



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT PREVIEW

[californiaveterans.org](http://californiaveterans.org)



California Association of Veteran Service Agencies

# Serving Veterans

2024

California is home to the largest number of veterans (1.8 million) and the largest number of active-duty troops (161,052) of any state in the nation. On this Veterans Day, November 11, 2024, we salute them all!

CAVSA members serve California veterans every day – those in acute crisis and those who have fallen on the hardest times. Collectively, we draw upon our experience working directly with veterans to inform policy and advocate for adequate and accessible services and support. Together we work to improve services for California’s veterans while educating our communities, elected officials and state



Crowd watches as Amada Williamson, active duty Navy, performs the National Anthem at Veterans Village of San Diego Stand Down, August 2024

veterans face – homelessness, suicide, mental illness, substance abuse disorder, and more. We highlight our member’s achievements and legislative advances of the previous year, and we

Veterans Day is the day set aside to thank and honor the [more than 19 million men and women](#) who have served in the U.S. military during times of war and of peace.

agency leaders about the unique needs of military veterans and their families.

To accomplish this, we publish an annual report in which we document the most up-to-date data on challenges that too many

announce our advocacy objectives for the coming legislative session. What you read here is a preview of what is to come in our 2024 Annual Report that we will release in January 2025.



A Veteran attends the Veterans Village of San Diego Stand Down, August 2024

# Acknowledging Veteran Needs

## Veteran Homelessness

In 2023, the nation's homeless population grew by nearly 11%, bringing the total to over 653,000 individuals. In contrast, the size of California's total homeless population decreased 10%. While a promising trend, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in California has increased slightly, by 1.8% to 10,589 veterans. Roughly 70% of these veterans are living unsheltered.

## Suicide

In California, after a high of 640 veteran deaths by suicide in 2019, the number per year has remained generally stable with 526 reported in 2020, 559 in 2021-22, and now 570 in 2023.

Measure	California Veterans N= 1.4 million
Persons Experiencing Homelessness	10,589 Approximately 0.8% of California Veterans
Suicide Deaths	570 Age-adjusted rate: 41.0 per 100,000 individuals
Overdose Deaths Any Opioid	334
Fentanyl	278

## Data Bulletin

### Veteran Suicide & Firearms

The most frequent method of suicide among veteran suicide deaths in California is firearm, 65% ([Bradley & Cox, 2022](#)). UCLA's Center for Health Policy Research conducted [a study of firearm access, storage practices, and suicidal ideation](#) among California veterans. Alarming, this study revealed that almost 1 in 5 (18%) of veterans who resided in households with firearms reported needing professional help in the preceding year for mental health and substance-related services. The study also showed 14.1% reported having seriously considered dying by suicide at some point in their life (2023).

### PTSD Among Women Veterans

[Over 2 million Veterans](#) (11% of the 18 million Veterans) in the United States are women. Women Veterans experience disproportionately high rates of PTSD, 13%, compared to 6% of men Veterans ([VA Reports: Women Veterans Health Care](#)). Women veterans are more likely to experience some types of traumatic events, such as military sexual assault and intimate partner violence, that are associated with high risk for developing PTSD. According to the VA, about [1 in 3 women Veterans](#) tell their VA health care provider they experienced sexual harassment or assault while in the military.

Thanks to [AB 1462](#), authored by Patterson-R and Rubio-D and signed in 2023, annual reports on veteran drug overdose deaths in California are now required for the first time.



# Celebrating Veteran Service



Leaders gather for 35th annual Veterans Village of San Diego Stand Down, attended by San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria, August 2024

## **Veterans Village of San Diego**

Stand Down events are a vital lifeline for veterans struggling to regain stability and access to critical resources. Over \$28,000 worth of dental care, more than 3,000 meals, and 3,083 pairs of socks were received by veterans and their families. [Watch a short video here.](#)

**Nation's Finest**, based in Northern California, hosted a veterans advocacy group in October to learn more about concerns they have accessing needed services. At the session, veterans shared stories of their trials, tribulations, and successes. Together they

worked on strategies to bring these stories to state policy makers and local community leaders.

**U.S.VETS** hosts their Annual Suicide Prevention and Awareness [Virtual Summit](#). Guest speakers will provide testimonials and insights to lived experiences and clinical implications, mental health outreach and suicide prevention.

**California Veterans Assistance Foundation's** Covey Cottages is moving along as planned! The 12-unit village of new homes will provide permanent housing for veterans who are homeless or at-

risk of falling into homelessness.

## **New Directions for Veterans**

At OASIS for Women Veterans, NDVets creates a therapeutic and safe environment where military women recover and heal through education, wellness, and recovery.

## **Swords to Plowshares**

is celebrating **five decades** of service and advocacy. Each year they support nearly 3,000 homeless, low-income and at-risk veterans in the Bay Area.

# Veteran Legislative Victories

## [Proposition 1](#) Behavioral Health Bond

In March 2024, California voters passed Proposition 1, the Behavioral Health Infrastructure Bond Act, which allocates \$1.03 billion to housing projects specifically for veterans with behavioral health conditions. The state Notices of Funding Availability are starting to roll out for project [HomeKey+](#), and funding announcements are anticipated in the summer of 2025.

## [HR 104 \(Reyes\)](#) Relative to Veterans

The Legislature declared June as California Veterans Awareness Month and gave recognition to the work veteran service agencies are doing statewide.

## [AB 535 \(Schiavo\)](#) Veterans' aid and welfare: housing

Changes the definition of a secondary tenant to a homeless veteran with an income up to 60% of the area's median income, regardless of disability benefits. It also prohibits considering service-connected disability benefits when determining eligibility.

## [SB 1025 \(Eggman\)](#) Pretrial Diversion for Veterans

This bill includes certain felony offenses in the pretrial diversion program for veterans if their condition significantly contributed to the crime, requiring courts to make this determination unless there is clear evidence otherwise. The Governor's signing message can be found [here](#).

*"The promise of thousands of new, dedicated veteran housing units offers one of the state's most sweeping and welcome reforms in favor of vulnerable veterans."*

—Stephen Peck, CAVSA Board President and U.S.VETS President & CEO



CAVSA Board Members attend the CalVet Leadership Summit in San Diego. Pictured left to right are **Leo Cuadrado**, New Directions for Veterans COO, **Akilah Templeton**, Veterans Village of San Diego President & CEO, **Deborah Johnson**, California Veterans Assistance Foundation President & CEO, **Stephen Peck**, U.S.VETS President & CEO, **Michael Blecker**, Swords to Plowshares Executive Director.

# Advocating For Veteran Focused Policy



Art Alvarez (of VPOP) assists a veteran during the Orange County / Long Beach VA Stand Down at the Tierney Center.

## 2025 State and Legislative Priorities

- » Continue to educate legislators, regulators and staff on the unique needs of veterans and their families including but not limited to opioid abuse and mental health challenges such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- » Increase general funding and Behavioral Health Services Act funding for veteran mental health, substance abuse treatment, and suicide prevention.
- » Expand state and federal support service funding for veterans experiencing or exiting homelessness, especially to improve utilization of HUD-VASH vouchers.

## 2025 Local Priorities

- » Expand veteran advocacy and engagement at the local level to ensure veterans achieve their fair share of behavioral health services funding.
- » Educate providers and other constituencies about veteran cultural competency.
- » Expand CAVSA's local community impact through stakeholder advocacy outreach and training.

*As we reflect on the challenges and successes highlighted in this preview, we remain committed to improving the lives of California's veterans. While progress is being made, the ongoing struggles many veterans face demand continued attention and action. CAVSA will keep pushing for policies that prioritize veteran care and support. Stay tuned for our full report in January, and thank you for your continued support in honoring and serving those who have served us all.*