

MADISON - Gov. Tony Evers today announced his 2023-25 budget will include several innovative proposals to serve Wisconsin's veterans, building upon previous investments funded by federal pandemic relief aid based on recommendations from the governor's [Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity](#) created in 2022. The governor's initiatives announced today include funding to bolster the workforce at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), support veteran employment, education, and housing security, and expand access to mental health services for veterans.

"From creating our Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity to investing in employment opportunities, housing assistance, and increased mental health services for our veteran community, we've made important progress these last few years to ensure Wisconsin veterans have access to the support and resources they've earned and deserve," said Gov. Evers. "Now, we're continuing that good work in the upcoming biennial budget by proposing continued investment in various innovative initiatives to ensure the state is equipped to meet the needs of our veteran community and help them build strong, lasting success."

Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration are committed to ensuring Wisconsin veterans have the tools and resources they need to thrive in their civilian lives. In his [2022 State of the State address](#), Gov. Evers [announced](#) that he would be signing an executive order creating a [Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity](#) to develop new, innovative initiatives to support the more than 300,000 veterans who live in Wisconsin. Shortly thereafter, Gov. Evers [signed Executive Order #157](#) to create the Commission and charged the Commission with identifying gaps in existing services, areas in need of robust investment, and reducing barriers to economic security, including efforts to expand access to higher education and job training, address housing insecurity, and increase mental and behavioral health support and substance use disorder treatment.

Gov. Evers' Blue Ribbon Commission gathered input from stakeholders, conducted listening sessions, consulted experts, and built sound and innovative recommendations to build a better Wisconsin for veterans. Following the [release](#) of the Commission's final report in September 2022 and based on the Commission's recommendations, Gov. Evers [announced](#) a \$10 million investment, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, in veteran services across the state. This investment included:

\$4.5 million to support veteran mental health initiatives, including supporting community-based programs, increasing access to emergency services, and investing in peer support programs.

- \$2 million to create a rental assistance program for homeless veterans. This was also a recommendation from the Interagency Council on Homelessness' "[Welcoming Wisconsin Home](#)" report.
An additional \$1.5 million for the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), which provides case management and support to veterans and connects veterans to community services, including substance use treatment, housing, education, and mental healthcare. This investment is intended to fund seven additional positions to serve veterans across the state.
An additional \$1.5 million for county veteran services offices (CVSOs) and Tribal veterans service offices (TVSOs), which help veterans connect to benefits, preventative programming, and family engagement activities. The funding will increase allocations to CVSOs and TVSOs by 100 percent, ensure TVSO payments are not being prorated, and increase payments to part-time CVSOs.
An additional \$500,000 for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Hire Heroes Program, which provides services to veterans with high barriers to employment and reimburses employers for certain costs when hiring veteran employees.

Gov. Evers' budget builds on the investments recommended by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity, providing ongoing state support for these critical initiatives. A list of the governor's proposed investments to support Wisconsin veterans is available below.

Addressing Veteran Needs

To ensure the current and future needs of Wisconsin veterans are evaluated and that DVA can be responsive to changing demands, the governor is proposing the following through his 2023-25 budget:

- Providing \$500,000 general purpose revenue (GPR) to DVA to evaluate post-9/11 veteran needs arising from the increase in multiple deployments, higher survival rates, and longer-term use of skilled nursing.
- Requiring DVA to explore expansion opportunities at all existing sites of the Veterans Housing and Recovery Program.
- Providing funding to DVA to create a master plan for the campus of the State Veterans Home at King to assess the current status of the campus and how the campus can serve veterans.
- Providing funding to the state veterans homes to address their ongoing needs so that each home has adequate resources to provide the best possible care to the most vulnerable veterans in Wisconsin.
- Supporting the continuation of pilot add-ons to address critical recruitment and retention needs at DVA by providing \$6.7 million in non-GPR funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs to support add-ons for several nursing classifications.

Gov. Evers remains committed to meeting Wisconsin veterans where they are and making sure they're aware of the services they're entitled to, whether it's mental health access, preventative programming, family engagement, or education benefits through:

Doubling the amount of funding to County and Tribal Veterans Services Offices (CVSOs and TVSOs) by providing \$843,600 annually for CVSOs and \$253,000 annually for TVSOs. CVSOs and TVSOs play a vital role in connecting veterans to needed services.

Providing \$2.8 million (\$1.2 million in fiscal year 24 and \$1.6 million in fiscal year 25) to enable University of Wisconsin System campuses to provide services tailored to veterans, military personnel, and their families, including achieving the recommended School Certifying Officer (SCO) staffing level of one SCO for every 200 GI Bill-eligible students or otherwise improving or expanding services and supports for veteran and military personnel students.

Providing \$450,000 GPR in each year as state support for the peer-run respite center for veterans to ensure the center has a reliable, ongoing funding source.

Providing 7.0 FTE SEG positions and \$957,200 SEG over the biennium to expand the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program, which provides outreach mental health services and support to veterans who may have a mental health condition or substance use disorder. The goal of the program is to reduce the suicide rate among veterans and to provide veterans access to mental health supports, housing, and other services.

Gov. Evers is also investing in further securing the ability of Wisconsin veterans to have access to the services and devices they need post-service by:

Providing \$250,000 for a grant program to aid Wisconsin dog trainers in attaining Assistance Dog International accreditation, specifically for providing post-traumatic stress disorder training to better serve veterans.

Expanding access to the Assistance for Needy Veterans Grant program by including medical devices as an allowable expense under the program and increasing the annual and lifetime caps for support under this program.

Veteran Housing and Employment

In his budget proposal, Gov. Evers is encouraging housing and employment stability for veterans and their families through tax credits by:

Increasing eligibility for the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit by extending eligibility to those with a disability rating of at least 70 percent. This would provide an additional \$43.2 million in tax relief to claimants over the biennium.

Further expanding eligibility for the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit by offering the credit to persons who otherwise qualify but rent instead of own their home. This proposal would provide approximately \$10 million in tax relief over the biennium.

Broadening the current disabled veteran-owned business certification within the Wisconsin Supplier Diversity Program to be a veteran-owned business certification and eliminating the fees associated with participating in the program.

Providing \$450,000 GPR annually to assist employers that hire veterans who are transitioning to civilian life. The funding will help employers provide training and wrap-around services to veterans.

Creating a veteran rental assistance program funded at \$1 million GPR in each fiscal year.

Honoring Veterans Past and Present

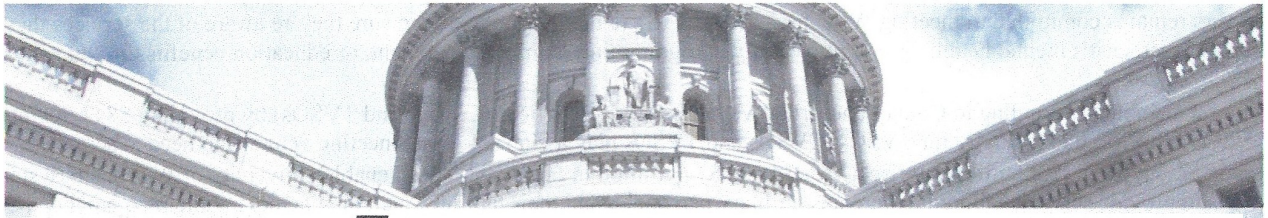
To honor the final resting places of Wisconsin veterans, Gov. Evers is proposing:

Funding one new position at each of the Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemeteries to maintain adequate services to those who qualify for internment.

Investing \$425,000 in FY24 and \$355,000 in FY25 into new equipment to serve the needs of the Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemeteries.

Providing \$500,000 GPR in each year of the biennium for the University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project for missions to recover and identify Wisconsin veterans who went missing during deployment.

Establishing Veterans Day as a state holiday to commemorate their service. Wisconsin is the only state that does not observe Veterans Day as a state holiday.



TODAY *in the* LEGISLATURE

Currently the Wisconsin State 2023-2024 Legislature is working on the following:

2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 7 - (Introduced February 7, 2023) This bill modifies the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain veterans and their spouses and children enrolled in University of Wisconsin System schools and technical colleges.

2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 8 - (Introduced February 7, 2023) This bill expands the definition of "veteran" to include individuals who were naturalized pursuant to the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000. The bill extends most veterans benefits to anyone who meets this newly expanded definition of veteran, however, admission to a state veterans home and burial in a veterans cemetery are not included as they are subject to federal regulation.

2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 12 - (Introduced February 7, 2023) This bill modifies the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain veterans and their spouse and children enrolled in University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges. The bill makes a similar change with respect to grant eligibility for certain veterans and their spouse and children enrolled in private nonprofit colleges. The bill also modifies the UW System nonresident tuition exemption for certain veterans.

2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 91 - (Introduced March 8, 2023) This bill creates an application fee exemption for veterans and members of the U.S. Armed forces applying for admission to University of Wisconsin System schools or technical colleges.

2023 SENATE BILL 102 - (Introduced March 1, 2023) This bill reduces the eligibility threshold for an eligible veteran, the spouse of an eligible veteran and the unmarried surviving spouse of an eligible veteran to claim the veterans and surviving spouses property tax credit under the individual income tax system. Under the bill, a claimant may claim the credit if the claimant's service-connected disability rating of at least 70 percent. Currently that rating must be 100 percent.

GOODS NEWS

WASHINGTON DC - Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento joined Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro for the naming celebration of the USS Telesforo Trinidad, the Arleigh Burke-class Destroyer memorializing Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Navy Fireman Second Class Telesforo de la Cruz Trinidad, on Capitol Hill, today.

"As Navy veteran, a VFW member and proud Filipino-American, I am so honored to be part of this celebration of true heroism," said Sarmiento. "The VFW passed a resolution in 2021 to support this and made a concerted effort to push for the naming, to include sending a letter to Sec. Del Toro. Today's ceremony is in great part due to our members determination to meet the challenge of having our voice heard here in our nation's capital."

VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, left, is pictured with Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro. Trinidad was awarded the Medal of Honor on April 1, 1915, for saving the lives of two of his fellow crewmembers three months earlier following a series of boiler room explosions aboard the USS San Diego. Trinidad is the only Filipino in the U.S. Navy to be awarded the Medal of Honor and is one of only two service members ever to receive the award in peacetime.

"We are grateful to the secretary that he would honor not just Telesforo Trinidad, but generations of Filipinos who, for the past 100 years, have faithfully and honorably served in the United States military," said Sarmiento.

The USS Telesforo Trinidad (DDG 139) is the latest Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer added to the surface fleet. It is the first U.S. Navy ship named in honor of a Filipino Medal of Honor recipient and the second ship named after a Medal of Honor recipient of Asian, American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander descent, following the commissioning of the USS Daniel Inouye (DDG 118), on Dec. 8, 2021.