



PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska Division of Veterans Affairs recognized for innovation

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – The Department of Military & Veterans Affairs, Division of Veterans Affairs has been nationally honored for its efforts in improving veterans' access to VA benefits and services.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald announced Feb. 24 the recipients of the 2015 Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Awards at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs winter conference in Alexandria, Virginia.

VA and the association of state directors worked together to establish the Pillars of Excellence Awards to recognize top-notch state programs that support or exemplify VA's strategic goals and priorities. Awards were presented in three categories: Elimination of the Disability Claims Backlog, Improving Veteran Access to VA Benefits and Services and Outstanding State Programs.

The DMVA's Division of Veterans Affairs received the award for Improving Veteran Access to VA Benefits and Services for facilitating the VA/Alaska Tribal Health Agreement.

In the most remote state in the country, with many locations only accessible by plane, boat, or snowmachine, the Alaska Division of Veterans Affairs brokered an agreement with Alaska Native Healthcare Programs and the federal VA to dramatically increase access to care for veterans residing in these areas. Veterans can now access care at all of the tribal health clinics that are part of the Tribal Sharing Agreement – saving veterans as much as four days of travel per medical visit; increasing enrollment of veterans in Alaska VA Healthcare System by 14 percent in the first year of the agreement and reducing travel costs by \$3.5 million.

"We are honored to receive this prestigious award and be recognized nationally for our leadership and innovation," said Verdie Bowen, director of the Alaska Division of Veterans Affairs. "We are encouraging other states to look at Alaska as a model for delivering healthcare to their veterans."

Today, there are more than 21 million veterans. Caring for their particular needs, and their

dependents needs, requires innovation and collaboration between federal and state governments.

"This partnership will continue to work with communities across Alaska until every veteran has been afforded the opportunity to access the services and assistance that he or she may need to improve their quality of life," Bowen said.

For more information, please contact the Office of Veterans Affairs at (907)334-0874 or 1-888-248-3682.

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US. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald stands with award winners of the 2015 Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Awards at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs winter conference in Alexandria, Virginia, Feb. 24. Alaska Division of Veterans Affairs Director Verdie Bowen is pictured on the far left. He accepted the award that the Alaska office won Improving Veteran Access to VA Benefits and Services for facilitating the VA/Alaska Tribal Health Agreement. Photo: Reynaldo Leal, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs