

# NO VET LEFT BEHIND

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

**2022 ANNUAL REPORT**



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## CACVSO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR 2023

In February 2022, I was elected as the first female President of the CACVSO and I am proud to have been bestowed this honor and responsibility by my fellow CVSOs.

It has been a busy year for California's County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) and their staffs, as well as our association, the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO). With the re-opening of offices after the COVID-19 pandemic, veterans were able to receive in-person support and advocacy at their local CVSO offices once again. Transitioning back to in-person training events and being able to once again network and collaborate more closely was welcome and much anticipated by many.

Keeping our promise in "Serving Those Who Served", CVSO offices assisted 141,813 veterans and their families in-person and assisted 785,363 via phone or email. As a result of these contacts with veterans and their families, 89,571 claims were filed with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for VA Pensions, disability, and healthcare. These efforts resulted in \$425 million in claims awards for veterans and their families. With many changes at the VA level, to include the PACT Act enacted by Congress in August 2022, more veterans are now eligible for VA benefits and entitlements than ever before. The PACT Act improved healthcare access and funding for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances.

Through its training conferences, the CACVSO was able to engage experts to provide a better understanding of these changes. During the 2022 Fall Training Conference, the VA Principal Undersecretary of Benefits, Mike Frueh, provided information and answered questions regarding these changes. Keeping our CVSOs engaged in relevant and informative training ensures that our veterans are face-to-face with subject matter experts who advocate for their benefits and entitlements.

Our continued partnership with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) is strong, mutual, and collaborative. We are grateful for this relationship and will continue to foster and grow partnerships at all levels for the benefit of California's veterans.

The increase in state subvention funding during FY 2020-21 was hailed as a much-needed funding improvement for CVSO offices. As we continue to fulfill our mission of serving veterans and their families, this increase helps to continually provide the highest quality service and advocacy through CVSOs.

Thank you to all of our membership, our supporters at the state and federal level, and our partners in sponsorship for helping us make this past year successful and productive. The CACVSO is thriving on its professional members, collaborative relationships, and partnerships that share our common goal: Improve the lives of California veterans and their families by "Serving Those Who Served".

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rhonda Murphy', is positioned above the printed name.

**Rhonda Murphy**, President 2022-23  
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers



STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
1227 O STREET, SUITE 300 | SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814

**THE SECRETARY**

As the Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), I want to, once again, extend my sincere appreciation for the services provided by California's County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs).

CalVet is the state agency responsible for ensuring the nearly 1.6 million veterans in California have access to the benefits they have earned through their service. We have long valued our partnership with CVSOs who, for the past 76 years, have played a vital role in connecting California's veterans with their earned benefits. So often, CVSOs are their very first point of contact. They understand the importance of making a great first impression as veterans begin to wend their way through what can often be a confusing, complex, and overwhelming process. CVSOs play a critical role in serving our large and diverse veteran population.

When the pandemic disrupted life as we knew it, CalVet and the CVSOs never missed a beat in working together to help veterans and their families navigate benefits in new ways and to maintain access to vital services. Our Veterans Services Division that includes our Local Interagency Network Coordinators (LINC)s, our three District Offices, and our California Transition Assistance Program (CalTAP), worked closely with CVSOs to overcome the obstacles the pandemic presented. That also included working closely with the USDVA to maintain appeals representation to the Board of Veteran Appeals through the use of virtual hearings.

We adapted our methodology of outreach—working with other state departments, universities, and community-based organizations—to deliver critical benefits and mental health information over a digital landscape. To date, we've hosted 603 total events including 438 webinars, reaching more than 20,400 service members, veterans, and their families.

CVSOs are instrumental in the development of mental health programs funded through CalVet's \$2.4 million Proposition 63 Grant Program, providing vulnerable veterans, and those who serve them, critical behavioral health support and resources. They will be important partners as we establish our California Veterans Health Initiative, which will support veteran mental health and suicide prevention.

CVSOs and CalVet share an important mission: to serve California veterans and their families. In fiscal year 2021-22, CVSOs helped California veterans receive approximately \$425 million in new federal benefits.

The entire CalVet team and I greatly appreciate the work they do and know this partnership will continue to benefit our California veterans in perpetuity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vito Imbasciani MD".

Vito Imbasciani MD  
Secretary

## SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

**The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO)** is an organization of professional veterans' advocates. In California, as well as other states, County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) play a critical role in the veterans' advocacy system and are often the initial contact in the community for veterans' services. Through CVSOs, the CACVSO is committed to California counties to provide a vital and efficient system of services and advocacy to veterans, their dependents and survivors.

Today, 56 of California's 58 counties have CVSOs to advocate not only for veterans and their families, but also for active duty, National Guard and military reserve members.

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### ON THE COVER



"No Veteran Left Behind" is based on the military creed and culture of "No Man Left Behind," which is the commitment by soldiers to the treatment and extraction of the seriously wounded, the recovery of the body of their military brothers and sisters killed in action, and attempts to rescue prisoners of war. In the context of CVSOs, they ensure that the veterans who return home are not left untreated, wounded or in other life-threatening jeopardy when there are services available to them.



## ABOUT COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) are county employees whose job it is to assist veterans, servicemembers, and their families within the county to obtain their earned federal veterans' benefits. The services they provide are 100% free to veterans and their families. While the mission of the CVSO is to assist the county's veterans in obtaining their earned benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), they also connect veterans to other state and county benefits.

In FY 2021-22, California's CVSOs assisted veterans to obtain about \$425 million in VA claims, which are paid directly to the veteran, usually for the rest of their life. VA healthcare is also a key benefit for veterans. VA benefits are unique to each veteran's service and are therefore complex to qualify for, hence the need for the assistance of a trained CVSO and Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs).

Every county in California, with the exception of Alpine County, is now served by a CVSO. For efficiency, some other smaller counties have reached agreements to share a CVSO. Currently, 56 of California's 58 counties have CVSOs to advocate not only for veterans and their families, but also for active duty, National Guard and reservists.

The CVSOs are represented by the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO), which was formed in 1945 — in the wake of WWII and in anticipation of the needs of over four million veterans returning home. CACVSO is a professional training and advocacy organization comprised of the CVSO offices throughout the state.

**The CVSO system is the most widely used model by states to deliver services and assist veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits.**

The majority of CVSO funding is provided by the counties, while the remainder comes from the state's General Fund and other state programs, as CVSOs help veterans with mental health services and Medi-Cal cost avoidance.

The CVSO system is the most widely used model by states to deliver services and assist veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits.

### History

California's CVSOs track their beginning in the state to 1924, when Stanislaus County began assisting veterans from the Spanish-American War and World War I. San Bernardino County followed in 1926, Riverside in 1930, Ventura in 1931, and San Diego in 1933. On June 6, 1939, Governor Culbert Olson signed AB 1270 into law, which permitted Boards of Supervisors to "appoint, prescribe the qualifications of and fix the compensation of an officer to be termed 'county service officer.'" The bill furthermore stated that, "It shall be the duty of the county service officer to administer the aid provided for in this chapter, to investigate all claims, applications or requests for aid made pursuant to the terms of this chapter, and to perform any other such services as may be detailed to him for performance by the board of supervisors."

The end of World War II sparked a new chapter in the mission of the CVSOs. According to government documents, oral history and personal accounts, "10,000 veterans a month were being diagnosed with psycho-neurotic disorder (now known as PTSD). Alcoholism, homelessness, and unemployment also were rampant, leading to a skyrocketing divorce rate." And in 1947 — after most GIs had returned home — over 400,000 Californians remained unemployed, and 767,000 claimed unemployment benefits, the second highest in the nation. CACVSO endeavored to do a better job of assimilating veterans back into society and the workforce than had happened after WWI, when discharged veterans received little more than a \$60 allowance and a train ticket home.

With the passage of the GI Bill in 1944, returning veterans had access to education and training; loan guaranty for homes, farms or businesses; and unemployment pay. But how would they learn of and access these crucial benefits? The Veterans Administration (now called the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) was responsible for carrying out the law's key provisions by communicating the benefits available and offering the assistance needed to navigate the process. However, the magnitude of accomplishing this for four million veterans was not a task easily achieved from Washington, D.C., so California wisely adopted the CVSOS model of veterans benefit assistance. This model has grown to be the most widely used approach to delivering services to veterans, with 24 states and several Tribal Nations using the CVSOS model. California's legislature also continued to provide more tools for the CVSOS to use. In 1946, the legislature passed AB 14, giving CVSOS the powers of a notary public.

Since WWII, the scope, duties, responsibilities, and tools of the CVSOS has steadily grown into the professional cadre of trained advocates they are today. For instance, in 2014, AB 935 created the "VETERAN" designation on the driver's license. To qualify as eligible to receive this designation, AB 935 stipulated that the veteran must first visit a CVSOS for a determination of veteran status before DMV would process the application. This process directs veterans to the CVSOS offices, where they can also be screened for other federal benefits for which they may be eligible. Since AB 935 went into effect, over 250,000 veterans have visited a CVSOS office in pursuit of the driver's license designation and over 103,000 have filed claims for VA benefits, resulting in almost \$257 million in annualized VA payments paid directly to veterans.

The legislature also helps counties defray the costs of maintaining CVSOS offices by providing Local Assistance funding from the state budget. Acknowledging the importance of the work CVSOS do, the legislature, with the concurrence of Governor Newsom, approved an increase in this funding in the FY 2021-22 State Budget from \$5.6 million to \$11 million. The Governor has continued this vital level of funding in the FY 2022-23 and FY 2023-24 budgets. CVSOS offices have hired and trained more VSRs to help assist veterans with their VA claims and go out into the community to perform outreach among the elderly, homeless, urban, and rural hard-to-reach populations who may not be aware of their potential eligibility for federal and state veterans benefits.

### **Going forward**

The CVSOS, through their professional association, the CACVSO, continue to sponsor and support state legislation to enhance their abilities and provide the resources necessary to fulfill their mission of helping veterans obtain the benefits they earned by virtue of their service to this country. The CACVSO also works closely with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), which has an oversight and training function over CVSOS as mandated by the legislature. The CACVSO organizes triannual, weeklong training conferences that help CVSOS and their key staff to stay abreast of the constantly evolving federal and state programs and their eligibility processes. ■

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**Since WWII, the scope, duties, responsibilities,  
and tools of the CVSOS has steadily grown into the  
professional cadre of trained advocates they are today.**

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VET PRO/PANORAMIC SOFTWARE INC. IS HONORED TO PARTNER  
WITH CALIFORNIA'S COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS IN  
**IMPROVING THE LIVES OF VETERANS**

**Congratulations CVSOs for a successful 2022!**

Assisting **141,813** veterans and their families in-person.  
Assisted **785,363** veterans and their families via phone and email.  
Filing **89,571** claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.  
Helping veterans obtain over **\$425 million** in cash VA benefits.

Your dedication and support of our honored veterans every day makes a real difference  
in the lives of those who served this country and protected our freedoms.

Thank you for letting VetPro help you in that mission.

**We appreciate and thank you for all that you do!**

*- Your VetPro Team*

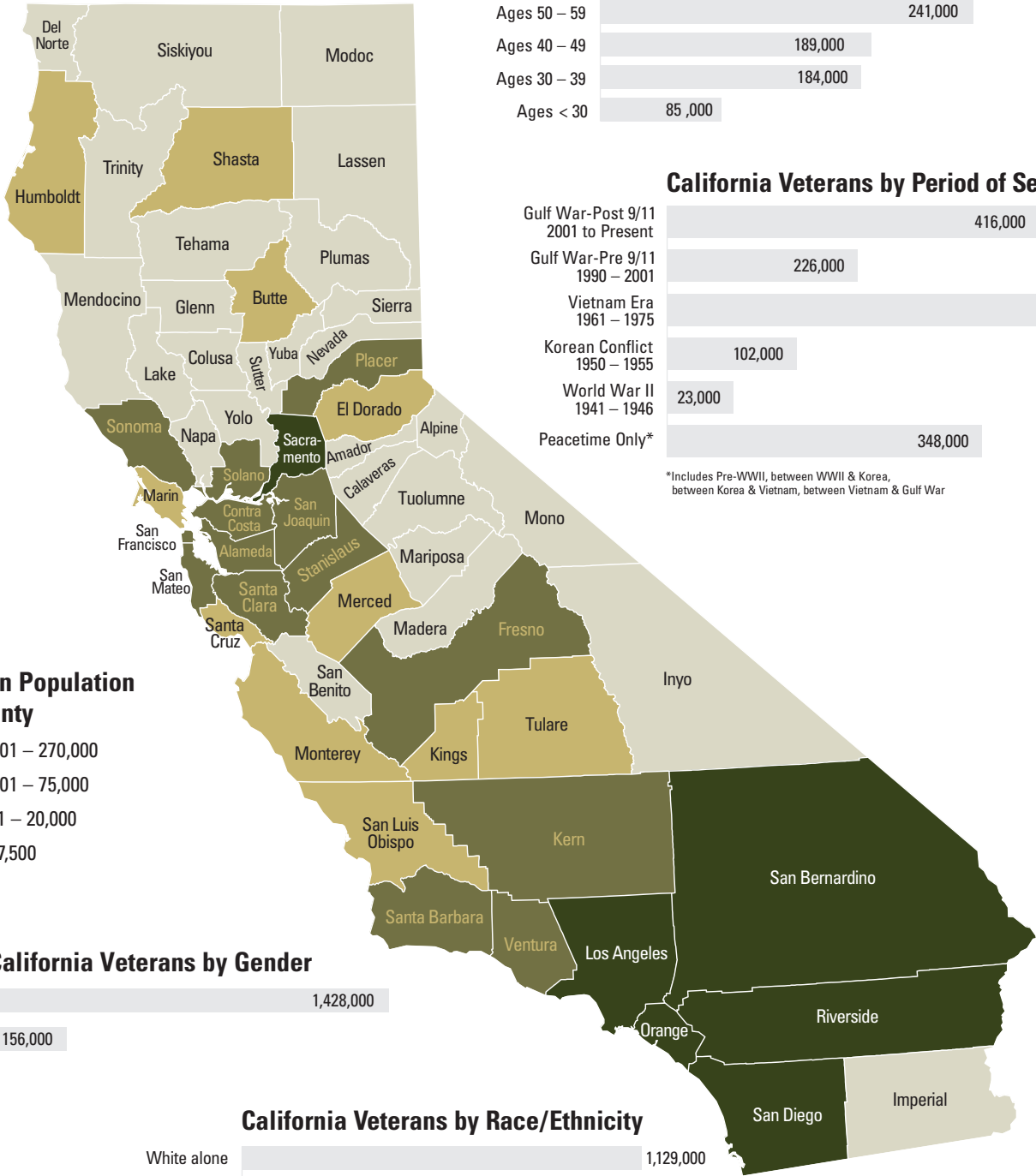


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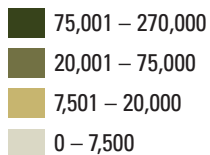
# California Veterans by the Numbers

Estimated By County as of September 30, 2021

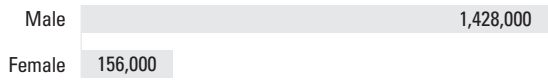
Source: USDVA VetPro 2020 (Tables 6L, 7L, 8L)



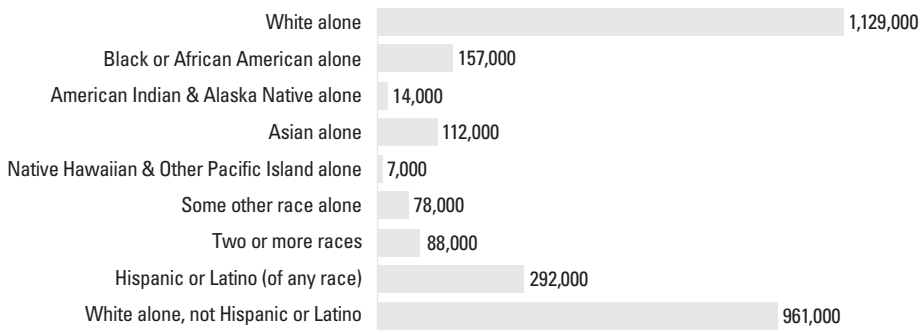
## Veteran Population by County



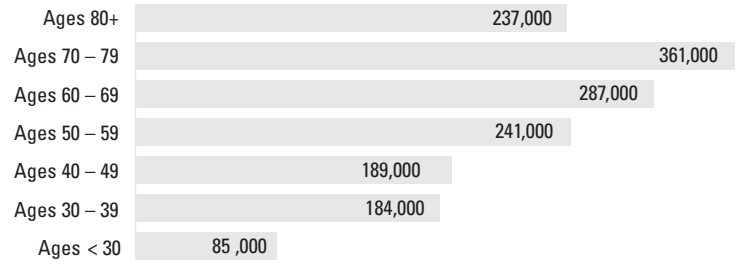
## California Veterans by Gender



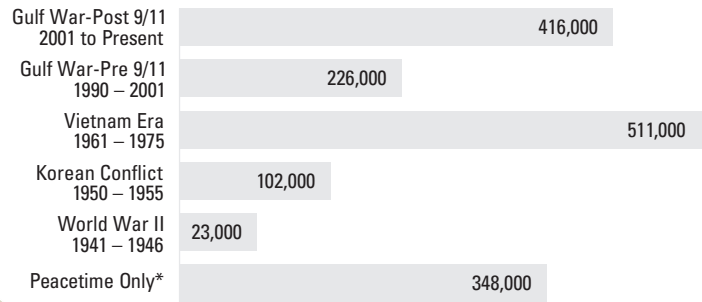
## California Veterans by Race/Ethnicity



## California Veterans by Age Group



## California Veterans by Period of Service



\*Includes Pre-WWII, between WWII & Korea, between Korea & Vietnam, between Vietnam & Gulf War

## WHY DO VETERANS NEED HELP FILING FOR BENEFITS?

Applying for Social Security and other federal benefits is a simple, uncomplicated process. The opposite is true of veterans' benefits. Without professional assistance, many veterans lose benefits they have earned by their service — often thousands of dollars a year. Unlike other federal benefits, veterans' benefits are extremely individualized and must be applied for, otherwise benefits are lost.

They depend on a wide variety of factors — when and where you served, if you served in combat or served during a congressionally approved war-time period, the cause and severity of a disability, and other individual factors. Additionally, Congress, federal courts and the Veterans Administration (VA) are constantly changing what benefits and services those who served in the military are eligible to receive. That is why County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) play such an important role.

Studies show that veterans receive more of the benefits owed them when they come to a professional for help. CVSOs do their jobs well. In fact, they turned \$43 million in county and state funding into more than \$425 million in benefits for the 2021-22 fiscal year. CVSOs are not remote paper-shuffling bureaucrats; they meet veterans face-to-face with an attitude that says, "We're on your side." In a relaxed but professional atmosphere, veterans discuss their situation freely, and the CVSO is able to develop a claim that nets the largest possible benefit.

- CVSOs walk alongside veterans, guiding them through the complex process — as a real and caring person, not an anonymous voice at the end of a phone line.
- CVSOs also save the state money by connecting veterans with veteran treatment courts, homeless veterans' Stand Downs, and other local services. They help find homeless veterans a warm place to sleep on a cold winter night. They get at-risk veterans mental health services today, not some distant tomorrow.
- Without the assistance of a CVSO, veterans face difficulties navigating the VA claims process in the best of times. The pandemic's restrictions amplified the difficulties involved in dealing with a large bureaucracy. In these difficult times, CVSOs play an even greater role in acting as facilitators and advocates for veterans seeking their benefits. To comply with social distancing rules and health ordinances, CVSOs developed alternative methods of assisting veterans. CVSO offices offered consultations face-to-face (when allowed), and otherwise leveraged technology and implemented online appointments, video conferencing, virtual offices, and electronic signature applications. ■

**CVSOs play an even greater role in acting as facilitators and advocates for veterans seeking their benefits.**

## FACTORS AFFECTING HOW MANY VETERANS RECEIVE MONETARY BENEFITS

Studies have shown:

- Claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) filed with the assistance of a professional representative from the office of a County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO), commonly called a Veterans Service Representative (VSR), have a higher approval rate than other claims.
- Claims filed with the assistance of a professional VSR result in higher disability ratings and thus higher monetary benefits for the veteran.
- The ratio of veterans to the number of professional VSRs in a state directly correlates to the state's utilization of federal monetary awards.
- California's ratio of veterans to VSRs lags other comparable states; the result being a limited supply of VSRs available to serve the largest veteran population of any state in the nation.

The limited access to the services of a professional VSR adversely impacts:

- The number of veterans properly served — roughly **65,000 veterans are missing out on their benefits.**
- The veterans' quality of life — **there are approximately \$1.1 billion in VA benefits lost annually.**
- Access to life-changing services, such as medical care, rehabilitative services, mental health services and ongoing education.
- The balance of federal tax dollars flowing to and from California.
- The economic impact in communities where veterans reside.

### HOW DO WE FURTHER IMPROVE CALIFORNIA'S PERFORMANCE?

Additional improvement in veteran benefit utilization comes down to putting more professional VSRs in the field. California can do that by:

- **Maintaining the \$11 million in state local assistance funding which was included in the FY 2023-24 Governor's Proposed Budget.** This level of funding has allowed CVSO offices to increase the number of VSRs and get more "boots on the ground" to assist veterans and their families, while also allowing small or rural counties the latitude to tailor the use of the funds to local needs.
- Establishing a budgetary mechanism (*see opposite page*) to ensure the state provides fifty percent of the cost of CVSO operations in future years.

### WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT MORE FUNDING WILL HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT?

Beginning in 2022, the state began sending the counties \$11 million in Local Assistance funding from the state budget. This helped counties to hire more VSRs and increase outreach to underserved veterans. The CVSOs were able to make a tremendous difference in the lives of many veterans. The proof of this is in the VA and CalVet reporting data.

From 2013, when the state funding level was increased to \$5.6 million, to 2021:

- The state's benefit utilization rate had increased from 17.5% to 28.6%.
- More than 113,000 veterans have been added to those receiving VA Compensation and Pension Benefits (C&P Benefits), despite a decrease in California's veteran population. The total amount of C&P Benefits paid annually to California's veterans has increased from \$5.4 billion to \$9.5 billion.

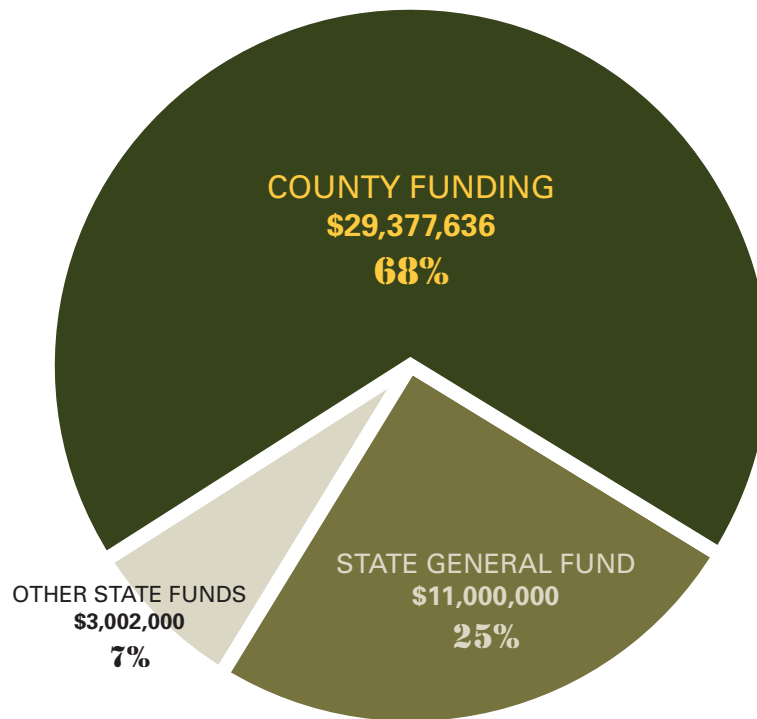
California's CVSOs are key to ensuring that all veterans who have earned benefits through their service to the nation have access to those benefits. ■



## WHO FUNDS THE CVSOS?

County veterans service office operations are front funded with county funds, subject to reimbursement through various appropriations from state funds, including the General Fund, Veterans Service Office Fund, Mental Health Services Fund and Medi-Cal cost avoidance reimbursements. Individual counties establish the size and extent of their own county veterans service office operations based upon local needs and their ability to fund the program. The state's General Fund appropriation in support of county veterans service office operations is primarily distributed on a pro rata basis utilizing performance measures established by the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). Other funding is distributed based upon implementation of specific types of programs related to the intended use of these specialized funds. The chart below shows how county veterans service office operations were funded in fiscal year 2021-22.

### FISCAL YEAR 2021-2022



**TOTAL CVSO OPERATING COSTS: \$43,379,636**

Sources: CalVet NCC Data FY 2021-22, 2023-24 Jan 10 Budget Detail

The state has long acknowledged that the cost of maintaining County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) should be shared equally between the counties and state. This history goes back to 1997 when, in order to track performance, the legislature enacted Senate Bill 608 requiring CalVet to annually report the monetary benefits paid to veterans by the federal government that were directly attributable to the assistance of CVSOs. This

legislation also required the Department of Finance to consider an increase in the annual budget for support of CVSOs of up to \$5 million. In 2009, Senate Bill 419 raised this target amount to \$11 million. In 2021, the legislature and the Governor acknowledged the important work the CVSOs do for veterans and their families and approved an increase of \$5.4 million from the General Fund to bring the state's annual Local Assistance funding for CVSOs to \$11 million.

It is critical that the CVSOs receive a steady stream of funding as many of the more than 24,000 servicemembers leaving the military annually and returning to California are not aware of how to access the federal and state benefits that are available to them. Furthermore, many veterans from prior eras are not aware that they may still be eligible for state and federal veteran benefits despite the time that has passed since their discharge from service. This continues to result in many underserved veterans and dependents who are not aware of, or do not know how to access, the federal and state benefits available to them because of their military service.

Studies which looked at states with similar populations and veterans service operations show that higher staffing at county veterans service offices results in larger amounts of federal funds to veterans, both in the aggregate and to the individual veteran. Another independent study showed that by using trained professional Veteran Service Representatives (VSRs) when applying for benefits the claimants receive higher, more comprehensive awards.

All these reasons more than justify state support for county veteran service office operations. ■

## FINANCIAL IMPACT OF VETERANS CLAIMS BY COUNTY

The monetary veteran benefit statistics presented on the following pages provide data on the new federal veteran benefits obtained with the assistance of County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs).

The left section of the table shows the veteran population, by county, as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the numbers of veterans and family members who contacted a CVSO office in person or remotely in Fiscal Year 2021-22. Some limitations resulting from COVID-19 still persisted in early 2022 and affected some in-person visits to CVSO offices, prompting CVSOs to utilize phone, email, videoconferencing and other technology to serve the needs of veterans in their county. Meeting the needs of veterans who lack access to the internet and new technologies remains a challenge.

The right section of the table, "New Awards Attributable to CVSOs," provides the monetary value of new or increased monetary benefits paid to eligible veterans and their dependents during the state's fiscal year 2021-22. These amounts are directly attributable to the activities and efforts of the CVSOs. **In total, the CVSOs accounted for over \$425 million in new federal veteran benefits being brought into California's economy.** Even with the recent increase in state General Fund support for CVSO operations, this still represents a return on investment of \$36 for every \$1 of General Fund monies spent. It should be noted that "New Awards Attributable to CVSOs" reports only the new or increased benefits obtained in that fiscal year, not the cumulative benefits and, as such, is a reflection of the continuing effort of CVSOs to assist veterans in obtaining the benefits they have earned — this is truly a "what have you done for me lately" metric. ■

**In total, the CVSOs accounted for over \$425 million  
in new federal veteran benefits being brought  
into California's economy.**



Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County Fiscal Year 2021-22						
County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
ALAMEDA	51,041	1,458	5,230	715	\$4,428,753	\$6,194
ALPINE	83	No CVSO				
AMADOR	3,184	226	1,048	211	\$907,217	\$4,300
BUTTE	13,852	656		1,148	\$6,808,557	\$5,931
CALAVERAS	4,003	872	1,926	407	\$3,060,024	\$7,518
COLUSA	761	757	7,441	86	\$1,510,718	\$17,566
CONTRA COSTA	42,233	9,058	36,300	2,821	\$18,619,804	\$6,600
DEL NORTE	1,970	165	320	176	\$468,212	\$2,660
EL DORADO	12,429	2,460	2,885	814	\$4,937,720	\$6,066
FRESNO	35,979	600	16,000	2,433	\$7,583,973	\$3,117
GLENN	1,324	1,800	2,800	97	\$534,023	\$5,505
HUMBOLDT	7,689	1,442	4,879	860	\$4,477,620	\$5,207
IMPERIAL	6,321	4,247	3,186	1,149	\$7,800,051	\$6,789
INYO-MONO	1,956	350	1,980	131	\$349,365	\$2,667
Notes: See last page of "Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County"						

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Alameda	Clint Taxdahl	510-577-1926	clinton.taxdahl@acgov.org
Alpine	Due to low veteran population, there is no CVSO		
Amador	Terry Sanders	209-223-6476	tsanders@amadorgov.org
Butte	Matthew McCoy	530-552-6608	mmccoy@buttecounty.net
Calaveras	Brian Galicia	209-754-6872	bgalicia@co.calaveras.ca.us
Colusa	Don Parsons	530-458-0388	Don.Parsons@countyofcolusa.com
Contra Costa	Vacant	925-313-1481	bill@vs.cccounty.us
Del Norte	Vacant	707-464-2154	j.silva@co.del-norte.ca.us
El Dorado	Jonathan Brown	530-621-5963	jonathan.brown@edcgov.us
Fresno	Kyle Pennington	559-600-5436	kpennington@fresnocounty.ca.gov
Glenn	Brandon Thompson	530-934-6524	bthompson@countyofglenn.net
Humboldt	Rena Maveety	707-445-7611	maveety@co.humboldt.ca.us
Imperial	Federico Garcia	442-265-3200	federicogarcia@co.imperial.ca.us
Inyo-Mono	Gordon Greene	760-873-7850	ggreen@inyocounty.us

**Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County  
Fiscal Year 2021-22**

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
KERN	38,111	1,237	11,942	2,731	\$7,917,047	\$2,899
KINGS	8,578	2,347	8,938	773	\$5,204,477	\$6,733
LAKE	4,822	5,000	27,000	831	\$6,755,977	\$8,130
LASSEN	2,015	400	1,150	140	\$955,654	\$6,826
LOS ANGELES	269,918	9,925	92,102	8,870	\$26,062,275	\$2,938
MADERA	6,000	1,127	3,806	628	\$2,719,290	\$4,330
MARIN	8,569	107	1,015	383	\$1,276,279	\$3,332
MARIPOSA	1,516	240	510	23	\$105,898	\$4,604
MENDOCINO	5,125	947	3,640	827	\$21,225,829	\$25,666
MERCED	10,266	2,798	1,814	1,104	\$1,088,693	\$986
MODOC	722	41	65	33	\$381,683	\$11,566
MONTEREY	19,031	3,193	8,668	1,797	\$10,723,361	\$5,967
NAPA	5,840	1,040	11,300	1,244	\$4,948,759	\$3,978
NEVADA	6,720	1,254	4,200	1,534	\$5,125,616	\$3,341

Notes: See last page of "Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County"

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Kern	Joshua Dhanens	661-868-7300	jdhanens@kerncounty.com
Kings	Scott Holwell	559-852-2669	scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us
Lake	Saul Sanabria	707-263-2384	Saul.Sanabria@lakecountyca.gov
Lassen	Chris Mancebo	530-251-8192	CMancebo@co.lassen.ca.us
Los Angeles	Jim Zenner	213-744-4825	jzenner@mva.lacounty.gov
Madera	Joshua Christopherson	559-675-7766	Josh.Christopherson@maderacounty.com
Marin	Sean Stephens	415-473-6193	SaStephens@marincounty.org
Mariposa	Bob Johns	209-966-4929	veterans@mariposacounty.org
Mendocino	Ulyses Lopez	707-463-4226	lopezu@mendocinocounty.org
Merced	Refugio Llamas	209-385-7588	refugio.llamas@countyofmerced.com
Modoc	Harry Hitchings	530-233-6209	harryhitchings@co.modoc.ca.us
Monterey	Jason Cameron	831-647-7613	cameronj@co.monterey.ca.us
Napa	Dell Pratt	707-253-4558	dell.pratt@countyofnapa.org
Nevada	David O. West II	530-265-1446	David.West@co.nevada.ca.us





<b>Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County Fiscal Year 2021-22</b>						
<b>County</b>	<b>Veteran Population (Note 1)</b>	<b>Veterans &amp; Family Members Contacting CVSO</b>		<b>New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)</b>		
		<b>In Person</b>	<b>By Phone or Email</b>	<b>New Claims Submitted by CVSO</b>	<b>New Awards Obtained by CVSO</b>	<b>Average New Award Obtained by CVSO</b>
ORANGE	105,092	2,000	26,928	2,610	\$9,097,874	\$3,486
PLACER	24,986	5,615	10,353	2,066	\$15,910,217	\$7,701
PLUMAS	1,695	528	4,186	124	\$951,971	\$7,677
RIVERSIDE	118,193	5,854	43,944	6,672	\$28,971,067	\$4,342
SACRAMENTO	80,574	4,801	8,740	2,250	\$8,353,899	\$3,713
SAN BENITO	2,603	63	1,573	236	\$1,416,375	\$6,002
SAN BERNARDINO	93,927	11,167	15,467	8,560	\$40,811,782	\$4,768
SAN DIEGO	236,225	12,041	165,318	8,997	\$17,303,263	\$1,923
SAN FRANCISCO	23,291	2,020		1,685	\$3,326,072	\$1,974
SAN JOAQUIN	29,739	3,867	22,356	1,733	\$9,066,934	\$5,232
SAN LUIS OBISPO	16,532	1,284	13,771	1,225	\$9,662,127	\$7,887
SAN MATEO	23,381	63	1,573	868	\$6,051,908	\$6,972
SANTA BARBARA	20,174	3,500	28,500	1,342	\$9,886,554	\$7,367
SANTA CLARA	52,575	647	18,398	2,075	\$16,077,332	\$7,748
<b>Notes: See last page of "Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County"</b>						

<b>County</b>	<b>CVSO</b>	<b>Telephone</b>	<b>Email</b>
Orange	George Dixon	714-480-6555	george.dixon@ocgov.com
Placer	Matthew Galvin	916-780-3290	matthewgalvin@placer.ca.gov
Plumas/Sierra	Bill Cook	530-283-6275	billcook@countyofplumas.com
Riverside	Grant Gautsche	951-955-3060	gautsche@rivco.org
Sacramento	Rochelle Arnold	916-874-6811	arnoldro@saccounty.net
San Benito	Jason Cameron	831-647-7613	CameronJ@co.monterey.ca.us
San Bernardino	Frank Guevara	909-382-3290	Frank.guevara@va.sbcounty.gov
San Diego	Wilfred Quintong	858-694-3222	wilfred.quintong@sdcounty.ca.gov
San Francisco	Elena Kim	415-934-4200	elena.kim@sfgov.org
San Joaquin	Susan Feighery	209-468-2916	sfeighery@sjgov.org
San Luis Obispo	Morgan Boyd	805-781-5766	mboyd@co.slo.ca.us
San Mateo	Ed Kiryczun	650-802-6598	EKiryczun@smcgv.org
Santa Barbara	Rhonda Murphy	805-346-7160	rmurphy@countyofsb.org
Santa Clara	Vacant	408-918-4980	lisa.moreno@vets.sccgov.org

**Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County  
Fiscal Year 2021-22**

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 2)		
		In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims Submitted by CVSO	New Awards Obtained by CVSO	Average New Award Obtained by CVSO
SANTA CRUZ	9,342	1,722	1,587	855	\$6,794,095	\$7,946
SHASTA	13,796	5,296	14,355	1,293	\$7,475,710	\$5,782
SIERRA	252	10	10	0	\$0	N/A
SISKIYOU	3,558	1,586	4,348	324	\$1,824,021	\$5,630
SOLANO	32,910	9,012	19,407	3,955	\$18,270,783	\$4,620
SONOMA	23,514	2,200	5,200	1,200	\$8,789,015	\$7,324
STANISLAUS	21,092	3,500	8,421	2,503	\$11,442,580	\$4,572
TEHAMA	4,197	402	1,351	647	\$2,547,954	\$3,938
TRINITY	963	175	755	138	\$321,766	\$2,332
TULARE	15,574	2,431	11,205	1,430	\$6,024,769	\$4,213
TUOLUMNE	4,549	2,002	3,319	445	\$2,453,672	\$5,514
VENTURA	37,231	2,744	23,367	2,263	\$12,651,945	\$5,591
YOLO	7,411	944	26,900	573	\$3,566,758	\$6,225
YUBA-SUTTER	11,603	2,592	2,387	1,536	\$10,150,512	\$6,608
STATEWIDE	1,585,037	141,813	785,363	89,571	\$425,177,830	\$4,747

**Notes:**

1. Veteran population estimates, as of September 30, published by USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "VetPop 2020".
2. These amounts are the new or increased benefits obtained by the CVSO as reported in CalVet's Annual Report to the Legislature "Monetary Benefits Attributable to the Assistance Of County Veterans Service Offices" for this Fiscal Year. They do not include any awards attributable to other veteran service organizations or individual filers.

Historical Note: Prior to federal fiscal year 2019 the USDVA published data on compensation and pension beneficiaries at the county level. That information was included in our annual reports as County Comparative statistics. In fiscal year 2019 they stopped including pension beneficiary data at the county level. Their rationale was that the use of the pension benefit had declined so much nationwide that publishing pension data at the county level could compromise individual veteran privacy information. We included that data in our annual report using estimated data on pension beneficiaries. The USDVA has not published any annual data on any benefit at the county level since the federal fiscal year 2019 data was published. If/when they resume publishing this data we will resume including it in our annual report.

County	CVSO	Telephone	Email
Santa Cruz	Dean Kaufman	831-454-7276	dean.kaufman@santacruzcounty.us
Shasta	Troy Payne (acting CVSO)	530-225-5616	tpayne@co.shasta.ca.us
Siskiyou	Tom Jackson	530-842-8010	thomas.jackson@siskiyousheriff.org
Solano	Alfred Sims	707-784-6590	acsims@solanocounty.com
Sonoma	Mark G. Orlando	707-565-5960	morlando@schsd.org
Stanislaus	Ryan Kegley	209-558-7380	Kegleyry@stancounty.com
Tehama	Shawn Bondon	530-529-3664	sbondon@co.tehama.ca.us
Trinity	Jennifer Dobbs	530-623-3975	jdobbs@trinitycounty.org
Tulare	Ken Cruickshank	559-713-2880	kcruicks@tularecounty.ca.gov
Tuolumne	Debra Kay Esque	209-533-6280	DEsque@co.tuolumne.ca.us
Ventura	Jim McHugh	805-477-5155	james.mchugh@ventura.org
Yolo	Salvador Torres	530-406-4850	Salvador.Torres@yolocounty.org
Yuba-Sutter	Marvin King, Jr.	530-749-6710	mking@co.yuba.ca.us



## THE SERGEANT FIRST CLASS HEATH ROBINSON PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS (PACT) ACT OF 2022

Passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden on August 10, 2022, The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act), was authored by Congressman Mark Takano (D-Riverside), 2019-22 Chair of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The PACT Act expands and extends eligibility for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare and benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances. The PACT Act also substantially expands coverage for Agent Orange exposure to many veterans who served in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll during the Vietnam Era. Veterans from the Vietnam War era, Gulf War era, and the Post-9/11 era are now eligible to apply for those programs and benefits. This eligibility expansion will have a tremendous impact on the lives of numerous veterans and our County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) will undoubtedly be serving many of them in the coming decade. According to the VA, it "is currently executing the largest Veteran outreach campaign in its history to inform Veterans, their families, and survivors about the PACT Act and encourage them to apply for the health care and benefits they have earned."

The military utilized burn pits as a way of disposing of waste materials in war zones. A variety of materials were burned, including plastics, basic trash, human waste, chemical waste, weapons, munitions, electronic waste, medical waste, and numerous other byproducts common to overseas military facilities large and small.

It's estimated that 78% of veterans were denied VA disability benefits for burn pit injuries between 2007 and 2020. The VA will now expand and extend eligibility for toxic exposure, improve the internal decision-making process for medical determinations, train their staff and claims processors on toxic exposure, and open 31 new facilities nationwide to provide greater access. The PACT Act will also fund research studies on the mortality of veterans who served during the Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 periods.

The PACT Act is estimated to expand eligibility to an estimated 3.5 million additional veterans, many of whom had been denied VA benefits for years or even decades. Many of those veterans experienced illnesses they believed were caused by exposure to toxic fumes from burn pits. They can now enroll to receive a toxic exposure screening, which will also include a follow-up screening every five years.

The PACT Act will also cover exposure experienced during certain cleanup and response missions undertaken by the military outside of warzones, such as cleanup of the nuclear testing site at Eniwetok

Atoll in the late seventies, and cleanup of plane crashes with nuclear weapons aboard in the late sixties.

Surviving family members may also be eligible for VA benefits, including Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and burial benefits.

The following conditions are now presumed to be service connected by the VA:

- Asthma (diagnosed after service)
- Brain or head cancer of any type
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Chronic rhinitis, sinusitis or bronchitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Glioblastoma
- Granulomatous disease
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD)
- Kidney cancer
- Lymphomatic cancer or Lymphoma of any type
- Melanoma
- Monoclonal Gammopathy of Undetermined Significance (MGUS)
- Neck cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Reproductive cancer of any type
- Respiratory (breathing-related) cancer of any type
- Sarcoidosis

For more information, contact your local County Veterans Service Office:

<http://www.cacvso.org/county-contacts/>



Riverside County CVSO office staff recognized by Congressman Mark Takano, 2019-22 Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, who visited the Riverside County Veterans Service team to recognize them for their work advocating for and assisting veterans, their dependents and survivors with obtaining the benefits they have earned and deserve.

**CVSOS IN ACTION**



Veterans resource and turkey give-away event at the Los Angeles Veterans and Community Thanksgiving held at El Camino College.



San Mateo CVSO staff with former Congresswoman Jackie Speier at an outreach event.



San Mateo CVSO staff at Christmas event promoting the Veterans Curation Program.





Hemet Veterans Day Resource Fair.



San Mateo County Veterans Service Officer Ed Kiryczun with WWII veteran.



Riverside CVSO table at Hemet Veterans Day Resource Fair.



Riverside CVSO at Ruck Challenge ("rucking" is going for a hike with a rucksack).



Riverside CVSO and Menifee Senior Health Festival.

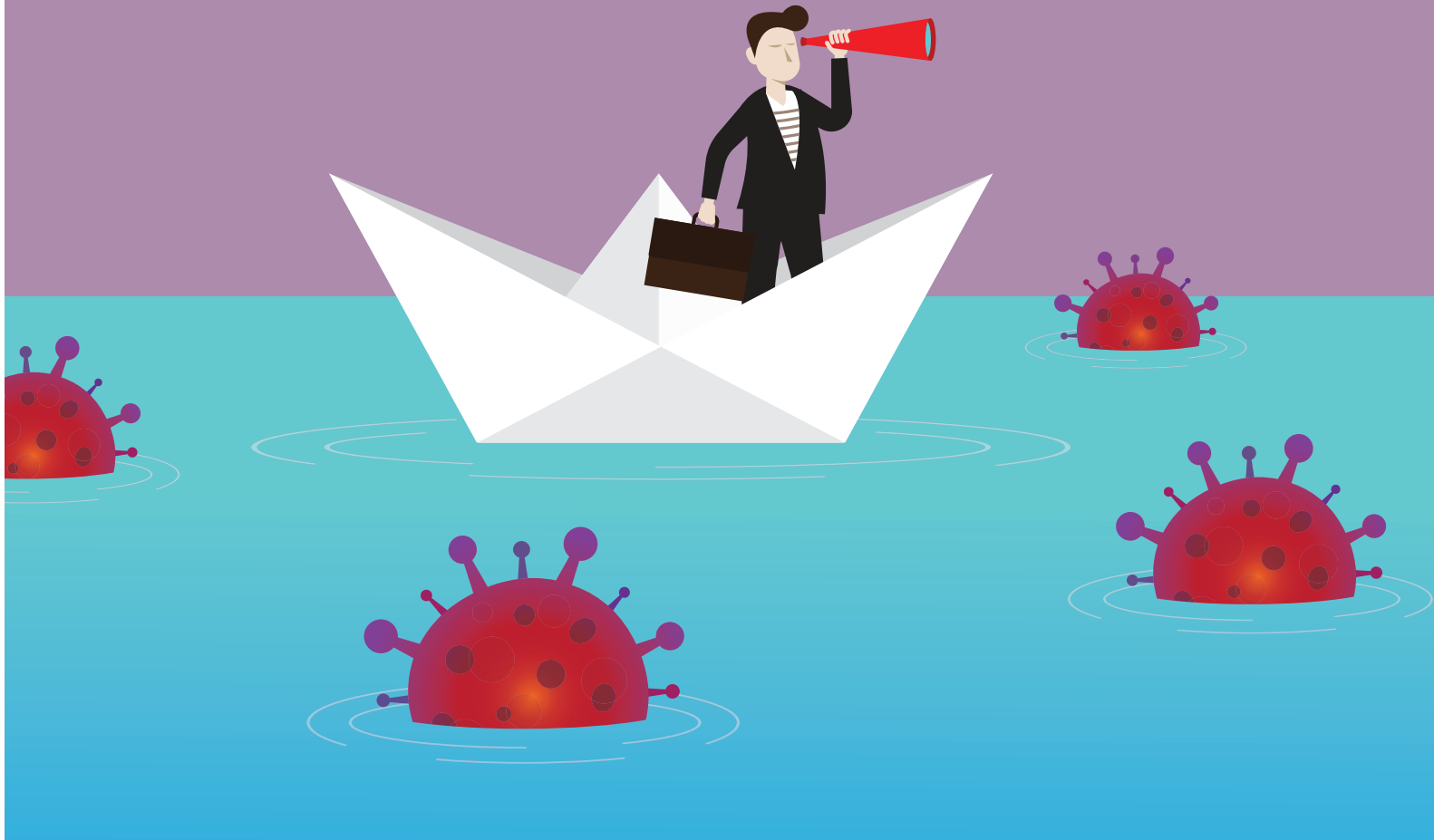


Field of Honor Veterans Resource Expo.



Fresno CVSO and staff at Fresno State University game.

# CVSOs CONTINUE TO NAVIGATE COVID



**Despite the continuing challenges of COVID, CVSOs remained committed** to the mission throughout and since the pandemic. Now they have incorporated some of the innovations learned into standard practices.

Starting with the Presidential COVID-19 national emergency declaration in February 2020, followed by the statewide Stay-at-Home Order on March 19, 2020, county veterans service office operations had to react to the appearance of COVID variants and numerous closure and social distancing public health orders — leading up to the variants of late 2021 and into 2022. For over two years, CVSO operations continued to adapt to the situation on the ground.

Prior to 2020, offices had operated predominantly via in-person outreach and meetings with veterans where an exchange and review of hard copy documents took place. During COVID, CVSOs and their staff moved quickly to establish new protocols to serve the veterans and families depending on them.

While some activities had to be temporarily suspended due to health considerations — such as in-person outreach programs to the incarcerated or homeless — others were reorganized and adapted to the “new normal.”



To continue serving California’s veterans during the pandemic, while still protecting public health, CVSOs adapted by implementing the following workarounds:

- Transitioned from in-person claims processing to email, scanned and faxed claims.
- Invested in electronic document signing programs (i.e., Finger-Ink, etc.) to assist veterans in completing required claims online.
- Installed drop-boxes outside of their offices for veterans to leave important documents and assigned clerks to pick up the documents and mail daily.
- Created “Virtual VSOs” allowing face-to-face meetings with veterans and CVSOs who were teleworking, as well as virtual outreach to county jails, senior living facilities and other outside agencies.
- Obtained mobile workstations, printers, hotspots, mobile phone data stipends and other necessary equipment for employees now teleworking to ensure that they were fully equipped to continue their work on behalf of veterans.
- Transitioned in-person staff meetings (and ongoing trainings) to Zoom.
- At least one county will soon have the capability for veterans to complete certain VA forms via the county website.
- Another county replaced its in-person outreach with a new “Welcome Home” program, sending letters and phoning all newly separated servicemembers using data provided by CalVet.

In late 2022 and going onto 2023, the CVSOs continue to utilize many of these technological and procedural innovations to augment and enhance their traditional one-on-one interactions with veterans. For instance, the Contra Costa County CVSO hosted live, online shows for veterans (see below). The Veterans’ Voices monthly program could be seen live online on the County’s website, Facebook, and on cable. Topics of concern to veterans are explored and viewers can ask a question or share their own experiences.

The Contra Costa CVSO office also continues to offer its COVID closure inspired Virtual Office, which allows veterans to have a live, face-to-face session with a Veterans Service Representative. For instance, a veteran who works as a postal carrier needed assistance filing a claim for disability compensation for injuries received during his military service. The veteran, from the convenience of his cell phone, was able to receive assistance from the CVSO in discussing his claim and completed the application for benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) while he was in his mail delivery truck during lunch break. ■



Contra Costa CVSO office broadcasts live online show for veterans.

## CONNECTING VETERANS TO BENEFITS

### REAL STORIES, REAL LIVES CHANGED

California is home to over 1.6 million veterans, many of whom still do not know that they're eligible for federal Department of Veterans Administration (VA) benefits and healthcare. Yet, awareness is only half the battle; navigating the claims process is the other.

Due to complex and bewildering claim forms and ever-changing rules and regulations, County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) play a critical role in connecting these veterans to the benefits they've earned.

While each veteran's situation is unique, the following stories provide a sampling of how California's veterans are assisted, supported and outstandingly served by California's CVSOs every day.

#### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — VSO STAFF ASSIST MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA VICTIM TO RECEIVE BENEFITS 42 YEARS AFTER ASSAULT, 14 YEARS AFTER VA DENIAL OF CLAIM**

In 1978, a female sailor, who was expecting a long career in the U.S. Navy, was assaulted by a superior, leaving physical and psychological scars. She tried to live a normal life but was unable to sustain a stable relationship, commenting that "I was not sane anymore." Military Sexual Trauma (MST) left her angry and alone. Treatment over the years did not help until she joined a rape survivor group at the VA Vet Center in Los Angeles County. In 2006 she filed for VA benefits through a lawyer but was denied. In 2020, she approached the Los Angeles CVSO office and worked with a Senior Veterans Service Representative (VSR), who asked her to obtain proof of her documented disability. The VSR then re-opened her case and filed an appeal with the VA. The veteran eventually received a direct deposit from the VA of \$232,000. This award gave her the ability and stability to secure a small home, dog, and garden.

#### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE REFILES CLAIM TO HELP NAVY VET RECEIVE \$140,000**

In 2014, a U.S. Navy veteran filed a claim at the Long Beach VA Hospital for health complications arising from Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War. He had been working on a helicopter carrier a mile off the coast of Danang. Following his service, he suffered from Type II diabetes and a heart condition. In 2022, the veteran learned that the Monrovia library had a satellite CVSO office, where he met with the accredited VSR. The VSR informed the veteran that the Agent Orange sprayed within a 12-mile radius of Danang was now recognized by the VA as an eligibility factor for benefits. The VSR refiled the claim and requested medical records from the veteran. The veteran then visited a VA doctor, who diagnosed him with neuropathy and diabetes. A year after re-filing, the veteran received a \$140,000 check from the VA. The thankful veteran was able to pay off debt and help his children and grandchildren.

#### **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — QUICK TURN-AROUND**

In April 2022, Los Angeles CVSO staff assisted a veteran with over eight years of military service who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), shoulder dislocations and tinnitus. A claim was filed with the VA and was approved in one month.

With the veteran's combined disabilities and evaluation, the veteran is now rated 60% service-connected disabled and received a check for \$16,000. The veteran will also continue to receive a monthly, tax-free check from the VA. VA disability compensation is a monetary benefit paid to veterans who are determined by the VA to be disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service. These disabilities are considered to be service connected.

"We change people's lives," the VSR said, noting how rewarding it is to help the veterans she sees. "They come in with zero to little income and a lot of problems, and we're able to get them help with monthly payments for the rest of their lives."





## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY — CVSO OFFICE SECURES \$430,000 PAYOUT FOR VETERAN'S WIDOW**

A veteran, who in 1971 at the age of 22 was drafted into the U.S. Army, served until 1972 in the Vietnam War. During his tour in Vietnam, he was exposed to Agent Orange (AO). During the war, the U.S. government was utilizing AO, a hazardous dioxin chemical used as a defoliant. Years later, the U.S. government finally admitted the deadly consequences of AO.

In 2002, the veteran filled a claim for Type II Diabetes and Hepatitis C with the VA. However, the VA would only approve his claim for Type II Diabetes, not for Hepatitis C, which was denied due to lack of evidence the disease was associated with the Vietnam War and military service. Due to the complex nature of the VA system, the veteran gave up. Until his death in 2013, the veteran always told his spouse that his medical condition was somehow related to his service in Vietnam.

In 2014, the widow attempted to apply for VA benefits on her own, but due to her lack of knowledge of VA rules and regulations, she only applied for VA burial benefits and was awarded about \$2,000. The VA failed to inform the widow that she could apply for additional benefits such as Death Indemnity Compensation (DIC) or a basic widow's pension. Over the years, the widow felt that something wasn't right.

Three years later, the widow visited the West Covina Courthouse and met with a Los Angeles County Veterans Claims Assistant. She wanted to know if she qualified for any other VA benefits, whereupon the Claims Assistant conducted an in-depth interview regarding her husband's service and cause of death. During the interview process, the widow was screened for two benefits: DIC and a basic widow's pension.

These efforts were complicated by the fact that the veteran had already passed away and a medical opinion could not be obtained. The only option was to assemble a claim package utilizing the veteran's own description of his illness from 2002 and the claim that there was a correlation. The Claims Assistant opted to help the widow produce a written argument trying to associate Type II Diabetes and Hepatitis C together. Unfortunately, the VA again denied the claim due to lack of evidence.

But the widow and the Claims Assistant kept at it. They decided to continue to fight with the VA by filling a timely appeal and maintaining the stance that the Hepatitis C and Type II Diabetes can be linked together. In 2018, the Claims Assistant assisted the widow with a Notice of Disagreement, which stated that Type II Diabetes weakens the immune system, which caused the veteran to develop all conditions listed on his death certificate and that there are many medical reports that liver disease is associated with Diabetes. Again, the VA denied it. The only option left was to continue the appeal before the Board of Veteran Appeals (BVA).

In 2021, a BVA judge reviewed the appeal and liberally construed it supporting the veteran's past argument from 2002 stating his Hepatitis C was related to his military service. Subsequently, the widow was surprised to receive several checks in the mail which ranged from \$966 to \$335,130. Moreover, the VA received a new medical opinion stating there is a correlation between Hepatitis C, Type II Diabetes, and the veteran's cause of death. This was a huge win for the widow, as well as for other veterans who underwent the same difficulties. The widow will also receive a check from the VA for the rest of her life. Additionally, the widow can now apply for more aid and attendance benefits if she needs it.

## **MARIN COUNTY — CVSO PROVIDES IMPETUS FOR EFFORT TO ESTABLISH 24-UNIT HOUSING FOR HOMELESS VETERANS**

In 2014, the Marin CVSO had the idea of converting unused Coast Guard housing at Hamilton Field in Novato into homes for homeless veterans. He contacted Marin's representative in the California Senate, Mike McGuire, who investigated the proposition. Ultimately, that approach proved infeasible. However, McGuire wouldn't let it go and the project took off when the city of Novato and Homeward Bound became involved. Homeward Bound of Marin is the primary provider of Marin County homeless shelters and services for homeless families and individuals.

In 2020, the Novato City Council agreed to lease a 2.8-acre parcel to Homeward Bound for a nominal fee and provide \$750,000 for the project from its affordable housing fund. Senator McGuire then helped secure a \$4 million allocation from the State Budget. The project has also received a \$3 million grant through the state's Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program, which was funded through the issuance of bonds authorized by Proposition 41 in 2014. Construction was launched on a 24-unit building reserved for homeless veterans.

According to the Marin CVSO, the first thing recruits are taught in boot camp is the importance of supporting the other members of their team and that housing homeless veterans together at one site is ideal because it will appeal to veterans' sense of camaraderie. One of the hardest things to get over when leaving military service is the loss of that connection between you and your fellow service members.

If everything goes according to plan, veterans will begin moving into the new housing in the summer of 2024.

### **NAPA COUNTY — COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SERVICE RECORDS LEADS TO SERVICE-CONNECTION AND HOUSING FOR CHRONICALLY HOMELESS VETERAN**

A veteran had been homeless and dealing with substance abuse issues (in and out of shelters) for several years. His previous claims to the VA for service-connected disability compensation had been denied due to his discharge status, and he'd given up hope. One morning while on a walk, the Napa CVSO noticed the veteran in a heated verbal dispute over a bicycle. The CVSO asked the veteran to walk with him, during which the veteran explained his anger issues and the cause of his military discharge. The veteran had been the victim of a "blanket party" aboard the Navy ship to which he was assigned. A blanket party is a form of corporal punishment or hazing in which the victim is restrained with a blanket and beaten.

The CVSO requested the veteran's files and upon receipt of the complete file from the National Personnel Records Center, the CVSO audited each document and discovered an entry in the service treatment records that specifically used the phrase "Assaulted during Blanket Party." Moreover, it was discovered the veteran had been awarded a medal for an honorable period of service. Utilizing the uncovered evidence, a claim for service connection was developed and filed with the VA. Flagged as homeless, the claim was decided quickly, and the veteran was awarded his long overdue service-connected disability rating.

The CVSO then helped the veteran enroll in VA Healthcare and arranged a meeting with a VA HUD/VASH social worker. HUD/VASH is a collaborative program between the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA Supportive Housing (VASH) that combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans and their families who are homeless to sustain permanent housing.

A short time later, the veteran stopped by the CVSO office to show off his new VA Healthcare ID Card and express pleasure about being able to shop at the Travis Air Force Base Commissary and Exchange. Even more remarkable, he wanted to update his address to his new apartment and show off his car — the first car he'd owned in over 15 years! It all started with a simple walk and conversation. A great reminder of the importance of being willing to listen with empathy.

### **RIVERSIDE COUNTY — SURVIVING SPOUSE OF VIETNAM VETERAN GRANTED \$290,847 IN RETROACTIVE BENEFITS AND \$1,645 PER MONTH**

A surviving spouse of a Vietnam veteran visited the Riverside County Veterans Service Office (Hemet) in mid-2022 seeking assistance with filing a claim for VA survivors' benefits and was assisted by the Senior VSR. The deceased veteran had previously obtained a 70% service-connected disability rating for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and had attempted to file for benefits for cancer due to Agent Orange many years prior to his death. That claim had been denied by the VA, leading the veteran to file an appeal with the VA, which was also denied.

The VSR first reopened the claim for cancer with the VA. About one month later, the VA granted the deceased veteran a service-connected disability rating for cancer from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam and the rating was retro-active to 2009. The spouse was then granted accrued benefits in the amount of \$270,266 and \$1,700 to augment the burial allowance. She was also granted a retroactive benefit for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) of \$18,881 in addition to a monthly stipend of \$1,645.



## **RIVERSIDE COUNTY — VETERAN'S RIGHT TO VA BENEFITS RESTORED AFTER TECHNICAL ERROR IN AWOL CHARGE FROM VIETNAM WAR**

A Vietnam veteran of the Tet Offensive was receiving a 100% service-connected disability compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), back injury, and other related injuries. Recently, the VA performed a review of his file and terminated his service-connection for PTSD because the veteran had been charged with being Absent Without Leave (AWOL) during his time in the service, which disqualified him from some benefits. This reduction in benefits terminated his eligibility for Special Monthly Compensation caregiver benefits.

A VSR at the Riverside County Veterans Service Office reviewed the veteran's claim file and service personnel records and determined the veteran was charged with AWOL after being granted emergency leave and requesting a compassionate reassignment to care for his parents. The request was never processed, which led to the veteran's AWOL charge. A thorough review of VA regulations revealed a legal statute that permits the VA granting the veteran's service as honorable due to these specific extenuating circumstances. An appeal to the VA Board of Appeals was filed, which eventually led to the veterans 100% disability rating being restored along with all other related benefits.

## **RIVERSIDE COUNTY — VETERAN FATHER VISITS CVSO TO GET SURVIVOR BENEFITS FOR CHILD OF DECEASED VETERAN MOTHER, FINDS OUT HE IS ALSO ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFITS NETTING \$237,000 FROM VA**

A VSR in the Riverside County Veterans Service Office (Indio) assisted a veteran who was claiming Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the VA for his child due to the service-connected death of the child's mother. DIC is a monthly benefit paid to eligible survivors of servicemembers who died while on active duty, active duty training, or veterans who died as a result of a service-connected injury or disease, or veterans who were totally disabled by a service-connected disability. The child subsequently received the DIC benefits.

During this process the VSR discovered that the father was also a veteran who had previously been barred from obtaining VA benefits. After further investigation, the VSR learned that the father was a Marine Corps infantry veteran of operation Iraqi Freedom who had two enlistments and only the second enlistment was barred from benefits. This allowed the veteran to claim VA compensation for his first four years of service. The VSR submitted the claim and provided evidence that the effective date should be retroactive to 2014. In late 2022, the veteran was awarded a 90% service-connected rating from the VA retroactive to 2014. This resulted in a retroactive payment of about \$237,000. This claim will change this veteran's life in a positive way.

Sometimes when a veteran or family member visits a County Veterans Service Office for one thing, it is revealed during the process that the veteran may be eligible for other benefits they never knew about.

## **SAN MATEO COUNTY — CVSO OFFICE INCREASES STAFF AND OUTREACH AS A RESULT OF COUNTY TAX ASSESSMENT**

In 2014, San Mateo County assessed its veteran population and then conducted an update in 2021. The purpose of these assessments was to better understand the needs of veterans and their family members in the community and to determine what programs, support, and service delivery systems would be needed to improve their lives. The assessment found that some veterans were struggling to make ends meet and older veterans were facing the challenges of surviving on fixed incomes. Others had lost jobs, while still others were struggling with physical, mental, or behavioral health challenges that had not been adequately addressed.

As a result of these findings, the county allocated funds from a recent tax assessment approved by the voters to the San Mateo County Veterans Service Office, which allowed them to expand staff from three to five people, thus expanding VA claims assistance and help with other state and local veterans programs and benefits. In FY 2021-22, the San Mateo County Veterans Service Office was able to assist their veterans in obtaining over \$6 million in new or increased payments from the federal VA. These payments are paid directly to the veteran on a monthly basis and continue for the rest of the veteran's life. These monthly VA cash benefits make a big difference in a veteran's life — and could mean the difference

between being housed or becoming homeless. Many veterans are also eligible for healthcare benefits. In addition to bringing stability to the lives of veterans and their families, these federal benefits also take some of the pressure off of already strained state and local safety net programs.

### **SAN DIEGO COUNTY — CVSO LEVERAGES MOBILE OFFICE FOR OUTREACH AT LIBRARIES**

In 2022, the San Diego County Veterans Service Office aggressively utilized the county's Live Well on Wheels (LWOW) mobile office, a 40-foot "mobile outreach" vehicle designed to bring support services to veterans and their families in the communities where they live. Each month, an LWOW outreach event is conducted at rural, coastal, and metropolitan county libraries allowing VSRs to connect with and provide needed services to local veterans. The library locations are an ideal focal point in the community because veterans bring their children to see what the LWOW is all about. The program has served over 1,000 veterans and resulted in 3,600 VA claims submitted and awarded.

The County of San Diego is home to over 236,000 veterans — the second largest in California. This includes 35,000 women veterans — the largest concentration of women veterans in the world. San Diego is also home to over 120,000 active-duty military. In total, over 1.2 million residents in San Diego County are associated with the military and veterans, yet many of these men and women are not fully aware of the benefits and healthcare they're eligible for from the VA and CalVet. Raising awareness of these benefits and services through innovative outreach is an important priority for the San Diego County Veterans Service Office.



### **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY — CVSO ASSISTS VETERAN TRANSITION FROM VETERAN'S TREATMENT COURT TO OPERATING A NON-PROFIT FOR HOMELESS VETERANS**

A veteran of the Marine Corps found himself homeless, addicted to drugs and involved in the justice system. The veteran was able to utilize the Santa Barbara County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC), which was established to serve justice-involved military veterans struggling with addiction, serious mental illness, and/or co-occurring disorders.

The VTC promotes sobriety, recovery, and stability for veterans by establishing a viable option of treatment, rather than incarceration. The VTC's goal is to address the unique needs of the veteran considering their service and injuries sustained during that service, then link the veteran to the appropriate programs and services to reduce incarceration and facilitate their integration back into the community. Volunteer veterans acting as peer mentors are available to assist the justice-involved veteran fulfill the requirements of the VCT program.

The Marine Corps veteran in question, upon graduation from the VTC program, contacted the county's local supportive services program to get housing, and medical and mental health treatment. He was advised that the best place for a veteran to get this assistance was at the County Veteran Services Office, but for one reason or another the veteran resisted.



A few years later, he met the County Veteran Services Officer (CVSO) at an event and advised her he was still struggling with his mental health and having financial trouble. The CVSO asked if he had filed for his disabilities and the veteran admitted that he had not. The CVSO then filed a claim for all the veteran's conditions incurred during his service. Subsequently, the benefits were granted, and the veteran is now running a non-profit helping veterans in the community.

### **SISKIYOU COUNTY — INDIGENT NAVY VETERAN RECEIVES BURIAL IN STATE VETERANS CEMETERY WITH MILITARY HONORS**

The Siskiyou County Veterans Service Office received a call from a U.S. Army veteran who owns an apartment complex in the county. He reported that one of his tenants, a retired U.S. Navy veteran, had passed. The landlord stated that the veteran did not have any immediate family and asked for assistance. The CVSO contacted the Coroner's Office to inquire about the remains and was notified that they were located at a local funeral chapel in Yreka and were awaiting release of the death certificate. The landlord was able to enter the veteran's apartment when the investigation was complete. He found a military discharge certificate and the deceased's Navy Retiree I.D. card. After the death certificate was released, the Coroner's Office contacted the CVSO, who was then able to order a copy of the certificate from the County Recorder's office. With this information in hand, the CVSO ordered a copy of the veteran's military discharge papers from the National Personnel Records Center. Upon receipt of the DD-214, the CVSO contacted the Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Igo, CA and requested an indigent burial. The cemetery asked the CVSO to help determine the veteran's eligibility. After completing this task, the CVSO coordinated with the Coroner's Office to notify the funeral chapel to release the cremains to the CVSO, who then transported them to the state veterans cemetery in neighboring Shasta County. The cremains then had a proper burial with military honors.

### **SOLANO COUNTY — CVSO SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE AND MISUSE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) announced Alfred C. Sims, Director of Veteran Services for Solano County, was chosen to be part of a select group of fellows in a new rural leadership program: *Reaching Rural: Advancing Collaborative Solutions*.

Program fellows will learn how to adopt bold solutions to the persistent challenge of substance use in rural communities. They'll work closely with innovators who have established successful programs in other rural communities. The participants were selected through a competitive process. The Solano County Department of Veteran Services will participate in this national effort to improve cooperation between federal, state, and local organizations for the benefit of veterans.

The year-long program will have a strong focus on creating engagement across rural communities and sectors. The program will demonstrate how diverse systems with different missions can engage with one another to serve justice-involved individuals more effectively with substance use or co-occurring disorders.

The *Reaching Rural: Advancing Collaborative Solutions* initiative is a collaborative project providing training to a class of over 65 fellows working to adopt bold solutions to the persistent challenge of substance use and misuse in 81 rural communities across 15 states. The fellows include elected county leaders, county and tribal judges, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, public defenders, public health and behavioral health practitioners, emergency management professionals, reentry coordinators, and individuals working in community nonprofits.

The BJA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the State Justice Institute (SJI), with support from the Institute for Intergovernmental Research, co-sponsor the project. The National Association of Counties (NACo) is a key partner. ■



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We'd love to help tell your story too.

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## CALIFORNIA VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS

### What are Veterans Treatment Courts?

The purpose of Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) is to address the root causes that led to a veteran becoming involved in the criminal justice system. As an alternative to incarceration, which does not fix the problem and often results in reoffending, the goal of VTCs is to utilize treatment, support, and therapy to give veterans the tools to cope with their military-related mental injuries. While in the VTC program, veterans can meet frequently with an officer of the court, other veterans as peer mentors, treatment specialists, or other support staff.

### What are some of the root causes that can cause a veteran to become involved in the criminal justice system?

There are many mental health problems that can become the underlying cause for criminal activity in veterans, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Military Sexual Trauma (MST). These conditions can also be contributing factors to homelessness, drug addiction, and financial problems.

### What crimes do Veteran Treatment Courts help veterans with?

VTCs are an option for veterans in participating California counties, and the rules governing which crimes may be eligible for the VTC are specific to each county. Eligible crimes may include offenses such as public intoxication, disorderly conduct, violation of probation or parole, driving under the influence (DUI), domestic dispute, delinquency or non-payment of child support, drug possession or trafficking, vandalism, theft, or robbery. The most common crimes handled by most VTCs are DUI, public intoxication, disorderly conduct, and drug possession.

### Legislative history of Veterans Treatment Courts

In 2006, California became the first state to establish an alternative sentencing program for veterans and military members when the Governor signed AB 2586 (Parra) into law. Under this statute, veterans or active-duty servicemembers with service-related mental health issues may be sentenced to therapy (through the federal VA) in lieu of incarceration. The veteran, upon completion of the program, may have charges reduced, records expunged, and rights restored, and will not have to list the conviction on job applications. This law is the basis for the state's network of VTCs, although it can be implemented in any courtroom. VTCs in California are not mandated and receive no allocated state funding. Another related law — SB 1227 (Hancock) signed in 2014 — established diversion for veterans accused of misdemeanors. Qualifying veterans completing this therapy can have their charges dismissed. And in 2017, SB 725 (Jackson) was signed into law, clarifying that veterans and servicemembers suffering from PTSD and other mental health disorders are eligible for pretrial diversion programs for misdemeanor DUIs, thus ensuring that these veterans get the help they need sooner and more effectively.

### Do Veterans Treatment Courts work?

According to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 70% of defendants finish the programs and 75% are not rearrested for at least two years after. The VTC program has reduced recidivism, lowered crime, and changed the lives of participating veterans.

### Does every county have a Veterans Treatment Court?

California currently has 31 counties with established VTCs, and some counties have multiple VTCs in different cities.

These counties are:

Alameda	Lake	Sacramento	Santa Clara
Butte	Los Angeles	San Bernardino	Santa Cruz
Calaveras	Madera	San Diego	Solano
Contra Costa	Merced	San Francisco	Sonoma
Del Norte	Monterey	San Joaquin	Stanislaus
El Dorado	Orange	San Luis Obispo	Tulare
Fresno	Placer	San Mateo	Ventura
Kings	Riverside	Santa Barbara	

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COLLEGE FEE WAIVER | EMPLOYMENT | ENTREPRENEURSHIP | BENEFITS | HEALTHCARE | CLAIMS | COMPENSATION | TRANSITION |



California Transition Assistance Program informs and connects veterans of all eras to their earned federal and state benefits and to their community-based system of care, even as their needs change over time.

For more information on CalTAP programs go to [bit.ly/3D00HB2](https://bit.ly/3D00HB2) or e-mail us at [caltap@calvet.ca.gov](mailto:caltap@calvet.ca.gov)





LIEUTENANT COLONEL PETER MICHAEL CONATY, U.S. Army (Ret.)  
CACVSO Legislative Advocate (2001 to 2017)



We lost a dear friend, tireless advocate and faithful advisor with the passing of longtime CACVSO lobbyist Pete Conaty in July 2022.

Pete was a force of nature; a man with a mission who was unstoppable and unforgettable. He diligently fought for CVSOs at the state legislature and assiduously made sure that legislators and staff were familiar with how CVSOs helped veterans in their counties.

He fought fervently for legislation, policies, and regulations to provide the funding and strategies for CVSOs to serve their veterans. He also represented numerous veterans service organizations and was an active member in many of them.

Serving in the military was central to Pete’s life. He served 21 years in the U.S. Army, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1986. He was a graduate of the Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2016. As a member of the famed 101st Airborne Division, he served two tours of duty in Vietnam, earning a Purple Heart for wounds received on his

first tour. He also served as an Army Ranger and military intelligence officer, receiving many medals and awards, including three Bronze Stars, a Meritorious Service Medal, and an Army Commendation Medal.

Pete joined the California State Assembly as a Legislative Aide in 1986 and spent the next decade in a variety of roles, including Chief of Staff and Committee Consultant. In 1996, Pete founded a lobbying firm and spent the next 21 years representing a variety of clients, many of which were veteran and military related. Pete’s work was recognized by many. He received the California Department of Veterans Affairs Annual Secretary’s Award on two occasions, as well as an award from the Adjutant General of the California National Guard.

Pete was most proud of establishing a prison diversion program for veterans with PTSD who found themselves in trouble with the law, and for helping establish the “Veteran” designation on the California driver’s license, which became a valuable outreach tool for CVSOs.

Pete’s bigger-than-life presence is already missed, but his legacy will live on.

## LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) selected Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana) as the recipient of the Motomu Nakasako Legislator of the Year award for 2022.



### SENATOR TOM UMBERG (D-SANTA ANA)

Senator Umberg served in the State Assembly from 1990 to 1994 and 2004 to 2006. He has served in the State Senate since 2018. He currently represents the 34th Senate District, which encompasses South Whittier, East Mirada, La Habra, Buena Park, Fullerton, Anaheim, and Santa Ana. During the 2021-22 legislative session, Senator Umberg served on the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs.

Senator Umberg is a retired U.S. Army Colonel, a former federal criminal prosecutor, small business owner, and Deputy Drug Czar for President Clinton.

Senator Umberg began his military service at the Korean DMZ and served three overseas tours. He served on active military duty in 2009, leading the U.S. military effort to attack corruption within the Afghan Army and Police, for which he was awarded a Bronze Star for meritorious service in a combat zone.

He founded and built a successful veteran-owned small business in Orange County, recognized as one of California's preeminent boutique law firms by "Best Lawyers" and "The Daily Journal." Since 2020, Senator Umberg has served as a Trustee for the Judicial Council of California, the constitutionally created policy making body of the California courts.

Senator Umberg lives in Orange County with his wife Robin, who is a Retired Brigadier General.

Senator Umberg has authored many key veteran and military related bills in his legislative career. In 2022, he authored SB 837, which was sponsored by the CACVSO. SB 837 sought to delete the \$5 fee at the DMV for veterans to obtain the "Veteran" designation on the California driver's license or the California I.D. card. Senator Umberg and his staff were able to work with the DMV and the governor's office to move the bill through the legislature and then to the governor's desk, where it was signed into law and went into effect on January 1, 2023.

For a veteran to qualify for the "Veteran" designation on the driver's license and I.D. card, it is required that the veteran visit a CVSO to verify their veteran status. This visit also allows the CVSO to ascertain if the veteran is eligible for any federal VA benefits.

Since 2015, a total of 250,105 veterans have visited CVSOs to get the "Veteran" designation on their driver's license. During these visits, 103,833 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 42,314 veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling \$256,722,754. Thanks to Senator Umberg's SB 837, utilization of this program will increase and more veterans will access their rightful federal VA benefits. ■

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**The Motomu Nakasako Award** is named after the late "Mote" Nakasako, a Los Angeles County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) who was deeply involved in legislation to improve the lives of veterans. He was a decorated member of the Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of World War II's most decorated units.

#### Past Recipients of the CACVSO Motomu Nakasako Award

2021 — Senator Bob Archuleta and Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris  
2020 — Assemblyman Jim Frazier (*second award*)  
2019 — Senator Jerry Hill  
2018 — Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson and Assemblyman Marc Levine  
2017 — Senator Josh Newman and Assemblyman Rocky Chávez  
2016 — Senator Jim Nielsen and Assemblywoman Jacqui Irwin

2015 — Senator Richard Roth and Assemblyman Jim Frazier  
2014 — Senator Ben Hueso and Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva

#### Recipients of CACVSO Lifetime Achievement Award

2015 — Assemblywoman Toni Atkins  
2011 — Assemblyman Paul Cook  
2009 — Congressman Mike Thompson



## CALIFORNIA VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE ACADEMY

### CALVET PROVIDES CVS0 STAFF THE REQUIRED TRAINING TO MAINTAIN ACCREDITATION WITH FEDERAL VA

#### **Overview**

The intent of the California Veterans Service Representative Academy (CVSRA) is to train County Veterans Service Officer (CVS0s) and their staff for the job of preparing veterans' claims for benefits, instilling in each new staff member the working knowledge of federal, state, and local veteran benefit programs, as well as the skills necessary to develop and submit high-quality claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration (VA). The standardized curriculum ensures that county Veterans Service Representatives (VSR), who are required by state law to pass and maintain VA accreditation to file claims on behalf of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), all receive the same high-level training. This also prevents future backlogs of claims and/or appeals by promoting the submission of quality claim packages to the VA.

The CVSRA includes two phases of classroom training and three months of on-the-job training (OJT) in preparation for the CalVet accreditation exam. In non-pandemic times, both phases of classroom training are offered in northern and southern California to accommodate CVS0 staff from across the state.

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the continued demand for the academy, CalVet quickly transitioned from in-person trainings to a virtual platform, offering the first virtual CVSRA training to 15 students in June of 2020.

#### **VA Accreditation Examination**

The examination covers knowledge of the VA's compensation and pension programs, procedures for filing claims, procedures for appealing denied claims, and familiarity with Title 38 of the U.S. Code pertaining to veterans' benefits, as well as sections of Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Knowledge of ethical standards is also required.

#### **Community Partnerships**

The CVSRA is a true partnership between the 56 county veterans service offices, CalVet and the VA Regional Offices in California. With three levels of training, continuous feedback and periodic checks and balances, the county partners are truly prepared to succeed. The positive impact of this success on the community is significant. Claim packages are prepared accurately and in a timely fashion ensuring veterans receive awards more quickly. Tribal VSRs are also encouraged to attend CVSRA and become accredited by CalVet as allowed by the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations.

In addition to the CalVet Home office, CalVet also has three District Offices co-located within the VA Regional Offices in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego. These District Office managers provide more than 20 years of combined experience to the classes. This early introduction to District Office staff also allows CalVet and the county employees to develop strong working relationships from the very beginning of the students' careers. From the start of their claims work, new CVS0 staff know who to contact at each CalVet District Office with claims questions and issues. District Offices also provide ongoing feedback to the accredited county VSRs to ensure claim issues are quickly identified and addressed, and that each VSR continues to develop.

#### **Overview of Performance Metrics**

In 2021-22 the virtual training platform allowed CalVet and CVS0s to maintain a high standard of claims representation, with 88% of academy attendees who took the VA-approved accreditation test passing on the first attempt — the highest rate to date.

## LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2023

Thanks to the \$5.4 million Local Assistance funding increase from the State Budget provided by the legislature and Governor Newsom in 2021, the CVSOs have been increasing “boots on the ground” by hiring new Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) who can help process claims and provide outreach to underserved populations of veterans. In addition to ensuring CVSOs have appropriate funding for their vital services, the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) also advocates for state policies and programs that will benefit California’s veterans and their families, as well as active-duty servicemembers, reservists, and National Guard personnel. The CACVSO also works closely with veterans service organizations to sponsor and support legislation in support of this goal.

### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- **Homelessness**

In early 2020, the CACVSO realigned its priorities to focus on getting homeless veterans off the street and into housing, including transitional and permanent supportive housing. The key to assisting homeless veterans is outreach and building trust among a population that usually eschews contact with social workers, including CVSOs. The pandemic severely, if not completely, curtailed CVSOs’ abilities to engage with the homeless. With most COVID restrictions being lifted by late 2022, CVSOs were able to expand their outreach efforts accordingly. CVSOs have resumed working with CalVet to record and track all homeless contact, outreach activities, and successful entry into a housing environment.

- **Accreditation**

Support legislation that would require an individual who is assisting a veteran with filing a claim for benefits to notify that veteran if they are not a VA-accredited representative, and make it a criminal offense to intentionally misdirect or mislead a veteran, or anyone acting on a veteran’s behalf, concerning benefits or entitlements for their own monetary gain.

- **Veterans license plate fee waiver**

Support legislation that would grant the license plate fee waiver to all veterans rated at 100 percent disability or through individual unemployability. Change the language on the DMV form to eliminate the requirement that the veteran have a single disability rated at 100%. Also, separate the disabled placard and make it an option for veterans with a mobility impairment.

- **Restore veterans-only license plate**

Support legislation that would restore the veterans-only specialized license plate, making two veteran plates available for sale — “Veteran” and “Honoring Veterans.”

- **Jobs**

Support legislation that would streamline and/or provide affordability to veterans seeking occupations after their military service. In addition to veterans receiving their earned VA benefits and procuring housing, obtaining a job in an occupation that provides stability and self-reliance is of the utmost importance to financial and mental well-being.

### OTHER LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Support the legislative priorities of the state veterans service organizations that are in line with our own legislative priorities.
- Support legislation that would promote state income tax exemption on military retirement pay for military retirees.
- Support legislation that would raise the current state dollar limitation on property tax relief for disabled veterans.
- Support legislation which enhances healthcare/mental healthcare in support of veterans.
- Support legislation focused on women veterans.
- Support legislation focused on minority and underserved veteran communities.
- Support legislation that would require that California Disabled Veterans Business Enterprises (DVBEs) hire more disabled and non-disabled veterans. Currently, there is no requirement for DVBEs to hire veterans.



- Support legislation that would continue to encourage expansion of veterans’ treatment courts to more counties by providing state funding of veterans’ treatment courts in California.
- Support legislation that would reduce property tax assessment on veterans service organizations’ posts and chapters.
- Support legislation that would expand laws to prevent dishonest vendors and businesses that prey on or scam veterans and active-duty military personnel by criminalizing their activities.
- Support legislation that would create a Governor’s Memorial Certificate similar to the Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC). Include information directing survivors to the CVSOs. (PMC is a signed certificate by the President to the family of deceased veterans.)

#### **CACVSO FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

- Support legislative, regulatory or policy changes that would create a federal/state/local government partnership to reduce the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (USDVA) veterans claims backlog and expand outreach services to veterans.
- Support legislation that would authorize USDVA pharmacies to honor prescriptions written by non-USDVA physicians. Currently, the USDVA medical system will only provide prescription medication to eligible veterans if the prescription is written by a USDVA physician.
- Support legislation that would eliminate the Means Test for veterans to qualify for USDVA medical care. These income limitations have excluded some veterans who would otherwise qualify for enrollment from obtaining their primary healthcare through the USDVA. ■

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**Thanks to the \$5.4 million Local Assistance funding increase from the State Budget in 2021 ... CVSOs have been increasing “boots on the ground” by hiring new Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) who can help process claims and provide outreach to underserved populations of veterans.**

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## CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

### SALUTES VETERANS IN THE 2023-24 STATE LEGISLATURE



**Senator Bob Archuleta** (D-Pico Rivera), U.S. Army  
Cities Represented: Brea, Downey, Montebello, Norwalk, Pico Rivera, Whittier



**Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman** (D-Stockton), U.S. Army  
Cities Represented: Escalon, Galt, Lathrop, Lodi, Manteca, Modesto, Ripon, Riverbank, Stockton, Tracy



**Senator Shannon Grove** (R-Bakersfield), U.S. Army  
Cities Represented: Bakersfield, California City, Centerville, Clovis, Ridgecrest, Taft, Visalia



**Assemblyman Devon Mathis** (R-Porterville), U.S. Army  
Cities Represented: Dinuba, Hanford, Porterville, Tulare, Visalia



**Senator Caroline Menjivar** (D-Panorama City), U.S. Marine Corps  
Cities Represented: Burbank, Lang, Panorama City, Van Nuys, San Fernando Valley, Winnetka



**Senator Josh Newman** (D-Fullerton), U.S. Army  
Cities Represented: Anaheim, Brea, Buena Park, Chino, Chino Hills, City of Industry, Cypress, Diamond Bar, Fullerton, La Habra, La Palma, Placentia, Rowland Heights, Walnut, West Covina, Yorba Linda



**Senator Richard Roth** (D-Riverside), U.S. Air Force  
Cities Represented: Corona, Eastvale, Jurupa Valley, Moreno Valley, Norco, Perris, Riverside



**Senator Tom Umberg** (D-Santa Ana), U.S. Army  
Cities Represented: Anaheim, Buena Park, Fullerton, La Habra, Santa Ana, South Whittier, Westminster



## CACVSO LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATES

Since the 1950s, the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) has been active at the State Capitol, advocating on behalf of California veterans, active duty servicemembers, and their families. The CACVSO first retained a professional legislative advocate in 1985, when it hired lobbyist and former WWII pilot Art Krause, who served in this position until 2000. From 2000 to 2017, lobbyist and Vietnam veteran Pete Conaty represented the association. Upon Mr. Conaty's retirement, Iraq and Afghanistan veteran and lobbyist Seth Reeb, along with lobbyist Dana Nichol, transferred from Pete Conaty and Associates to Reeb Government Relations (RGR), which assumed advocacy duties for the CACVSO and provided years of institutional knowledge and familiarization with the needs of veterans.



### **Bob Reeb, Reeb Government Relations**

RGR was established in January 2005 by Bob Reeb to assist clients with policy analysis, issues management, and legislative and regulatory advocacy regarding water resources. Bob has over three decades of experience in California state and local government and previously served as a legislative staff member and committee consultant. He also served as the State Legislative Director for the Association of California Water Agencies.



### **Seth Reeb**

Seth enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2004 as an infantryman with the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Polk, Louisiana. He served in Afghanistan in 2006 and Iraq in 2007-2008. He was promoted to Sergeant in 2009 prior to leaving the Army. Seth was mentored by Pete Conaty in 2017, becoming familiar with veterans service organizations and CACVSO issues. Transferring to RGR in 2018, he assumed the lead role representing the CACVSO.



### **Dana Nichol**

Dana transferred to RGR in 2018 to continue working on veterans and military issues. Dana joined Pete Conaty and Associates in 2004 and has worked on all aspects of legislative and budget issues pertaining to the CVSOs and veterans service organizations. Dana also serves as the Annual Report Editor.



### **Raquel Ayala Vargas, Esq.**

Raquel joined RGR as a legislative assistant in 2009, having previously gained valuable experience as a legislative intern in the State Senate. She became a lobbyist for RGR in 2018, following graduation from Lincoln Law School. She is a member of the California State Bar, and is bilingual — fluent in speaking and writing Spanish.

# VETERAN DRIVER LICENSE AND ID AVAILABLE

Have you served in the U.S. military? You may qualify to proudly display veteran on your California driver license or identification card. It's easy as 1, 2, 3!

- 1** Find your military discharge certificate (DD214). If you need assistance obtaining your military records, then contact your County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO).
- 2** Take your DD214 and government identification to your CVSO to obtain your Veteran Status Verification Form.
- 3** Go online or call DMV for an appointment. Then bring your Veteran Status Verification Form to DMV. Complete your application, pay any fees including the \$5 fee to add the Veteran Designation. Note: tests may be required.

For faster CVSO service, schedule an appointment by finding your local CVSO at [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov) or call **(844) 737-8838**.

To schedule an appointment at a DMV, visit [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov) or call **(800) 777-0133**.



[www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov)

**CALVET**  
California Department  
of Veterans Affairs





## HOW ONE SMALL BILL IS IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

California was the second to the last state in the nation to allow a veterans' designation on its driver's license. Since November 2015, veterans across the state have visited their county veterans service office to apply for this designation, which shows proof of status for a variety of state and local programs.

Imagine visiting your County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) to obtain a form for the DMV to get the "Veteran" designation on your driver's license and discovering you are also eligible for a vast array of federal VA services and payments that you earned because of your military service.

It happens every day in CVSO offices as some of the stories earlier in this report attest.

With the implementation of AB 935 (Frazier) in 2015, CalVet, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) worked together to create a form used to verify a veteran's status to the DMV. This eliminated the need for the DMV to check the many different types of identification veterans have. For instance, the Department of Defense's Report of Separation Form (DD-214), which is issued to all servicemembers who leave the military, may require interpretation to ascertain if the veteran is qualified for this program. Also, many other state programs for veterans have requirements that the veteran be eligible, as prescribed in state law. For instance, a veteran that was separated from the military under certain circumstances, may not be eligible for state programs (dishonorable, bad conduct, etc). By properly managing the "veteran" driver's license and ID program, this allows CVSOs to leverage this valuable form of veteran verification.

More importantly, it required the veteran to visit their county veterans service office to obtain the necessary form for the DMV. While this may seem like an extra step, it has provided the opportunity for CVSOs to connect veterans to a myriad of benefits they may have never known were available to them.

Most importantly, in the process of verifying the veteran's status for the DMV designation, the CVSO also reviews the veteran's military records to see if they are eligible for any federal VA benefits. Because of the complexity of the VA Benefits System and ongoing changes to the law, a vast number of California veterans are unaware that they are eligible for these benefits, some of

which include monthly monetary payments. The passage by Congress in 2022 of the Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act) has the potential to greatly enhance access to healthcare and monetary benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during their military service. Many veterans who may have been previously denied VA benefits, may now be eligible.

As a result of the "Veteran" designation on the driver's license and ID program, 250,105 veterans visited CVSOs to get the designation on their driver's license between November 2015 and January 1, 2022. During these visits, 103,833 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 42,314 veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling \$256,722,754. This does not include over \$143 million in retroactive payments and \$2.51 million in miscellaneous payments.

Since the majority of this benefit is annualized monthly payments made directly to the veterans, these monthly payments continue as long as the veteran lives. After the veteran passes, the spouse may be able to continue to receive benefits.

Were it not for the drivers' license program continuing to direct veterans to their CVSOs, they would not discover the untapped financial and healthcare resources available to them. This program has had a tremendously positive impact on thousands of California veterans and their families, and will continue to do so for decades to come.

On behalf of all veterans and their families, many thanks to the legislature, governor, CalVet, DMV, and counties for their continued support of this valuable program, which helps so many of the people who served our country in the United States Armed Forces. ■

### **As a result of the VETERAN designation on the driver's license/ID card:**

**250,105 veterans visited CVSOs to get the "Veteran" designation on their driver's license/ID between November 2015 to January 2022.**

**During these visits, 85,918 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 35,384 veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling \$202,499,570.**

**This does not include over \$117 million in retroactive payments and \$2.06 million in miscellaneous payments.**



Western States  
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Source: United States Energy & Employment Report 2022, U.S. Department of Energy

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# California State Commanders Veterans Council

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## California Association of County Veterans Service Officers

**WORKING TOGETHER ON BEHALF OF CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS FOR OVER 56 YEARS**



The California State Commanders Veterans Council serves as the collective Legislative voice for the state's major veterans service organizations. CSCVC supports veterans through advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing the rights, benefits, and well-being of California's 1.6 million veterans and their dependents.

Some of the Veteran Organizations in CSCVC are below



To Contact CSCVC visit the website or by email  
CSCVC Website: <https://calcommanders.org/>  
Email: Chuck Jamison [oakpiper@gmail.com](mailto:oakpiper@gmail.com)



The logo for my CALVET features the word "my" in a blue script font, "CALVET" in a bold blue sans-serif font, and a yellow sun with a blue bear silhouette in the center of the "O".

*my*  
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INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO  
YOUR NEEDS!**

**REGISTER WITH MYCALVET TODAY!**

myCalVet provides veterans and their families the opportunity to create a customized profile which targets the benefits, resources, and services available in their community and throughout the state.

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