

THE VETERAN PEER ACCESS NETWORK

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

#YouMatter



hope



recovery



wellbeing



greater quality  
of life



valued members  
of the LA County  
community



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

Dear L.A. County,

This year continued to be challenging for our entire country and all of our diverse local communities as we dealt with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as well as a variety of other serious population stressors. Nonetheless, we rallied as a truly dedicated and resilient people achieving progress in many ways.

Among the programs that has led the way in this regard, establishing its core foundation and growing by leaps and bounds over the past year, is L.A. County's own Veteran Peer Access Network, aka VPAN. While it comes as no surprise to me that a program built by our military community to assist our military community members in need, the VPAN has flourished beyond my expectations.

Embedded in all five supervisory districts and created through myriad partnerships across public and private sectors from the grass roots to the grass tops of our county, state, and nation, the VPAN broke down barriers to housing, healthcare, employment, benefits/legal assistance, and numerous other reintegration resources for thousands of veterans.

I invite you to view this inaugural VPAN report with an eye to the future, a future in which we, as an American society, recognize and support veterans as civic assets and leaders who, given an opportunity to serve, will take the ball and run. The VPAN report summarizes many of our extraordinary achievements and provides some insights into the remarkable men and women who are the network's voice and face.

The VPAN is possible because of you, L.A. County, and it is a particular privilege to acknowledge the work and sacrifice of the veteran peers who have put together this very special, impactful program that will grow and serve for generations to come.

Heart Forward,  
Jon



**Jonathan Sherin, MD, PhD.**  
*Director of Los Angeles County  
Department of Mental Health*

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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.



Client and Squad Coordinator Luis Rodriguez

L.A. 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 L.A. County – from downtown Los Angeles to the Antelope Valley there

*L.A. 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 L.A. County Board of Supervisors passed a motion authorizing the Director of L.A. 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. L.A. 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.

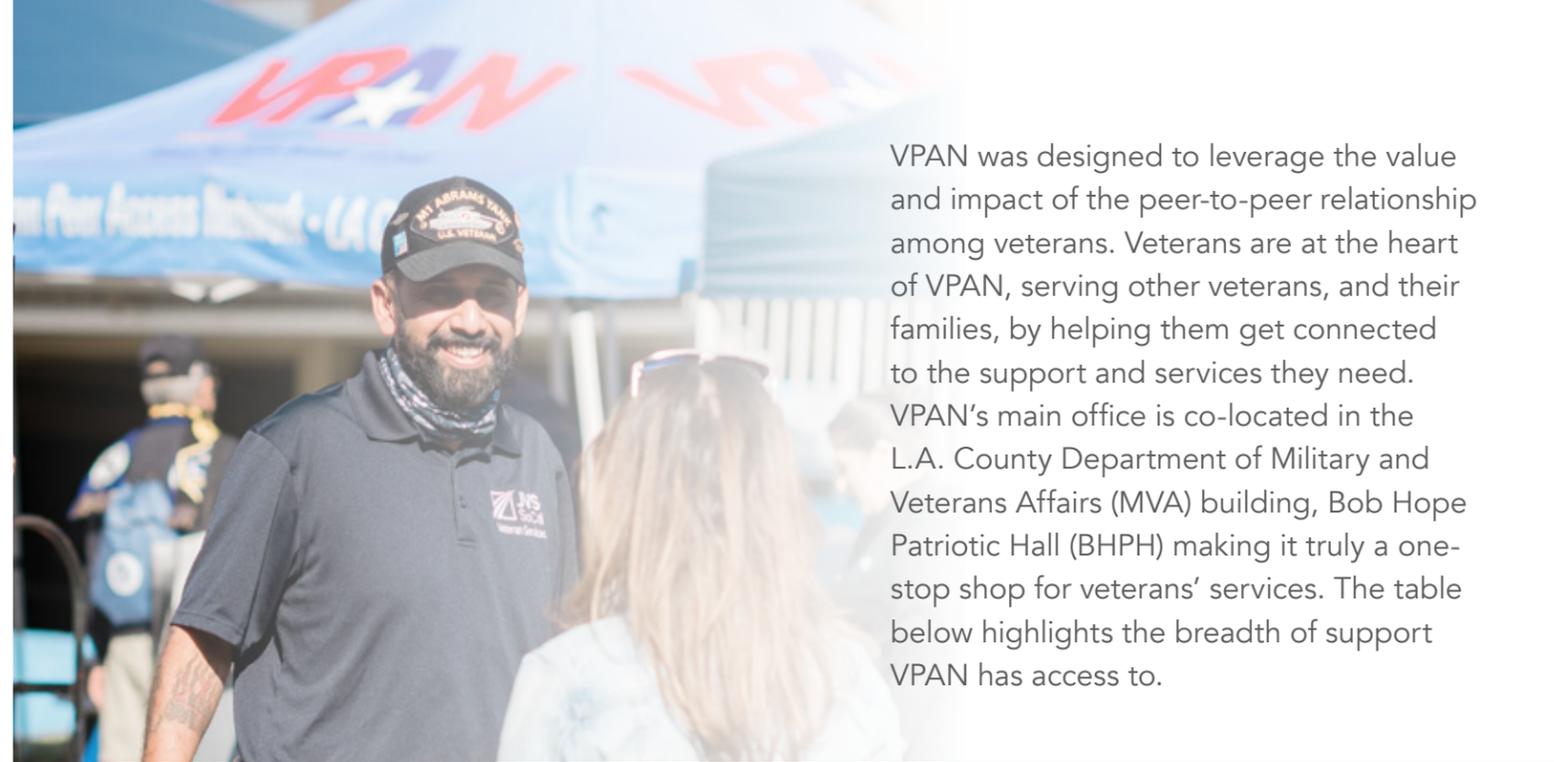


# The Program

## 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 L.A. 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”

↑ Increase Awareness

↓ 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*



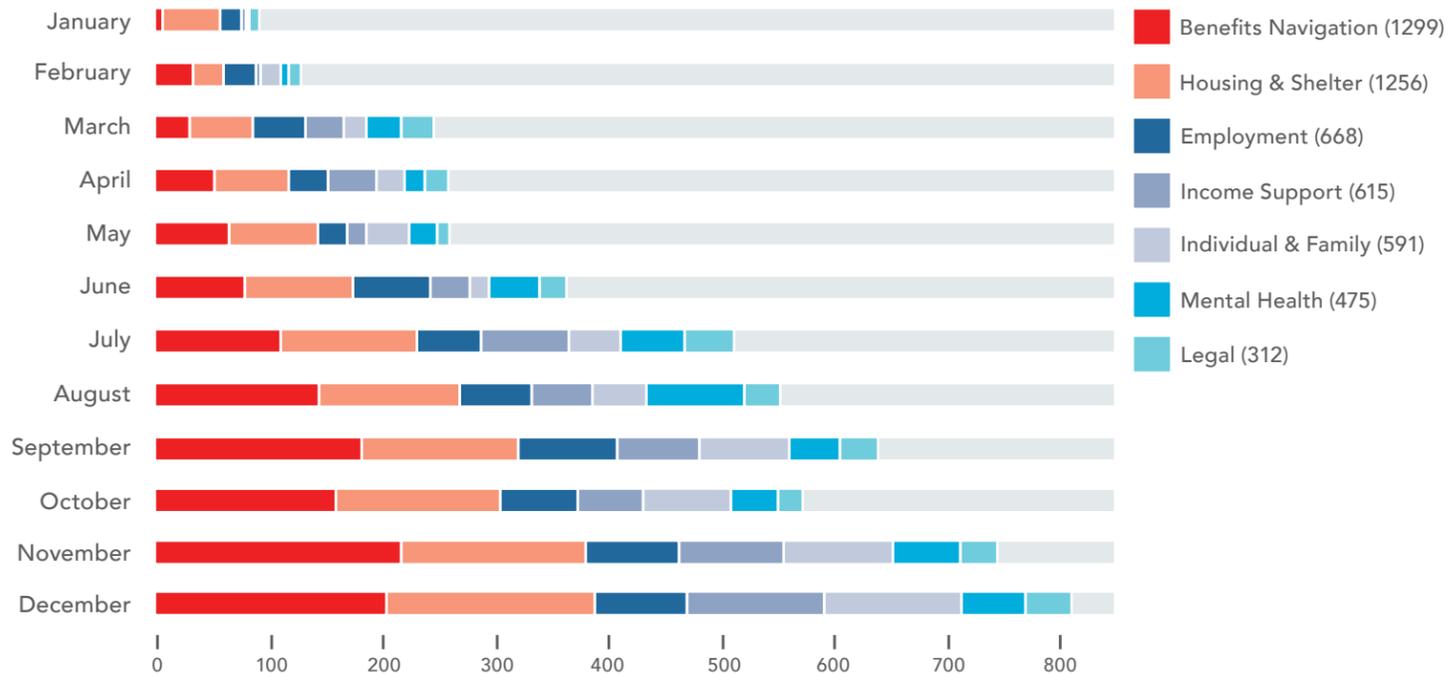
**Legal Services** *Help with eviction prevention, discharge upgrade, applying for VA benefits, etc.*



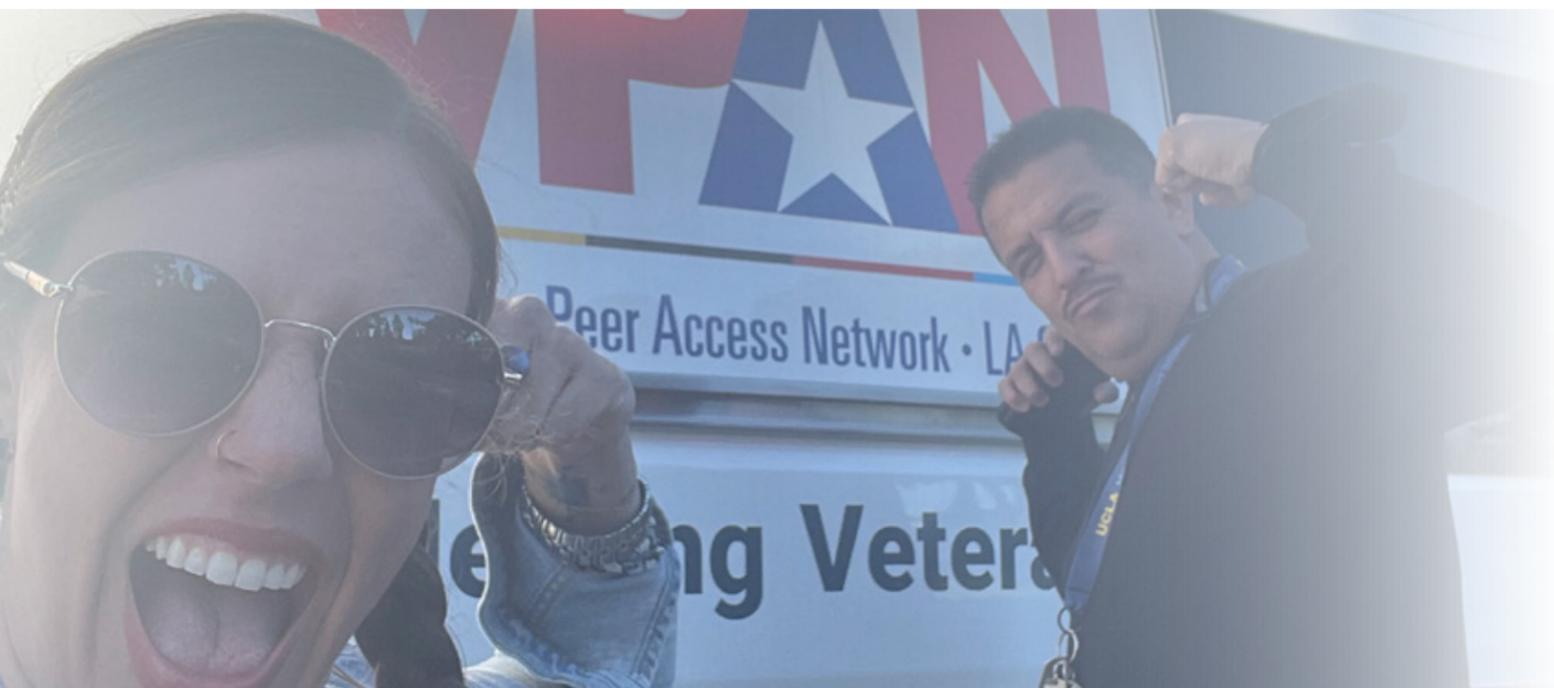
**Social Connection/Recreation** *Opportunities to connect with other veterans in a variety of settings*

### Service Type Case Numbers By Month

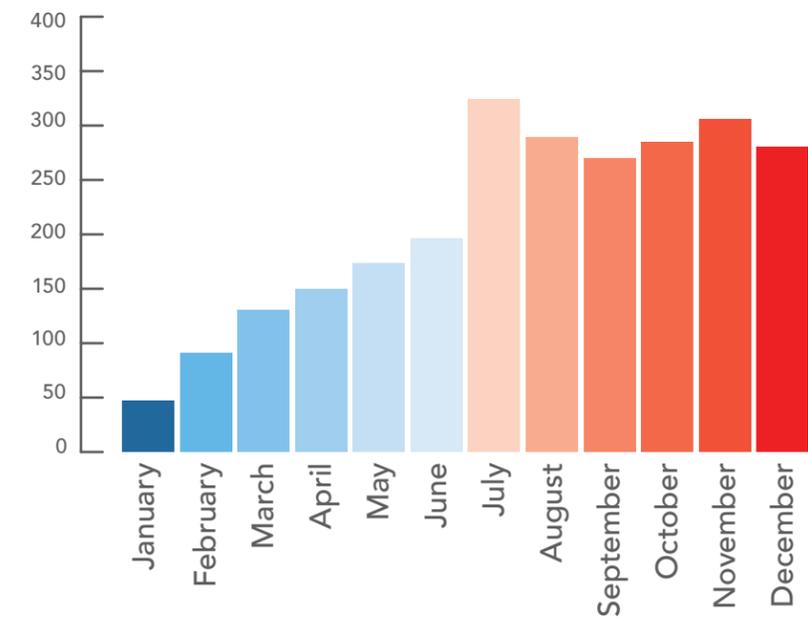
The steady increase each month of 2021 validates the need for this community-based program.



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:**

(800) 854-7771 - Press 3

## 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**



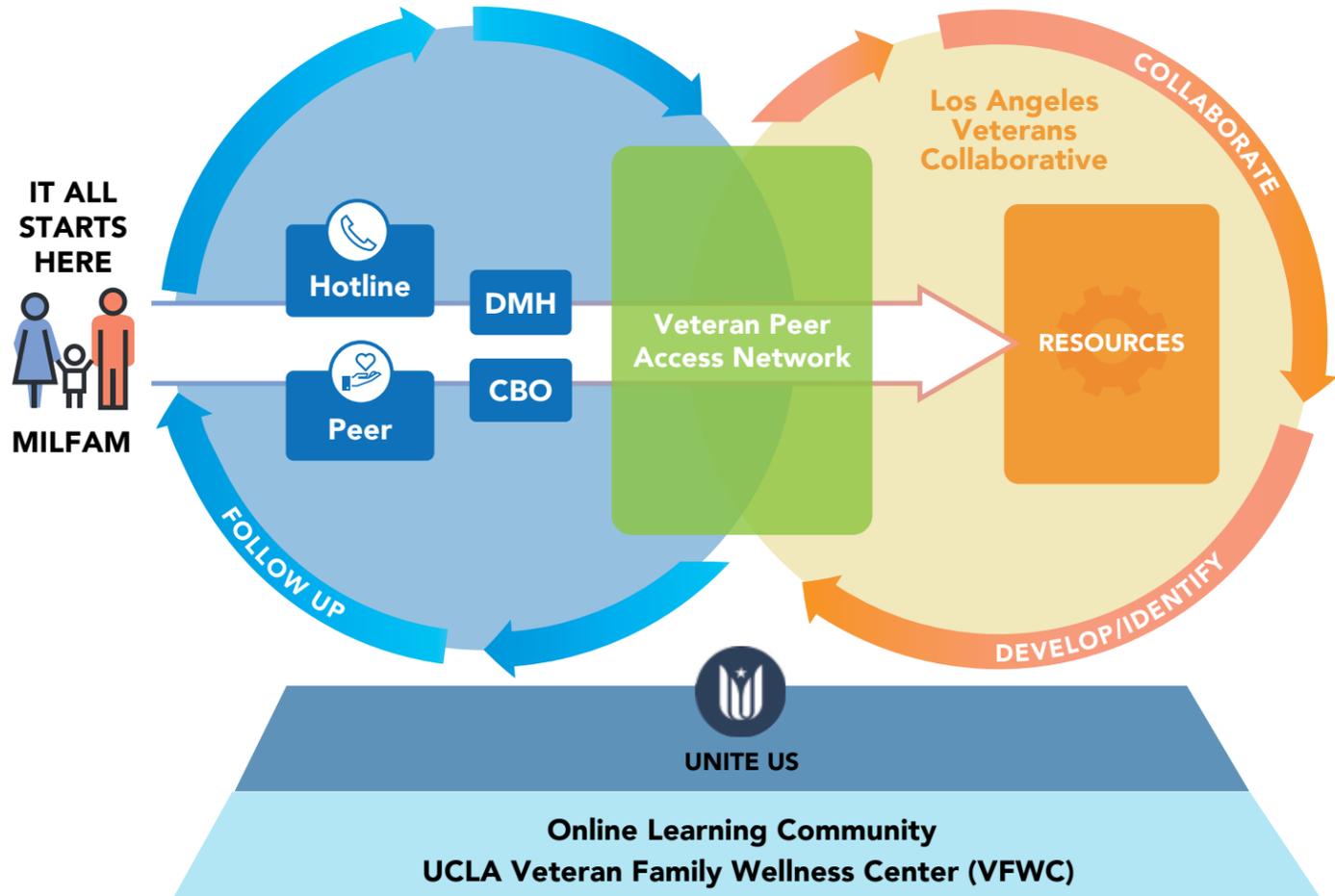
Number of  
**Service Requests**

**5,837**

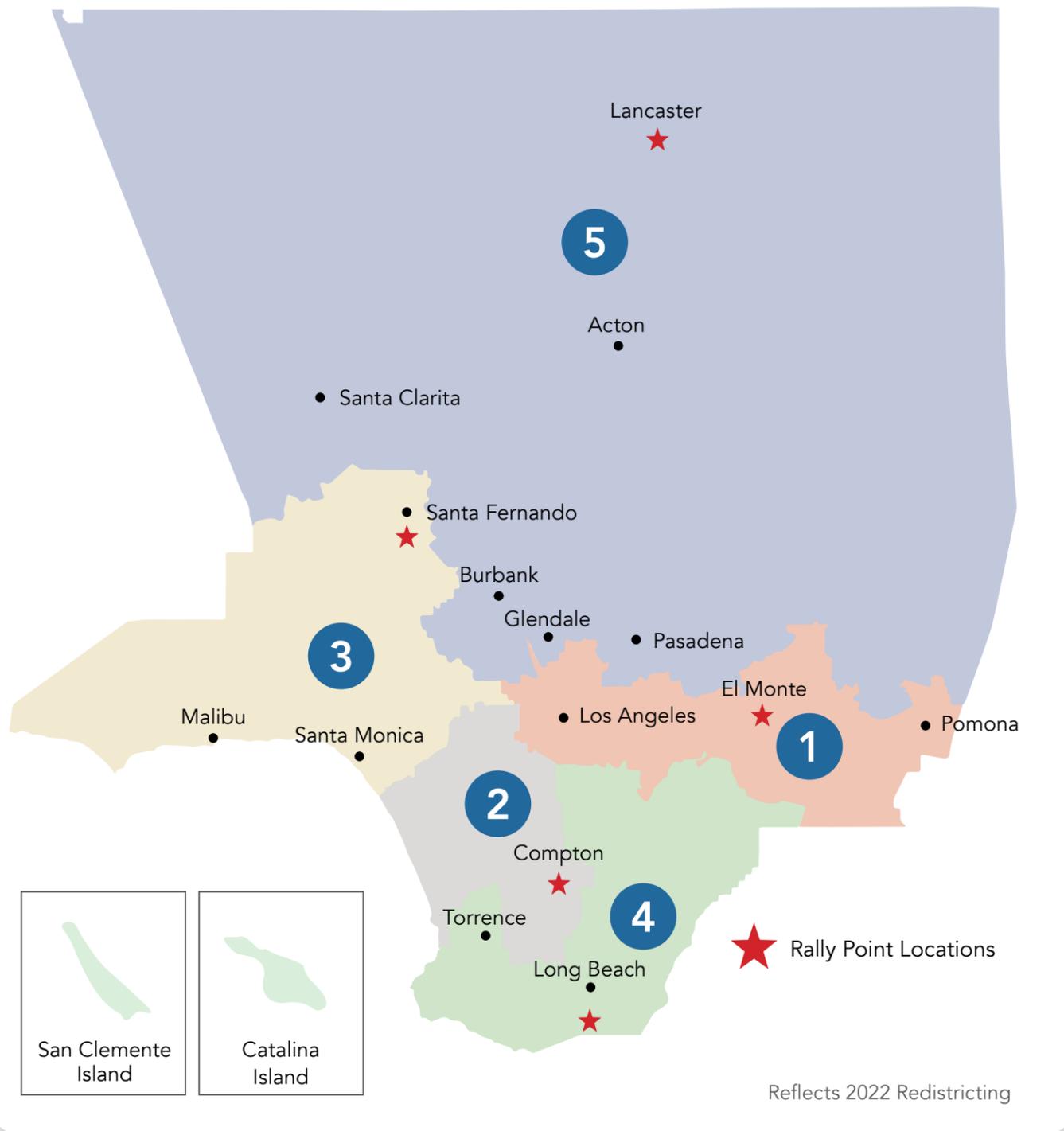
VPAN is all about access  
The VPAN Model in Action

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 L.A. County.

Because it is a community-driven support network, VPAN embodies the #YouMatter ideal. The existence of this network sends a clear message to L.A. 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 Supervisorial District - A True Team Effort

2021 validated the strength of our community-based approach. VPAN teams integrate with L.A. 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.

<b>VPAN HQ</b>	Bob Hope Patriotic Hall 1816 S. Figueroa St. Los Angeles, CA 90015 vpan@dmh.lacounty.gov
<b>DISTRICT 1</b>	<b>JVS SoCal</b> 1180 Durfee Ave., South El Monte, CA 91733 vpan@jvs-socal.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Alex Figueroa afigueroa@mva.lacounty.gov
<b>DISTRICT 2</b>	<b>VOALA</b> 700 N. Bullis Road, Compton, CA 90221 vpan@voala.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Michele Felix mfelix@mva.lacounty.gov
<b>DISTRICT 3</b>	<b>Goodwill SoCal</b> 10324 Balboa Blvd., Granada Hills, CA 91344 vpangoodwill@goodwillsoocal.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Hector Castillo hcastillo@mva.lacounty.gov
<b>DISTRICT 4</b>	<b>Battleship Iowa</b> 250 S. Harbor Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90731 vpan@veteranswest.org Veteran Benefit Navigator: Ken Gonzalez Jr. kgonzalesJr@mva.lacounty.gov
<b>DISTRICT 5</b>	<b>JVS SoCal</b> 237 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 L.A. 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.

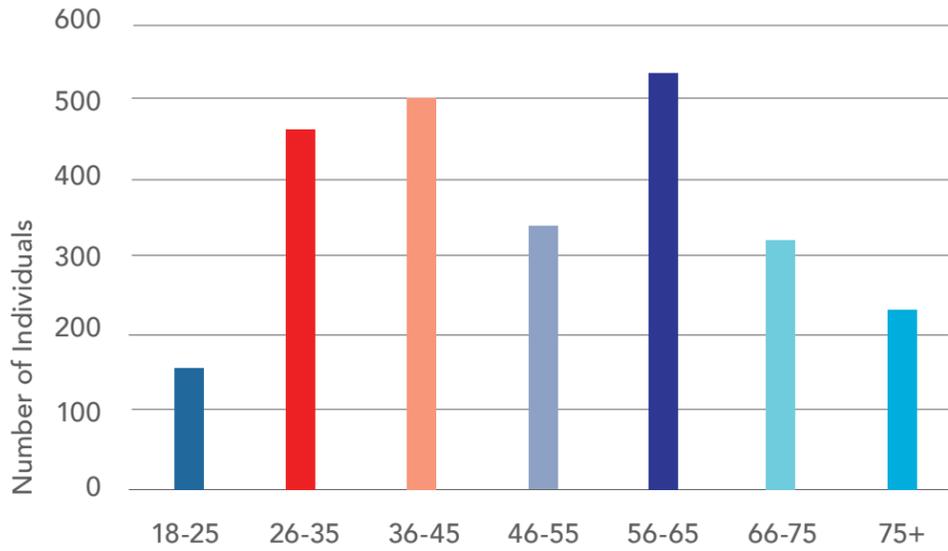
### *Los Angeles* **Veterans Collaborative**

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 L.A. 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.



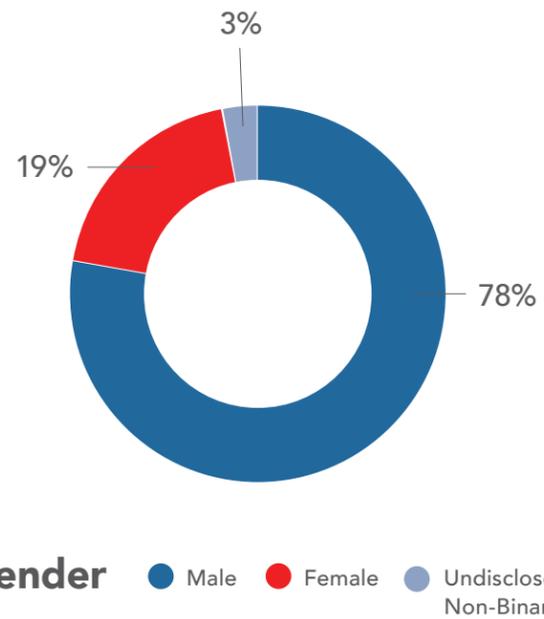
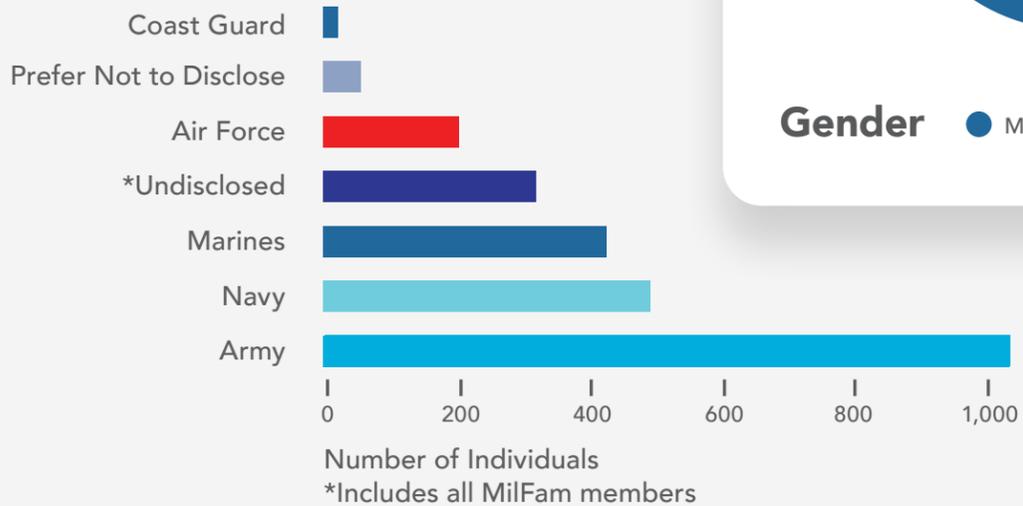
Another critical partner is the Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP) which works in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) to sponsor service members through the transition process from military to civilian life. The program provides 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.”*

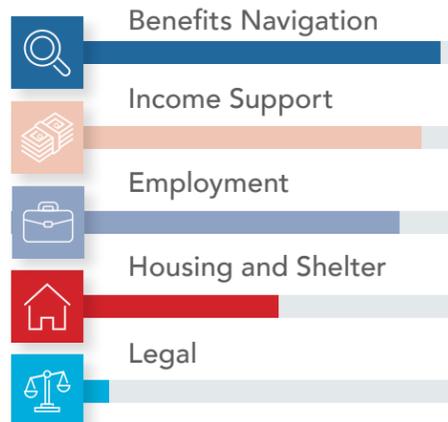
JVS SoCal  
Supervisory District 1



**Team Members**

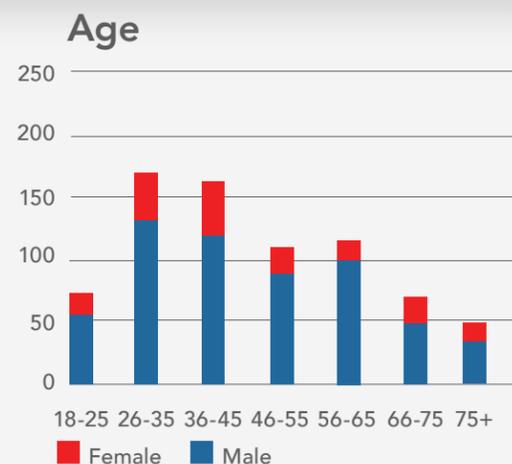
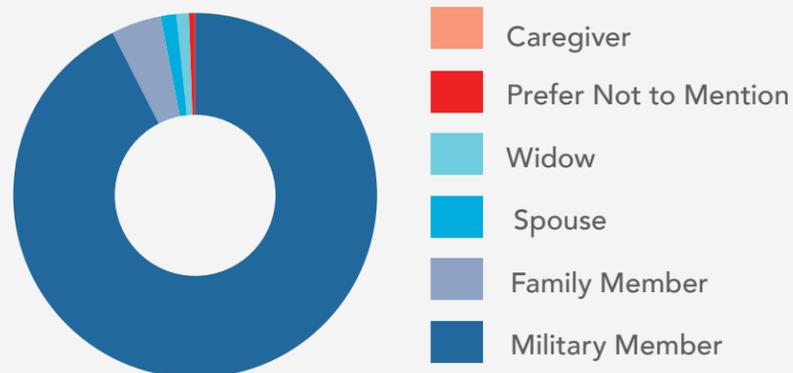
- Adam Castillo, LCSW, Program Manager
- Behkie Aguilar, Service Supervisor
- Joe Leal, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Rudolph Andrade, Peer Support  
Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Jorge Marcia, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Erika McInnis, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Jose Rodriguez,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

## Supervisory District 2



### Top 5 Needs

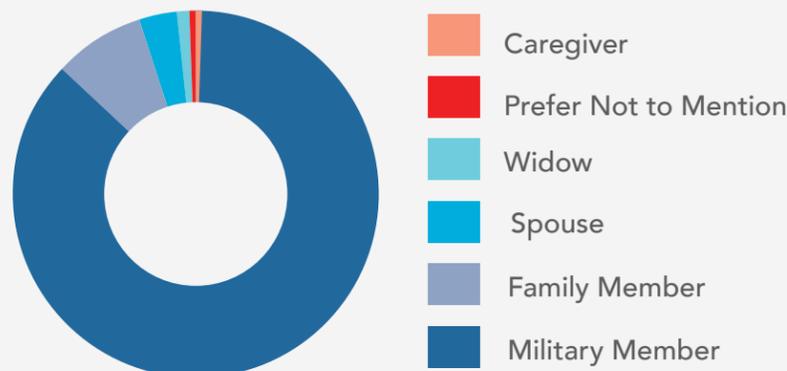


### Team Members

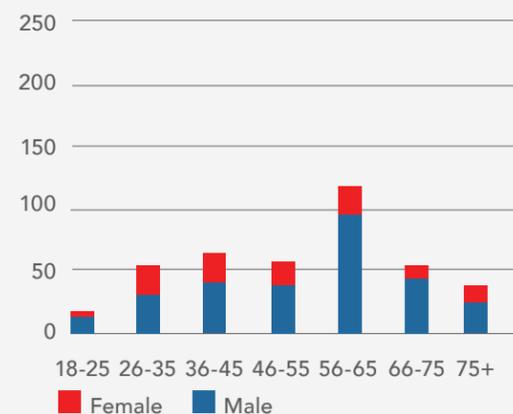
- Christina Rheingold, Program Manager
- Daniela Guzman, Service Supervisor
- Luis Rodriguez, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Randall Cunningham, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Devina Escalera, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- James "Jim" Schotter, Peer Support Specialist/Battle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

**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



### Age

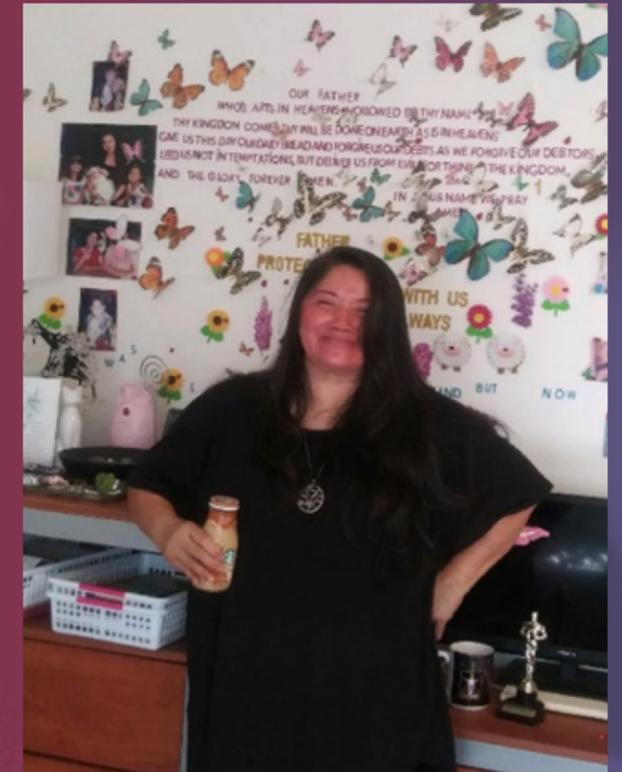


Letter from a previously homeless veteran (Connie):

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

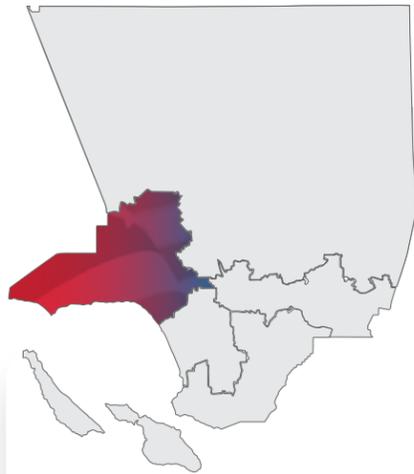
She was fast in getting paper work ready. I never met someone who handle this task with such confidence and pulled me out of a swamp that fast. Thank you for the moral support and giving me my dignity back. I will never forget you, Volunteers of America VPAN Luis Rodriguez, whom I never met in person. 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

## Supervisory District 3



### Team Members

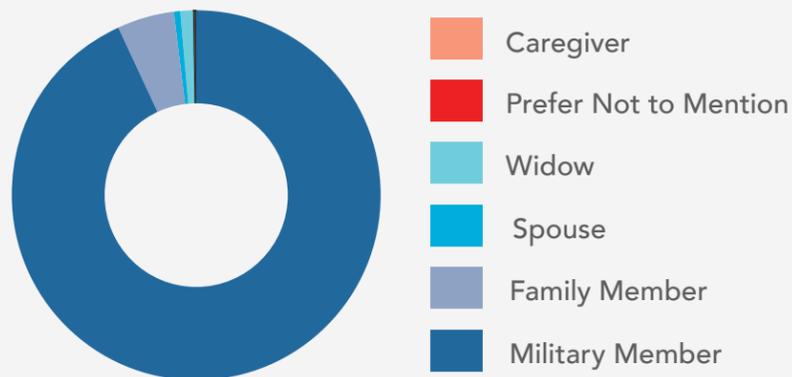
- Tarence Mann, Program Manager
- Collin Kwon, Service Coordinator
- Steven Henderson, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Mario Solares, Peer Support Coordinator/Squad Leader
- John Follmer, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Steven Choi, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Rebecca Jones, 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

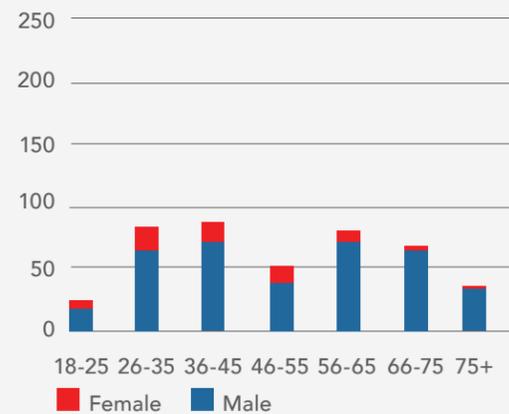


**Total Clients** 447  
**Cases** 826  
**Service Requests** 733  
**Referrals Sent** 168 to 35 Organizations  
**Time to Case Closure** 36.24 days

### 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

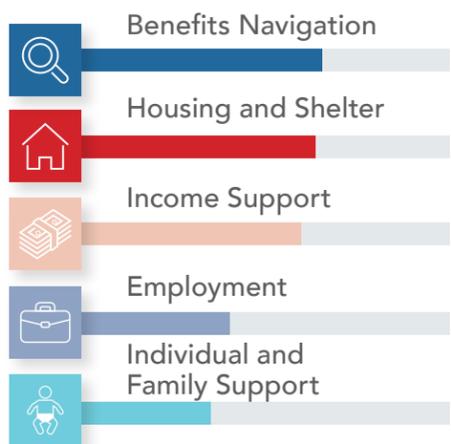
## Supervisory District 4



### Team Members

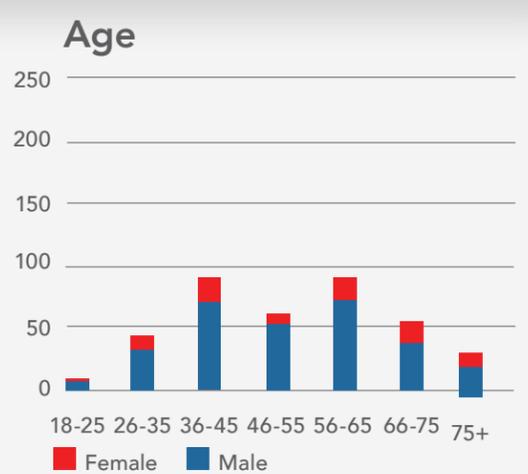
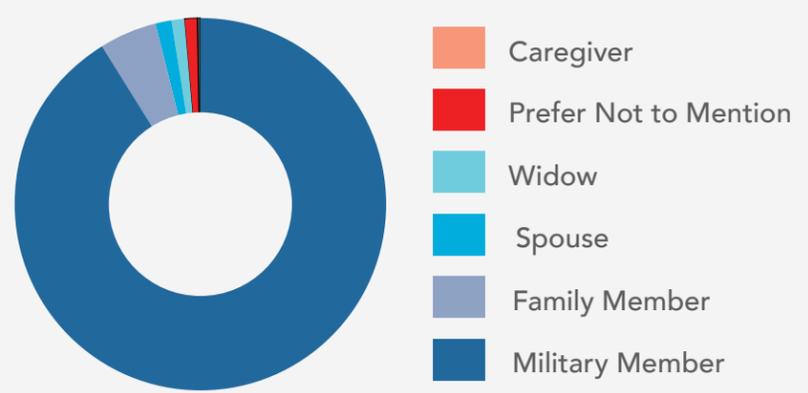
- Jesse Mendoza, *Project Manager*
- Chris Ehling, *Team Leader*
- Remi Lafayette, *Services Coordinator*
- Rich Douglas, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Matt Uribe, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Audrey Champ, *Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy*
- Sabrina Hererra, *Peer Support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



### 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

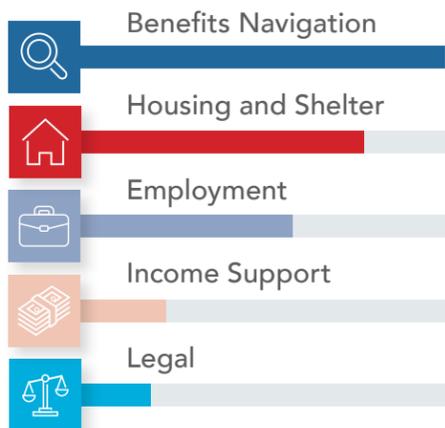
## Supervisory District 5



### Team Members

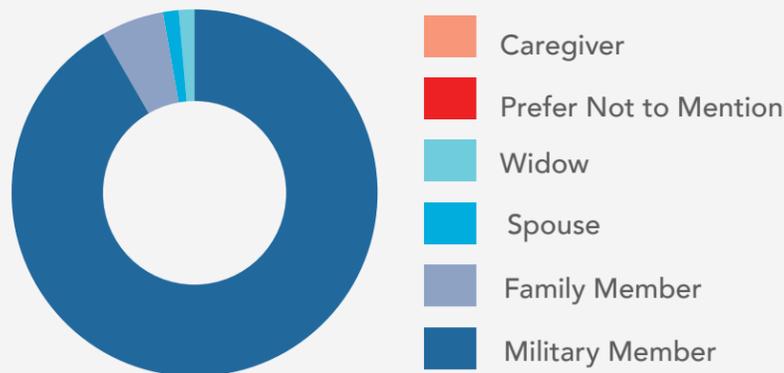
- Jimmy Guevara, Program Manager
- Louie Borrayo, Service Supervisor
- Rhaniel Miel, Peer Specialist Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Enrique Conchas, Peer Specialist Coordinator/Squad Leader
- Jessica Zarley, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Brock Milhorn, Peer Support Specialist/Battle Buddy
- Matthew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

### Top 5 Needs

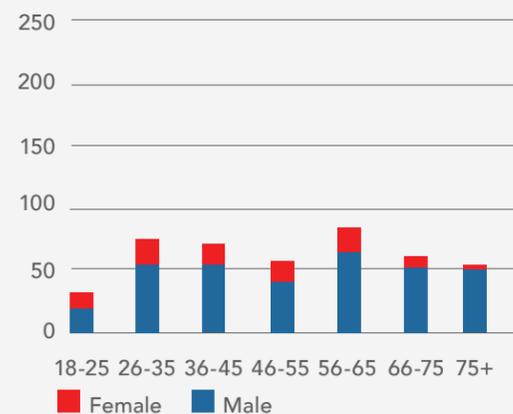


**Total Clients 432**  
**Cases 752**  
**Service Requests 798**  
**Referrals Sent 256 to 35 Organizations**  
**Time to Case Closure 59.82 days**

### 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](mailto:veterans@dmh.lacounty.gov)

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