

# VETERANS SERVICES DEPARTMENT

## I. 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 general 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.

## II. MAJOR PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

### 1. SERVICES

Assists Veterans, spouses and their dependents with access to Veterans 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 (Calworks, Medi-Cal, Food Stamps 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. Information and referral services and crisis intervention:
  - 1) Legal service referrals
  - 2) Debt management to include home foreclosures
  - 3) Respite care referrals
  - 4) Discharge upgrades
  - 5) Homeless outreach
- D. 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. VA, CHAMPVA and TRICARE medical care access
- g. 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
- h. Vocational Rehabilitation
- i. Clothing and dependent allowances
- j. Special Adaptive Housing and Auto Grants
- k. VA Home Loans and CAL-VET Home Loans
- l. VA Life Insurance
- m. State Veterans Homes – Yountville, Barstow and Chula Vista
- n. Burial benefits
- o. Many other ancillary benefits and programs

### **III. DEPARTMENT DATA**

- i. Budget (0579) – FTE 6
  - 1. FY 2010-2011 Gross Expenditures \$735,061.00
  - 2. FY 2011-2012 (proposed) Gross Expenditures \$734,341.00
- ii. Staff Training: The California Association of County Veterans Services, Inc. (CACVSO) sponsors three (3) mandatory professional accreditation conferences per year. The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA) designates \$2,500.00 per year from State Subvention allocations to offset the cost of attendance to each participating county. 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.
- iii. Automation: Installation of VetPro in October 2010 has enabled communication between our main office in Martinez and our branch office in Richmond.

### **IV. DEPARTMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- A. A small but dedicated staff has performed another year of high volume workload and client assistance. Our staff conducted 6,368 office interviews, 15 field interviews and answered 14,815 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 \$460,083.00 in retroactive and lump sum payments. (See Workload Indicators)
- C. Under the California College Tuition Fee Waiver program, our department granted 401 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 \$1,567,374.00 per school year. (See Workload Indicators)

- D. During federal fiscal year 2011, Contra Costa County Veterans, their dependents/survivors and other beneficiaries received approximately \$126.1 million in monetary assistance from compensation, pension readjustments and 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% (\$20.0 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.
- E. Our department welfare referral program resulted in \$66,625.00 of cost avoidance savings to the public assistance programs of CalWorks, Medi-Cal and General Assistance. With the installation of a new processing system comes a change in how some of the monetary benefits are reported. Although the figures for CalWorks, Medi-Cal and General Assistance seem considerable, lower than previously years, we continue to assist an equal if not a greater number of Veterans. (See Workload Indicators)
- F. The Department Head performed over 500 hours of evening, weekend and holiday community interface to include outreach, presentations, seminars and speeches to Veteran organizations, civic organization, Guard and Reserve Units, East Bay Veteran's Fair, general public and the press/media. Our Department Head served on the Executive Board for East Bay Stand Down, a program that reaches out to Homeless Veterans. Outreach to our elderly Veteran community (WWII and Korean Veterans) has helped provide an increase in claims for Aid and Attendance enabling these Veterans to receive monetary benefits that allow continued care.

## **VI. DEPARTMENT CHALLENGES**

- A. Absorb budget reductions and reduced services due to federal, state and local deficits and the slowing economy. Budget reductions have resulted in the loss of one (1) full time Senior Level Clerk.
- B. Currently the VA Regional (VARO) Office backlog is in excess of 46,000 claims. This backlog creates anxiety and frustration for our clients as well as our staff. However, the VA is continuing their efforts to improve staff and training thereby improving the VA adjudicative process.
- C. Unfortunately, over the past 10 years the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)

has had an impact on our Veterans such as exasperating combat related conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). And most importantly, this department is ready to provide services to this new generation of Veterans who have defended our freedom and liberty at home and around the world.

- D. Staff retirements and resignations have resulted in recruitment, hiring and training for four (4) of six (6) positions in 2011. This has required extra effort to train and formalize new staff with job responsibilities and office procedures.

## **VI. 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 Veterans and Desert Storm. We are 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. We endeavor to be alert, sensitive and compassionate to the needs 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. Answering questions from federal, state and local agencies.
- D. 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)
  - 7. Operations/pathology/autopsy/MRI/radiology reports
  - 8. Hospital discharge summaries
  - 9. Miscellaneous information from National Archives
  - 10. Affidavits in support of claims and appeals
  - 11. Funeral/cemetery bills and paid receipts
  - 12. Medical expenses and income reports
  - 13. California College Fee Waivers
- E. Time to ready/study SMR's, PMR's and other medical reports
- F. Claim/appeal packaging and transmittal
- G. Numerous clerical/reception functions conducted by all staff

For more information on the Veteran Services Department, please visit:

H. <http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=1557>