

On April 8, 1946, at the invitation of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs, representatives of several national veterans and welfare organizations met in Washington, D.C., with representatives of the Veterans Administration Central Office staff. They discussed the plan for the coordination and integration of community and voluntary assistance in hospitals and domiciliaries.

DAV was represented at that initial meeting to take part in forming a plan for Veterans Administration volunteer activities. The meeting resulted in the creation of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program, under which volunteers would assist hospital staff by supplementing the individualized patient services.

Under the VAVS program, veterans and welfare organizations work in conjunction with the VA to develop the effective use of community volunteer resources. Additionally, these organizations enjoy worthwhile participation in the VAVS program through the VAVS National Advisory Committee.

The VA operates the largest network of health care facilities and domiciliaries in the United States. It also operates many community-based outpatient clinics and vet centers. The VAVS program assists professional staff in the healing and rehabilitation of ill and injured veterans. This joint effort of staff and volunteers assists veterans during the treatment, healing and recovery processes.

Volunteers in no way replace staff members, but they do provide a service beyond the scope of the medical center staff—a touch of home, a feeling of belonging, a bond with the outside world and help instilling a desire in the individual patients to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

Volunteers who participate in this program range from teenagers to senior citizens. Most volunteers belong to veterans service and fraternal organizations, which collaborate with the VAVS through their organization's VAVS Representatives. Other volunteers participate in the program by directly contacting the Voluntary Service Program Manager at a VA health care facility.