

Incorporating Public Comments: Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)

In spring 2026, the Olmstead Implementation Office (OIO), in partnership with the Dendros Group, Inclusion Consultants, and state staff, held a public comment period. This included:

- Virtual meetings
- An online survey in multiple languages
- Individual interviews
- Submissions from organizations
- Email comments

This document includes themes from all public comment. Agency teams were asked to address how feedback was incorporated into their goals and strategies in the Olmstead Plan.

For more information about these feedback themes, please review the public comment summary reports for employment and housing.

Feedback on Employment Goal 2

Employment Goal 2: More Veterans with disabilities will have jobs in the community

Based off feedback received, the Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) agency team changed Employment Goal 2 to a Data Goal. The new details of the goal are included below.

Employment Data Goal 2: More Veterans with disabilities will have jobs in the community

Lead agency: Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)

What is this goal about?

This data development goal is about expanding outreach to Veterans with disabilities or health conditions who:

- Use non-VA healthcare systems

- Are job seeking

Why does this goal matter?

Employment is a key source of income and community connection. Veterans tend to have a harder time finding jobs than non-veterans. One reason is that military experience doesn't always align with non-military job requirements. Disabled Veterans experience unemployment at even higher rates. Many Veterans who use non-VA healthcare systems are job seeking but lack connections to Veteran specific employment resources. Job services can help Veterans find meaningful work.

How we track our progress

Data Development Plan:

MDVA is improving employment engagement efforts in non-VA healthcare systems. Around half of American Veterans do not use the VA for care. This could be because of where they live, personal preference, or long wait times. Many of these Veterans may be seeking employment. However, they lack the connection to Veteran-specific employment resources.

MDVA aims to partner with nine healthcare systems. The partnership will help ensure that Veterans response models and services are appropriate. It is vital that Veterans are not missing out on employment resources that can help them.

MDVA is in the beginning stages of this work. The agency is working to build connections with healthcare systems across the state. MDVA's Veteran Health Navigators are essential in this. They work with healthcare systems to identify Veterans and connect them to services. The services available to Veterans will range. Services include care coordination, education services, and employment services such as Veteran Readiness and Employment. Services will also include non-profit, state, and federal employment resources.

Once fully embedded across the state, MDVA will begin tracking the number of disabled Veterans who were connected to employment services. This will create baseline data. A goal will be created to increase the number of disabled Veterans who are referred to employment services.

About this data:

This data will come from non-VA healthcare systems that are partnering with MDVA in this initiative.

Strategies

To reach this goal, MDVA will:

- Partner with healthcare systems across the state. Together they will improve outreach efforts to Veterans who do not engage with Veteran specific services and resources.

- Collaboratively assist healthcare systems to use person centered practices. This will help address the needs of Veterans with disabilities and health conditions that are employment seeking.
- Engage with healthcare systems to develop data reporting requirements. This includes gathering data that speaks to a variety of Veteran identities and backgrounds that receive care in these systems.

The feedback received about Employment Goal 2 encouraged MDVA to change to a Data Goal. That feedback and MDVA's response are included below.

Feedback theme: The targets for this goal are too low and lack context

The MDVA agency team wrote:

Our previous goal with DEED intended report on Veterans with disabilities who successfully connected with appropriate employment. We recognize that the target for this goal was small, as DEED's Veteran Employment program has limited capacity to serve a large number of Veterans across the state. Unfortunately, we have no alternative ways to track Veterans with disabilities who are employment seeking or who are successfully connected to employment through State administered programs. We intend to use this data development goal in a way to increase the identification of Veterans with disabilities who are employment seeking.

Feedback theme: Veterans face unique challenges and need stronger, streamlined employment assistance

The MDVA agency team wrote:

While we originally partnered with DEED on a Veteran employment goal to address this exact concern, we also understand that program's limited capacity to serve a great number of Veteran makes it hard for the public to see meaningful progress. We have pivoted to a data development goal to address comments that describe the goal as too low in hopes that we can identify more Veterans with disabilities seeking employment.

General feedback themes for all employment goals

Feedback theme: The employment goal targets are too low

The MDVA agency team wrote:

We recognize that while very important, DEED's Veteran employment program captures a small group of Veterans with disabilities who are seeking employment. We know there are more Veterans across the state who have disabilities or who are service connected that are seeking employment. Our agency needs a better idea of where these Veterans are and what kind of

employment services they are seeking, which is something we can aim to do with our initiative to embed Veteran Health Navigators in non-VA healthcare systems. We have created a data development plan related to the Veteran Health Navigator initiative that will have an employment component.

Feedback theme: Employers should be incentivized and held accountable

Some employers continue to discriminate against people with disabilities and employment goals should focus on enforcement and accountability.

MDVA did not update their goal based off this feedback. They wrote: “This is not relevant to our new data development goal as we do not work with employers.”

Feedback theme: State systems are too complicated and do not hold employers or agencies accountable

MDVA did not update their goal using this feedback. They wrote:

Our new data development goal is centered around increased identification of employment seeking disabled Veterans. It does not intend to work with employers directly. We will be partnering with non-VA healthcare systems who will be held accountable to provide MDVA with data related to the Veteran Health Navigator project.

Feedback theme: People need sustained, quality employment built on person-centeredness

MDVA did not update their goal based on this feedback. They wrote:

We are pivoting our plan to focus on an employment centered data development goal. We are still working to identify areas in which we can work towards connecting Veterans to appropriate employment services and hoping to achieve this through the Veteran Health Navigator project. While our previous goal with DEED did aim to provide person centered employment services to Veterans with disabilities, we understand from public comments that this goal appears low as the overall capacity for this specific service is limited.

Feedback theme: Intersectionality

Community members said the state must address disparities based on other identities held by people with disabilities. These identities can include race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, language, and more.

MDVA did not update their goal using this feedback. They wrote:

While we recognize that intersectionality plays a factor in employment rates among Veterans with disabilities, we are still working to determine to what extent this impacts the Veterans our agency will work with. Once we gather data from the various health systems we partner within this initiative to build on this goal, we may be able to pull in additional information related to intersectionality.

Feedback theme: Income limits are harmful to employees with disabilities.

MDVA did not update their goal using this feedback. They wrote: “This is a data development goal and does not intend to address the difficulties Veterans with disabilities have with income limits related to employment.”

Feedback theme: The shortage of quality, well-trained staff should be directly addressed

This feedback influenced changes to this goal. MDVA wrote:

The Veteran Health Navigators in this program will be well trained to work with non-VA health systems to equip them with the employment resources and services for Veterans identified in these systems. We hope this fills the gap that employment seeking Veterans with disabilities may be facing as noted in this feedback.

Feedback theme: Transportation issues impact employment in Greater Minnesota and rural areas

MDVA did not update their goal using this feedback. They wrote: “This data development goal does not have intend to cover transportation issues related to employment among Veterans with disabilities. This is outside of our scope.”

Feedback on Health and Safety Goal 1

Health and Safety Goal 1: More Veterans with disabilities will receive disability compensation.

Feedback theme: This goal is too narrow

MDVA updated this goal using the feedback. They wrote:

Our goal is more ambitious. It is important to recognize that data related to this goal comes from the federal Veterans Benefits Administration and is based on historical reports of service-connected Veterans for our state. Trends in numbers were tracked starting from 2020; years 2020, 2021, and 2022 had slow growth due to the pandemic which accounted for low average percentage of growth in our original calculation. In recent years, growth has been much more than that (around 2%-2.5% per year) which is what we have updated our goal to reflect.

Feedback theme: Strategy suggestions for Health and Safety Goal 1

MDVA changed their goal strategies based on feedback. The wrote:

Our strategies are now more specific, emphasizing the various ways the agency can connect eligible Veterans to the disability claims process.

There are a few ways in which we cannot update our goals and strategies on this feedback. VA disability claims are not approved by MDVA; this is a federal benefit decided by the federal VA. MDVA can support the navigation of this process, both within the agency and outside with our Veteran advocate partners, but the agency has little to no impact on eligibility decisions or the timeline in which these are made. We hope to increase our ability to identify Veterans outside of Veteran specific systems so we can ensure they are connected to the benefits they are entitled to, including disability compensation.

We initially developed this goal as an awareness and outreach effort. This was a common theme heard in community conversations and from our Inclusion Consultants. Measuring awareness is difficult. We decided to measure the number of statewide service-connected Veterans to not only measure how many Veterans with disabilities are receiving this benefit in Minnesota, but also to measure their awareness of Veteran specific resources and services. The public comments on this goal are important, but the suggestions fall outside of the scope of our agency.