

THE VETERAN PEER ACCESS NETWORK

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



hope



well-being



greater quality
of life



valued members
of the LA County
community



#YouMatter



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH
hope. recovery. wellbeing.

Dear Friends,

This year continued to be challenging for the world and our community as we dealt with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, our community rallied, demonstrating the creativity and passion for improvement that LA County is known for. 2021 is the year that we achieved what so many have worked so long for, the establishment of a purpose-built ecosystem dedicated to improving the lives of veterans and their family members across the county. 2021 is the year the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN) became operational.

At the heart of VPAN are 47 veterans who served our country, and now serve our community, embedded in all five supervisory districts, partnering with local community organizations and leaders to break down barriers to benefits, services, and health care and creating opportunities for our veterans to become their best selves.

None of this would have been possible without you all – the public and private partners who worked these past three years to see this vision through and doing it in the face of the pandemic. It is truly impressive to see what our community can accomplish together.

In this inaugural annual report, you will read about the extraordinary achievements across all supervisory districts. You will gain insights into the remarkable men and women who are the voice and the face of our peer network. And, you will see the impact VPAN had on individuals and families in its first year, which is only a glimpse of the tremendous potential this network has, and how our community will benefit. As we look forward to a bright future, it is my privilege to acknowledge the work and sacrifice of our veteran peers, of the community that supports them, and the communities they serve.



Jonathan E. Sherin

Dr. Jonathan Sherin
Director of Los Angeles County
Department of Mental Health

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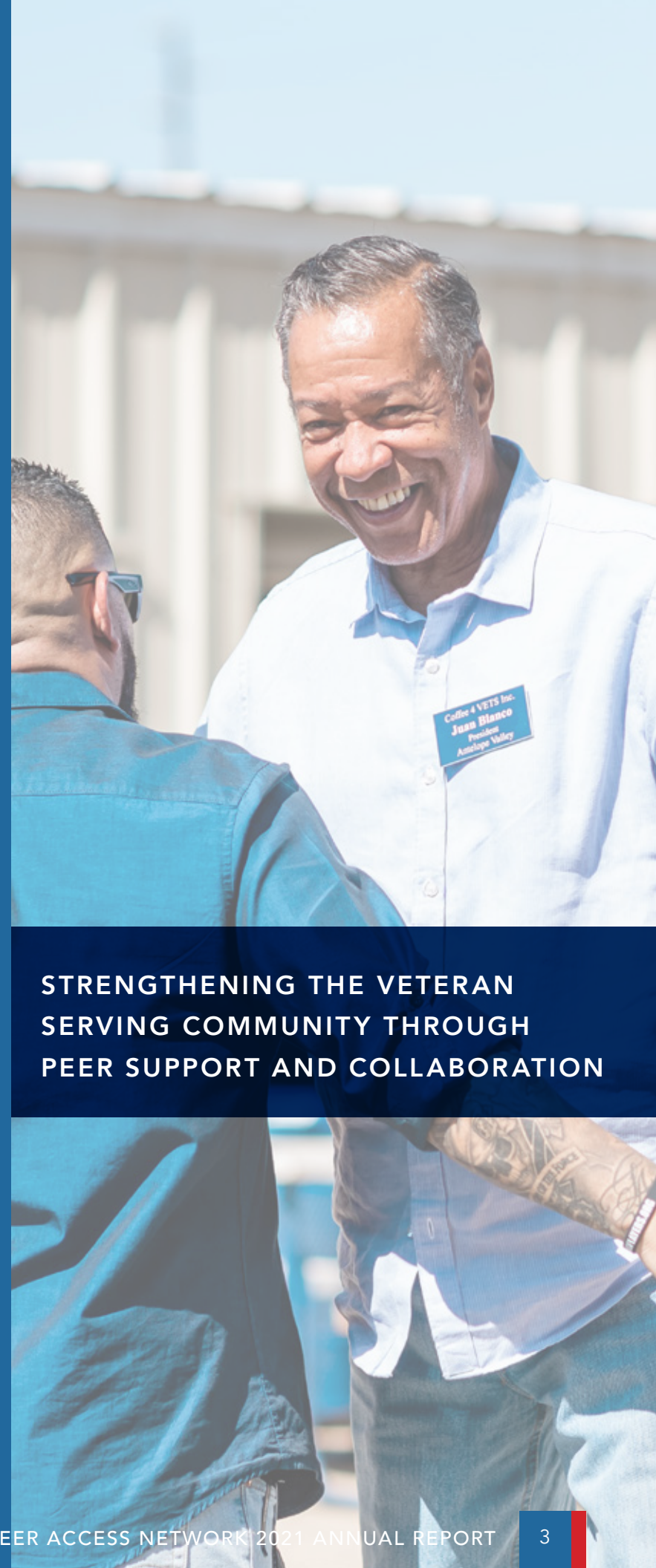
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**STRENGTHENING THE VETERAN
SERVING COMMUNITY THROUGH
PEER SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION**

VPAN is all about access

The Need

At the onset of 2021, our country had been engaged in a war for twenty years. Young men and women took an oath, donned a uniform, and deployed overseas to protect and defend the wonderful and privileged lives we lead as Americans. They did so willingly, in the greatest tradition of servant leaders and citizen soldiers.

Returning from war, many of these veterans are now in our workforce, teaching our children, partners in law firms, or leading in our communities. They are in our community, but most will quietly struggle to make sense of parts of their service. Many will struggle to find help when they need it. The ripples of a twenty-year war do not go away easily. As 2021 ended and we withdrew from Afghanistan, many veterans found themselves revisiting old wounds they thought had healed over. This is a painful reminder of the need for connection and clearly delineates the need for our community to take a proactive role in supporting those who served.

Approximately 10,000 service members per year transition out of active duty and back into Los Angeles County to make it their home.



Client and Squad Coordinator Luis Rodriguez

LA County is home to a population of more than 260,000 veterans, the largest veteran population in the country. Our veterans face a unique challenge: accessing support. Our veterans need to know how to access the benefits, services, and health care they earned through their service to our country. While across LA County – from downtown Los Angeles to the Antelope Valley there

LA County is home to a population of more than 260,000 veterans, the largest veteran population in the country.

are organizations dedicated to supporting our veterans, finding access and navigating the often challenging bureaucracy can present barriers to access. Without support, many will succumb to the physical and mental health challenges that often come post service.

It turns out that support comes from a lot of places, centered in a public-private partnership in the heart of Los Angeles. In 2019, the LA County Board of Supervisors passed a motion authorizing the Director of LA County’s Department of Mental Health to form the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN), the first publicly funded, peer support network serving veterans and their families in the U.S. Relying on the strength of peer-to-peer relationships, VPAN is a model that ensures veterans have a place to connect with other veterans to get support in any form they need.

The pain and suffering of war often follow veterans home. LA County recognized that and created this network that is all about access and support for the veterans who served our country.

Learn more about what VPAN achieved in 2021 - it is remarkable.

The Program

Community Driven Solution



Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN) is the county’s coordinated community response to those challenges; a robust network of veteran and military and veteran family peer advocates acting as access agents who exist within the county and the community. These agents work closely with community partners to connect veterans, their families and caregivers with the services available to them. The primary function of the network is to help veterans and their families navigate internal stigma/barriers as well as external barriers, primarily the resource maze that exists in the veteran service-providing community, and also to avoid homelessness, hospitalization, incarceration and achieve greater well-being. Being a workforce development project for veterans transitioning out of military service or homelessness, it further serves as a hiring pipeline for qualified veterans that honors and empowers women and men who have served our country.



VPAN was designed to leverage the value and impact of the peer-to-peer relationship among veterans. Veterans are at the heart of VPAN, serving other veterans, and their families, by helping them get connected to the support and services they need. VPAN’s main office is co-located in the LA County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA) building, Bob Hope Patriotic Hall (BHPH) making it truly a one-stop shop for veterans’ services. The table below highlights the breadth of support VPAN has access to.

VPAN Goals For 2021

↑ **Develop a clear road map and “no wrong door”**

Access: phone/chat, online platform, or peers

Assist: navigation and follow-up

↑ **Increase Awareness**

Among the Community: where to direct veterans and military families

Advertise: #YouMatter campaign

↓ **Decrease Veteran Suicide**

↓ **Decrease Veteran Homelessness**

↓ **Decrease Veteran Under/Unemployment**

We Provide Resources for the Following Programs:



Mental Health *Treatment for trauma from combat exposure, military sexual trauma, relationship and intimacy issues*



Substance Misuse Support *Treatment for substance use disorders, including misuse of alcohol, prescription medication and other drugs*



Housing *Temporary and permanent housing for veterans and their families, help locating housing*



Workforce Development and Employment *Help with developing interview skills, resume creation, job coaching, plus volunteer and job opportunities*



Healthcare *Enrollment into VA healthcare, transportation to appointments, ensuring access to prescription medications*



Education *Support with school enrollment, vocational training, tuition assistance*



Miscellaneous *Food, childcare, transportation, financial assistance and more*



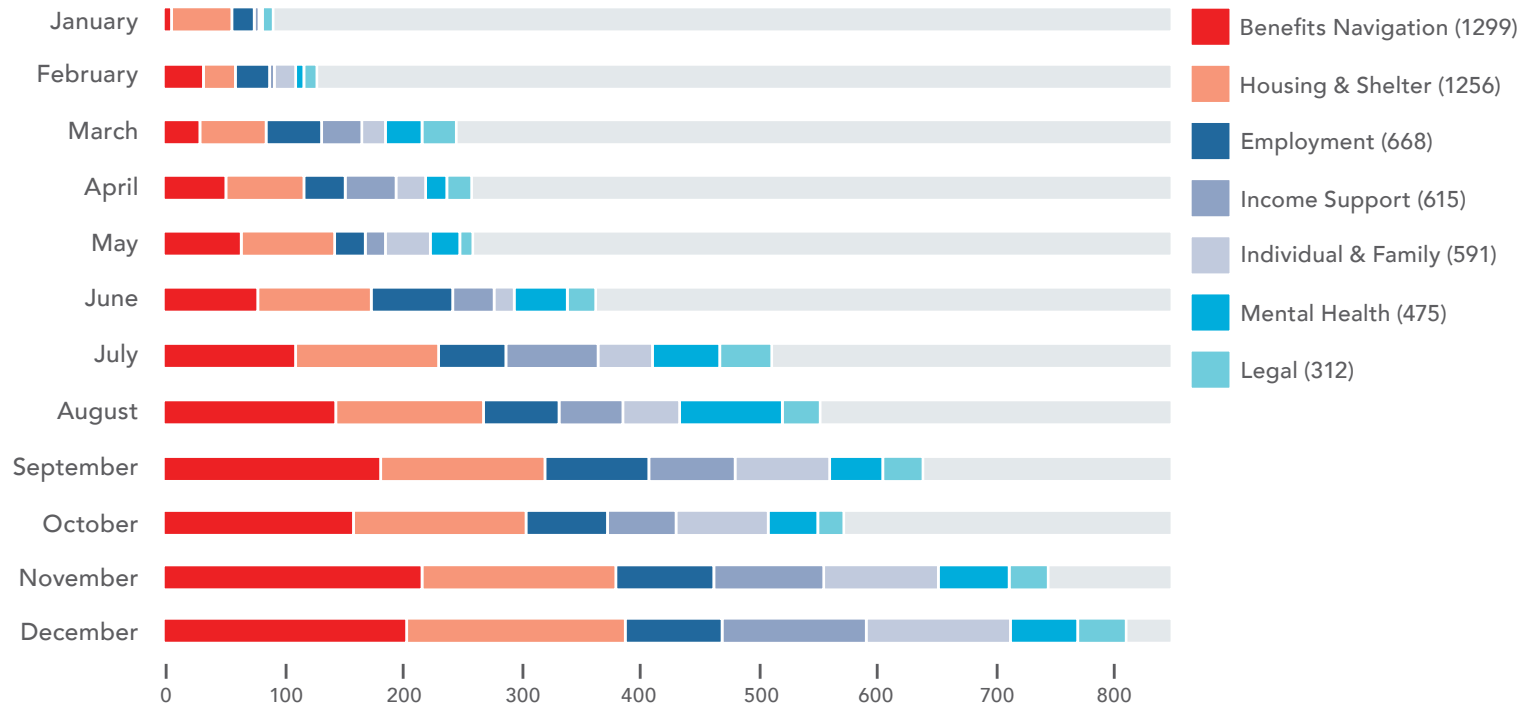
Legal Services *Help with eviction prevention, discharge upgrade, applying for VA benefits, etc.*



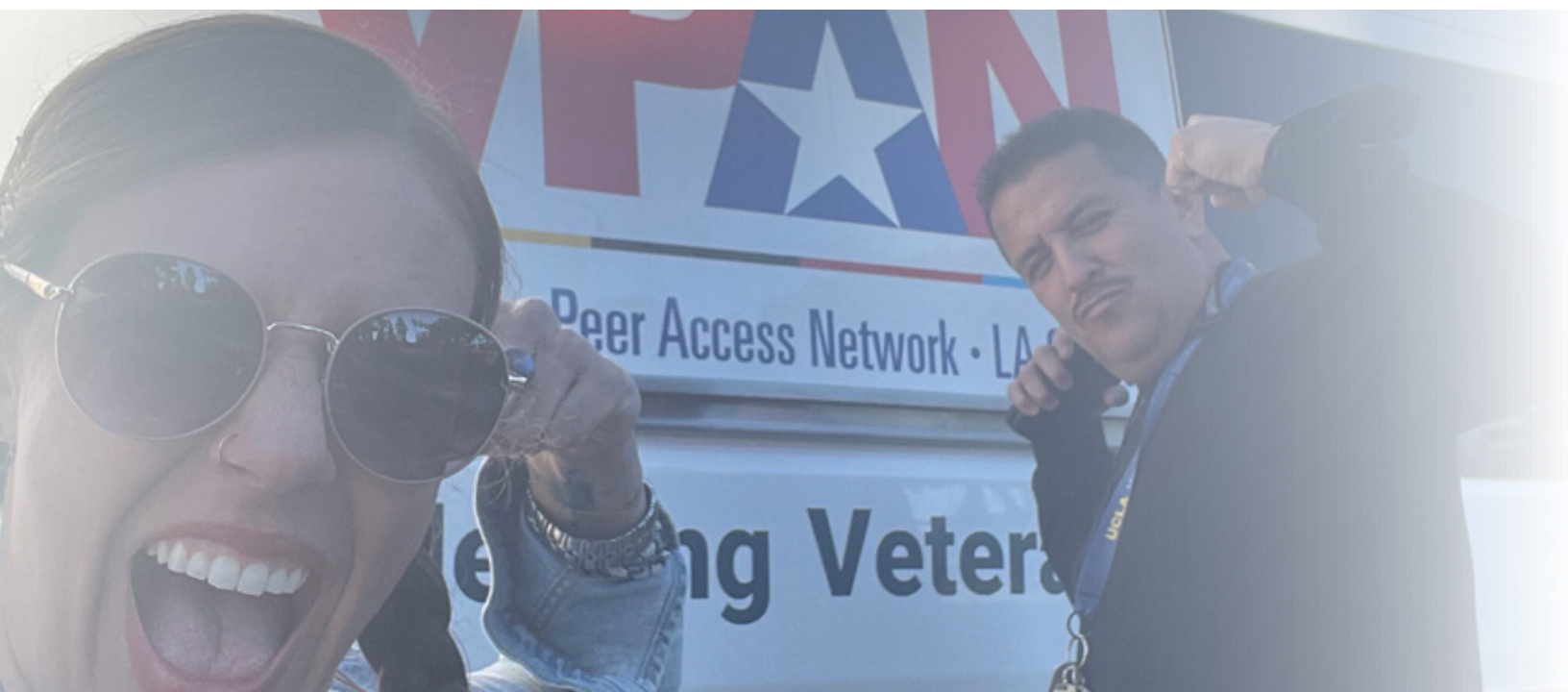
Social Connection/Recreation *Opportunities to connect with other veterans in a variety of settings*

Service Type Case Numbers By Month

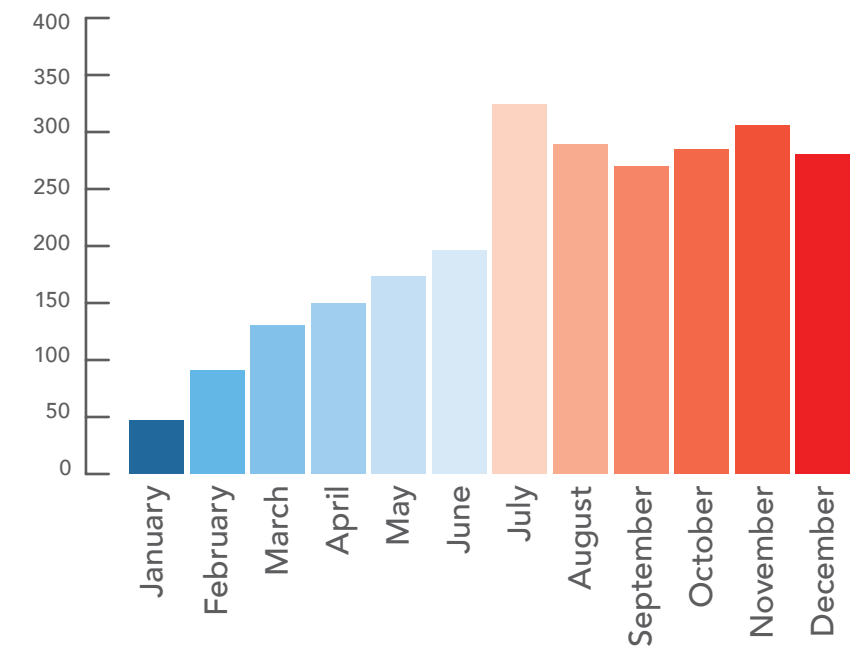
The steady increase each month of 2021 validates the need for this community-based program.



Service-related data for each Supervisorial District can be found on pages 20-29.



“Veterans taking care of fellow veterans. I am in this field because it is worthwhile to help others.”



New Clients Served By Month

VPAN IS ALL ABOUT ACCESS.

In 2021, we discovered what services veterans need access to.

Department of Mental Health **Support Line**

Calls Received Per Month

JANUARY	394
FEBRUARY	550
MARCH	593
APRIL	593
MAY	467
JUNE	687
JULY	963
AUGUST	711
SEPTEMBER	647
OCTOBER	906
NOVEMBER	1107
DECEMBER	711

INSIGHT

1. Large % of referrals received are for high-risk veterans including interactions with law enforcement and/or requiring emergency response
2. Some referrals received were for clients with minimal to no clinical history/information
3. Large number of high risk referrals coming in are assigned internally to the DMH VPAN team
4. Significant number of referrals are generated for unhoused veterans/ MilFam
5. Steady increase in the amount of referrals received for veterans 65+
6. 274 referrals were for VA Health Care Benefits
7. 324 referrals were for Housing and Shelter related needs
8. 43 referrals were for Employment related needs
9. 368 referrals were MH service requests assigned to the DMH VPAN team

Number of Calls received by DMH in 2021: 7,423

Of all Service Requests in 2021, these are the top 5 Needs.



1

HOUSING & SHELTER

- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Emergency Housing



2

BENEFITS NAVIGATION

- Benefits Eligibility Screening
- ID / Documentation Assistance



3

EMPLOYMENT

- Job Search / Placement
- Career Skills Development



4

INCOME SUPPORT

- Veterans Pension & Disability Benefits
- Emergency / One-time Financial Assistance



5

INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY

- Caregiving Services
- Child Care

INSIGHT

1. Of those who sought out housing and shelter support about one in five (20.42%) also needed benefits navigation support.
2. Of those who sought out support with benefits navigation at least one in five (21.64%) also needed individual & family support.



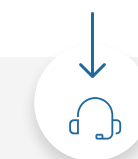
Number of
Veterans Served

2,555



Number of
Referrals

2,733



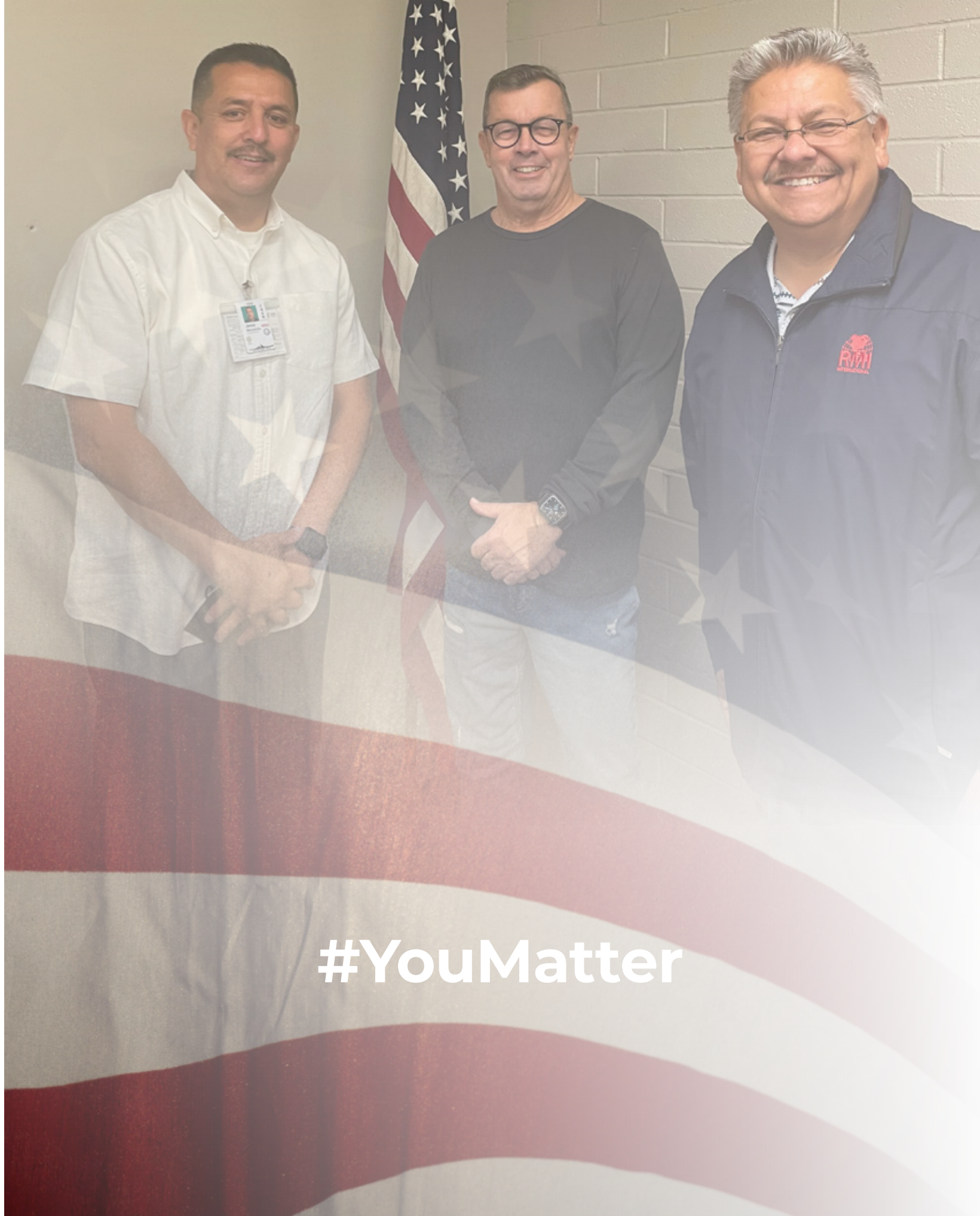
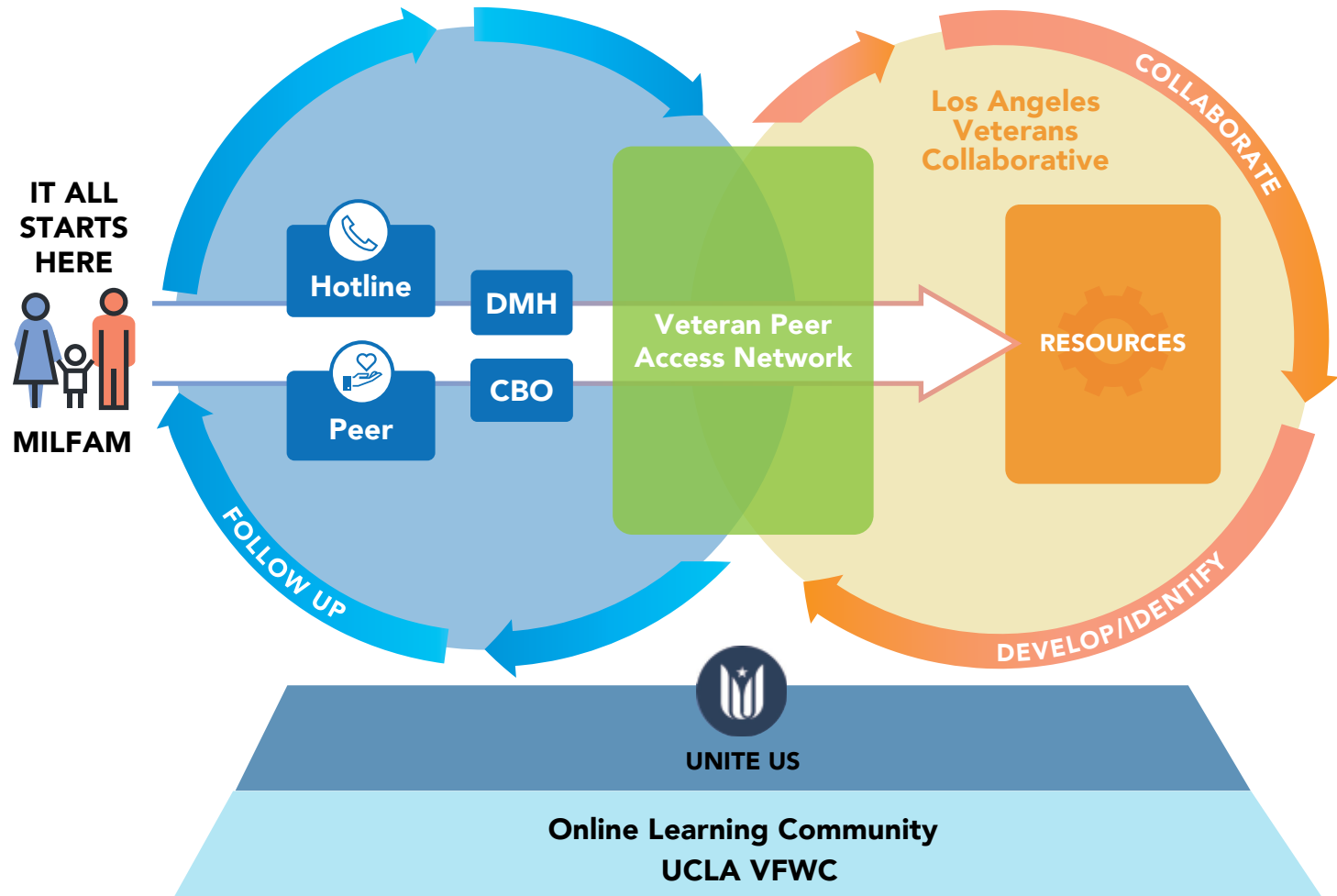
Number of
Service Requests

5,837

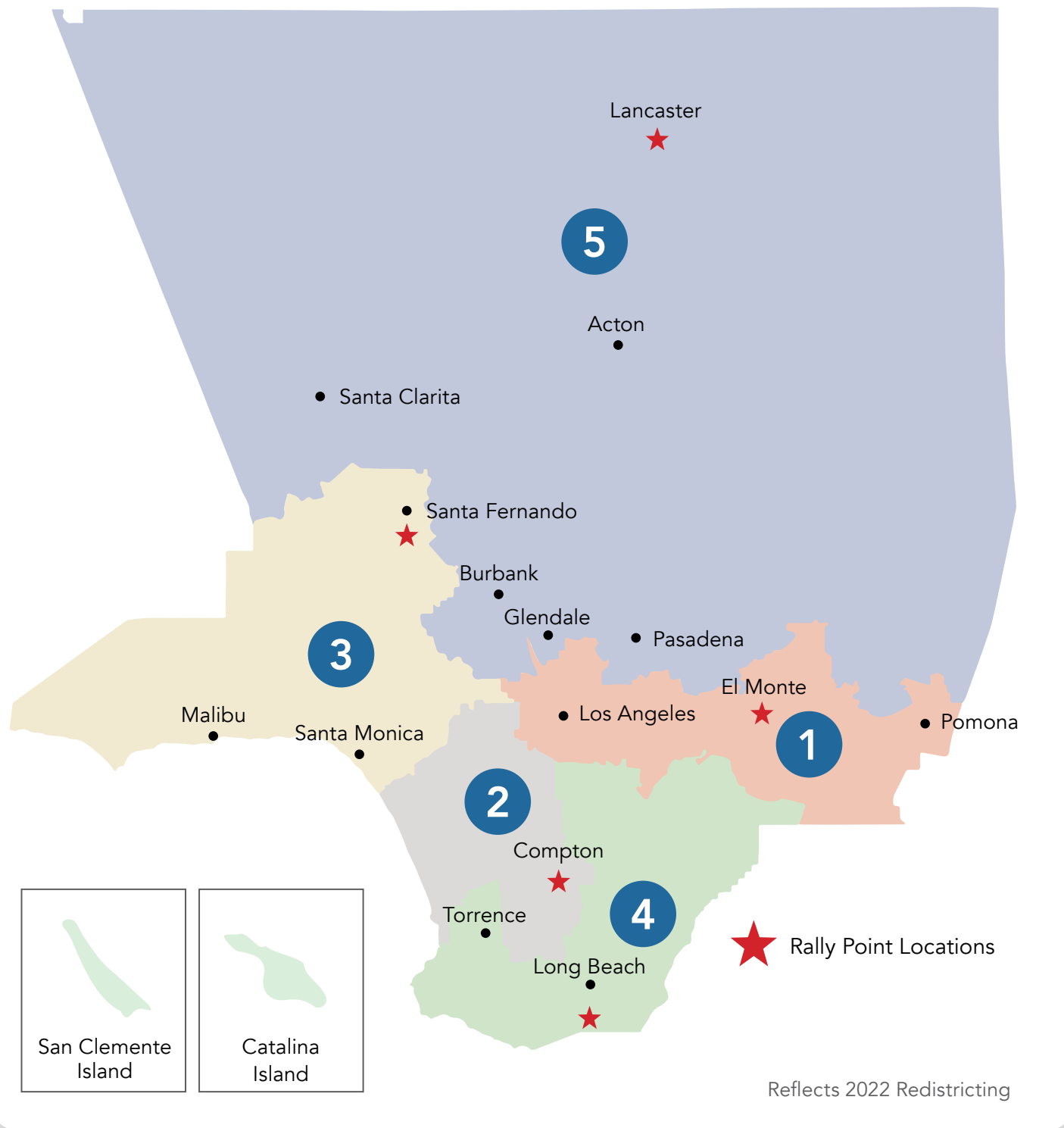
VPAN is all about access
The VPAN Model in Action

The success and impact of VPAN relies on the fact that the network is a part of the community it serves, with VPAN veteran peers working alongside, with, and among the residents of LA County.

Because it is a community-driven support network, VPAN embodies the #YouMatter ideal. The existence of this network sends a clear message to LA County veterans that #YouMatter. Our veterans deserve hope, well-being, and a greater quality of life, as valued members of our community. The inverse is also true – the members of our community, whether they are business leaders, residents, or county leadership, also play a role in the success of VPAN - #YouMatter as well.



VPAN Rally Point Map



HUB and Spoke Model

While BHPH serves as the hub for VPAN, it is the veterans who staff the Rally Points in each Supervisory District (SD) that make VPAN so impactful. These Rally Points are places where veterans and military family members (MilFam) can obtain information, socialize with others, and get support. Community access points (CAPs) also located in SDs have been identified in addition to the spokes or Rally Points. Peers are co-located at CAPs so they can engage veterans and their families where they are in each community.

VPAN in your Supervisory District - A True Team Effort

2021 validated the strength of our community-based approach. VPAN teams integrate with LA County MVA to ensure every veteran has access to benefits. MVA assigns Benefits Navigators to each Rally Point as a direct source of information and resources.

VPAN HQ	Bob Hope Patriotic Hall 1816 S. Figueroa St. Los Angeles, CA 90015 vpan@dmh.lacounty.gov
DISTRICT 1	JVS SoCal 1180 Durfee Ave., South El Monte, CA 91733 vpan@jvs-socal.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Alex Figueroa afigueroa@mva.lacounty.gov
DISTRICT 2	VOALA 700 N. Bullis Road, Compton, CA 90221 vpan@voala.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Michele Felix mfelix@mva.lacounty.gov
DISTRICT 3	Goodwill SoCal 10324 Balboa Blvd., Granada Hills, CA 91344 vpangoodwill@goodwillsoocal.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Hector Castillo hcastillo@mva.lacounty.gov
DISTRICT 4	Battleship Iowa 250 S. Harbor Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90731 vpan@veteranswest.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Ken Gonzalez Jr. kgonzalesJr@mva.lacounty.gov
DISTRICT 5	JVS SoCal 37 E. Columbia Way, Lancaster, CA 93535 vpan@jvs-socal.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Keith Niesen kniesen@mva.lacounty.gov



WE DON'T WALK THIS PATH ALONE.

Supporting our veterans is a team sport, and we actively seek partner organizations that can enhance our ability to serve veterans, their families and caregivers.

“One thing I really like about VPAN is that if you served, you are a veteran. We don't worry about how someone was separated or what their disability rating is.”

 **SoCal Grantmakers**

In November 2019, the LA County Board of Supervisors passed a motion authorizing the Director of DMH to execute an agreement with Southern California Grantmakers (SCG) to “create a public-private partnership focused on the implementation of services to veterans using a peer-to-peer model.” The motion appointed SCG as the fiscal intermediary for VPAN, the county’s visionary response to the growing problem of veteran access.

From the beginning, SCG’s Veterans Funders Group has played a role in the advisory board, grantmaking, and strategic implementation process. Leveraging the county funding, the group helped to shape the grantmaking process by serving on the selection boards along with veterans and military families from their own Service District (SD). SCG then selected five community-based organizations (CBOs) across five SDs to lead the efforts to provide services to veterans and build out the network.

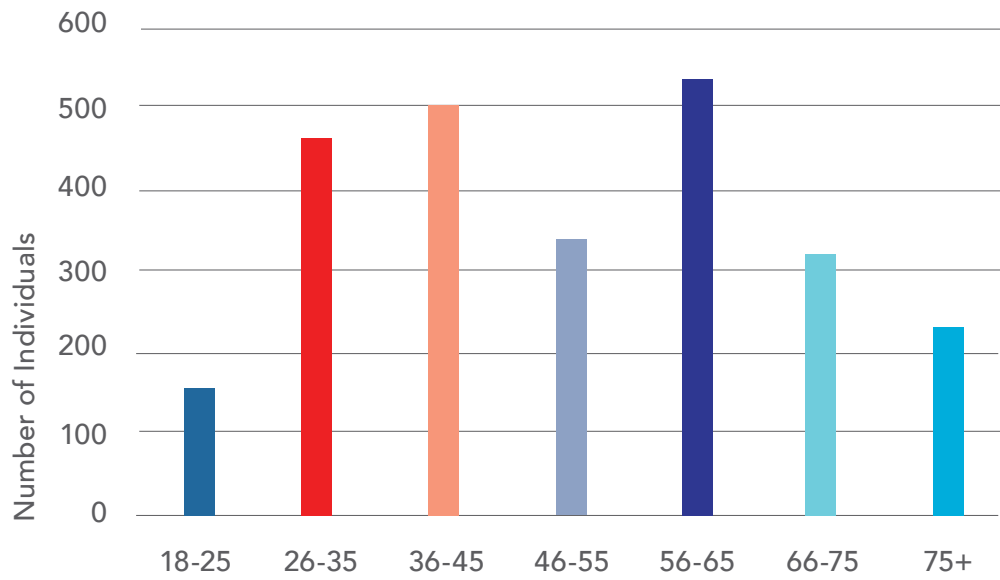
Los Angeles
Veterans Collaborative

The Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative (LAVC) is a structured network of public, private, and government agencies working together to reduce suffering and improve the lives of veterans and military families in LA County. The LAVC is a collaborative organization that seeks to provide backbone services to the Veteran Service Organizations (VSO’s) in the greater Los Angeles area. As an organization that focuses on VSO’s who provide the direct services to the veterans, LAVC is a natural partner for VPAN.



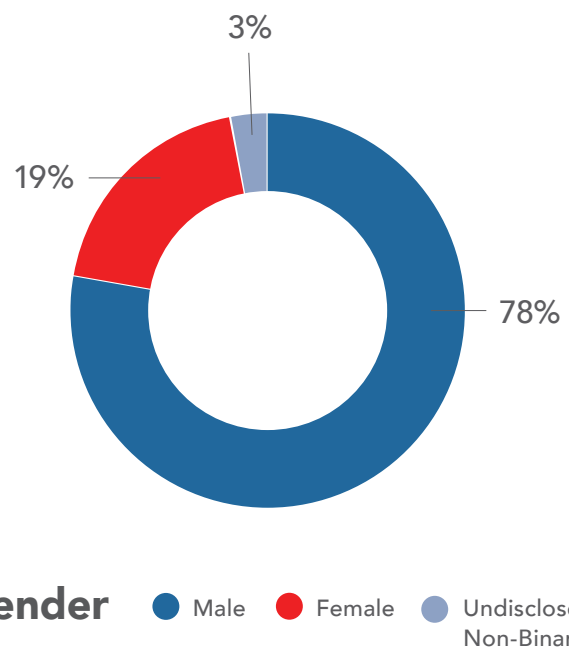
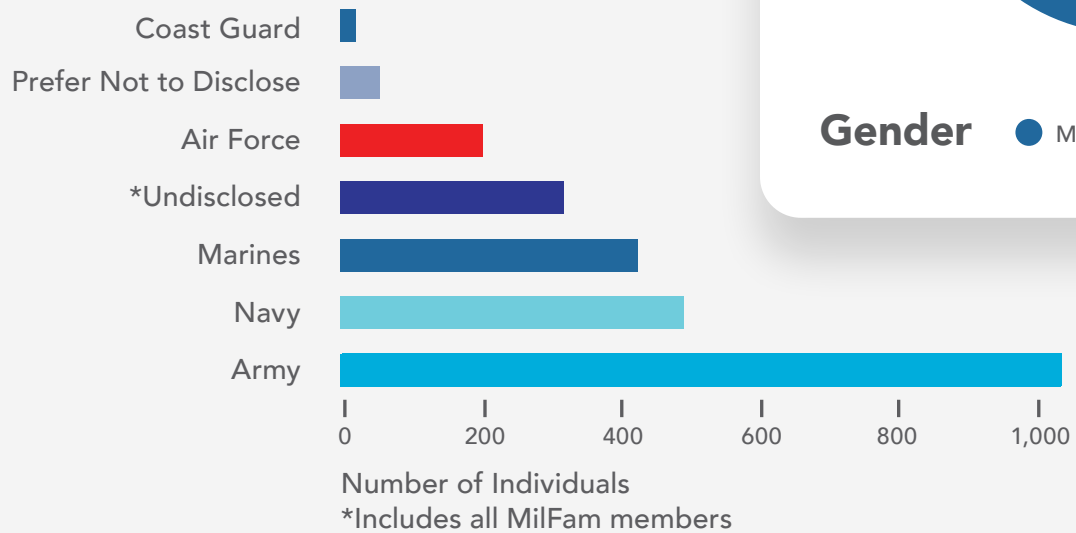
Another critical partner is the Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP) which works in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) to sponsor service members through the transition process from military to civilian life. The program provides mentorship and guidance to service members coming to Los Angeles from active duty, helping to connect with veterans and organizations that support them in transition.

Who We Served in 2021



Age Range

Branches



Gender ● Male ● Female ● Undisclosed/Non-Binary

“Being a part of a program that not only supports the veteran but the veteran family as well is very important to me. This program also helps address the family members who can be impacted by the challenges the veterans face. Often times families - spouses and children are eligible for benefits that they may not be aware of.”

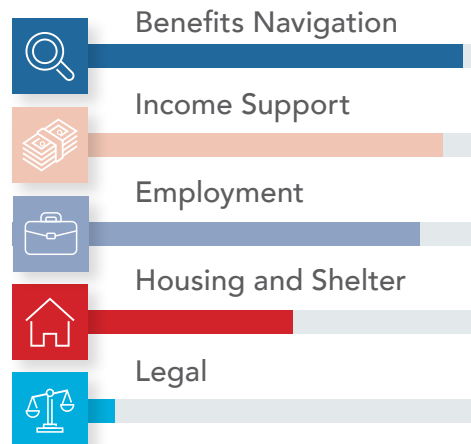
JVS SoCal Service District 1



Team Members

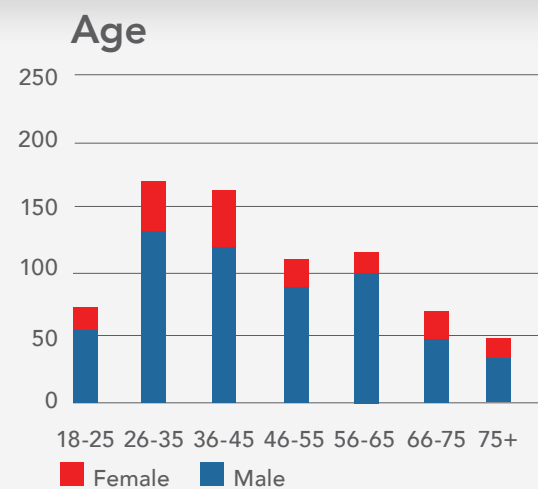
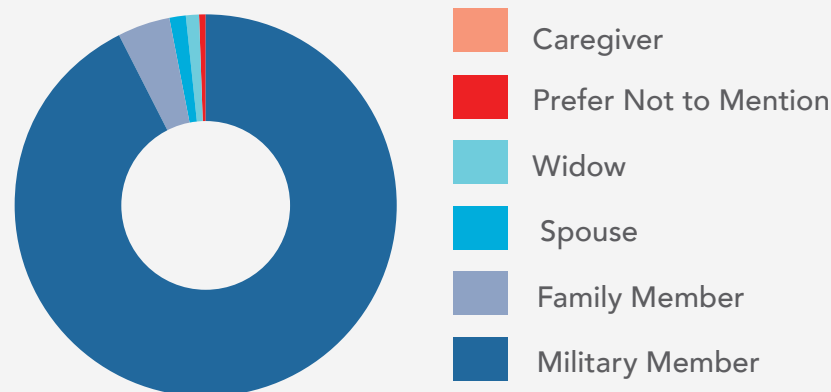
- Adam Castillo, LCSW, Program Manager
- Behkie Aguilar, Service Supervisor
- Joe Leal, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Rudolph Andrade, Peer Support
Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Jorge Marcia, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Erika McInnis, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Jose Rodriguez, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Richard Rodriguez, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy

Top 5 Needs



Total Clients 744
Cases 1,069
Service Requests 1,062
Referrals Sent 293 to 36 Organizations
Time to Case Closure 40.02 days

Breakdown of Clients



The Team in Action



Service District 1 Team



Jose Rodriguez, Peer Support Specialist, delivering food to a client



Jorge Marcia, Peer Support Specialist, with a client

- ★ SD1 Hosted 3 Wellness Days: East LA Wellness Day, Wellness Day at Pasadena City College and Lennox Library
- ★ Attended & Supported 37 community events resulting in 39 community referrals
- ★ Delivered 13 briefings on VPAN to organizations across the SD

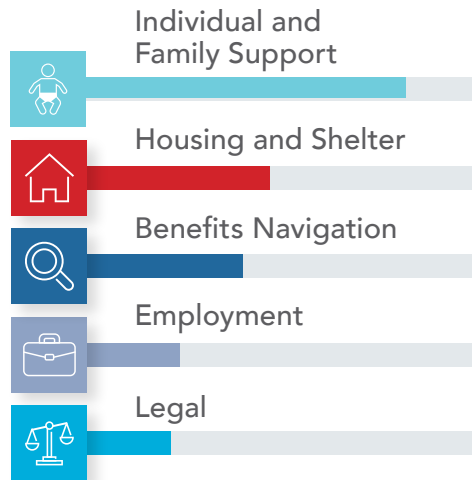
VOALA Service District 2



Team Members

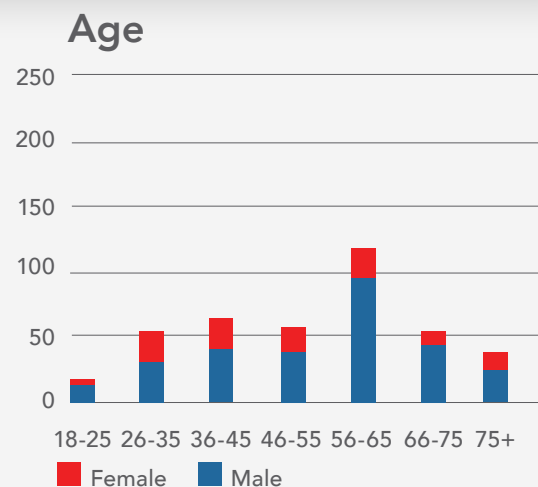
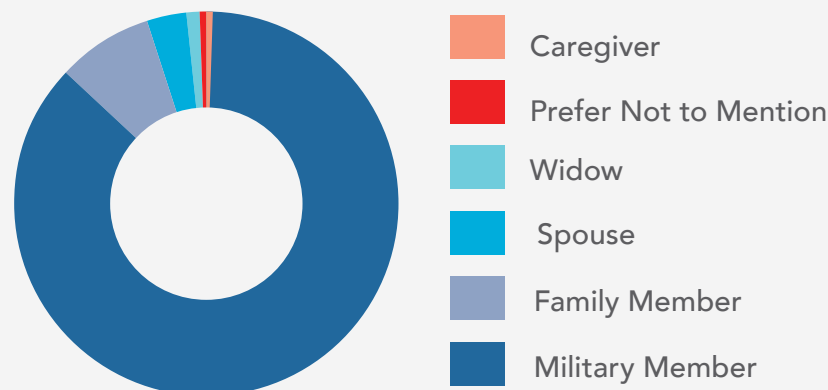
- Christina Rheingold, Program Manager
- Daniela Guzman, Service Supervisor
- Luis Rodriguez, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Randall Cunningham, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Devina Escalera, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- James "Jim" Schotter, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Nate Session, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Oscar Rosales, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Shevonda Kala, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy

Top 5 Needs



Total Clients 418
Cases 637
Service Requests 1,062
Referrals Sent 284 to 78 Organizations
Time to Case Closure 35.93 days

Breakdown of Clients



Letter from a previously homeless veteran (Connie):

Thank you so much for helping me get housing at a most desperate time of my life. Being homeless, living in my car and not in my best health. I lost hope in many ways especially after 8 years of getting a place. I called on a phone number that was my last referral. I met with Tonia Roa (former SD2 Peer Support Specialist), an incredibly warm, professional and most importantly of all, persistent veteran that I have ever met.

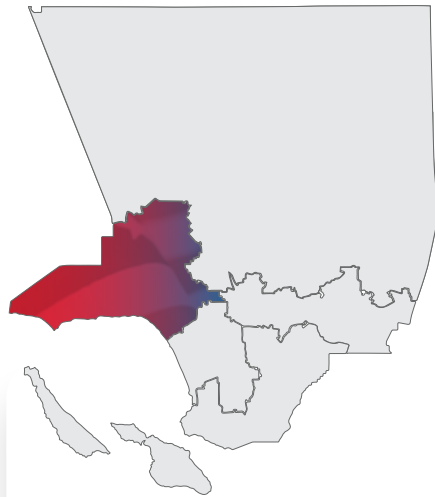
“At the end I got saved by the Marines... Thank you for the moral support and giving me my dignity back.”
 -Connie

She was fast in getting paper work ready. I never met someone who handle this task with such confidence and pulled me out of a swamp that fast. Thank you for the moral support and giving me my dignity back. I will never forget you, Volunteers of America VPAN Luis Rodriguez, whom I never met in person. You guys are the best! May God bless you all in Christ our Lord forever!



- ★ Christina Rheingold named CALVet Womens Veteran Advocate of the Year
- ★ SD2 participated and supported 13 events
- ★ Delivered 28 briefings on VPAN to organizations across the SD

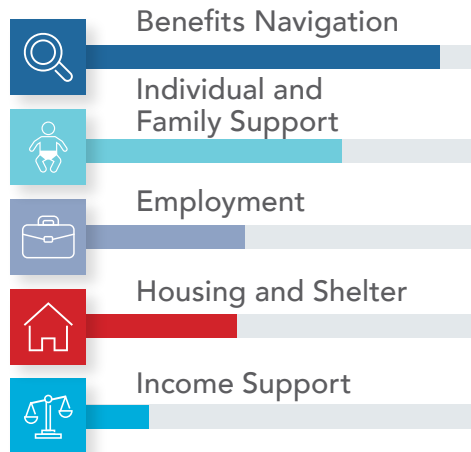
Goodwill SoCal Service District 3



Team Members

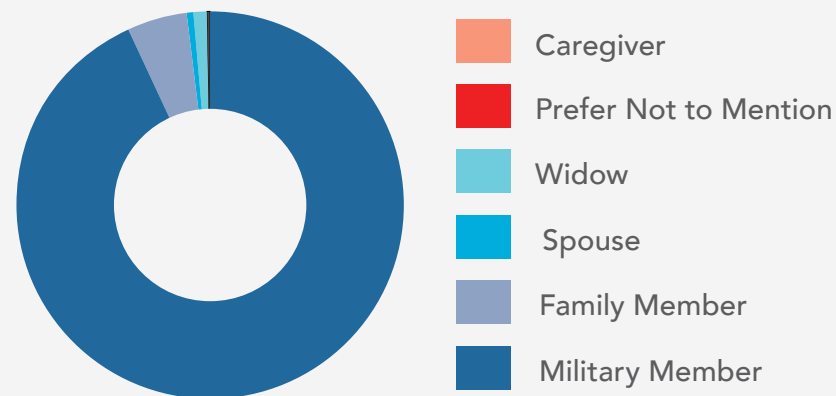
- Tarence Mann, Program Manager
- Collin Kwon, Service Coordinator
- Steven Henderson, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Mario Solares, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- John Follmer, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Steven Choi, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Rebecca Jones, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Jay Prema, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Alejandro Rocha, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Maritza Medina, Secretary

Top 5 Needs

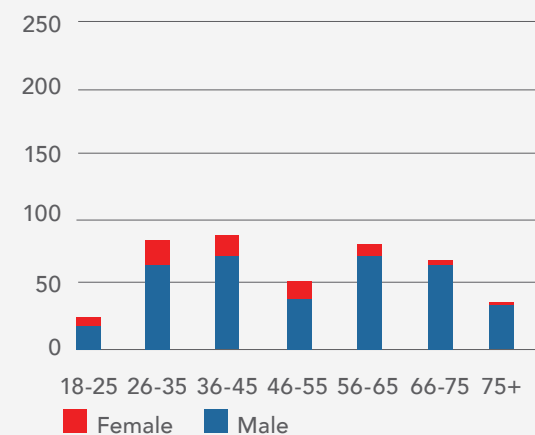


Total Clients 447
Cases 826
Service Requests 733
Referrals Sent 168 to 35 Organizations
Time to Case Closure 36.24 days

Breakdown of Clients



Age



The Team in Action



“Why do I do this? I get the opportunity to give back to my veteran community.”
 -SH

★ Delivered 10 briefings on VPAN to organizations across the SD

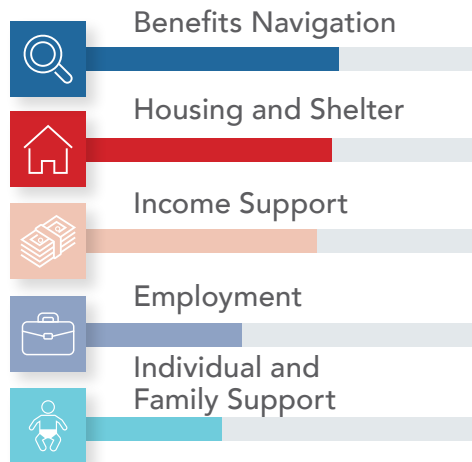
Battleship USS Iowa Service District 4



Team Members

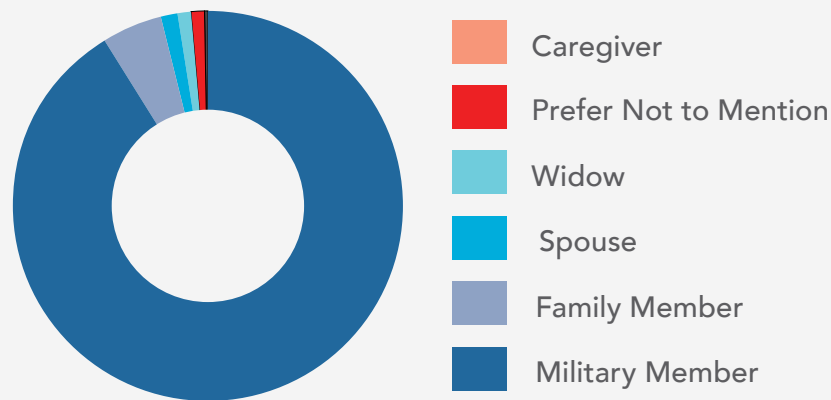
- Jesse Mendoza, *Project Manager*
- Chris Ehling, *Team Leader*
- Remi Lafayette, *Services Coordinator*
- Rich Douglas, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Matt Uribe, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Audrey Champ, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Sabrina Hererra, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Jennifer Saravia, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*

Top 5 Needs

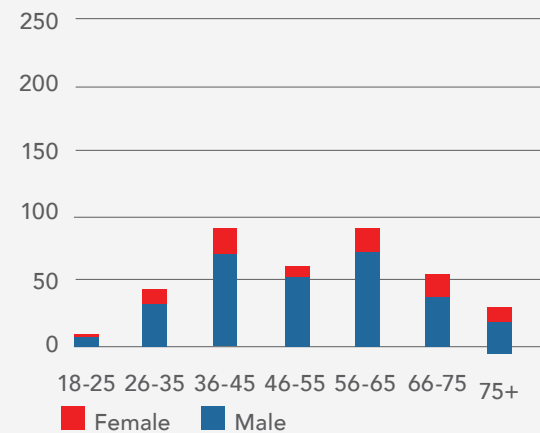


Total Clients 389
Cases 683
Service Requests 785
Referrals Sent 327 to 72 Organizations
Time to Case Closure 65.12 days

Breakdown of Clients



Age



The Team in Action



“Community relationships are a critical part of making VPAN successful.”

Stakeholders/Partners SD 4 is working with:

- ★ CMVR: Center for Military Veteran Reintegration
- ★ Whittier College
- ★ City Heart at Villages at Cabrillo
- ★ Multi-Service Center, Long Beach
- ★ Bell Army Reserve Center
- ★ Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base
- ★ Long Beach VA

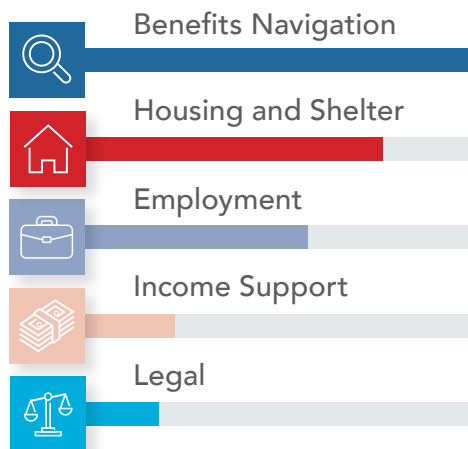
JVS SoCal Service District 5



Team Members

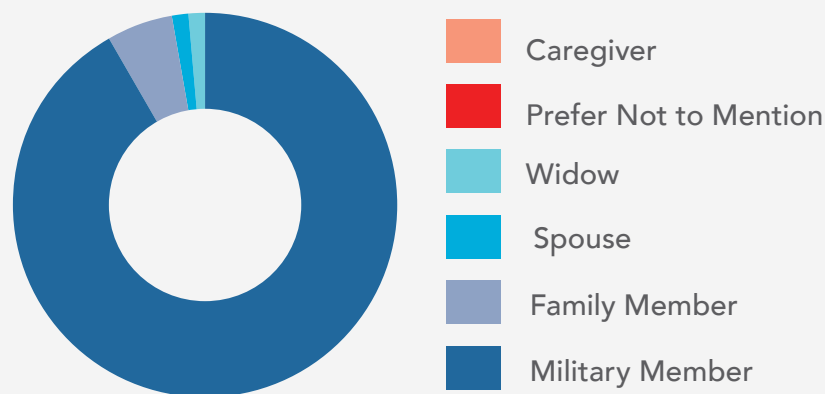
- Jimmy Guevara, Program Manager
- Louie Borrayo, Service Supervisor
- Rhaniel Miel, Peer Specialist Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Enrique Conchas, Peer Specialist Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Jessica Zarley, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Brock Milhorn, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Matthew Castillo, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Angela Rose, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- James Mumma, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy

Top 5 Needs

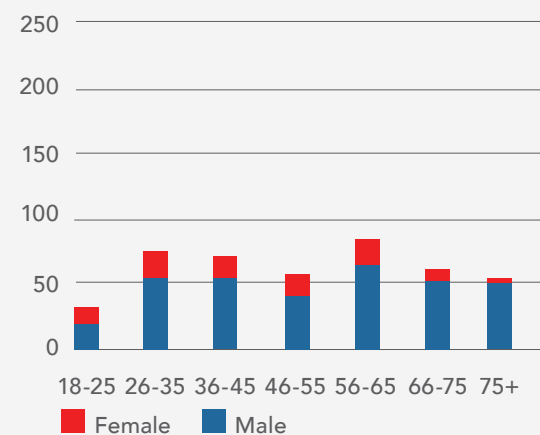


Total Clients 432
Cases 752
Service Requests 798
Referrals Sent 256 to 35 Organizations
Time to Case Closure 59.82 days

Breakdown of Clients



Age



The Team in Action

- ★ Attended or supported ten events in the SD to conduct outreach and connect with veterans
- ★ Delivered 36 briefings about VPAN to community organizations that may be able to refer veterans in need
- ★ Coffee4Vets conducts FACEBOOK live feed every Tuesday. James Mumma/VPAN Battle Buddy talks about what VPAN does in the community <https://www.facebook.com/coffee4vets>



“I applied to work at VPAN because I wanted to be the person who could create the change. I wanted to be the conduit through which veterans could find assistance.”

Highlights from the Year

- + The first SD from all five districts to execute a Wellness Day in the Antelope Valley over 100 veterans and families attending.
- + Received the highest approval rating in all the SDs from our veterans and their families.
- + Partners with the Quartz Hill Veteran of Foreign War Post 3000 to launch a free comedy night for the Antelope Valley community.
- + Launched an Antelope Valley Desert Encampment monthly outreach in partnership with the VA and other community-based organizations.
- + Partnered with community colleges in the district to support student veterans and their families in Pasadena, Santa Clarita, and Antelope Valley.



We are who we serve.



Glossary

BHPH	<i>Bob Hope Patriotic Hall</i>
CAP	<i>Community Access Point</i>
CBO	<i>Community-Based Organization</i>
DoD	<i>Department of Defense</i>
ETS-SP	<i>Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program</i>
JVS SoCal	<i>Job. Vision. Success, Southern California</i>
DMH	<i>Department of Mental Health</i>
MVA	<i>Military and Veterans Affairs</i>
LAVC	<i>Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative</i>
MH	<i>Mental Health</i>
MILFAM	<i>Military Family</i>
RP	<i>Rally Point</i>
SCG	<i>Southern California Grantmakers</i>
SD	<i>Supervisory District</i>
VA	<i>Department of Veterans Affairs</i>
VFWC	<i>Veteran Family Wellness Center</i>
VOALA	<i>Volunteers of America, Los Angeles</i>
VPAN	<i>Veteran Peer Access Network</i>
VSO	<i>Veteran Service Organization</i>

THE VETERAN PEER ACCESS NETWORK

VPAN Support Line: 1-800-854-7771 Press *3

Website: <https://dmh.lacounty.gov/veterans/>

Email: veterans@dmh.lacounty.gov

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