

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER AND  
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MAY 21, 2024

**CROSS DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION AND CENTRALIZATION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY’S VETERAN INITIATIVES, PROGRAMMING, AND POLICIES**

On July 1, 2020, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) embarked on a transformative journey by initiating a visionary three-year pilot program known as the Los Angeles County Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN). This groundbreaking initiative, carried out in partnership with Southern California Grantmakers (SCG) and funded and staffed by the Department of Mental Health (DMH), serves as an exceptional model of cooperation in the realm of local government engagement with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It stands as a shining example of a concerted effort to bridge gaps in access to services and benefits, defying the bureaucratic nature of veteran and homelessness services.

From its inception, the VPAN, spearheaded by DMH, SCG, and collaborating agencies, implemented the innovative spoke and hub model, which provides invaluable peer-to-peer support to veterans, service members, and military-connected families throughout the expansive Los Angeles County region. The core mission of VPAN is to address the persistent and critical challenges of veteran homelessness and suicides in the County, issues that continue to demand urgent attention and action, even with the program's extension for another three years.

On January 10, 2023, recognizing the gravity and immediacy of the homelessness crisis, the Board took a resolute stance by declaring a local emergency related to homelessness. Subsequently, on February 7, 2023 the Board issued a directive to the Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), in close collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer - Chief Information Officer (CEO-CIO), to orchestrate a multifaceted effort.

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This effort sought to unite relevant County departments responsible for serving veterans affected by homelessness, and its objectives were clear: to identify existing services, dismantle the silos that hinder service delivery, enhance integration and coordination, and, most importantly, provide effective assistance to veterans grappling with homelessness. The Board also left no stone unturned, instructing DMVA to engage in meaningful dialogue with key State and Federal partners, including CalVet and the VA, with the express purpose of streamlining service delivery, exploring veterans-specific housing solutions, and nurturing a culture of inter-governmental collaboration to address the unique challenges faced by all veteran sub-demographics confronting homelessness.

These County-led endeavors represent an unwavering commitment on the part of local government to confront complex and pressing issues head-on. It is abundantly clear that a strong and synergistic relationship with CalVet and the VA, complete with centralized coordination between the County and these vital Federal and State agencies, is not merely important but indispensable in addressing the diverse and intricate needs of the local veteran and military-connected communities. The advocacy of DMVA has not only positioned the County to influence and champion State-level legislation but has also secured vital resources and funding to better serve its veteran population. Under the leadership of the Director of DMVA, the County has significantly intensified its direct engagement and collaboration with the VA, advocating for impactful legislative changes at the Federal level and pushing for programmatic enhancements within the VA itself. Additionally, the Los Angeles County Veterans Advisory Commission recently sent a recommendation to the Board for veterans services to begin being centralized under DMVA.

As the County continues to navigate through the persistent challenges of serving our veteran and military-connected communities, its determination and resolve to develop and implement effective solutions remains steadfast. The valuable lessons learned and feedback gleaned from various initiatives have underscored the critical need for ongoing adjustments to enhance collaboration, break down inter- departmental barriers, and streamline veterans policies and initiatives within the county and amongst government agencies. These measures are not just aspirational but absolutely essential to ensure that the County optimally harnesses the State and Federal funding available to support its veteran population and bypass the bureaucracy that can often hamper the services they so rightfully deserve.

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**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. Direct the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to be the lead on behalf of Los Angeles County on any local, county, or state initiatives and efforts that require coordination or collaboration with either CalVet and/or the VA;
  - a. DMVA shall take a lead role in coordinating on behalf of Los Angeles County with CalVet and/or the VA, working with the requisite county departments, to implement any veteran specific, veteran targeting, or pilots and initiatives with overlap on veterans policy;
    - i. All relevant departments will assume a collaborative role pertaining to any pilots and initiatives with CalVet and/or the VA;
2. Direct the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Department of Mental Health to:
  - a. Develop a plan in coordination with CEO Budget to transfer SCG contract for VPAN peer to peer contracted services and the Veteran Service Navigator program from DMH to DMVA no later than October 1, 2024. The transfer of SCG contract does not include DMH budgeted items. With support from CEO, DMVA to identify a plan for ongoing funding of SCG and peer to peer contracted services if MHSA funding is reduced as a result of Proposition 1.
  - b. DMVA shall provide outcome and other required data to DMH for any MHSA funding received as required by MHSA reporting requirements or new requirements as a result of Prop 1.
  - c. DMH shall have responsibility for, and continue to provide oversight of, veterans mental health services provided through directly-operated or legal entity staff.
    - i. DMH and DMVA shall report back during the Supplemental Budget on integrating the 1-877-4LA-VETS DMVA call line into the 1-800-854-7771\*3 VPAN Support Line and consider the following:
      - a) DMH and DMVA shall integrate staff from both departments onto the Veterans Service Triage Line to centralize all calls related to veterans benefits and services;
      - b) DMVA shall explore including VA Greater Los Angeles' (GLA) Homelessness Call Center (310-268-3350), incorporating federally funded resources, including access to VA supported emergency housing units;

- c) DMVA and DMH shall work to continually explore and incorporate other county department's veteran, military, and family/caregiver programming on to the line with the intention of the public being able to get access to all relevant services through the one call line;
3. Direct the CEO-HI and DMVA to advance the work started through the County's Homelessness Emergency Declaration to create a veteran specific plan to increase access to services and benefits for veterans experiencing homelessness in partnership with CalVet and/or the VA or any other state or federal agency to leverage state and federal funding and resources for veterans experiencing homelessness and report back in writing, in 90 days;
  - a. Pursue equitable and increased access for minority veterans, female veterans, and any other underserved or unserved veteran populations;
  - b. Explore opportunities for partnerships with cities, council of governments, and other local jurisdictions to increase access to veteran services and benefits;
  - c. Explore creation of a master leasing pilot in partnership with VA to rapidly house veterans experiencing homeless with the initial pilot being in the Antelope Valley with intent to scale these efforts county-wide;
  - d. Work with the Department of Health Services, in collaboration with the California Policy Lab, to develop a mechanism to identify veterans who are at-risk of losing housing and refer to the requisite resources as identified by CEO-HI and DMVA;
  - e. Engage the VA Greater Los Angeles, for potential access to their contract with Single Stop that provides online screening and guidance to improve access to a range of Federal and State resources;
  - f. Provide recommendations of necessary collaborations to better coordinate the efforts of LAHSA's veterans systems coordinators and LACDA's HUD VASH programs with the County's efforts;
4. Direct the DMVA, to identify all benefits, services, programming, or initiatives for veterans, service members, and their families currently offered by County departments;
  - a. Draft a plan with recommendations to streamline all County funded or operated veteran- specific benefits, services, programming, and initiatives to centralize and coordinate to create a centralized point within the County for veterans and report back in 90 days;
5. Direct the Department of Public Health, in coordination with Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, to add veteran status as a social determinant, and require departments to collect veteran status as a required field in screenings and electronic health records:
  - a. DMVA shall provide guidance on culturally competent wording to all departments;

- b. Direct all County departments to add the question “Have you ever served in the U.S military?” as a mandatory field in all screening and intake documents;
  - c. Any veteran identified by a County agency shall be liaised with DMVA for further screening and triaging for other veterans services and benefits if the veteran agrees to the referral and linkage;
6. Direct CEO-Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, in collaboration with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, to review the necessary legislative changes and priorities for the County to advance and advocate for policies at the State and Federal levels; and provide recommended County legislative priorities to allow the County to streamline the housing of veterans experiencing homelessness and receive the services necessary to stay housed and to address veteran suicides.

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