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resulting in 260,939 claims filed with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

260,939

These efforts resulted in \$485 million in claims awards for veterans and their families.

\$485 M



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CACVSO PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FOR 2024

2023 has been an eventful and busy year for the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO). Going back to regular in-person conferences has been a great opportunity for our members to network, share best practices, and receive great training by experts from around the country.

With the PACT Act deadline this year, California's Veterans Service Officers and Representatives were busier than ever.

CVSO offices assisted 238,655 Veterans and their families in-person and assisted 408,972 via phone or email. As a result of these contacts with veterans and their families, 260,939 claims were filed with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for VA Pensions, disability, and healthcare. These efforts resulted in \$485 million in claims awards for veterans and their families.

A big "Thank You" goes to our training consultants, Jim and Katrina Eagle, who stood ready to provide amazing training on the many PACT Act rules and requirements, both during training conferences and in individual question and answer sessions.

We were delighted to congratulate and welcome Ms. Lindsey Sin on her appointment as the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) Secretary, Mr. Keith Boylan on his appointment as Undersecretary, and Mr. Roberto Herrera on his appointment as Deputy Secretary of Veterans Services. As in the past, our relationship 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.

I was honored to represent the CACVSO during the CalVet Leadership Summit and the National Conferences, as well as a Veteran Committee hearing at the State Capitol.

As we prepare to elect new CACVSO leadership, I reflect on the past two years and am humbled to have had the privilege of working with true professionals within the CACVSO, CalVet and many other organizations. Our common goal of "Serving Those Who Served" has been the focus of our efforts and I am proud to say that we have made amazing strides in that mission.

There is much still to do and I look forward to our continued work and collaboration in improving the lives of California's veterans and their families.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rhonda Murphy', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Rhonda Murphy, President 2022-24
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers



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

THE SECRETARY

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 1.6 million veterans who live in California have access to the benefits they earned by virtue of their military service.

Veterans and their dependents often need assistance navigating the complex systems of benefits and services. Those include access to education benefits, College Fee Waivers, disability compensation, discharge upgrades, employment assistance, VA healthcare, home ownership, affordable and supportive housing, behavioral healthcare, elder care, and so much more.

For the past 77 years, CalVet has relied on our county partners, the CVSOs, to aid veterans in receiving those benefits. Fiscal Year 2022-23 proved to be an exceptional year, as CVSOs brought approximately \$485 million in new or increased federal benefits into California's economy. That represented an increase of about \$60 million over Fiscal Year 2021-22. Those figures are directly attributed to the assistance of CVSOs.

Often the first point of contact, CVSOs bring depth, knowledge, patience, and understanding as they guide veterans and their families through what can seem like an overwhelming and confusing navigation process.

CVSOs work with all of CalVet's divisions and programs—including our Veterans Services Division, Women Veterans Division, and Minority Veterans Division—our eight Local Interagency Network Coordinators (LINC)s, three District Offices, and the California Transition Assistance Program (CalTAP). During the pandemic, CVSOs were integral in informing veterans about CalTAP's conversion from live events to webinars. To date, 868 events have been held—519 of them webinars—that have reached 28,147 servicemembers, veterans, and family members.

Likewise, CVSOs are vital to the mental health programs CalVet funds through its \$2.4 million Proposition 63 Grant Program in which vulnerable veterans and those who serve them receive critical mental health support and resources. CVSOs will be equally important to the success of the California Veterans Health Initiative, created to combat veteran suicide and address their mental health needs.

On behalf of CalVet, I again thank the CVSOs for their outstanding work with veterans in 2023, and am confident that 2024 will be even better.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "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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ON THE COVER

\$485 M

"Serving Those Who Served" means providing quality, responsive and zealous assistance to ensure veterans and their families receive the most comprehensive benefits and highest claims awards possible for their service and sacrifice to our country.



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 2022-23, California's CVSOs assisted veterans to obtain about \$485 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 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.

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 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 CVSO 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 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 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 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

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. ■

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



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 v eteran interests.

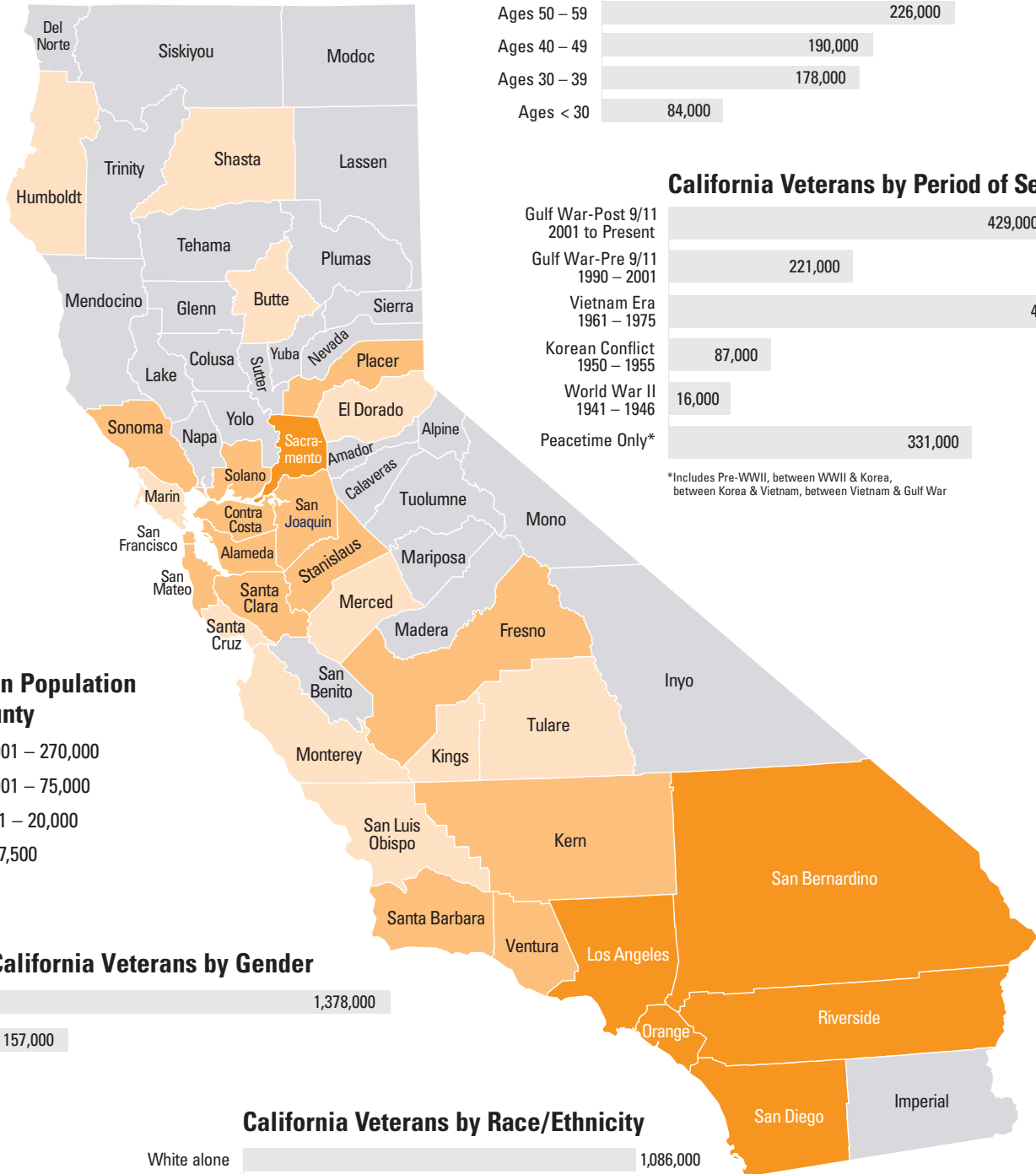
MOTTO

Serving those who served.

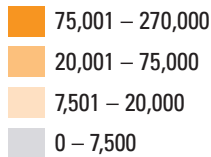
California Veterans by the Numbers

Estimated By County as of September 30, 2022

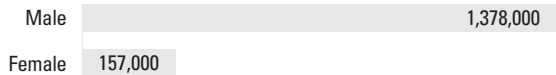
Source: USDVA VetPro 2020 (Tables 6L, 7L, 8L, 9L)



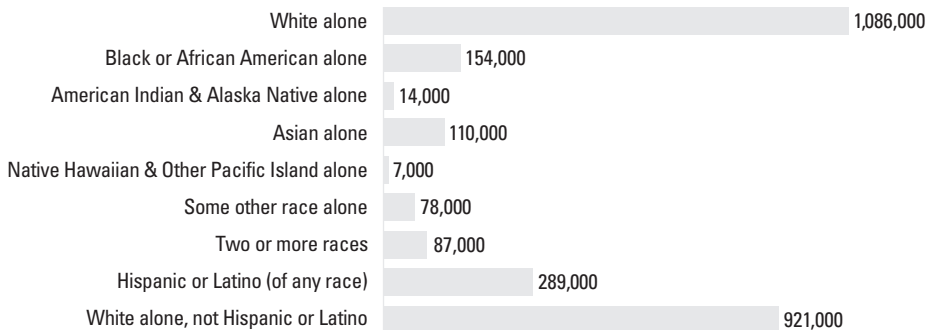
Veteran Population by County



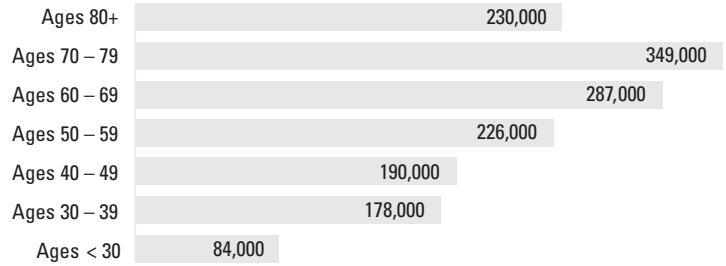
California Veterans by Gender



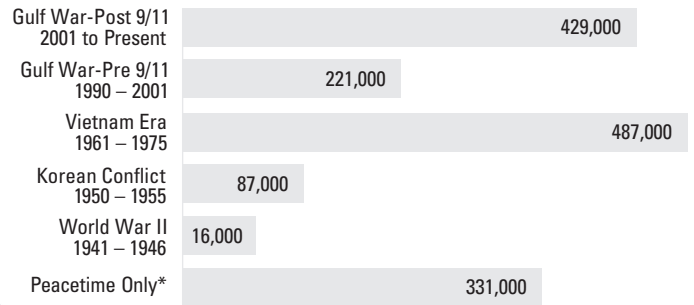
California Veterans by Race/Ethnicity



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 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.

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 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (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 to them when they come to a professional for help. CVSOs do their jobs well. In fact, they turned \$50.7 million in county and state funding into more than \$485 million in benefits for the 2022-23 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 — **we estimate roughly 120,000 veterans are missing out on their C&P benefits.**
- The veterans' quality of life — **there are approximately \$1.9 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 General Fund local assistance as the absolute minimum.** 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 increased the General Fund local assistance to \$11 million in support of CVSO operations. This is helping counties to hire more CVSOs and increase outreach to underserved veterans. The CVSOs are now leveraging those dollars to make a tremendous difference in the lives of many veterans.

The effect is seen by looking at historical data using 2013, when the state General Fund support was increased to \$5.6 million, as a baseline year. and understanding that funding remained at that level until 2022. From 2013 to 2022:

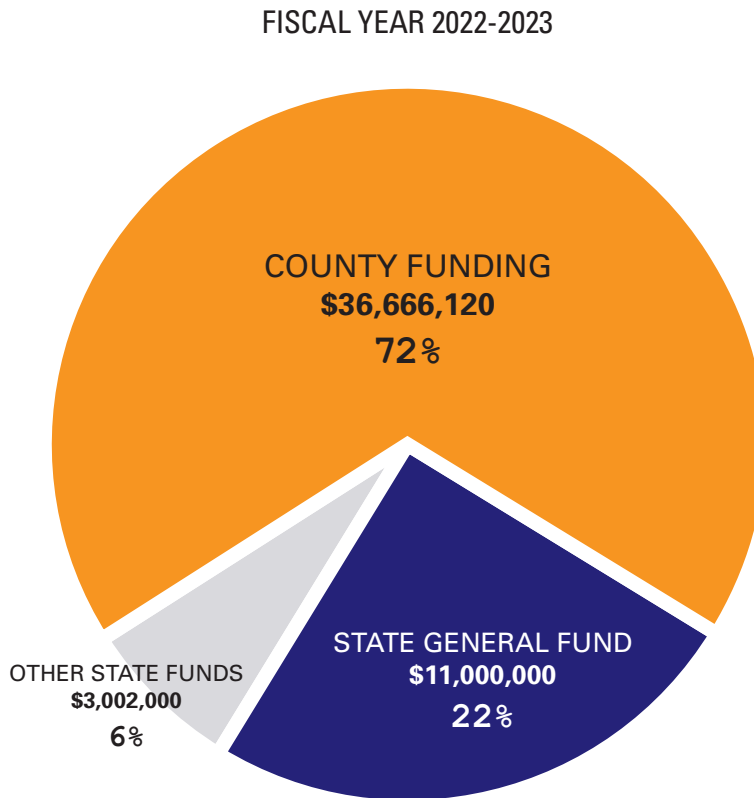
- The state's benefit **utilization rate had increased from 17.5% to 29.9%.**
- About **119,000** more beneficiaries are receiving C&P Benefits, despite a decrease of over 400,000 veterans estimated to be living in California.
- The total C&P Benefits paid annually to California's veterans has **increased from \$5.4 billion to \$9.4 billion.** While some of this may be attributed to increased payment rates, the increased number of beneficiaries certainly played a significant role.

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. Additional state support of CVSO 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. ■



WHO FUNDS THE CVSOs?

County veterans service office operations are front-funded with county funds, subject to partial reimbursement through various 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. 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. 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 2022-23.



Total CVSO Operating Costs: \$50,668,120

Sources: CalVet NCC Data FY 2022-23, and 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, 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. These factors 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.

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

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF VETERANS' CLAIMS BY COUNTY

The monetary veteran benefit data presented on the following pages provide information 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 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 leadership 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 2022-23. These amounts are directly attributable to the activities and efforts of the CVSOs. **In total, the CVSOs accounted for more than \$485 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 \$44 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. 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 total, the CVSOs accounted for more than \$485 million in new federal veteran benefits being brought into California's economy.





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 2023!

Assisting **238,655** veterans and their families in-person.

Assisted **408,972** veterans and their families via phone and email.

Filing **260,939** claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Helping veterans obtain over **\$485 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

Monetary Impact of CVSO Activities - By County

Fiscal Year 2022-23

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
Los Angeles	260,075	L	26,243	6,500	24,072	\$23,439,596	\$974
San Diego	230,507	L	23,956	75,222	19,507	\$16,675,473	\$855
Riverside	115,937	L	8,124	22,935	13,603	\$29,860,307	\$2,195
Orange	101,674	L	23,990	10,893	12,641	\$19,594,152	\$1,550
San Bernardino	91,652	L	19,089	12,237	55,784	\$57,895,384	\$1,038
Sacramento	77,794	L	6,000	11,000	5,183	\$10,285,017	\$1,984
Santa Clara	50,295	M	6,889	18,652	7,369	\$15,930,687	\$2,162
Alameda	48,841	M	600	1,000	2,240	\$5,137,659	\$2,294
Contra Costa	40,815	M	6,182	7,300	4,140	\$21,797,165	\$5,265
Kern	36,996	M	3,300	12,674	8,841	\$16,123,931	\$1,824
Ventura	35,975	M	4,600	25,480	6,649	\$18,427,173	\$2,771
Fresno	34,991	M	5,232	26,772	4,371	\$5,776,186	\$1,321
Solano	32,080	M	6,800	10,000	3,545	\$11,480,584	\$3,239
San Joaquin	28,742	M	4,434	13,302	3,767	\$11,913,594	\$3,163
Placer	24,529	M	6,050	3,499	4,666	\$18,053,192	\$3,869
Sonoma	22,612	M	2,981	3,012	3,301	\$12,509,414	\$3,790
San Mateo	22,415	M	2,581	1,750	3,183	\$9,903,219	\$3,111
San Francisco	22,317	M	6,050	1,029	6,852	\$8,796,127	\$1,284
Stanislaus	20,342	M	5,942	11,000	6,362	\$14,031,708	\$2,206
Santa Barbara	19,372	S	12,750	26,450	3,935	\$12,850,379	\$3,266
Monterey	18,297	S	4,290	8,566	5,860	\$14,213,502	\$2,426
San Luis Obispo	16,063	S	2,812	10,657	8,353	\$9,462,883	\$1,133
Tulare	15,059	S	3,788	9,971	2,996	\$7,706,164	\$2,572
Butte	13,445	S	2,336	4,106	2,813	\$7,197,649	\$2,559
Shasta	13,242	S	4,617	5,598	4,904	\$9,956,742	\$2,030
El Dorado	12,050	S	2,787	3,745	2,545	\$6,432,236	\$2,527
Yuba-Sutter	11,213	S	1,968	2,023	2,261	\$10,478,174	\$4,634
Merced	9,877	S	2,658	0	1,958	\$1,722,190	\$880
Santa Cruz	9,003	S	3,292	875	1,990	\$7,844,922	\$3,942
Kings	8,304	S	2,863	6,254	2,142	\$1,457,311	\$680
Marin	8,187	S	321	450	632	\$1,644,625	\$2,602
Humboldt	7,444	VS	1,611	3,422	1,777	\$4,457,456	\$2,508
Yolo	7,164	VS	1,516	10,200	1,308	\$4,646,432	\$3,552
Nevada	6,521	VS	2,200	1,800	3,805	\$6,705,352	\$1,762
Imperial	6,158	VS	0	0	1,674	\$7,041,074	\$4,206

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	5,736	VS	2,000	3,500	1,535	\$3,258,331	\$2,123
Napa	5,535	VS	960	3,750	3,001	\$6,755,025	\$2,251
Mendocino	4,858	VS	1,835	3,135	960	\$3,203,274	\$3,337
Lake	4,618	VS	2,800	4,000	2,166	\$6,962,539	\$3,214
Tuolumne	4,419	VS	1,654	3,466	1,628	\$3,432,546	\$2,108
Tehama	4,024	VS	1,078	2,591	1,632	\$4,634,909	\$2,840
Calaveras	3,865	VS	932	1,644	984	\$2,670,317	\$2,714
Siskiyou	3,410	VS	1,266	3,813	457	\$1,731,138	\$3,788
Amador	3,027	VS	574	2,117	444	\$1,107,100	\$2,493
San Benito	2,539	VS	425	680	711	\$2,280,834	\$3,208
Lassen	1,919	VS	2,100	1,900	285	\$789,568	\$2,770
Del Norte	1,894	VS	131	64	434	\$580,611	\$1,338
Plumas	1,610	VS	432	720	452	\$1,500,069	\$3,319
Mariposa	1,458	VS	240	500	32	\$8,023	\$251
Inyo	1,387	VS	160	293	228	\$607,196	\$2,663
Glenn	1,267	VS	1,650	2,000	170	\$1,202,007	\$7,071
Trinity	926	VS	451	798	477	\$1,145,240	\$2,401
Modoc	685	VS	53	197	61	\$159,697	\$2,618
Collusa	722	VS	979	5,273	198	\$1,690,757	\$8,539
Mono	502	VS	80	147	55	\$170,658	\$3,103
Sierra	241	VS	3	10	0	\$0	\$0
Alpine	81	VS					
STATEWIDE	1,534,710		238,655	408,972	260,939	485,337,502	1,860

Notes:

1. Veteran population estimates, as of September 30, 2022, published by the USDVA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "VetPop 2020".
2. County size is an arbitrary designation, for comparison purposes, based upon veteran population with "Very Small" <= 7,500, 7,500<"Small" <=20,000, 20,000<"Medium" <=75,000, "Large" >= 75,000.
3. These amounts are the new or increased benefits obtained by the CVSO, during this fiscal year, as reported in CalVet'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.



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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) 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 healthcare 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 war zones, 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 information, contact your local County Veterans Service Office: <http://www.cacvso.org/county-contacts/>



Solano County CVSO Alfred Sims (facing, second from left) was invited to serve as a member of Congressman Mike Thompson's (CA-4) (head of table) Veterans Advisory Council. During this meeting, Mr. Sims and other local veterans discussed the PACT Act and its impact of Vietnam veterans with hypertension. Maintaining close connections with elected officials ensures veterans issues remain a top priority in public policy.

CVSOs IN ACTION



CACVSO President and Santa Barbara CVSO Rhonda Murphy (*far left*), the first and only woman to lead the CACVSO in its 78-year history, and San Francisco CVSO Elena Kim (*far right*), who has worked as a veterans advocate since leaving the Army in 2010, were honored at the CalVet Trailblazers Women Veterans Reception in Sacramento.



The Sacramento County CVSO office provides outreach at annual Sacramento Veterans Day Parade and ceremony at the State Capitol.



Sacramento County CVSO Rochelle Arnold (*left*) at the Women Veterans Health and Resource Fair at the VA Hospital at Mather Field with Melissa Washington, founder of the Women Veterans Alliance.





Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana) receives 2022 Legislator of the Year award from CACVSO President Rhonda Murphy at the CVSO's Sacramento Training Conference for his service on the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs and his many bills benefiting veterans, servicemembers, and their families during his legislative tenure.



CVSOs and key staff attend a triannual, weeklong training conference — a requirement in state regulations. Since federal and state laws and regulations are constantly evolving, learning is a constant process. These conferences also provide a forum for CVSOs from around the state to compare notes and share lessons learned.



Twice a year the Solano County CVSO office participates in the Paradise Valley Veterans Resource Fair at Paradise Valley Estates — a 76-acre, nonprofit Life Plan Community that welcomes people age 60 and older from all walks of life. CVSOs strive to perform as much outreach as possible in the communities they serve.



Ventura County participates in Operation Green Light. The National Association of Counties and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers urges counties across the U.S. to show support for veterans by lighting county buildings green during the Veterans Day week.



Monterey County CVSO Jack Murphy and CVSOs from Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Cruz attend PACT Act briefing with Congressman Jimmy Panetta (CA-19). The PACT Act is one of the largest expansions of VA benefits and will expand eligibility to about 3.5 million veterans nationally.



Sacramento County CVSO Rochelle Arnold (left) and others supporting a local community outreach event in support of veterans and their families.



CVSOs from across the state gather in the State Capitol's Swing Space as part of their Capitol Advocacy Day. CVSOs presented their Association's Annual Report and educated legislators and staff on what CVSOs do.

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.

CALAVERAS COUNTY — ARMY VETERAN VISITS CVSO OFFICE TO INCREASE DISABILITY RATING, LEARNS OF OTHER BENEFITS HE WAS ELIGIBLE FOR, AND EVENTUALLY GETS JOB WITH CVSO OFFICE SO HE CAN HELP OTHER VETERANS

An Army veteran had received a 40% disability rating upon separation from active duty in 2014. He then began working as a civilian Veteran Technician for the Department of Defense while serving in the National Guard. In 2020, he looked into qualifying for an increase in his disability rating and sought help in filing his claim. He was given the name and contact for someone, however he didn't hear back after leaving multiple messages. He eventually found his way to the Calaveras County CVSO office, where he sought to submit a claim for a rating increase due to his National Guard service. After some discussion and review of the veteran's Service Treatment Records (STR), CVSO staff submitted the claim for the increases, but also submitted another claim for new conditions that staff had found in his STRs. A supplemental claim for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was also submitted.

In late 2022, the VA made a decision and increased his total disability rating to 90%. The increase in monthly VA benefits took the load off the shoulders of he and his wife, allowing them to move forward with their lives. As a result of these experiences, the veteran developed a passion for helping other veterans and is now a member of the Calaveras CVSO office as the Veterans Outreach Coordinator.

COLUSA COUNTY — DAUGHTER OF VETERAN SEEKS ASSISTANCE IN FATHER'S BURIAL, WHICH LEADS TO VA LONG-TERM CARE FOR MOTHER

While attending the CalVet Leadership Summit in San Diego, the Colusa County CVSO received a phone call from a veteran who spoke about the passing of a gentleman who had always played Taps on the bugle at local veteran burials, and who sought advice on how to honor him. Twenty minutes later, the funeral home called and informed the CVSO that the daughter of the deceased was bringing in her father's DD-214 discharge papers and wanted a burial ceremony flag. When the CVSO returned home, he reviewed the DD-214 and noticed that the veteran had served in Vietnam. The CVSO inquired into the cause of death and the Death Certificate indicated it was from a heart attack and hypertension. Prior to the veteran's death, service-connection had not been established for any disability, however with the recent passing of the PACT Act in August 2022, the service-connection for heart attack and hypertension was now recognized.

The CVSO contacted the daughter, who mentioned that her father always kept his time in the Army a secret because of the way servicemembers were treated upon return from Vietnam. He suggested to her that her mother should submit a claim for VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). DIC is for the surviving spouse, child, or parent of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or the survivor of a veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness. DIC recipients may be able to get a tax-free monetary benefit. The CVSO submitted the claim to the VA and in two months, the veteran's widow moved into a care facility. Two months after that, the widow was granted DIC for her husband's service-connected death and hypertension from Agent Orange exposure. The CVSO then submitted for another VA program called Aid & Attendance for the widow, which was subsequently granted. VA Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits provide monthly payments added to the amount of a monthly VA pension for qualified veterans and survivors. This benefit is for those who need ongoing assistance with activities of daily living



(including bathing, feeding, dressing needs, etc.), or are housebound. CVSOs are the nexus for all things veteran related in their counties and making connections in the community helps the CVSOs maximize their efficiency. Local veterans and the funeral home knew to contact the CVSO and the issues were resolved to the benefit of all involved.

COLUSA COUNTY — LIFE CHANGING OUTREACH

While doing outreach to various locations in the county, the Colusa County CVSO noticed that many veterans never explore or apply for the VA benefits to which they may be entitled. He explains to veterans and the community that many Vietnam veterans may have been exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange (AO) and that the VA now recognizes certain cancers and other health problems as presumptive diseases for the purposes of an AO related disability.

One day, while speaking to a community group during a question-and-answer period, a person asked the CVSO if Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a presumptive condition for AO benefits. The CVSO informed the group that while ALS is not a presumptive condition for AO, the VA does presume ALS as presumptive for all veterans who served 90 days or more on continuous active military service. The person asked if it mattered how long ago the veteran passed away from ALS, to which the CVSO replied "no". The CVSO was then put in touch with the widow of a veteran who had served in the Army in the mid-1960s and passed away 20 years earlier. The CVSO made an appointment with the widow and filed a claim for VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). DIC is for the surviving spouse, child, or parent of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or the survivor of a veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness. Her claim stalled in the VA for some reason.

At a CVSO training conference, the CVSO spoke with a person from one of the VA's Pension Centers, who was there to make a presentation to the CVSO Association. After some investigating, the VA person found that the claim had all the evidence needed to award the benefit. The surviving spouse prepared the claim for a decision and, a few days later, the VA notified the CVSO that the claim had been awarded. The CVSO then took the letter to her house and explained that she had been awarded a DIC. She said that this would more than double her monthly income. The CVSO also submitted a claim for her for CHAMPVA benefits (a VA health insurance program in which the VA pays part of the cost of certain healthcare services and supplies) and veterans related property tax exemption. These benefits truly changed this widow's life.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY — VIETNAM VETERAN VISITS CVSO OFFICE FOR HEARING LOSS ISSUE AND SUBSEQUENTLY RECEIVES A \$750,000 PAYMENT

A Vietnam Army veteran visited the Contra Costa County CVSO office to inquire about filing a VA claim for hearing loss and tinnitus. The veteran stated he had been denied his claim in 2009 due to a missed medical examination. After reviewing his claim history, the Veterans Service Representative (VSR) noticed that the veteran was also denied for a bladder cancer claim. The VSR informed the veteran that bladder cancer was added to the list of presumptive conditions for Agent Orange by the VA in 2021. The VSR encouraged the veteran to file a supplemental claim. A little over a year later, the claim was finally adjudicated. The VA provided a retroactive payment of over \$750,000 dating back to 2001.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY — VA BENEFITS ASSIST VETERAN TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE TERMINAL STAGES OF ALS

A veteran was brought into the Contra Costa County CVSO office by his daughter, who was hoping to obtain VA healthcare for him. The veteran was suffering from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), which is also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The CVSO interviewed the veteran, then encouraged him to file an ALS claim with the VA. That claim resulted in a \$130,000 retroactive benefit along with \$3,800 monthly payments. A year later, his daughter called to let the CVSO know that her father had passed away but that he had spent the last year of his life getting out and enjoying himself despite the debilitating effects of ALS. He had hired someone to drive him to the places he liked to go. That retroactive benefit allowed him to live the last year of his life how he wanted.

FRESNO COUNTY — COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BY CVSO AND VA PROVIDES HANDICAP-ACCESSIBLE VAN TO DISABLED VETERAN

A disabled veteran, whose service to his country left him with mobility challenges, experienced a life-changing moment of community support and generosity. The veteran had long been limited in his ability to travel. Through the collaborative efforts of the Fresno County Veterans Service Office and the Fresno VA Hospital, the veteran received a donated handicap-accessible van, which opened new possibilities in his life. The veteran now looks forward to more frequent journeys to visit and reconnect with family, friends, and loved ones — experiences that were once difficult for him to achieve. The life-changing donation granted the veteran freedom and connection, a testament to the community's respect and support for its veterans.



KINGS COUNTY — DECEASED VETERAN'S COMMON LAW SPOUSE RECEIVES OVER \$498,000 FROM VA

The *Nehmer v. Department of Veterans Affairs* ruling required the VA to re-adjudicate previously denied claims. In May 2022, the VA reviewed the claim folder of a Kings County veteran who died in 2012. While alive, the veteran had been receiving a VA Non-Service-Connected Pension for coronary artery disease. After the veteran's passing, coronary artery disease was added to the list of Agent Orange presumptive conditions.

In 2023, the veteran's surviving common-law spouse visited the Kings County CVSO office to request their assistance in proving to the VA that she was an eligible claimant for retroactive compensation owed to the veteran. The CVSO office assisted her in obtaining the proper documents to file a claim. Additionally, the CVSO helped her gain recognition as the veteran's surviving common-law spouse since 1995, which made her eligible to receive her own lump sum payment from the VA. Subsequently, the VA granted the deceased veteran a service-connected disability for coronary artery disease for the effective dates of September 1995 to November 2012, the date of the veteran's death and also added a grant of Individual Unemployability (IA). This meant that the retroactive pay adjustment from pension to IA went all the way back to 1995 rather than the veteran's death in 2012, netting the spouse a retroactive payment of \$291,800. Furthermore, on top of the retroactive payment, the widow, as a surviving spouse, was now eligible to file a claim for VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) as well as a burial reimbursement.

DIC offers a tax-free monetary benefit for a surviving spouse, child, or parent of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or the survivor of a veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness. The VA awarded another retroactive payment of \$206,200 for DIC and burial reimbursement.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY — FOR ONE VIETNAM VET, BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

In 2014, a U.S. Navy Vietnam veteran filed for multiple Agent Orange (AO) related conditions such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and neuropathy. Although his service earned him a Vietnam Campaign Medal, the VA deemed him ineligible for an AO disability compensation claim because he served aboard a ship off the coast of Vietnam. At the time, presumptions for AO related illnesses were restricted to those who served on land or on the inland waterways of Vietnam. In 2019, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (BWNVA), authored by Congressman Mark Takano (CA-41), was signed into law. The act declared any servicemember aboard a ship within twelve nautical miles of the Vietnamese shore was now presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange.

In 2021, the veteran visited a Los Angeles CVSO office and asked if the BWNVA would now entitle him to disability compensation benefits.



A CVS SO staff person filed a VA form 20-0995 supplemental claim challenging the VA's previous denial of the veteran's benefits on the basis that the recent policy changes expanded the presumption of Agent Orange exposure. The VA spent ten months processing the veteran's claim; however, in late 2022, the veteran and CVS SO staff were notified that a 70% service-connected disability rating was granted, as well as eight years of retroactive benefits totaling \$140,000.

CVS SOs must not only know how to file claims, but they must also keep track of new federal legislation and regulations which change eligibility for VA benefits, programs, and services. This also applies to state legislation and regulations as they relate to California veterans.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY — AFTER NINE YEARS IN PRISON, ARMY VET COMES HOME TO FRESH START



An Azusa native joined the Army in 2004, was deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2006 to 2007 as a tank specialist, and was discharged in 2010. In 2013, he was convicted of a felony and incarcerated for nine years. During that time, his 40% service-connected disability rating from the VA dropped to 10%, which is standard practice for incarcerated veterans. Upon his release, he connected with the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health's Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN) in South El Monte. After VPAN helped get him housed, a fellow Army veteran introduced him to a Veterans Claims Assistant (VCA) in the Los Angeles County CVS SO office. The VCA found an opening for an appointment that day, helped the veteran with filing a claim for a service-connected disability, and assisted in clearing up some VA overpayment problems stemming from incarceration. The VA granted him a 90% service-connected disability rating and attendant benefits.

This VCA was no stranger to veterans in the justice system, spending much of his time in the prison system looking for veterans who may or may not identify as such and connecting them with their benefits and other resources. According to him, "we want to get their claims processed quickly upon release so they don't end up back on the streets again." Even after the veteran settled into his new home — and his new life — the VCA is still there. He continues to help him with his claims and benefits, stating: "I told him to stop by the office and let me know how he's doing. He's a combat vet, I'm a combat vet, and we're here for one another."

MADERA COUNTY — A HERO'S REDEMPTION: UNVEILING VALOR'S LEGACY

A Vietnam War veteran, disheartened and having faced a silent battle for recognition, sought the Madera County CVS SO office's aid in securing a Purple Heart for his actions during the war. He had attempted for years on his own to navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth of the Department of the Army. Unfortunately, his efforts were met with frustration, and the valor that had defined his service remained hidden in the shadows for decades.

CVS SO staff meticulously examined his service records and uncovered compelling evidence of his heroic actions. Unearthed from the veteran's service records was evidence of him entering a minefield to rescue his wounded comrades, verified by five sworn statements. Armed with newfound proof, CVS SO staff submitted an application to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records, who then awarded the veteran a Purple Heart and amended his DD-214 discharge papers. These became a symbol of triumph for the veteran, giving him a legacy for future generations. In correcting this hero's history, the CVS SO office served as a bridge between a veteran's forgotten valor and his remembered heroism. Beyond paperwork, CVS SOs also help veterans and their families heal from the physical and mental injuries of war and ensure their sacrifices are recognized.

NAPA COUNTY — FROM FRAUDULENT ENLISTMENT TO FULLY CONNECTED VA DISABILITY RATING

A U.S. Army veteran walked into the Napa County Veterans Service Office to inquire about pursuing a discharge upgrade. When servicemembers are discharged from the military, the nature of their discharge is categorized as Honorable, Under Honorable Conditions, Under Other than Honorable Conditions, Bad Conduct, Dishonorable, etc. Veterans who believe the characterization of their discharge from military service was unjust, erroneous, or warrants an upgrade can apply for a discharge upgrade or correction. All branches of the military consider a veteran to have a strong case for a discharge upgrade if they can show their discharge was connected to any of these categories:

- Mental health conditions, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Sexual assault or harassment during military service
- Sexual orientation (including discharges under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy)

While seeking employment, the veteran wanted to access any potential veterans hiring preference points. Additionally, he hoped to qualify for enrollment into VA Healthcare. He had served 17 months on active duty in the late 1970s — with an entry date and discharge date clearly annotated on the discharge document. However, the entry on his Record of Service was all zeros (as if he'd never served) and his Character of Service was listed as "N/A".

The CVSO interviewed the veteran and learned that while the veteran had been stationed in Texas as a heavy equipment operator, he was cited for a traffic violation. He was also found to have an unresolved civil warrant from California, which had taken place prior to his enlistment. The subsequent legal proceedings resulted in a Fraudulent Enlistment charge and ultimately the uncharacterized discharge status, which resulted in a classification of no active service. As the CVSO was explaining the discharge upgrade process, he noticed the veteran seemed to have trouble hearing, causing the CVSO to repeat himself several times. The veteran was also shifting his posture and constantly adjusting his seating position. The CVSO asked about any injuries and/or noise exposure while on active duty; the veteran confirmed both. With this new information, the CVSO advised the veteran that he was eligible to file a claim for service connection and, as part of the claim's process, the VA would conduct its own Character of Discharge Review. A favorable review from the VA resulted in monthly compensation and eligibility for VA Healthcare, while the Department of Defense (DoD) discharge upgrade is still pending. The veteran is now Priority Group 1 in VA Healthcare, and the VA compensation enabled him to move to a larger apartment. Moreover, he recently started volunteering to assist other Napa County veterans requiring transportation to medical appointments. The Napa County CVSO office is keeping its fingers crossed for the DoD discharge upgrade.

ORANGE COUNTY — VIETNAM VETERAN RECEIVES PURPLE HEART HE EARNED OVER 50 YEARS AGO

Orange County Veterans Claims Representative staff assisted a Vietnam veteran to obtain his Purple Heart, over five decades after his discharge. Staff assisted the veteran by investigating a previous unfavorable decision he had received from the VA. A thorough investigation revealed Army headquarters had in fact awarded the Purple Heart to the veteran. With the assistance of CVSO staff, the veteran was able to appeal his previously denied claim and file an application for Correction of Military Record to obtain his Purple Heart. Although it has taken 53 years to be formally honored for his Purple Heart, the veteran received his Purple Heart medal just in time for National Purple Heart Day on August 7, 2023.

PLACER COUNTY — VETERAN'S WIDOW, WHO WAS PREVIOUSLY DENIED, RECEIVES VA DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION BECAUSE OF 2022 PACT ACT

Signed into federal law in August 2022, the PACT Act expands VA healthcare and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances. The PACT Act adds to the list of health conditions that presumed to have caused exposure to these substances. Many veterans and their dependents may now be eligible for health benefits from the VA that they were once denied.

In 2023, the Placer County CVSO office was auditing veteran profiles for PACT Act eligibility and discovered that a surviving spouse that had



previously been denied Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the VA for the death of her husband, was now eligible under the new law. CVSO staff checked the VA's Veterans Benefits Management System and found that the VA had previously sent her an AMA Notice of Action Letter, which is a letter sent to a veteran when VA has made a decision regarding their disability benefits. However, the Notice had been returned to the VA because the spouse had moved and had not notified the VA of the address change. CVSO staff tracked down the spouse and notified her that a DIC appeal had been granted. She subsequently received a retroactive payment of \$31,316.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY — CVSO STAFF ASSISTS GULF WAR VETERAN OVERCOME LACK OF FAITH IN SYSTEM

After many years of struggling with physical and mental issues and financial difficulties, a Gulf War veteran came to the Sacramento County Veterans Service Office to file for his service-connected disabilities. He had a lot of military service treatment records and private medical records to support his claims. After his first claim was returned with some denied and deferred issues, he became discouraged to the point that he left a voicemail disparaging the VA and telling the office to never call back. However, after a few weeks, the VA granted him service-connection for PTSD and multiple physical disabilities with an overall rating of 90 percent.

The CVSO Staff also assisted the veteran in enrolling and accessing his VA Health Care. The veteran now has a renewed hope and positive opinion of the VA claims process due to the assistance the CVSO staff provided to him throughout the process. Sometimes veterans give up on themselves, so we must advocate for them and follow through until they receive the benefits they have earned.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY — CVSO STAFF ASSISTS SURVIVING SPOUSE WITH PACT ACT CLAIM

The Sacramento County CVSO office assisted a terminally ill Vietnam/Gulf War veteran submit his claim for disability compensation for a presumptive cancer to the VA. Unfortunately, the veteran passed away prior to the VA making a final decision on his claim. Upon receiving notification of the veteran's death, CVSO staff submitted the paperwork to obtain Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for the surviving spouse, which was granted within 60 days. DIC is a tax-free monthly benefit paid to eligible survivors of military servicemembers who died in the line of duty or eligible survivors of veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease. The CVSO staff also submitted paperwork to allow the surviving spouse to be the substitute for the veteran's pending disability claim, which entitled her to receive the 100% disability compensation payments the veteran should have received prior to his death. The surviving spouse was very appreciative of the work the CVSO staff did to honor the veteran by ensuring the VA completed the veteran's claim to acknowledge his catastrophic service-connected disabilities.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY — CVSO OFFICE INCREASES OUTREACH

In 2023, the Sacramento County CVSO office increased its presence and accessibility throughout the county. The CVSO conducted regular monthly outreach at the City of Elk Grove's dedicated Veterans Hall, which honors and serves the 9,000 veterans in the city and the rural, neighboring community of Galt. The CVSO office partnered with the American Legion Post 55 to establish a satellite office location for assisting veterans seeking to obtain their earned VA benefits. This effort benefited veterans who have difficulty accessing transportation travel to the main office location.

Since the start of the regular monthly outreach in late 2023, the CVSO's Veteran Claims Representative has submitted three compensation claims, one BVA case, one supplemental claim, multiple DMV verifications, and two Intent to File forms on behalf of veterans. To further expand the effort to connect with veterans, the city advertised CVSO presence in the Elk Grove newspaper. The CVSO anticipates assisting more veterans at this location as the word travels throughout the community about their regular presence at that location. The Sacramento CVSO office has also been attending a monthly Veterans Benefits clinic in the VFW's Post 67 veterans hall in Sacramento. In the first month, CVSO staff assisted over 20 veterans with VA claims and connecting to other federal, state, and local benefits and resources.

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY — WHEN YOU HELP A VETERAN YOU HELP A FAMILY

A U.S. Army combat veteran, exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam, came into the San Francisco County CVSOS Outstation at the Fort Miley hospital for help. His son recently passed away from bladder cancer, his wife was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and his daughter was diagnosed with cancer. With his own health in decline, and on the verge of homelessness, he struggled financially, emotionally, and mentally. The veteran suffered from paranoia and refused to seek medical care for himself — only concerned with how he could help his wife and daughter, as well as his son's widow and child. A Veterans Claims Representative (VSR) filed a new claim for bladder cancer and requested an increase in the VA disability rating for the veteran's heart condition and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. While it took multiple interactions, the VSR eventually convinced the veteran to attend his Compensation & Pension exams, which are needed to assess eligibility for the conditions being claimed.

As a result of the VSR's persistence, the veteran underwent the exams and was subsequently granted a retroactive award of \$56,000 from the VA. The veteran is now rated at a 100% service-connected disability and is also receiving over \$4,000 monthly from the VA for the remainder of his life. The veteran recently notified the VSR that he was finally seeking VA medical and mental health care. The veteran noted, "even more important to me is that, thanks to your help, I am now able to give back and pass on what I get financially to my son's wife and his child."

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY — PROVIDING RELIEF TO A GRIEVING SPOUSE

The surviving spouse of a U.S. Marine Corps veteran visited the San Francisco County CVSOS office to inquire about financial aid, just under a year after the veteran passed away. She stated that she did not live with the veteran at the time of his death, and had previously been told that this disqualified her from VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. After further questioning, however, the Lead Claims Representative (LCR) discovered that the veteran and his spouse only lived separately around the time of his death because the VA placed the veteran in hospice care. The wife had planned to move back in with the veteran as soon as possible but her husband passed away from his service-connected disabilities prior to the couple reuniting. The LCR assured the surviving spouse that the separation was not her fault and that she may still be eligible for the benefit.

The LCR's assistance resulted in the VA awarding her a retroactive claim of \$26,010 and an additional \$2,000 for the deceased veteran's burial expenses. The LCR is now helping the surviving spouse enroll in CHAMPVA healthcare and get information on a VA home loan guarantee. CHAMPVA is the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, a VA program for the spouse, surviving spouse, or child of, a veteran with disabilities or a veteran who has died. This benefit is a health insurance program for those who don't qualify for the Department of Defense's healthcare program for active-duty and retired service members and their families. CHAMPVA also covers the cost of some healthcare services and supplies.

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY — HONORING VIETNAM VETERANS

The brother of a Vietnam veteran with significant cognitive challenges walked into the San Francisco County CVSOS office to get help for the veteran. A Veterans Claims Representative (VCR) interviewed the veteran, with the help of his brother, and learned that the veteran had suffered several traumatic experiences in Vietnam. After hearing these stories, the VCR recommended they initiate a claim to the VA for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Based on the veteran's interview, the VCR started building the veteran's case to send to the VA. The case included 14 disabilities the veteran was diagnosed with and a detailed account of the wartime events that caused the veteran's PTSD symptoms. The VCR also signed the veteran up for VA healthcare so that he could go to the VA hospital and complete an Agent Orange Registry Health Exam.

After several weeks of coordination between the VCR, the veteran, the veteran's brother, and the veteran's private healthcare doctors, the veteran was awarded a 100% disability compensation rating. Furthermore, recognizing the specific combination of disabilities outlined by the VCR, the VA awarded the veteran additional Special Monthly Compensation (SMC). Because of the 100% VA disability rating, with a SMC, the veteran



is now receiving \$3,750 a month for the rest of his life. Upon reviewing the veteran's claims folder, the VCR noticed that the VA denied several conditions that should have been service-connected, which if granted, would provide the veteran with another SMC, thereby further increasing the monthly amount the veteran receives. The VCR is currently reaching out to the veteran and his caregiver to initiate a Higher-Level Review.

SOLANO COUNTY — CONGRESSMAN TEAMS WITH CVSO TO HELP CONSTITUENTS WITH PACT ACT

The Solano County CVSO was invited by Congressman John Garamendi (CA-8) to brief the community on the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act). The PACT Act, authored by Congressman Mark Takano (CA-41), was signed into law in 2022. The PACT Act is perhaps the largest expansion of VA benefits ever signed into law, currently budgeted for \$797 billion. The Act will greatly improve healthcare benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during their service.



The VA is currently executing the largest veteran outreach campaign in its history to inform veterans about the PACT Act and how to access their benefits. Congressman Garamendi's PACT Act informational meeting, in conjunction with the VA's Northern California Health Care System, sought to inform the public of this complex, yet beneficial program. The Solano CVSO briefed veterans and family members about the Act and how the CVSOs can assist veterans to navigate the process. By maintaining a working relationship with national, state, and local elected officials and offering their expertise on veterans benefits, CVSOs ensure that veterans issues remain an important policy issue.

SOLANO COUNTY — CVSO JOINS CONGRESSMAN'S VETERANS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Congressman Mike Thompson (CA-4) invited the Solano County CVSO to become a member of the 4th Congressional District's Veterans Advisory Council (VAC). The VAC is comprised of individuals and organizations that represent the diverse interests of the veteran community in the district. The purpose of the VAC is to allow the Congressman to hear about the issues facing veterans and be an opportunity for VAC members to share concerns and suggestions about policies that impact the community. The Solano CVSO, realizing the collaborative benefits of such councils, readily accepted to participate and in July attended the first meeting.

TUOLUMNE COUNTY — WIDOW RECEIVES LONG OVERDUE DEATH BENEFIT FOR VIETNAM VETERAN HUSBAND WHO PASSED AWAY IN 1977

In 1977, a decorated California Air National Guard veteran with prior U.S. Air Force service in Vietnam passed away suddenly after being treated for lung cancer. He left behind his wife and three sons under the age of ten. The family struggled to continue without a husband and father. For years the widow clung to the memories of her husband, unaware of any benefits available for surviving veteran's spouses. In 2018, she became aware of a VA benefit called Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). DIC can provide a tax-free monetary benefit for the surviving spouse, child, or parent of a servicemember who died in the line of duty, or the survivor of a veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness.

The widow filed a claim for DIC with the Tuolumne County CVSO office. The VA denied the claim because the veteran's death certificate listed "unspecified carcinoma" as the cause of death, a common way of identifying these deaths in 1970s. Devastated, but still determined, the widow continued to pursue the claim with the assistance of CVSO staff. The staff tracked down the physician that signed the death certificate forty-six years ago and asked for his assistance. Initially, the physician was reluctant to provide his support, as he thought CVSO staff were asking him to write a medical opinion linking Agent Orange (AO) exposure to lung cancer. Staff members were worried that they were going

to lose the doctor's support. They explained to the doctor that they were simply requesting a statement demonstrating that he had treated the veteran for lung cancer and that the medical opinion linking AO to lung cancer had long since been established and recognized by the VA. The doctor wrote the statement, and along with many additional statements from various friends and family members, the supplemental claim was resubmitted to the VA.

In September 2023, the widow's DIC claim was granted. She received a \$96,000 lump sum payment and a \$1,823 monthly stipend, which more than doubled her monthly income. She has since replaced her roof, which had been long overdue for repairs, and she has reported sleeping easier every night knowing that her hero husband's death was finally recognized as a sacrifice to his country.

VENTURA COUNTY — CVSO HELPS VETERAN IN SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL NEED

In October 2022, a sailor preparing to separate from the U.S. Navy called the Ventura County CVSO office to inquire about his benefits. He stated that he may have an Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharge. Due to a cancellation, the office was able to get him a phone appointment with a Claims Officer that same day. The sailor was unsure of the exact date of his separation from the Navy. The CVSO informed him that if the separation was in fact an OTH, the VA would make a determination if his service was honorable for VA purposes. The CVSO sent the necessary paperwork to the sailor to prepare his claim. The sailor ended up separating in December with an OTH, and his disability claim was submitted in January 2023.

After 5 months, his claim was returned as denied because the VA determined his service was dishonorable and therefore, he was not eligible for VA benefits. However, he was entitled to healthcare benefits for issues the VA determined were service-connected. The CVSO noticed that the VA had closed the veteran's claim without any decision on his issues and contacted the VA to reopen the case. The CVSO also filed a supplemental claim to dispute the VA's dishonorable finding because the sailor had reenlisted and had honorable service for his first full enlistment. In July 2023, the VA determined that his whole time in service was honorable for VA purposes. The sailor now has an 80% service-connected disability, for which he received \$13,000 in retroactive payment, and is also receiving monthly funds that have allowed him to stay in his apartment and attend school. ■



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 nationwide 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. VTCs throughout California remain the most effective tool to successfully reintegrate justice involved veterans back into their communities. These court ordered programs instill a sense of personal accountability while offering supportive services to ensure that veterans are successful throughout the program. VTC participants are highly case managed to ensure that they are receiving the proper level of treatment for their substance use disorders, PTSD, or any other service-connected disabilities that are associated with their justice involvement. To be successful, any court related efforts to help veterans should require participants to adhere to the court ordered programing associated with that participant's charges.

How are Veterans Treatment Courts funded?

Established VTCs are typically supported through the Superior Courts, however, there are also several grant opportunities available from federal and private sources to bolster VTC operations.

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



**VETERANS SERVE WITH HONOR.
WE SHOULD HONOR THEM WITH SERVICES.**

Our deepest gratitude to those who served,
and those who serve them in return.

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CALIFORNIA VETERANS SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE ACADEMY

CALVET PROVIDES CVSO 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 Officers (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 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 2020, CalVet transitioned from in-person to virtual CVSRA in response to the COVID pandemic, a practice that continued in 2022.

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 CVSO 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 2022, 82 individuals participated in the CVSRA — more than any other year in history. The increased participation in the Academy can be directly attributed to an increase in County Subvention funding. County Subvention funding doubled in 2021-22 and County Veterans Service Offices across the state have used the additional funding to hire more representatives. Eighty-eight percent of CVSRA participants passed their accreditation exam on the first attempt, a figure consistent with prior years. ■

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 streets 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 a 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 that 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 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 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 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 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. ■

CVSO MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) operates a mentorship program that connects new and experienced CVSOs and Veterans Service Representatives (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 triennial training 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. ■

CACVSO 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 continues to provide 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 2003 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.



Kenneth McKelvie

Kenneth first joined RGR as an intern in 2016. After a few years in the hospitality industry, Kenneth returned to RGR in 2022 with valuable experience in business administration and communication. He earned his undergraduate degree from Pacific Union College, Angwin, with a double major in Business Administration and Political Studies. He also earned his Master of Arts in Professional Communication from the University of San Francisco. Kenneth is bilingual, speaking and writing in English and Filipino.

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



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).

More importantly, it requires 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.

During 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 had been previously denied VA benefits, may now be eligible.

Many veterans who had been previously denied VA benefits, may now be eligible.

As a result of the "Veteran" designation on the driver's license and ID program, 284,110 veterans visited CVSOs to get the designation on their driver's license between November 2015 and January 1, 2023. During these visits, 124,210 veterans filed claims with the federal VA and more than 49,149 veterans are now receiving annualized monthly VA payments totaling \$287,668,892. This does not include over \$168 million in retroactive payments and \$3.05 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 driver's 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. ■

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This does not include over \$168 million in retroactive payments and \$3.05 million in miscellaneous payments.

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(see Inyo-Mono County)

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

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