



A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families

January 2026

Issue # 5

FROM THE 2025-2026 NATIONAL CHAIR OF THE VA&R PROGRAM

Upcoming Events

2025-2026 ALA Mission Training & National Junior Meetings

January 31: Las Vegas

**ALA senior members at capacity,
still open to ALA Juniors**

January 31: Indianapolis

**ALA senior members at capacity
still open to Juniors, TAL, and SAL**

February 7: Atlanta – still open to all Legion Family
Register at <https://www.legion-aux.org/Meetings/Mission-Training>

Unhoused Veterans

Submitted by Lauren Lloyd
Eastern Division VA&R Chair

As we begin the new year, let's celebrate the work our American Legion Family has done to support unhoused veterans, sometimes referred to as homeless veterans. The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Point-in-Time Count showed that there were **32,882 veterans experiencing homelessness** in the U.S.—the *lowest number since records began and a decline of about 7.5% compared with 2023*. In fact, in 2025, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reported that it permanently housed 51,936 previously homeless veterans nationwide. This is the most significant number of veterans that have been housed since tracking unhoused veterans began.

The American Legion places a priority on supporting our veterans in finding sustainable housing and resources for their journey through the Homeless Veterans Taskforce, partnering with agencies to address the housing, employment, and health needs of our veterans.

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Service to Veterans Outside of VA Facilities

Submitted by Lisa Chaplin
National VA&R Chair

The VA&R program encompasses two specific categories of volunteering: opportunities within Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMC) and VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC), as well as opportunities to volunteer outside of VA facilities. The latter is referred to as Service to Veterans, which combines what was once known separately as *Field Service* and *Home Service*.

In essence, any volunteer service to veterans occurring outside of VAMCs and CBOCs falls under Service to Veterans. This provides opportunities to reach veterans beyond the VA system and without the structure of a VA Medical Center or Clinic. Members can volunteer individually or as part of a group. So how can you or *your Unit* get involved? Here are a few ideas:

- Identify a need of a servicemember, veteran, or their family member and consider how to meet that need.
- Coordinate with your Post Family for larger or recurrent needs, such as building a wheelchair ramp or providing transportation to recurrent or frequent appointments.

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Member Spotlight

Rhonda Bailey is a member of the Department of Florida Maurer Unit 14 in St. Petersburg, FL. She was the caretaker for her father, through whom she received her eligibility. Rhonda is a 13-year member who honors her father's service by serving and supporting our veterans. She is actively involved in Wreaths Across America, where she remembers, honors, and teaches others about the importance of freedom and service. You can find Rhonda visiting local nursing homes, passing out bears to let veteran residents know that they are "beary" loved. Her dedication to serving our veterans is evident through her smiles and generosity as she distributes wooden coins to the veterans who attend the monthly Coffee on Sundays at the VA. She is always available to assist when needed and loves giving her time and talents to our veterans as she works the ALA Mission.

Send us your nominee for the next Member Spotlight!



Collaboration with the Legion Family

Submitted by Elaine Roach, Western Division VA&R Chair
and Lisa Chaplin, National VA&R Chair

One of the greatest strengths of the American Legion Family is the number of members and the heartfelt patriotism that we all believe in. The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary may have separate national headquarters and finances, but the mission of honoring those who have served and caring for their families is something we share. Collaborating with your Legion Family and working together in the community shows not only that unity, but that the American Legion Family is a great family to belong to. Family teamwork makes taking on larger projects more manageable, encourages future participation, and hopefully brings in new members.

Communication is key - invite your Post Commander to speak at your meetings and ask if your Unit could do the same. Keeping each other informed about your future activities can make them feel more welcome to join you. When you host an event and ask for assistance from your American Legion, Sons of the American Legion, or American Legion Riders, they could offer a variety of knowledge and strengths that your Unit may not possess. Offering to volunteer at Legion, SAL, or ALR events is another way you can promote mutual helpfulness. Working together opens the possibilities of having more resources at your disposal. There may be someone with a print shop for your flyers, or who works at a company who is willing to donate to your event. The possibilities are endless, and the end results can be rewarding to not only your Unit, and Legion Family, but to your community as well.

Collaborating with the Legion Family on VA&R projects can include working together on any endeavors directed to benefit veterans within VA facilities as well as to those residing in the community. In addition to some of the activities noted elsewhere in this newsletter, jointly hosting a Bingo event, movie night or cook-out at a VA Medical Center or State Veterans Home, supporting shelters for homeless veterans, writing cards and letters for Honor Flight *Mail Call*, and providing holiday and birthday cards for patients and nursing home residents are some ways to make a difference. Consider how your Legion Family might participate in *National Salute to Veteran Patients Week* which is observed annually during the week of February 14th. To learn how you can get involved at a facility near you, check out <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/nationalsaluteveteranpatients.asp>

Another opportunity for Legion Family collaboration is supporting Veterans Creative Arts at a facility near you, as each year there are local/regional competitions leading up to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival for the following year. To learn more about planning or supporting a local competition, go to <https://www.legion-aux.org/Member/Committees/VAR/How-to-Facilitate-a-Local-Veterans-Creative-Arts-F>

Combining our Legion Family resources multiplies our impact in delivering our all-important mission of service to veterans and their families wherever they reside.

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Veteran Homelessness

It is through these partnerships and the efforts of our Posts, Units, and Detachments that we have contributed to reducing that number and increasing our support nationwide.

How can your unit support these efforts? In Vermont, they discovered that their city did not have a place for unhoused female veterans. They partnered with community organizations and posts to help create space in the Dodge House in Rutland for females to join the transitional home as they found housing and gained employment. In Delaware, they collect and assemble backpacks filled with ready-to-eat foods to distribute to veterans on the street who face food insecurity. In DC, unit members hit the streets as part of the Point-In-Time Count. Many of our units participate in the VA Stand Down to offer resources for our most vulnerable veterans.

For additional ideas on how your units can support unhoused veterans, check out these resources:

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans <https://nchv.org/>

Veterans Justice Outreach Center <https://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp>



Submitted by Lauren Lloyd

Reminders & Resources

- Join us to share ideas and activities on our Facebook group page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALAVAR>
- Share our newsletters with your Units and members.
- Look for like-minded organizations in your area to collaborate with on projects that serve veterans.
- Sign up for the free online **Be the One** training at <https://www.legion.org/advocacy/be-the-one/be-the-one-training>
- Download the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Guide available at <https://www.legion-aux.org/member/guides/volunteer-guide>
- Download the Homeless Veterans Handbook available at <https://www.legion.org/get-involved/community-programs/homeless-veterans>

On behalf of the VA&R Committee, we wish you a
Happy New Year!
Lisa Chaplin

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Service to Veterans Outside of VA Facilities

- Host events at state veterans' homes.
- Visit a homebound veteran.
- Provide a respite break to a veteran's caregiver or help with their yardwork or housework.
- Contact community leaders and businesses to secure donations for veterans' transitional housing programs or for "Buddy Baskets" for those exiting a transitional program.
- Participate in a Stand Down.
- Participate in clean-up of veterans' graves or at veterans' cemeteries.

We serve our communities as well, so when volunteering at community facilities such as nursing homes, halfway houses, and shelters that serve both veterans and non-veterans, your hours can be allocated in part to VA&R and in part to Community Service.

Submitted by Lisa Chaplin

The 2025-2026 VA&R Committee

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