

Collier County tops federal list for new state veterans home funding

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Collier County has been selected as the top priority for funding on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' FY 2025 State Home Construction Grants list, bringing a long-anticipated veterans nursing facility one step closer to reality.

The federal designation paves the way for construction of a \$72 million, 120-bed skilled nursing and adult day care center—designed to serve both aging and younger veterans across Southwest Florida. The project is expected to break ground in 2026, with doors opening in 2029.

"This is a major milestone for our community," said county officials in a statement. "Collier County has worked tirelessly to bring this project forward, and we're proud to be leading the way."

The modern two-story facility will include services such as therapy, skilled nursing, and adult day health care, all located on the second floor to streamline staffing and care delivery. Amenities such as gardens, gazebos, walkways, libraries, and community spaces are designed to enhance quality of life for residents.

The effort represents Collier County's second attempt to secure a state veterans home. The county previously topped Florida's priority list in 2014 but was passed over in favor of St. Lucie County, where the \$62 million Ardie R. Copas State Veterans' Nursing Home opened in 2022.

In 2019, Collier County purchased the 167-acre Golden Gate Golf Course for \$29.1 million to host the new facility and prevent future overdevelopment of the site. The county is funding 35% of construction costs—about \$40 million—while the federal VA is expected to cover the remaining 65%.

To meet its commitment, Collier County transferred \$30 million last year from its voter-approved 1-cent sales surtax, with another \$10 million held locally. This is the first time a veterans home project in Florida has been fully funded at the state level through local dollars alone.

State VA officials visited the site in 2021 and recommended it to Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet as the next location for a state-run veterans home.

Collier County was home to more than 21,800 veterans aged 65 and older in 2019, with the total veteran population now estimated to exceed 31,000. A 2014 needs-based assessment identified more than 200,000 veterans living within a 75-mile radius who could benefit from the facility.

Florida currently operates nine state veterans homes, although eight are not at full capacity due to staffing shortages. With Collier's facility moving forward, advocates hope the project will help ease the growing demand for veteran-focused long-term care across the region.