



Communicator

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The COMMUNICATOR is the official publication of the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO). Opinions expressed are those of contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of CACVSO officers, members, or the editorial staff. The newsletter reserves the right to edit, amend, or reject any contribution submitted for publication.

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President's Message

(Solano County CVSO Ted Puntillo, President)

Hello Everyone:

Spring has sprung and the flowers are in bloom. I hope everyone is having a great Spring.

The winter conference was one of the best ones I have ever attended. The banquet was fun, and I want to thank Terri Lopez and Saul Sanabria for having the best drawing and awards ceremony yet. Also thanks to Harry Hitchings and Rhonda Murphy for adding to the fun.

This training conference is a first, in that all the training was filmed and will be available on U-Tube. I want to send out a big thank you to Angela and CalVet for making this happen. We will be able to have the vet reps that did not attend, actually view what went on at the training and refer to it later down the road when questions arise.

Our executive director, Tom Splitgerber will be reaching out to you soon to get the mentor program off the ground. We want to hit the ground running in July when the funding starts. Tom will be asking who wants to be a mentor county. We are looking for experienced, competent CVSO's who are willing to travel to other counties to help them with their operation. This is particularly important to new CVSO's and offices that are struggling with poor numbers.

The latest subvention report just came out from CalVet and it shows how many vets in your county and how many WLU's your county filed in the last 6 month accounting period. As you can see from the report, there is a great difference in WLU's to veteran's ratio.

Tom will also be heading up a best practices website that will identify some of the good things that we are doing in our operations so that these ideas may be easily shared with all offices. We will be having our June conference in San Diego and you had better reserve your rooms now. It will be a joint conference with NACVSO. There will be a lot of activities, but we must attend all the training and not miss any to go to the zoo or other attractions. We are on the clock and getting paid by the county and the state to be there. Thanks to Wil Quintong for getting sponsorships and other activities in place.

See you in San Diego.

Ted

TIME & PLACE COMMITTEE

(Kern County CVSO Richard Taylor, Chair)

Dates & Locations of Upcoming Conferences



June 11—16, 2017

*Town & Country Resort & Convention Ctr.
San Diego, CA*



October 8—13, 2017

Marriott Convention Center



February 25—March 2, 2018

*Holiday Inn Sacramento Downtown
Sacramento, CA*

NewsLetter
DEADLINE

**Last Thursday of the Month
Unless Notified Otherwise!**

CALOVET

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender Veterans

CalVet is committed to ensuring all Veterans have access to and receive the benefits they have earned without regard to sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability. The Minority Veterans Division promotes the use of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, programs, and services by Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender Veterans (LGBT) Veterans. We advocate on behalf of LGBT Veterans by identifying gaps in services and by making recommendations to improve service. We support and initiate activities that educate and sensitize the public to the unique needs of our LGBT Veterans.

In September 2014, CalVet hosted a two-day California LGBT Veterans Leadership Forum, the first in the nation, to identify needs, gaps and exclusions in housing, employment, healthcare, education, and legal affairs. Based on the Forum, the California Research Bureau prepared White Papers, "[Better Serving those who Serve: California's LGBT Veterans Speak Out.](#)" The important and significant findings from the white papers were shared with legislators, stakeholders, and LGBT Veteran advocates in September, 2015. Since then, CalVet's Minority Veterans Affairs Division has worked diligently with stakeholders across the state to ensure delivery systems conform to the needs of our LGBT Veterans population.

Health Care

Are you a Veteran in crisis needing immediate assistance? The [Veterans Crisis Line](#) connects LGBT Veterans in crisis with qualified, caring VA professionals through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, [chat online](#), or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Veterans Crisis Line: (800) 273-8255
National LGBT Crisis Line: (888) 843-4564
Veteran Health Care Line: (800) 455-0057

This Month's Featured County

Lake County is a county located in the north central portion of the U.S. state of California. As of the 2010 census, the population was 64,665. The county seat is Lakeport. The county takes its name from Clear Lake, the dominant geographic feature in the county and the largest natural lake wholly within California (Lake Tahoe is partially in Nevada; the Salton Sea was formed by flooding). Lake County forms the Clearlake, CA Micro-politan Statistical Area. It is directly north of the San Francisco Bay Area. Lake County is part of California's Wine Country, which also includes Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties. It includes five American Viticultural Areas and over 35 wineries.



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT

Legislative Advocate's Report CACVSO Communicator

April 2017

By: Pete Conaty

On March 28, the Assembly Budget Subcommittee #4 on State Administration, rejected the proposed \$1.7 million Department of Finance's negative Budget Change Proposal to cancel the 16 CalVet positions.

Testifying in opposition was:

Pete Conaty representing the CACVSO
State Commander, American Legion
State Commander American G.I. Forum
Legislative Committee Chairs for AMVETS, California State Commanders Veterans Council, Vietnam Veterans of America, Scottish American Military Society, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Military Officers Association of America.
National Chair, VVA, Women Veterans
Lobbyists for Contra Costa County and SEIU (state employee union).

We got a really terrific write-up by the committee's budget consultant using all the information we had provided to her (see her analysis below).

This issue is still "open" in the Senate to be revisited after the Budget May Revise. Senator Steven Glazer (D-Orinda) was very strong in his opposition to the cuts.

ASSEMBLY BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 4 – STATE ADMINISTRATION HEARING DATE: MARCH 28, 2017

ISSUE 2: REDUCE FUNDING FOR VETERAN SERVICES DIVISION SUPPORT

The Governor's budget requests a reduction of \$1.7 million General Fund ongoing to reverse the 2016-17 Spring Finance Letter that funded 16 existing, but unfunded positions, and reclassified 4 positions that assist in processing claims for federal veterans benefits and increase oversight of county veterans service officers. The positions are located in the three district offices in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego which are co-located with USDVA Regional Offices.

BACKGROUND

Federal Veteran's Benefits. To receive federal veterans benefits a veteran must apply and file a claim with the USDVA. Many federal veterans benefits depend on a veteran's "service-connected disability" rating. A service-connected disability is defined by the USDVA as a physical or mental disability that was incurred or aggravated while in training or active duty.

Federal veterans benefits include a range of benefits such as VA health care, monetary benefits such as disability compensation and pension, education benefits, and vocational rehabilitation and employment. In 2015, about 355,000 veterans in California received federal disability

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT

compensation and over 28,000 California veterans received a pension, with an average disability compensation and/or pension benefit of about \$17,000 (including annual and one-time retroactive payments).

The State Helps Connect Veterans to Their Federal Benefits

To apply for health care, disability compensation, pension, or other federal benefits, a veteran must complete a detailed application (“claim”) with evidence of his or her service-connected disability and proof of income. This is a lengthy process, and some veterans need assistance to gather evidence of their service-connected disability and complete the application. Sometimes, the federal government will reject the claim and the veteran will appeal the decision and, for example, add more medical evidence to his or her claim. Appeals can take three to five years to process. The State helps veterans claim benefits in three key ways as described below.

Veterans Services Division. For about 40 percent of the USDVA claims filed in California, one of the three CalVet district offices represents the veteran or family member through the submission and appeal process. The 2013 Budget Act provided \$3 million for 36 three-year limited-term positions to create a 12 person “strike team” in each district office designed to reduce the backlog of pending initial entitlement claims. This team expedited the processing of \$175.2 million in payments going to California veterans every year for the rest of their lives. In addition, these staff have resulted in significant one-time pension and survivor payments for veterans families.

Due to the lengthy claims process, which had and continues to have significant backlogs, the 2015 Budget Act made the 36 positions permanent, but the funding for the positions expired June 30, 2016. The 2016 Budget Act funded 16 of the 36 positions and provided funding to reclassify four existing positions. The Governor’s budget proposal reverses last year’s budget action.

Partially Funds County Veterans Service Officers.

The state provides \$7.5 million (\$5.6 million General Fund) each year to CVSOs, a joint state- and county-funded program to counsel veterans on available benefits, help them develop benefit claims, provide case management services throughout the claim process, and refer veterans to other nonfederal resources. Each county has at least one CVSO and larger counties may have several. In 2015–16, over 400,000 veterans and their family members reached out to CVSOs for assistance, resulting in about 109,000 monetary and health care claims and \$487 million in new or increased federal benefits to veterans.

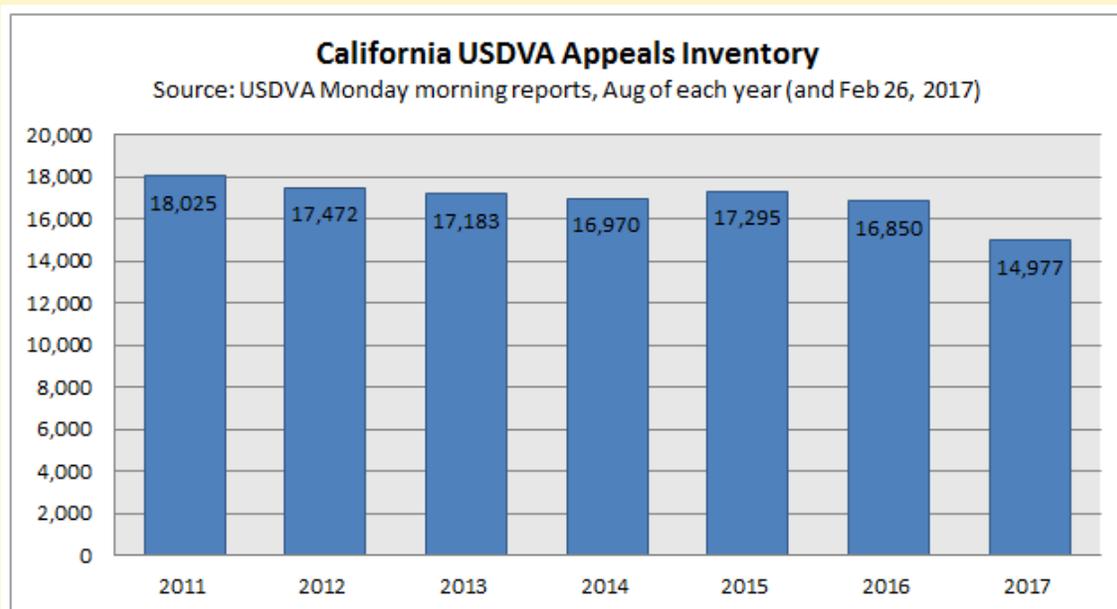
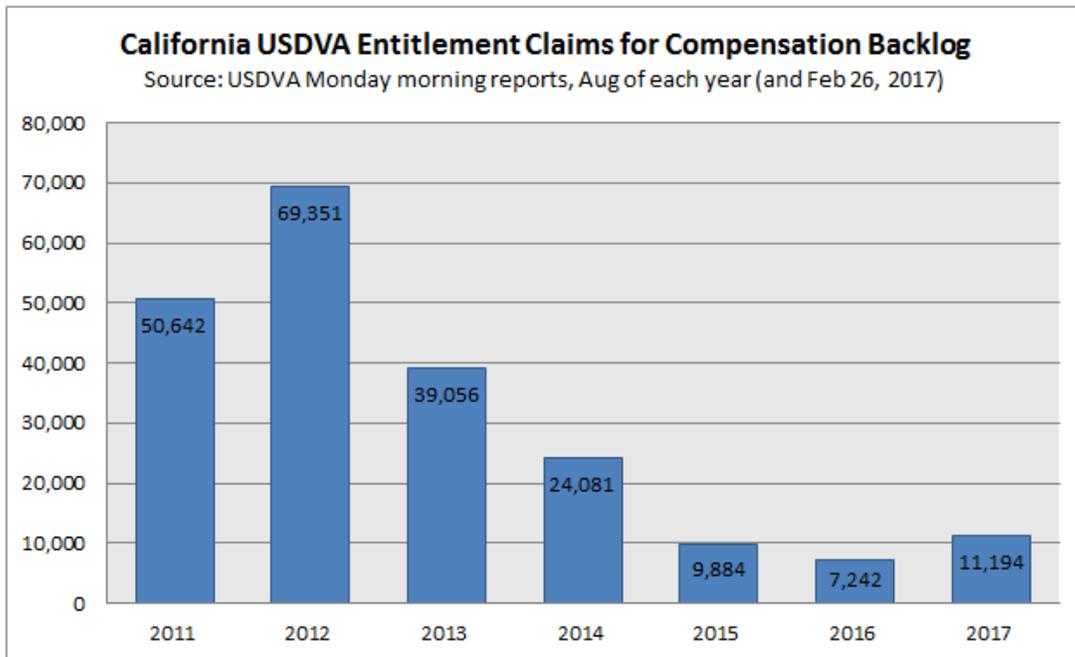
California Transition Assistance Program (Cal-TAP) Aims to Educate Veterans About Available Benefits.

Cal-TAP—administered by CalVet—adopted as part of the 2016–17 budget package educates veterans and their families about benefits available to them. Unlike CVSOs, which do some outreach but primarily help veterans apply for benefits, the main mission of Cal-TAP is outreach and education. Cal-TAP offers online and in-person presentations from state, federal, and community-based partner organizations to inform and connect veterans to available benefits. Outreach through Cal-TAP focuses on younger veterans as they leave military service, but presentations will also be available for veterans at all stages of life. This program would not be affected by the Governor’s budget proposal.

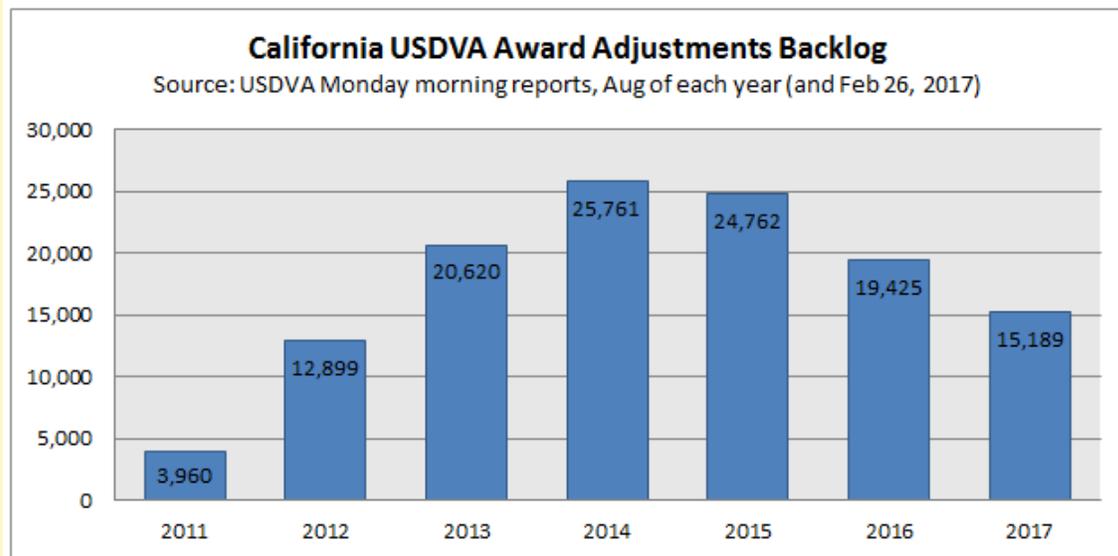
LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT

Significant Claim Backlogs

There are various USDVA claim backlog inventories. A backlog is defined as being 125 days and older. The figures below show that while some of the backlogs have been reduced by the efforts discussed above, there continue to be very significant backlogs.



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT



STAFF QUESTIONS

1. Why are these positions being proposed to be cut, when the General Fund savings are minor and the staff result in significant federal funds coming into the state?
2. Did the Administration in its overall budget propose cutting staff in other areas of the budget that result in increased federal dollars for California?

STAFF COMMENTS

The positions that are being proposed to be defunded are part of strategy that began in 2013 to ensure that California's veterans and their families receive the federal benefit awards to which they are entitled in a timely manner. The positions assisted the USDVA in reducing its claims processing backlog, improved the quality of claims submitted (which helped reduce the cause of the claims backlog), and provided oversight and accountability of the CVSOs.

The loss of funding for these positions will result in delays in veterans receiving their federal benefits. These positions have resulted in more federal dollars coming into the state and are critical for connecting our veterans with other federal and state programs and benefits.

Last year's request to fund these positions on an ongoing basis emphasized the importance of these staff and noted that, "without these positions only 11 staff would be servicing the 1.8 million veterans in California". Staff recommends rejection of this proposal because the benefits to veterans in California and the state overall far outweigh the minor General Fund cost for these staff.

Staff Recommendation: Reject the Budget Proposal.

Persian Gulf War Veterans Still Suffering Serious Health Problems

By Healthline

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Persian Gulf War.

It was fought in late 1990 through early 1991 by a U.S.-led coalition of 34 countries against Iraq in response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

It also was the first U.S. war to be waged after the advent of the 24-hour cable television news cycle.

The conflict was accompanied by memorably intense and round-the-clock coverage on CNN.

But there've been few recognitions of the war's 25-year milestone on the cable news networks, let alone in broadcast or print media.

For David Winnett, a Gulf War combat veteran who climbed the ranks from private to captain during his 20-year career in the U.S. Marines, it's just the latest in a succession of insults to the men and women who served in this largely forgotten war.

"It's no surprise that many people could easily forget 'our war.' It was far too fast by any historical measure," Winnett told Healthline. "Perhaps things would be different had we continued our advance all the way to Baghdad, but the fact is, we didn't. So regardless of whether or not we think our war has been unfairly set aside in the history books, it is what it is."

The VA's Position

Despite the scientific evidence and a mandate from Congress that Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognize several of the symptoms as connected to service in the Gulf War, the VA maintains that there are no definitive scientific studies that link symptoms and diseases associated with GWI to toxic exposures during the war.

According to a [2015 report](#), about 80 percent of Gulf War veterans who file disability claims citing presumptive chronic multi-symptom illnesses connected to toxic exposures are denied by the VA.

A written statement from the VA's Post-Deployment Health Services team to Healthline stated that in the past few years the VA has "ramped up educational efforts to VA providers on Gulf War Illness." However, the statement read, "there are times when referral to a psychiatrist is indicated due to a co-morbid condition such as severe depression or another severe mental health condition."

In another email to Healthline, VA officials said a claim could be denied for a number of reasons, including the belief an ailment was caused by something other than military service or the ailment could be "less than 10 percent disabling." Most often, say multiple sources for this story, veterans who say they have these symptoms are sent to the psychiatric departments of VA centers, where they are typically given psychotropic drugs that don't help them, and in many cases make things worse.

The VA acknowledges the following in a [statement](#) on its website: “Rockets filled with sarin and cyclosporine mixes were found at a munitions storage depot in Khamisiyah, Iraq, that had been demolished by U.S. service members following the 1991 Gulf War cease-fire. An undetermined amount of these chemicals was released into the atmosphere. The Department of Defense concluded about 100,000 Gulf War Veterans could have been exposed to low levels of these nerve agents.”

The VA also adds that “research doesn’t show long-term neurological problems from exposure to low levels of sarin. A low level of sarin is an amount that doesn’t cause noticeable symptoms during the exposure.”

Regarding the burn pits, a VA [statement](#) on its burn pits registry page reads, “At this time, research does not show evidence of long-term health problems from exposure to burn pits.”

Did the Gulf War Cause Cancer, Too?

Benjamin Krause is a Gulf War veteran who went to law school after he retired from the military, and dedicates his practice to helping his fellow veterans.

He told Healthline that burn pit exposures are associated with an increasing number of diseases, including cancer.

“There’s growing evidence showing a link between burn pits and certain cancers like pancreatic cancer, for example,” Krause said. “VA is working to create a registry to help with service connection and health benefits for these veterans, but history has shown us that such initiatives take much longer to perfect while sick veterans die.”

Compounding the problem, Krause said, are non-VA healthcare providers who are simply unaware of the health risks of military service.

“They don’t ask the right questions and risk deadly misdiagnosis of symptoms because of a lack of awareness of the harms of burn pits, among other things,” Krause noted. “Veterans are getting sick and dying now. We need our VA to pick up the pace before more veterans get sick and die from burn pit exposure related illnesses.”

Reasons for Optimism

Despite the frustrations, every veteran advocate interviewed for this story said there is reason for optimism.

For one thing, Congress recently decided to continue funding GWI treatment research at \$20 million for the next year.

“[This] is just what we asked for,” said Hardie. “It shows that Congress continues to take Gulf War veterans’ health issues far more seriously than the Department of Defense or the VA.”

In addition to the two House hearings earlier this year, the Senate has also taken up the GWI issue.

Last month, Sen. Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat from Wisconsin, [announced](#) that reforms and investments she fought for to improve veterans’ care were passed by the Senate as a part of the fiscal year 2017 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs funding bill.

Among Baldwin’s priorities stated in the bill is “better treatment for veterans suffering from Gulf War Illness.”

Baldwin’s provisions, which have received virtually no media coverage, would “improve the approval rates of veterans’ disability claims; enhance ongoing studies and research into the causes of and treatments for Gulf War Illness; and strengthen the membership and work of the Research Advisory Committee, which oversees the government’s research agenda.”

A spokesperson for the VA told Healthline, “The Department of Veterans Affairs is currently working on responding directly to Senator Baldwin, and will include relevant post-deployment health information.”

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2017

VA, DOD study a major breakthrough for understanding PTSD

WASHINGTON — Researchers from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DOD) recently released findings of a new study called Prospective Post-Traumatic Stress disorder Symptom Trajectories in Active Duty and Separated Military Personnel, which examines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms in Veterans, compared with active-duty populations.

This is the first known study comparing PTSD symptom trajectories of current service members with those of Veterans, and is the product of a collaborative effort from VA and DOD researchers analyzing data from the [Millennium Cohort Study](#) (MCS), the largest prospective health study of military service members. According to [VA's National Center for PTSD](#), the PTSD rate among Vietnam Veterans was 30.9 percent for men and 26.9 percent for women. For Gulf War Veterans, the PTSD rate was 12.1 percent. Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans had a PTSD rate of 13.8 percent.

“Knowing there are similarities in how PTSD affects service members and Veterans makes it easier to pinpoint which treatments are the best to control the condition,” said Dr. Edward Boyko, an epidemiologist and internist at the [VA Puget Sound Health Care System](#) in Washington state, and VA’s lead researcher on the Millennium Cohort Study.

Officials involved with the project said they are hoping the collaboration will improve the understanding of Veterans’ health needs, relative to their experiences in service.

“The data that MCS researchers have been collecting since 2001 is incredibly valuable for both the DOD and VA,” said Dr. Dennis Faix, director of the Millennium Cohort Study and preventive medicine physician. “Going forward, working with VA will allow both agencies to make sure we are getting the best information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of health in current and former service members.”

The results of the joint VA DOD study will appear in the [Journal of Psychiatric Research's](#) June 2017 issue. It is the first of many joint future publications expected to result from the collaboration between VA and MCS.

DATES OF INTEREST

MARCH 2017

- 08 Daylight Savings Begins
- 17 St. Patrick's Day
- 20 First Day of Spring
- 29 Palm Sunday
- 31 Cesar Chavez Day

APRIL 2017

- 1 April's Fools
- 5 Easter Sunday
- 13 Thomas Jefferson's B-Day
- 15 Tax Day—Taxes Due Date
- 20 Patriot's Day
- 22 Admin. Professionals Day



Freedom isn't Free



Support Our Troops

