

NO HERO LEFT BEHIND



**THEY
SERVED.**

**THEY
EARNED.**



San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs **works with organizations throughout the region to help vets and their families avoid or recover from homelessness.**

SPECIAL INSERT

“YOU DESERVE THIS”

BY
RAUL
CLEMENT

Veterans Affairs encourages veterans to seek out benefits

For decades, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has offered a robust network of benefits to military veterans. These range from disability compensation for veterans wounded in service, free education for veterans and their immediate family, housing vouchers and home loans, health care through the Veterans Health Administration, and even death and burial benefits. All stages of a veteran's post-service life are accounted for.

The difficulty has been making veterans aware of these benefits. “Understanding the vast resources out there is a challenge,” says Andrea Lipinski, Director of the San Diego Regional Office of Veterans Affairs.

To overcome this challenge, San Diego VA has focused on outreach. One thing that has helped is their deepening relationship with the Department of Defense and its VA offices at all the local military installations. This allows them to hold regular transition assistance and disability briefs, ensuring that transition assistance is an ongoing process and not just something that happens when someone leaves the military.

“The day you sign on the dotted line to enlist or be commissioned is the first day of your discharge planning,” Lipinski says.

San Diego VA also holds events out in the community such as claims clinics. At these clinics, veterans can meet with a Veterans Service Officer, who will determine the viability of their claim and help them submit the necessary paperwork.

The results of all this outreach have been a greater understanding of VA benefits among younger service members and veterans.

“We see different awareness levels in our OEF and OIF veterans,” Lipinski says, referring to veterans of the Afghanistan and Second Iraq War, respectively. “They’re much

“Understanding the vast resources out there is a challenge.”

Andrea Lipinski, Director
San Diego Regional Office of Veterans Affairs



more aware of the VA and VA compensation than World War II and Vietnam Veterans are.” WWII and Vietnam veterans are also more

likely to be reluctant to accept benefits. Often, they believe that if they’ve gotten by for so many years without benefits, it would be wrong to accept them now. San Diego VA’s outreach is intended not just to inform veterans of VA benefits but to destigmatize their use.

“We tell them, ‘You signed on the dotted line,’” Lipinski says. “These are the benefits given to you from Congress, and you don’t need to be too proud. It will help you. It will help your family. You deserve this.”



BY THE NUMBERS: US MILITARY IN SAN DIEGO

Roughly
115,000
active duty military in San Diego

An additional 3,000 reserves and 30,000 civilian employees of the military

Nearly 8% of the total active duty population resides in San Diego, including 17% of Navy personnel and 30% of Marine personnel

1/6th
of entire U.S. naval force is based in San Diego

The military generates 22% of San Diego’s jobs, accounting for around 356,000 total jobs

230,000 veterans reside in San Diego County

Veterans account for **9%** of the total San Diego population and 6.8% of the civilian labor force

17% of San Diego’s veterans are between the ages of 18-34, nearly double the national average of 9%

10.8% of San Diego businesses are veteran-owned

When including the families of active duty and veterans, roughly
1.2 million people in San Diego County have a direct connection to the military. This is 39% of the county’s total population.



HEALTH CARE AND BEYOND

The VA assists homeless veterans with health care,
housing, employment and more

BY MELANIE ANDERSON

When people think of the VA, health care typically comes to mind. For veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, reaching out to the VA can unlock a variety of crucial services, from primary care to housing.

"I think veterans are surprised that the VA does more than health care," says Jessica Chamberlain, chief of social work and acting director of Health Care for Homeless Veterans at the VA San Diego.

HCHV was established to help homeless veterans access health care, but the program has expanded to provide assistance with housing, employment, and substance and mental health issues. HCHV is one of the few VA programs that serves veterans without honorable discharge status.

"If (veterans have) never enrolled (in VA health care locally), the homeless program will work to get them enrolled but will also concurrently work to get them needed services," says Chamberlain. "We do that as a parallel process."

VA housing assistance includes connecting veterans to transitional housing—provided by community partners—or enrolling them in HUD-VASH, a permanent supportive housing program that provides housing and case management for qualifying veterans.

"HUD-VASH is what we call a housing first model, meaning veterans don't have to be sober or psychiatrically stable. They just have to be able to be safe in their (housing) unit," says Chamberlain. "The philosophy behind that is if they can be

"We have huge success stories of people ... who really embrace the services and really thrive."

Jessica Chamberlain
Chief of Social Work, VA San Diego



housed in a safe place, then we can start to treat the other issues, be it substance issues, be it mental health, be it unemployment—whatever it is."

The VA provides comprehensive health care, including mental health services and substance abuse treatment. The VA also has strong, longstanding partnerships with community organizations that provide residential treatment.

HCHV has a primary care team that serves homeless veterans and a recuperative care program that provides a place to recover from an illness, injury or surgery after being discharged from the hospital. "It's designed for veterans who ... need a bit more time to recuperate, but they don't need to be in the hospital," says Chamberlain.



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

"Our approach is to meet veterans where they are. If veterans are willing and ready to accept help, which is oftentimes coupled with treatment, it gives them an opportunity to turn it around and resolve their homelessness," says Jessica Chamberlain, chief of social work, VA San Diego.

"We have folks who were in our programs who now are very successful and work for the VA. In my early days as a social worker, I worked at Stand Down, the big three-day community event put on by one of our community partners that treats homeless veterans. I met a veteran there and through that event he got into the VA's alcohol and drug treatment program, got clean and stayed clean. I run into him at the hospital (where he works) about once a year and this is 22 years later."

Veterans can access employment assistance through VA employment specialists or community referrals. The VA also partners with the legal system to provide treatment courts, which offer qualifying veterans the choice to enter a structured treatment program in lieu of incarceration for misdemeanors.

"We have huge success stories of people who have been very ill, be it with mental health or substance use, and who really embrace the services and really thrive," says Chamberlain.



For more information on Health Care for Homeless Veterans, call this national hotline number 1-877-424-3838 or the VA San Diego: 619-497-8988.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASPIRE

ONE FACILITY'S ALL-HANDS APPROACH

BY
KRYSTA
SCRIPTER

The Aspire Center is doing things differently when it comes to treating vets with PTSD, depression and anxiety

“I’m not aware of another one in the nation like it,” says Dr. Carl Rimmele, Ph.D., Aspire Center director. Dr. Rimmele is a psychologist who’s worked with Veterans Affairs for more than 30 years.

He says the Aspire Center was designed with a very specific mission: “That is to address the problem of veterans returning from the most recent conflicts and their difficulty engaging in care.”

Aspire residents are usually vets from conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan suffering from PTSD and combat theater trauma. “So it could have been they were dealing with bodies, it could have been they were aboard ship,” explains Rimmele. “It could have been some other kinds of trauma that happened.”

Aspire vets also must have been deployed since the early ‘90s, or since 9/11. This means most of their patients are a lot younger than other vets. Many of them still have families, Dr. Rimmele says. Some are married, and some still have children they’re involved with.

“But what that provides is that when these veterans come in, they look around the room and they don’t see grandpa across the room,” he says. “They see their squad, they see the people that they served with, and so they’re much more at ease and much more able to engage in what’s a very difficult treatment to treat their PTSD.”

Vets who come to Aspire typically have not responded well to other types of treatment. What makes Aspire different is its three-stage treatment plan. First, vets come and live at Aspire for about five or six months. During that time, vets work with

“What are six months compared to the years you’ve been living with this?”



Dr. Carl Rimmele, Ph.D.
Aspire Center Director

trained professionals, and sometimes other vets, to manage their emotions in healthy ways. The second is skills acquisition, where Dr. Rimmele says the team either tweaks the skills vets already have or provide them with new skills to better manage anxiety and other issues.

“And then where I think we excel is we take their third phase, and we try to engage them in the activities they’ll be doing when they leave,” he says. “So if they want to work, we get them working. So they may be working full-time. They get up in the morning, get breakfast, and go off and work and come back and live.”

Aspire creates a safe environment where vets’ needs are met, both physically and emotionally. “The ideal scenario would be that when they leave, the only thing that changes is where they sleep and who cooks their food so that the transition is much smoother,” Rimmele says.

Most of the magic from this program comes from how veterans are in treatment together, rather than being isolated to one or two meetings a week. “Whereas on an outpatient basis, anyone can hold it together for an hour at a time in the group and look good,” he says. What a patient is like during those other 23 hours is critical, and a residential facility allows vets to be treated in all aspects of their anxiety or PTSD.

It is a significant commitment, Dr. Rimmele says, and he understands how some veterans may be apprehensive about an intense program. But for him, the benefits are worthwhile. “Where else can you put together some sort of a comprehensive program that is going to look truly at making this kind of difference?” he asks. “What are six months compared to the years you’ve been living with this?”

‘FUNCTIONAL ZERO’

BY
MATT
JOCKS

A San Diego organization works to ensure all veterans have a home

Veterans Village of San Diego is there to assist the large military population of the region. Sometimes, the help goes both ways.

Akilah Templeton, CEO of VVSD, faces the same worries many feel when needs seem to overwhelm resources. But she doesn't have to look far for inspiration.

"I think we learn a lot from the people we serve," Templeton says. "They are very resilient. And if they can deal with their challenges, we certainly can."

Veterans Village has been operating for 42 years, offering assistance in housing, employment, mental health and legal issues.

Getting the number of unhoused veterans to "functional zero" is the goal of VVSD, according to Templeton. The barriers standing in the way of that goal are not small.

The COVID pandemic accelerated an already growing problem, but also may have offered a way out.

"What we saw was a lot more flexibility," Templeton says. "There was a by-any-means-necessary mentality because we were working as if our lives depended on it."

The efforts were also assisted by emergency federal legislation that provided funding, although federal dollars often come with restrictions. Much of that emergency funding has gone away, leaving all social service organizations scrambling.

"I think we learn a lot from the people we serve. They are very resilient. And if they can deal with their challenges, we certainly can."



Akilah Templeton, CEO
Veterans Village of San Diego

However, the model of cooperation remains. In July, the Leave No Veteran Homeless Initiative was launched, a collaborative effort that includes local, state and federal governments, as well as the service providers.

"That's what has me hopeful," Templeton says. "What we do know is that when we target a particular group of homeless, we see a decrease. We saw it in 2022, when we had a decrease of about 30% in the veterans' homeless population."

While Templeton has her eye on the bottom line, hoping that funding will allow VVSD to be fully staffed, the mission of VVSD rolls on.

Veterans Village addresses the entire life of the veteran. Temporary and long-term housing fill an immediate need, but employment services and training set veterans up for long-term success. Mental health services are offered not just for veterans, but their families, who are impacted by the challenges faced by their spouse or parent.

VVSD also engages in outreach, attempting to locate and, often, convince reluctant veterans to avail themselves of assistance.

"It's not easy for a lot of veterans to ask for help," Templeton says. "So there is an education component to this."

Those interested in learning about or accessing programs can start at vvsd.net. They can also call 619-393-2000 or walk in to the main office at 4141 Pacific Highway.



VVSD's Stand Down event
PHOTO COURTESY OF VVSD

MOBILE SUPPORT

The OMVA is finding new ways to bring services to vets

BY ELISSA EINHORN

Nine years ago, Tim Mathues' supervisor asked him to develop outreach programs for San Diego County's veterans. When he asked what the role entailed, he was told, "We have no job description."

Fast forward to 2023. The Veteran Outreach Coordinator fielded more than 25,000 inquiries from the veteran community and the county's four active military bases (three Marine Corps and one Navy). This is indicative of the robust portfolio of programs and services Mathues has built to serve active and retired military—including vets who are homeless—as well as military spouses and families.

"When I started working for the county, I was going out into communities and I was noticing a lot of homeless," Mathues recalls. "I thought, 'We could use a mobile unit.'"

These days, the "Live Well Mobile Office Vehicle," provided by the county's Health & Human Services Agency, is the realization of Mathues' idea and one of two main ways that he brings services to veterans, particularly those without access to transportation and technology.

Created to help multiple vulnerable populations, the mobile van sets up shop in a parking lot near the county's homeless encampment. Reps help between 20-25 veterans monthly with various services.

VET-CONNECT, available in eight city and county libraries, also brings Veterans Administration services to vets in rural areas or to those without transportation. This allows them to video-conference with staff who assist them with completing benefit forms and who provide referrals for others services, such as medical care and housing assistance.

A vet himself—Mathues served in the Marine Corps from 1969-1971, including 13 months in Vietnam—said of the next stage of his life after he left the military, "I knew I didn't want to go back to war."

After spending 40+ years in the human resources field that eventually brought him to San Diego, he happened upon a VA Hospital in La Jolla that needed volunteers. He recalls sitting in the cafeteria on the first day of his volunteer service: "I looked around and it felt like I knew every single person in that room and every person in that hospital."

Years later, Mathues is still committed to his fellow veterans and is clear about why the services he provides are critical. "My position as outreach coordinator is to get the word out about the benefits and services they're not aware of but are entitled to," he says.

"When I started working for the county, I was going out into communities and I was noticing a lot of homeless. I thought, 'We could use a mobile unit.'"

Tim Mathues, Veteran Outreach Coordinator
County of San Diego Office of Military & Veteran Affairs



ABOUT LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO

Live Well San Diego is a partnership made up of health care providers, community and faith-based organizations, businesses, school districts, city and tribal governments, and military or veterans organizations.

The purpose is to improve the overall well-being of residents in the San Diego region. It does this by focusing on five key areas:

- Health (including life expectancy and quality of life/ability to live independently)
- Knowledge (adults with at least a high school diploma)
- Standard of living (being employed and spending less than one-third of income on housing)
- Community (living in a clean and safe environment, which includes reduced crime, improved air quality and access to parks and other outdoor recreation)
- Social (which tracks vulnerable populations who are experiencing poverty or food-insecurity, as well as the percentage of the population that volunteers)

To participate as an individual or as a partner organization, see www.livewellsd.org.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OMVA



A TABLE TO SIT AROUND

A San Diego task force unites community members to reduce veteran homelessness

BY RAUL CLEMENT



Tackling a complex problem like homelessness requires research, organization and planning. This is where an organization like the Regional Task Force on Homelessness can help.

"We're sort of the table everyone in this work is sitting around," says the RTFH CEO Tamera Kohler.

Operating out of San Diego, RTFH was founded over 40 years ago as a Mayor's Taskforce before eventually becoming San Diego's Continuum of Care. In practice, this involves delivering monthly data reports on homelessness, bringing a regional board together called the Collective Impact Board, and regularly updating standards of practice on everything from street-based outreach to trauma-informed care.

"If you're talking about homelessness solutions, practices and data, people look to the RTFH to be that lead organization to answer all of those questions and pull it together in an organized way," Kohler says.

One area of focus is veteran homelessness. RTFH releases monthly Veteran Housing Placement Reports tracking San Diego's progress toward "Functional Zero" in veteran homelessness. According to the RTFH website, Functional Zero is "the point when a community's homeless services system is able to prevent homelessness whenever possible and ensure that when homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief and one-time."

On the path to this goal, RTFH uses a multipronged approach.

"The data only tells you so much because there are gaps," Kohler says. "And so we also use the lens of lived experience. So you have both the quantitative and qualitative, which we believe very strongly gives us the best path forward."

This approach involves direct surveys of veterans, but

"We have all the housing authorities, local government, health care, education, law enforcement and veterans represented. We have folks with lived experience, and also service providers, on our board."

Tamera Kohler, CEO
San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness

RTFH also receives feedback through dozens of service providers and governmental organizations. The Collective Impact Board currently has 31 members filling a variety of community roles, allowing RTFH to cast a wide strategic net.

"We have all the housing authorities, local government, health care, education, law enforcement and veterans represented. We have folks with lived experience, and also service providers, on our board," she says.

Veteran homelessness is not a simple problem with a single solution. Those who enter the military are often seeking the stability it can provide—income, housing, purpose, community. Upon leaving the military, veterans may find this stability abruptly removed and struggle to adjust. When combined with mental health and medical issues, this puts veterans at greater risk of homelessness than expected, given the array of resources at their disposal.

"No one plans for homelessness," Kohler says. "If it were predictable, then the VA with all its incredible resources and supports would be able to... well, it would be very rare that a veteran experiences homelessness."

Homelessness may not be predictable. But the more we know about its underlying causes and patterns—and the more we have robust standards and practices in place to respond to it—the better we can react and reduce it going forward.

For more information on the San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness, visit <https://www.rtfhsd.org/>

A PATH HOME

This local nonprofit helps veterans find housing and stabilize their lives

BY MELANIE ANDERSON

For veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, PATH San Diego provides a lifeline in the form of housing assistance. In addition, the nonprofit helps veterans and families create sustainable household budgets and access benefits and services.

"Everything (we do) is geared toward, 'How do we increase your ability to stay in housing for the longer term?'" says Hanan Scrapper, regional director of PATH San Diego. "We're really creating a housing stability plan and...looking at budgeting on a monthly basis to help (veterans and families) get to financial stability."

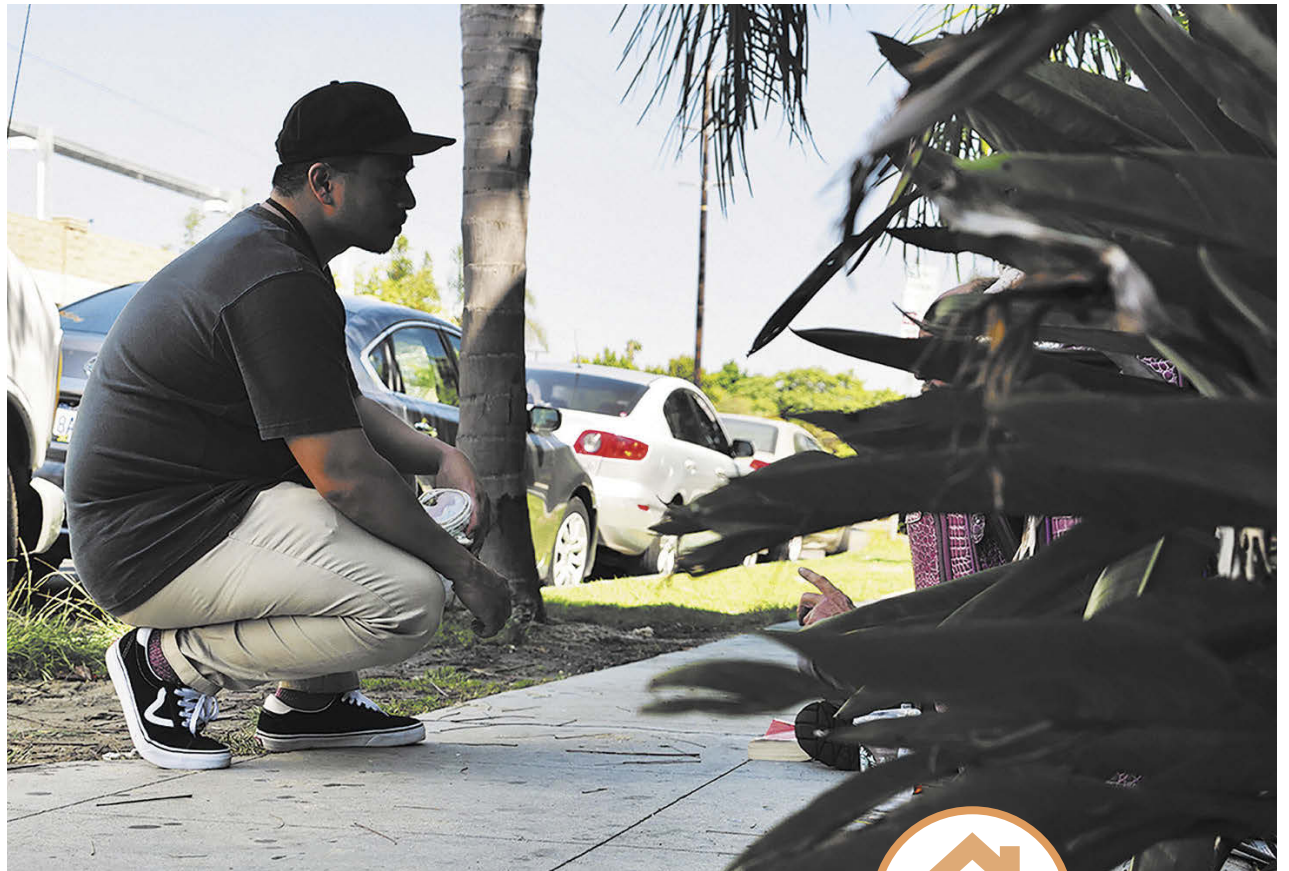
PATH helps determine eligibility for programs such as SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families), rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing through HUD-VASH, as well as disability and employment assistance.

"We have specific resources for veterans and make sure our team is really knowledgeable about what those resources are, based on the person's discharge status and whether or not they have VA health care," says Scrapper. "We make that linkage in a quick manner."

When a veteran calls PATH, the first step is often speaking with a rapid resolution specialist, who talks through possible ways to resolve housing issues outside the system. If PATH's assistance is needed, veterans are matched up with a case manager and housing specialist. For those with an urgent need for housing, PATH has an interim shelter.

"The case manager will meet with them immediately after the referral is made and gather more information on what could they qualify for," says Scrapper. "What does a housing stability plan look like? It's client-driven with the plan of what they would like to accomplish."

For some, that means receiving short-term rental assistance from PATH. "Sometimes they just need a little hand up and they're good to go," says Scrapper. "Other times, we need to look at the unit they're living in. If you're paying 70-80% of your income toward rent, if anything happens—



such as medical or car issues—there isn't money to help you problem-solve. All those things can really snowball."

PATH's housing specialists help clients find housing that fits their budgets and, whenever possible, is within their communities. To support clients in their new homes, PATH typically pays the deposit and up to nine months of rent.

"Our goal is to improve the lives (of veterans) as much as we can," says Scrapper. "We want...to remove any barriers that are preventing them from living that successful, thriving life."

"Sometimes (clients) just need a little hand up and they're good to go."



Hanan Scrapper
Regional director, PATH San Diego

For more information about PATH of San Diego, visit www.PATHSanDiego.org or call 619-810-8668.



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

"Last summer, I was at the (Veterans Village) tents on Pacific Highway. Then when COVID hit, I ended up at the convention center," says veteran Darryl Sikkila. "At the end of July, PATH brought me to a different highway."

"(First) they took me to the Old Town Inn. I loved it over there. I'm now at the Peachtree, which is closer to my job. (On the day) I moved to my new room, my case manager Sharon called me a Lyft from my hotel—and (PATH housing specialist) Christian was right down the street. It was just heaven sent."

"In 2016, I hurt my back. After the tents, I was so sick at heart. I just can't say enough (about PATH). They helped me out so much."

FROM SERVICE TO SHELTER

BY
GAIL
ALLYN
SHORT

San Diego program is empowering homeless vets to build new lives.

Though they fought in wars and helped keep peace around the world, after their service ends, some military veterans return home to find themselves in another battle: homelessness.

The reasons for homelessness among veterans can vary, says Mathew Brown, Chief Agency Operations for San Diego County's Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, Office of Homeless Solutions (HSEC). "It can be mental health or substance abuse issues or just an unfortunate turn of events in their lives," Brown says.

For some veterans in San Diego, the biggest barrier is often the cost of housing, Brown says.

"There's a scarcity of available and affordable units, he says. "The challenge is that the fair market value of a rental unit is high, and that's oftentimes more than one individual can afford."

HSEC works with various agencies and nonprofits to help people gain access to housing through outreach, evidence-based programs and case management.

"The overarching focus of the department is to achieve better coordination of existing and new county homeless and equitable community efforts, and serve as a central point of collaboration amongst all San Diegans to reduce homelessness in the region," Brown says.

HSEC, for example, teams up with multi-disciplinary teams countywide for street outreach to make initial contacts with the unhoused. HSEC has social service case managers who help veterans navigate various programs to access food, medical care and employment, as well as housing.

"The important thing when working with individuals experiencing homelessness is to really get to know them and their individual situations, identifying the barriers that are preventing them from their housing goals, and then systematically removing those barriers and helping them to stabilize and achieve those housing goals."

During fiscal year 2022-2023, HSEC connected 1,775 people experiencing homelessness to shelter and housing, he says.

One of HSEC's partners is the county's Housing and Community Development Services, which administers the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program in San Diego. VASH is run through a partnership between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. Through VASH, veterans receive vouchers to help them afford housing, as well as guidance from case managers and access to supportive services, such as financial counseling and substance abuse counseling.

HSEC also works to prevent homelessness by partnering with local agencies to help what Brown calls "specialized populations," including veterans.



Mathew Brown of HSEC
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

"Housing is a right, and we want to make sure that we create and maintain a system where it's available to everyone."

Mathew Brown, Chief Agency Operations
Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities

"A pilot program launched this year was the Senior Rental Subsidy Program. This is a true prevention program. It will help 222 eligible seniors stay in their homes by providing a \$500 rental subsidy for the next 18 months," he says.

Another program, focused on justice-involved veterans, is the Community Care Coordination for Veterans, or C3V.

"These are veterans who have additional barriers to housing programs because of involvement with the justice

system. And C3V is designed to provide case management and housing to that specific population," he says.

While some veterans can be reluctant in seeking help, Brown says HSEC is determined to continually offer housing solutions until a veteran is ready to accept assistance..

"That sometimes takes a lot of different interactions. It may in fact require time and relationship-building, but it's worth it and we'll be there, when they're ready, to help navigate them through the system and into a better place," he says. "Housing is a right, and we want to make sure that we create and maintain a system where it's available to everyone."

For more information on Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, visit <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/hsec/OHS.html>

A HAND UP, NOT A HAND OUT

A Q&A with OMVA Liaison Ray Flores

BY ANNE STOKES

After serving 21 years in the U.S. Navy, Ray Flores “retired” to civilian life. Today, he’s again serving his fellow veterans through the San Diego County Office of Military & Veterans Affairs as liaison to the San Diego Veterans Coalition, a nonprofit support network across the San Diego region, home to the nation’s second largest veteran population.

What role does the OMVA play in getting veterans any help they may need?

If you do a Google search for “veteran homelessness,” “housing” or “employment,” and then there’s 47,000 hits, where do you start? It can be extremely intimidating and overwhelming, and that’s where the OMVA comes in. We can say, “Here’s the top three we recommend.” (And) it’s more than just VA benefits ... we do counseling for a variety of other benefits that they are eligible for. Every veteran we work with, when they come into the office or schedule an appointment for one matter or concern, more than likely there’s two or three other (issues) as well—it could be spouse employment, it could be child care, it could be housing, it could be education—and that’s where the men and women who serve at the OMVA can point veterans toward great resources that are out there in the community and that these veterans and their families may not know about yet.

In addition to the San Diego Veterans Coalition, what organizations and agencies does the OMVA partner with to connect veterans with those community resources?

We partner with the San Diego Military Family Collaborative, we partner with the Veterans Association of North County, we partner with the American Legion, which is across San Diego County, we partner with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, we work with Rotary, we work with Elks, we work with Optimists. ... We network with networks so that our message—“Here’s what we are, here’s what we do, and we’re available”—is out there so veterans and their families know who to call.

Navigating the VA system is a big obstacle for many veterans. How can OMVA staff help?

That’s where the members of the OMVA staff are at their finest. They’ve been there, done that, they’ve seen it all and they’re able to help veterans and their families navigate a rather complex and intricate path, depending on their needs.

“That’s where the members of the OMVA staff are at their finest. They’ve been there, done that, they’ve seen it all and they’re able to help veterans and their families...”



Ray Flores, liaison to the San Diego Veterans Coalition
San Diego County Office of Military & Veterans Affairs

We have a number of great VSRs, veterans service representatives, who previously worked at the VA and they have their own experience managing their own benefits. ... We’re able to translate that incredible wealth of knowledge, expertise and experience directly to the veterans and families we provide support for.

What do you want veterans to know about the OMVA and how they can help?

We’re more than a voice on the phone, we’re more than somebody sitting across from somebody else at a desk. ... We have four locations staffed with men and women who have served just like they did, and who have knowledge and resources that these homeless veterans can benefit from.

It’s that old phrase: “It’s not a hand out, it’s a hand up,” ... We give them the runway, we give them the distance, and we give them the stability.

To see how the OMVA can help you,
call 1-866-726-8831 or email
sdcvso.hhva@sdcounty.ca.gov
for more information.



SUPPORTING VETERANS AND THEIR COMPANIONS

San Diego Humane Society’s Community Pet Pantry is one of the country’s largest. It works with 35 other agencies—including San Diego Food Bank, Feeding San Diego and Veterans Village of San Diego—to provide free pet food and other supplies to any owners in need. Quinn Douglas-Hiley, community pet pantry supervisor, says the program serves many veterans as clients.

“They might be on the streets, they might be struggling...but having that pet might be what’s keeping them grounded,” he says. “Being able to support that person by supporting their pet is everything for us. ... We could all be a couple life setbacks away from being in the same situation.”

Donation needs and available resources

- Wet or dry food, especially cat food (open bags are accepted in original packaging)
- Kitty litter
- Leashes
- Collars
- Beds
- Crates
- Toys
- Monetary donations are always welcome

Where to go

5480 Gaines St.,
San Diego

3500 Burnet Drive,
Escondido

572 Airport Road,
Oceanside

Campus sites are open Tuesday through Sunday,
9 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information on
resources or donations, visit www.sdhumane.org
or call 619-299-7012.

A BENEFITS GUIDE

Veteran service representatives can help navigate the VA system

BY ANNE STOKES

The VA provides benefits that help millions of veterans and their families, but navigating the federal bureaucracy can be daunting. At the San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs, experienced veterans service representatives know how the system works and what it takes to get veterans and their families the benefits they've earned.

Many veterans just don't know about the help that's available to them. VSRs can determine what you're eligible for, what documentation you need and how to get that documentation to the right place.

And it's not just veterans: Dependents can be eligible for educational **benefits, such as the Cal-Vet tuition fee waiver and Chapter 35 assistance. Surviving spouses may be eligible for Dependent and Indemnity Compensation.**

VSRs can also make referrals to other service providers and connect veterans and their families with county services, housing, job training and more.

Where to find help

County of San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs

5055 Ruffin Road
San Diego, CA 92123
Phone: 1-866-726-8831
Fax: 858-573-7381
Hours: Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
www.sandiegocounty.gov/hhsa/programs/ais/veterans_services/

Military Veterans Resource Centers offer a one-stop-shop where veterans can get help with VA benefits and connect with other community resources.

North Inland Military & Veterans Resource Center

North Inland Military &
Veterans Resource Center
649 W. Mission Ave.
Escondido, CA 92025
Phone: 1-866-726-8831
Fax: 760-740-5571
Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

South Region Military & Veterans Resource Center

401 Mile of Cars Way, Ste 300
National City, CA 91950
Phone: 1-866-726-8831
Fax: 619-731-3357
Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

North Coastal Military & Veterans Affairs Resource Center

3708 Ocean Ranch Blvd.
Oceanside, CA 92056
Phone: 1-866-726-8831
Fax: 760-754-0740
Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

At **San Diego County libraries**, veterans can connect with VSRs for help with paperwork and filing claims. Certain locations offer **VET-CONNECT** video conferencing and monthly in-person assistance.

Alpine Branch

1752 Alpine Blvd., Alpine
VET-CONNECT appointments: Thursdays, 858-694-3222

Bonita-Sunnyside Library

4375 Bonita Road, Bonita
VET-CONNECT appointments, 619-475-4642

Borrego Springs Branch

2580 Country Club Road, Borrego Springs
VSR walk-in appointments: Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
VET-CONNECT appointments, 858-694-3222

Imperial Beach Branch

810 Imperial Beach Blvd., Imperial Beach
VET-CONNECT appointments, 619-424-6981

Julian Branch

1850 Highway 78, Julian
VET-CONNECT appointments: Thursdays, 858-694-3222

Lakeside Library

12428 Woodside Ave., Lakeside
VET-CONNECT appointments, 619-443-1811

Poway Branch

13137 Poway Road, Poway
VET-CONNECT appointments: Wednesdays, 858-694-3222

Valley Center Branch

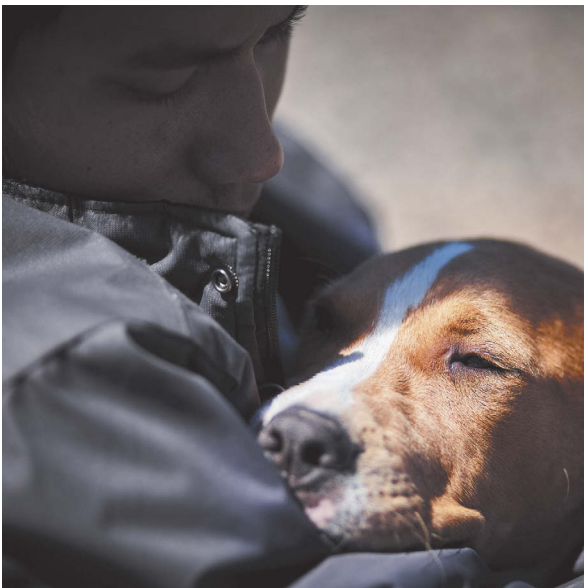
29200 Cole Grade Road, Valley Center
VET-CONNECT appointments, 760-749-1305



Forms and documentation to have:

Having the right documentation can help get your claim process started quickly. However, even if you don't have complete records, VSRs can help you obtain them. When working with a VSR, it's helpful to have:

- ☐ DD 214
- ☐ Marriage certificate
- ☐ Birth certificates
- ☐ Available medical records
- ☐ Military records
- ☐ Bank information (some programs may require direct deposit)



CLAIM YOUR BENEFITS

If you are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, or are struggling with other issues, the Office of Military & Veterans Affairs is an important resource for veterans and their families in San Diego County.

To receive benefits counseling, follow up with a claim or acquire housing—or to determine what benefits you are owed and how to acquire them—give OMVA a call at 1-866-726-8831.

RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM YOUR PEERS

Military veterans, active service members and their loved ones can receive even more support from 2-1-1 San Diego. Upon contacting the 24/7 confidential helpline, callers reach a Peer Support Specialist who is dedicated to making their very first call productive and fulfilling. Find solace in the staff of veterans that are able to empathize and assist from direct experience.

For support, call
2-1-1

For more
information, e-mail
[support@
211sandiego.org](mailto:support@211sandiego.org)



County of San Diego
Office of Military &
Veterans Affairs

5055 Ruffin Road
San Diego, CA 92123
1-866-726-8831

Additional Office Locations
MVRC Escondido
MVRC National City
MVRC Oceanside

PHOTOS BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

