

## Simmy Foundation partners with Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs to increase awareness of VORP, support veteran's mental health

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*Innovative VORP program helps veterans in the communities where they live*

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STEVENS POINT, WISCONSIN, USA, June 30, 2021/ -- The Jason Simcakoski ("Simmy") Foundation today announced a new initiative to help raise awareness of and access to the Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs' (WDVA) Wisconsin Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program, or [VORP](#).

The Simmy Foundation is raising funds and working with partners to create billboards, digital advertising and grassroots outreach to increase awareness among veterans and their families about VORP. The goal is that—by increasing awareness—the number of veterans enrolled in and benefiting from the VORP program will increase as well. An example below is an electronic Milwaukee billboard currently running on I-94 near Marquette.



VORP is a unique Wisconsin state program that supports veterans, providing community-based outreach and holistic services. VORP has eleven regions, each with its own coordinator. These coordinators are locally based and work through community groups to identify and help veterans in need.

“VORP has empowered veterans to create meaningful and lasting change in their own lives,” said WDVA Secretary Mary Kolar. “Local VORP coordinators connect and develop relationships with veterans in their communities. These relationships aid in the identification of needs and the alignment of services to meet those needs, including economic and mental health supports.”

The Simmy Foundation is dedicated to increasing access to quality mental health services for veterans and their families and to promote effective, non-pharmaceutical alternative treatments. The Simmy Foundation, named after Jason Simcakoski a former marine who died of an opioid overdose, was instrumental in the passage of the federal Jason's Law. Jason's Law has led to steep reductions in the number of veterans on chronic opioids both in Wisconsin and around the country.

“Because of our focus on improving mental health services for vets, the Simmy Foundation sees the tremendous value in a program like VORP,” said Foundation President Marv Simcakoski. “There are some veterans who do not go to the US Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), but still need help with conditions like PTSD, depression and addiction.” Simcakoski continued, “The VORP program is effective because it finds veterans where they live and builds trusting relationships that lead to lasting improvement.”

VORP was given an “innovative program” award from the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs in 2020. This award is reserved for programs that are identified as holding great promise for replication in other states. The Simmy Foundation is hopeful that, through its education and advocacy, the program will spread.

A large focus of VORP is helping veterans who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. In Wisconsin,

- 11% of the homeless adult population is veteran.
- 20% of the male homeless population are veterans.
- 51% of individual homeless veterans have disabilities.
- 50% of homeless veterans have serious mental illness.
- 70% of homeless veterans have substance abuse problems

About Jason and the [Foundation](#): Jason was a wonderful and loving son, brother, husband and father and proud to be a Marine. During his service, he suffered a head injury and was honorably discharged on February 23, 2002. Upon returning home, Jason sought treatment for his injury, but did not receive the care he needed. As was the case with many veterans prior to Jason’s Law, he was overprescribed opioids at the VA. As result, he went from being one the fittest men in his Marine platoon to someone who could not find the motivation to get out of bed in the morning. Tragically, Jason lost his life on August 30, 2014 at the Tomah VA. While we weren’t able to save Jason, his memory lives on and is an inspiration for us to support others. Please join us in this effort so that every veteran gets the mental healthcare they need. **They do deserve it.**

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