

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services State Veterans' Homes

Department operates State Veterans' Homes, reported implementing emergency actions to respond to COVID-19 pandemic, and took action to correct licensing, health, safety, and infection-control deficiencies, but preferences are shifting to home-based care

Audit purpose

To provide information about the Department's State Veterans' Homes (Homes), Arizona veterans' long-term care options, and shifting preferences and funding for long-term care services; the processes and requirements for constructing veterans' long-term care facilities; and the Phoenix and Tucson Homes' compliance with State licensing and federal certification requirements and standards and quality-of-care ratings from 2017 through 2020.

Key findings

- To provide long-term skilled nursing care to eligible Arizona veterans and their spouses, the Department operates a 200-bed Home in Phoenix, a 120-bed Home in Tucson, and is constructing 2 new 80-bed Homes in Flagstaff and Yuma, which it expects will begin admitting residents in fiscal year 2022.
- The Department reported implementing screening requirements, restricting visitor access, routinely testing the Homes' staff, and vaccinating residents and staff at the Phoenix and Tucson Homes to address the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Infection rates and deaths—According to federal data, as of March 14, 2021, the Homes reported 70 residents and 97 staff with confirmed COVID-19 cases and 16 resident deaths.
 - Resident vaccination rates—As of March 26, 2021, 79 of 103 Phoenix Home residents and 80 of 87 Tucson Home residents had received 1 or both COVID-19 vaccine doses.
 - Staff vaccination rates—As of March 26, 2021, 90 of 153 Phoenix Home staff and 100 of 153 Tucson Home staff had received 1 or both COVID-19 vaccine doses.
- The Homes must be financially self-sustaining and during fiscal year 2020, their revenues and expenditures totaled approximately \$40.4 million and nearly \$37.4 million, respectively. The Department plans to use the Homes' Trust Fund's \$30.3 million balance to pay for the new Flagstaff and Yuma Homes' initial operating costs.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides grant funding to eligible states to pay for up to 65 percent of the construction costs to build or renovate state veterans' homes. The State must commit funding for the remaining 35 percent of construction costs. The State has considered adding more Homes and additional long-term care options are available to Arizona veterans. Finally, Arizona's veteran population is projected to decline, and individuals' long-term care preferences and VA and CMS funding are shifting to home- and community-based services, which might impact veterans' demand for institutional long-term care in Arizona.
- The Phoenix and Tucson Homes were cited by federal regulators for health, safety, and quality-of-care deficiencies between 2017 and 2019 and took required corrective action. The Phoenix Home was cited for more CMS health deficiencies and the Tucson Home was cited for fewer CMS health deficiencies than State and national averages.

Key recommendations

There were no recommendations for this report.