

# Volunteers Wanted

## A Critical Support System For Veterans

(NAPS)—There are certain aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that many Americans may not have thought about. For example, one area that saw a sharp decline was volunteerism—placing heavy burdens on nonprofit organizations that rely on the compassion of their volunteer forces.

According to a recent research survey by Fidelity Charitable, a nonprofit organization created by Fidelity Investments, two-thirds of all U.S. volunteers had either decreased volunteer hours or stopped volunteering altogether because of the pandemic.

### Volunteer to Help Veterans

One nonprofit feeling the effects is DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and its Transportation Network, which has helped get veterans to and from medical appointments since 1987, when the government-run system was shut down. The nationwide DAV Transportation Network provides no-cost rides to veterans who need help getting to their Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers and clinics. Prior to 2020, volunteer drivers spent more than one million hours and logged over 20 million miles, providing more than 600,000 rides for veterans each year.

“We’ve seen a major decline over the past year in volunteer support across all of our programs,” said John Kleindienst, Director of Voluntary Services at DAV. “For our aging veteran population, getting to and from critical care appointments is a growing concern and without volunteers, many veterans have no way to access their health care or get other much needed support.”

Ramping up volunteerism for the DAV Transportation Network is critical as the pandemic restrictions lift, as it is anticipated that higher than average numbers of veterans will return to the VA both for routine appointments and for care that was delayed over the past year.



**Helping a veteran get to needed medical care can be a great way to give back.**

“While safety has been the key priority, we have to think toward the next phase and be prepared to meet this increased demand for transportation,” Kleindienst added. “We know the pandemic has hurt a lot of veterans and they might not get the care they earned without our dedicated volunteers. We need the help.”

VolunteerMatch’s survey, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Volunteering” found many in the nonprofit sector are rethinking volunteer engagement strategies to accommodate the current environment. While this strategy works for some sectors, it can be challenging for others.

Nonprofits, such as DAV, are hopeful that there is light at the end of the pandemic tunnel as vaccines are made widely available, restrictions are lifted and communities can safely get back to volunteering.

“We know there are many passionate and dedicated volunteers who are ready to step up and support our nation’s veterans and with added safety measures in place we’re beginning to see more people coming out to help. We can only hope it will be enough to keep pace with those veterans in need,” added Kleindienst.

### Learn More

If you are a veteran in need of support or want to learn more about volunteer opportunities in the community, go to [dav.org/volunteer](http://dav.org/volunteer).