
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs



Annual Report 2020

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WHO WE ARE

Mission

The Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs provides highly motivated, effective professionals to execute global, theater, and state operations. We are always prepared to respond to and assist in the recovery from domestic disasters and emergencies; we serve and support Alaska's veterans; educate Alaskan teens in disciplined, structured environments; and provide reliable public safety communications.



HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Mission

The mission of the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) is to provide homeland security and emergency management, and to foster a prepared, resilient Alaska capable of meeting the needs of its communities and citizens in response to all-hazards events.

OPERATIONS

DHS&EM's Response section and State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) continue to manage a wide variety of community emergencies and disasters. The most significant incident this year was the State's response to the worldwide pandemic of a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) causing the highly-contagious infection known as COVID-19. Beginning in March 2020, the SEOC was activated up to Level 3 (actual event) under Unified Command between the Departments of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Health and Social Services (DHSS), and Public Safety (DPS). This effort required a complex yet flexible telework/in house staffing schedule to protect staff against contracting the virus, while working at a rapid pace to answer traveler, resident, and seasonal worker questions, push community resource requests, deploy state testing and contact tracers, set up and management of alternate care sites, and provide public and community information.

Three additional major incidents this year included the response to the July 21, 2020 Magnitude (M)7.8 earthquake in the Alaska Peninsula, severe spring ice jam flooding on the Kuskokwim River, and a catastrophic school facility fire in Kaktovik, a remote village on the North Slope of Alaska, in February. All were declared state disasters. Other incidents included a M7.6 aftershock three months after the July earthquake, riverine and coastal flooding, unusually strong sea storms, windstorms, major building fires, volcanic eruptions, tsunami warnings, power outages, community water and sewer system failures, and fuel shortages. The SEOC has addressed over 60 separate requests for technical, logistical, or financial support or interagency coordination this year. The SEOC coordinated numerous Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) requests for hurricane response,

firefighting, incident management, Emergency Operations Center staffing, and other resources from West Coast states impacted by unprecedented and extensive wildfires in California, Oregon, and Washington; and Hurricanes Laura, Sally, and Beta each making landfall in Southeast US as Categories 4, 2, and 1-hurricanes, respectively. The SEOC also deployed incident management personnel to the States of Oregon and California to support their wildfire responses last summer.

Grants

The 2020 State Homeland Security Program awarded grants to 20 communities and 2 State Agencies. The 2020 State Non-Profit Security Program was awarded to 3 applicants. The 2020 Emergency Management Performance Grant was awarded to 13 communities.

Disaster Assistance

The Disaster Assistance (DA) section responded to five new State-declared disasters, one new federal disaster and monitored progress on projects associated with 9 currently active state and 12 federally declared disasters. This represents 483 ongoing projects providing approximately \$430M in state and federal assistance for impacted communities across the state.

DA staff are working with communities and FEMA on project development for costs associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic Response, Kaktovik School Fire, Sandpoint, Alaska magnitude 7.8 earthquake as well as damages caused by the November 2018 Cook Inlet Earthquake. That event alone is on track to produce approximately 500 restoration projects valued at nearly \$500 million. The State Individual Assistance staff have augmented State Emergency Operations Center personnel in Mass Care, Sheltering and Plans Review Task Force activities. They are also working with the communities affected by the 2019 August Southern Wildfires that displaced 52 families and destroyed numerous other structures.

PREPAREDNESS

Exercise

The community exercise program has been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the Exercise Team is working with the Resilience Team to explore virtual tabletop Small Community Emergency Response Plan (SCERP) exercises to communities until in-person delivery can resume. The Exercise Team has also begun working on Alaska Shield 2022 in conjunction with the Alaska National Guard and the Alaska Command. Preliminary information will be provided to communities in late October, ahead of a planned Virtual

Initial Planning Meeting to occur in late January 2021. The team also is preparing for an Integrated Preparedness Planning Workshop to develop the next exercise cycle. The team is ready to assist communities with exercises at their request but understands the ongoing impacts of COVID.

Training

Classroom delivered training was halted – a total of 33 deliveries were cancelled. Multiple National Training Partners retooled classroom deliveries for virtual deliveries. LSU, NMT-EMRTC, TEEX, EMI, CDP and many others have done their best to fill the gaping hole in training. Virtual training schedules are emailed out on a regular basis from each training provider and can be seen on their websites. The DHS&EM Training Section has been actively engaged in transitioning from the legacy training database and processes to the more automated Acadis Readiness System. Acadis is a Commercial-Off-the-Shelf (COTS) web-based Training Management System. Although the system is COTS, it does need to be configured to the organization, and the training section has organized the structure of the system to accommodate the emergency management training needs of state, local and tribal organizations to adapt to any jurisdiction's needs.

Outreach

The Outreach team has focused the majority of its time working as part of the Unified Command as Public Information Officers during the COVID-19 event. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 FEMA Region 10 Youth Preparedness Camp, which was scheduled to take place in Chugiak, AK in July, was cancelled. Instead a virtual workshop was conducted with 40 youth selected for this camp. This workshop took place July 27-29 via Zoom.

The first meeting with the FEMA Region 10 Youth Preparedness Council meeting of the new year with the new council members took place at the beginning of October. Alaska has a whole new council since the previous two council members retired. This year we have 3 youth who are from Chugiak, Anchorage and Fairbanks. The outreach team had begun working with organizations to do virtual presentations. They partnered with AARP for National Preparedness Month to host 4 virtual senior preparedness workshops. Each of these 4 workshops/presentations highlighted four different regions in Alaska: Southeast, Southcentral, Interior and Rural Alaska.

PLANS

Mitigation

The Mitigation team successfully prioritized and managed \$41 Million in state and FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance funding for seismic, flood risk reduction, planning, and wildfire mitigation projects, and 1.2 Million in NOAA funding for mitigation projects statewide. This includes assisting in the development of more than 20 local hazard mitigation plans. The team participated in the Sitka Rural Resiliency Workshop (RRW) conducted by the All-Hazards Resilience team, by providing an overview of the Hazard Mitigation process and timelines.

Community Planning

The Community Planning team worked with communities to develop Small Community Emergency Response Plans (SCERPs) until May when the task was reassigned to the All-Hazards Resilience Team. The Spring Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)/State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) meetings were canceled due to COVID-19; the team prepared for and conducted virtual meetings for the Fall LEPC/SERC. The team completed the 2019 Threat Hazard Risk Analysis/Stakeholder Preparedness Review. The team provided project management for the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)(federal), and technical assistance with State Homeland Security Program Grant (SHSP). The team was heavily engaged with FEMA during their revision of the Alaska Catastrophic Annex. The team also completed the Distribution Management Plan required for EMPG and SHSP eligibility. Additionally, the team was heavily engaged in the active management of COVID-19 in the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC).

All-Hazards Resiliency team

The All-Hazards Resiliency team conducted a Rural Resiliency Workshop (RRW) in Sitka, AK for 77 attendees representing 14 Southeast Alaskan communities from Port Alexander to Yakutat. The workshop was held at Harrigan Hall, sponsored by the Sitka LEPC. The All-Hazards Resiliency team also conducted numerous assist calls to communities throughout the state to help them develop their Small Community Response Plans (SCERPs). From the start of the State response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, members of the All-Hazards Resiliency team formed the Critical Infrastructure Sustainment (CIS) Branch under the Alaska COVID-19 Unified Command. The CIS Branch leveraged their traditional relationships with the Alaska Partnership for Infrastructure Protection (APIP) in order to ensure the continued operation of Critical Infrastructure (CI) and safe travel for CI Workers during the pandemic.

AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Mission

The Alaska Air National Guard (AKANG) provides mission-ready forces and combat capability to the nation to secure the homeland. Additionally, the AKANG protects the citizens of Alaska and local communities through medical, civil engineering, security, and communications support to civil authorities during emergencies and natural disasters. Over 2,100 trained and ready AKANG Airmen proudly serve in the 168th Wing at both Eielson Air Force Base (AFB) and Clear Space Force Station (SFS), and at the 176th Wing at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

The AKANG maintained a high operational tempo and deployment pace in 2021, enabling global mobility, airlifting over 9,694,000 lbs of cargo, 1,639 passengers, dropped over 50 Pararescue Jumpers, transferring over 10 million pounds of fuel to over 1,400 receivers, and flying more than 750 sorties. Airmen provided 24/7 year-round support to North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), National Missile Warning and Space Surveillance, Search and Rescue, and C-17 strategic airlift tasking. Guardsmen of the Air Defense Squadron scrambled F-22 Alert Fighters, E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, and KC-135 refueling aircraft on 24 occasions to battle manage 35 Homeland Air Sovereignty missions, resulting in 8 intercepts of a total of 16 long range Russian aircraft.

168th Wing

The 168th Wing's "Guardians of the Last Frontier" are Arctic experts who operate and maintain nine KC-135R Stratotankers at Eielson Air Force Base. The Wing operates, secures, and supports the AN/FPS-123 Ballistic Missile Upgraded Early Warning Radar (UEWR) at Clear Space Force Station (SFS).

The 168th Wing provides 24/7 tanker access for Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Command and Air Mobility Command, and is also postured to support 24/7 Missile Warning and Defense and Space Domain Awareness in support of the US Space Force's strategic objectives. The 168th Wing continues to excel at maintaining both high availability and reliability rates – equal to that of annual Middle East deployments. PACAF's use of 168th Wing tankers for missions throughout the Pacific Theater is extensive. The 168th Wing is in high demand due to Eielson's strategic location, its tanker support to Alaska-based receivers, and proximity to the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex. Additionally, the 168th Wing was

proud to receive the news of a new association with the Active Component that will bring additional KC-135s into theater.

The 168th Wing also conducted Missile Warning and Space Situational Awareness with 637,497 taskings, resulting in 538,251 objects tracked and over 3M (3,055,178) total tracks leading to 10.8M (10,887,720) observations collected in FY20.

176th Wing

The 176th Wing's "Arctic Guardians" are an elite force of well-trained professional Airmen who integrate seamlessly into all DOD, Active Component, Air Reserve Component (ARC), and Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) operations. The 176th Wing operates and maintains eight C-17 Globemaster III, four HC-130J Combat King II, seven HH-60 Pave Hawk aircraft, an Air Defense Squadron, Rescue Coordination Center and Medical Group. The wing conducts federal missions of Strategic and Tactical Airlift, Combat Search and Rescue, and Agile Combat Support for Air Expeditionary Force taskings, and provides 24/7 battle management, command and control (BMC2) for the Alaska NORAD Region. This year the 176th Wing had multiple successful deployments: 22 mobilizations, 320 personnel, and 71 short tons of cargo deployed around the world, and re-emerged as primary participants in Exercise RED FLAG-ALASKA.

The 210th and 212th Rescue squadrons supported Operation INHERENT RESOLVE where they provided 2880 hours of alert coverage flying 133 combat sorties. This team supported 50 individual combat operations flying 133 combat sorties totaling 233 flight hours. The dedication of these 45 individuals further enhanced the NDS and saved nine lives.

The 176th Wing is poised to expand into new missions and continues to prepare for upcoming deployments around the world. The Arctic Guardians proactively seek opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships with total force mission partners, the local community and state, and the interagency to support a whole of government approach to complex problems.

Mission Assurance

On any given day, the AKANG had Airmen deployed worldwide in support of the federal mission with no degradation of service to the State of Alaska. AKANG members performed superbly in multiple world-wide deployments, operations, and international/national/state-level exercises throughout the year. Airmen provided direct support to the US Presidential

Inauguration, RESOLUTE SHIELD, INHERENT RESOLVE, FREEDOM'S SENTINEL, ARCTIC EAGLE, ICEX, DEEP FREEZE (Antarctica), NOBLE EAGLE, Exercise RED FLAG-ALASKA, and the NASA Manned Spaceflight Program. Additionally, AKANG members demonstrated agile combat employment (ACE) by conducting ARCTIC ACE throughout Alaska. This demonstration was lauded by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) as one of the best to date and showed the readiness of the AKANG to support 2018 NDS priorities.

The last year has been a year of innovation for the AKANG and 176 WG. The 176th Wing is a founding member and key stakeholder in the Arctic Spark innovation Lab on JBER. In the last year the 176 WG received approval for 8 innovation projects valued at \$525,000. This put the wing in the top 10 of 71 wings for amount of innovation funding across the entire force. The estimated savings of these projects are over 3200 man-hours and over \$400,000.

Additionally, 22 personnel from the 176th Wing were activated in support of JTF-MED and the National Guard's COVID response. This team supported the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) throughout the pandemic in Alaska. These roles included: contact tracing, vaccine helpline call center, data management/informatics and emergency management planning.

Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) and Emergency Management

The Alaska Air National Guard's search-and-rescue (SAR) Mission continues to play a critical role across Alaska. The Alaska Command (ALCOM) Alaska Rescue Coordination Center (AKRCC) is manned 24/7 by 12 members of the 176th Wing. For fiscal year 2021, the men and women of AKRCC coordinated 87 SAR Missions across six Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components, and multiple Good Samaritan volunteer agencies resulting in 107 lives saved, year to date. These efforts helped the AKRCC reach its 6,005th SAR Mission and an incredible 2,616 lives saved since July 1, 1994.

Community Engagements

AKANG members volunteered and served local communities, organizations, and remote Alaska villages, supporting hundreds of events throughout the state. This year, AKANG members participated in two innovative readiness training events in Kodiak, Alaska and Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Additionally, the AKANG planned for the resumption of commissary runs in the state of Alaska.

The AKANG's culture is one of respect, empowerment, safety, and compliance with DOD, Air Force, National Guard Bureau, and The Adjutant General's policy directives. The establishment of the Joint Diversity Executive Council furthers the AKANG goal of inclusion and diversity within our workforce. The Alaska Air National Guard is committed to providing ready and lethal forces to execute global, theatre, and state operations. Airmen are committed to serving the communities in which they work and live. The AKANG will continue to provide agile, innovative, and ready Airmen to respond to the State's and Nation's call.

ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Mission

The Alaska Army National Guard builds and maintains ready units and Soldiers that are prepared to support the Governor and fellow Alaskans for domestic operations and deploy worldwide in support of US National Strategy.

Force Structure and Modernization

The AKARNG continued managing changes to units and facilities in a way that best supports training, mission requirements, and the stationing of units and Soldiers in Alaska's communities. Army force structure adjustments resulted in an increase of authorized personnel from 1624 to 1700 in 2020. Once the AKARNG recruits and trains the additional authorized Soldiers, the AKARNG will have a greater capability and capacity to execute its federal and state missions.

The AKARNG Construction and Facilities Maintenance Office (CFMO) made great strides in "right-sizing" the facilities footprint by executing facility improvement projects and divesting excess land, buildings, and property across Alaska. CFMO competed for, was awarded, designed, and constructed a \$27 million United States Property and Fiscal Office Military Construction (MILCON) project bringing work and federal money into the state, with an estimated project completion in 2021. In addition, the AKARNG CFMO competed for, was awarded, and saved the federal funding for a \$59 million Camp Carroll Readiness Center MILCON project bringing work and money into the state. The estimated project completion is 2026. CFMO divested 27 sites since initiation of the divestiture program in 2015. CFMO is actively working to divest the remaining 36 sites. This initiative has benefited the AKARNG by cleaning up decades of real estate actions and has helped AKARNG comply with past National Guard Bureau audit findings, gained square footage authorization for new construction, corrected real property records, and provided facilities to local communities in rural Alaska.

Mission Assurance

The organization demonstrated it is an operational force capable of mobilizing, deploying, and successfully operating anywhere in the world when called to active duty. This year, the 297th Regional Support Group deployed to Poland to provide base support of eleven bases that host rotational U.S., Polish, and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces

participating in the Atlantic Resolve mission. The AKARNG Medical Detachment also successfully participated in Overseas Deployment Training in Hohenfels, Germany where they provided outstanding medical care to Soldiers participating in the Combined Resolve Mission. This established multi-national relationships and paved the way for future overseas deployment trainings. Additionally, the AKARNG continued support of its Mongolian partners in Afghanistan with two liaison teams as leadership and training mentors. Alaska's state partnership with Mongolia began in 2003, and the AKARNG has continued the combat mission partnership since 2004. In 2020, the 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment and 297th Military Police Company redeployed from Kosovo and Kuwait respectively. Soldiers conducted law enforcement, personnel security, peacekeeping, training and advising.

Arctic Expertise

In 2020, the AKARNG continued Arctic skills training with the goal of increasing Soldier survivability and unit performance in extreme cold weather operations. Soldiers from the 1-297th Infantry Battalion conducted annual training at the Yukon Training Area in conjunction with Exercise Arctic Eagle. With temperatures as low as -30F, the Arctic skills training challenged participants in extreme cold weather and high latitude environments.

The AKARNG Aviation Battalion flew 40.1 hours in support of Ice Exercise (ICEX) 2020 from 25 February through 1 March 2020. ICEX is a U.S. Navy exercise designed to research, test, and evaluate operational capabilities in the Arctic Region. ICEX 2020 allowed the AKARNG Aviation Battalion to assess operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic Environment, and develop partnerships and collaborative efforts.

The AKARNG Aviation Battalion flew 86.6 hours in support of the Colony Glacier recovery mission. AKARNG aviators have supported this operation since 2012 when an AKARNG Blackhawk crew on a routine training flight discovered a C-124 Globemaster cargo plane that crashed in November 1952.

Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) and Emergency Management

The Alaska Army Guard sustained its record of working with local, state, and federal partners. At the local level, units participated in emergency management planning events with local community law enforcement, search and rescue groups, and local emergency planning committees. At the state and federal level, the AKARNG partnered with the Alaska Department of Public Safety, the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of

Interior, the Alaska Division of Forestry, and other agencies in an effort to increase overall emergency management response capacity for Alaska.

Not only did the AKARNG prepare, it responded. In 2020, AKARNG provided over 100 Soldiers in locations across the state to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These Soldiers selflessly supported the distribution of goods at local food banks, provided logistics assistance as requested by the state, conducted COVID testing at the Anchorage International Airport, provided contact tracers to the Department of Health and Social Service offices across the state, augmented the Alaska State Public Health Laboratory in processing COVID samples for testing, prepared meals at Beans Café, provided Kodiak harbor security, established a patient overflow site at the Alaska Airlines Center, and provided volunteers to Division of Elections at rural polling locations that were short staffed.

The AKARNG Aviation Battalion supported Operation Guardian Support (OGS), assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection from April 2019 through June 2020. For the duration of the Operation, the AKARNG Aviation Battalion had 4-8 Soldiers supporting the mission at any given time. The unit provided much needed UH60 Blackhawk maintenance, pilot, and operations support to the Arizona National Guard.

Additionally, the AKARNG Aviation supported civil authorities by conducting 15 search and rescue missions (51.2 hours) and was credited with 17 saves.

The Alaska Army National Guard remains committed to its local, state, and federal partners. As shown above, Soldiers and units are ready to deploy and operate anywhere in or outside of Alaska when called. Citizen-Soldiers are dedicated to building relationships that strengthen Alaska communities and improve response capabilities. Mission-ready Guard members will continue providing the services and results Alaska and AKARNG partners have come to expect.

Always ready, always there!

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mission

The Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs serves as the primary advocate for Alaska's veterans and strives to help our veterans and their families improve their lives. From helping veterans to file claims for education, medical or other benefits to assisting them in obtaining earned military awards, the Office of Veterans Affairs is here to serve you.

Contribution to Department's Mission

The Office of Veterans' Affairs (OVA) establishes and sustains comprehensive advocacy programs for all of Alaska's Veterans, Active Duty, National Guard/Reserves and dependents. The Office of Veterans' Affairs works to:

- Identify and resolve issues that face Alaska's 69,384 veterans and their 152,644 dependents, survivors, and extended families in 348 communities across Alaska;
- Represent the State of Alaska to federal and state agencies and nationally recognized veteran service organizations;
- Build connections between military and veteran populations, veteran groups and service organizations, and local, state and federal government agencies;
- Provide Alaska's veterans with direct services, outreach, and advocacy.

Major Component Accomplishments in SFY 2020

In SFY2021, the Office of Veterans' Affairs had four full-time staff who maintained and managed several advocacy programs for Alaska's veterans including: Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (13 members), State Veterans Cemetery planning consultants, Alaska Territorial Guard task force, volunteer Tribal Veteran Representatives, Veterans town hall meetings, Funeral Honors, Veterans Memorial Grant Funds, Veteran Service Officer grants, and the Rural Veteran Outreach Program. Staff members also partnered with other veteran organizations and agencies to prevent homelessness, provide services, reduce suicide, and build connections that serve Veterans and their dependents throughout Alaska.

The economic impact of Alaska Veteran Benefits is significant, averaging just over \$600 million annually over the past ten years. As such, OVA remains keenly focused on connecting Veterans with benefits earned as a result of their service. In SFY2021, the combined OVA team assisted 51,440 Veterans, active duty, reserve component members, and family members, with federal and state benefits/claims questions and processing.

Representatives completed 24 visits around the state, again reaching many veterans for the first time. There was a major down turn in access to those OVA serves due to the COVID 19 pandemic but OVA is still serving their clients through a new appointment only system. The result of these efforts is the following:

- The Veterans Affairs (VA) Mortgage Servicing Assistance program insured issuance of Certificates of Eligibility to 6,310 Veterans, resulting in over \$1.8 billion in home loans
- VA Healthcare System increased by over \$34 million in managed - care served a total of 37,000 Veterans receiving care totaling \$417 million in federal funds
- Compensation and pension increased annually by \$29 million, for a total of \$362 million federal funds – largest one-year increase and first year reaching this monumental amount
- Through successfully navigation of the USDVA Appeals board, Veterans and families received over \$174 million in single one-time payments reflecting the largest increase in one year
- Over 3,882 veterans attended higher education/certification in Alaska, expending over \$61M federal funds

Additional successes include:

- Authored and printed the first of its kind Veterans Benefits guide reflecting all Alaska and Federal benefits in one magazine – 500 placed in the hands of Veterans and since COVID 19 onset have had 62,000 on-line views
- Largest increase in 100% service connected Veterans – Normal year is an average of 40 during COVID 19 1,272 Veterans received this award – directly due to Veterans delivering complete medical records and filling fully developed claims
- Co- Sponsored 12 virtual town halls due to pandemic crisis – 1,150 Veterans across Alaska were provided direct assistance in the area of medical access and benefits
- Sponsored events in Soldotna, Seward, and Hoonah honoring our Vietnam Veterans –Welcoming Home 51 of our Veterans
- Receipt of a \$250,000 federal transportation grant, allowing over 5,916 Veterans funded travel for healthcare – Alaska is the only state in the nation selected
- Veterans Memorial Endowment Grant provided the funds needed to complete the Wasilla Veterans Wall of Honor – Memorial Day 2021 was enhanced greatly by the cover and bleachers provided by this grant – more than 200 attended this event to Honor our Fallen
- Partnership with the US Department of Veterans Affairs resulted in 51 additional Tribal Veterans Representatives receiving VA 101 trained, increasing the state-wide volunteer pool to over 450, the largest Veteran’s volunteer corps in the nation

- Partnered with the Fairbanks Stand Down committee and the Fairbanks Vet Center to provide clothing and service using an appointment system for Veterans in need of a hand up during the shutdown caused by COVID 19
- Assisted the local Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in Anchorage to continue processing new claims while in tele-work status due to COVID 19 shut down – OVA established a permanent direct uploaded system replacing the temporary fax system for claims with the assistance of VA IT – allowing claims to be uploaded into the VA claims network – allowing local and nationwide tele-workers to continue to work new Veterans' claims

Key Component Challenges

The COVID crisis has pushed OVA's staff to a critical level of clients. The local VA Benefits Administration has moved their staff of 40 to tele-work schedules and closed their local office. In doing so, the VA has sent all VSOs to each perspective headquarters limiting access to our VSOs via appointment only. The Office of Veterans Affairs has remained opened during this crisis, added to our daily case management routine- individual claims processing and established a system to place claims into the VA secure system. This allowed tele-working VA staff to continue processing new claims. This new process continues to move clients' claims through the system. Currently the largest challenge is personal physicals for claims validation. This is a work in process and is much smoother now compared to the start of the COVID crisis.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2021

The Alaskan VA Healthcare System started a new initiative to improve health care in Alaska. The first step was to break ground on a new 11,000sq ft Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) located in Soldotna. This clinic will be completed in the summer of 2021 and adds two more VA doctors and support staff to this area. After that, a full time CBOC was established in Homer, a doctor and staff are now serving at that new location. Next, the Alaska VA announced they are relocating the CBOC on Ft Wainwright to a new 11,000sq ft facility in Fairbanks. This location is still under negotiation. The Alaska VA Healthcare System also revealed a pending expansion for the CBOC in Wasilla. This will significantly increase appointment availability ensuring those who need care, in each location, will receive it. With all other medical partnerships in place, Alaska has reached the highest level of care offered to our enrolled Veterans. Today, Alaska has 98% medical coverage for our Veterans; this has been a long path to keep the promise made to each Veteran.

ALASKA MILITARY YOUTH ACADEMY

Mission

The Alaska Military Youth Academy's ChalleNGe Program is designed to meet the life coping skills and educational needs of 16 to 18-year olds to intervene in and reclaim the lives of at-risk youth.

Major Accomplishments

The Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA), formally opened its doors January 30, 1994 as one of the original ten pilot programs and has grown along with the national program. There are currently 41 active sites nationally in 30 states, the District of Columbia and the territory of Puerto Rico. The Program leads, trains, and mentors 16 – 18-year-olds to become productive citizens. Over 6,080 young Alaskans have completed this physically demanding and educationally stimulating Program since 1994. Class 2020-1 graduated 132 cadets in January 2020 before the first reports of the novel coronavirus were published. The next class, 2020-2, began on time in February before the virus reached pandemic status. Class 2020-2 was sent home in March 2020 for distant delivery in order to protect the students and staff. The normal average graduation rate for cadets who begin the program is well over 80% when they remain on campus under the residential model. Only 10 cadets, or 7%, graduated in July 2020 under the distant learning model. The difference reinforced the value of the residential model and the staff worked to ensure cadets would return to campus in July for class 2020-3 and many cadets who didn't graduate in 2020-2 returned for 2020-3.

The Youth ChalleNGe Program holistic model uses a quasi-military, tuition-free residential environment to strengthen the academic and social skills of program participants in the Eight Core Components of the program while encouraging emotional growth. The 17 ½ month program includes a 5 ½ month Residential Phase followed by a 12-month Post-Residential Phase. This approach recognizes that opportunities for development are the outgrowth of positive changes in the physical, emotional, and situational elements of the young adult's life. AMYA runs two residential classes per year which are now better aligned with the school calendars. One class begins in January and the other in July.

The Residential Phase of the program is a 22-week experiential learning model conducted in Alaska National Guard facilities with separate sleeping quarters for male and female cadets. This begins with a two-week Acclimation Period, considered as an extension of the

screening process. During this time, the applicants are referred to as “candidates” and assessed for their ability to handle stress and program structure; propensity for gang activity and/or bullying activity, either as a victim or an inflictor; and desire to succeed and complete the program. Additionally, candidates experience a caring, disciplined, tough-love environment that tests their physical, mental, and emotional commitment to the program. Focus is on group and individual discipline, structure and goal setting, while the staff provides medical service, emotional support, meals, counseling and instruction. The candidates who successfully complete Acclimation earn the distinction of becoming an AMYA “cadet”.

In the remaining 20 weeks of the Residential Phase, daily activities and experiences like academics, physical fitness, vocational technical education, outdoor adventure training and service to the community add value to the transformation process. These elements build the Cadet’s education level, promotes healthy living, and aid in the development of employability skills while contributing to a growing sense of community involvement and commitment.

During the winter and summer of 2020, eligible AMYA cadets successfully completed credit recovery, and 142 earned the award of their high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) Test, by examination. Cadets earned up to 7.5 credits toward their secondary education bringing them closer to the required credits should they opt to return to public school for graduation. As a secondary education institution accredited by AdvancED/Northwest Accreditation Commission, eligible students can receive an AMYA high school diploma when they meet the State standards, complete the Armed Services Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), or Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development WorkKeys Assessment. AMYA is certified to offer participants preparation and testing for the GED if they prefer this high school equivalency credential.

One of the core components of the ChalleNGe program is job skills. AMYA offers exposure to vocational fields that are available when the Graduates enter the post-residential phase of the program. In 2020, AMYA continued to build on its relationship with the Department of Labor’s Job Corps in order to maximize follow on training opportunities to keep graduates on track. Also, AMYA worked directly with AVTEC in Seward for additional residential training opportunities for those interested in pursuing one of the many trade schools offered by the program. While on campus, Cadets had the opportunity to receive certification in scaffolding and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10 safety training, and small engine repair. A select number of cadets completed the Healthcare Specialties Course while other cadets had an opportunity to work towards their

Equipment and Engine Training Council certification. During the spring of 2020, many vocational hands-on opportunities were restricted or halted due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Cadets develop a Post-Residential Action Plan (P-RAP) beginning in Week 3 as a goal-setting process with the guidance of staff and support from their mentors. The P-RAP provides a point of reference, discussion, and focus when they return to their communities following graduation. Some of the goals may include completion of secondary and post-secondary education, entering the workplace or joining the military. Through the collaborative efforts of AMYA staff, parents, and mentors, 100 percent of the graduates of 2020-1 and 2020-2 were placed in one of these categories. The goal of the post-residential phase is for graduates to transition back to their communities and apply their newly gained strategies as a productive member of society. Additionally, graduates recognize the need to refine their method of goal attainment while building upon the mentoring relationship. Mentors are a key element to sustained successes and often one of the graduates' pivotal healthy adult relationships in the earliest stages of the post-residential phase. AMYA is blessed with a large number of dedicated adult community volunteers from across the State who share the cadet's desire for long-term success.

The Academy's staff remains committed to its mission of "helping intervene and reclaim the lives of Alaska's at-risk youth and produce graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults". AMYA is considered among the top ChalleNGe programs in the nation. Adapting to operations under the pandemic, AMYA developed, implemented, and continues to refine a plan that allowed the cadets to safely return to on-campus operations in State fiscal year 2021. The use of virtual meeting places such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams in 2020 enabled human connection without the physical risk of gathering in person during the pandemic.

Entering into its 28th year of operation, AMYA has graduated over 6,080 cadets from this physically demanding and educationally stimulating program. Additionally, more than 3,880 high school diplomas and/or GED certificates have been awarded to deserving graduates who are demonstrating tremendous success in communities across Alaska and around the world. The Academy's track record of sustained success strategically positions it to impact the next generation of Alaska's families as an alternative for students who fall behind in school during the pandemic.

DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Mission

DMVA's Division of Administrative Services' (DAS) team of dedicated professionals leverages their unique capabilities to execute the Department's mission. Specifically, the DAS team:

1. *Delivers* critical budget, financial management, human resources, information technology, procurement, and administrative products and services;
2. *Assists* colleagues across DMVA in executing their assigned duties and responsibilities; and
3. *Serves* the state's Veteran population and the citizens of Alaska

Major Accomplishments

- Reengineered the Centralized Personnel Plan (CPP) into timely monthly billing process, allowing for increased level of budgetary management for DMVA divisions and transparency for Master Cooperative Agreement appendices.
- Improved internal process for clearing credit card charges within a 30-day timeframe and implemented standards for prompt employee travel reimbursements.
- Restructured the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) revenue draw-down assignments for the successful draw down of over \$52M in federal reimbursement.
- Reviewed and processed over 1,300 on-boarding packets for the Alaska Organized Militia to facilitate expedited response times to emergency activations of State Active Duty.
- Activated 119 State Active Duty (StAD) personnel for COVID-19 response and support of the state during the health pandemic.
- Completed required First Class and Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management software training to integrate procurement support into the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) during disasters and emergencies.
- Supported the SEOC and Department of Health and Social Services in emergency procurements resulting from urgent COVID-19 pandemic response.

RURAL OPERATIONS

Mission

Systematically execute DMVA operations throughout rural Alaska, using a hub approach, to ensure a ready response capability for state declared disasters. We strive to continue a strong relationship going forward.

Priorities

1. Cultivate relationships before declared disasters and assistance is requested
2. Demonstrate capability and capacity to support Alaskan communities
3. Conduct annual Domestic Operations Exercise at a hub location
4. Build federal readiness
5. Expand response ability through increased locally trained professionals
6. Rapidly provide requested assistance for declared events

ALASKA PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATION SERVICES

Mission

Provide highly reliable, public safety grade infrastructure, services, and support to State, Local, Federal and Alaskan priorities and customers

Priorities

1. Provide public safety grade infrastructure in support of our services and our customers' requirements
2. Support customers' equipment, needs, and requirements
3. Successfully recruit staff, continually develop our people
4. Identify options to resource gaps impacting mission success

Major Accomplishments

- Transitioned components from the Department of Administration, Office of Information Technology to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.
- Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) System carried 22,880,140 push to talks and 12,359,823 group calls supporting first responders and critical workforce missions at the State, Local, Department of Defense (DOD), and Federal levels.
- Staff continued to respond to system equipment failures and perform maintenance and upgrades during COVID-19 pandemic as critical infrastructure workforce.
- Performed periodic maintenance inspections and service on the State and DOD Motorola radio system infrastructure equipment ensuring high reliability of the shared public safety communications system.
- Managed completion of the annual inventory of approximately 22,191 subscriber units belonging to 130 member agencies.
- Provided technical advice and support for the addition of a new municipal AWARN site at one of our sites in Wasilla continuing our close partnership to reduce costs and share infrastructure.
- Provided support for the contract effort to replace the ALMR site radios at 72 State of Alaska sites.
- Worked to implement a new, more modern ALMR website to improve information availability

- Worked to develop a new training and delivery program, include on-line courses related to ALMR services and systems that can be consumed in 15-minutes or less video segments
- ALMR Help Desk staff accepted and processed 1,274 work order/service requests supporting System operations and maintenance oversight.
- Staff responded to 61 unscheduled major outages repairing equipment and restoring service to full operating capability.
- ALMR System provided critical communications support to first responders during response to the 300 fires on the road system.
- Completed several funded deferred maintenance projects and lifecycle refresh projects during the pandemic at system sites throughout the State.
- Executed service agreements with critical equipment vendors to establish and maintain technical support and software updates vital to maintaining high available services.

ALASKA STATE DEFENSE FORCE

Mission

The Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF) is an all-volunteer organization and is considered part of Alaska's Organized Militia. The ASDF consists of approximately 150 members from 19 communities across Alaska. Alaska Statute 26.05.100 states "during the time that the Alaska National Guard or the Alaska naval Militia, or any part of either of them, is not available to the state by reason of active federal service, or the National Guard or Naval Militia requires augmentation to perform its state mission, the governor may activate the Alaska State Defense Force." Members train for missions including communications, emergency management, medical, logistical support, chaplaincy, and shelter management. Members meet for training monthly, for 2 days.

During 2020, the ASDF provided support to events such as parades, festivals, preparedness training, potlatches, speaking engagements at schools, assisting with training and working with groups in communities such as in Kotzebue, Cold Bay, Nome, Bethel, Kwethluk, Fairbanks, Quinhagak, Kodiak, Wasilla, Little Diomed, and Utqiagvik.

ASDF members attend a minimum of 11 drills each year. Members train and prepare to be ready to respond to any natural or man-made disaster. All members are required to complete Incident Management System (ICS) courses and are prepared to act as Liaison Officers if needed during a local disaster or emergency.