

SPEAKER ADRIENNE E. ADAMS

State of the City Report Card Initiative

Department of Veterans' Services

2025



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
Compliance Division

THE COMPLIANCE DIVISION

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LETTER FROM THE SPEAKER

My fellow New Yorkers:

In my State of the City address last year, I discussed the need for our city government to get back to the basics to fulfill its duty to New Yorkers. Amidst an unequal pandemic recovery that has exacerbated economic hardships, our city is facing the dire affordability challenges of skyrocketing rents, one in four children living in poverty, and a quarter of New Yorkers not being able to afford simple necessities. To meet the core needs of our city, I called for strengthening our municipal government to deliver for all New Yorkers.

The New York City Council is focused on advancing policies and investments that can provide important solutions to our city's challenges. As a co-equal branch of government, our duty is to turn these ideas into effective laws and to conduct oversight of City agencies that ensures they more effectively deliver services to New Yorkers. Oversight and transparency are essential to accountability, which is critical to the health of our city and our democracy. Yet, laws and policies are only as effective as their implementation.

While the Mayor's Management Report provides important data about City agencies, it does not provide a complete picture to the operational performance of agencies or whether they engage in best practices in their delivery of services. This inaugural City Agency Report Card Initiative, which I first introduced as an idea in my 2024 State of the City, begins the Council's work of conducting our own performance evaluations of City agencies in their delivery of services to New Yorkers. These evaluations are the product of extensive research and review of best practices for first-class delivery of government services. Through this Report Card Initiative, the Council will examine how our city's agencies compare to best practices of local government.

Our inaugural City Agency Report Cards examine the Department of Veterans' Services, the Department of Youth & Community Development, and the Department of Parks & Recreation. Using seven pillars of evaluation, the Council identified metrics by which to assess these City agencies. It is my hope that these Report Cards will serve as a tool for government leaders, municipal workers, advocates, and New Yorkers to ensure each agency is using its resources most effectively to be effective and improve. An effective and strong city government is fundamental to confronting our challenges, providing essential services, and delivering on our promise to New Yorkers.

I look forward to advancing the Council's efforts to promote the oversight, transparency, and accountability our city deserves.

Sincerely,



Adrienne E. Adams

Speaker of the New York City Council

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Executive Summary

The New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is the nation's first standalone City agency dedicated to serving the needs of Veterans and their families.¹ Celebrating its decennial anniversary, the moment is apt for the Department to evaluate the past ten years, with an eye to the next ten. With more than 100,000 Veterans across the five boroughs, the needs of Veterans are unique and can prove challenging. Housing insecurity, mental health issues, digital access, continuing education, and financial insecurity are just some of the issues facing Veterans.

One of the smallest agencies in the city, DVS operates with less than one percent of the City budget, coupled with one of the smallest headcounts (less than 40 full-time staff). Maximizing resources is a challenge the agency faces as it works to deliver on its mission to:

connect, mobilize, and empower New York City's Veteran community in order to foster purpose-driven lives for US Military Service Members – past and present – in addition to their caregivers, survivors, and families.

The Department has tried to use its resources wisely, while recognizing that it cannot do it alone. DVS has created various support channels for Veterans to access its services and also collaborates with several government and non-profit agencies on a number of initiatives. These collaborations often result in what DVS calls “synergies”—indirect services made possible through working with external stakeholders. The combined effort of DVS and its partners leads to outcomes where the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts” or more substantial outcomes than the agency could achieve independently. In addition, the Department uses several strategies to increase awareness of the agency, such as using social media, newsletters, and engaging with community-based organizations. Further, DVS makes an effort to meet Veterans where they are likely to be. This is particularly true for the “invisible” Veterans.

It must also be recognized that there is a disconnect between the Department's views of the success of its operations, and how Veterans, their families, and Veteran advocates view the Department. Through outreach with those same groups, there is a gap between the DVS' reported practices and the experiences described by Veterans and advocates. The Department needs to rebuild trust with the New York City Veteran community. DVS needs to meaningfully and continually engage these constituencies, and the engagement must be integrated into DVS' internal decision making.

The time has come for the Department of Veterans' Services to strategically long-term plan for this next decade—DVS 2.0. The partners are there, the vision must be too.

Learn About Our Grading Process

Grade	Additional Comments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blue Ribbon Agency ▪ Exceptional performance and capability ▪ Agency prioritizes continuous improvement with a systematic approach to implementation and evaluation of agency programs, goals, etc. ▪ Evidence of systematic and regular internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive performance and capability ▪ Extensive evidence of continuous improvement activities ▪ Widespread evidence of internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adequate performance and capability ▪ Some evidence of continuous improvement activities ▪ Sufficient evidence of internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps ▪ Internal processes need improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inconsistent performance and capability ▪ Evidence of early stages of continuous improvement activities ▪ Limited evidence of internal assessments of performance and/or capability gaps ▪ Internal processes need urgent improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concerning levels of agency performance and capability ▪ Little to no evidence of an agency's commitment to continuous improvement ▪ Little to no internal awareness or knowledge of performance and/or capability gaps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient evidence available to make a credible assessment

To learn more about methodology and process, please refer to the Appendix.

Grade

NYC

**Department of
Veterans' Services**

**Final Report
Card**

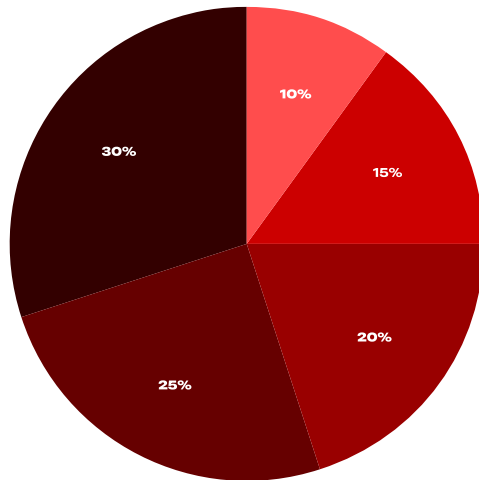
C

PILLAR	GRADE	INDICATORS
Leadership, Strategy, and Direction	C	Leadership and Governance C
		Strategy Development C
		Strategy Implementation C
Service Delivery for New Yorkers	C	Equity B
		Access C
		Meeting Demand D
Relationships and Collaboration	C	Stakeholder Engagement C
		Institutional Engagement C
Workforce Development	C	Staff Capacity C
		Staff Development C
Digital Government	B	Strategic Approach C
		Policy Levers B
		Implementation B
		Monitoring C
Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management	B	Reporting and Data Availability B
		MMR Review and Evaluation C

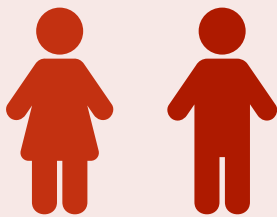
Department of Veterans' Services

Data About NYC Veterans

TOTAL POPULATION

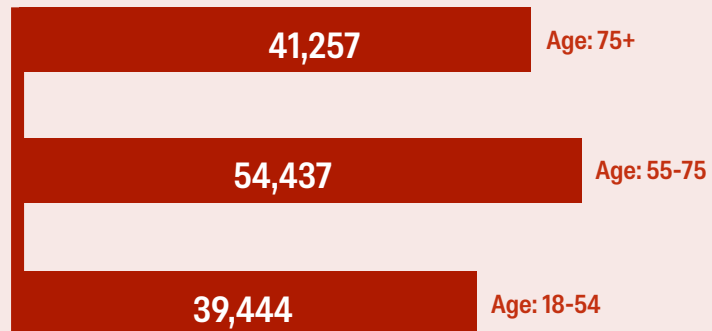


GENDER



Women: 12,933
Men: 122,205

AGE



RACE



White – 64,472



Black – 39,761



Hispanic or Latino
(of any race) – 31,085



Asian – 7,187



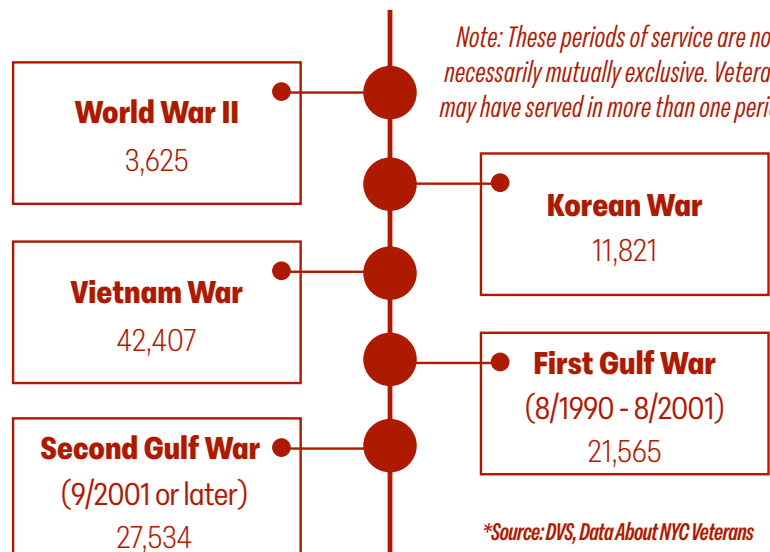
American Indian
or Alaska Native – 1,054



Two or more – 11,546

Note: Including the Hispanic or Latino origin results in double counting, as individuals may be counted in both their race and Hispanic or Latino categories.

PERIOD OF SERVICE



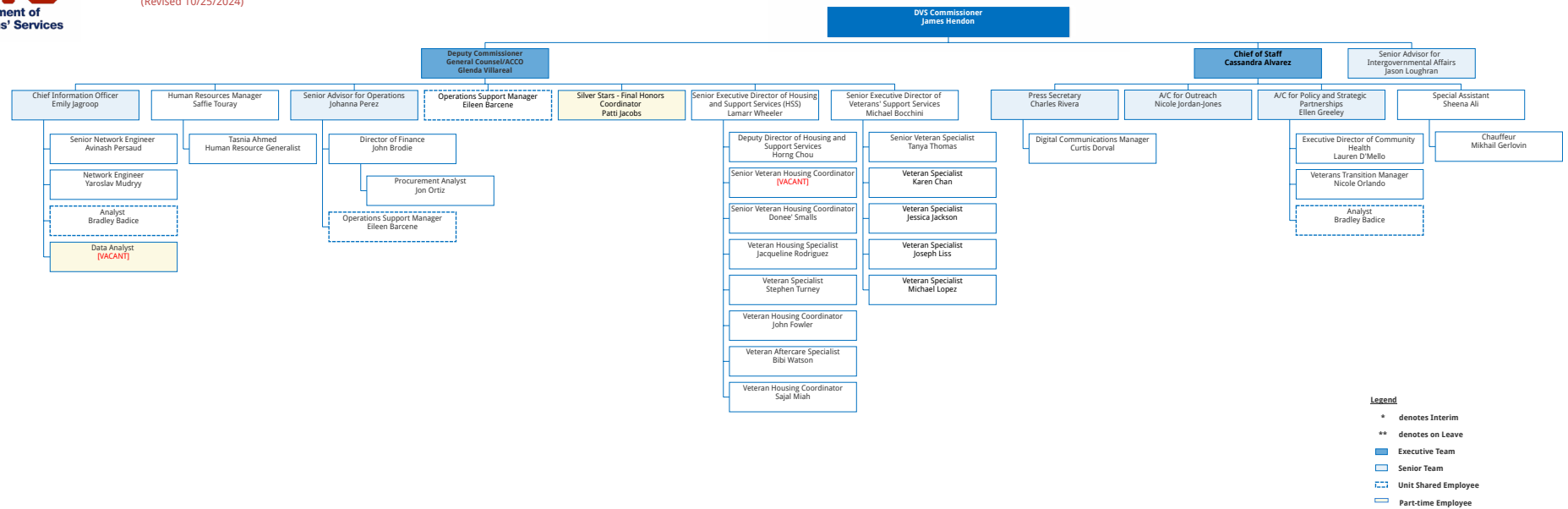
Note: These periods of service are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Veterans may have served in more than one period.

**Source: DVS, Data About NYC Veterans*

DVS Organizational Chart



Organization Chart (Internal DRAFT) (Revised 10/25/2024)



Introduction

The first city-level effort to serve New York City's Veterans population was in 1987 under Local Law 53 with the creation of the Office of Veterans' Affairs (MOVA), whose mission was to improve the lives of New York City veterans and their families.² "Leveraging the resources of agencies across the City government, [MOVA] provided services and connected veterans, active duty military and their families to the vast New York City, state and federal programs, as well as public and private resources which are available throughout the City of New York."³ At the time there were more than 630,000 Veterans in the city according to one of the prime sponsors of Local Law 53, then-Council Member Abe Gerges, who declared in his support of Local Law 53 that "[t]he creation of a local veterans' affairs office and the city's commitment to locate and help veterans lost in the homeless system represent huge strides towards aiding a large, but sadly neglected, segment of society."⁴

In order to continue the work of the MOVA; improve the coordination between MOVA and City agencies; scale up operations; and develop a sustainable long-term strategic vision, the City Council passed Local Law 42 of 2013 (requiring the appointment of Veteran liaisons at every City agency) and Local Law 113 of 2015 (creating the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS)).^{5,6} Establishing a New York City Department of Veterans' Services would provide for increased Council oversight and direct allocation of funding supporting Veterans.⁷ Finally, the establishment of a City agency dedicated to and serving veterans would also allow the Council to better monitor the City's veterans services through the annual assessment of funding allocations via the preliminary and executive budget hearing process. A Department of Veterans' Services would also be required to submit Departmental estimates and other information for the executive budget annually.⁸

DVS is the first standalone municipal-level department in the United States dedicated to Veterans' services.⁹

Services & Infrastructure

DVS accomplishes its mission by providing various support services to the city's more than 100,000 Veterans and their families in relation to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims, individual care, family care, housing, health, and business and entrepreneurship.^{10,11} These services are delivered either directly by DVS employees or through referrals and can be solicited either through the agency's online platform for Veterans' assistance requests (VetConnectNYC) or by phone, email, walk-in at an event, or at one of seven Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs) located in each borough.^{12,13} The agency's website includes lists of services DVS provides directly, and organizations through which the agency recommends services it does not provide directly.

Structure & Resources

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, DVS' Adopted Budget was \$5.1 million¹⁴—representing 0.005 percent of the City's FY24 Adopted Budget of \$107.1 billion. Of the \$5.1 million, 93.6 percent of funding came from the City, and 6.4 percent came from the State.¹⁵ There was a budgeted headcount of 37 staff, the agency's actual staffing level, as of June 2024 (the end of FY24) was 35 full-time staff.¹⁶ DVS' FY25 Adopted Budget was \$6.4 million,¹⁷ a \$1.3 million increase, 86.6 percent of which came from City funds, 6.8 percent came from State funds, and 6.5 percent came from intra-city funds (funds which are received from another City agency, sometimes in the form of a contract that one agency holds but another one uses), and which included a new \$540,000 DVS City Council Veteran Initiative for Veteran Resource Centers (VRC). This expanded funding also allowed for an increase in the budgeted headcount to 39 full-time staff.¹⁸

The agency is divided into nine divisions:

- Executive;
- Fiscal;
- Procurement;
- Legal;
- Policy and Strategic Partnerships;
- External Relations (Communications and Outreach);
- Administration (HR, Timekeeping, Payroll, and Facilities);
- Information Technology;
- Housing; and
- Veteran Support Services (Referrals and Claims).

Agency leadership (Assistant and Deputy Commissioners, Chief Information Officer, and Chief of Staff), helmed by the DVS Commissioner appointed by the mayor, manage staff related to agency-wide operations (Director of Finance, Procurement Analyst, Human Resources Manager, etc.); and Service-specific roles (Senior Executive Director of Housing and Support Services, Final Honors Coordinator, Executive Director of Community Mental Health, etc.).¹⁹

Relationships & Collaboration

In addition to DVS' own direct services and referrals, Veterans' service provision in New York City is enhanced by DVS partnerships with outside organizations and Council Veteran services initiatives contracted by other City agencies. Currently, DVS contracts with New York Legal Assistance Group and Veterans Advocacy Project for discharge upgrade services and holds discretionary contracts with a variety of NYC Veteran businesses such as United Veterans and Fraternal Organizations of Maspeth, Black Veterans for Social Justice, Vietnam Veterans of America Angel Almedina Chapter 126, and others. Furthermore, City agencies aside from DVS have long funded Council initiatives for Veterans due to DVS' status as a newer City agency that only recently started managing Council contracts in 2023. Non-DVS City agency initiatives for Veterans include the Human Resources Administration's Homeless Prevention Services for Veterans and Legal Services for Veterans; Small Business Services' Job Placement for Veterans; the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Mental Health Services for Veterans; and a collaborative effort by the City University of New York, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth and Community Development known as Veterans Community Development.^{20,21,22,23}

LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY, AND DIRECTION

The Leadership, Strategy, and Direction pillar focuses on the capability of the agency's leadership to properly steer the agency and prepare for the future. This review evaluates how the executive team and the agency as a whole develop, implement, and adhere to its mission, vision, values, and strategies.

In this section:

- *Leadership and Governance*
- *Strategy Development*
- *Strategy Implementation*

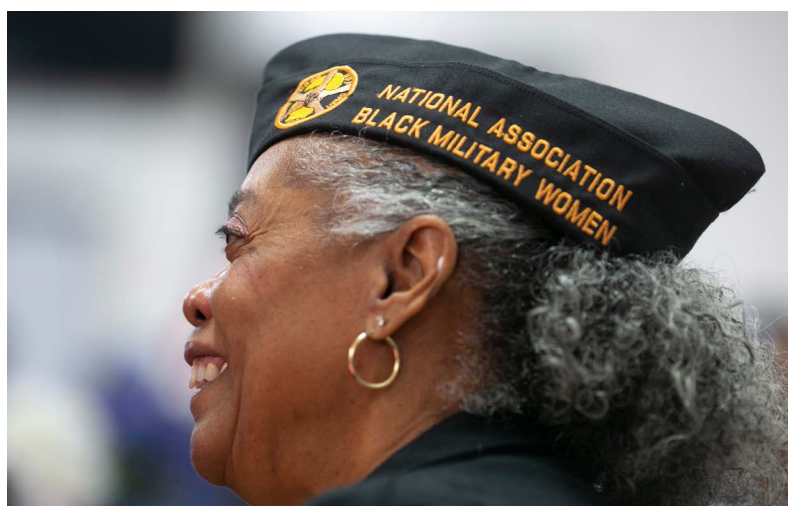
Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Rating
Leadership, Strategy, and Direction	Leadership and Governance	C
	Strategy Development	C
	Strategy Implementation	C

Leadership and Governance

Agency

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international organization that develops economic and social policy, identifies a “transparent and accessible” strategy as one of their principles of good governance. OECD lists various elements of how a “transparent and accessible” strategy can be accomplished; the first of which is making the strategy available online in an easily accessible format.²⁴

DVS has a variety of both short- and long-term strategies that center around the agency’s Charter-mandated focus areas: housing, healthcare, benefits, education, employment, and culture.²⁵ Each strategy is tied to a specific program or initiative that advances the agency’s vision led by the Commissioner.²⁶ Although many of the agency’s initiatives are listed on their website, none of their short- or long-term strategies are publicly available, making it difficult to understand what their overarching strategies are and what strategy each initiative is tied to.²⁷



Making the agency’s short- and long-term strategies publicly available on its website would help facilitate transparency and accountability. DVS’ staff emphasized to the assessment team that the Department is not a municipal equivalent to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Instead, they said that DVS is designed to fill an access, service and benefit gap for New York City Veterans.²⁸ DVS noted that the agency does not view its staff as caseworkers, with specific caseloads and client portfolios.²⁹ Feedback gathered from stakeholders throughout this assessment period accentuates the need for a clear strategy that is publicly accessible. Advocates have noted that while DVS may advertise many offerings to Veterans and their family members, the substance behind these offers can vary considerably. Stakeholders mentioned that while DVS has taken on new initiatives, these can come at a detriment to DVS’ existing offerings and advocates shared that it is unclear what DVS envisions itself to be.³⁰ Given that DVS was the first stand-alone municipal department dedicated to serving Veterans in the nation, and is approaching the ten year anniversary of its codification, DVS should lay out a clear roadmap of both short-term and long-term strategies.

OECD's framework also asserts that for an organization to best support its strategies, roles responsible for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation should be clearly defined.³¹ Reviewing DVS' job descriptions can identify how these responsibilities are delegated. Several DVS leadership positions were identified in this review:³²

- The Chief of Staff guides and supports “the design, implementation, and oversight for DVS’ current major programs and new initiatives.”
- The Senior Advisor of Intergovernmental Affairs provides “planning, coordinating and implementing interagency and agency-specific projects.”
- The Senior Advisor of Operations/Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Officer “determine[s] and evaluate[s] the need for audits” and “oversee[s] the development and implementation of audit plans.” In addition, they “develop, implement, and monitor day-to-day operational systems and processes that support the unit and the agency’s key initiatives.”
- Both the Human Resources Manager and Generalist support the implementation of DVS’s Performance Evaluation Development Plan.

While these job descriptions highlight how DVS has established implementation, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms and processes, these descriptions are not currently publicly available. Best practices also recommended that organizations establish clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities, including an organizational chart.³³ Currently, job descriptions are only available if DVS has open recruitment on JobsNYC; however, DVS does outline its Executive Office and Senior Leadership team on its website.³⁴

Strategy Development

Evidence-Based Practices

Ensuring that all stages of the policy development and implementation process and any strategic planning processes are based on the most reliable, relevant, independent, and up to date research should be a core practice of any governmental body. This ensures that the data gathered is based on the best practices in the field and that policy design and delivery are more successful, reflecting the needs and realities of the community.³⁵

When asked about the agency's process for conducting strategic planning, DVS stated that their short- and long-term goals are shaped by community needs data, various agency feedback forums, and best practices.³⁶ The agency also noted that they regularly use research from organizations such as the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families, the VA, and the New York State Health Foundation to shape their strategic plans and reevaluate the agency's strategic plans every quarter.³⁷ However, some Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners feel that the results of the agency's strategic plans do not necessarily reflect best practices or Veterans' highest needs. When advocates and community-based organizations that work with DVS were asked if they felt the agency was transparent and forthcoming about their data, 62 percent of survey participants stated they disagreed, feeling that DVS was not transparent and forthcoming. Thirty-eight percent of participants also stated they felt the agency does not understand Veterans' highest priority needs.³⁸ Although DVS states it uses best practices and a variety of data to shape policies and plans, the negative sentiment indicated by the survey highlights a disconnect between how the agency develops and implements its strategic plans and how Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners feel it impacts Veterans. While DVS develops its strategic plans to the best of its ability, some improvements still need to be made in agency research practices as noted earlier.

Service Fragmentation and Overlap

When agencies have multiple programs that aim to achieve similar outcomes, it can result in fragmentation, overlap, or duplication of programming. Ensuring that any fragmentation, overlap, or duplication is intentional or planned helps eliminate inefficiencies, decrease costs, and can improve outcomes and impact.³⁹

DVS is one of the smallest City agencies and as a result, provides minimal direct services to Veterans. The services provided by the agency are as follows:^{40,41}

- Housing support services
 - Housing preparation services
 - Veteran status verification
 - Vital documents collection
 - Needs assessment
 - Permanent housing placement services
 - Aftercare services
 - Rapid-rehousing assistance
 - Eviction prevention assistance

- Benefits navigation
 - Assistance with filing VA Claims
 - Support for indigent burials
 - Support for enrolling in health insurance
- Client referrals

Due to the agency's limited programming, there is no apparent overlap or duplication of programming. However, the agency's inability to directly provide all necessary services has instead resulted in the fragmentation of its service programming. DVS refers Veterans to other city agencies, non-profit partners, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to fill resource and service gaps.⁴² This fragmentation was done deliberately because the agency lacks the necessary resources and/or staff to assist Veterans with all service needs. Due to the absence of overlap or duplication in programming, and the intentionality of its service fragmentation, the agency has shown exceptional performance and capability in this area.

Strategy Implementation

Improvement Mechanisms

Organizational performance is ultimately enhanced through continuous improvement. Improvement mechanisms should be integrated into all management and service delivery processes, as well as other necessary organizational processes, to maximize the outcomes for all stakeholders involved.^{43,44}



In response to a Council inquiry concerning strategies and mechanisms used to ensure continuous improvement, DVS responded that this area is discussed weekly at the agency's team meeting. **DVS noted that they have updated the agency's weekly meeting agenda to include an "Issue, Discuss, and Solve" component where they review and evaluate program data and discuss how they can improve agency processes and service delivery.** They also use quarterly emailed questionnaires to obtain feedback from the NYC Veteran community.⁴⁵

However, many advocates feel that while DVS may have improvement processes in place, it has not translated to consistent improvement of services, communication, or outreach. When Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were surveyed about different aspects of DVS, such as service referral, communication, service design, responsiveness, etc., the overall response was negative. Almost half of the survey participants stated they felt that DVS does not operate in a way that supports innovation and diversity of service design and delivery models and 52 percent of participants felt that DVS employees struggle to demonstrate an understanding of Veteran and non-profit partner requests and communications.⁴⁶

The negative feedback from Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners suggests that the current improvement mechanisms in place need further refinement to ensure agency processes meet the needs of all clients.

SERVICE DELIVERY FOR NEW YORKERS

The Service Delivery for New Yorkers pillar encompasses the accessibility, inclusivity, and availability of all agency services. This review measures how well the agency is accounting for and meeting the needs of the community using the resources available to the agency.

In this section:

- *Equity*
- *Access*
- *Meeting Demands*

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Rating
Service Delivery for New Yorkers	Equity	B
	Access	C
	Meeting Demand	D

Equity

Information Accessibility and Outreach Efforts

Veterans are entitled to an array of benefits at the federal, state, and city level; however, many Veterans are often unaware of the support they have access to. Additionally, those that are aware of or are seeking out services may find benefit navigation difficult. To make navigating benefits a more equitable and accessible process, Local Law 113 of 2015 included a mandate that DVS inform Veterans and their family members of the availability of certain services, such as:⁴⁷

- Educational training and retraining services and facilities
 - Veterans' tuition awards
 - Tutoring services
 - Professional development and networking
- Health, medical, and rehabilitation services and facilities
- Federal, state, and city health plans
 - Counseling services
- Provisions of federal, state, and local laws and regulations offering special privileges to Veterans and their families
- Veterans with Disabilities Employment Program
 - G.I. Bill benefits
- Employment and re-employment services
- Free professional skills training
 - Customized career-building tools

In addition to providing mandated information on the aforementioned services, the agency also provides resources on various housing services such as home energy assistance programs, New York City's Housing Connect Program, and VA home loans.⁴⁸

Since DVS does not directly provide any of these services, they refer Veterans to CBOs, non-profit partners, or state and federal agencies that provide these programs at no cost.⁴⁹ All City Charter-mandated service information is listed under the “Services” tab on the DVS website and links to external service providers. Veterans can also obtain more specialized assistance in understanding the availability of these services by requesting help through VetConnectNYC.⁵⁰

SILENT GENERATION:

generation of people sandwiched between the “Greatest Generation,” which fought World War II, and the “baby boomers,” the generation born during the surge in births in the United States and other countries in the years immediately following the war.

-Source: Encyclopedia Britannica
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silent-Generation>

DVS aims to conduct outreach and make important information available through non-digital mechanisms; it is acknowledged that a subset of the target population will always be unwilling or unable to adapt to digital technologies, making non-digital mechanisms necessary to create a more participatory and inclusive public service design process.⁵¹ For example, a Pew Research Center survey found that although older generations, such as the **SILENT GENERATION**, are using technology at higher and higher rates, they are much lower in comparison to younger generations, such as Millennials or Gen-Z. Of individuals between the ages of 74 and 91, 40 percent own a smartphone, 33 percent own a tablet computer, and 28 percent use social media, which makes it clear there is an overwhelming need for non-digital outreach.⁵²

When DVS was asked what forms of outreach they do to engage Veterans who do not have digital access or prefer non-digital mechanisms, they responded stating they use a variation of strategies to achieve this. The agency regularly engages with community boards, attending meetings and distributing materials to community board offices to hand out to constituents. DVS also tables at hospitals and various community events throughout all five boroughs where they provide Veteran resource materials, offer assistance with claims and other benefits, and answer any questions Veterans and their families might have. Additionally, the agency holds its own quarterly community engagement meetings with Veteran service organizations and CBOs to provide resources and spend time engaging with the Veteran community.⁵³ For example, in August 2024, DVS held a community engagement session with Brooklyn’s Community Board 14 which focused on burial benefits, end-of-life benefits, the Final Honors Program, and more.⁵⁴ Finally, DVS runs several programs, such as Veterans on Campus and Mission: VetCheck, and various events, like the annual Veterans Summit, that focus on outreach through non-digital means.^{55,56}

The agency measures both its digital and non-digital outreach efforts in the Mayor’s Management Report (MMR). The performance indicators used by DVS include online site visits, social media impressions, average newsletter subscribers, and public engagement events attended by DVS.⁵⁷ While the agency appears to prioritize its digital outreach and impact, DVS has stated that the single indicator focused on non-digital outreach encompasses all of the agency’s efforts in this area.⁵⁸ Although it might behoove the agency to create more specific non-digital outreach indicators to increase transparency, its performance continues to trend upward in almost every area.⁵⁹

Despite the agency’s best efforts to provide easily accessible benefits information and non-digital outreach, it appears they may not be reaching as many Veterans as intended.

IN ITS 2021 VETERAN AND MILITARY COMMUNITY SURVEY, 4 IN 10 VETERANS WERE AWARE OF DVS, WITH 58 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS NOT AWARE OF DVS.⁶⁰

When Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were surveyed by the Council about the accessibility of information on DVS resources, 52 percent of survey participants responded they found it difficult to access the necessary information. One advocate stated that older Veterans who do not have computer skills have a harder time accessing information about the agency and their services.⁶¹ Given that 53 percent of New York City’s Veteran population is over the age of 64, a cause for concern is warranted.⁶² More than half of participants also felt that DVS was not conducting the necessary outreach to reach the largest number of Veterans, and 90 percent of survey participants remarked they felt that DVS should perform more outreach or diversify its outreach efforts.⁶³ These

DVS launched a new survey in 2024, the results of which have not yet been made public as of the writing of this report.

responses indicate that despite the availability of the information and agency outreach efforts, there is still a disconnect between how information is presented and Veterans' ability to access and understand it.

Service and Resource Inclusivity

Inclusivity is a key aspect of people-centric services: meaning that for an organization to ensure all services and programming are people-centered, they must be accessible to all segments of the targeted population.⁶⁴ One aspect of ensuring total inclusivity is guaranteeing that agency programming offers operating hours that accommodate both standard and non-standard work schedules.⁶⁵

DVS has little to no in-person programming due to its limited budget and small staff. Despite limited staff and resources, DVS still funds and operates eight Veteran Resource Centers across all boroughs where Veterans can go and receive help from a care coordinator getting connected to services.⁶⁶ Currently, the VRCs are only open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. two days during the workweek and are closed on weeknights and weekends.⁶⁷ Although the days each VRC is open vary depending on the VRC, those days are fixed, lessening the flexibility of the resource centers.

When Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were surveyed about the accessibility of the VRC operating hours, 43 percent of participants replied that they felt the VRCs were open at inaccessible times for working Veterans. One respondent commented that even when the VRCs are open, many Veterans have gone in and there is not a care coordinator present to help them.⁶⁸ According to data from the 2021 DVS Veteran and Military Community Survey, almost half of Veterans in New York City work full-time, meaning that current VRC operating hours are inconvenient or inaccessible for nearly half of the city's identified Veteran population.⁶⁹

In addition to ensuring inclusivity in services and programming, organizations must also ensure inclusivity in resources and information shared with clients to reduce barriers to accessing it. To achieve this, organizations should use plain language that everyone in the target population can easily understand.⁷⁰

The NYC Digital Blueprint describes plain language as "communication your audience could understand the first time they read or hear it." It recommends that any organizational text written in plain language be written at an eighth-grade reading level, using shorter sentences and simpler words.⁷¹ The use of plain language improves organizational accessibility, especially when trying to reach individuals who have a cognitive or intellectual disability or whose first language is not English.⁷²

“Plain language is not “dumbed down” writing—it’s a way of writing that makes text easier for all readers to understand.”

In response to a Council inquiry, the Department stated using plain language that is clear, accessible, and easily understood is essential for them when communicating with the Veteran community. When asked how this is accomplished, the agency responded that they do their best to tailor the Digital Blueprint plain language best practices to the Veteran space due to the diversity in Veterans' backgrounds and experiences. They also limit their use of military jargon and ensure they are sensitive to potential traumas when addressing healthcare, mental health, or other triggering topics in agency communications.⁷⁴ Below is one example of the agency's use of plain language, taken from an email sent to Veterans regarding DVS' Veterans Voice Project:

"DEAR NYC VETERAN,

We hope this email finds you well. We are reaching out because you have expressed interest in participating in our Veterans Voices Project during a call with one of our Mission: VetCheck volunteers. Participating in the Veterans Voices Project is a chance for you to share your journey, memories, and reflections. It's a space for your voice to be heard and your story to be preserved. The process is simple and can be done virtually from the comfort of your own home.

In preparation for your session and to schedule a recording, please click on the button below to fill out the google form. Once you've booked your session, we'll provide you with further details on how to join the virtual recording. If, for any reason, you would prefer to participate in-person, please reach out to us and we will do our best to accommodate.

As you prepare for your session, we've compiled a series of questions to help guide your conversation. These questions are designed to spark meaningful reflections, but feel free to share whatever aspects of your story feel most important to you. Remember, your story is yours to tell, and we are here to listen."

The agency's use of shorter sentences and elementary lexicon in this email communication adheres to the city's Digital Blueprint and shows the agency's efforts to use simple and clear language.

Despite the agency's efforts to use plain language communication, a portion of the Veteran population is still struggling to understand agency messaging. In a survey to Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners, participants were asked about the clarity and effectiveness of DVS communications. More than one-third of participants indicated they felt agency communications lacked clarity and effectiveness.⁷⁵ While other factors, such as the medium and timeliness of communication, may contribute to this issue, the agency's communication may need improvements to enhance accessibility for the entire Veteran population.

Access

Availability of Assistance

Veterans are entitled to an array of benefits such as tuition support, income assistance, specialized health insurance, and affordable housing but often need support to navigate the benefits process.⁷⁶ To address Veteran housing insecurity and the lack of awareness about available resources, comprehensive and accessible support must be available to Veterans to find and successfully secure housing. In DVS' 2021 Veteran and Military Community Survey, 55 percent of respondents said they were seeking access to new housing and 50 percent said they were seeking access to better housing.⁷⁷



Obtaining certain benefits, such as affordable housing, are essential to a Veteran's well-being but can be difficult to find and confusing to navigate alone. Needs assessments for Veteran and military populations in the United States point to a lack of awareness about available resources as a major contributing factor to Veteran homelessness, while insights provided by Veterans' services advocates identify homelessness as one of the major issues affecting New York City Veterans.^{78,79,80} The Department does produce and make available for download on its website, a Veterans Resource Guide that lists housing services that Veterans and their families can avail themselves of.⁸¹

DVS offers support for several housing-related needs such as rapid re-housing, paying for permanent or supportive housing, securing housing for elderly Veterans, and assisting with obtaining various housing loans.⁸² When a Veteran comes to the agency in need of housing support, they are assigned a housing caseworker who works closely with the Veteran to meet their needs. The agency expressed they do their best to provide seamless care coordination to Veterans in need of assistance, aiming to return client calls the same day, schedule appointments within a week of the client's initial contact, and refer clients to partner agencies or providers when necessary.

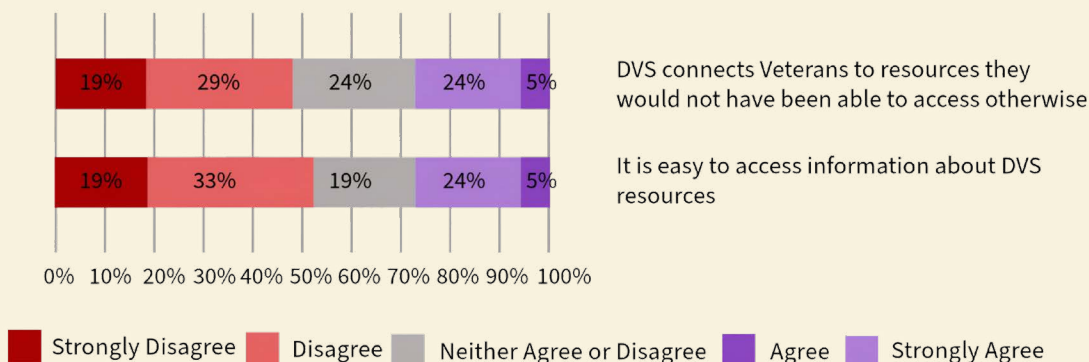
That said, accounts from advocates and New York City Veterans at the Council's roundtable regarding their experiences with DVS suggest that even though the agency provides housing assistance, Veterans continue to face difficulties reaching agency staff or experienced a lack of follow-through resulting in the Veteran remaining homeless and seeking housing assistance elsewhere.⁸³ According to a member of the Veterans Advisory Board, communication is the biggest challenge with DVS and is a source of frustration for Veterans, advocates, and partners alike when attempting to work with the agency. An advocate from a legal services provider stated that they felt there was organizational chaos and a lack of responsiveness within the agency. When Veterans, advocates, and providers were surveyed about the efficacy of housing through DVS, only 24 percent of participants felt that DVS improved housing accessibility for Veterans while almost half of participants insisted otherwise. One advocate insinuated that DVS may not be best equipped to handle housing concerns stating that "they need to develop partnerships with other agencies that are better equipped to handle housing concerns."⁸⁴

In addition to challenges navigating housing benefits, Veterans also struggle to navigate the claims process. A 2019 Systematic Review of Need Assessments on U.S. Veteran and Military-Connected Populations, by Ryan Van Slyke and Nicholas Armstrong of the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, found that of 61 assessments on Veterans issues, Veterans across the United States noted a lack of education and information on VA and health resources available to them. The review also found that all the paperwork and bureaucracy required to apply for or submit benefits claims was extremely burdensome for Veterans.⁸⁵

To assist Veterans with these challenges, DVS does its best to provide claims assistance. Similar to the housing process, DVS assigns a state-accredited claims caseworker to each Veteran in need of claims support to help them through the process. DVS states that each caseworker conducts multiple follow-ups with clients to ensure their paperwork is filed and all issues are resolved as well as requesting that the client share any VA correspondence received, so the agency can assist in further issues. DVS also works to promote claims assistance for those who are unaware of the help the agency provides by supplying community boards with resource materials, attending community board meetings, and tabling at various hospitals and community events to offer claims assistance.^{86,87}

However, feedback from advocates and Veterans suggests that there is inconsistency in the level of training and aptitude to successfully submit claims on Veterans' behalf and not enough personnel to fulfill the high volume of requests for claims assistance that DVS receives. It was even intoned that DVS currently has such a poor reputation for their claims assistance that "no one would refer to DVS for benefits," partly due to an advocate's belief that the agency's claims assistance was being administered by non-accredited staff for a period of time.⁸⁸ When Veterans, advocates, and providers were asked if the agency made claiming VA benefits easier and more successful, almost two-thirds of participants said no and only 20 percent of participants felt that the agency managed claims effectively and promptly. One advocated replied that the Veterans they have spoken with have not had any success submitting a claim with DVS while another advocate went so far as to say they would never refer a Veteran to DVS claims assistance.⁸⁹

Ease of Access to Resources

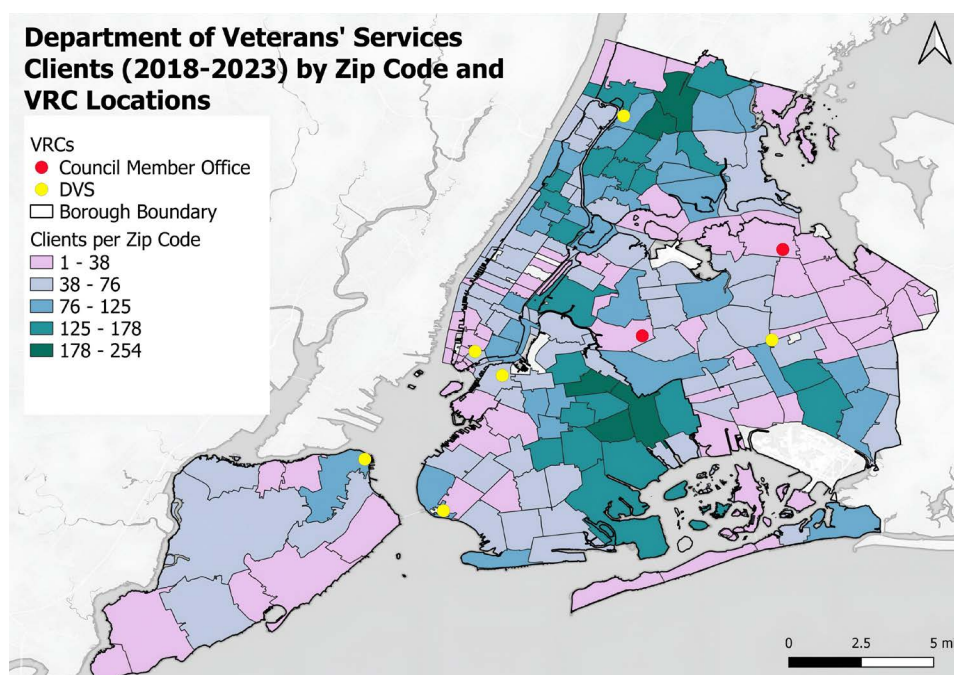


Source: Department of Veterans' Services Council advocate survey

Although DVS notes various ways in which they attempt to provide housing and claims assistance to Veterans, it is clear many Veterans are still struggling to get the support they need and communication lines between Veterans and the agency need imminent improvement.

Financial and Geographic Accessibility

Various factors, such as location and affordability, severely impact whether an organization's services and programming are accessible to its target population.⁹⁰ Ensuring services or programs are located within a reasonable geographic proximity and are provided at no-cost to clients enhances service accessibility, reduces economic inequality, and eases financial burden.^{91,92}



Source: New York City Council, DVS OpenData, See: https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Social-Services/Department-of-Veterans-Services-Clients/idat-aemv/about_data

Veterans often experience challenges accessing resources due to geographic barriers. A review of prior Veterans needs assessment found that Veterans across the United States reported experiencing difficulties accessing VA and VHA health benefits and resources, often due to a lack of access to transportation.⁹³ Since DVS provides minimal in-person programming and refers out to non-profit partners for a majority of needed services, the assessment team cannot evaluate the geographic

accessibility of the agency's programming.⁹⁴ However, the agency operates eight Veteran Resource Centers throughout all five boroughs where Veterans can go to receive help obtaining benefits and get connected to essential services.⁹⁵ VRCs "are satellite offices staffed by DVS Employees who are ready to connect Veterans and their families to benefits assistance and other essential services."⁹⁶ Due to Local Law 215 of 2018, which requires that there be at least one VRC in each borough, but a lack of funding to open more, there have been complaints that the current VRCs are tough to get to and located in areas with smaller Veteran populations.^{97,98} When Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were surveyed about the VRCs' accessibility, about half of the participants explained they felt the current VRCs are located in areas that are not easily accessible by public transit and are not hubs for Veterans.⁹⁹ One survey respondent stated "We need to have a Bronx Veteran Resource Center in a better, accessible area in the Bronx, closer to public transit," while another respondent said, "I'm a veteran living in eastern Queens and I'm not aware of any VRC near me."¹⁰⁰

The agency's 2021 Veteran and Military Community Survey shows that 41 percent of the New York City Veteran population receives VA disability compensation benefits suggesting the idea that almost half of the population may struggle to use public transit and could require alternate transportation to the VRCs.¹⁰¹ The agency itself has also noted that while having a space for Veterans to receive help in person is important, the current local law does not allow them to best serve the geographic areas with larger Veteran populations.¹⁰² While the local law mandates that there be a VRC in each borough, it does not specify where in the borough each VRC must be located giving DVS some agency over each location. Even though all of the VRCs are technically accessible by public transit, it does not mean they are accessible to all of the agency's target population, and DVS should consider revising the VRC locations.

Since the agency has a limited budget to work with, only three care coordinators staff the VRCs, they are unable to open additional VRCs.¹⁰³ The agency needs to improve the geographic accessibility of the VRCs, but it cannot do so without more funding for additional VRCs and a larger headcount.

Although the agency struggles with geographic accessibility, it excels at ensuring its services and resources are financially accessible. Any services provided by the agency are done so at no cost to clients and the agency ensures that any provider DVS refers Veterans to do not charge for their services. DVS states that “all organizations must provide free care to be offered as a resource on the agency website.”^{104,105} Additionally, the New York City Administrative Code requires that Veteran Resource Centers provide up-to-date information on housing; social services; applicable financial assistance and tax exemptions; discharge upgrade resources; and federal, state, and local benefits at no cost to Veterans.¹⁰⁶

Meeting Demand

Referral Processes

For an organization to meet the highest standard of service access, it must have processes in place to refer clients to alternative services if it cannot provide them with services due to ineligibility or lack of capacity.¹⁰⁷ The United States Department of Veterans Affairs follows this protocol, having developed partnerships across the government and private sector to enhance its ability to deliver integrated care and services.¹⁰⁸

Due to DVS' lack of direct service provision, it employs a strategy similar to the VA, providing Veterans with suggested providers they can connect with, as well as referring Veterans to non-profit or government partners for any needed services.^{109,110} They work with organizations that provide services to Veterans at no cost and refer them for services like legal support, financial assistance, employment resources, and healthcare services. DVS also affirmed that they ensure Veterans meet the eligibility criteria for whatever service and organization they are being referred to and help collect any necessary documentation for an outside organization to render services.¹¹¹

However, when Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were surveyed about whether they felt that the referral services and organizations Veterans are being referred to are satisfactory—half of the survey participants disagreed. Thirty-eight percent of survey participants also responded that they felt the referrals made by DVS were not personalized and not facilitated well.¹¹² Many Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners have also had issues with DVS' VetConnectNYC portal, the main platform used to refer Veterans to services. Veterans needing services fill out an online form, which is then processed by DVS Care Coordinators who are supposed to contact Veterans in three to five business days. Unfortunately, when asked about the ease and usefulness of VetConnectNYC, almost two-thirds of survey participants responded stating that the system is not very useful and is not an effective or easy way to request services.

Although the agency has referral processes in place, it is clear that significant physical and digital infrastructure improvements are needed. It is not enough for the referral processes to exist if they are not effective, and the community being served is not receiving needed care.

Care Continuity

Continuity of care can be understood as an individual receiving care at the same place from the same provider, or the seamless delivery of care through the sharing, coordination, and integration of information between different providers. While care provided at the same place from the same provider is optimal, it is recognized that a single provider is rarely able to meet all of an individual's health care needs.^{113,114} A 2015 Journal of the American Geriatrics Society research article found that veterans who have experienced higher continuity of care rates from the same provider are less likely than those who have experienced lower continuity of care rates to visit emergency departments (ED), be hospitalized, or have a history of depressive disorders.¹¹⁵ This cohort study in United States Department of Veterans Affairs primary care clinics in 15 regional health networks, ED, and inpatient facilities, resulted in the conclusion that:

“Even slightly lower primary care provider (PCP) continuity was associated with modestly greater ED use and inpatient hospitalization in older veterans. Additional efforts should be made to schedule older adults with their assigned PCP whenever possible.”

Since older veterans tend to have higher rates of hospitalizations and are more frequent users of emergency department care, coordinated care may be even more important for this subset of the Veteran population. There is also evidence that continuity of care can improve veterans' mortality rates, medication adherence, and the delivery of preventative care.¹¹⁶

Given that 71 percent of New York City's Veteran population is above the age of 55, ensuring continuity of care is especially important for DVS to effectively support the city's Veteran population.¹¹⁷

When asked about agency protocols for ensuring coordinated care for Veterans, DVS stated they work internally and externally to provide seamless care coordination. The agency uses a tracker to assign a caseworker to each client, provided the client does not need specialized housing help—in which case the client would be assigned two caseworkers: a claims caseworker and a housing caseworker.¹¹⁸ Once a Veteran receives assistance, the caseworker follows up at various intervals to understand the support's success and identify additional assistance needed.^{119,120} At a meeting with Veterans Advisory Board leadership, it was mentioned that DVS has created a new database to improve their case management.¹²¹ If DVS cannot provide the necessary services, they work closely with partner agencies and non-profit providers, both at the city and state level, to refer Veterans for needed care.¹²²

However, the tone of Veterans, advocates, and providers regarding care continuity conflicts with the agency's response. A variety of Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were asked about their overall satisfaction with DVS' care and only 10 percent marked that they felt DVS was the best care they had experienced. Almost 60 percent of respondents disagreed, replying that DVS was not the best care they had experienced, highlighting a discrepancy between sentiments within the Veterans community and the agency's statement that they provide “seamless care coordination.” Survey participants were also asked whether DVS followed up to ensure referrals were successful, but only 15 percent of survey participants felt the agency did so while more than half of participants asserted that DVS did not follow up with Veterans to ensure successful referrals.¹²³ Roundtable participants also noted that DVS lacks care continuity with the Veterans they serve, leading to frustration when a Veteran feels that they constantly have to start at step one as they work with DVS to resolve their issue.



Ensuring Communication and Support

An essential aspect of service accessibility and client prioritization is guaranteeing that agency support is available to all clients through various channels.¹²⁴ DVS serves Veterans of varying ages, socioeconomic status, familial status, housing status, and locality—meaning that depending on a Veteran’s demographics, the method of support used will vary. Ensuring access to a wide range of support channels will allow DVS to better serve all Veterans.

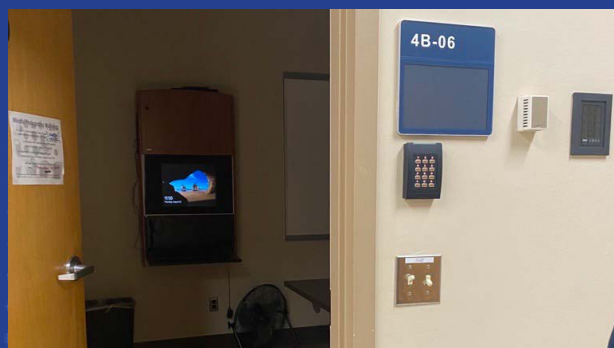
After thoroughly reviewing the DVS website, agency support is accessible through the following avenues:¹²⁵

- Email
- Phone
- Requesting services on VetConnectNYC
- A “Message the Commissioner” form on the agency website
- Visiting a Veteran Resource Center

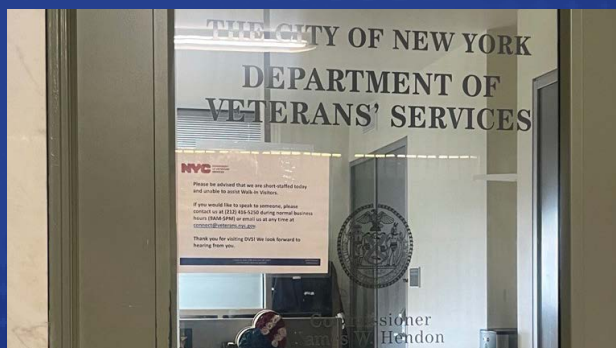
Though DVS has created multiple support channels for Veterans to use, many Veterans report having issues contacting the agency. When Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners were surveyed about DVS’ reachability, more than half of the participants responded that they did not find DVS employees to be very reachable or responsive to Veteran inquiries. Survey participants spoke specifically about calling the agency; they detailed getting anyone on the phone is difficult and many calls go unreturned. When asked about the VRCs, survey participants responded with a similarly negative sentiment stating that VRCs are open at inaccessible times for working Veterans and that staffing issues can lead to VRCs being closed at times when they should be open.¹²⁶ An advocate commented on the VRCs saying, “Even though DVS lists when their VRCs are open, many veterans, including myself, have visited during those times with no one there.”¹²⁷

The City Council’s Oversight and Investigations Division (OID) completed visits to five VRCs in summer 2024, one in each borough, to gather information on location challenges, client volume, common services, and staffing challenges.

*OID found that most of the resource centers were difficult to locate within the buildings where they are housed, due to a lack of signage directing clients to the office. The Bronx VRC even appeared closed during its allotted ‘open’ hours, as the lights were off and no staff were present. OID noted that each VRC only had one staff member on-site to assist with client concerns and all expressed the need for additional staff. The need for additional staff was emphasized by the Manhattan VRC being temporarily unable to assist walk-in visitors due to being short-staffed during OID’s visit. Lastly, staff estimated their average client visits at each site to be between two and four clients a day. While this could be because of a lack of client desire to visit the VRCs, it may be attributable to a lack of staffing or a difficulty in finding the resource center.*¹²⁸



BRONX VRC



MANHATTAN VRC

When asked about VetConnectNYC, Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners expressed frustration. Sixty percent of survey participants expressed that VetConnectNYC is an ineffective way to request DVS support or services and has not made requesting services easier.¹²⁹ Since VetConnectNYC is generally the main way to request services from DVS, this poses a large barrier for Veterans in need of services.¹³⁰

Veterans and advocates have also struggled to reach DVS by phone, with some individuals stating the agency rarely answers the phone and seldom returns calls. "Communication with DVS is non-existent. They never answer the phone and when you leave a message, they never return the call," said a frustrated survey participant. Another survey participant went so far as to note that they felt DVS has the poorest communication of any Veterans agency they have dealt with due to the difficulty of getting them on the phone.¹³¹ When DVS was asked about this in a meeting with the Council, they explained that they do their best to return calls the same day, but sometimes clients do not answer the phone causing a lag between the client's initial call and when DVS is actually able to reach them. "We are calling back when it's convenient for the team, but not necessarily convenient for the client," the agency stated. They also mentioned that they will call clients back two and three times but sometimes run into the same issue of calling them at an inconvenient time. Lastly, they commented they have noticed that sometimes clients try to reach the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, not DVS, so they conflate the two agencies and find frustration with the wrong agency.¹³²

Although DVS has created various support channels for Veterans to access, it is clear there is still a major disconnect, and Veterans are struggling to obtain proper support from the agency.

In addition to ensuring continuous support, agencies must also ensure they are actively keeping all clients informed of changes to service or important updates through official agency sources, such as their website, newsletter, client portal, or email.¹³³ Doing so enhances trust and transparency between the agency and its clients.

One of the agency's main ways of keeping both Veterans and DVS partners updated is through their weekly newsletter. In a call with the Council, DVS shared that their newsletter has some of the highest engagement of all of their communication channels and typically has a 25 percent open rate. They also stated that they frequently share agency updates and important information at Community Board meetings and Veteran Advisory Board meetings, which can be attended both in person and virtually. Lastly, the agency will sometimes run print ads in local newspapers depending on the type of information they need to communicate with the public, such as the transition summits they have hosted with the Mets and the Yankees.¹³⁴

Unfortunately, despite the agency's efforts to keep the public informed through official agency channels, some Veterans, advocates, and non-profit partners have expressed frustrations with the agency's communication tactics. When DVS partners, advocates, and members of the Veteran community were surveyed about the effectiveness and clarity of DVS communications, more than one-third of participants indicated they felt agency communications lacked clarity and effectiveness. While other factors, such as the medium and timeliness of communication, may contribute to this issue, the agency's communication may need improvements to enhance accessibility for the entire Veteran population. A few survey participants went as far as to say that they felt agency communications were nonexistent, while one respondent expressed that they felt communication was improving, but that the agency's outreach was still poor.¹³⁵

This disconnect between the agency and Veterans shows that there is a portion of the target population that is most likely having to seek out information from the agency. Although the agency cannot ensure that all Veterans will see its communications, agency communication methods need improvement to ensure that Veterans do not have to continually seek out information.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

The Relationships and Collaboration pillar assesses how inclusive the agency's policy design and improvement processes are. This review also evaluates how well the agency works with outside partners, since agencies often collaborate with outside stakeholders, such as community-based organizations and other governmental agencies, to achieve shared goals. The evaluation is conducted with an understanding that positive working relationships and collaboration are contingent on outside partners' willingness to work with the agencies.

In this section:

- *Stakeholder Engagement*
- *Institutional Engagement*

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Rating
Relationships and Collaboration	Stakeholder Engagement	C
	Institutional Engagement	C

Stakeholder Engagement

Feedback Processes

The Human Services Quality Framework, created by the Queensland (Australia) Government, outlines how an accessible and effective feedback and complaint process is critical to an organization's implementation of service delivery improvements.¹³⁶ Under the framework, the Human Services Quality Standards (Standards) state that organizations should establish "fair, accessible and accountable feedback, complaints and appeals processes & client complaints" and demonstrate how these processes lead to service improvements.¹³⁷ By collecting and incorporating feedback from Veterans, their families, caregivers, and active duty service members, DVS can ensure continued improvement in its operations.¹³⁸

Based on DVS' responses to Council inquiries, the agency has an established process for resolving complaints. Senior leadership, overseeing the relevant topic area, follows up with the client who submitted a complaint within one to three days to "assess the situation and determine next steps."^{139,140} Complaints are then assigned to a staff member for resolution, and leadership follows up to confirm completion. However, a common theme observed in roundtables and surveys of Veterans and advocates has been that a lack of clear and consistent communication by the Department leads to constant frustration for Veterans and their families.¹⁴¹ While the Standards recommend that outcomes based on feedback and complaints be communicated to relevant stakeholders, most surveyed Veterans and advocates disagreed with the statement that "DVS manages client feedback and claims effectively and promptly" (29 percent strongly disagreed, 14 percent disagreed and 24 percent neither agreed or disagreed).¹⁴²

A key component of feedback and complaint processes is the availability of service-focused feedback or complaint forms for clients or family members. DVS reports that complaints can be submitted through their website, the 'Contact the Mayor' webpage, customer satisfaction questionnaires, or 311.¹⁴³ However, a review of DVS' website found no service-focused feedback or complaint form currently available for Veterans, their families, advocates, or service providers to complete. DVS reports that most clients submit written feedback or complaints through the "Message the Commissioner" form, a freeform comment box.¹⁴⁴ In addition, several unestablished methods are also used, including emailing the Commissioner directly, contacting through social media and LinkedIn, or speaking to their case manager or staff directly.¹⁴⁵ DVS staff monitor the "Message the Commissioner" inbox during business hours to ensure no message is missed.

For clients engaged with services through VetConnect or other service streams, DVS sends quarterly customer satisfaction questionnaires throughout the referral process and when the client receives services. The Customer Satisfaction Survey focuses on gathering feedback about the experiences of Veterans and their families with the services or referrals provided. Quantitative and qualitative questions assess satisfaction in areas such as timeliness, staff knowledge, and the helpfulness of shared resources. The survey also invites open-ended feedback on service improvements and asks respondents whether they would recommend the services to others.¹⁴⁶ DVS justifies this frequent solicitation of feedback because of

how long it can take to receive benefits. While DVS' services may end with a referral, the client receives services longer and may not immediately be connected to care.

It is critical for DVS to communicate feedback, complaints, and appeals processes to stakeholders so that the agency can understand gaps in service and the experience of Veterans, families, and service provider partners. The Standards recommend that human service organizations "efficiently communicate [these] processes to people using services and other relevant stakeholders."¹⁴⁷ Feedback from Veterans and advocates signals these processes are not communicated or advertised to those engaging with DVS: surveyed Veterans and advocates reported that "the agency does not ask for feedback."¹⁴⁸

These responses further enforce the gap between the DVS' reported practices and the experiences described by Veterans and advocates. While DVS outlines a structured feedback system, the feedback the Council has received indicates a gap between DVS and those outside DVS' view of internal processes.

Participation

The OECD has established frameworks providing a public governance approach to policy that addresses unique and specific needs of vulnerable populations. The frameworks can assess programming and engagement with populations, such as Veterans, prioritizing “focused activities to promote participation and feedback from vulnerable and marginalized groups.”¹⁴⁹ OECD further suggests that organizations “involve relevant stakeholders at all stages of the policy process, from the elaboration and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.”¹⁵⁰ In this context, incorporating Veterans’ experiences can ensure that DVS includes their unique perspectives in policy and program development.

Such participation can be accomplished through “various tools and channels, such as face-to-face meetings, surveys, seminars and conferences, online consultations, and virtual meetings (webinars), radio, television, or print media.”¹⁵¹ DVS utilizes several of these methods, including the Veteran and Military Community Survey (the more recent of which was 2024) and public meetings. DVS noted several public forums where non-DVS affiliated Veterans can inform policy, including City Council Committee on Veterans oversight hearings, Veterans Advisory Board meetings, and DVS’ community engagement meetings.

However, there is a nationwide issue with Veterans not self-identifying.

*At an October 2024 oversight hearing held by the New York City Council Committee on Veterans, it was reported that approximately 35 percent of Veterans self-identify nationwide, with only roughly 24 percent self-identifying in New York City.*¹⁵²

The 2021 DVS Veteran and Military Community Survey found that 53 percent of Veterans feel lonely in a typical week and that Veterans “were more likely to seek help for physical ailments than other kinds of troubles, but even for physical ailments, about one-third of Veterans said they were unlikely to seek help.”¹⁵³

Failing to reach those who do not initiate contact with DVS risks excluding a significant portion of Veterans from the policy process and service engagement. Each activity described above targets participation from Veterans who are already actively involved with or aware of the agency and services. To reach those not generally engaging with veteran services, DVS employs several methods to their messaging in non-veteran-specific spaces with a broad audience spectrum. Some examples include ads on iHeart Radio, community board meetings, and positioning staff in non-Veteran specific locations like Council Member offices. Being available at Council Member offices enables DVS to connect general constituents to services and DVS.

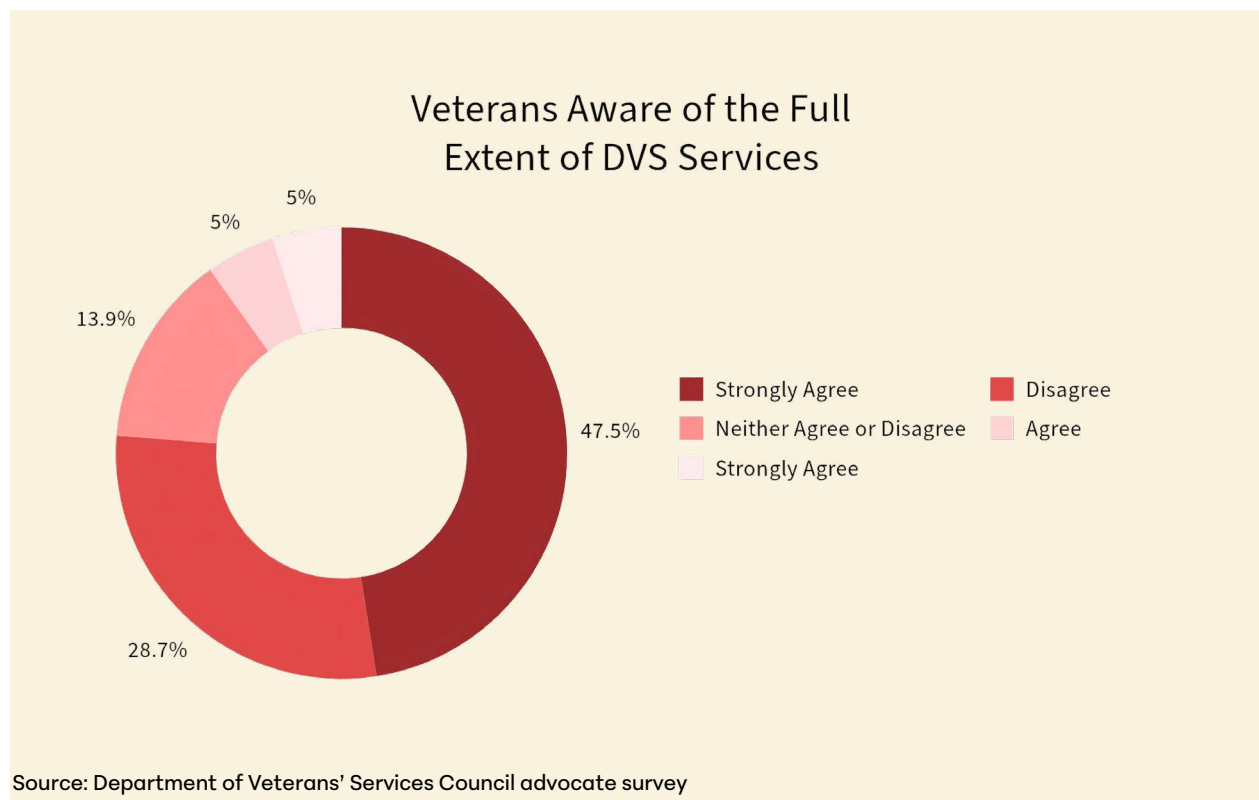
Many Veterans fail to self-identify due to societal stigmas or personal reluctance. In Rand Corporation’s 2024 Needs Assessment Understanding Veterans in New York, researchers found the barriers to care differed from their 2010 Needs Assessment: “more [V]eterans in the current sample reporting not knowing how to find the proper services and believing that the care would not be effective.”¹⁵⁴ While the focus of the needs assessment was on the United States Department of Veteran Affairs, broader research on engaging Veterans has found similar trends. Some Veterans “decide not to engage in community-based services due to strongly held views about receiving help for mental health issues,” viewing “asking for help ... as a sign of weakness within the mindset of military culture.”¹⁵⁵ The importance of engaging these unidentified Veterans has come up in recent testimony at City Council Committee on Veterans hearings, and DVS has acknowledged the need to connect these Veterans to services.^{156,157}

Awareness within the New York City Veteran Community

As a relatively new agency serving a vulnerable population, it is critical for the targeted population to be aware of DVS. The 2021 DVS Veteran and Military Community Survey revealed that about half of the overall surveyed participants (including Veterans, active service members, and family members) were not aware of the Department.¹⁵⁸ Awareness and interaction with DVS were relatively low across the survey participants, with 30-36 percent aware and 12-18 percent having interacted with the Department.¹⁵⁹ In response to this, DVS began several actions to increase awareness within the community. This ranged from quarterly written engagement with all CBOs, schools, VSOs, and other grassroots community organizations who have contact with Veterans, veteran resource guides, attending District Service Cabinet meetings for community boards in each borough monthly, and tabling at community events and partnering with existing community organizations, businesses, and schools. To gauge how aware the community is of DVS, the agency uses social media metrics, newsletter engagement, event registration, event turnout, and Community Surveys. The newsletter has been the most helpful tool for DVS, with a high open rate typically exceeding 25 percent.¹⁶⁰ While event turnout is a useful metric, additional information is needed to understand who is in attendance. For example, at the 2024 Veteran and Military Family Summit at Yankee Stadium, 460 veteran community members attended. Of those, approximately 75 percent engaged with services, and 25 percent were personnel from various agencies or CBOs.¹⁶¹

Despite these efforts, the ongoing challenge remains that many Veterans still need to gain knowledge of the full range of services DVS offers or the organization itself. Veteran advocates feel increased awareness within the Veteran community is still needed: of surveyed advocates in 2024, 48 percent felt Veterans are not aware of the full extent of DVS services.¹⁶² Further, Veteran advocates think many learn about DVS through VRCs or VetConnect.

“the first touch to DVS is usually by word of mouth from another Veteran or from looking online.”¹⁶³



The Engaging Veterans and Families to Enhance Service Delivery toolkit, created by the National Center on Family Homelessness, outlines best practices for effective outreach and engagement with Veterans, including both traditional outreach methods (e.g., direct, one-way communication such as flyers, print ads, and radio ads) and social media (e.g., either one or two-way communication via email newsletters, blogs, and social network sites).¹⁶⁴ The Engaging Veterans toolkit acknowledges the challenges associated with Veterans who do not seek out community-based services, but blending social and traditional media has been found to help combat this.

Comparing recommended engagement tools with DVS' reported practices confirms that DVS is using multiple of the best practices to engage with unidentified Veterans. DVS is employing several strategies to increase awareness of the agency, such as using social media, newsletters, and engaging with community-based organizations. Further, DVS makes an effort to meet Veterans where they are likely to be. This is particularly true for the "invisible" Veterans, such as women who do not self-identify as veterans.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the feedback from Veterans advocates signals that additional work is still needed. The downside of relying on social media and newsletter clicks with the Veteran population is that it is an aging population where a significant portion does not use social media.

Institutional Engagement

As the Human Services Quality Framework outlines, strategic agreements and partnerships are crucial in helping an agency work effectively with community networks, other organizations, and government agencies to achieve desired outcomes.¹⁶⁶ While DVS provides a handful of direct services, the agency primarily provides referrals to and partners with outside organizations and other City agencies. DVS' key partnerships include non-profit and governmental agencies focusing on housing, employment, entrepreneurship, outreach, education, and culture.

The partnerships with each organization are structured in several ways, some based on formal written agreements, while others are ongoing, informal working relationships. As the City Charter establishes, DVS is not generally a contracting agency; therefore, they more often collaborate with or refer clients to agencies. As a comparison, DVS has entered a formal contract with the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) and the Veterans Advocacy Project to provide legal services for Veterans seeking discharge upgrades.¹⁶⁷ This flexibility allows DVS to respond to the individual needs of Veterans and their families. In addition to the contracted organizations, some examples of the most common organizations DVS reports referring to are The Viscardi Center for employment training and job placement, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grantees (e.g., S:US and Jericho Project), and Volunteers Legal Services for support with will and estate management.¹⁶⁸

DVS also outlined several working relationships with other city and state agencies to help expand services, including the Department for the Aging, the Department of Small Business Services, the Department of Social Services, the New York State Department of Veterans Services, and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, among others.¹⁶⁹ However, as noted later in Staff Development, advocates and current residents share that there is room for improvement in its collaboration with city agencies at shelters dedicated to Veterans (e.g., Borden Avenue). While the Borden Avenue shelter is not under the direct oversight of DVS but rather under the umbrella of the Department of Homeless Services, it remains important to note that many Veterans and advocates feel DVS does not have a presence at the shelter and services could drastically improve.¹⁷⁰

DVS also collaborates with several government and non-profit agencies on several initiatives. These collaborations often result in what DVS calls “synergies”—indirect services made possible through working with external stakeholders. The combined effort of DVS and its partners leads to outcomes where the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts” or more substantial outcomes than either agency could achieve independently.¹⁷¹ In this design, DVS signals an understanding of the importance of collaboration in expanding its reach and enhancing its service delivery through direct services and referrals to external partners.

The Department, in response to many Veterans and advocates feeling that DVS does not have a presence at the Borden Avenue shelter, wanted to make clear that DVS housing staff have maintained a steady presence at the Borden Avenue Residence since 2016. Staff are on-site every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Example Synergies:

Mission: VetCheck – Partnership with New York Cares

A wellness call program where trained volunteers make supportive check-in calls to Veterans and provide information on available support or services from DVS.¹⁷² Through this program, volunteers called more than 16,000 veterans in the NYC area in 30 weeks of the FY24 session.¹⁷³

CoveredNYCVet – Partnership with Mayor’s Public Engagement Unit & NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

A CoveredNYCVet Specialist (from the NYC Public Engagement Unit) provides one-on-one support to Veterans and their families, helping them determine their eligibility for – and, when applicable, enroll in – VA healthcare, Tricare (Tricare is specific to certain military and retired military communities), and the New York State of Health. This reduces barriers to healthcare and streamlines processes for Veterans.^{174,175}

Military Family Advocate (MFA) Program – Partnership with NYC Public Schools

NYC Public School principals identify a staff or faculty member who will serve as said school’s MFA. The MFA is trained to inform and assist their school’s Veteran and Military families, acting as an extension of DVS. The program was recently expanded to be citywide during the 2024-25 academic term.¹⁷⁶

Veterans on Campus – Partnerships with colleges and universities

Proactively work with student veteran coordinators to get students involved and informed and assist academic institutions in adopting best practices for student veterans.¹⁷⁷ DVS strategically targeted campuses with the highest veteran population at the onset to develop strong relationships, and it has since branched into every university in New York City.¹⁷⁸

Feedback from Veterans advocates, however, suggests that there are areas where DVS could improve its partnership approach. Advocates have expressed concerns that DVS’ partnerships are sometimes used only when advantageous to the agency. Most surveyed veteran advocates (43 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement: “DVS is taking advantage of all possible partnerships.”¹⁷⁹ One advocate noted they believe DVS “lack[s] partnerships with a lot of organizations in the city.”¹⁸⁰ However, the results were more mixed when considering the increased capabilities of the agency. For “[p]artnering with DVS enables partners to reach and serve more Veterans,” 24 percent of surveyed advocates strongly disagreed, and 24 percent agreed.¹⁸¹ These insights suggest that while DVS has established numerous partnerships, there is room for improvement in communication and collaboration.

DVS’ standard processes for sharing necessary information include public meetings, such as Veterans Advisory Board meetings and community board meetings, print advertisements in local newspapers and

newsletters, or direct communication with advocates. When DVS uses direct communication, it depends on the type of advocate or agency; for example, DVS has held roundtable discussions with specific advocate groups in the past, such as street vendors, mental health providers, and Hispanic advocates.¹⁸²

DVS could foster more transparent, ongoing communication with advocates and non-profit organizations to enhance its partnership. Expanding roundtable discussions that include a broader audience on a routine basis could strengthen collaborations with agencies and build relationships between partners. This would also give Veteran advocates a clearer picture of DVS' work with its governmental and non-profit partners.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Workforce Development pillar focuses on the agency's staff capacity, training, and development. This review measures how well the agency maintains its headcount, trains and develops its staff, and ensures that staff are reflective of the communities being served. This pillar is evaluated with an understanding that the agency maintains and develops staff using the resources available to the agency.

In this section:

- *Staff Capacity*
- *Staff Development*

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Rating
Workforce Development	Staff Capacity	C
	Staff Development	C

Staff Capacity

Staff capacity can indicate an agency’s ability to meet the needs of its community, particularly in human service organizations that serve vulnerable populations like Veterans. Ensuring that staffing levels are sufficient and proportionate to the community’s demonstrated need is essential for effective service delivery.

As of January 2025, DVS employs 38 full-time staff across its nine divisions as outlined earlier under Structure and Resources.¹⁸³ The Veterans’ Support Services and Housing & Support Services (HSS) divisions serve as the primary interface with clients, and DVS reports it prioritizes its staffing levels in these divisions based on the support and services that clients require: “client and community is at the center of all agency decision-making because the agency’s overall goal is to maintain and improve upon service delivery.”¹⁸⁴ The largest share of the current DVS workforce (as of January 2025, 39 percent) are in leadership positions.^{185,186} The remaining workforce comprises back-of-house/operational staff (27 percent) and service-delivery staff (33 percent). While DVS has reported that many staff assist with phone calls or have frequent face-time with clients, only roughly a third of staff (all of which fall into the Veterans’ Support Services and HSS divisions) have assisting clients as a part of their job description.¹⁸⁷

DVS allocates five employees to Veterans’ Support Services, including one Senior Specialist and four Veteran Specialists, who report to the Senior Executive Director of Veterans’ Support Services.¹⁸⁸ The Veterans’ Support Services unit, which combines the Claims and Referrals teams, aims to provide a holistic approach to serving Veterans. By combining these functions, DVS reports it can respond to the multi-dimensional needs of clients: while the five staff members are accredited to process and assist VA claims, they can also provide referrals to other services (e.g., housing or mental health) as needed.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the workload for a Veteran Support Services Specialist varies across the different functions: in November 2024, on average, there were 12 new benefits navigation cases, 61 claims, and 26 non-housing or claim referrals to services.¹⁹⁰ There were also 142 housing support requests per Veteran Specialist during this month.¹⁹¹ While sometimes a client will have both a Veteran Support Services Specialist and HSS caseworker due to the specialization of the teams, there are also circumstances where DVS assigns one case worker to a client.¹⁹²

DVS’ HSS division consists of one Senior Veteran Housing Coordinator and two Veteran Housing Coordinators (VHC) who report to the Senior Executive Director of Housing and Support Services.¹⁹³ VHCs provide housing support to clients by managing the intake process, advocating for Veterans in securing housing, and providing support in eviction prevention and rehousing assistance. Touchpoints for these clients sometimes overlap with claims and referrals, so VHCs work closely with Support Services staff.¹⁹⁴ The current caseload ratio is approximately 30-35 cases per VHC.¹⁹⁵

Currently, HSS and Veterans’ Support Services staff VRCs each week. Under Local Law 215 of 2018, VRCs must be open at least ten hours per week per borough. HSS staffs the Chapel Street HRA office in Brooklyn two days a week, while Veterans’ Support Services staffs VRCs two days a week at the Bronx VA Medical Center, Queens Borough Hall, and Staten Island Borough Hall.¹⁹⁶ In addition, HSS staff have a daily presence

at the Borden Avenue Veterans Residence (BAVR), a veteran-specific shelter under the Department of Homeless Services umbrella.^{197,198}

Staff functional changes are prompted by the need for additional work in a specific arena or due to other dynamics, such as staff leave, new programming, and process improvement or adjustments.²⁰¹ DVS' headcount has varied over the past few fiscal years, with the agency filling 77-89 percent of its budgeted positions. This is lower than the citywide totals over the same years. Between FY21 and FY24, the City filled 92-98 percent of all positions.²⁰² DVS has faced fluctuations in staffing over the past few years, likely due to the pandemic: in FY21, 39 out of 44 positions were filled (89 percent). By FY23, it had dropped to 32 out of 41 budgeted positions (78 percent). Budgeted positions slightly decreased the following year (FY24), with 32 out of 37 positions filled.²⁰³

FY	BUGETED	ACTUAL	%FILLED
FY21	44	39	89%
FY22	44	34	77%
FY23	41	32	78%
FY24	37	35	95%
FY25	39	34	87% ^{199,200}

DVS reported frequently collaborating with the Office of Management and Budget to assess agency capacity and ensure that needs are adequately met. Though DVS is a relatively small agency, and "it is difficult to quantify the 'ideal' number of employees;" it leverages strategic partnerships, such as those with the New York City Council and local Veteran Service Organizations, to increase services.²⁰⁴ Despite these efforts, there is a discrepancy between the agency's staffing levels and the community's needs. Forty-three percent of surveyed advocates strongly disagreed with the statement: "at its current budget and staff capacity, DVS can serve the entire community and match its level and type of need." Similarly, 38 percent disagreed, indicating that many feel DVS is not sufficiently staffed to meet the full range of needs within the Veteran community.²⁰⁵ There is also an outside sentiment that direct service providers are "overworked, thrown into the fire and get burned out."²⁰⁶ Further, based on conversations with the Department, they recognize a need for additional staff to meet growing demands and expand services, especially if DVS expands its services or opens additional VRCs across boroughs.²⁰⁷

Staff Development

Recruitment

Organizations should establish “transparent and accountable recruitment and selection processes that ensure people working in the organization possess the knowledge, skills, and experience required to fulfill their roles.”²⁰⁸ As a city agency, DVS follows the standard Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) hiring process. In its approval process, new positions go through the Executive Team, Human Resources, Fiscal, and the Office of Management and Budget.²⁰⁹ Applicants who meet the minimum standards are interviewed, and the best fit is hired. When hiring for front-facing positions, DVS looks for several attributes. For Veterans Support Specialists, DVS prioritizes prospective applicants with “experience with computers and customer relationship management software, and reasoning and writing skills. A background or degree in social work or public policy may be beneficial, but it is not necessary.”²¹⁰ Meanwhile, for VHCs, DVS indicated, “mental Health [and] Substance credentialed job seekers are strongly preferred.”²¹¹ As DVS follows the standard recruitment policies of DCAS, this targeted review will not examine these practices. However, DVS can inform the makeup of its staff within the hiring process by who is selected for hire.

The OECD recommends that public service organizations hire staff who reflect the diversity of communities served, creating a more efficient and empathetic public sector.²¹² In the context of DVS, Veterans must be prioritized in the hiring process. A review of DVS job descriptions reveals that hiring Veterans is highly preferred, with seven of 31 positions indicating “veteran status is a plus,” including the Chief Information Officer, Network Engineer, Veteran Support Services Specialist, Senior Director of Veterans’ Support Service, Final Honors Coordinator, Chief of Staff, and Transition Services Manager.²¹³ If not a Veteran, DVS prioritizes those with “experience working with Veterans and Veteran families.”²¹⁴ For front-facing roles specifically, DVS prioritizes hiring Veteran Specialists “who have familiarity with or an interest in Veterans benefits [and] military cultural competency” and VHCs with “prior experience working with the homeless population, veterans, case management/social services.”²¹⁵ However, this cannot always be accomplished.

A shortage of Veterans in its workforce has been highlighted as a significant concern within the community: a veteran advocate indicated that “there are ... not enough [V]eterans at the agency” in its current state and that “this is a major complaint in the community.”²¹⁶

Further, staff “who are not Veterans working at DVS have not shown much cultural competency on the military/veterans issues.”²¹⁷ Although DVS prioritizes veterans in its hiring process, the emphasis is mainly on leadership and managerial positions, with only two job descriptions in direct service roles directly prioritizing hiring Veterans.²¹⁸ While DVS may hire Veterans for these roles, this also signals a potential gap between the perception within the community that DVS lacks sufficient Veteran representation, as the available Veteran-focused positions are often not aligned with the day-to-day needs of Veterans receiving services. These responses further enforce the gap between the DVS’ reported practices and the experiences described by Veterans advocates.

Training and Development

In addition to recruitment practices, training and professional development can enhance the productivity and skillset of an organization's workforce. The Human Services Quality Framework recommends organizations provide "people working in the organisation with induction, training and development opportunities relevant to their roles."²¹⁹ Staff who work in front-facing roles also require training to be qualified to work with at-risk populations, such as trauma-informed customer service, crisis intervention, and de-escalation training.^{220,221} DVS requires staff who provide claim assistance to complete state accreditation training from the New York State Department of Veterans Services before processing claims for benefits. A Veteran advocate indicated that in the past, DVS only had one staff member accredited to provide claim assistance, signaling their capability to provide this service may vary over time.²²² DVS also reported providing trauma-informed customer service training, crisis intervention, and de-escalation training to staff in front-facing roles, ensuring they are prepared to work with at-risk populations effectively.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach emphasizes integrating trauma-informed principles into policies and procedures. While the report focuses on behavioral health services, SAMHSA highlights how trauma-informed approaches can be used in Veterans affairs.²²³ DVS' inclusion of trauma-informed customer service in its training program signals that its policies align with these best practices. DVS reported partnering with organizations like **PSYCHARMOR INSTITUTE** and the **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT** to provide additional training in military cultural competency, suicide prevention, and mental health first aid to its staff.²²⁴ DVS cites these training programs for helping staff understand the unique challenges faced by Veterans, such as PTSD and traumatic brain injury, and the programs enable DVS to offer more effective support. Lastly, DVS ensures staff receive naloxone training to prevent overdose deaths.²²⁵

PsychArmor Institute leverages industry experts and trainers to develop educational content designed to support the unique needs relevant to the military and Veteran communities.

Formed under the auspices of Columbia University to disseminate the Columbia Protocol, the Project's mission is to light the way to ending suicide. The message, like the Columbia Protocol itself, is simple: "Just Ask. You Can Save a Life."

-Source: <https://psycharmor.org/>

-Source: <https://cssrs.columbia.edu/>

Beyond role-specific training, the training and professional development opportunities an organization provides can also inform the expertise of the staff. DVS disseminates to staff the DCAS training catalog to provide the option of requesting additional training on specific skill sets or professional development broadly. Supervisors can require their staff to complete particular DCAS training or provide professional development through "real-time social service settings, such as in DHS shelters and supportive housing residences."²²⁶ The final component of professional development DVS cites is its performance review process. Incorporating annual performance reviews, setting specific and measurable goals, and providing ongoing feedback are several tools DVS uses to encourage staff engagement and growth.²²⁷

Feedback from Veteran advocates signals additional work may be needed in this area. One advocate stated that "not enough training" is provided to DVS staff, while another reported they "have no idea what or how they are trained."^{228,229} Responses to a survey of Veteran advocates have a mixed response. When asked whether they believed "DVS employees are qualified and well-trained to do their job," 38 percent disagreed with the statement, while 33 percent agreed. This gap between internal and external perspectives further signals the need for additional transparency and communication between DVS and Veteran advocates.

An example can be seen through VHCs. Under the Homebase Best Practices for Emergency Shelter Providers, guidance is provided on best practices for helping clients secure housing. Looking at the level of knowledge and degree of case involvement of VHCs, DVS prioritizes several of these best practices, such as trauma-informed customer service techniques.²³⁰ While a Veteran advocate noted that VHCs support residents at the Borden Avenue shelter, others report they have not heard of many clients securing housing solutions through DVS.²³¹ In response to the advocate survey, nearly fifty percent of respondents disagreed with the statement, “DVS makes housing more accessible for Veterans.”²³² This discrepancy highlights the need for DVS to improve communication and clarify its training processes.

FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The Financial and Resources Management pillar presents the resources and budget allocated to the agency and outlines the current citywide procurement process.

In this section:

- *Financial Management*
- *Review of the Procurement Process*

Pillar	Indicators	Description
Financial and Resources Management	Financial Management	Presentation of agency's resources and budget allocations
	Review of the Procurement Process	There are a number of similar issues raised by agency RFPs, contracting, and late payments (for non-profit providers), but this report card will not evaluate this type of agency work. Instead, the report card will outline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal Landscape Key Procurement Achievements Issues and Concerns

Financial Management

For Fiscal Year 2024, DVS' Adopted Budget was \$5.1 million²³³—representing 0.005 percent of the City's FY24 Adopted Budget of \$107.1 billion. Of the \$5.1 million, 93.6 percent of funding came from the City, and 6.4 percent from the state.²³⁴ Even though there was a budgeted headcount of 37 staff, the agency's actual staffing level, as of June 2024 (the end of FY24) counted was 35 full-time staff.²³⁵ DVS' Fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget was \$6.4 million,²³⁶ a \$1.3 million increase, 86.6 percent of which came from City funds, 6.8 percent in State funds, and 6.5 percent in intra-city funds (funds which are received from another city agency, sometimes in the form of a contract that one agency holds but another one uses), and which included a new \$540,000 DVS City Council Veteran Initiative for Veteran Resource Centers. This expanded funding also allowed for an increase in the budgeted headcount to 39 full-time staff.²³⁷

The agency is divided into nine divisions:

- Executive;
- Fiscal (Procurement);
- Legal;
- Policy and Strategic Partnerships;
- External Relations (Communications and Outreach);
- Administration (HR, Timekeeping, Payroll, and Facilities);
- Information Technology;
- Housing; and
- Veteran Support Services (Referrals and Claims).

Agency leadership (Assistant and Deputy Commissioners, Chief Information Officer, and Chief of Staff), helmed by the DVS Commissioner appointed by the mayor, manage staff related to agency-wide operations (Director of Finance, Procurement Analyst, Human Resources Manager, etc.) and service-specific roles (Senior Executive Director of Housing and Support Services, Final Honors Coordinator, Executive Director of Community Mental Health, etc.).²³⁸

Review of the Procurement Process

Due to the low contract volume, the Mayor's Office of Contract Services did not include DVS in its reporting to the Council,²³⁹ but according to the FY26 Preliminary Executive Budget released on January 16, 2025, for FY25, DVS' contract budget is \$1.2 million across four contracts.²⁴⁰ Compared with its sister agencies, the Department is not heavily engaged in or reliant on contracting. However, with one of the smallest budgets among City agencies, DVS must use its resources efficiently and thoughtfully.

DVS is currently in contract with:

- 1. United Veterans and Fraternal Organizations of Maspeth, Inc. for support operating and veteran services by the Organization;***
- 2. Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 32 Queens for supporting veterans, access to benefits and homeless services;***
- 3. New York Legal Assistance Group for providing legal services for Veterans seeking discharge upgrades; and***
- 4. Veteran Advocacy Project for providing legal services for Veterans seeking discharge upgrades.***

Source: New York City Comptroller, Checkbook NYC

Legal Landscape

“Public procurement is the process local, state, and federal government agencies use to acquire necessary goods and services through purchases from for-profit and not-for-profit businesses.”²⁴¹ Procurement in New York City is governed by New York State Law, the New York City Charter, the Administrative Code of the City of New York, and the Rules of the New York City, including the Procurement Policy Board Rules.

The governmental entities charged with oversight over the City’s procurement of goods, services, and construction are the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services (MOCS) and the Procurement Policy Board (PPB). The PPB exercises power pursuant to Chapter 13 of the New York City Charter and MOCS is not a codified entity in local law, however, the Administrative Code of the City of New York does define the City Chief Procurement Officer, defined as the individual to whom the mayor has delegated authority to coordinate and oversee the procurement activity of mayoral agency staff, including the agency chief contracting officers and any offices that have oversight responsibility for procurement.²⁴²

MOCS sets citywide procurement policies, provides guidance to City agencies on procurement matters (including training and education), and manages the City’s digital procurement platform—the Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (PASSPort). PPB is authorized to promote and put into effect rules governing the procurement of goods, services, and construction.²⁴³

With one of the largest contracting budgets in the world,²⁴⁴ New York City purchases more than \$30 billion in goods and services each year.²⁴⁵ In Fiscal Year 2023, the City entered into 147,140 contracts, accounting for almost \$41.1 billion dollars of goods and services “from outside contractors, ranging from nonprofits providing community services, to construction firms, to goods suppliers, that ensured that City agencies run smoothly and deliver on their missions.”²⁴⁶ In Fiscal Year 2024, the City entered into 155,000 contracts accounting for \$34.4 billion dollars of good and services.²⁴⁷

Key Procurement Achievements

PASSPORT

One of the biggest procurement achievements by the City, was the establishment of PASSPort. PASSPort is the City's "end-to-end digital procurement platform, [that] manages every stage of the procurement process from vendor sourcing—who we purchase goods and services from to releasing and responding to solicitations, and contract award, development, registration and management."²⁴⁸

When building this platform, MOCS identified guiding principles and objectives to build a system that streamlined the process while also maintaining integrity and fairness.²⁴⁹ These principles and objects laid out the intentions of the system and were organized in the following areas: Process Improvement, Smart Use of Technology, Transparency & Accountability, and Planning & Management.²⁵⁰ Across these areas, MOCS identified several goals of PASSPort, including: shortening the procurement cycle times, creating a comprehensive vendor management system, internal and public-facing interfaces, business integrity controls, and the ability to manage risk.²⁵¹

PASSPort was launched in the summer of 2017, which started with vendors creating and managing their online accounts, completing their vendor and principal questionnaires, identifying their capacity to do business, and allowing vendors to view and respond to performance evaluations based on their contracts with various city agencies.²⁵² The goal of Release 1 was to begin integration for vendor profiles across city agencies, and to streamline both the vendor experience when contracting with the city, and the time between a contract award and registration.²⁵³

Release 2 of PASSPort, "Requisition to Pay," was launched in April 2019.²⁵⁴ This phase of the system allowed for electronic invoicing and the creation of an online catalogue of vendor goods, which could be edited in real time.²⁵⁵ Using PASSPort, vendors could upload their inventory of goods available for purchase, which agencies could then shop for online. Having an online database of goods meant that city agencies were able to easily search for needed items, and vendors could keep their product lists up-to-date, ensuring that agencies were not trying to procure items that were no longer available.²⁵⁶

PASSPort Release 3 was delayed due to COVID, but was launched by MOCS in June 2020.²⁵⁷ Release 3 of PASSPort allowed vendors to search through all of the City's solicitations, and gave vendors the ability to track the contract registration process through a "milestone tracker," which provided vendors with the list of remaining steps to be awarded a city contract, with check-boxes indicating where the vendor's contract is in the process.²⁵⁸

Release 4 launched in June 2021, and it offered enhanced bidding tools, including quote management for contracts under the small purchase limits; citywide invoicing and payment integration for all mayoral contracting agencies, and pre-qualification options for all eligible vendors through integration with each agency's project management systems.²⁵⁹

COUNCIL ACTION

Under Speaker Adrienne Adams' leadership, the City Council has made substantial progress in tackling deep-rooted inefficiencies in the city's procurement process, with a focus on ensuring timely and reliable payments to nonprofit contractors.

Establishing Procurement Timelines (Local Law 169 of 2023)²⁶⁰

- Mandates a comprehensive study on the time required to complete the city's procurement process

for human services contracts (due October 1, 2024).

- Requires the Procurement Policy Board to set binding procurement timelines by October 1, 2025.

Streamlining Document Management (Local Law 31 of 2024)²⁶¹

- Creates a secure electronic “document vault” for procurement-related documents.
- Reduces duplicative paperwork and improves document accessibility.
- Expected to cut down on administrative burdens for both city agencies and nonprofit contractors.

Reducing Administrative Burdens (Local Law 85 of 2024)²⁶²

- Increases the threshold for review of contracts outside an agency procurement plan from \$200,000 to \$1,000,000; requires additional evidence that certain service contracts would not displace City workers; and mandates public notice at least ten days prior to certain unplanned contract actions.
- The significance of this law is that increasing the dollar threshold of review would account for the vast majority of applicable contract dollars while at the same time reducing the administrative burden, which invariably increases the procurement timeline for lower value awards.

Provide contractors with a written explanation when denying approval of a subcontractor (Local Law 105 of 2024)²⁶³

- Requires city agencies to provide contractors with a written explanation when denying approval of a subcontractor upon the contractor’s request.
- Agencies have 30 days to provide this explanation after receiving the request.

EXECUTIVE ACTION

Finally, On January 24, 2025, Mayor Eric Adams issued Executive Order 47, “instructing agencies that provide oversight to or directly engage in substantial contracting activities or funding arrangements with nonprofits to designate a chief nonprofit officer to report to the Mayor’s Office of Nonprofit Services (MONS) and the MOCS. Each agency chief nonprofit officer will be responsible for coordinating with MONS and MOCS to improve services, provide quality customer service in response to outreach from nonprofits, and expedite payments and communications with nonprofits.”²⁶⁴

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

The Digital Government pillar evaluates how advanced an agency's digital government strategies, implementation, and performance are across multiple elements. An agency's efforts are reviewed within the wider framework to ascertain whether it has the capability to achieve its intended outcomes, as well as whether the agency is effectively prioritizing its resources to meet existing mandates. This Pillar draws on aspects of digital government identified by the OECD, United Nations e-Government development models, and other frameworks. It considers each agency within its strategic and legislative context.

In this section:

- *Strategic Approach*
- *Policy Levers*
- *Implementation*
- *Monitoring*

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Rating
Digital Government	Strategic Approach	C
	Policy Levers	B
	Implementation	B
	Monitoring	C

Focus on Digital Government

Data and digital technologies provide governments with opportunities to improve agency operations and service delivery outcomes.²⁶⁵ This report uses the OECD term ‘digital government’ to refer to the use of digital technologies as an integrated part of governments’ modernization strategies to create public value.²⁶⁶ For New York City, the effective use of data and digital technologies can enable the continuous improvements of operations and services and reduce barriers for citizen engagement with agency services.²⁶⁷ Digital government is improved when governments embed digital technologies throughout the policy life cycle process.²⁶⁸ This means integrating strategies with the right policy settings to enable the implementation of the strategic approach with adequate tools and resources to monitor whether those strategies are working as intended.

Whole-of-Government Approach

Governments and their citizens increasingly expect a public sector to be interconnected, coordinated and to operate more as a single entity with joined-up services.²⁶⁹ Benefits can include a reduced need for government interactions (for example, through centralized government portals), fewer requirements to provide the same information more than once (due to better inter-agency coordination), and cost savings from agencies using existing resources and tools more effectively. DVS is part of a citywide administrative system that has been moving towards a more coordinated approach to digital government.²⁷⁰ Since 2022, Mayor Adams’ Administration has consolidated the City’s technology agencies and resources into the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI).²⁷¹ With this consolidation, OTI is central to the City’s oversight and coordination of its digital government efforts. OTI is a rebranded continuation of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT) with the agency head designated as the City’s Chief Technology Officer. OTI also has central authority over the Office of Cyber Command and the Office of Data Analytics, as well as all City information technology, information security, information privacy, and telecommunications.²⁷² For this review, OTI’s relationship with DVS is therefore important in assessing the effectiveness of DVS’ digital government efforts.

Strategic Approach

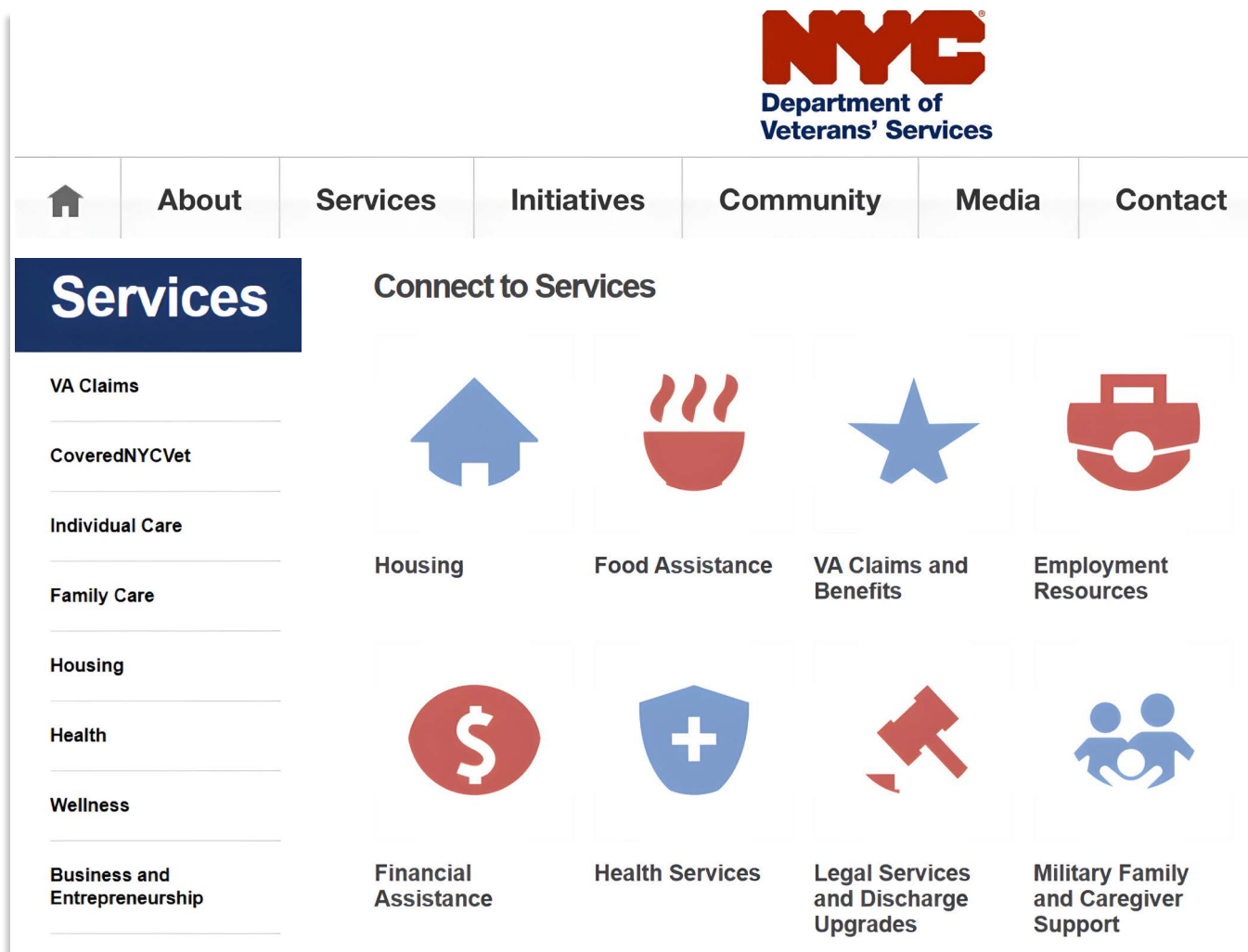
Digital strategies help agencies identify and prioritize ways to leverage data and technology to improve internal processes and public facing services. A publicly available strategic plan improves transparency, which encourages public engagement, and scrutiny, which can lead to better policy outcomes by aligning more closely with public expectations.²⁷³ The Department's Annual Services and Performance Reports, reviewed for this report, list as a responsibility the development and implementation of a Department digital strategy.²⁷⁴

DVS' annual reports do refer to a digital strategy but it does not seem to be overly front facing.

*In feedback, while DVS did not identify a public agency digital government strategy, it is guided by the Citywide OTI Strategic Plan 2022 (Strategic Plan 2022) in its approach to data and technology, and in shaping its own strategic goals.*²⁷⁵

Among its stated strategic priorities, the Strategic Plan 2022 identifies, "Advance Digital Service Delivery" as a priority for improving City and agency digital government, by accelerating and simplifying the delivery of City services and modernizing supporting technologies.²⁷⁶ Another strategic priority is "Enhance Technology Resiliency", which has an aim of optimizing agency engagement and service delivery to enable partner-agency missions and innovation.

DVS' website was identified as a central component to the Department's digital strategy and mission of connecting, mobilizing, and empowering the community by leveraging its available resources and partners.²⁷⁷



The website contains key information about the Department, as well as various online forms and portal links.²⁷⁸ These include: access to services (such as the online VetConnectNYC platform) and initiatives (including Mission: VetCheck and VetBizNYC); as well as other community information, media services, and ways to contact the Department. VetConnectNYC also plays an essential role in the Department's overarching digital government efforts, by acting as a coordinating 'one-stop-shop' for simplifying veterans' and the communities' engagement with the Department.²⁷⁹

Overall, the Council, through its roundtables and Veteran and advocate survey, heard mixed views on the Department's approach to its digital government strategy. DVS acknowledges the role of data and technology in improving digital government outcomes. However, the Department has also expressed some caution in a digital only approach identifying the unique needs of Veterans and their families, and the barriers that a digital only approach can lead to. Some stakeholders expressed similar reservations, noting that older Veterans without computer literacy have a hard time accessing information about DVS and their services.²⁸⁰ Noting this, as society progressively digitizes, continuous improvements will be needed to meet users where they are. The community will continue to evolve, for example, as digital technologies change and society responds. This tension between user ability and technological changes highlights DVS' challenge. An effective strategic approach will need to acknowledge the Department's mission, appropriately taking into account technological changes in society, while focusing on placing the user at the center of any modernization efforts.

Transparency in strategic planning helps to ensure that agencies, including inter-agency partners, are both held to account and meeting the needs of their constituents. This is important given the inherently coordinated nature of the City's digital government efforts through OTI and the Strategic Plan 2022. In feedback on their overarching strategic planning, the Department noted that its short and long term goals are shaped by community needs, data, various agency feedback forms, and best practices.²⁸¹ Most stakeholders did not share this assessment, noting a general lack of transparency regarding the Department's mission and inconsistency in its communications.²⁸² The DVS website does contain a clear public facing strategy—with the Mayor's Management Report and the Department's mandated Annual Services and Performance Reports being more backwards looking by design. Similarly, DVS does not publish a digital strategy on its website to link its digital goals to the citywide approach as expressed through the Strategic Plan 2022. The Department needs to ensure that it is proactive in engagement on its digital strategic approach, especially given the unique needs of its constituents. There is an opportunity for DVS to highlight how its services, such as VetConnectNYC, form part of a cohesive digital government strategy. Articulating this would help to focus the Department's work and provide greater clarity to the public on how its services link with the City's wider digital aims in the service of the city's veterans.

Policy Levers

Policy levers include any laws, tools, resources or other mechanisms that encourage or enable implementation of a government's strategic approach.²⁸³ Policy levers are an important element within the policy life cycle because they create the enabling environment for agencies to give effect to a proposed strategic direction.²⁸⁴ To be effective, a strategic framework relies on sufficient resourcing, staff, and funding to achieve the proposed outcomes. The City's strategic framework encompasses a wide set of local laws that mandate or promote the use of digital technologies across agencies. These include the City's Open Data Law, laws relating to website accessibility and related reporting requirements, citywide language access requirements, as well as DVS specific laws that promote the use of digital tools indirectly, such as Local Law 214 of 2018 (LL 214).²⁸⁵

To assess DVS' digital operations for this report, recent Annual Services and Performance Reports, the MMR, and recent fiscal budgets were reviewed together with feedback received from the Department and from

relevant stakeholders. Within the strategic framework, LL 214 is a good example of a legal mechanism that requires DVS to provide certain benefits and counseling services to eligible Veterans and other individuals. VetConnectNYC is an online program staffed by DVS, which acts as a 'hub' through which service members, Veterans, survivors, caregivers, and military families are connected to resources, benefits, or services.²⁸⁶ As a platform for connecting Veterans with appropriate benefits, VetConnectNYC is an appropriate means for DVS to remain in compliance with LL 214 while also representing an interconnected digital service platform that aligns with a whole-of-government digital approach by reducing the complexity of navigating resources and benefits.²⁸⁷

Overall, after reviewing DVS digital operations, it is apparent that while technology specific staffing levels have seemingly not changed in recent years, the use of its core digital services including VetConnectNYC continues to increase at a rapid pace. At the same time, the proportion of Department resources used to facilitate this enormous growth is not currently disaggregated in these highly public-facing documents despite their clear importance to DVS' present and future operations for the community they serve. As recognized in the Council's response to the FY25 Preliminary Budget, Veterans increasingly require support navigating the various U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs claims and benefit programs.²⁸⁸ DVS has an opportunity to further highlight the increasing importance of their digital efforts in serving the wider Veteran community.

Implementation

Implementation refers to practices that are employed to execute a particular strategic approach into a concrete action.²⁸⁹ Implementation is most effective when a strategic approach is user-focused and when the implementation closely reflects the needs of the community over processes in achieving its ends.²⁹⁰ During the course of this review, a majority of stakeholders questioned the overall efficacy of the VetConnectNYC platform with some noting a lack of transparency and accountability in understanding how the system operates in the back end to make the connections that ultimately determine what organization best meets the needs of the particular requestor.²⁹¹

These findings reflect issues first identified through a Council Committee on Veterans oversight hearing on VetConnectNYC in 2019.²⁹² Despite improvements to the release of data on Veteran engagement with VetConnectNYC, the Council has concerns that many of the same issues expressed in 2019 remain unchanged over half a decade later. Overall, feedback from DVS indicates an acceptable level of coordination within the agency on its digital strategic planning. This report also notes further feedback regarding the Department's major areas of programmatic budget allocations in FY25 include its focus on care coordination (VetConnectNYC), and on current work to build out a new customer relationship management system in the back end to power the VetConnectNYC platform based on user experience and data reporting requirements. These developments are encouraging. Enablers, including mechanisms like funding of regular digital platform improvements, are crucial to effective implementation.²⁹³ To continue improving, DVS should work to ensure that there is a means for interested stakeholders to actively access information on how its system operates during the development of those systems where it is possible to do so. This would also help the general public to better understand the benefits and drawbacks of platforms run by the Department.

Monitoring

Monitoring refers to any resources and tools that are available and used to track progress and evaluate the implementation of a proposed strategic approach. Monitoring mechanisms may be mandatory (for example, through statutory reporting requirements), or promoted by agencies through processes that

actively gauge user experience of an agency's services. Effective monitoring systems can help governments and their agencies to identify weaknesses and improve future policy design.²⁹⁴ The numerous reporting obligations on City agencies are just one example of a mechanism for monitoring agency operations and particular service delivery outcomes.

DVS recognizes the importance of Veteran engagement and feedback for improving its services.²⁹⁵ The Department appears to be making genuine efforts to engage the veteran community where they are, via phone, email, social media, other community outreach initiatives, and its various online systems and portals.²⁹⁶ This has also included two major community outreach surveys conducted in 2021 and 2024 to evaluate overall satisfaction and engagement.²⁹⁷ DVS appeared confident in its use of digital feedback tools and the range of methods used to identify issues with current online services. However, the Council heard from stakeholders on the perceived lack of proactive engagement from DVS with stakeholders and other industry partners noting an overall lack of responsiveness.²⁹⁸ Examples of this lack of responsiveness include: phone calls and emails going unanswered, Veteran communities' difficulties in understanding who to follow up with on service needs when systems like VetConnectNYC fail to connect requestors to the appropriate resource, and delayed response times when engaging VetConnectNYC far exceeding the several days proffered by the Department. This disconnect may suggest that any overarching DVS guidelines and standards for monitoring or evaluating its current digital systems are not reaching the communities they are intending to serve. In reviewing the DVS website, its approach appears to remain largely reactive, relying on passive online user survey forms, piecemeal community engagement programs, or large PDF pamphlet documents, some of which were not machine readable as of this review. To address this, DVS should consider developing a more engaged approach to Veteran input. This could involve continuing to work towards more proactive feedback at each stage of the policy life cycle, from the development of its strategic approach through to the technical implementation of new systems.

MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management pillar measures the agency's compliance with Open Data laws, the City Charter, and relevant local laws. This review also assesses the Mayor's Management Report (MMR) targets, performance results, and any information gaps.

For the review of an agency's reporting obligations and compliance with the City's Open Data Laws,²⁹⁹ the framework draws on aspects of the three main facets from the OECD's Open, Useful, and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index: data availability, data accessibility, and government support for reuse.³⁰⁰ Additionally, the framework uses established best practices in performance measurement to review an agency's performance indicators listed in the Mayor's Management Report (MMR).

In this section:

- *Reporting and Data Availability*
- *MMR Review and Evaluation*

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Rating
Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management	Reporting and Data Availability	B
	MMR Review and Evaluation	C

Reporting and Data Availability

OECD's Open, Useful, and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index focuses on three core areas to foster open government: data availability, data accessibility, and government support for reuse.³⁰¹ Ensuring “access to timely, relevant, and high-quality data to foster resilience and facilitate a comprehensive whole-of-society response” is a good governance principle established by the OECD,³⁰² and assists in building data-driven, “transparent and accessible” strategies.³⁰³ Several elements can be used to accomplish a “transparent and accessible” strategy: data, surveys, progress reports, evaluations, and fiscal reports. DVS houses its reporting in NYC OpenData, the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS), and the DVS website.^{304,305} All agency reports listed in NYC OpenData are reports the agency has chosen to make publicly available or contain any data or tables, while all reports housed in the DORIS online library have been mandated by local law.

Data

Regarding data availability, OECD recommends that agencies make relevant public sector data and information available in a clear, timely, and reliable manner.³⁰⁶ Better transparency in agency data can create more meaningful engagement with the agency's policy and strategy.

DVS adheres to the City's Open Data Laws and reporting requirements to ensure that public sector data is accessible. DVS actively maintains three OpenData datasets as of 2024: Department of Veterans' Services Cases (DVS Cases), Department of Veterans' Services Clients (DVS Clients), and NYC Veteran Owned Businesses.³⁰⁷ DVS Cases, which replaced DVS Assistance Requests, provides case-level details with information on case status (e.g., managed, assistance requested); service type (e.g., housing, physical health, employment); service outcome (e.g., received information, unable to contact); and the resolution status of each case (e.g., resolved, unresolved).³⁰⁸ Meanwhile, DVS Clients includes demographic information about clients such as gender, race, ethnicity, marital status, income, military affiliation, branch of service, discharge type, and postal code.³⁰⁹ DVS noted that all data is reviewed to ensure that personally identifiable information is removed per citywide protocols. As these are new reports, historical data (2018 through 2023) has been uploaded, with 2024 data expected in 2025 during the publication period, and all future data to be uploaded annually.³¹⁰ The last report, NYC Veteran Owned Businesses, serves as a directory of self-reported Veteran Owned Businesses in New York City.³¹¹

When DVS modified its OpenData reports in 2024, it cited increasing efficiency. In its agency survey, DVS noted that all end-dated OpenData datasets were indicated by a “Historical” in the title and would no longer be updated. However, two datasets that are no longer being maintained, DVS Assistance Requests and DVS Resource Map, have not had its title updated.³¹² It is important to update this as some OpenData public users may not be familiar with all OpenData features and know where to learn if a dataset is regularly updated.

Beyond its OpenData requirements, the accessibility of public sector data can also be reviewed through data sharing with stakeholders. While DVS adheres to the City's OpenData Laws and improved data transparency by updating its datasets, there are opportunities to further enhance the accessibility of its data. When surveyed, most Veteran advocates (43 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement, "DVS is transparent and forthcoming about its data."³¹³ Further, feedback from advocates signals they feel there is not enough data sharing outside of DVS' OpenData requirements. One stated, "When asked about data they never respond to requests."³¹⁴ This feedback from Veteran advocates indicates that there may be room for improvement in how DVS shares data beyond its mandated requirements.

Reports, Surveys, and Evaluations

After examining DVS' publicly available reports, consultations, and surveys, the Council found that all reports mandated by local law were available on DORIS, and various discretionary reports were available on NYC OpenData.³¹⁵ DVS also lists each of its required Local Laws on its website. Some examples include:³¹⁶

- **Local Law 39 of 2024** requires DVS to submit an annual report on the mental health services provided to Veterans by city agencies.
- **Local Law 4 of 2022** requires that DVS report instances of Veterans accessing assistance required under subdivision c of Admin. Code Section 31-112. DVS offers connections to services for discharged LGBTQ Veterans seeking a discharge characterization upgrade to be eligible for additional VA benefits.
- **Local Law 215 of 2018** requires DVS to report on the operation of Veterans Resource Centers.

DVS has also released two major community surveys and several questionnaires during its tenure. In 2021 and 2024, the DVS conducted the NYC Veteran and Military Community Survey to better understand the Veteran community's needs.³¹⁷ Future surveys should be conducted every four years pursuant to Executive Order 65, signed by then-Mayor Bill de Blasio.³¹⁸ DVS contracted with Polco's National Research Center, an independent survey research and civic engagement firm, to conduct the survey. Questions focus on demographics (age, gender, military service), health and housing conditions, employment status, awareness and use of Veterans' services, and the needs and experiences of Veterans and their families concerning support services.³¹⁹ However, only the results of one community survey (2021) are available on the DVS website. 2024 results have been under review since the survey concluded in June 2024, with the agency citing that they are holding focus groups to support its 2024 survey.³²⁰

In this review, no publicly available performance reviews were identified. In its agency survey, DVS reported it conducts employee performance evaluations, enabling management to track their staff's performance by setting up performance standards, meeting with the employees to discuss work expectations, opportunities to discuss performance, and whether corrective actions need to be taken.³²¹ However, DVS should publicly make these practices known if any program evaluation occurs.

Fiscal Reports

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), a financial agency of the United Nations, operates under a fiscal transparency code widely recognized as the international standard for the disclosure of public financial information.^{322,323} Their Fiscal Transparency Handbook states that fiscal reporting "should provide a comprehensive, relevant, timely, and reliable overview of the government's financial position and performance."³²⁴ After thoroughly examining all mandatory and voluntary reports, it is clear that outside of the annual City budget process and the fiscal reporting that entails, DVS does not provide publicly available reports related to its financial position and performance.

Client and Advocate Expectations

The extent to which an agency publishes data publicly directly informs potential clients and partners about what to expect when interacting with DVS. The OECD recommends that organizations provide clear service information to set clear expectations and avoid frustrations.³²⁵ When agencies do not provide clear and consistent information, clients may feel uncertain or dissatisfied with the process, impacting their engagement with the services offered.

When asked how long the wait times are for clients to begin services with DVS, the agency reported that “there is no waiting list for assistance, calls are returned within a couple of days, and appointments are scheduled within a couple of days to a week.”³²⁶ However, the external factors of how long it takes to receive the benefits or services DVS refers a client to are less exact. For example, DVS described how they are frequently subjected to the VA’s ability to process benefits, leading to delays in processing VA claims. In other circumstances, clients may need to be re-referred to another organization for mental health services.³²⁷ Therefore, without a complete picture of the timeline and circumstances outside DVS’ control, the clients’ and veteran advocates’ expectations of DVS services may be skewed without this information. Through the veteran advocate survey, most advocates feel that the services provided by DVS are not as timely as expected (28 percent strongly disagreed with the statement “DVS services are provided in a timely manner”). Additionally, 29 percent strongly disagree that DVS responds or takes action within the expected timeframe. Only ten percent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement in both questions.³²⁸ These results indicate a gap between client and advocate expectations and performance regarding timely service delivery and responsiveness. While some advocates believe DVS services are timely and responsive, a more significant percentage expressed dissatisfaction. Despite said dissatisfaction, DVS cannot control the timelines of external entities like the VA and the adverse impact that may have on DVS operations, including its assisting of Veterans.

MMR Review and Evaluation

Key Performance Indicators and Measurable Objectives

Creating clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and connecting them to specific targets is crucial for ensuring that an organization's objectives are effectively measured, monitored, and achieved.

DVS' explicitly defined KPIs exist within the context of the Mayor's Management Report. However, beyond these, there does not appear to be specific and measurable goals to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs and services. For example, one of DVS' short-term goals is to "increase Veteran access to affordable housing through client outreach and education." Because this goal overlaps with Goal 1a of the FY24 MMR (Mitigate and prevent homelessness for Veterans), these metrics can support the broader affordable housing goal. However, if it did not overlap, there would not be specific targets associated, like for other short-term goals. For example, their goal to "support Veterans ... to identify suitable employment opportunities through agency-led 'transition summit'" has no overlap with MMR KPIs and does not have a numerical target tied to it.

MMR Metrics

Since its establishment, DVS has produced seven MMR reports.³²⁹ A review of its most recent MMRs, from FY22 through FY24, shows how the performance indicators established for services have expanded. The FY22 MMR was the last report before the larger expansion and focused primarily on housing placements, homelessness prevention, and resources, with just five KPIs.³³⁰ By FY24, the scope of the MMR expanded to four goals that center around resource accessibility and Veteran health, with a total of fifteen KPIs. The new KPIs that support each goal are used to measure capture more granular data on activities like mental health referrals, collaborative case management vouchers, and the success of outreach, and marketing initiatives to engage specific veteran populations, in addition to the existing housing KPIs.³³¹

In FY24, DVS met its targets in several key areas, including exceeding the housing needs of homeless Veterans and providing homelessness prevention and aftercare services. The target for housing homeless Veterans through the Veteran Peer Coordinator program was set at 87, but DVS successfully housed 126 Veterans, surpassing its target.³³² Similarly, the target for homelessness prevention and aftercare services was 190, and DVS assisted 227 Veterans.³³³ However, the performance in mental health referrals fell short of the targets. The number of referral requests completed was 129, far below the target of 250, likely due to the shift to a voluntary approach in FY24.³³⁴

While these are mixed outcomes, there is a possible explanation for these variances from established targets. Some FY24 and FY25 targets appear too low, risking a situation where the department consistently meets targets easily. Research has found this may not push the agency to improve its performance: "[p]erformance may not improve substantially if targets are set only slightly above the already achieved level. An easy target is unlikely to inspire or motivate managers to improve public services."³³⁵ Additionally, setting targets too high continuously can discourage staff or provide a picture of their efficiency that is not accurate. The targets associated with mental health screenings and referral requests have been adjusted for FY25, signaling DVS is addressing this. The FY25 MMR target for mental health screenings completed was removed, and there is a lower target for mental health referral requests. However, with other targets remaining too high or low, DVS should review each of their MMR KPIs to determine if there are more justifiable targets.

Moreover, there were fluctuations in the output results, which can be seen through several examples:

- While DVS exceeded its housing target in FY24, both of the housing KPIs, “Homeless Veterans and their families who received housing through DVS Veteran Peer Coordinator program” and “Veterans and their families who received homelessness prevention and aftercare assistance from DVS,” did not substantially differ from FY23. In FY23, 123 Veterans and families received housing through the Veteran Peer Coordinator program, rising to 126 in FY24. In FY23, 217 Veterans and families received homelessness prevention and aftercare assistance from DVS, which increased slightly to 227 in FY24.
- Comparing their performance for these KPIs over time can also show an agency’s efficiency. For example, the number of Veterans and their families who received assistance has decreased by 63 percent since FY21, where actual expenditures were lower (in FY21, DVS assisted 617 Veterans and families compared to 227 in FY24).³³⁶
- Other KPIs had substantial improvement: the number of requests from Veterans and their families increased by 970 percent between FY23 and FY24 (2,918 to 31,232). DVS served 10,701 of these requests, a 220 percent increase from FY23 that totaled 3,338.³³⁷ DVS added additional programs into this metric for FY24 (Mission: VetCheck and the HelloFresh Food Program).

By reviewing the FY24 MMR, existing information gaps can be identified. While the updated report provides valuable data on the number of homeless Veterans housed and the number receiving homelessness prevention services, it does not offer insights into the long-term effectiveness of these. Understanding how many Veterans have been successfully placed in housing beyond the Veteran Peer Coordinator program and have had their requests for claims and referral assistance successfully fulfilled is vital. Some potential data points to capture this include the percentage of Veterans successfully placed in housing and the percentage of those Veterans still housed one-, three- and five-years out, Veterans whose request for claims assistance was successfully fulfilled, and Veterans whose request for referral assistance was successfully fulfilled. While the Council did not have the data necessary to analyze these areas in this review, this is something that should be analyzed in the future and tracked by the agency itself. Additionally, by focusing only on event attendance and social media outreach under Goal 2a (Inform Veterans and their families about services, benefits, and resources available to them), DVS may not be able to capture the full breadth of engagement with Veterans. As an aging population, many of their clients likely do not use social media. To expand support of this, DVS could report the open rate of their emailed newsletter, which, in their agency survey, DVS reported was their most helpful tool for understanding its outreach.³³⁸ These gaps suggest that while the MMR provides valuable metrics through its MMR, additional detail and metrics may be necessary.

Sample of Performance Indicators ³³⁹	FY24 Actual	FY24 Target	FY24 Performance	FY25 Target	FY25 4-Month Actual
Homeless Veterans and their families who received housing through DVS Veteran Peer Coordinator program	126	87	144.83%	92	61
Veterans and their families who received homelessness prevention and aftercare assistance from DVS	227	190	119.47%	190	56
Mental health screenings completed	211	730	28.90%	*	12
Mental health referral requests	129	350	36.86%	200	6
Public engagement events attended by DVS to promote Veteran resources	277	365	75.89%	200	66
Online site visits	161,931	150,000	107.95%	160,000	51,729
Social media impressions	474,075	572,015	82.88%	575,000	192,262
Average newsletter subscribers	10,022	10,500	95.45%	10,500	9,792



RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations

Leadership, Strategy, and Direction

1. The Department of Veterans' Services should create, and publicly disseminate, strategy plans:
 - A. A short-term plan that identifies its core services, improvement plans for those services, measurable targeted outcomes for Veterans served (with applicable assessment plans to measure these), along with benchmarks and goals for the Department of Veterans' Services. These should be cornerstone services that the Department envisions a standard of excellence in service delivery and that can build trust between the Department of Veterans' Services and the New York City Veteran community
 - B. A long-term plan describing what DVS envisions itself to be in its second decade. This long-term strategy should be coupled with a needs assessment for New York City Veterans, to help project areas of potential growth or adjustments in resources for the Department. As the Department of Veterans' Services enters its adolescence, it should envision what a "DVS 2.0" should look like in this second decade.

Service Delivery for New Yorkers

2. The Department of Veterans' Services should create, and publicly disseminate, strategy plans:
 - A. DVS should examine current schedules of each of its VRC and update the operating hours to include some weeknight hours and at least one weekend day would better accommodate for Veterans who work jobs with non-standard hours. The VRCs' current operating hours need improvement as they lack the flexibility needed to accommodate Veterans with varying schedules.
 - B. For when VRCs are closed, DVS should evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of 311 being able to log calls from Veterans, gather the pertinent information and input the data into the Department of Veterans' Services' systems for follow-up.
 - C. DVS should reevaluate the location of each VRC to understand what areas are more accessible by public transit and might better serve the current Veteran population.
3. A common theme throughout this report has been the disconnect between how the Department of Veterans' Services views the success of its operations and the opinions held by Veterans and advocates, therefore, the Department of Veterans' Services should collaborate with CBOs and Veteran advocate groups on forward-facing communications to ensure that language used, methods of dissemination and other considerations are taken into account by the Department of Veterans' Services.
 - A. DVS should send out physical mailings to increase non-digital outreach to older Veterans.
 - B. To better facilitate significant and actionable feedback, DVS should create a formal feedback form on its website instead of a freeform comment box.
 - C. To avoid survey fatigue, DVS should evaluate the level, scope, and mode of solicitation for

customer satisfaction and explore the feasibility of conducting surveys by phone.

4. The Department of Veterans' Services should audit its processes for providing housing assistance to Veterans.
5. The Department of Veterans' Services should audit its internal processes through a continuity of care lens. Identifying gaps, bottlenecks or other areas where the Department of Veterans' Services may be falling short will better support Veterans' wellbeing. In addition, creating robust profiles of the Veterans they assist, so that the staff have a full understanding of the Veterans' challenges in addition to the initial request made, and additional care may be provided as necessary.
6. The Department of Veterans' Services should implement call-tracking software, such as Zendesk, to monitor when calls are returned and track when a case is closed.

Relationships and Collaboration

7. The Department of Veterans' Services should engage in meaningful and sustained conversations with outside partners to close the knowledge gap and lessen perceived negative opinions about the Department of Veterans' Services and its operations.
 - A. DVS should hold roundtables and conduct surveys with stakeholders (e.g., Veterans, advocates, CBOs, VSOs, grassroots community organizations, etc.) to solicit feedback on the agency's improvement processes; issues accessing and understanding benefits information; non-digital outreach methods; and service quality among others.
 - i. Segmenting the roundtables by age would be beneficial to understand how challenges change based on a Veteran's age group.

Workforce Development

8. The Department of Veterans' Services should consider quantifying their 'ideal' number of public service employees. Understanding how many staff are currently needed to maintain the Department's service level (through phone calls and at VRCs, for example) will help inform how many additional positions would be needed to expand VRCs.
9. To improve the recruitment and representation of Veterans, the Department of Veterans' Services should expand the preference for Veteran status to include all direct service roles, ensuring that Veterans are hired not only in leadership positions but also in front-facing roles that interact with Veterans and their families. Publicly indicating the Department's internal priorities when hiring direct-service roles will better show Veteran advocates and other community partners the effort to hire Veterans.
10. The Department of Veterans' Services should establish transparent training procedures for new and ongoing staff. By creating such documents, it can confirm with external stakeholders the training provided to staff, filling the information gaps.

Financial and Resources Management

11. The Department of Veterans' Services, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office of Contract Services, should conduct an audit of its existing contracting under a developed list of key performance indicators (KPI) to ensure that every contracting dollar spent by the Department of Veterans' Services

is being used effectively and efficiently, i.e. measuring the value gained from the services provided in relation to the money spent on them.

Digital Government

12. The Department of Veterans' Services should create and publicly disseminate a master digital strategy plan, taking into consideration and accounting for:
 - A. Mechanisms that can help to implement and fund their digital strategies. This information could help to justify and enable further resource allocations for simplifying and coordinating their digital efforts.
 - B. Identifying ways for stakeholders and the Veteran community to have open access to its digital system development process to encourage public engagement throughout the policy life cycle.
 - C. Leveraging its relationships with agencies such as OTI to obtain more targeted feedback that takes closer account of the needs of the Veteran community, including more regular monitoring of users' experiences with its online platforms.
 - D. Conducting routine performance assessments of its digital services, to better track how well those services are meeting their strategic objectives.
 - E. Implementing a continuous improvement approach to how it engages with the Veteran community that monitors existing efforts such as surveys, online feedback forms, and other means, and makes regular findings on how those efforts can be better tailored to the community using digital tools.

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

13. The Department of Veterans' Services should publish its policies for sharing data on its website so that stakeholders understand the limitations of what they can share publicly.
14. The Department of Veterans' Services should consider adding additional case-related details in its internal files to improve its usability. For instance, including dates a client's case was opened and closed could help track the average time to resolve a case.
15. The current "outcome_description" column includes many unique descriptions. The Department of Veterans' Services should consider grouping options for this field into broader categories, like "Received Benefits," "Ineligible for Benefits," "Employed," "Unable to Contact," etc. If the current level of detail is necessary, adding an additional outcome detail field could be beneficial. This would allow the Department to keep broad outcomes for data analysis while providing more granular descriptions in a separate field during operations.

Appendix

Scope and Methodology

Statutory Authority and Scope

The scope of the authority for the inaugural assessments conducted under this framework is pursuant to the Council's Charter-mandated powers. New York City Charter Section 29 provides the Council the ability to "investigate any matters within its jurisdiction" and "review ... the activities of the agencies of the city, including their service goals and performance and management efficiency."³⁴⁰ As part of the Council's legislative professional staff, the assessment team is empowered by Charter Section 47 to "assist ... in [the] review of the performance and management of city agencies."³⁴¹ Charter Section 1128 requires agency and administration officials to cooperate with any investigation conducted pursuant to the Charter.³⁴²

Methodology

For the inaugural round of the Report Card Initiative, the Council focused on three areas of information collection: advocate engagement, agency engagement, and independent research.

For engaging advocates, the Council used non-statistical sampling approaches to provide conclusions on advocate sentiment and recommendations. The assessment team selected judgmental samples based on "professional judgment, expertise, and knowledge."³⁴³ However, due to this non-statistical sampling approach, the assessment team did not project these conclusions and recommendations to reflect the total advocate population. The samples consist of in-person roundtables with advocates and written surveys of advocates concerning agency performance. As circumstances permitted, the Council engaged advocates in follow-up meetings to gain further insight into the topics raised as part of our standard outreach.

For engaging agencies, the assessment team also used non-statistical agency surveys with two sets of requests for written responses. The second round of agency questions focused on the seven pillars of the framework, detailed below. While these requests were issued to each agency, the assessment team understood that different offices and departments throughout the Administration vetted these responses before submission to the Council. As such, agency responses were viewed with a whole-of-Administration lens. The assessment team also issued data requests and requests for follow-up meetings with agency subject matter experts. Additionally, requests for information were issued to supporting offices throughout the Administration.

As part of the analysis of agency performance and capability, the assessment team identified areas of focus for each agency assessed, including recommendations for areas of performance to improve weaknesses and resolve inefficiencies.

Organizational Analysis

The framework centers around seven pillars:

- Leadership, Strategy, and Direction
- Service Delivery for New Yorkers
- Relationships and Collaboration
- Workforce Development

- Financial and Resources Management
- Digital Government
- Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Within each pillar, the framework allows for more detailed analysis using best practices from sources such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).^{344,345}

While the framework considers current agency performance, weight was also given to an agency's demonstrated capability to deliver improved services in the foreseeable future. The framework accomplishes this by adapting performance-based elements from the Baldrige Excellence Framework and other commonly-used public sector performance measurement approaches, while also using capability-based elements from the aforementioned New Zealand and Australia models, along with parts of frameworks used in Europe,³⁴⁶ the United Kingdom,³⁴⁷ Canada,³⁴⁸ Ireland,³⁴⁹ and South Korea,³⁵⁰ amongst others.

Leadership, Strategy, and Direction

The Leadership, Strategy, and Direction pillar focuses on the capability of the agency's leadership to properly steer the agency and prepare for the future. This review evaluates how the executive team and the agency as a whole develop, implement, and adhere to its mission, vision, values, and strategies.

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Description of the Indicator
Leadership, Strategy, and Direction	Leadership and Governance	How an agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides direction and communicates its mission, vision, and values Develops a framework for decision-making and establishing a chain of command
	Strategy Development	How an agency considers strategic advantages, disadvantages, and risks during the development of its strategic plan
	Strategy Implementation	How an agency deploys and modifies its strategic plan

Service Delivery for New Yorkers

The Service Delivery for New Yorkers pillar encompasses the accessibility, inclusivity, and availability of all agency services. This review measures how well the agency is accounting for and meeting the needs of the community using the resources available to the agency.

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Description of the Indicator
Service Delivery for New Yorkers	Equity	How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusivity of services and resources Consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner
	Access	How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical accessibility of services and resources Availability of assistance Plans to mitigate and reduce programmatic barriers Program and resource adaptability
	Meeting Demand	How well an agency assesses and meets the needs of the community

Relationships and Collaboration

The Relationships and Collaboration pillar assesses how inclusive the agency's policy design and improvement processes are. This review also evaluates how well the agency works with outside partners, since agencies often collaborate with outside stakeholders, such as community-based organizations and other governmental agencies, to achieve shared goals. The evaluation is conducted with an understanding that positive working relationships and collaboration are contingent on outside partners' willingness to work with the agencies.

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Description of the Indicator
Relationships and Collaboration	Stakeholder Engagement	In program creation and improving processes, how well an agency accounts for maintaining consistent and proactive engagement with vital partners such as community-based organizations, volunteer groups, and community members
	Institutional Engagement	How well an agency collaborates with other governmental agencies to achieve shared goals

Workforce Development

The Workforce Development pillar focuses on the agency's staff capacity, training, and development. This review measures how well the agency maintains its headcount, trains and develops its staff, and ensures that staff are reflective of the communities being served. This pillar is evaluated with an understanding that the agency maintains and develops staff using the resources available to the agency.

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Description of the Indicator
Workforce Development	Staff Capacity	How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staffing levels proportionate to the community's level of need ▪ Filling and maintaining its budgeted headcount
	Staff Development	How well an agency accounts for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transparency and accountability of staff recruitment processes ▪ Staff training and development ▪ Staff readiness to support community needs

Financial and Resources Management

The Financial and Resources Management pillar presents the resources and budget allocated to the agency and outlines the current citywide procurement process.

Pillar	Indicators	Description of the Indicator
Financial and Resources Management	Financial Management	Presentation of agency's resources and budget allocations
	Review of the Procurement Process	<p>There are a number of similar issues raised by agency RFPs, contracting, and late payments (for non-profit providers), but this report card will not evaluate this type of agency work. Instead, the report card will outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal Landscape ▪ Key Procurement Achievements ▪ Issues and Concerns ▪ Next Steps

Digital Government

The Digital Government pillar evaluates how advanced an agency's digital government strategies, implementation, and performance are across multiple elements. An agency's efforts are reviewed within the wider framework to ascertain whether it has the capability to achieve its intended outcomes, as well as whether the agency is effectively prioritizing its resources to meet existing mandates. This Pillar draws on aspects of digital government identified by the OECD, United Nations e-Government development models, and other frameworks.

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Description of the Indicator
Digital Government	Strategic Approach	Overarching strategies, policy frameworks, and goals for digital government
	Policy Levers	Resources and tools to enable the implementation of the strategic approach
	Implementation	Practices to execute the strategic approach into a concrete action
	Monitoring	Resources and tools to track progress or evaluate the implementation

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

The Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management pillar measures the agency's compliance with Open Data laws, the City Charter, and relevant local laws. This review also assesses the Mayor's Management Report (MMR) targets, performance results, and any information gaps.

For the review of an agency's reporting obligations and compliance with the City's Open Data Laws,³⁵¹ the framework draws on aspects of the three main facets from the OECD's Open, Useful, and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index: data availability, data accessibility, and government support for reuse.³⁵²

Additionally, the framework uses established best practices in performance measurement to review an agency's performance indicators listed in the (MMR).

Pillar	Indicators Covered by the Targeted Review	Description of the Indicator
Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management	Reporting and Data Availability	<p>Whether required reporting is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed in a timely and complete manner Presented in a manner compliant with the requirement to transmit data "in a non-proprietary format that permits automated processing" (e.g. Microsoft Excel) pursuant to New York City Charter § 1134³⁵³ (and provisions of the City's Open Data Laws) Presented in a publicly accessible manner
	MMR Review and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting Targets^{354,355} (Review of targeted vs. actual performance indicators in the MMR³⁵⁶) Efficiency³⁵⁷ (Assessment of MMR performance results compared to budgeted costs) Information Gaps³⁵⁸ (Areas where the MMR does not address aspects of an agency's mission)

Abbreviations

CBO – Community-based Organization

DOITT – Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications

DVS – Department of Veterans' Services

GAO – U.S. Government Accountability Office

LL – Local Law

MOCS – Mayor's Office of Contract Services

MONS – Mayor's Office of Nonprofit Services

MMR – Mayor's Management Report

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OTI – Office of Technology and Innovation

VA – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VRC – Veteran Resource Center

VSO – Veteran Service Organization

VAB – Veterans Advisory Board

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Data Operations

Anne Driscoll

Web Development Unit

Johnathan Chei, Anthony Taylor

Committee on Veterans

Ross Goldstein, John LaRosa, Regina Paul

Event and Production Services Unit

Brittany Ng, Dickson Tan, Cassandra Tennyson

Oversight & Investigations Division

Zachary Meher-Casallas, Katie Sinise

Editorial Assistance

Bill Drafting Division: Jessie Foong, Johari Frasier, Pauline Syrnik. **Human Services Division:** Regina Paul, Chloë Rivera. **Infrastructure Division:** Kevin Kotowski. **Governmental Affairs Division:** Erica Cohen. **Finance Division:** Julia Haramis. **Oversight & Investigations Division:** Zachary Meher-Casallas, Meagan Powers. **Office of the Speaker:** Meghan Lynch

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Endnotes

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- ²⁰⁴ Information provided by Department of Veterans' Services on July 17, 2024. On file with the Compliance Division.
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