

VETERANS SERVICE DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT MISSION

Established in 1946, the County Veterans Service Office/Officer (CVSO) provides assistance and advocacy to the men and women who served in the Armed Forces of America, their dependents, survivors and the public in obtaining benefits/entitlements from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Defense (DOD), State and local programs for Veterans and their families.

MANDATE: The Board of Supervisors has the authority to appoint, prescribe the qualifications, and set the compensation for the CVSO. Staff and facility support for the CVSO is stipulated under the provisions of section 970 and 972, Military and Veterans Code (MVC) of California.

GOAL: In addition to the mission statement above, a major component of our department is to provide cost-avoidance to the County Departments of Health Services and Human Services via VA health care eligibility and Welfare Referral Program respectfully.

MAJOR PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

1. SERVICES

Assists Veterans, spouses and their dependents with access to the Department of Affairs (VA) benefits/entitlements by providing the following:

- A. Comprehensive benefit counseling, claim preparation, case management and assistance with appeals when appropriate.
- B. County Welfare Referral (CW-5) Program, which assists those clients applying for public assistance (Cal works, Medi-Cal, Cal Fresh and General Assistance – GA) to be referred to our services in the hope of acquiring Veteran benefits thereby cost-avoiding public assistance and local county health care costs.
- C. Assistance with the following primary entitlements:
 - a. Disability Compensation (service-connected)
 - b. Disability Pension (non-service-connected)
 - c. Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouse and children
 - d. Death Pension for surviving spouse and children
 - e. Housebound/Aid and Attendance benefits
 - f. DMV – Veteran Status Verification
 - g. VA, CHAMPVA, Veterans Choice Act, Fee Basis, and TRICARE medical care access
 - h. Education and dependent education
 1. California College Tuition Fee Waiver for dependents
 2. Post 9/11 GI bill eligibility & transferability
 3. Chapter 35 education benefits
 4. Post 9/11 Yellow Ribbon Program & Gunny Fry Scholarship
 - i. Vocational Rehabilitation
 - j. Clothing and dependent allowances
 - k. Special Adaptive Housing and Auto Grants
 - l. VA Home Loans and CAL-VET Home Loans
 - m. VA Life Insurance
 - n. State Veterans Homes – Eight Veterans homes locations including Yountville, Fresno,

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- and Redding.
- o. Burial benefits
- p. Many other ancillary benefits and programs

DEPARTMENT DATA

1. Budget (0579) – FTE 10
 - i. FY 2016-2017 Gross Expenditures \$1,127,135
 - ii. FY 2017-2018 projected Gross Expenditures \$1,402,043
2. Staff Training: The California Association of County Veterans Services, Inc. (CACVSO) sponsors three (3) mandatory professional accreditation conferences per year. CalVet has instituted changes in how Subvention Funds are allocated to each county. These changes have made it necessary for our department to send the CVSO and one additional staff member to each training conference. By adhering to these changes our department will continue to receive the maximum (\$12,000) funds allocated for training. In addition, the Department Head conducts ongoing training for staff, especially professional staff, regarding frequent changes of the laws, regulations, policies and procedures of programs at the federal, state and local levels.
3. Automation: Utilization of the Electronic File capability of VetPro has allowed our office to maintain a safe & secure virtual file system, which can be accessible from our four service locations.

DEPARTMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- A. For the first time in several years, all employee positions are filled and trained, which has improved our ability to better service our Veterans. Our staff has performed another year of high volume workload and client assistance. Our staff conducted 7,818 office interviews (includes San Pablo, Brentwood & Danville outstations), 67 field interviews and answered 21,000 phone inquiries. (See Workload Indicators)
- B. During the past year, our case management assistance enabled hundreds of new Veterans to take advantage of VA medical care and receive monetary benefits. Clients obtained \$7,354,993 in retroactive, \$443,018 in lump sum payments, and \$781,456 in new and recurrent monthly benefits. (See Workload Indicators)
- C. The Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Veteran Affairs established a program whereby Veterans can have the word “Veteran” appear on their Driver License or California ID card. Since the inception of the DMV & VA program on November 12, 2015 our office implemented procedures for processing certifications with great success. 882 DMV certifications were provided in the FY 2016/2017. Of the 882 certification, 180 Veterans applied for benefits. 83 of the claims filed resulted in new recurrent monthly payments to Veterans in Contra Costa County. Claims resulted in \$216,618 in retroactive benefits, \$34,043 in recurrent monthly benefits and \$3,363 in lump sum payments. Year to Date figures for 2017/2018 indicates that we will meet or surpass prior year figures.

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- D. Under the California College Tuition Fee Waiver program, our department granted 471 dependents of service connected disabled Veterans, state-mandated tuition and registration fee waivers at the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU) and Community College campuses throughout California. The value of the Fee Waiver program represents a savings to our Veterans of \$2,442,828 per school year. (See Workload Indicators)
- E. During federal fiscal year 2016/2017, Contra Costa County Veterans, their dependents/survivors and other beneficiaries received approximately \$165.1 million in monetary assistance from compensation, pension readjustments, vocational rehabilitation, insurance and indemnities. Since 1946, our department has been the primary source for the Veteran community to access and maintain these annual recurring monetary benefits. In addition, this revenue stimulates the local economy and approximately 16% (\$26.4 million) flow back into the county general fund in the form of tax revenue. This revenue not only covers our entire annual department budget, but it helps fund other vital county departments and programs as well.
- F. Our department welfare referral program resulted in \$167,253 of annual cost avoidance savings to the public assistance programs of Cal Works, Medi-Cal and General Assistance. We continue our outreach effort by mailing brochures and introductory letters to each Veteran referred to our office for cost-avoidance. (See Workload Indicators)
- G. In collaboration with the Contra Costa County District Attorney's office, we were able to establish *Veterans Treatment Court & Mentor* program. The goal of these programs, are to enable Veterans to receive proper treatment to include behavioral health vs incarceration. The mentor program helps Veterans re-integrate into society through non-clinical *Peer to Peer* interaction.
- H. In 2016/2017 we continued to receive a \$22,500 grant from CalVet. This grant has allowed our department in collaboration with CCTV to produce a monthly live one-hour program titled "Veterans' Voices". This program is a critical outreach tool whereby we connect with as many Veterans that are not comfortable in leaving their homes and engaging in personal interaction with others. "Veteran's Voices" will continue through 2018 thanks to the receipt of a \$30,000 grant from CalVet.
- I. The Department Head performed over 1,250 hours of evening, weekend and holiday community interface to include outreach, presentations, seminars and speeches to Veteran organizations, civic organization, Guard and Reserve Units, VetCon, general public and the press/media. Our Department Head served on the Board of the Stand Down on the Delta, East Bay Stand down, All Wars Memorial Board, Vietnam Helicopter Museum, and the National Armed Forces Business Network.
- J. Outreach to our elderly Veteran community (WWII and Korean) has continued to provide an increase in claims for Aid and Attendance enabling these Veterans to receive and maintain monetary benefits that allow for continued care.
- K. Outreach to newly discharged Veterans by sending introductory/invitations letters to Veterans newly released from the service.

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- L. Maintaining outstations in Brentwood (2 days a week), Danville and San Pablo (2 days a week) offices continues to improve our accessibility to service Veterans in outlying areas.
- M. In addition to our outstations, we provide weekly visits to inpatient Veterans at the Center for Recovery and Extended Care (CREC). This weekly visit enables our Veterans Service Representative to meet with Veterans and submit claims.

DEPARTMENT CHALLENGES

- A. Absorb budget improvements due to federal, state and local revenue increases. Continue to manage expenses in the most prudent manner, ensuring that budget decisions are sustainable and within the parameters of the slowly improving economy.
- B. Currently the Oakland VA Regional (VARO) Office appeals backlog is in excess of 5,000 claims. This backlog creates a major challenge for our clients as well as our staff. However, implementation of e-files has approved our ability to monitor pending claims and respond promptly to status inquires made by our Veterans. Dependency claims are processed at a much slower rate.
- C. Implementation of the DD 360 platform allows our department to electronically submit claims directly to the VA. As with any new procedure, there comes the ongoing challenge to maintain a high level of staff training sessions.
- D. Our department continues to work closely with DoIT to ensure that the Microsoft Surface Pro's purchased for each of our employees and outstations work together with our system (VetPro) and the VA systems.
- E. Unfortunately, over the past 17 years the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has had an impact on our Veterans such as exacerbating combat related conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). In addition, most importantly, this department continues to provide services to this new generation of Veterans who have defended our freedom and liberty at home and around the world.
- F. Establish a cross training program to ensure that the knowledge gained by our senior staff members is passed down in the most efficient manner. Keeping in mind that the timeframe for perfection is three (3) to five (5) years.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Many tasks that we perform in Veteran Services for the public cannot be benchmarked, measured or quantified. Our work involves sensitive and complex issues that are often very personal in nature. The Global War on Terrorism has brought out combat related issues for not only our young Veterans but also our WWII, Korean, Viet Nam and Desert Storm Veterans. We are in depth fact finders and problem solvers. We deal with all aspects of physical and emotional disablement and profound bereavement. Our clients are county employees. Some clients are hostile and belligerent but we endeavor to be alert, sensitive and compassionate to the needs

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and concerns of our clients. The following tasks are examples of items difficult to measure or quantify:

- A. Answering a high volume of client questions during office interviews, phone calls, via correspondence and e-mail.
- B. Conduct detailed and probing interviews with clients.
- C. Provide field visits for Veterans that are unable to travel to our office due to mobility problems.
- D. Answer questions from federal, state and local agencies.
- E. Obtain supporting documentation for claims and appeals to include but not limited to the following:
 - 1. Military separation/discharge documents
 - 2. Military personnel records
 - 3. Death/marriage/divorce/birth documents
 - 4. Physician statements of diagnosis and treatment history
 - 5. Service medical records (SMR's)
 - 6. Private medical records (PMR's) & Hospital discharge summaries
 - 7. Operations/pathology/autopsy/MRI/radiology reports
 - 8. Miscellaneous information from National Archives
 - 9. Affidavits in support of claims and appeals
 - 10. Funeral/cemetery bills and paid receipts
 - 11. Income and asset verification
 - 12. Medical expenses
- F. Receive and review VA claims correspondence to ensure accuracy and follow-up with Veterans to provide them with assistance in understanding their benefits.
- G. Ensure that Veterans are informed of any and all benefits that they might be entitled to.
- H. Time to evaluate SMR's, PMR's and other medical reports.
- I. Prepare claims and transmit to various VA Regional offices.
- J. Numerous clerical/reception functions conducted by all staff.

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