

Image not found or type unknown

## U.S. Military Delivers Over \$127K in Free Veterinary Care During St. Thomas Mission

**Comprehensive pet services provided through Department of Defense program as part of ongoing USVI support efforts**

Health / **Published On July 10, 2025 05:25 PM /**

Staff Consortium **July 10, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



**Military veterinarian Maj. Christine Bui examines a dog during the June 16–27 clinic at the Humane Society of St. Thomas, where she served as Officer in Charge. By. VIDOH**

More than 1,100 no-cost veterinary services—valued at over \$127,000—were delivered to St. Thomas residents through a two-week deployment of U.S. military professionals under the Department of Defense’s Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) Program, the V.I. Department of Health has announced.

The mission, which took place from June 16 to June 27, was coordinated in partnership with VIDOH and the Humane Society of St. Thomas.

A 20-member team composed of military veterinarians, veterinary technicians, preventive medicine experts, and food safety specialists provided a wide range of pet care services while receiving valuable field training. According to the final report submitted to the Department of Health this week, the team conducted 443 pet wellness exams, administered 534 vaccinations, and performed 181 spay and neuter surgeries. In total, these services generated a cost savings of \$127,480 for local pet owners.

“This has been a true demonstration of service and partnership,” said VI Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. “Access to veterinary care is limited for many residents, and this mission not only filled that gap—it did so with compassion, professionalism, and a commitment to improving lives.” She also extended special thanks to the Humane Society of St. Thomas for hosting the mission. “We could not have done it without them,” she said.

The IRT initiative not only benefits local communities but also provides hands-on mission training for participating military personnel. The 2025 St. Thomas deployment included service members from the 7354th Veterinary Detachment, 49th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, 4th Civil Affairs Group, and the 402nd Civil Affairs Battalion. For these units, the mission offered real-world experience in veterinary surgical care, coordination, and leadership within a joint-service environment.

The full estimated value of services delivered—when factoring in labor, materials, and equipment—was approximately \$1.7 million.

“This mission helped protect both pets and people, especially in communities where veterinary access is limited,” said Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar, Chief Medical Officer for the Virgin Islands Department of Health. “The services provided were also impactful in addressing the overpopulation of cats and dogs in the community.” Dr. Hunte-Cesar worked closely with the IRT team to help coordinate the deployment and said she looks forward to seeing similar missions reach residents on St. Croix and St. John in the future.

In addition to clinical work, IRT service members engaged with the broader community. They met with local business and government leaders, visited the Boys and Girls Club, and hosted a Distinguished Visitors Day luncheon on June 26 to brief military and community partners on the mission’s outcomes.

Maj. Christine Bui, who served as Officer-in-Charge, shared the team’s overarching vision during the luncheon: “To be a trusted force for health and services in the USVI, delivering high-impact veterinary care that strengthens animal welfare, supports public health, and builds enduring bonds between military personnel and the local community.”

This most recent deployment marks the third consecutive IRT mission to the U.S. Virgin Islands. In August 2023, a small IRT team assisted with back-to-school physicals and immunizations during the Department of Health’s pediatric clinic. In June 2024, the program sent nearly 300 military medical professionals to provide basic healthcare services across the territory—delivering an estimated \$2.25 million in medical care to local residents.

With each successive visit, the IRT program has expanded its role in supporting the territory’s public health infrastructure—offering free, high-value services while fostering long-term partnerships between the armed forces and the Virgin Islands community.

