

SNAPSHOT

State Benefits for Veterans in Tennessee

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In response to a legislative request about state benefits for veterans, the Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) identified more than 40 benefits, services, and protections for veterans and their families provided by the State of Tennessee. State agencies providing benefits include the Tennessee Departments of Veterans Services, Revenue, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Treasury, Safety and Homeland Security, and Environment and Conservation. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Tennessee State Veterans' Homes Board, Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, and the Tennessee Comptroller's Office, among others, also provide certain benefits to veterans and qualifying dependents.

State benefits provided to veterans in fiscal year 2019-20 totaled at least \$30.3 million in recurring costs and at least \$1.1 million in nonrecurring costs. These figures are based on benefits and services for which costs could be calculated. Among recurring costs – which include both actual expenditures and estimates of forgone revenue that occur when state fees are waived or discounted for veterans – the largest was the state's expenditure for disabled veterans' property tax relief. At \$20.9 million in fiscal year 2019-20, it had a larger state fiscal impact than the other remaining recurring benefits and services combined. The next largest cost was the approximately \$6.2 million in state appropriations for the Tennessee Department of Veterans Services. The main duties of the department are to provide information and assistance to veterans through its local offices and to maintain and operate the state's veterans cemeteries.

Other veteran-related state expenditures are nonrecurring, such as capital appropriations used as matching funds to qualify for federal nursing home construction grants or for land acquisition for nursing homes or state veterans cemeteries. Veteran Reconnect grants are another example of a veteran-related nonrecurring appropriation. THEC awards these grants, which have averaged approximately \$1.05 million per year over the last three years, to public and private campuses to help improve the ability of higher education institutions to support student veterans.

All states offer a variety of benefits and services to their veterans. The greatest number of veterans benefits offered by states were in the categories of education and employment. At least three-fourths of other states offer benefits similar to many of those offered by Tennessee, including a state-level department for veterans services, veterans cemeteries and nursing homes, property tax relief, veteran specialty license plates and designations on driver licenses, state job hiring preferences, out-of-state tuition exemptions, and discounted rates on hunting and fishing licenses and camping fees.

Tennessee is home to 460,692 veterans according to the most recent data available. A total number of veterans who receive state benefits is not available; adding together the number of veterans receiving different benefits does not provide an accurate figure because a veteran may receive benefits from multiple state agencies. The state's veteran population has declined by almost 9 percent since 2015 and is expected to continue declining at both the state and national levels in coming years. Estimates of Tennessee's veteran population by 2030 place it at just under 400,000.

To learn more about this study, see the full report at: tncot.cc/orea.