

California Veterans Community Report
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
SYSTEM REFORM IN FOCUS



2023
Annual Report



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Association of Veteran Service Agencies (CAVSA) is a consortium of six nonprofit veteran service providers working together to address the needs of California's veterans. Members deliver direct services throughout the state – urban and rural communities stretching from Eureka to San Diego.

This annual report contains up-to-date data on challenges that too many veterans face – homelessness, suicide, mental illness, substance abuse disorder, food insecurity, and more. However, the story of this year is not solely about troubles; it is also about progress – the modernization of the behavioral health system through passage of the Behavioral Health Services Act and the Behavioral Health Infrastructure Bond Act; it is about triumph – the life successes of veterans helped by our members and our state and local partners; **it is a story about the future – CAVSA's plan and advocacy agenda for 2024.**

Table 3

TOP 10 CONTINUUMS OF CARE (COCS) WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF UNSHELTERED HOMELESS VETERANS IN 2022

| CoC | Number of Unsheltered Homeless Veterans |
|--|---|
| Los Angeles City and County CoC | 2,721 |
| San Jose/Santa Clara City and County CoC | 520 |
| Oakland, Berkeley/ Alameda County CoC | 430 |
| Sacramento City and County CoC | 415 |
| San Francisco CoC | 404 |
| San Diego City and County CoC | 378 |
| Watsonville/Santa Cruz City and County CoC | 310 |
| Long Beach CoC | 264 |
| San Bernadino City and County CoC | 166 |
| Santa Rosa, Petaluma/Sonoma County CoC | 146 |

THE DATA

Homelessness. The number of veterans experiencing homeless in California decreased 9% from 11,401 in 2020 to 10,395 in 2022.

Suicide Deaths. More veterans, 559, died by suicide this year than last year, 439.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. 7% of veterans nationally are estimated to have PTSD. Applied to the veteran population in California, that would be 96,600 veterans.

Food Insecurity. 22.5% of Californians were food insecure in 2022. That is 310,500 veterans when applied to the veteran population.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS YEAR

- 3 CAVSA members were awarded a combined total of \$16.8 million for Veterans Support to Self-Reliance (VSSR).
- U.S.VETS placed 269 veterans in employment.
- New Directions for Veterans holds a 96% retention rate in their permanent supportive housing sites.
- Swords to Plowshares opened Maceo May Apartments, 104 homes for formerly homeless veterans and their families.
- Veteran Housing Development Corporation and Nation’s Finest enhanced neighborhoods by remodeling distressed homes in Oroville.
- California Veterans Assistance Foundation set out to build 12 tiny homes, Covey Cottages, to fill a housing gap for veterans 55 to 62 years of age.
- Veterans Village of San Diego served 2,061 veterans, 206 of which were 65 or older, by providing housing, bus passes, and vouchers for DMV ID, and HUD-VASH vouchers.

OVER \$81 MILLION from federal government brought to the state to serve veterans



LEGISLATIVE STRIDES

CAVSA actively engaged the legislative process around the two bills at the center of Governor Newsom’s push to reform the Mental Health Service Act and modernize California’s behavioral health services system – [SB 326](#) (Eggman), the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA), and [AB 531](#) (Irwin), the Behavioral Health Infrastructure Bond Act (BHIBA). BHSA updates funding



CAVSA shares veteran voice at a listening session on Senator Eggman’s and Assemblywoman’s Irwin’s bills hosted by the Governor.

categories for services, it includes money for treatment of moderate and severe substance use disorders, it designates funding for residential care and/or housing assistance, and it focuses attention on the most vulnerable age groups. Fiscal accountability for state and local spending is also enhanced. In addition to the legislation passing the Legislature and being signed by the Governor, some of these changes also require the approval of voters in March 2024.

The passage of [AB 531](#) places a \$6.38 billion general obligation bond on the March 2024 ballot for construction of behavioral health treatment and residential care settings and permanent supportive housing. CAVSA’s involvement helped secure \$1.065 billion (if the measure is passed) to invest in supportive housing for veterans who have behavioral health needs or substance use disorders and are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.

ADVOCACY ACTION

Governor Newsom and the Legislature, especially Senator Eggman and Assembly Member Irwin deserve a special thank you for their leadership and support to ensure veterans are a priority in behavioral health system reform. A special thanks as well to CalVet and the MHSOAC for keeping CAVSA engaged in the process.

CAVSA and our Strategies 360 lobbying team consistently engaged on issues and legislation that directly, and indirectly, impact California veterans and CAVSA member agencies. This year the 2023-24 state budget included \$50 million for the Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program (VHHP).

Three of our priority bills were signed into law by Governor Newsom.

- [AB 1386 \(Gabriel\)](#) broadens placement eligibility for veterans in supported housing.
- [AB 1474 \(Reyes\)](#) brings veterans into the [California Statewide Housing Plan](#).
- [AB 1462 \(Patterson\)](#) requires the state to track veteran drug overdose deaths.

2024 LOCAL PRIORITIES

- Increase local engagement efforts to raise awareness and funding for veterans to help communities supplement what is done through BHSA.
- Educate providers and other valued constituencies about veteran cultural competency.
- Expand CAVSA’s local and statewide networks to join with the former MHSA Coalition, state and local veteran organizations, and local public officials to insure veteran engagement in local MHSA (BHSA) policy and funding decisions.
- Enhance and leverage CAVSA’s stakeholder network for action in state and local advocacy.

IMMEDIATE TOP PRIORITY:

Help pass Proposition 1, the Behavioral Health Infrastructure Bond measure, in March 2024.