

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION

Service to Veterans

Since World War I, the members of the American Legion Auxiliary have taken an active role in the care and rehabilitation of veterans.

On April 8, 1946 representatives of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and other veterans' service organizations met in Washington, D.C. This meeting resulted in the creation of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) advisory Committee.

These volunteers assisted within the VAMC – VA Medical Centers. In 1964, the Auxiliary inaugurated a new program call **Field Service Volunteers** and in 1974 the **Home Service** program was recognized. In 2013, the National ALA convention body voted to combine Field Service and Home Service hours under an umbrella called **Service to Veterans**.

Today, under the direction of the ALA's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program, members serve as **VAVS volunteers** and as **Service to Veterans volunteers**. VAVS volunteers *MUST* serve in a VA healthcare facility (VA medical centers, VA hospitals, clinics, etc.), whereas Service to Veterans volunteers can serve from their homes or in the community with other service organizations.

Regardless of where you serve, the Auxiliary membership is proud of its legacy of volunteer service. Oklahoma Department President, Susan Engstrom, is carrying on this legacy through her theme of "**Serving Those Who Served**".

The ALA has adopted a code of ethics to guide both VAVS and Service to Veterans volunteers while serving in their communities. This code protects the veterans and their families, as well as the volunteers and the integrity of the service programs.

Compassion, Dignity, and Respect: As a volunteer, your main purpose is to make sure all veterans and service members are treated with the compassion, dignity, and respect they have earned and deserved. This includes **Engaging in thoughtful conversation, Listening without judgment, and Confidentiality**. Dress in ALA branded attire if possible and always dress appropriately for the circumstance. While "on duty" volunteers should always be pleasant, cordial, helpful and positive.

For full details go to the Guide for Volunteers from Nationals Web Site:
[Volunteer Guide \(legion-aux.org\)](http://legion-aux.org) .

Service to Veteran Program!

The most significant difference between VAVS and Service to Veteran programs is where the service takes place and how volunteers are recognized for their service.

Service to Veterans volunteers are American Legion Auxiliary members who provide service to veterans outside a VAMC (VA Medical Center). Members who assist during a stand down, help assemble care packages, tray favors, greeting cards, assisting with a veteran's burial or gravesite upkeep, sewing, cooking or shopping for active-duty military/veterans and/or their families are just a few ways of volunteering for Service to Veterans.

Service to Veterans Training:

There is no formal ALA Service to Veterans training program required on a national level.

When a member makes the decision to volunteer outside of a VAMC the first step should be to identify a service member, veteran, and/or family member's needs within the community. Consider the following to locate where to identify these needs.

- Start with your Post home. Some Legionnaires are now aged, infirmed, confined due to illness or inability to drive, and spend most of their time at home or in assisted living facilities.
- Utilize leaders in your community. Speak with City officials, religious leaders, and social services offices to ask about different programs in your community and how they serve veterans.

Once you have identified the needs in your community, brainstorm different ways to meet these needs with your unit or American Legion Family. Example: Visit with veterans and remember them on special occasions, Offer to drive veterans to doctor appointments, Offer to stay with a veteran while caregiver goes shopping or out for a break, Treat veterans with tickets to sporting events or movies, Arrange an outing to a Legion meeting for a special event such as a Veterans Day dinner or memorial service, Brighten the day of veterans living in nursing homes or assisted living facilities by providing activities, such as Poppy Day activities.

Service to Veterans Volunteer Recognition:

Hour bars for your Service to Veterans pin can be earned through work done on behalf of veterans in state or community-based nursing homes, homeless shelters, stand downs, veteran cemeteries or gravesites for any service tasks including but not limited to transportation, snow removal, landscaping/yard mowing, and assisting with tax preparation.

Hours can also be earned through work done in your home for the benefit of homebound, sick or injured service members and veterans. These activities might include sewing, mending, and/or babysitting while the veteran attends medical appointments or rehab sessions, making quilts or knitting for hospitalized or homeless veterans. Driving a service pet to the veterinarian! The possibilities to assist a military person, veteran or their family members are endless!! Anything done directly for a veteran outside of a VAMC is considered Service to Veterans.

Caregivers can now be awarded Service to Veterans hours which may accumulate for hour bars for time spent providing care and assistance to veterans *within their families if they do not receive PROFESSIONAL compensation for doing so*. If the caregiver lives with the veteran, they may be awarded 10 hours a week. If they do NOT live with the veteran, then they may be awarded 5 hours a week. The onus (responsibility) is placed upon the caregiver to report these hours through the existing structure within their units and departments.

Service to Veterans Reporting:

It is the responsibility of each ALA member to report their Service to Veterans hours served. They must record service hours and values of any expense or donation made in service, and submit them to the department VA&R chairman as well as be included within their Unit's yearly impact report within the allotted time. They must provide written feedback to Unit/Department VA&R Chairperson about volunteer assignments as well as other volunteer needs and/or opportunities they know or discovered and they must represent the ALA as prescribed in the Code of Ethics.

These hours MUST be reported each year to the current Department of Oklahoma VA&R Chairman. This year's information must be received no later than the yearly end of year report date of April 1, 2025. These hours can be counted only once and may not be reported again under another committee such as National Security or Community Service. It is also the responsibility of the ALA member to remember their accumulative hours of service from year to year.

The Department VA&R chairperson or Service to Veterans chairperson can order hour bars for members. Volunteers who are not members of the ALA may also receive hour bars as long as their volunteer hours are included in their local unit's impact numbers for the year. Hours may be cumulative of the years; therefore, resulting in higher increments of hour bars awarded.

Service to Veterans Chairperson

Debbie Bertolasio
da.bertolasio@gmail.com
9906 Hefner Village Blvd
Oklahoma City, OK 73162
405.229.6522

VA & R Chairperson

Kim McInnis
kimberly.d.mcinnis@gmail.com
5684 S. 89th West Ave
Tulsa, OK 74017
918.807.4680