

OVERVIEW

THE AUDITOR
STATE OF HAWAII

Study of Programs and Services for Veterans

Summary

An estimated 100,000 veterans live in Hawaii. They are a diverse group and need diverse services--medical attention, counseling, and long-term care. Many are the aging survivors of two world wars. This study, requested by Senate Concurrent Resolution 77 of 1990, rose out of concern for the services available to veterans. It focused on the role of the Office of Veterans' Services, the state counterpart to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.

We found there was a lack of reliable information about characteristics of Hawaii veterans and their dependents and the nature of their needs. This is an area where the Office of Veterans' Services should take the lead.

Health services, including those geared to the elderly, could be made still more accessible. Although Hawaii has one of the highest ratios of veterans in the nation, it ranks near the bottom in medical dollars spent by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Hawaii is one of two remaining states that do not have a veterans hospital. The facility planned for Tripler will take some years to complete.

Hawaii is also among a minority of states without a veterans nursing home. Neighbor island veterans want to be assured good access to these services. Because of their isolation from the main service centers, they want assurance that they can continue to be reimbursed by the VA for care provided by certain private practitioners.

The Office of Veterans' Services has not yet built strong working relationships with other veterans groups and agencies. Its ability to fully assume its "coordinating" function would be strengthened by more active participation by its advisory board and better supervision of the offices of neighbor island counselors. We also found that many veterans and their groups remain uninformed about the services that the office can provide.

Recommendations and Response

We recommend that the Office of Veterans' Services work with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies to compile up-to-date information on the characteristics of veterans in Hawaii. With the help of the advisory board, the office should carry out an action plan that

concentrates the activities of the office on pressing for timely completion of the VA medical center, facilitating health services to the neighbor islands, working with relevant agencies to apply for VA construction grants for a nursing home, and exploring new programs, such as assisting homeless veterans.

As for improving its role as a coordinating agency, we recommend that the office clarify its relationship with neighbor island staff, make full use of its advisory board, reach out to veterans organizations, and publicize its services through a newsletter and brochures. The Office of Veterans' Services concurred with our recommendations and has initiated several steps to address our concerns.

Background

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is the primary provider of veterans benefits and services. Medical services, including those for the elderly, are provided in Hawaii at the Honolulu VA Outpatient Clinic and the Triper Army Medical Center. Satellite VA Primary Care Clinics were opened in 1989 on Maui, Kauai, Hilo, and Kona.

Established in 1988 by Act 115, the Office of Veterans' Services has as its mission "to serve as the single focal point of contact for the State government in terms of being responsible for the welfare of veterans, their dependents, and survivors." The office has a director, 11 full-time employees, and branch offices on Maui, Kauai, and Hawaii. It is attached to the State Department of Defense for administrative purposes and is assisted by a statewide advisory board.

The office helps veterans identify the kinds of help they need, counsels them on their benefits, and refers them to appropriate service agencies. Two major activities of the office have been to establish the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe and to erect memorials for veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Office of the Auditor State of Hawaii

465 South King Street, Suite 500
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
(808) 548-2450
FAX (808) 548-2693