



2018-20

STRATEGIC

PLAN

California Department of Veterans Affairs
Vito Imbasciani MD, Secretary

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY

Two years ago, I had the honor of becoming the 16th person appointed to lead the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). As a war veteran myself, it is a pleasure to work with the dedicated staff of CalVet and to serve the nation's largest veteran population. Together with our partners in the County Veteran Services Offices, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and veteran service organizations, we work to ensure that veterans have access to the benefits they have earned so they can achieve a high quality of life.

In recent years we have made a great deal of progress toward accomplishing our goals. We dramatically increased the quality ratings of our veterans homes across the board according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services. This accomplishment was aided by implementation of an automated drug dispensing system to improve efficiency, reduce waste, and assure patient safety.

We increased the number of home loans issued to assist more than 600 veterans achieve the dream of home ownership last year. We also helped develop 1,500 permanent and transitional supportive housing units for homeless and low-income veterans. These homes combine life skills training and mental health and substance abuse treatment services to help veterans achieve long-term self-sufficiency.

We reduced the backlog of benefit claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs from almost 70,000 to just over 6,000, producing more than \$120 million in retroactive payments and more than \$17 million in ongoing monthly payments for veterans and their families. In addition, we initiated a veteran designation for California driver licenses. To date, more than 64,000 veterans have applied.

We also introduced the California Transition Assistance Program, called CalTAP, to educate

service members, veterans, and their families about the benefits they have earned. This is the first of its kind state program in the nation and will address the needs of veterans at every stage of life – from the time they separate from active duty, through their education and providing for their families, through to the end of their lives.

Additionally, at long last we celebrated the opening of the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery in Seaside in October 2016, which was the culmination of two decades of effort by the Monterey County community. In just over a year, the cemetery has received more than 700 veterans and qualified family members.

Looking back on our success is useful, however there is much more to be done. The following pages set the stage for the progress we intend to make in serving veterans over the coming years.

We are confident that we will achieve these objectives with support from the federal, state, local and non-profit groups who are also committed to improving service to California veterans.



Vito Imbasciani MD
Secretary

CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS

California is home to 1.7 million veterans, representing over eight percent of total U.S. veterans. California veterans are a diverse group encompassing women veterans, Native-American veterans, Latino and African-American veterans, and more LGBT veterans than any other state. A quarter of veterans in California have no more than a high school education and their military training. Half of our veterans are over age 65, 10 percent are under 30, and a quarter of our veterans are disabled by their service to some degree.

While the number of veterans here and nationwide is trending downward, the needs of the veteran population are not waning. Every year, 25,000 people come to California as they make their transition from the military to civilian life. A substantial number of them are under the age of 30, leaving the military after deployments to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The vast majority of veterans return to civilian life with little difficulty, assuming their roles as productive members of their communities which benefit from the training and experience gained through their military service. CalVet works to ensure those veterans are aware of benefits and resources available for them to enhance career, family, health and financial aspects of their lives. While most veterans eventually transition into civilian life with success, those who do experience difficulties need greater assistance and services. Multiple subsets of our veterans struggle with their post-service transition due to injury and disability, mental health and substance abuse issues, or difficulty accessing education and employment opportunities.

The largest segment of our veteran population consists of Vietnam War veterans who, as a group, need greater access to medical facilities and long-term care. California is planning for a sustained increase in the demand for these earned services as our veteran population ages. Over the past decade we have dramatically expanded the capacity of our veterans home system, and we are actively working to ensure that we are making the best possible use of our resources. In the coming years we will focus on getting the most benefit from the California Veterans Home – Yountville to serve all of our veterans. At the same time we will take a fresh look at creative ways to move all eight of our veterans homes toward self-sufficiency through fiscal efficiency and improved cost recovery.

While only six percent of adult Californians today have served in the military themselves, statewide public support for ensuring that our nation keeps its promise to servicemembers continues to be strong. With assistance from our partners at the federal, state and county level, as well as the non-profit and service organizations our state is fortunate to have in abundance, CalVet is committed to ensuring that all veterans attain a high quality of life.

MISSION

To serve and honor all California veterans by connecting them and their families with their earned benefits through education, advocacy and direct services.

VISION

CalVet provides innovative leadership in veteran advocacy and veteran services in California and sets the national standard for connecting veterans and their families with the rights and benefits they have earned through their military service.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Compassion:** *We demonstrate respect, empathy and sensitivity in every interaction, treating all veterans and their family members, our colleagues, and our partners with dignity and appreciation. We understand and honor the military experience and the impacts of service on veterans and their families.*
- **Accountability:** *We hold ourselves responsible for providing extraordinary care in our veterans homes, exceptional service to our veteran community, and sound stewardship of our resources with competence and expertise.*
- **Leadership:** *We collaborate and support efforts to develop and adopt innovative ideas to enhance veteran services, advocacy, and outreach statewide and throughout the nation, and share our improvements and counsel freely with other veteran service providers.*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OVERVIEW

The California Department of Veterans Affairs organizes its efforts to serve veterans into three core program areas: Veterans Homes, CalVet Home Loans, and Veterans Services and Outreach.

This strategic plan describes how all programmatic and support divisions within CalVet will work toward the same strategic goals to deliver services to California's veterans. Each element of this plan is identified to directly support CalVet's Mission and Vision, and to ensure that we act in accordance with our Guiding Principles.

- 1. Provide the highest quality care and services for our veterans and their families.*
- 2. Enhance operational effectiveness to maximize service to California veterans.*
- 3. Invest in our workforce to enhance services to veterans over the long term.*
- 4. Provide excellent customer service to our veterans, colleagues, and partners.*



GOAL 1

Provide the highest quality care and services for our veterans and their families.

A. Provide premier care throughout California's eight veterans homes and respond to the changing needs of veterans.

Maintain notable reputations at all eight of our veterans homes, including high ratings and inspection marks by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, state licensing agencies, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

B. Improve CalVet Home Loan use among veterans and real estate professionals.

Continue to improve and develop new product offerings and communication options to attract veterans and real estate professionals.

C. Provide home loan products to a wider array of veterans.

Develop loan products and outreach to assist veterans statewide who may not be able to obtain financing with private lenders to obtain a home loan while maintaining a sound financial position.

D. Improve the quality of veteran benefits claims.

Increase the rate at which CalVet staff review veterans claims submitted by county representatives to ensure greater accuracy, update and improve the accreditation program for veteran representatives, and initiate a continuing education component to the VetRep Academy.

E. Ensure access to benefits and services for underserved veterans.

Identify the disparities in services delivery and benefits access to veterans who are traditionally underserved, such as women veterans, minority veterans, disabled veterans, incarcerated veterans, and other underrepresented populations.

F. Educate California veterans and their families about federal, state, and local benefits.

Continue to develop and implement the California Transitional Assistance Program to ensure that we interact with veterans in-person at pivotal moments throughout their post-military experience to educate them about their earned benefits.



GOAL 2

Enhance operational effectiveness to maximize service to California veterans.

- A. Implement modern information technology solutions throughout CalVet.**
Seek and implement solutions that leverage modern methods and technology to enhance delivery of care to residents, streamline outreach efforts, and provide more efficient service to all veterans and their families.
- B. Improve business processes and distribution of work.**
Implement the Financial Information System for California (FI\$Cal); leverage software to streamline business practices, such as tracking consumable inventory; continue standardization efforts across numerous operational areas; update regulations; and implement a new electronic health record for use across all veterans homes.
- C. Generate fiscal efficiencies across all operations.**
Continue to address Medicare and Medi-Cal eligibility and enrollment when applicable, require all veterans home applicants and residents to have medical insurance, create through the state regulatory process a clear delineation of the services and goods the department covers on behalf of veterans home residents and those not included in our benefit package, and reduce pharmacy waste through system-wide use of Talyst drug dispensing machines.
- D. Ensure legislation and regulations support CalVet's mission.**
Through collaboration across CalVet's divisions, promulgate regulations that provide transparency, consistency, and accountability across CalVet's programs.
- E. Advocate for increased federal investment in our operations.**
Advocate, educate, and strategically engage federal decision-makers about the work of CalVet and the needs of California's veterans to ensure that California veterans and their families receive federal support.
- F. Educate the public and decision-makers to foster awareness and support.**
Increase outreach and education efforts regarding CalVet's activities and successes to the public, legislators, and other government agencies via CalVet Connect, traditional media coverage, social media, participation at events, and publications.
- G. Enhance CalVet's leadership function in collaboration with the veteran community.**
Continue to expand CalVet's role as a state and national leader in veteran advocacy through statewide conferences, meetings and consultation with our partners at the federal, state, local government levels as well as non-profit organizations and veteran service organizations throughout California.

GOAL 3

Invest in our workforce to enhance services to veterans over the long term.

A. Assess and plan for department staffing needs.

Complete a departmental workforce development plan and continue to implement streamlined strategies so less staff time and resources are spent on administrative support functions and more staff time and resources are spent on providing services directly to veterans.

B. Recruit, develop, and retain quality staff.

Establish cohesive, innovative ways to create a holistic approach to staff careers as a part of an engaged CalVet team including advocating for revision of the state employment process to increase opportunities for career growth within the agency and seek strategies to address compensation disparities.

C. Publicize CalVet's effectiveness, accomplishments, and professionalism.

Increase volume of articles distributed through CalVet Connect, social media and traditional media about CalVet staff expertise and accomplishments. Nominate CalVet staff for public recognition when appropriate to ensure their efforts are appropriately rewarded.

GOAL 4

Provide excellent customer service to our veterans, colleagues, and partners.

A. Raise levels of cultural competency and our ability to effectively serve our diverse customers.

Focus staff training and development and delivery of services to be culturally aware and customer-oriented. Ensure that publications, posted information, and public remarks are sensitive to the interests of all segments of our diverse veteran population.

B. Ensure veterans and their families are satisfied with the care and services they receive.

We will continue to communicate with residents, families, stakeholders, and the public through regular meetings, social media and other means. We will ensure veterans in the veterans homes and their families have a voice through the Allied Councils, individual meetings about care activities, and quality of life.

C. Maintain timely and effective communication with governmental entities and partners.

Conduct strategic engagement with key stakeholders to meet their particular information needs. Maintain awareness of the political environment and shape communication and engagement with that in mind.