



Division of Veterans Services—The Newest Group Under the DHS Umbrella



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Allegheny County has long had a Department of Veterans Services, but the recent decision to relocate them to the DHS Office of Community Services makes complete sense when considering their role and their mission. “There are about 63,000 veterans in Allegheny County and it’s our goal to reach as many of them as we can to make sure they are getting the proper services they are entitled to,” says John Kaufman, Chief Veteran Affairs Officer. “Because DHS already touches so many other areas and communities, being here allows us to meet people where they are at.”

John leads the team, and while he’s located in the Human Services building, other members are spread around the County, allowing a Veterans Services representative to always be “nearby.” This includes Jaleesa Holifield, also at HSB, Kevin Carmichael and Hannah Trieu at Mon Valley CYF, and Julian Holland at CYF East Regional Office.

“Upon release from the military, you get your discharge papers and are pointed to the nearest VA healthcare facility. That’s about the extent of community reintegration,” says John. There are actually a lot of funded services that veterans can take advantage of, but it can be a little challenging to navigate the system, and that’s where the Division of

Veterans Services comes in. The two biggest programs they assist with are connecting people to VA disability services and assisting with survivor benefits. They also answer questions, facilitate applications, and can just be an ear for folks who are frustrated.

“Younger vets are used to going online and finding the information they need, but for a lot of our older vets, that’s not the case. And they’re not as used to reaching out for help either, so we might go and just sit at different locations for couple of days before some of the regulars really become comfortable with us,” John says. And their determination has really been paying off. In the first few months of 2025, they have already had interactions with 2200 veterans and assisted in drawing down \$1.7 million in VA compensation. And like all parts of the Human Services, there’s always room for growth. The team is hoping to add another position shortly to allow them to assist event more people.

If you have served in the military or are working with someone who served in the military, Allegheny County Veteran Services can be reached at 412.621.4357 or employees can drop in at any of their office locations.



Behavioral Health Fellowship Program Celebrates Its First Graduating Class



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On Thursday, May 8, twenty-three BH Fellows from the program's inaugural cohort were celebrated in a graduation ceremony and luncheon at the Pittsburgh Botanical Gardens. The ceremony marked the completion of a unique two-year program designed to help strengthen the region's behavioral health direct-care workforce, through support from the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

On hand to offer remarks were Karen Feinstein, President, Jewish Healthcare Foundation, DHS Director Erin Dalton, and County Executive Sara Innamorato, who praised the group for taking a chance two years ago on a new program that ultimately will make “a difference for you, both professionally and in your personal lives, as well for the members of our community that you serve every single day.” Along with praising the graduates, speakers also thanked the many provider groups, members of the education community, foundations, and others who help make this program possible.

BH Fellows are guaranteed full-time employment at a participating area behavioral health provider agency, and, while in the program are eligible for student loan repayment and additional training opportunities. The program currently has 124 Fellows across six cohorts serving in areas including family based mental health, crisis services, case management for substance use disorders, and more. Information on the program [can be found here](#).

