

ENVSC 101

Serving Our Nation's Veterans

Our Mission

Our mission is to ensure that veterans thrive by providing Elks volunteers with tools and resources through community service and engagement.

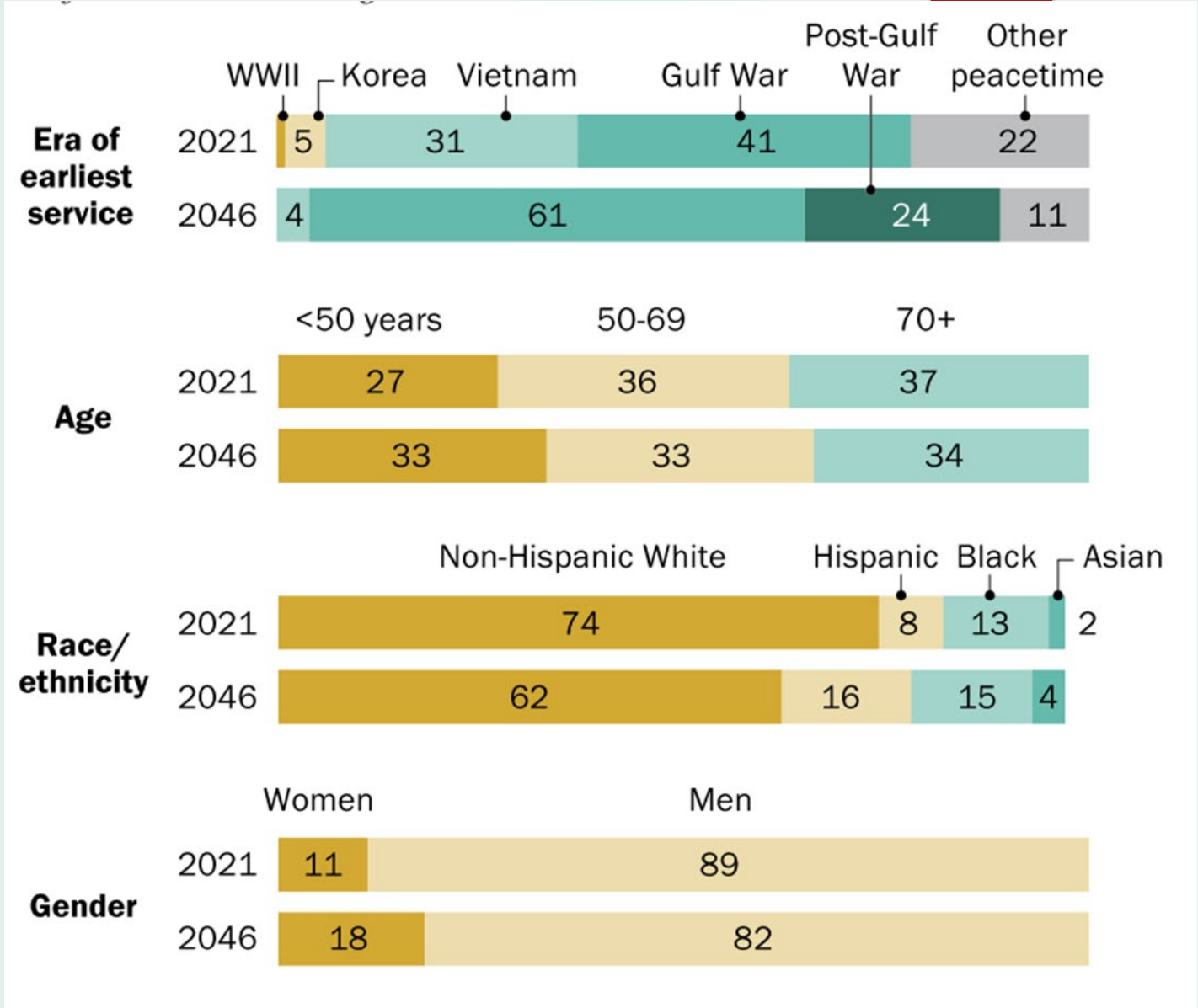
We know our members are busy. The purpose of the ENVSC is to provide Elks with the resources and the information needed to best serve the veterans in Elks communities.

To make the most our resources and your time, we aim to focus on serving veterans in need.

Our ultimate vision is a nation of strong communities meeting veterans' ever-changing needs.

Today's Veterans

- There are about 16.5 million veterans in the United States.
- Veterans represent around 6.5 percent of the US population.
- Forty-nine percent of the veteran population is 65 or older
- About 30 percent of the veteran population are currently living with a disability
- As of 2016, the number of Gulf War-era (August 1990-present) veterans exceeded the number of Vietnam-era veterans.



SPOTLIGHT ON IAVA VETERANS

Since 2001, about 4.1 million service members have served in post-9/11 war operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and over half of them have deployed more than once.

Over 7,000 U.S. service members have died in the post-9/11 warzones of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere.

This generation of Veterans is characterized by an increased number of Reservists and National Guard members who served in combat zones; a higher proportion of women; and different patterns of injuries, such as multiple injuries from explosions, than were seen among Veterans of previous wars.

Veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan are surviving in greater numbers than in previous conflicts due to advances in body armor, battlefield medicine, and medical evacuation transport. As a result, more Veterans are living with disabling injuries, including the often-lifelong effects of traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Data suggests a high prevalence of respiratory symptoms and respiratory illness consistent with airway obstruction in Veterans deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, likely due to exposure to a variety of airborne hazards, including burn pits.

15% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will suffer from PTSD at some point in their lives, 3 times as high as the population of Vietnam Veterans.



General Guidelines

If Lodges are using ENVSC funds to serve veterans and military members in need, the project must focus on one of these five areas of increased need:

Employment

Homelessness and Housing

Military Families

Health (including mental health)

Educational Support

WHY THESE 5 AREAS?

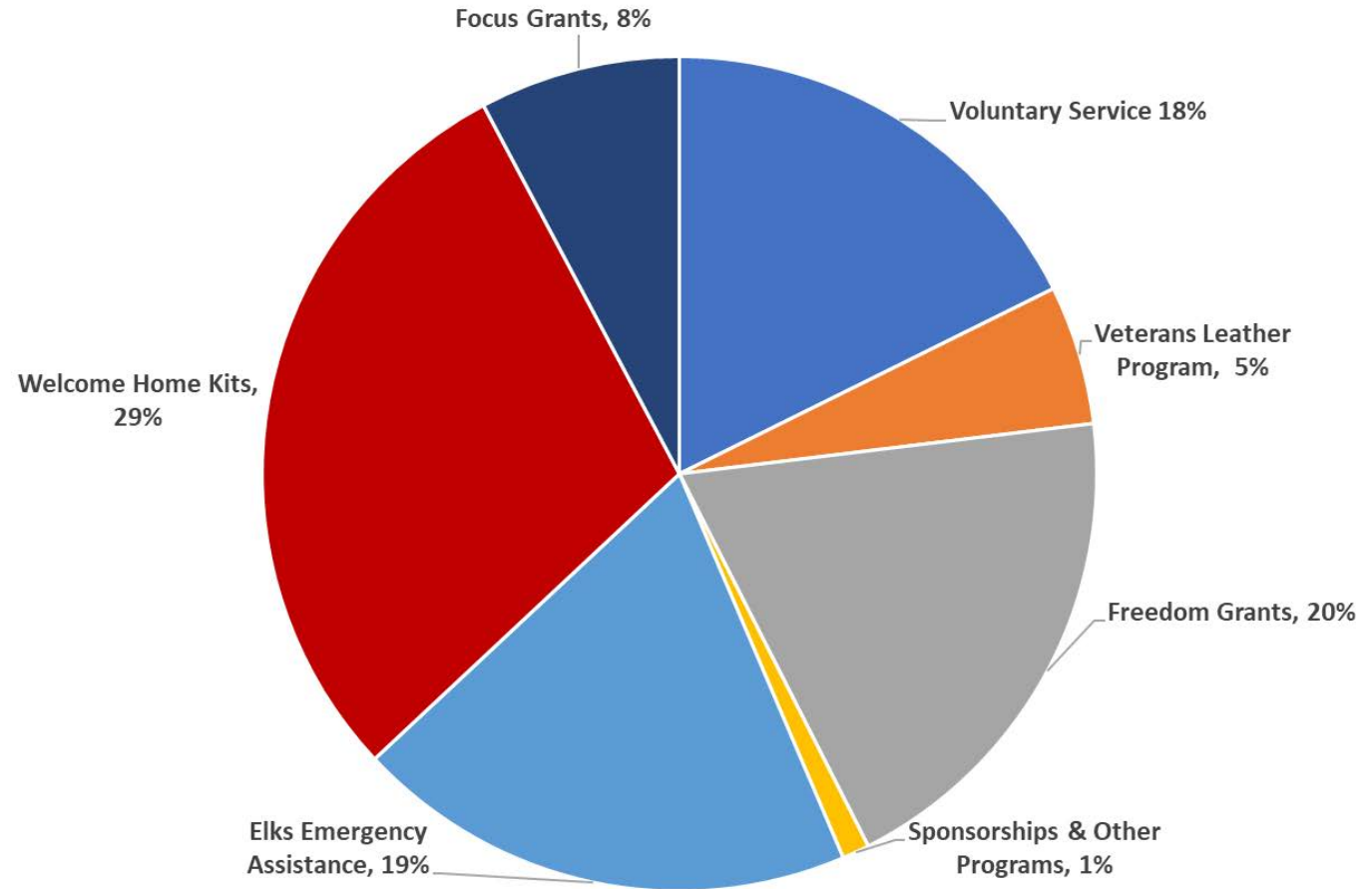
Research by the VA, the Department of Defense, Blue Star Families, IAVA, VFW and other VSOs show that statistically these are the 5 areas that veterans and military members need and request the most help with.

2024-25 Program Overview

This is a snapshot of our largest programs.

Sponsorships includes support of several National Adaptive Sports Events for Veterans, as well as programs like Bugles Across America and Playing Cards for Veterans.

We also have several programs and partnerships which do not receive national funding, including Adopt-a-Veteran and Army of Hope.



Elks Voluntary Service

The cornerstone of the ENVSC, this facility-based volunteer program is aimed at providing reliable and consistent support to hospitalized and recovering veterans.

- We station Voluntary Service Representatives and Deputy Representatives at veterans' facilities and provide them with monthly stipends to help fund activities and support for veterans at their facility.
- Volunteers are required to be certified by the national ENVSC office and undergo training and registration at their local facility.
- Thanks to the large number of Elks volunteers in VA facilities, the Elks are on the Executive Committee for the national VAVS program.
- The Elks Voluntary Service Program expanded upon the VA's idea and stations volunteers at State Veterans Homes and community veterans' facilities as well.



Elks Voluntary Service

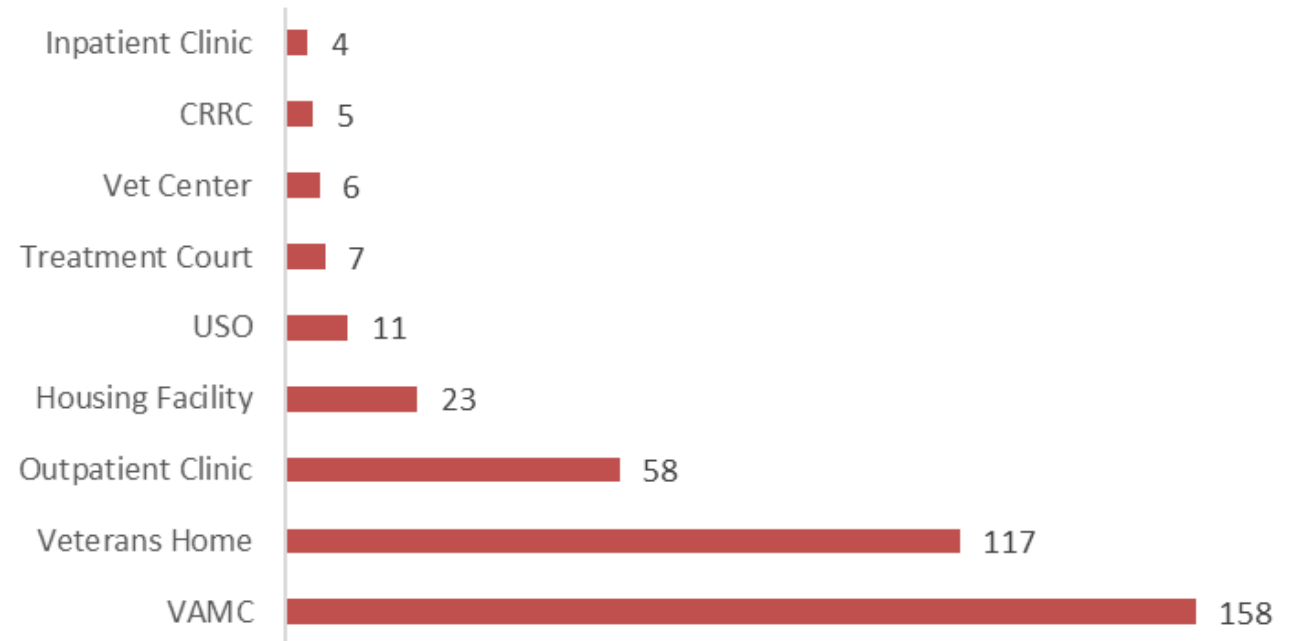
Program volunteers provide valuable social support for thousands of aging and hospitalized veterans, improving their lives and their health.

Representatives visit their facilities at least once a month to spend time with veterans. They plan events, recruit volunteers, handle the monthly stipend and submit monthly online reports to the ENVSC.

Deputy Representatives provide additional support to the veterans, assist the Rep and fill in as needed.

75% of our Representatives serve in VA Medical Centers or State Veterans Homes.

Voluntary Service Facilities





Elks Representatives in Action!

- Venita Collier provides supplies for the ceramic arts program at the Valor Point transitional home in Lakewood, Colorado. Veterans learn to create and paint clay art. She also gives veterans the opportunity to attend shows at the local theater.
- Leonard Mills creates hygiene kits for veterans experiencing homelessness in Vancouver, Washington. Elks in his Lodge work together with a local high school's volleyball team to assemble and distribute the kits.
- Thomas Kramin partners with the St. Cloud and Willmar Lodges to hold a Flag Day ceremony and meal for veterans from the St. Cloud VAMC.
- At the DJ Jacobetti Home for Veterans in Marquette, Michigan, Robert Wellman plans and supports activities for veterans' families like the Blueberry Festival, an annual Carnival, and a Woodstock anniversary picnic.



Freedom Grants

- In 2024-25, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission will award Freedom Grants to 1,000 Lodges! All Lodges are eligible to apply. Grants are awarded for projects that serve local veterans and/or military members in need.
- Applications will be reviewed and approved on a rolling basis.
- Lodges that are not in the first 1,000 qualifying projects will be placed on the waitlist.
- Grants must focus on one of the 5 areas of increased need.



Successful Freedom Grant Projects

- **Auburn Opelika, Alabama, Lodge No. 1834** hosted a barbecue and bingo games for 90 residents of the Tuskegee VA. Each veteran also received a gift bag with books and supplies.
- **Kellogg, Idaho, Lodge No. 1841** purchased first aid kits, hygiene products, and daily necessities for 35 local veterans experiencing homelessness
- **Easton, Maryland, Lodge No. 1622** chartered a boat to take veterans with disabilities on a day-long, wheelchair-accessible fishing trip. Elks provided assistance, snacks, and a post-trip meal.



Welcome Home Kits

Most formerly homeless veterans move into new homes with nothing. Elks can help! Here's how to get started.

1. Find out what the veteran needs.

- Start with a standard list of what a new home would need, and then tailor the kit to the needs and preferences of the veteran.

2. Shop for the items.

- Look for deals. Ask Lodge members if they have items to donate. Hold a supply drive to collect common items.

3. Assemble and deliver the kit!

- Deliver the kit to the veteran or project partner. Stay in touch with the veteran if you can!

4. Submit your receipts to the ENVSC online at www.elks.org/vets/kits.

- The ENVSC will reimburse your Lodge up to \$400 for each Welcome Home Kit you provide, and up to \$600 for each kit that also includes a bed.
- Lodges can now spend up to \$50 per kit on food.



Focus Grants

Lodges in the 12 metropolitan areas with the highest number of homeless veterans* are eligible for additional Focus Grant funding of up to \$10,000 for large-scale, Elks-run, direct service projects. Applications are available online April 1.

Here are some examples:

- Food baskets and monthly dinners for newly housed veterans.
- Supplies, a dental care van, and volunteer support at a Stand Down.
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- Partnership with AmVets to provide beds and bedding supplies for veterans moving into homes throughout the year
- Monthly cooking workshops, meals, and support at a veterans housing facility.



Elks Emergency Assistance Fund

Run out of the ENVSC office in Chicago, this program provides emergency financial assistance directly to veterans to help them exit or prevent homelessness.

- Veterans registered with and receiving services from the Department of Veterans Affairs in the 12 areas* with the highest number of homeless veterans can apply for one-time monetary assistance to prevent homelessness or secure a home.
- Uses include rent, security deposits, and utilities.
- Veterans must be referred by a VA social worker; application forms must be signed by the veteran and by a VA employee.



A study from the University of Notre Dame says that “people who received financial assistance ‘are 76 percent less likely to enter a shelter within six months. . . And significantly less likely to become homeless.’

Not only do targeted prevention programs work, they also can save the community money.”

After the loss of a job, a car accident and his wife’s illness hit the family all at once, Phil, a US Air Force veteran, applied for and received emergency assistance.

“You extended a hand through this program and lifted us up through the mud and mire,” Phil says. “We were able to stand on our feet again. As a vet who served my country, I love that people like the Elks exist to try to help vets, like myself and other vets, stand on our feet again.”



Veterans Leather Program

- The Veterans Leather Program relies on the charity of hunters across the nation to donate hides.
- Elks and hunters donate hides which are tanned and finished into leather to be used for wheelchair gloves and therapy kits for veterans.
- Elks donated 16,229 hides in 2022-23!
- Representatives can order gloves and craft kits for veterans they serve.
- Lodge Veterans Chairs can order craft kits for veterans they serve, free of charge, thanks to the Elks leather donations to Help Heal Veterans (HHV).
- All forms available at www.elks.org/vets/leather.cfm.

Adaptive Sports Events



Through these events, the VA and other partners offer veterans the chance to improve their health through sports and art, learn new skills and socialize with other veterans.

The ENVSC assists by sponsoring 6 of these events. Local volunteers often volunteer, host dinners and provide their own support.

Leather Program volunteers also attend to distribute gloves, and veterans wear them when they compete!

Sponsored by the ENVSC:

Veterans Winter Sports Clinic
Veterans Wheelchair Games
Veterans Creative Arts Festival
Veterans Golden Age Games
Veterans Summer Sports Clinic

Partnerships & Programs



Bugles Across America

This organization provides veterans and their families with a formal recognition of their service by providing live taps at veterans' funerals. The ENVSC provides financial support to help recruit, train and organize buglers across the country. Many Elks are volunteers!



Playing Cards for Veterans Program

For many veterans in hospitals, VA homes, nursing homes and care centers, time can move slowly between visits from family and friends. Veterans are often looking for ways to stay engaged and upbeat. Playing cards can offer an engaging and social activity to fill spare time. ENVSC volunteers can order playing cards for veterans.



Make the Connection / Veterans Crisis Line

These two organizations focus on mental health resources for veterans. Make the Connection is an online resource center. The Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-9255) serves veterans who are at-risk or in need of emergency assistance.



Visit www.elks.org/vets to get the latest news!

- Read more about all our programs.
- Sign up to get our monthly e-newsletter.
- Visit the Elks Volunteer Resource Center to access leather and glove order forms, Playing Cards order forms, Freedom Grant reports, resources lists for veterans in need, instructional guides, and more.
- Connect with your State Veterans Chair and volunteers in your state.