



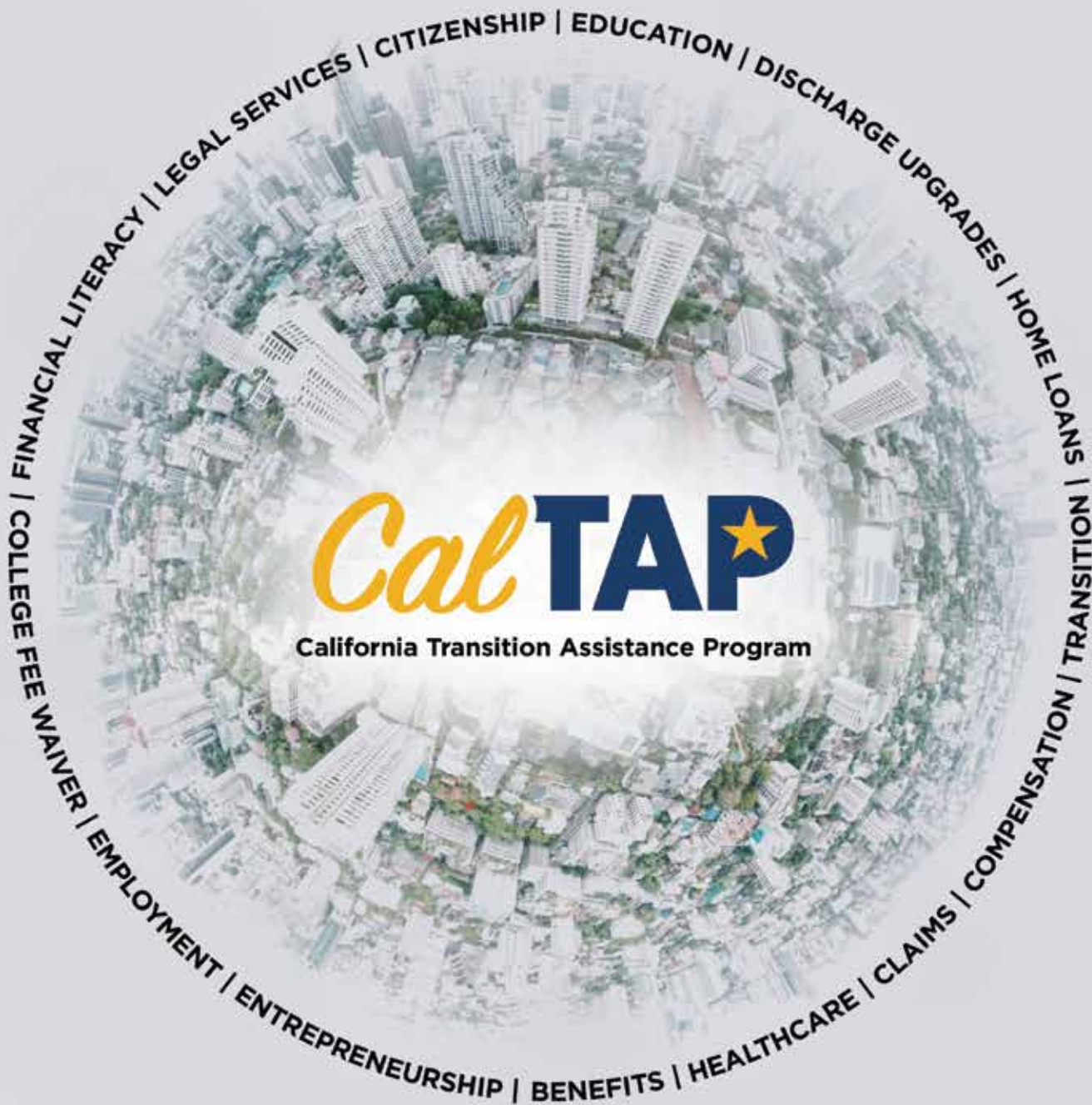
2024

ANNUAL REPORT / DIRECTORY

CACVSO

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

PROFESSIONAL VETERANS ADVOCATES SERVING CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES



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CACVSO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR 2025

It has been my pleasure to serve as President of the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) over the past year. The CACVSO is an association for professional veterans advocates who are instrumental to the success of California's veterans' advocacy system. CACVSO has set the standard for how local county government and state agencies should collaborate to the benefit of its veterans. California is one of the few states in the nation in which all county agencies use common software which accumulates and tracks data regarding veterans' claims assistance.

In 2024, CVSOs endeavored to connect the state's 1.43 million veterans to the benefits they earned through their military service. While California's veterans represent 8% of the nation's total veteran population, California's CVSOs were responsible for 12% of the total claims submitted to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), resulting in \$579 million in new federal benefits to our state's veterans. California's state budget enjoys an impressive return on investment from its \$11 million in local assistance funding from the state budget.

As successful as California's CVSOs are in securing VA benefits to our veterans, we continue to see increasing numbers of veterans leave the state. There are about 30 military installations, 157,000 active-duty service members, and 52,000 reserve or National Guard members currently living in California, and it is important that we strive to attract and retain veterans and military retirees after they have completed their service.

In 2025, CACVSO will work on accomplishing the following legislative goals:

- Increase state local assistance funding from \$11 million to \$25 million.
- Pass legislation to protect veterans from consumer fraud by requiring businesses collecting fees or portions of a veteran's VA benefits to be federally accredited before preparing, presenting, or prosecuting a veteran's claim for VA benefits.
- End the state's income tax on military retirees and surviving spouse benefits. California is the only state which offers no such tax relief.
- Expand current property tax exemption limits for disabled veterans from the current \$100,000 to a level that is consistent with current home values (2024 median home price in CA was \$869,000).

Increasing state funding will provide CVSOs with the financial resources to assist more veterans, free of charge, fee, or claim to a veteran's future award of VA benefits. As county officials, CVSOs do not receive compensation for their services. Recently, unaccredited agencies began operating in California and are seeking to help veterans obtain their VA benefits in exchange for various types of compensation. Not only does the veteran lose the utility of some of their benefits, our communities also lose the economic multiplier effect of those lost funds.

Finally, we are looking forward to our continued collaboration with CalVet on the successful implementation and rollout of the state's Proposition 1 initiative. We believe this will be instrumental in California's efforts to significantly reduce our state's homeless veteran population, while providing resources to overcome issues with self-medication and improving mental health. CACVSO values our historically strong relationship with CalVet and are aligned in our efforts with Secretary Lindsey Sin to ensure that every veteran in California is connected, protected, and respected.

David O. West

David O. West II, President 2024-25

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 thank California's County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) for all that they do for our veterans and their families.

CalVet is the agency responsible for ensuring that the nearly 1.5 million veterans who live in California have access to the benefits they earned by virtue of their military service.

The relationship between CalVet and CVSOs is one that has stood the test of time, and is representative of a collaboration that serves as a national model of how state and local governments can work together in service to veterans and their families.

CVSOs are often the first point of contact for veterans in their community. CVSOs demonstrate expertise, cultural competency, and understanding as they guide veterans and their families through the complex systems of benefits and services.

Benefits and services include disability compensation, educational benefits, discharge upgrades, employment assistance, primary healthcare, behavioral healthcare, affordable and supportive housing, elder care, and so much more.

Fiscal Year 2023-2024 was a landmark year for CVSOs. They successfully secured nearly \$578 million in new or increased federal benefits for veterans and their families, setting an all-time high. This achievement represents an increase of approximately \$93 million compared to Fiscal Year 2022-2023. Additionally, 113 county Veterans Service Representatives were trained and accredited by CalVet, marking another all-time high.

Likewise, CVSOs are vital partners to many programs CalVet administers such as its \$2.4 million Mental Health Services Act Grant Program, in which vulnerable veterans and those who serve them receive critical mental health support and resources. Over Fiscal Year 2024-2025 CVSOs will be equally important to the success of major state investments to combat veteran homelessness and suicide such as Homekey+, and the California Veterans Health Initiative.

On behalf of CalVet, I again thank the CVSOs for their continued partnership, expertise, and unwavering dedication to California's veterans and their families. Your efforts ensure that California's veterans are the most connected, protected, and respected in the nation.

Lindsey Sin

Lindsey Sin
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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Western States
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The oil and gas industry is proud to employ more veterans than the industry national average.

Thank you to all the veterans who help power the western states.

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Source: United States Energy & Employment Report 2023, U.S. Department of Energy

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ABOUT COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) are county employees who 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 2023-24, California's CVSOs assisted veterans to obtain almost \$579 million in VA claims, which are paid directly to the veteran, usually for the rest of their life. VA health care 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 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 assisted these veterans to assimilate back into society and the workforce. This was an improvement over post-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 guarantees 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 CVSO model of veterans benefit assistance. This model has grown to be the most widely used approach to delivering services to veterans, with 30 states and several Tribal Nations using the CVSO 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 CVSO for a determination of veteran status before DMV would process the application. This process directs veterans to the CVSO offices, where they can also be screened for other federal benefits for which they may be eligible. Since AB 935 went into effect in 2015, over 284,000 veterans have visited a CVSO office in pursuit of the driver's license designation and over 124,000 have filed claims for VA benefits, resulting in almost \$287 million in annualized VA payments paid directly to veterans.

The legislature also helps counties defray the costs of maintaining CVSO offices by providing Local Assistance funding from the state budget. Acknowledging the importance of CVSOs, 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 subsequent budgets. CVSO 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

CACVSO is looking forward to aligning with Governor Newsom and CalVet to ensure veterans are connected, protected, and respected. CVSOs are uniquely positioned to ensure veterans are connected in their communities being a part of their county safety nets. This year, CACVSO will be working with the state legislature and CalVet to explore adding peer support solutions to expand access and

facilitating connection. The Association will pursue sponsoring a bill that protects veterans and their dependents from unaccredited, for-profit companies that charge them for services and do not have any accountability if they make costly mistakes. Part of the reason veterans go to unaccredited, for-profit companies is CVSOs simply don't have enough staff to keep up with the need given the recent passing of the PACT Act. CACVSO will be approaching the state legislature and the governor's office with a budget ask to make sure we have enough accredited staff so they don't leverage the for-profit sector for assistance. CACVSO participates in and will look to expand initiatives that ensure that veterans are respected. Operation Greenlight is an example of those efforts. Every year during the week of Veterans Day, CVSOs encourages county departments, small businesses, and individuals to place green lights up to show support for veterans. ■

The Association will pursue sponsoring a bill that protects veterans and their dependents from unaccredited, for-profit companies that charge them for services and do not have any accountability if they make costly mistakes.

CACVSO is looking forward to aligning with Governor Newsom and CalVet to ensure veterans are connected, protected, and respected.



MISSION STATEMENT

To advocate on behalf of, educate, and support member counties as they assist their military and veteran communities.

VISION

To assist County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) in developing productive relationships with state and local governmental agencies. To be the leading organization in advocating and developing state and federal benefits for our veterans. To have the best trained membership and CVSO staff. To implement processes and remove barriers that hinder effective processing of veteran claims. To provide CVSOs with tools to enhance outreach to their local veterans.

VALUES

California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) values the service and sacrifice of our military members, veterans, their families, and survivors.

CACVSO values our leadership who conduct themselves with integrity, honor, professionalism, and empathy with open, transparent, and honest communications to membership.

CACVSO values transparency and open communication within the association and among our membership.

CACVSO values good character, integrity, and ethics for all internal and external stakeholders.

CACVSO values a well-trained professional membership.

CACVSO values inclusiveness within the association.

CACVSO values members who exhibit professionalism, commitment, and empathy when advocating for veterans and their families.

CACVSO values collaboration among member counties.

CACVSO values active, meaningful, and effective participation in the local, state, and federal legislative process, affecting and/or advancing veteran interests.

MOTTO

Serving those who served.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2025

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

- CVSOs support policies which will increase outreach to homeless veterans via a “by-name” list developed via justice involved veterans programs.
- CVSOs support increasing housing units for elderly veterans who are aging out of their homes.
- CVSOs support strengthening the continuum of care model which ensures our veterans don’t fall through the cracks as they transition to different stages in life.

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. Require persons assisting veterans with claims to be federally accredited before preparing, presenting, or prosecuting a veteran’s claim for VA benefits.

Military transition and reintegration

- Support legislation that would streamline and/or enhance accessibility to jobs for 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.
- Support legislation that enhances programming to military bases for active and all reserve component personnel focused on outreach, education, and promoting access to employment, county veterans service offices, VA health care, and other resources.

Military spouse employment and economic opportunities

- Support legislation that removes occupational licensure barriers to employment as military spouses move across state lines. This can include occupational licensure compacts and improving application processes and conforming to the federal Military Spouse Licensing Relief Act of 2022. The state should take these steps to help military spouses maintain professional and financial stability.

Tax exemption for military retirement pay and Survival Benefit Plan

- Support legislation to implement a state income tax exemption for military retirement pay and Survival Benefit Plan beneficiaries.

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 enhances health care/mental health care in support of veterans.
- Support legislation that establishes veteran peer support and health care navigation programs within county veterans service offices.
- Support legislation focused on women veterans.



- Support legislation focused on minority and underserved veteran communities.
- Support legislation that would require California Disabled Veterans Business Enterprises (DVBES) to hire more disabled and non-disabled veterans. Currently, there is no requirement for DVBES to hire veterans.
- Support legislation that requires veterans preferences for state jobs.
- 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 raise the current state dollar limitation on property tax relief for disabled veterans.
- Support legislation that would reduce the property tax assessment on veterans service organizations' posts and chapters.
- Support legislation that would expand laws to penalize 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 CVSOs. (PMC is a signed certificate by the President to the family of deceased veterans.)

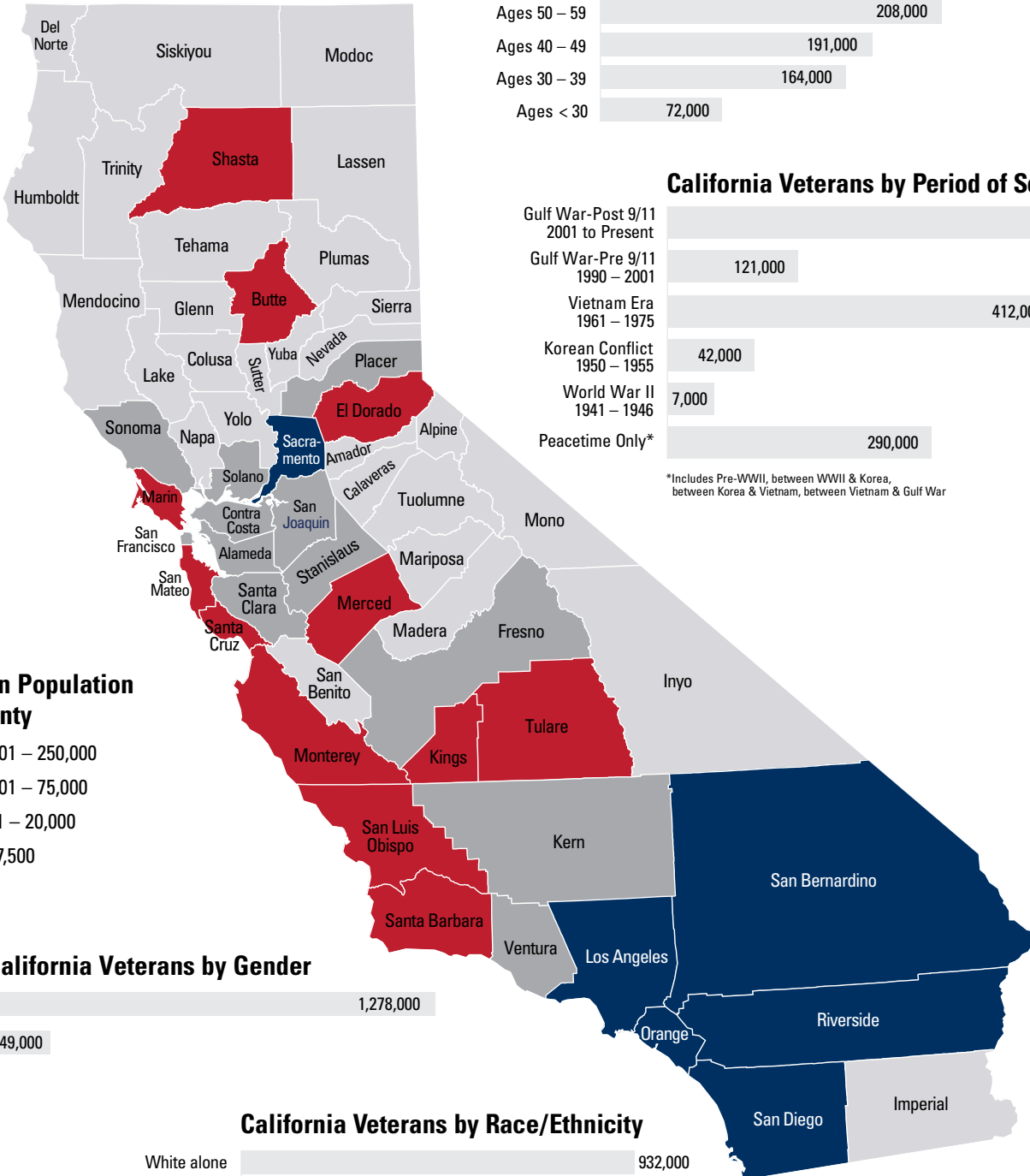
CACVSO FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Support passage of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act. As of this writing, the bill is awaiting review by President Biden. Included in the Dole Act is the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (CVSO Act) which would authorize \$10 million per year over the next two fiscal years to expand and strengthen County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs).
- Support legislation similar to the 118th Congress' efforts to pass the Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding VA Benefits Act (GUARD VA Benefits Act). The Guard Act would reimpose criminal penalties for soliciting or charging unauthorized fees with respect to claims representation before the Department of Veterans Affairs. This type of legislation is needed to dissuade bad actors from preying on an already vulnerable veteran and dependent population.
- 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 health care through the USDVA. ■

California Veterans by the Numbers

Estimated By County as of September 30, 2024

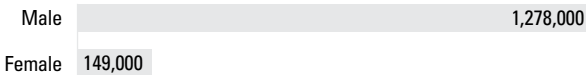
Source: USDOVA VetPro 2023 (Tables 6L, 7L, 8L, 9L)



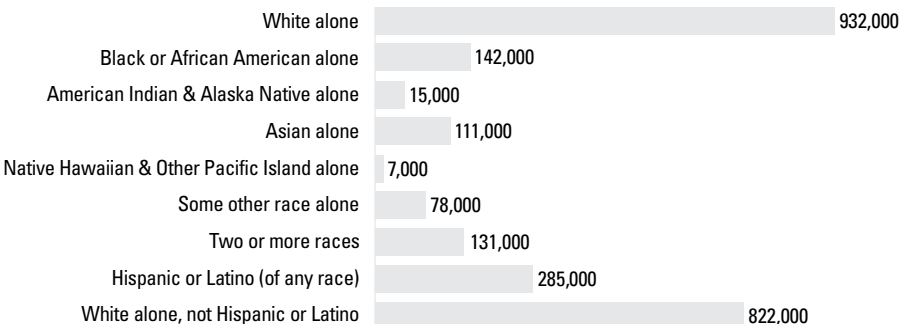
Veteran Population by County

- 75,001 – 250,000
- 20,001 – 75,000
- 7,501 – 20,000
- 0 – 7,500

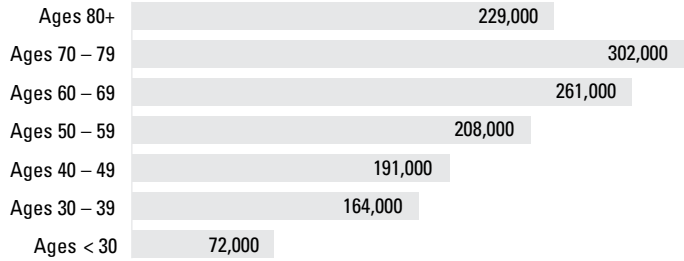
California Veterans by Gender



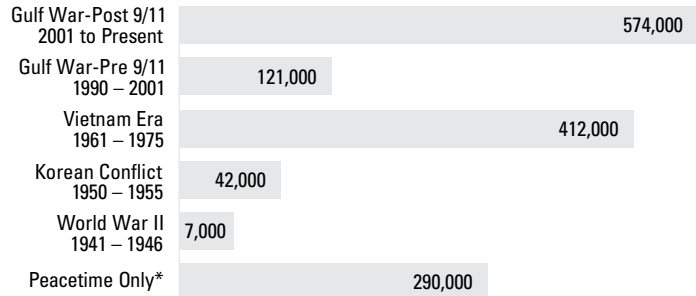
California Veterans by Race/Ethnicity



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?

Navigating the resource maze is something that County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) are well equipped to do. All CVSOs are accredited and are also veterans who often have had to navigate the system themselves. Without professional assistance, many veterans can 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 could be lost. Additionally, CVSOs guidance can often lead to mitigating frustration on behalf of the veteran and their dependents, which sometimes leads veterans to not access benefits and health care they deserve. Research shows better outcomes for veterans who engage in VA health care and utilize their earned benefits.

Benefits 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 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are constantly changing what benefits and services those who served in the military are eligible to receive. This is why CVSOs play such an important role. CVSOs participate in regular trainings from CalVet and the VA to remain current on changing regulations and to provide the best possible guidance to veterans and their dependents.

In instances where veterans are ineligible for some health care and benefits, CVSOs being part of their county safety nets can help navigate them into the appropriate county services. CVSOs are increasingly leveraging tailored legal services to screen veterans who are not eligible for VA health care and benefits to see if they can work toward a discharge upgrade with the Department of Defense or Character of Discharge with the VA, which can open up VA health care and benefits for them. This creates a real safety net for veterans that prevents them falling through the cracks and also minimizes county costs.

- CVSOs walk alongside, advocate on behalf of, and guide veterans through the complex process.
- CVSOs also save the state and counties money by connecting veterans with VA health care while putting additional tax-free money into their pockets, which is mostly spent in their counties. There are numerous studies that show most veterans in crisis have some kind of financial stressor involved. CVSOs advocate on behalf of the veteran with the VA for payment plans for debt, establishment of compensation and pension, and educate them on numerous state and federal benefits that strengthen their household's economic situation.
- CVSOs never charge veterans and their families for services. Many veterans and dependents that CVSOs connect with are often struggling financially and emotionally, and should not be subjected to pay for the benefits they earned as a result of their service to our country.
- Superior outcomes for veterans that go through a VA-accredited veteran representative versus someone who is unaccredited and not authorized by the VA to assist with veteran's claims are pretty clear. Veterans get better and more accurate guidance from accredited professionals, which leads to higher compensation (at no cost to the veteran). The Veterans of Foreign Wars recently released the findings of their joint study conducted with the VA, which show how this system continues to provide the best outcome for veterans. The results of that study are on the following pages. ■

Veterans get better and more accurate guidance from accredited professionals, which leads to higher compensation (at no cost to the veteran).



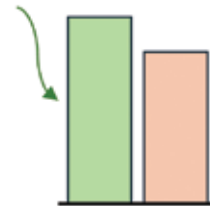
VA Disability Claims

What The Data Say

Like a lawyer being admitted to the bar, and not a law firm, individuals get VA-accredited, not businesses!

Represented Veterans
(Accredited representatives)

\$2,221

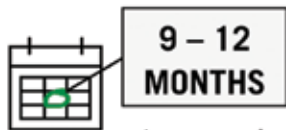


Unrepresented Veterans
(Includes Claim Sharks)

\$1,928

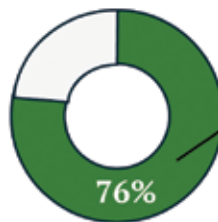
Average VA Award Per Month

Source: Internal Veterans Benefits Administration Data, Sept. 2024



9 - 12 MONTHS

Average time for VA to process an accreditation application



* Over last two years

% of all veteran beneficiaries* with accredited representative on file with VA
(Numbers consistent regardless of Claim Shark presence in states)



What's the Deal with Accreditation?

NO ONE (except VA) can make VA claims go faster!

Initial VA Disability Claims

~ 128 DAYS

Increase VA Disability Claims*

~ 60 - 90 DAYS

* Most types of claims the Claim Sharks say they do



START

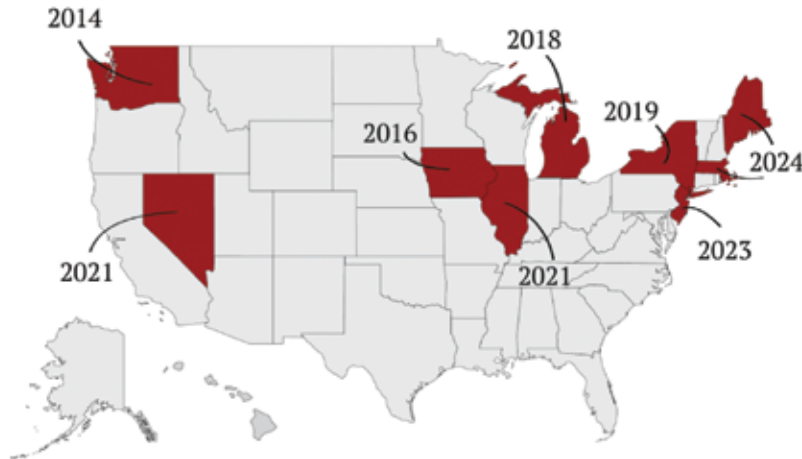
FINISH



How Long Do VA Claims Take?

Percentages of veteran benefit enrollment have increased in states with Claim Shark laws, NOT decreased!

Since 2014,
9 States
 Have Passed
 Claim Shark
 Laws

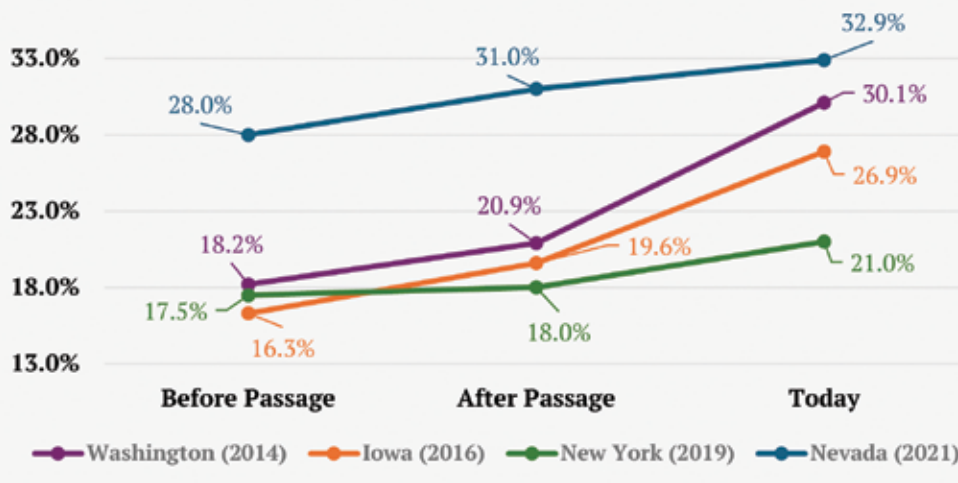


The Truth About Claim Shark Laws



% Veteran Benefit Enrollment Pre- and Post- Claim Shark Law Passage (By State)

Source: VA Annual Benefits Reports (2013-2023)



Contact the VFW National Legislative Service today

Pat Murray, Legislative Director (pmurray@vfw.org)

Kristina Keenan, Deputy Legislative Director (kkeenana@vfw.org)

Nancy Springer, Associate Legislative Director (nspringer@vfw.org)

Questions?



FACTORS AFFECTING HOW MANY VETERANS RECEIVE MONETARY BENEFITS

Studies have shown:

- Claims filed with the assistance of a professional 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 percentage of the veteran population receiving federal monetary awards.
- California's ratio of veterans to professional VSRs lags behind comparable states; the result being a limited supply of VSRs available to serve the largest veteran population of any state in the nation.

"For veterans navigating the transition from military to civilian life, securing access to earned disability benefits often becomes a complex, daunting journey. Although these benefits are essential for veterans dealing with service-related disabilities, data reveals that only one-third of the 18 million eligible veterans in the U.S. have applied. This gap in access underscores the pressing need for organizations to demystify the process and ensure that veterans know their options."

"Adapting disability benefits to meet the changing needs of veterans" *Military Times*, November 1, 2024
<https://www.militarytimes.com/education-transition/2024/11/01/adapting-disability-benefits-to-meet-the-changing-needs-of-veterans/>

California's limited access to the services of a professional VSR adversely impacts:

- The number of veterans properly served — we estimate at least 126,000 California veterans are missing out on their monetary benefits.
- The veterans' quality of life — we estimate that \$2.25 billion in VA monetary benefits are 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 of these benefits to 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:

- **Increasing local assistance to 50% of the cost of operating county veterans service office operations.** This equates to an increase of approximately \$10 million; a level that allows CVSO offices to increase the number of VSRs and get more "boots on the ground" to assist veterans and their families.
- Establishing a budgetary mechanism to ensure the state provides fifty percent of the cost of CVSO operations in future years.

126,000 veterans not getting benefits they earned
+
\$2.25 billion in federal benefits left on the table
=
Justification for at least a \$10 million increase in local assistance



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

Beginning in 2022, the state increased the General Fund local assistance to \$11 million in support of CVS0 operations. This is helping counties to hire more CVS0s and increase outreach to underserved veterans. The CVS0s are now leveraging those dollars to make a tremendous difference in the lives of many veterans.

The effect of increased funding is seen by looking at historical data using 2013 as a baseline year. Since 2013, there have been two General Fund local assistance increases, bringing the appropriation to the current \$11 million. Over that same period:

- The state's benefit **utilization rate has increased from 17.5% to 31.5%**.
- About **129,000 more beneficiaries are receiving C&P Benefits**, despite a decrease of over 456,000 veterans estimated to be living in California.
- The total C&P Benefits paid annually to California's veterans has **increased from \$5.4 billion to \$10.9 billion**. While some of this may be attributed to increased payment rates, the increased number of beneficiaries certainly played a significant role.

California could double those improvements by putting additional VSRs in high density veteran population locales — and that can be accomplished with additional local assistance funding by the state.

California's CVS0s are key to ensuring that all veterans who have earned benefits through their service to the nation have access to those benefits. Additional state support of CVS0 operations is critical to successfully connecting more veterans to those benefits. The counties cannot continue to bear the brunt of funding and still deliver successful results. ■

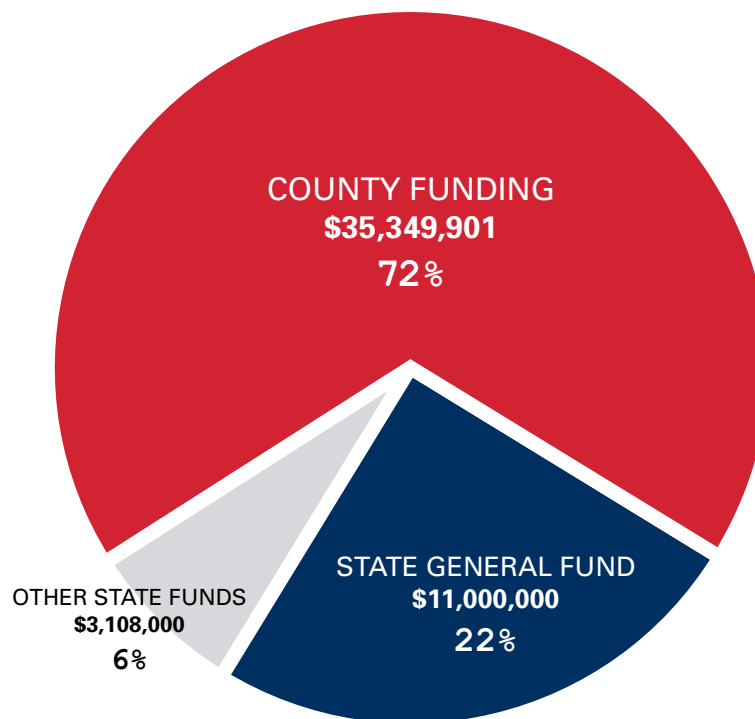
**The state's benefit utilization rate has increased from 17.5% to 31.5% ...
California could double those improvements by putting additional VSRs
in high density veteran population locales.**

WHO FUNDS THE CVSOs?

County veterans service office operations are front funded with county funds, subject to partial reimbursement through various local assistance appropriations from state funds, including the General Fund, Veterans Service Office Fund, Mental Health Services Fund, and Federal Funds (in the form of 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 net of anticipated local assistance. 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 2023-24.

Who Funds CVSO Operations?

FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024



Total CVSO Operating Costs: \$49,457,901

Sources: CalVet Annual Report to Legislature FY 23-24, Table 4 and 2024-25 Jan 10 Budget Detail

Historically, the Legislature has periodically addressed General Fund appropriation targets in legislation using a point-in-time determination of 50% state support. However, budget action did not occur until years later, if at all — causing a perpetual lag in attaining the 50% goal. Based upon Fiscal Year 2023-24 operations, **state funding support would need to increase by approximately \$10 million** to reach an equitable cost share of CVSO operations.

Last year CVSOs brought in \$52 in new federal benefits for every dollar of General Fund local assistance invested by the state. That's \$579 million in new benefits in a single year.



It is critical that the state increase its level of local assistance to CVSOs which, when coupled with a maintenance of effort by the counties, would allow for an expansion of services to California’s veterans.

Veteran Services Demand Drivers

- Approximately 24,000 servicemembers leave the military annually and return to California — all are prospective new customers.
- Changes in medical conditions as veterans age opens opportunities to access additional benefits. Aging veterans from prior eras are not aware they may still be eligible for benefits despite the time that has passed since their discharge from service.
- The need to expand services that can directly impact chronic veteran issues such as suicide and obtaining permanent housing.
- The PACT Act greatly expanded eligibility for disability benefits, including making veterans eligible for benefits that had previously been denied, a fact not understood by many veterans.
- PACT Act changes resulted in many additional veterans who are unaware of, or do not know how to access, the benefits available to them because of those changes.
- The proliferation of veteran claims scams. Recent growth in companies purporting to have the “ability” to improve veteran claim results, expedite claim decisions, and even to guarantee results. Demand is so high at legitimate veteran service providers that wait times drive veterans to take chances on “too-good-to-be-true” schemes.
- These types of fraudulent claim activities demand policymaker action to expand the network of Veteran Service Representatives.

These reasons more than justify additional state support for expanding county veteran service office operations. ■

It is critical that the State increase its level of local assistance to CVSOs which, when coupled with a maintenance of effort by the counties, would allow for an expansion of services to California’s veterans.

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF VETERANS’ CLAIMS BY COUNTY

The county comparative data presented on the following pages provides information on the new federal veteran benefits obtained with the assistance of County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) in Fiscal Year 2023-24.

The left section of the table shows the veteran population, by county, as estimated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, sorted by an arbitrary “county size”. This sorting allows state and local policymakers to make comparisons between like-sized counties in performance metrics. Metrics include public contact results and “New Awards Attributable to CVSOs.” The “New Awards” data provides the monetary value of new or increased monetary benefits paid to eligible veterans and their dependents during Fiscal Year 2023-24. These amounts are directly attributable to the activities and efforts of the CVSOs. 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. As such, they reflect 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 the last fiscal year alone, CVSOs accounted for more than \$579 million in new federal veteran benefits being brought into California’s economy.

Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County Fiscal Year 2023-24

County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	County Size (Note 2)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 3)		
			In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims by CVSO	New Awards by CVSO	Average New Award
San Diego	231,599	L	28,416	49,049	27,487	\$18,002,412	\$655
Los Angeles	231,477	L	6,007	3,317	34,849	\$15,976,216	\$458
Riverside	111,917	L	19,229	26,596	16,197	\$36,030,103	\$2,224
Orange	86,713	L	9,988	12,811	11,474	\$26,060,994	\$2,271
San Bernardino	85,701	L	22,040	13,605	63,346	\$74,577,126	\$1,177
Sacramento	73,558	L	10,482	11,808	6,739	\$18,266,804	\$2,711
Santa Clara	44,378	M	7,132	19,579	8,480	\$21,730,856	\$2,563
Alameda	42,443	M	2,550	6,558	2,138	\$3,644,769	\$1,705
Contra Costa	38,570	M	11,000	37,500	4,715	\$25,114,887	\$5,327
Fresno	33,873	M	10,500	4,716	5,149	\$3,897,272	\$757
Kern	33,866	M	20,801	20,801	9,219	\$11,408,972	\$1,238
Ventura	33,605	M	51,148	41,316	6,941	\$31,214,528	\$4,497
Solano	30,823	M	4,073	18,940	3,147	\$9,329,095	\$2,964
San Joaquin	27,428	M	5,389	20,362	4,905	\$14,626,509	\$2,982
Placer	22,974	M	9,260	10,922	5,489	\$17,987,291	\$3,277
Sonoma	20,291	M	3,612	7,853	2,729	\$14,777,802	\$5,415
San Mateo	19,299	S	410	2,618	3,485	\$12,974,637	\$3,723
San Francisco	19,146	S	5,164	23,433	6,669	\$7,569,818	\$1,135
Stanislaus	18,514	S	4,120	12,250	7,288	\$15,322,177	\$2,102
Santa Barbara	17,862	S	6,575	11,616	4,555	\$19,057,513	\$4,184
Monterey	17,545	S	4,336	6,271	5,570	\$19,831,328	\$3,560
San Luis Obispo	14,295	S	2,528	23,893	9,745	\$12,322,840	\$1,265
Tulare	13,912	S	4,197	13,218	3,205	\$10,389,441	\$3,242
Butte	12,552	S	7,877	8,047	3,155	\$9,518,412	\$3,017
Shasta	12,460	S	5,187	0	6,219	\$12,920,566	\$2,078
El Dorado	11,094	S	3,768	13,168	3,455	\$5,313,681	\$1,538
Yuba-Sutter	10,717	S	4,419	2,661	2,288	\$13,003,211	\$5,683
Kings	8,876	VS	3,172	9,304	2,744	\$8,819,722	\$3,214
Merced	8,755	VS	907	2,069	1,937	\$3,290,367	\$1,699
Marin	8,620	VS	2,400	6,359	1,427	\$8,701,984	\$6,098
Santa Cruz	8,172	VS	4,135	2,958	2,166	\$9,071,740	\$4,188
Humboldt	7,178	VS	1,418	3,471	1,648	\$4,815,189	\$2,922
Yolo	7,162	VS	1,028	26,831	1,298	\$5,041,291	\$3,884
Nevada	6,378	VS	2,158	3,757	3,886	\$4,831,827	\$1,243



County	Veteran Population (Note 1)	County Size (Note 2)	Veterans & Family Members Contacting CVSO		New Awards Attributable to CVSOs (Note 3)		
			In Person	By Phone or Email	New Claims by CVSO	New Awards by CVSO	Average New Award
Madera	5,937	VS	3,000	3,700	2,110	\$3,786,847	\$1,795
Napa	5,549	VS	2,080	13,520	3,508	\$8,069,355	\$2,300
Imperial	4,821	VS	2,154	6,400	1,703	\$5,640,231	\$3,312
Mendocino	4,232	VS	3,999	2,539	1,037	\$2,001,484	\$1,930
Tuolumne	4,012	VS	5,312	2,318	1,543	\$4,041,089	\$2,619
Lake	3,929	VS	4,000	4,000	2,400	\$7,614,983	\$3,173
Tehama	3,487	VS	1,482	7,321	1,729	\$3,866,644	\$2,236
Calaveras	3,302	VS	1,007	1,171	1,082	\$3,518,329	\$3,252
Siskiyou	3,016	VS	1,180	4,471	532	\$2,265,274	\$4,258
Amador	2,794	VS	624	2,846	404	\$1,755,708	\$4,346
San Benito	2,128	VS	156	445	809	\$2,563,037	\$3,168
Lassen	1,980	VS	-	-	302	\$729,182	\$2,415
Del Norte	1,756	VS	495	561	336	\$763,822	\$2,273
Mariposa	1,507	VS	300	624	48	\$165,869	\$3,456
Plumas	1,365	VS	774	3,512	418	\$1,404,316	\$3,360
Glenn	1,073	VS	1,850	4,150	200	\$1,035,934	\$5,180
Inyo-Mono	1,520	VS	380	660	280	\$924,069	\$3,300
Trinity	1,013	VS	410	1,296	523	\$1,836,333	\$3,511
Colusa	721	VS	1,491	3,869	129	\$1,217,766	\$9,440
Modoc	720	VS	51	89	59	\$228,033	\$3,865
Sierra	198	VS	7	3	1	\$0	\$0
Alpine	47	VS			No CVSO		
STATEWIDE	1,426,860		316,178	541,152	302,897	\$578,869,685	\$1,911

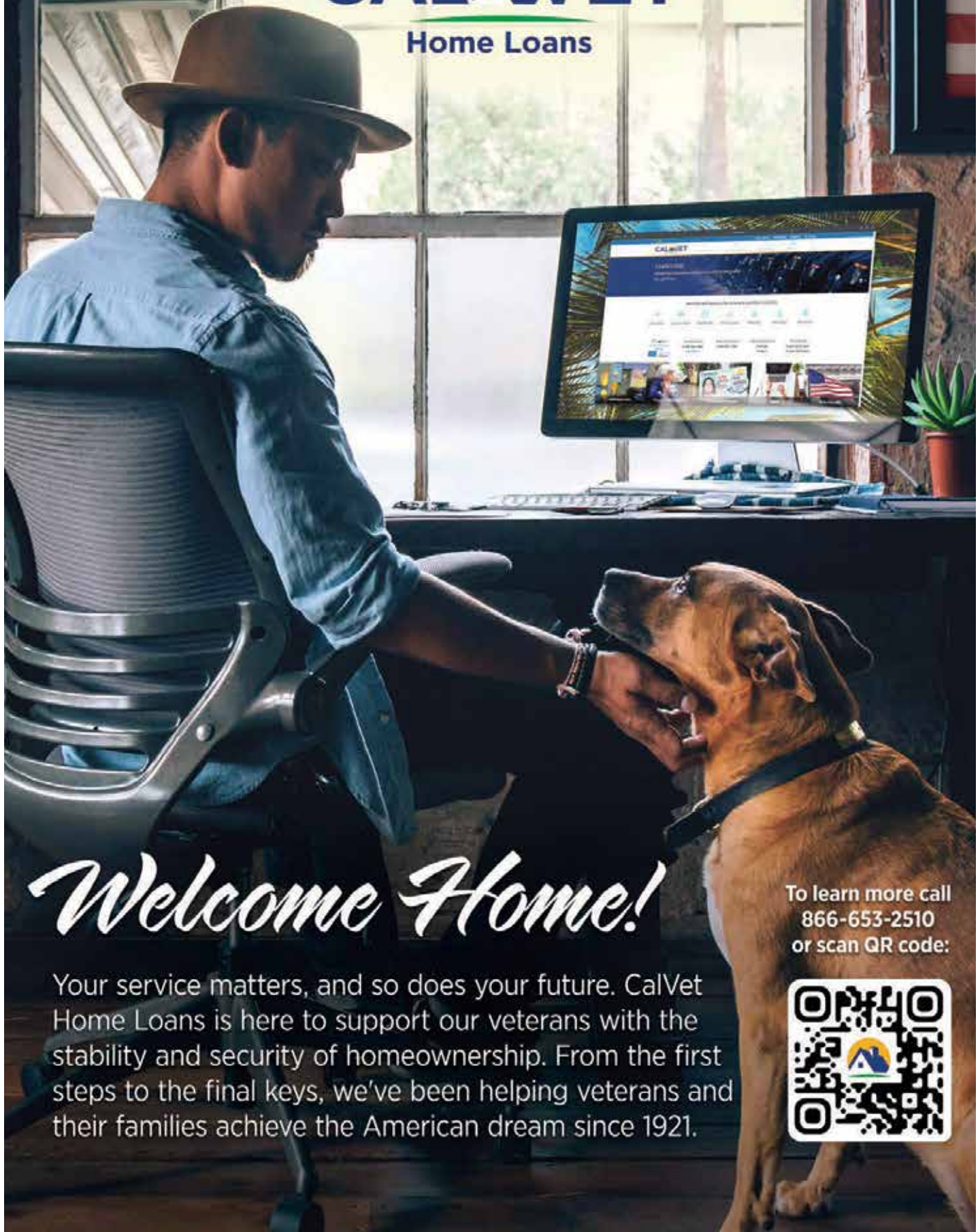
Notes:

1. Veteran population estimates, as of September 30, 2024, published by the USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "VetPop 2023".
2. County size is an arbitrary designation, for comparison purposes, based upon veteran population with "Very Small" <= 10,000, "Small" <= 20,000, "Medium" <= 50,000, "Large" >= 50,000.
3. These amounts are the raw or increased benefits obtained by the CVSO, during this fiscal year, as reported in CalVer's Annual Report to the Legislature "Monetary Benefits Attributable to the Assistance of County Veterans Service Offices". They do not include any awards attributable to other veteran service organizations or to individual filers. These are not cumulative amounts, but rather the direct impact CVSOs have had on California's veteran beneficiaries in a single year.

California Department of Veterans Affairs

CALVET

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PACT ACT (PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS)

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).

The PACT Act expands and extends eligibility for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care 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.

The PACT Act is estimated to expand eligibility to an estimated 3.5 million additional veterans. 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. Since the passing of the PACT Act, CVSOs in California have seen a significant increase in their workloads. In order to keep up with the workload and reduce the number of veterans and dependents who turn to for-profit, unaccredited agents who charge thousands of dollars, CVSOs need additional support from state and federal government.

In addition to the expanded eligibility, surviving family members may also be eligible for VA benefits, such as Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and burial benefits. Without additional resources for outreach, many of these dependents will go without knowing about and accessing the benefits that their family member earned for them through their military service. ■

DID YOU SERVE HERE?

If you served on the ground, in the airspace above, in territorial waters, or a ship that called there, you may be eligible for VA benefits and health care for over 300 conditions.

LEARN MORE about toxic exposure screening, toxic-exposure related benefits, and VA health care by visiting [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or calling 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411).

YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO:

- AIR POLLUTANTS:** Burn pits, oil well fires, sulfur fire, sand, dust, and particulates
- CHEMICALS:** Agent Orange or other herbicides, pesticides, and depleted uranium
- OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS:** Asbestos, lead, fuels, and industrial solvents
- RADIATION:** Nuclear weapons testing and ionizing radiation
- WARFARE AGENTS:** Chemical warfare agents, nerve agents, and mustard gas

Service members may have been subjected to any of these exposures in any of these areas.

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

DUTIES OF A CVSO

CVSOs must have the ability to perform multi-tasking and possess the following skills and knowledge:

- Knowledge of proper counseling and interviewing techniques
- Knowledge of medical terminology and human anatomy
- Ability to read and understand military and private medical records, hospital discharge summaries, surgery reports, autopsy reports, radiology and pathology reports
- Ability to interpret laws, regulations, policies, and directives
- Ability to analyze and evaluate individual problems of veterans
- Ability to establish and maintain cooperative and respectful relations with clients, subordinate personnel, elected and appointed government officials, veteran and civic groups, press corps and general public
- Ability to speak effectively before large and small groups
- Ability to prepare accurate, clear and concise claims, correspondence and reports
- Knowledge of principles and techniques of public administration and ability to supervise and train personnel

Responsibility for connecting veterans to a wide array of benefits

CVSOs are responsible for planning and administering a countywide program of comprehensive services for the men and women who served in the armed and uniformed services. CVSOs must be knowledgeable of all entitlements, programs, and ancillary services as administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, California Department of Veterans Affairs, and other federal, state, and local agencies.

Outreach to connect with underserved populations

Outreach is a fundamental part of the CVSO's duties. If veterans do not know who and where CVSOs are, they can't file claims for veterans benefits and services. CVSOs strive to ensure their office(s) and functions are broadcast far and wide in the community.

Leverage community events to inform the public

Local service organizations, such as the Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Soroptimist, and Chamber of Commerce are ideal opportunities for CVSOs to get their message out. Senior living communities are also excellent places to give presentations on veterans benefits such as surviving spouse benefits, health care, and the VA's Aid and Attendance benefit. Speaking engagements, facilitating ad hoc veterans committees, and engaging the Board of Supervisors are ways CVSOs can bring awareness to veterans issues and solutions.

Maintain accreditation from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

CVSO advocacy and representation to veterans is VA-sanctioned via accreditation, which enables CVSO's to act as Power of Attorney service representatives with congressionally chartered national Veteran Service Organizations and the California Department of Veterans Affairs. CVSO accreditation is codified in the Code of Federal Regulation, Section 38, 14.629(a)(1)(2)(i)(ii)(iii)(3).

Provide comprehensive benefits counseling and claims/appeals development and submission

CVSOs provide client case management for programs such as compensation for service connected disability and death; pension for non-service connected disability and death; VA and military related medical care; education benefits; California college fee waiver program; vocational rehabilitation; VA and DoD related life insurance; VA and CalVet home loans; veteran homes of California; retired military programs; correction of military records; discharge upgrades; burial benefits; and many other ancillary programs. ■



OPERATION GREEN LIGHT

National Association of Counties partners with CVSOs to show support for veterans

The National Association of Counties partnered with the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers to show support for veterans by lighting county buildings green from November 4-11, 2024. This lets county residents know that veterans are seen, appreciated, and supported. <https://www.naco.org/program/operation-green-light-veterans>



Placer County

The Placer County Veterans Service Office spearheaded the county's participation in the nationwide effort, Operation Green Light. This initiative is a way to visibly highlight our support for the veterans in our community. The Placer County Board of Supervisors passed a proclamation to participate by lighting their historic county courthouse green. In conjunction with this effort, and just in time for Veterans Day, Placer County also launched a new military appreciation website summarizing local business discounts available to veterans and active military personnel.



Los Angeles County

The Department of Public Social Services building in Santa Fe Springs illuminated in honor of Operation Green Light. Pictured are veterans that work for LA DPSS being honored by Department Director Dr. Jackie Contreras and the leadership team from the LA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; Director Jim Zenner, Chief Deputy Director Zuleyda Santana, and Deputy Director La Tina Jackson.



San Bernardino County

On October 8, 2024, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a resolution declaring the week (November 4-11) leading up to Veterans Day each year "Operation Green Light for Veterans." The resolution encourages residents to display green lights in their homes and businesses to honor the service and sacrifice of current and former members of the Armed Services. In addition, the county's three veterans service offices and five Board of Supervisors' offices were illuminated in green. Passage of the resolution underscores the county's continued commitment to assisting veterans in accessing federal benefits and transitioning to civilian life.

CONNECTING VETERANS TO BENEFITS

REAL STORIES, REAL LIVES CHANGED

California is home to over 1.43 million veterans, many of whom still do not know that they're eligible for federal Department of Veterans Administration (VA) benefits and health care. 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.

TRINITY COUNTY — CVSO MEETS VETERAN IN PHARMACY AND NETS HIM \$1,075/MONTH AND \$16,063 IN RETROACTIVE BENEFITS

A CVSO met a veteran in a local store. The veteran mentioned that the medication he had been seeking at the pharmacy was several hundred dollars and he had to forego the purchase. After finding out the condition was related to the veteran's military service, the CVSO scheduled an appointment with him to file a VA claim. As a result, the veteran was eventually granted a 50% disability rating which resulted in a tax-free monthly stipend of \$1,075, and \$16,063 in retroactive benefits. He also now receives VA medical care with no copays for visits or medication.

TRINITY COUNTY — CVSO'S PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF FOR WARTIME VETERAN VIA THE U.S. BOARD OF VETERANS APPEALS

A veteran contacted the Trinity County CVSO office with questions about education benefits. She was receiving a wartime pension but was interested in filing for service-connected disability compensation. A thorough review of her VA file revealed an appeal from 1995 that was never adjudicated. The CVSO filed paperwork to reopen the claim, which was immediately denied. The next step involved filing an appeal through the Board of Veterans Appeals. While that claim was processing, they filed a service-connected disability claim for other conditions. All claims were eventually granted, including the 1995 appeal, and the veteran was awarded 100% service connection, a tax-free monthly stipend of \$4,079, and retroactive cash benefits totaling \$226,832.

TRINITY COUNTY — CVSO ASSISTS WIDOW TO FILE FOR BENEFITS AS A RESULT OF HUSBAND'S AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE IN VIETNAM

A woman whose late husband had been a Vietnam veteran was advised by some friends to make an appointment with the CVSO. She was skeptical because he had passed away decades ago, but she made the appointment. Because his service in Vietnam exposed him to Agent Orange and per federal law, the VA was required to presume that exposure led to the medical condition which caused his death. The CVSO worked with the widow to file a Dependency Indemnity Compensation claim to the VA. As a result of these efforts, the widow was awarded over \$14,000 in back pay and a tax-free monthly stipend of over \$1,600.

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY — HOMELESS AND JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERAN IS HOUSED AND FINANCIALLY SECURED

A Veterans Service Representative (VSR) in the Santa Cruz CVSO office assisted a veteran in filing for a VA disability rating. The VA granted the veteran a 100% rating retroactive to 2017. While the amount of the total award is still being calculated, it is expected to be around \$250,000. The veteran called the CVSO office and left a message on the verge of tears thanking the VSR for her assistance with the VA claim. The veteran had been homeless, struggling with substance use, and had been involved in the justice system since at least 2012. He is now housed, stable, and in



receipt of a HUD-VASH voucher in Santa Clara County. This success is due in large part to the strong connection of partnerships throughout the county, including the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, local non-profits, and the CVSO office.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY — CVSO ASSISTS ACTIVE MILITARY AND VETERAN FLOOD VICTIMS

On January 22, San Diego County was deluged with one of the wettest days since 1850. This led to historic flooding of homes and neighborhoods and resulted in an emergency proclamation and activation of the County Emergency Operations Center. The San Diego CVSO office was deployed to assist in the county's Local Assistance Center (LAC) response. CVSO staff leveraged LiveWell Mobile Offices at the LAC sites established in National City and Southeast San Diego to provide outreach, support, and resources to military and veteran families affected. More than 400 households impacted by storm damage visited the county's LACs on the first day. Almost 1,000 county residents stayed overnight at shelters and more than 6,000 meals were served over the ensuing days. CVSO staff worked with the families to leverage federal, state, and county resources to assist in the damage recovery effort and reestablish normalcy.

PLACER COUNTY — VETERAN SEEKING DESIGNATION ON DRIVER'S LICENSE LEARNS HE IS ELIGIBLE FOR VA BENEFITS FOR AGENT ORANGE

A veteran visited the Placer County CVSO office to qualify for the "VETERAN" designation on his driver's license. The administrative clerk asked the veteran if he was a service-connected disabled veteran, to which he replied no. Persistent, the clerk reworded her question and asked if he had sustained any injuries during his service. He said that he broke his ankle while in the military. The clerk explained the VA claims process, submitted an intent to file for compensation, and scheduled the veteran for an appointment with the CVSO. During that appointment, the CVSO studied the veteran's service records and saw that he had multiple Agent Orange and other chemical exposures. The CVSO asked the veteran to order his current medical records from his primary care physician so that they could be included as part of a more fully developed VA claim. Once the medical records were received, reviewed, and uploaded, he was assisted by the Supervising Veterans Service Representative, who submitted the veteran's compensation claim for 14 contentions. This process took about one month from the initial visit. In August of 2024 the veteran was granted a 100% service connection for predominantly non-toxic exposure related injuries and illnesses. The veteran received approximately \$28,000 in retroactive compensation, and also receives monthly compensation going forward.

PLACER COUNTY — CVSO ASSISTS VETERAN IN JAIL TO CLEAR UP MISTAKEN ARREST WARRANT AND RESUME VA PAYMENTS TO THE FAMILY

During the summer, the newest Veterans Service Representative (VSR) established a relationship with the Placer County Sheriff's Office and the Placer County Jail Liaison Officer. The VSR was subsequently contacted requesting assistance for an incarcerated veteran, whereupon a VSR was sent to the jail to meet with the veteran in person. It was discovered that the veteran had already been granted a 100% service-connected disability by the VA, but had not been paid for several months due to incarceration, which was causing severe financial hardship for his family. He had not received any notices from the VA and he did not know how to handle this problem. The VSR immediately established advocacy with the veteran and began work on the issue. Upon review of the records, the VSR determined that an open arrest warrant issued by another county for a minor infraction had triggered a stop payment action with the VA. The VSR, in collaboration with the Placer County Sheriff's Office, was able to contact the county that issued the warrant and obtain proof that the warrant had been issued in error. The VSR submitted the evidence to the VA and successfully recouped past payments, enabling the veteran to eliminate his debts and provide relief for his family. Later, when the veteran was transferred to a state facility, the VSR contacted a CalVet Prison Outreach Representative to ensure seamless continued services for him. This showcases how important it is to advocate for all veterans in the community.

KINGS COUNTY — ASSISTANCE PROVIDED FOR VETERAN WITH SEVERE PARKINSON'S DENIED HOURS FOR IN-HOME HEALTH AID AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT

In October, the Kings County CVSO assisted a Navy veteran with severe Parkinson's Disease in obtaining a response from the VA Medical Center in San Francisco (VAMCSFO). The veteran had been receiving In-Home Health Aid but had his hours cut due to an administrative decision. The veteran's spouse worked through the VA's Patient Advocate office to restore the proper number of hours, however, family still had to pay out-of-pocket for the care due to the lost hours. The spouse did not receive help on how to receive reimbursement for the out-of-pocket care the veteran had to cover. The veteran was denied appellate rights and VAMCSFO refused to assist with a clinical appeal. A representative from the Kings County CVSO office called the VA Patient Advocate on the veteran's behalf and secured a response for the veteran's written request for a clinical appeal. Additionally, the representative communicated to the VA Patient Advocate at the veteran's request, for an appeal to increase Care Giver Support from Level 1 to Level 2. The representative was also able to assist the veteran in securing the clinical appeal that he was requesting. The determination of the Kings County CVSO office in assisting the spouse and her husband paid off by getting their appeal into correct VA department. There has not yet been a decision but the determination that was put forth was able to help the couple, who already have much on their plate with the veteran's health issues.

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY — CVSO STAFF ASSIST A HOMELESS VETERAN OBTAIN SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY COMPENSATION, ACHIEVE SOBRIETY, AND SECURE PERMANENT HOUSING

A veteran who was living in a homeless program visited the San Francisco County CVSO office at the suggestion of his housing program social worker. He had never applied for VA Health Care, which was likely due to lacking sufficient time-in-service, as he had been administratively separated from basic training for failure to obey orders. The Veteran's Claims Representative (VCR) assisted the veteran with getting his exams submitted to the VA. As a result, the veteran was able to get into a recovery program for his substance use disorder, which helped him achieve remission and ultimately, attend his VA examinations. The veteran was granted a 70% service-connected disability rating for PTSD with Alcohol Use Disorder. Also, due in part to the veteran's socio-economic challenges that delayed his claim, he was awarded over \$31,000 in retroactive compensation and an ongoing monthly award of \$1,663. Feeling that more could be done, the VCR encouraged the veteran to file for Individual Unemployability, a VA program that allows certain veterans to receive disability compensation at the 100% rate, even if their service-connected disabilities are not rated at that level. The VA granted the claim and found him entitled to compensation at the 100% rate backdated to the effective date of his initial claim, which triggered a retroactive payment of over \$41,000 and ongoing monthly payments of \$3,621. The veteran has now moved out of his housing stabilization program and into his own home.

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY — CVSO OFFICE STAFF'S KNOWLEDGE OF VA REGULATIONS HELP VETERANS AND SURVIVING SPOUSES OBTAIN BENEFITS FROM THE VA AFTER HAVING BEEN PREVIOUSLY DENIED

A veteran's surviving spouse visited the San Francisco County CVSO office as a walk-in customer seeking assistance with her survivor's benefit claim. Having previously been denied, she was losing hope until she spoke to a friend who recommended that she ask the CVSO for help. A Veterans Claims Representative (VCR) was able to assist her that same day. After reviewing her records in the VA claims file system, which contains a veteran's entire claims history, the VCR located the denial letter and assisted the surviving spouse in submitting a Decision Review Request-Higher Level Review, which is a form of appeal where a decision is contested without new evidence being submitted. The request contended that the prior denial of survivor's benefits — particularly, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), a monthly benefit based on service-connected death, and service-connected burial benefits — were clearly and unmistakably erroneous. In September 2024, the VCR who worked on that case received a call from the surviving spouse expressing appreciation for the assistance she received. Her claim had finally been granted by the VA and she received two checks, a one-time payment of \$1,700 for burial, and a retroactive payment of \$203,032. Going forward, she will receive an ongoing monthly payment of \$1,612. ■



COMPREHENSIVE BRIEF ON JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS (JIVS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Justice-Involved Veterans (JIVs) are a growing population in the United States, facing unique challenges rooted in military service. Conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and substance use disorders often contribute to justice involvement. California, home to over **1.43 million veterans**, leads the nation in veteran-focused legislation and programs, including **46 Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs)** across 36 counties. Despite these efforts, systemic barriers, staffing shortages, and fragmented services persist, limiting the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives.

This brief consolidates data and insights to provide a comprehensive overview of JIVs in California, highlighting legislative gaps, successful models, and recommendations for improving outcomes. It emphasizes the need for expanded funding, oversight, and collaboration to enhance existing programs and replicate successful practices nationwide.

UNDERSTANDING THE JIV POPULATION

Key Data Points

- **6,000 incarcerated veterans** in California spread across state prisons, fire camps, and jails.
- Veterans represent **8% of the national incarcerated population** (Maruschak et al., 2021).
- Contributing factors include:
 - **Military-related trauma:** High rates of PTSD and TBI among veterans increase vulnerability to justice involvement.
 - **Substance use disorders:** Often exacerbated by combat experiences and lack of support.
 - **Reintegration challenges:** Difficulties transitioning to civilian life lead to homelessness, unemployment, and justice involvement.

Projected Trends

Without systemic intervention, the JIV population is expected to grow due to:

- Increasing mental health challenges among servicemembers.
- Limited access to diversion programs for at-risk veterans.
- Fragmented reentry services leaving veterans vulnerable post-incarceration.

CALIFORNIA'S LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

California has implemented several penal codes and legislative initiatives to support JIVs. However, gaps in implementation and oversight hinder their full potential.

Key Penal Codes

1. **Penal Code 858:** Establishes Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) as alternatives to incarceration.
Issues: Uneven distribution across counties and inconsistent eligibility criteria limit access.
2. **Penal Code 1170.9:** Requires courts to consider military trauma during sentencing and prioritize treatment.
Issues: Lack of judicial training results in inconsistent application.
3. **Penal Code 1001.8:** Enables deferred judgment for veterans, dismissing charges upon program completion.
Issues: Programs are not uniformly available, especially in rural areas.
4. **Penal Codes 2695.1–2695.5:** Mandates pre-release economic recidivism plans for incarcerated veterans, including access to benefits and reentry resources.

Issues: Limited staffing and resources at CalVet result in fragmented services and delayed implementation.

5. **MIL-100:** Offers pretrial diversion for veterans with service-related conditions charged with misdemeanors.
Issues: Inconsistent adoption across counties and limited awareness among veterans.

CURRENT PROGRAMS AND CHALLENGES

Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs)

- **Successes:**
 - 70% of participants complete programs successfully.
 - 75% of graduates are not rearrested within two years.
- **Challenges:**
 - Geographic disparities and limited access in rural areas.
 - Lack of consistent program standards and data on recidivism.

CalVet's Role

- **Staffing:**
 - **Only six** staff members serve veterans in **over 30 prisons and fire camps**.
 - Visits occur every **6-12 months**, leaving many veterans underserved.
- **Challenges:**
 - Fragmented services and lack of coordinated reentry planning.
 - Inadequate resources to meet the growing needs of the JIV population.

PROMISING LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

1. **Senate Bill 1025:** Expands eligibility for diversion programs with individualized treatment plans.
Impact: Strengthens support for JIVs but requires consistent funding and oversight.
2. **Assembly Bill 1647:** Enhances collaboration between courts, service providers, and community organizations.
Impact: Builds stronger reentry frameworks but needs broader implementation.

CASE STUDIES AND MODELS FOR SUCCESS

San Francisco Veterans Court

- **Features:**
 - Structured, four-phased approach to rehabilitation.
 - Integration of court supervision with treatment services and community support.
- **Impact:**
 - Provides a clear alternative to incarceration, reducing recidivism.

San Mateo County Canine Therapy Program

- **Features:**
 - Participants train service dogs for disabled veterans, fostering therapeutic benefits.
- **Impact:**
 - Innovative approach enhances emotional stability and community reintegration.



Riverside County VTC

- **Features:**

- Focuses on addressing “invisible wounds” of veterans through comprehensive support.

- **Impact:**

- Demonstrates significant reductions in recidivism through tailored interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATORS

1. **Expand Staffing and Resources for CalVet:**

- Increase the number of staff dedicated to incarcerated veterans
- Leverage **local County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs)** to close service gaps.

2. **Standardize Veterans Treatment Courts:**

- Establish a **State Veterans Treatment Court Oversight Committee** to monitor outcomes and ensure consistency across counties.

3. **Mandate Judicial and Staff Training:**

- Provide trauma-informed training for judges and court staff to better address the needs of veterans.

4. **Invest in Data Systems:**

- Develop centralized databases to track veteran outcomes and measure program effectiveness.

5. **Enhance Collaboration:**

- Partner with local agencies, law enforcement, and community organizations to create seamless reentry services.

6. **Support Legislative Frameworks:**

- Build on SB 1025 and AB 1647 to legislate uniform practices and funding for veteran-focused diversion programs.

CONCLUSION

Justice-involved veterans represent a vulnerable yet resilient population. California’s efforts, including VTCs and legislative initiatives, have laid a strong foundation for addressing their needs. However, systemic gaps in funding, staffing, and program implementation hinder their full potential. By expanding resources, standardizing practices, and fostering collaboration, legislators can ensure that veterans receive the support they deserve. These investments will not only improve individual outcomes but also strengthen communities, reduce recidivism, and honor the sacrifices of those who served.

This brief serves as a call to action for legislators to champion justice-involved veterans by funding and expanding programs, addressing systemic barriers, and building a comprehensive support network that leaves no veteran behind. ■

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF CVSOS AND STAFF

Because County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) assist the veterans in their county to apply for their U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, they need to have intimate knowledge of the VA's laws, regulations, programs, and benefits. To do this, they must also have a working knowledge of the military, which is why California law specifies that a CVSO must be a veteran. VA regulations are contained in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulation (38 CFR), which comprise thousands of pages of detailed, technical rules which govern eligibility for VA benefits. In addition to knowing how to navigate this regulatory landscape, a CVSO also needs to stay abreast of the continuing changes taking place in 38 CFR due to new federal legislation signed into law each year. A CVSO must also be familiar with state laws and programs that help veterans and their families. Closer to home, counties have their own veteran related programs, as well as interagency partnerships between CVSOs, law enforcement, mental health, and social service providers designed to assist veterans.

It is imperative that CVSOs and their staff undergo constant training, updating, and mentoring to stay up-to-speed on new developments in veterans advocacy. Whether it be filing VA claims, assisting veterans to navigate higher education benefits, obtain VA home loans, guide veterans in the workplace, or working with the Department of Defense to obtain records, CVSOs must develop all the tools they can to aggressively advocate for their veterans.

In California, by law and regulation, the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) oversees and administers the training and accreditation of CVSOs and their staff. CalVet works to serve California veterans and their families. In partnership with CVSOs, they strive to ensure that veterans and their families of every era and demographic, get the state and federal benefits and services they have earned and deserve as a result of their military service.

CVSOs and their staff attend weeklong, triannual training conferences designed to keep them up to date on new developments. These conferences and ongoing mentoring and fellowship programs are presented by the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO), a 501 C-3 professional organization, that is committed to providing a vital and efficient system of services and advocacy to California's veterans.

CALIFORNIA VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE ACADEMY

The California Veterans Service Representative Academy (CVSRA) trains CVSOs 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 VA. The standardized curriculum ensures that a county's Veterans Service Representatives (VSR), who are required by state law to pass and maintain VA accreditation to file claims on behalf of CalVet, all receive the same high-level training. This also prevents future backlogs of claims and/or appeals by promoting the submission of quality, fully developed claim packages to the VA. The CVSRA includes two phases of classroom training and three months of on-the-job training in preparation for the CalVet accreditation exam. The VA Accreditation Examination covers knowledge of the VA's compensation and pension programs, procedures for filing claims, and procedures for appealing denied claims.

The CVSRA is a partnership between the 56 CVSO offices and the VA Regional Offices. Claim packages are prepared accurately and in a timely fashion ensuring veterans receive awards more quickly.

COUNTY VETERAN SERVICES OFFICER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The CACVSO is proud to announce an exciting initiative currently underway: the creation of a comprehensive CVSO Fellowship Program. This program, developed in partnership with Los Angeles County Military & Veterans Affairs and Ward Circle Strategies, is designed to strengthen the professional development of CVSOs and enhance their ability to serve veteran communities across California.



The CVSO Fellowship Program will provide advanced training, leadership development, and resource navigation tools tailored to the evolving needs of veterans. By building on proven fellowship models and incorporating insights from veteran service best practices, this initiative seeks to equip CVSOs with the skills to address a wide range of challenges — expanding their role as advocates, leaders, and community resources.

While still in its early stages, the development process is well underway, and we are eager to share more details as they become available. Stay tuned for updates on this exciting program and how it will position CVSOs to achieve even greater impact in their communities. Together, we are shaping a stronger future for veteran advocacy in California and beyond.

CVSO MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The CACVSO operates a mentorship program that connects new and experienced CVSOs and VSRs, allowing the knowledge collected by years of experience (often decades) to be passed on to the new generation of staff so they may better assist veterans in their counties. Though previous iterations of the mentorship program were more informal, the use of virtual platforms during COVID enhanced communication between mentor and mentee in recent years. The current mentorship program considers the expressed desires of CACVSO members to gain more opportunities to learn valuable skills (like office management, community outreach, and engagement) beyond triannual conferences.

Once a mentor and mentee are connected, the mentor can travel to the mentee’s office with CalVet reimbursing the mentor for a one-night hotel stay and mileage. The mentor spends the day observing the operations of the mentee and providing input. They then communicate either monthly or bi-weekly. The mentee can then visit the mentor’s office later to observe the operations and methods used. In 2023, the Mentorship Program held its first CVSO Mentorship Summit hosted by the Nevada County Veterans Service Office. The summit was an opportunity for CVSOs and Supervising VSRs from 23 different counties to learn from each other’s experiences and build professional relationships with each other. With the success of the Mentorship Summit, CACVSO is planning to make the 2024 event more beneficial and has voted to contribute \$5,000 annually to its Mentorship Committee to do so. ■

The CACVSO operates a mentorship program that connects new and experienced CVSOs and VSRs, allowing the knowledge collected by years of experience (often decades) to be passed on to the new generation of staff so they may better assist veterans in their counties.

CACVSO SALUTES VETERANS IN THE 2024-25 STATE LEGISLATURE



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



Assemblyman Jeff Gonzalez (R-Coachella), U.S. Marine Corps
Cities represented: Calexico, Coachella, El Centro



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



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



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





VETERAN DRIVER'S 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 DMV application, tests may be required.

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

To schedule an appointment at a DMV, visit www.dmv.ca.gov or call (800) 777-0133.



www.calvet.ca.gov

CALVET
California Department
of Veterans Affairs



"VETERAN" DESIGNATION ON DRIVER'S LICENSE/ID CARD ALSO SERVES AS A VALUABLE "IN REACH" TOOL

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 veteran status for a variety of state and local programs.

With the implementation of AB 935 (Frazier) in 2015, CalVet, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and the 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 DoD's Form (DD-214), which is issued to all servicemembers who leave the military, may require interpretation to ascertain if the veteran is qualified for a particular state program.

While many veterans seek the VETERAN designation on their ID to show pride in their military service, it also allows CVSOs to screen the veterans' military records for possible eligibility for VA benefits and programs.

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 health care and monetary benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances.

The majority of these VA benefits are lifetime monthly payments made directly to the veterans.

Were it not for the driver's license program continuing to direct veterans to their CVSOs, they would not discover the untapped financial and health care resources available to them. ■

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

327,231

veterans visited CVSOs to get the "VETERAN" designation in 2024

150,460

veterans filed claims with the federal VA

59,515

veterans are now receiving annualized VA payments totaling over \$360.7 million

This does not include over \$213 million in retroactive payments and \$4.2 million in miscellaneous payments.

DIRECTORY OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

Find your local CVSO by dialing 844-737-8838 • cacvso.org

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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 2024!

Assisting **316,178** veterans and their families in-person.

Assisted **541,152** veterans and their families via phone and email.

Filing **302,897** claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Helping veterans obtain over **\$579 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



VETPRO.US

VETERAN HOMELESSNESS IN CALIFORNIA

Issue: California faces a profound and ongoing crisis of veteran homelessness. As the state with the largest veteran population, it also accounts for nearly one-third of all homeless veterans in the United States, with over 10,589 recorded in 2023. While many counties have made strides in reducing veteran homelessness in 2024, challenges still persist.

California's Role in the Crisis

California is home to the largest population of veterans in the United States, and it bears a disproportionate share of the nation's homeless veterans. California voters approved Prop 1, which issued \$6.38 billion in general obligation bonds alongside statutory changes to the Mental Health Services Act. As part of the obligation bonds, it included \$1.05 billion for permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans who have mental health and/or substance abuse disorders. County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO), working closely with our county behavioral health departments and Veterans Administration Medical Centers, can use benefits to produce better outcomes, such as housing security and retention.

Demographics of Homeless Veterans

The demographic composition of California's homeless veteran population underscores the need for targeted interventions:

- **Race and Ethnicity:** Black veterans comprise 31% of the homeless veteran population in California, despite making up only 14% of the overall veteran population.
- **Gender and Family:** Women veterans, often accompanied by children, face unique challenges that exacerbate housing insecurity, such as lower incomes and limited access to family-focused housing programs.
- **Disability:** Nearly 30% of veterans have a service-connected disability, further complicating their ability to secure stable employment and housing.

Our Role in Combatting Veteran Homelessness

CVSOs are dedicated to supporting and advocating for veterans and their families. One way we support veterans experiencing homelessness is by participating in by-name list case conferencing with the VA and our homeless continuum of care lead in our counties. This allows us to screen every single veteran experiencing homelessness that is identified for valuable VA and CalVet benefits. We actively work to de-silo and streamline county services for veterans, including those experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness by 1) Getting other county departments to screen for veteran status; 2) Creating two-way referral processes; and 3) Leveraging our relationships with CalVet and the Veterans Administration to strengthen collaboration.

Conclusion

CVSOs are embedded in local government safety nets and are uniquely positioned to collaborate with other county departments to identify veterans connected to the departments of child support, social services, public defender, as well as the police and sheriff's departments. We help the most marginalized veterans, many of whom call our streets, jails, and hospitals home while they utilize a variety of additional county services. Ultimately, our work reduces the need for veterans and their families to depend upon our counties' social safety net services. ■



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McNally Temple is proud to support our military and its veterans,
as well as law enforcement, business and trade associations,
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WORKING TOGETHER ON BEHALF OF CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS FOR 58 YEARS

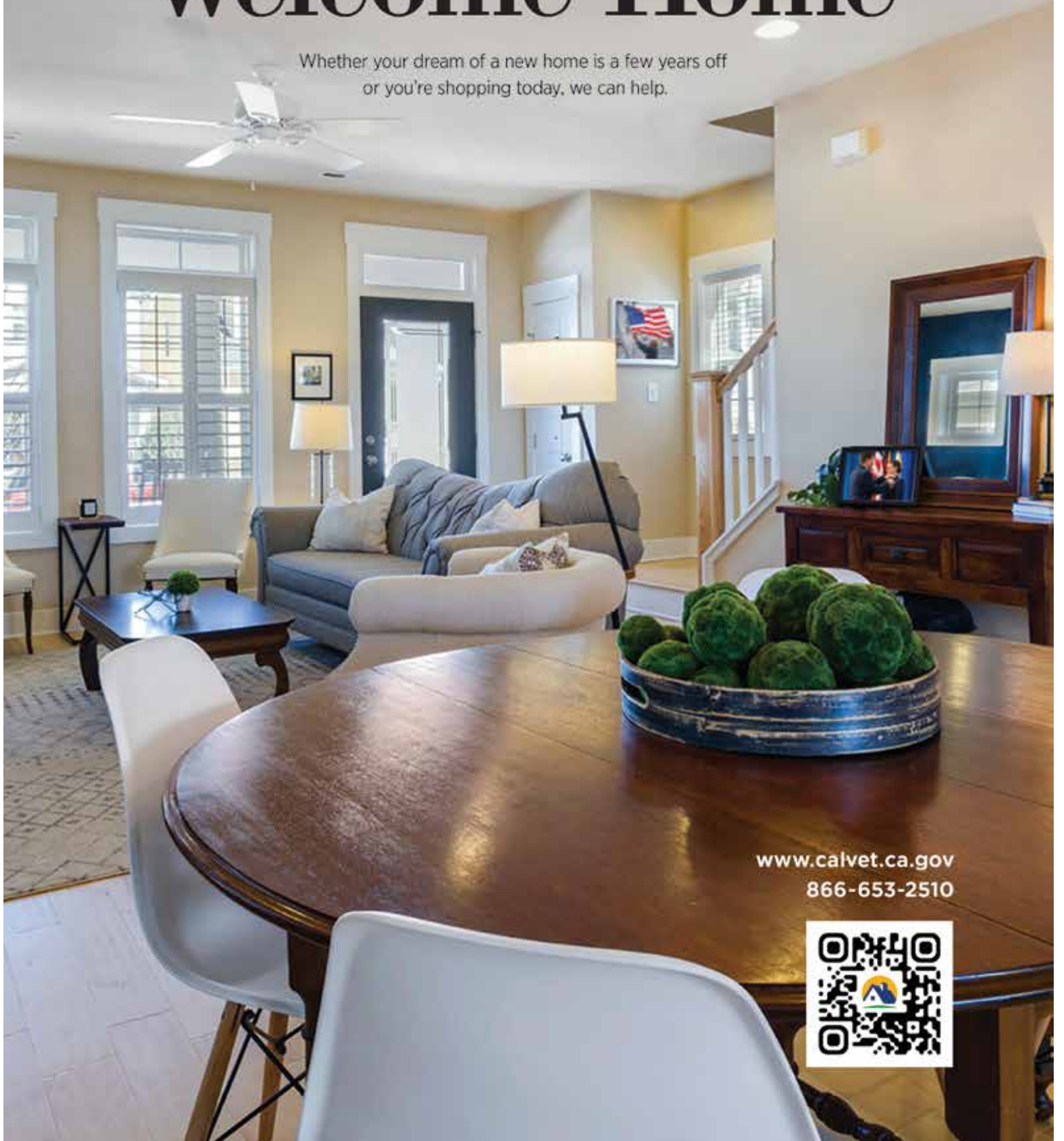


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