

ARTS AND THE MILITARY

Improving the Health and Well-Being of Military & Veterans' Populations through the Arts

ACTION NEEDED

We urge Congress to:

- Support anticipated recommendations from the National Defense Authorization Act report to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees that increase use of creative arts therapies that build resilience and support recovery of service members and their families.
- Support increased funding through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand the number of creative arts therapists employed in the VA providing clinical treatment in medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), and in virtual and telehealth services that reach a large number of rural and isolated Veterans.
- Support increased funding through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) to build more community partnerships that provide lifetime access to creative arts therapies and arts-based programming for active military, Veterans, their families, and caregivers.
- Support continued funding to the National Endowment for the Arts for the Creative Forces National Grant Program, which will provide resources to nonprofit arts organizations across the country providing programs and services for military-connected populations through the arts.

TALKING POINTS

Creative Arts Therapies and Community Arts-Based Programs Help Military and Veteran Populations

- The **Youngstown Veterans Outpatient Clinic (YVOC), Ohio**, launched Artful Living: A Whole Health Community Partnership virtual program in October 2020 to combat COVID-19-related isolation among its Veteran population and to complement the telehealth work of its art and music therapists. With funding from the VA Whole Health Program, the YVOC worked with seven community organizations to offer virtual classes including creative writing, songwriting, dance/movement, improvisation, drum circles, art appreciation, art creation, and Veteran-made/Veteran-themed national films.
- **Soldier Song & Voices in Northwest Arkansas** connects Veterans who perform music and create original visual arts pieces. They compete at the regional level for VA arts competition, and many have placed nationally. The artwork and cultural pieces are tied to mental health programs.
- The **Currier Museum of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire**, received **\$717,500 in CARES Act funding** to support Veterans, active service members, and their families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The museum's remote art therapy programs will be enhanced for Veterans unable to physically attend programs.
- The **Oklahoma Arts Council** now offers the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Grants, designed to empower organizations to serve military-connected individuals through learning and audience-based programs. These grants stem from the state agency's arts and military initiative, which began in 2015 and has included a partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **Blue Star Museums** offers free admission to **more than 2,000 museums across America** from Memorial Day through Labor Day each year. In the past five years, more than **4 million** active-duty members, National Guard, Reservists, and their families have participated.
- The **Big Red Barn Retreat (BRBR) in Blythewood, South Carolina**, offers integrated practices and programs that allow Warriors to thrive at home. In 2021, a credentialed art therapist is leading the **THRIVES Program**, a 10-week art therapy group using a mindfulness approach to navigate relationships by integrating vital emotional skills.

CREATIVE FORCES®: NEA MILITARY HEALING ARTS NETWORK

Established in 2012, this initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and state and local arts agencies seeks to improve the health, wellness, and quality of life for

military and Veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers. Creative Forces has grown to include multiple clinical sites at the Department of Defense and Veterans Health Administration treatment facilities across the nation and is managed in partnership with Americans for the Arts and the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine. Highlights include:

- **28 creative arts therapists (CATs)** work in **13 clinical settings** including providing services through **telehealth programs for rural and remote areas** and in **response to the COVID-19 crisis**.
- Despite significant disruption of services from COVID-19, over **14,000 patient treatment encounters** were delivered by Creative Forces CATs in 2020.
- **Over 12,000 patients** have been served since 2012 with an average of **2,800 new patients annually**.
- Since 2016, **19 Creative Forces clinical research studies have been published** in peer-reviewed journals.
- **10 Community Connections projects** were offered from 2018-2020 near existing clinical Creative Forces sites, designed to improve health, wellness, and quality of life for military-connected individuals. In **response to the COVID-19 crisis**, many of these projects **transitioned to virtual platforms**, and **seven sites received funding** to continue virtual work and document their learnings for the **Creative Forces National Resource Center**, which **launched July 2020** (creativeforcesnrc.arts.gov/).
- Through a cooperative agreement with **Mid-America Arts Alliance (based in Kansas City, Missouri)**, Creative Forces Community Engagement grants awarded more than \$750,000 to 26 organizations across the country offering nonclinical arts programs to military populations—active duty, reserve, Veterans—and their family members and caregivers.

BACKGROUND

“Arts and the Military” includes the professional creative arts therapies disciplines of art therapy, music therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, psychodrama, and biblio/poetry therapy, all of which are nationally board-certified therapies with licensure in selected states, as well as artist-directed applications of visual, literary and performing arts, and design. Economic analyses, cost studies, and clinical research show a positive trend in the use of creative arts therapies and their impact on containing healthcare costs and facilitating functional outcomes achievement. These clinical therapists and community artists provide quality, cost-effective healthcare and wellness services for military, Veterans, and their families.

In FY 2020, Congress took a positive step forward by including language in the DoD appropriations bill to increase support for creative arts therapies for service members with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions. Additionally, Congress also included language for increased support for creative arts therapies and first-time funding of \$5 million to provide arts-based treatments, programs, and partnerships serving Veterans through the VA’s Whole Health Initiative.

In FY 2021, Congress followed up on the DoD and VA appropriations bill language by including language in the FY 2021 NDAA bill recognizing that the use of creative arts therapies shows potential in treating servicemembers with traumatic brain injuries and psychological health conditions and that expanding this program could be beneficial to servicemembers and families. Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees not later than 90 days after the enactment of the FY 2021 NDAA bill on the feasibility of expanding the creative arts therapies program. The report shall include: the current funding and investment in creative arts therapies at the National Intrepid Centers, the projected cost to expand creative arts therapies, and the number of locations to which the program could be expanded.

Issue brief prepared by the Cultural Advocacy Group, a collaboration of arts and culture stakeholders working collectively to advance federal policy. Updated 2021.