughout the state. Demonstrations and training are provided by New Mexico National Guard Honor Guards to ensure that the volunteer units render honors in a professional manner.

All honor guards are strongly encouraged to attend at least one of the conferences. Any veterans' service organization that is interested in forming an honor guard are also welcome to attend. For more information, contact Diana Myklebust at (505) 231-8911 or [diana.myklebust@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:diana.myklebust@dvs.nm.gov).

*(all photos are from last year's two conferences)*





# SAVE THE DATE

Department of Veterans' Services

**SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2024**

Sheraton Albuquerque Uptown



# 2024



# WOMEN VETERANS'

# CONFERENCE

**"YOUR VOICE MATTERS"**

RSVP early and reserve your seat today!

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2024-department-of-veterans-services-women-veterans-conference-tickets-797077429047?aff=oddtcreator>

Email: [theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov)

## Veterans, Active Service Members Honored on “Military & Veterans Day at the Legislature”

New Mexico’s military community was the focus of *Military & Veterans Day at the 2024 New Mexico Legislature* on February 3 at the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

This annual day during the legislative session is presented by the DVS and the New Mexico National Guard to honor military veterans, active-duty service members, National Guard, and Reserve members for their service and sacrifice for our country. The Guard, DVS, and many other veterans’ and community service organizations had tables set up in the east and west wings of the Rotunda to present information about programs and services available for active duty service members, veterans, and their families.



At a noon ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda, New Mexico Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Miguel Aguilar thanked past and current service members answering the call for service that continues today.

“Thank you so much for what you did, to lay the path for all of us that came after you,” said Maj. Gen. Aguilar, who along with his role as the adjutant general of New Mexico is also currently the acting cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security. “You’re part of that one percent who did what our nation needed you to do. And I’m so incredibly proud to be one of you.”

DVS Acting Cabinet Secretary Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera, who is also the current deputy adjutant general of New Mexico, outlined how DVS also continues this legacy of service by serving veterans after their military service is finished.

“I’m humbled to lead the state agency that serves veterans...under a governor who shares this passion of helping our veterans and their families,” said Sec. Herrera, who is also the deputy adjutant general of New Mexico. “I appreciate each and every one of you, for what you’ve done for us...and continue to do for your fellow veterans as we work together to synchronize these efforts to ensure that none of us are left behind. God bless our great state and our nation.”

DVS videotaped the ceremony [and has produced a short video](#) with highlights of the rest of the ceremony, and more comments by the two generals.

# UNM Study Focuses on Link Between Veterans and Gambling

(by Savannah Peat/UNM Communications & Marketing Dept.)

The University of New Mexico [Center on Alcohol, Substance Use and Addiction \(CASAA\)](#) Associate Professor Joshua Grubbs is making sure veterans can trade wagering for a chance to focus on recovery. Grubbs is dedicating his research to this already vulnerable population, in [Addictive Behaviors](#) to understand risks and motivations associated with U.S. armed forces veterans' gambling addictions.



“This is one of those things that researchers love to split hairs about and talk about– is something a real addiction or not? It was just kind of mind-boggling to me that someone could get so addicted to something that wasn't a substance. That started kind of a long-term research trajectory, trying to understand this better,” he said.

Those who return from deployment, no matter location, branch of service or type of situation are uniquely at risk for developing substance use disorders. Problem gambling, on its own, affects 1-4% of the general adult population, versus 9.0 % for veterans.

“Veterans weren't taking substances that were destroying their bodies. They weren't, you know, using and getting in trouble with the law for things like illicit drugs or things like that,” Grubbs said. “They were, however, unable to stop gambling. I remember talking to people that were \$400,000 in debt with a credit rating below what I thought was even humanly possible because of all the things that had occurred.”

After working in the oldest gambling treatment center in Ohio and speaking with veterans firsthand, Grubbs dove into six years of treatment data.

“We were looking at that information of where they started their treatment and trying to understand how to help them. The goal was to understand what people were starting with so we could understand how to help them better,” he said. “We were looking specifically within this group of individuals when they were coming into treatment and what was going through their heads and how they were describing their experiences.”

Data of over 400 veterans receiving treatment for gambling disorders and problem gambling, revealed important takeaways on the behaviors and their characteristics.

“We also looked at other diagnoses and disorders along with gambling problems. We're not seeing necessarily differences in what's causing the gambling, but we are seeing differences in the games that they're drawn to,” Grubbs said.

Grubbs found a stark difference in how veterans gambled, and the difference in the various games they were addicted to. These were separated by strategic games, such as blackjack and Texas hold-em and non-strategic games like slot machines and horse betting.

“What we find pretty clearly is that veterans that have PTSD are certainly more likely to have gambling-related problems than veterans without PTSD,” said Grubbs.

Veterans who stuck to non-strategic gambling were often older, female, and single. They often spent more money and more hours involved in non-strategic gambling as a method of escape from scarring experiences.

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“If you sit in front of a slot machine and are just caught up pressing that button or pulling that lever it's very easy to more or less dissociate. You can completely separate yourself from the reality that surrounds you to block out memory and thought,” Grubbs said.

To avoid those memories, PTSD was a pronounced incentive in driving veterans to gambling. Although the actual total varies due to failure of reporting, up to 20% of veterans are estimated to experience PTSD. In Grubbs' set of 400 veterans receiving treatment, that was up to 40%.

“They are tormented by their memories, flashbacks, the

reliving and re-experiencing, the nightmares, the constantly looking out for threats because their memory is telling them they could be in danger. Slot machines in particular are in a real way an immersive experience,” he said.

While hitting a button and crossing two fingers together is an alarmingly simple respite for veterans, Grubbs also found non-strategic gamblers had difficulties moving towards seeking treatment for the addiction. They were also found to experience higher delays in happy emotions.

“Clinically working with veterans like this, I would hear them say things like:

*‘I would sit at the same machine for 16 hours. I would just sit there and press the button over and over again. I might feel awful afterward, but for those 16 hours that I was sitting there, I didn't think about watching my friend die in front of me. I didn't think about that time that my commanding officer sexually assaulted me. I didn't think about the time that our Humvee got blown up. I just thought about pressing the button again.’”*

Still, Grubbs pointed out PTSD drove veterans to strategic gameplay as well. These players were younger, predominantly male, and more likely to regain a sense of control in their lives.

“I think veterans that are turning to strategic gameplay are actually quite similar to what we see of the general population. There tends to be a stronger interest in the action of it,” he said. “People who have gambled in multiple ways, will tell you that there's a very qualitative difference to how it feels to gamble on a slot machine versus maybe sports or cards where you're watching every single thing that happens.”

These veterans, also fairly emotionally stunted, sought the dual experiences of analytical victory and sensationalism on the table.

“There are just some people that crave more excitement and the action-driven kind of experience. We have a lot of research that broadly shows that in particularly younger men. Anyone that's got a stronger tendency towards something we call positive urgency, acting rashly and impulsively when you're feeling excited, are particularly drawn to strategic gambling,” Grubbs said.



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It was important to note that the severity of service did not impact the frequency of gambling. Whether it was Gulf War veterans, Afghanistan veterans or peacetime veterans, PTSD didn't discriminate.

“We saw veterans everywhere from Vietnam to coming back fresh from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Broadly speaking, there weren't huge differences across different conflicts, but we did not look in this study as to whether combat trauma itself was a unique risk factor,” Grubbs said.

Without treatment, gambling addiction can wreck an already fragile life. Risks include the obvious financial consequences, as well as relationship problems and an increase in chances

of suicide. It's an especially crucial problem here in New Mexico, which not only has one of the highest totals of casinos per capita, but one of the highest rates of veterans.

“New Mexico does have higher than average rates of gambling disorder than you see in the country at large. Although we don't have as many options as other states, we still have these problems which suggest that casinos do play a role in the problems that people are experiencing. Access is always a powerful predictor of problems,” Grubbs said. There's still much to understand in the realm of gambling and veterans. Grubbs is aiming to find more connections when it comes to branches of service, additional substance use problems and specific experiences while still providing care.

“We're trying to change the face of understanding of what veterans with gambling disorders look like, act like, and what their experiences are,” he said. “How does that compare to the general population, and how can we leverage the resources? Because veterans in many ways are underserved, but they do have a very robust health care system. Learning how to leverage that to help people is the long-term goal.”

This will take time, as with so much to unpack psychologically, it's not simple to dive into gruesome, traumatic details in a survey. Still, Grubbs knows that the more he and other researchers can understand about veterans and gambling, the more treatment can be given in the long term.



“This is a very prevalent problem. Historically, there's not been a ton of research in the state looking at how those factors are influencing people with gambling. It's certainly something that we're hoping to change in the future,” Grubbs said. “We really do want to expand that body of research and build something more comprehensive so that we can get a much better picture of what gambling disorder looks like here and what's the most effective way to treat it.”

# Veterans' Community Bulletin Board

The following pages feature event and informational flyers provided to DVS by veterans and community service agencies. These flyers are published for the convenience of New Mexico's veteran community. Inclusion in *The Guardian* does not constitute an endorsement by DVS of the organization, content, products, or services contained therein.

DVS invites government agencies and non-profit service organizations to send flyers for publication in *The Guardian* announcing an upcoming or ongoing veteran-related event. DVS will run these flyers as a public service courtesy to the veteran community.

Please note:

- Flyers must have the name of a point-of-contact from the organization...along with the contact's phone number or email address. Flyers without this information will not be published.
- DVS is not responsible for the accuracy of the content, products, or services in these flyers.
- Views expressed in these flyers are the independent views of the authors/owners of the third-party entity that created the flyer—and does not necessarily reflect the views of DVS.
- To the maximum extent permitted by law, DVS expressly denies liability for any and all losses suffered by any persons or organizations who, in their independent discretion and reliance, either directly or indirectly rely on content, products, services or information offered by these independent third-party organizations.
- DVS reserves the right to edit or decline to publish any flyer.

## The 39th ANNUAL

### TRIBUTE TO WOMEN IN THE MILITARY



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*“Celebrating & Honoring Military Women in all Branches of Service”  
Past~Present~Future*

*This year we are:*

**COMMEMORATING THE “FUTURE” MILITARY**

**Friday, 1 March 2024**

At the

AMERICAN LEGION POST 13

1201 Legion Rd NE • Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102

0800 hrs - Registration Opens, Exhibits, Refreshments,  
Networking

0900 hrs - Opening Ceremonies

0930 hrs - Morning Entertainment

1200 hrs - Luncheon

### Keynote Speaker

**ALLISON M. WILLIAMS, C/Major AFROTC**

Tribute XXXIX Chair: Diana Wong, USAF (Ret) (575) 640-3042

Registration Info: Ms. Mary Cox (505) 492-6412

[www.TributeToWomenInTheMilitary.org](http://www.TributeToWomenInTheMilitary.org)



## News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)



### VA Proposes to Expand Access to Health Care For Toxic-Exposed Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is proposing a plan to expand the locations and time frames for which it presumes exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides.

Under the proposal, VA would implement a new presumption of exposure to locations where herbicides were tested, used, or stored outside of Vietnam. Specifically, this proposed rule would add locations in the United States ([full list of US locations where Agent Orange was tested or stored](#)), Canada, and India to the existing presumptives for Agent Orange in Vietnam, Cambodia, Johnson Atoll, Guam, American Samoa, Korea, Laos, and Thailand.

A presumption of exposure means that VA automatically assumes veterans who served in certain locations were exposed to certain toxins. Presumptives lower the burden of proof required to receive disability benefits, helping veterans get the benefits they deserve as quickly as possible. This expansion of presumptives will help veterans who served in the specified locations receive health care and benefits for [certain cancers and chronic conditions](#).

To be eligible, a veteran must have served in the identified location(s) during a specific time period and currently have a condition(s) presumptively associated with herbicide exposure. VA has expanded presumptive service connection for more than [hundreds of health conditions](#) related to toxic exposures under the [PACT Act](#) – the largest expansion of Veteran care and benefits in generations.

“This proposed change would make it easier for veterans exposed to herbicides who served outside Vietnam to access the benefits they so rightly deserve,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Our goal is to provide every veteran – of every era – with the VA health care and benefits they deserve, and this is another step in the right direction.”

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for a herbicide-related disability can visit [VA's website](#), use [VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits](#), or work with VA-recognized veterans service organizations such as DVS (*see last two pages of this newsletter for DVS office locations*) to assist with the application process. Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the veteran's service if the veteran died from at least one of the recognized presumptive herbicide diseases.





## VR Therapy Takes Veterans Back to “Virtual Vietnam” to Help Heal PTSD

A landmark virtual reality app geared toward helping older veterans looking for closure and dealing with trauma is taking exposure therapy to new places – to the markets of Hanoi or to the landscapes of Vietnam.

The new application, pioneered by immersive technology company Mynd Immersive in partnership with VA Immersive, part of VA's Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning, focuses specifically on Vietnam War veterans, digitally transporting them back to places they may have visited during

the war, so they can work through trauma and discover a "path to peace."

"We're tapping into the power of VR to really, really provide an emotional uplift to these aging veterans," Chris Brickler, co-founder and CEO of Mynd Immersive.

Brickler helped start the company approximately seven years ago, intent on improving the lives of the elderly, with digital therapeutics eventually taking shape by strengthening the bond between patients and caregivers. *A Path to Peace* is one of the ways it achieves its purpose.

"A Path to Peace is targeted to veterans aged 75 and older," said Brickler. "About 40% of our population of older men above 75 are veterans. So, it's an absolute massive percentage of older veterans that have survived and have been living a lot of times with a lot of emotional scars."

"Some veterans go back to Vietnam or have over the years, and that's a very emotional trip for a lot of folks, but a lot of folks don't have the mobility or financial ability to go back now," added Brickler. "Many would love to go back to obtain some closure or some emotional feelings around those aspects of the content," he continued.

The project uses crisp, clear high-resolution spherical video to immerse patients in a number of scenarios, giving off the impression they are in a faraway place without having to make the travel. The device used for the therapy almost resembles a large pair of sunglasses.

"When you're at a memorial or at a beautiful market in Hanoi, it's really crisp and clear. It's three-dimensional, and you feel like you're right there, so it gives a lot of these veterans that would want to go back and pay homage the opportunity to do that," Brickler said.

Content being built into the app would enable veterans to meditate on a beach in Vietnam or witness other areas of the country that might bring about peace. Brickler said the goal isn't to necessarily bring veterans back to the battlefield, but instead show them that they contributed to something historical, and the war was not all for naught.

Dr. Skip Rizzo, director of the medical virtual reality group at the University of Southern California, is also advising the project. He said he has worked in the virtual reality field since the 1990s, during the early days when people were especially skeptical of the technology.

*(continued on next page)*

"VR sometimes has been seen as some kind of Star Trek science fiction holodeck kind of thing, but functionally, it's a technology that allows us to put people in simulations, in a controlled fashion that helps them to confront their fears or experience positive things or get distracted from pain or engage them in activities clinically that they might not ordinarily do with traditional therapy," he said.

"So there's a sound rationale for applying it [in therapy]."

Rizzo, in 2004, helped build out a system geared toward veterans of more recent conflicts, namely Iraq and Afghanistan, rooting it in a "prolonged exposure" approach that immerses people in virtual experiences to face their trauma in a manageable way.

"We do it in a way that's, I think, more systematic and controllable by putting people in simulations that never mimic an exact replica but mimic the types of experiences they may have had, but at a pace they can handle," he explained.

"So maybe they got blown up in a Humvee. We don't put them in the Humvee and blow it up at first. We start off, maybe they're walking around by some vehicles and talking about their experience and talking about what they thought back then, as if they're going through it. Then we might put them in a Humvee and have them sit in it for a while. Then we may have them drive on a road in, provocative settings. So, by this gradual exposure and reprocessing of the emotional memory, we see reductions [in PTSD symptoms]."

The technology is said to help veterans develop mindfulness practices commonly used in therapy, giving the experience a surreal quality without the distractions of the surrounding world.

Mynd's VR technology can also help people beyond veterans, including those with ADHD, people suffering from chronic pain, the elderly experiencing loneliness or stroke victims who need more engaging approaches to rehabilitation.





## DVS Field Offices in New Mexico

DVS has field offices throughout the state that are staffed with nationally accredited veterans service officers. DVS VSOs are dedicated to helping veterans with filing VA claims, applying for state veterans benefits, or with helping with anything else a veteran or their family needs with.

Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, (excluding holidays). Though this service is free, appointments are required and can be made by contacting the VSOs below. **Please note: VSOs can also provide help by phone or email to any veteran or eligible dependent calling or emailing from anywhere in New Mexico.**

### Alamogordo/Southeast NM

**David Henley**

411 10th Street #107

(575) 937-5620

[david.henley@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:david.henley@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**May Chavez** (*ABQ metro supervisor*)

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2

4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd floor

(505) 527-2302

[helen.chavez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:helen.chavez@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**Ron Saavedra**

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2

4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr

(505) 525-3331

[ronald.saavedra@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:ronald.saavedra@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**Diana Powers**

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2

4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr

(505) 274-0393

[diana.powers@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:diana.powers@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque Metro Area

**Mathew Zamora**

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2

4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr

(505) 525-3331

[mathew.zamora@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:mathew.zamora@dvs.nm.gov)

### Albuquerque (downtown)

**DVS staff Mon. & Wed. (9am-4pm)**

Dennis Chavez Federal Bldg.

500 Gold Ave. SW/3rd floor

(*No appointment needed*)

(505) 383-2400

### Albuquerque (VA Hospital)

**DVS staff Mon. (9am-3pm) main bldg.**

Every Wed. & Thu. in the NM Dept.

of Workforce Solutions mobile unit

(505) 383-2400

### Belen/ABQ Metro & Central NM

**Rob Miller**

Belen Business Center

719 South Main St.

(505) 537-9339

### Carlsbad/Southeast NM

**Dagmar Youngberg**

101 N. Halagueno

(505) 537-9339

[dagmar.youngberg@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:dagmar.youngberg@dvs.nm.gov)

### Clovis/Southeast NM

**Matt Barela** (*SE region supervisor*)

904 W. Sixth St.

(575) 825-9602

[matthew.barela@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:matthew.barela@dvs.nm.gov)

### Clovis/Southeast NM

**Ben Padilla**

904 W. Sixth St.

(505) 537-1445

[ben.padilla@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:ben.padilla@dvs.nm.gov)

### Farmington/Northwest NM

**Robert Guinn** (*NW region supervisor*)

San Juan College Vet Center

4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B

(505) 327-2861

[robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov)

### Farmington/Northwest NM

*Temporarily vacant*

### Gallup/Northwest NM

**John Livingston**

908 E. Buena Vista Ave/Room 1A

(505) 389-8731

[john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov)

### Grants/Northwest NM

**April Ball**

551 Washington Ave.

(505) 521-8132

[april.ball@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:april.ball@dvs.nm.gov)

**Hobbs/Southeast NM****Fred Solis-Littlejohn**

2120 North Alto St.

(575) 241-0714

[fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Clint Anderson**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

[clint.anderson@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:clint.anderson@dvs.nm.gov)**Rio Rancho/Northwest NM****Dustin Newsom**

Sandoval County Admin. Bldg.

1500 Idalia Rd./Bldg. D/room 2041

(505) 221-7190

[dustin.newsom@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:dustin.newsom@dvs.nm.gov)**Silver City/Southwest NM****Clarissa Sierra**

Western New Mexico University 1000

West College Ave.

Juan Chacon Bldg./Rm. 138A

(575) 313-5627

[clarissa.sierra@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:clarissa.sierra@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Miguel Martinez** (*supervisor*)

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(575) 644-6869

[miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Vegas, NM/Northeast NM****Arturo Marlow** (*supervisor*)

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 331-8838

[arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov)**Roswell/Southeast NM****Danielle Thompson**

1600 SE Main Street /Suite A

(575) 416-2284

[danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov)**Taos/Northwest NM****Temporarily vacant****Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Vincent Tellez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 361-5298

[vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov)**Las Vegas/Northeast NM****Jimmy Saiz**

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 520-5079

[jimmy.saiz@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:jimmy.saiz@dvs.nm.gov)**Santa Fe/Northwest NM****Phillip Hernandez**

Bataan Memorial Bldg.

407 Galisteo St./1st Floor, Room 134

(505) 218-3125

[phillip.hernandez@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:phillip.hernandez@dvs.nm.gov)**Women Veterans Program (ABQ)****Theresa Figueroa**

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2

4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd floor

(505) 372-9106

[theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:theresa.figueroa@dvs.nm.gov)**DVS Tribal Liaison (Farmington)****Beverly Charley**

San Juan College Veterans Center

4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B

(575) 241-3322

[beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov](mailto:beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov)