

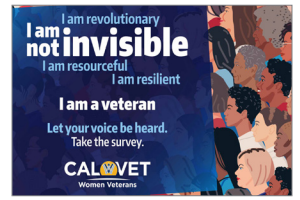


California LEGIONNAIRE

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CALEGION.ORG

NEW LAWS IN 2024 IMPACTING CALIFORNIA VETERANS

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

A series of laws take effect in 2024 to better the lives of California Veterans. These changes, both

at the federal and state levels, include a range of initiatives designed to streamline processes, improve data collection, and pay homage to the sacrifices of military personnel.

On the federal front, Military Retirees and Disabled Veterans will benefit from a 3.2 percent benefits increase in 2024. This raise aligns with the cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security benefits.

At the state level, California Governor Gavin Newsom has signed laws that address various aspects of Veterans' lives. These include measures to expedite claims procedures, improve data collection practices by



California State Capitol building, Sacramento, California (Photo: Rikki Almanza)

agencies and organizations, and introduce meaningful additions to the State Capitol in Sacramento through memorials and monuments.

One important change involves the acceptance of electronically generated letters of service-connected disabilities by county assessors. This move is to simplify the verification process for Disabled Veterans seeking

property tax exemptions. The Disabled Veterans' Exemption applies to eligible Veterans who are either blind in both eyes, have lost the use of two or more limbs, or were entirely disabled due to injury or disease incurred in military service, with a 100 percent disability rating from the VA or the Veteran's military branch. In cases where the Veteran holds a 100 percent disability rating from the VA,

further documentation of disability, such as medical files, may not be required for the exemption.

For more information on The Disabled Veterans' Exemption, which reduces the property tax liability, readers can visit boe.ca.gov/prop-taxes/dv_exemption.htm#Description

See NEW LAWS page 15

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NEW PROGRAM ADDRESSES HOUSING CHALLENGES FOR AGING HOMELESS VETERANS IN CALIFORNIA

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

In a move to support aging Veterans and combat homelessness, California launched the Veterans Support to Self-Reliance Pilot Program last year. Targeting Veterans aged 55 and above, the program enhances on-site supportive services at permanent supportive housing projects across the state. With a focus on housing first, the program allows aging Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness to age in place while



San Francisco, CA (Photo: Neerav Bhatt)

maintaining a stable and thriving quality of life.

The California Department of Veterans Affairs, CalVet, has allocated up

to \$20 million in grants, known as pilot grants, to fund supportive services for Veteran seniors aged 55 and above. This funding includes support

for Veterans with high acuity and those assisted through the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, HUD-VASH, program. The three-year observational and reporting period for pilot grantees will assess the program's effectiveness in aiding high-needs, formerly homeless Veterans.

Over 200 Veterans from across the state are currently enrolled in the VSSR program.

See HOMELESS VETERANS page 7

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DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA**

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- Email print articles to: editor@caLegion.org with the words "California Legionnaire" in the subject line of your email so that it will not be overlooked
 - Submissions to The California Legionnaire must be made by the 6th of the month prior to the issue month (Example: To submit material for the February issue, submissions must be received by Jan. 6)
 - Submissions to the Department website can be made at any time by visiting caLegion.org/ugc (please email the editor to let them know you've submitted online)
 - Photos should be sent at the highest resolution possible
 - Do not embed photos in a Word.doc. Send photos as email attachments with photo captions either typed in a word document or in the email body. Images that are pulled off of websites will not reproduce well, if at all. PDFs must be saved as high resolution from their original document
 - All submissions become the property of The American Legion Department of California. All submitted material is subject to edit, rework and omission. We are not responsible for lost items or misplaced material
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CALC 1-2024 is being held at Yolo Post 77 in Woodland, CA, from April 19-21, 2024.

Applications can be submitted online today at caLegion.org/calc-application/

The deadline to apply is April 1, 2024.

The course begins at 8 AM

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Location: The American Legion Yolo Post 77
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PREREQUISITES:

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2024 AMERICAN LEGION MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS CONTEST WELCOMES ENTRIES FROM LEGIONNAIRES AND LEGION GROUPS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The 2024 Media & Communications Contest welcomes entries from all Legionnaires, Sons of The American Legion members, Auxiliary members, and Legion Riders.

This annual competition acknowledges the media efforts undertaken by American Legion Family members at the post, district, and department levels to advance the organization's goals. The deadline for submissions is April 15.

To get started, visit legion.org/media/contest.

CONTEST ENTRY GUIDELINES AND PERIOD

A fee of \$5 is applicable for each entry submission, and all submissions must be from content published within the calendar year of 2023.

The contest entry period is from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. Electronic submissions must be made no later than April 15 of the following year. All entries must be the original work of the entrant(s). Violations of copyright rules, plagiarism, or other ethical breaches could result in the entrant's disqualification from the contest.

CONTEST CATEGORIES

This contest includes seven categories for submissions: Publications, Editorial/News Writing, Editorial/Informational Writing, Websites, Visual Media, Social Media Campaigns, and Public Relations/Community Outreach. The basis of judging for the categories is outlined in the rules.

PUBLICATIONS

This category includes both written and auditory publications, judged on relevance to American Legion Family content, make-up, design, clear and balanced writing or speaking, appearance, and use of photos and illustrations. Entrants can submit URLs or PDFs of their print publications or podcasts, with up to three examples per entry.

EDITORIAL / NEWS WRITING

Judged on headline, research, clear and accurate writing, grasp of subject, and timely and appropriate objectives suitable to the American Legion Family. Only one news story per entry is permitted.

WEBSITES

Judged based on site design, links, and

appropriateness of information as it relates to the American Legion Family. Entrants must submit the electronic address (URL) for their website. Multiple URLs require separate entries.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Evaluated on relevance to the American Legion Family, presentation, readability, content, engagement, goals, purposes, and outcomes. Submissions must include the URL for the social media site, along with a description of the campaign, its goals, and how success was measured. Separate entries are required for multiple campaigns.

PUBLIC RELATIONS/ COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Judged on how the entrant placed an American Legion Family event into external media. Entries should demonstrate coverage provided by outside media and explain in no more than 2,000 characters how the external outreach benefited The American Legion affiliated event, program, etc.

AWARDS

The Innovation Award and Chairman's Award will persist as part of the Media & Communications Contest, with winners receiving a plaque and a \$50 Emblem Sales credit.

The Innovation Award recognizes media innovation, while the Chairman's Award serves as the "Best in Show." Nominees do not submit entries specifically for these awards; instead, judges will select the winners.

RECOGNITION AND NOTIFICATION

The winners in each category will be selected by members of the Media & Communications Commission and the Media & Communications National Headquarters staff. The chosen entries will then be presented to the Media & Communications Commission for approval during the Spring Meetings in May.

The winners in each category, along with the recipients of the Chairman's Award and Innovation Award, will be notified via email by June 1.

Refer to the 2023 contest winners at legion.org/talma/259061/talma-names-its-2023-contest-winners for insights into the competition.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR INQUIRIES

For inquiries, please email dispatch@legion.org



VISUAL MEDIA

Evaluated based on clarity, originality, perspective, purpose, quality, connection to the American Legion Family, and interest. Entrants can submit up to three photos or videos published on the same subject or event.

EDITORIAL / INFORMATIONAL WRITING

Judged on headline, clear and accurate writing, grasp of subject, research, and how well it explains the subject matter while relating to the American Legion Family. Only one editorial per entry is allowed.



 **Veterans
Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1



Sgt. Robert B. Brown watches over the civilian Fire Fighters at the burn pit on Camp Fallujah, Iraq, 2007. (Photo: Cpl. Samuel D. Corum)

ALL VA ENROLLED VETERANS CAN RECEIVE REGULAR TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENINGS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs is actively working to screen all Veterans enrolled in VA health care for potential toxic exposure, a mandate set forth by the PACT Act signed into law in 2022.

The screenings involve both initial and follow-up assessments for every Veteran in VA health care at least once every five years.

Five million Veterans have already screened since the enactment of the PACT Act. Of those screened, 2.1 million self-reported experiencing at least one potential exposure.

Screenings, launched at VA medical centers and clinics, address various toxic exposures, with the

most commonly reported being Agent Orange and burn pits, prevalent issues from the Vietnam War and the Iraq War.

Screenings for unenrolled Veterans are also possible. Those who are not enrolled but meet eligibility requirements have the chance to enroll in VA health care and undergo the necessary screenings. The goal is to ensure that all Veterans receive these screenings to identify potential toxic exposure.

The PACT Act holds particular significance for Veterans who struggled to establish a link between chronic conditions and their military service. This law adopts a “presumptive” approach, relieving Veterans of the burden of proof by linking certain illnesses, such as asthma and some

cancers, to exposures like burn pits.

During screenings, Veterans are asked specific questions about potential toxic exposure they may have encountered during their military service. Affirmative responses lead to follow-up inquiries and connections to information on benefits, clinical resources, and registry-related medical exams. All responses are documented in Veterans’ VA medical records.

The screenings, which take five to 10 minutes, identify potential exposures and connect Veterans with necessary resources. All enrolled Veterans are encouraged to undergo these screenings at least once every five years.

Common conditions

covered in the toxic exposure screening include: war-related exposure, open burn pit exposure, airborne hazards exposure, Gulf War-related exposure, Gulf War Illness, Agent Orange exposure, radiation exposure, and Camp Lejeune contaminated water exposure.

Veterans not yet enrolled in VA health care are urged to apply online for physical and mental health care, checkups, surgeries, home health care, prescriptions, and medical equipment.

The PACT Act further expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances, with additional details available for those interested in filing for disability compensation under the act.



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DISABLED VETERANS WILL SEE AN INCREASE IN 2024 VA DISABILITY PAYMENTS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Starting January 1, Disabled Veterans will see a 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment, or COLA, increase in their monthly VA disability compensation.

Veterans with a current disability rating of 10% or higher will receive this 3.2% raise in their disability pay rate for the entire calendar year of 2024. The COLA increase is in line with the Social Security Administration's announcement of a 3.2% COLA for 2024.

For example, a Veteran rated 100% with no dependents, receiving \$3,621.95

in 2023, will see a monthly increase of \$115.90, bringing the 2024 total to \$3,737.85. Importantly, disability compensation, pension, and DIC benefits remain exempt from federal taxable income.

Over 5.4 million Veterans and nearly half a million surviving spouses and dependents will financially benefit from the 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment in VA disability compensation for the year 2024.

Veterans are encouraged to refer to updated information on the VA website, utilizing charts to assess eligibility and anticipate new monthly payments based on the COLA adjustment. The Department

of Veterans Affairs has updated information on its website at va.gov/disability/compensation-rates/veteran-rates/

The 3.2% COLA year-over-year increase, confirmed on December 1, follows the Social Security Administration's announcement on October 12. The COLA is intrinsically tied to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers. The COLA increase for 2023 was unusually high at 8.7%, marking the most substantial increase since 1981.

For 2024, 3.2% is based on the CPI-W's percentage increase. The Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates



the CPI-W, and after Senate approval, the VA adjusts Veterans' benefits, leading to an annual increase.

Veterans with a combined disability rating of 30% or higher and qualifying dependents are eligible for additional compensation.

Qualifying dependents include: a spouse, a child under 18 or between 18 and 23 still in school, dependent parents, an

additional child under 18, and an additional child between 18 and 23 who is in school.

Moreover, Veterans can enhance their VA rating by submitting a new VA disability claim at va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/ introduction for a separate condition or by pursuing a claim for an increased rating.

VETERANS AFFAIRS GRAPPLES WITH TECHNICAL GLITCHES, BACKLOG, AND SURGING CLAIMS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Veterans Affairs leaders have revealed that over 120,000 Veterans encountered technical obstacles while attempting to file benefit claims through the department's online platform.

This figure, approximately 35% higher than initially reported, has raised concerns among House lawmakers, who questioned the extent of these long-standing problems, some dating back over a decade.

During a hearing on the matter, Rep. Matt Rosendale, the chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's technology panel, expressed his dissatisfaction, stating that while errors are inevitable, it is unacceptable for some of these issues to persist for years unnoticed.

In late August, VA officials disclosed that around 32,000 disability claims had been lost in the VA.gov computer systems for months or even years. Subsequently, an additional 57,000 cases were discovered, primarily involving Veterans attempting to modify dependents on existing disability claims.

Further investigations by Veterans Affairs Chief Information Officer Kurt DelBene revealed that around 81,000 dependency claims had been misdirected within the system, along with several thousand other cases in various categories. DelBene assured that efforts were underway to promptly rectify these errors, emphasizing the importance of VA.gov as the digital front door for Veterans' benefits and services.

While progress has been

made, with approximately 26,500 dependency cases and 22,500 disability claims already processed, the delays in addressing these issues could have imposed financial hardships on affected Veterans and their families. Rep. Rosendale plans to introduce legislation to enhance oversight of online benefits systems, aiming to prevent similar problems in the future.

Despite record-high levels of benefits claims processing in recent weeks, VA staff faces significant challenges. Mandatory overtime will be required for thousands of hours over the next year to cope with the increasing workload. Willie Clark, deputy under secretary for field operations at the Veterans Benefits Administration, acknowledged the need for overtime to prevent Veterans from waiting excessively for their benefits.

Efforts are underway to hire more staff and prevent burnout among existing employees. VA officials reported record-breaking numbers of disability claims processed in fiscal 2023, and the workload is expected to continue growing this fiscal year. A considerable portion of this increase stems from new military toxic exposure claims filed through the PACT Act, with over 750,000 claims submitted in the last 13 months.

Consequently, the backlog of claims, those taking more than 120 days to complete, has risen to over 319,000, and VA officials anticipate it could reach between 450,000 and 700,000 next year. Clark anticipates that the backlog will be under control by 2025, contingent on maintaining the current processing pace.

Since early 2022, claims

staff have been mandated to work 20 hours of overtime monthly, with exceptions for those facing obstacles. Leaders are exploring new processing strategies, and VA Secretary Denis McDonough has expressed plans to expand the workforce, though budgetary challenges on Capitol Hill may pose obstacles to these plans. Despite the challenges, the VA remains committed to addressing these issues and ensuring timely benefits for Veterans.



Department of Veterans Affairs Seal (Photo: Stan F.)



Pfc. Matthew Carpenter fires an AT-4 during training at the Udairi Range Complex near Camp Buehring, Kuwait, 2012 (Photo: Sgt Christopher Johnston)

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT'S WARFIGHTER BRAIN HEALTH INITIATIVE TARGETS TBI CAUSED BY 'LOW-LEVEL' BLASTS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

In response to emerging research, the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs are intensifying their focus on monitoring and mitigating traumatic brain injuries and their influence on mental health, particularly concerning low-level blasts experienced on the battlefield, through the Warfighter Brain Health Initiative.

In June 2022, the DOD launched the Warfighter Brain Health Initiative, a program designed to maximize the cognitive and physical performance of Service Members. The initiative emphasizes understanding, preventing, accurately diagnosing, and promptly treating blast overpressure and its effects. It encompasses various facets, including identifying and mitigating brain

exposures, preventing and minimizing traumatic brain injury effects, and advancing warfighter brain health science.

Low-level blasts, generated from heavy weapons or explosives, are now acknowledged as potential contributors to cognitive issues, including concentration problems, slowed reaction time, memory difficulties, headaches, hearing problems, and decreased hand-eye coordination, despite not always resulting in clinically diagnosable concussions.

Military occupations and heavy weapon systems that may expose Service Members to low-level blasts include armor, artillery, gunnery, shoulder-mounted weapons, breaching charges, explosive ordnance disposal, military instructor

training, .50 caliber weapons, and indirect-fire weapons.

Additionally, the initiative places a specific emphasis on blast overpressure, a sudden pressure wave resulting from explosions, occurring both in combat and training scenarios. The DOD initiated 26 health and performance studies, known as Blast Overpressure Studies, to identify, monitor, and document blast overpressure events, providing safety measures and mitigation actions. The study evaluated the impact of 15 tier-one weapons on brain health and cognitive function.

Kathy Lee, Director of Warfighter Brain Health Policy, highlights the ongoing importance of raising awareness about blast overpressure symptoms, education, and treatment options. The

DOD is on track to submit a report to Congress based on the findings of the Blast Overpressure Studies, with plans for a case analysis in 2024 to evaluate a standardized program for monitoring blast overpressure.

The DOD is committed to a thorough approach to warfighter brain health including monitoring, injury prevention measures, and innovative treatments. Dr. Lester Martinez-Lopez, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, says promoting brain health and countering traumatic brain injuries is the Department's priority.

The Warfighter Brain Health Initiative is a collaborative effort between operational and medical communities, addressing brain health threats beyond conventional focus

areas like blast overpressure. Dr. Christopher Romig, associated with the Stella Center, emphasizes the link between low-level blast exposure and mental health issues in Veterans, particularly among Special Operators like Navy SEALs and Green Berets.

The Defense Health Agency's Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence offers resources for both providers and patients, including fact sheets on low-level blast exposure, as well as information on TBI prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. The DOD and Veterans Affairs are committed to understanding the long-term and late effects of low-level blast exposure on the brain, with a focus on the well-being of Service Members and Veterans through ongoing research and strategies.

VA'S ANNUAL REPORT REVEALS ALARMING RISE IN VETERAN SUICIDES IN 2021

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The VA recently released its National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, providing an analysis of Veteran suicides in 2021, the latest year for which data is available.

The report revealed a concerning increase, with 6,392 Veterans dying by suicide in 2021, a rise of 114 compared to the previous year. Non-Veteran suicides also saw an increase, reaching 40,020 deaths in 2021, a surge of 2,000 from 2020.

The report emphasized the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Veterans, citing factors such as financial strain, housing instability, elevated anxiety and depression levels, and barriers to healthcare as contributors to the heightened risk of suicide. Additionally, a surge in availability of firearms in 2021 was identified as a significant factor

associated with increased suicide risk. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Veteran suicides had witnessed a promising decrease for two consecutive years, declining from 6,718 in 2018 to 6,278 in 2020.

Addressing Veteran suicide is a top clinical priority for the VA and aligns with President Biden's Unity Agenda. Since 2021, the VA has implemented various measures to support Veterans in crisis, including providing no-cost healthcare to those in suicidal crisis, launching the 988 helpline to expedite connections with responders, collaborating with community-based suicide prevention organizations, expanding firearm suicide prevention efforts, and promoting awareness through a national campaign. These initiatives have yielded positive outcomes, including over 33,000 Veterans receiving free emergency healthcare, a 12.1% increase in the use

of the Veterans Crisis Line, and more than 3.5 million visits to VA's support website.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough emphasized the critical importance of preventing Veteran suicide, stating that even one suicide is one too many. Lawmakers, including House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mike Bost, expressed concern over the troubling data and emphasized the ongoing need to combat

veteran suicides. Senator Tim Kaine introduced the "Not Just a Number Act," a bipartisan legislation directing the VA to assess the relationship between VA benefits and suicide outcomes to identify effective programs and expand their access.

In response to the report, The American Legion's Chief Marketing Officer, Dean Kessel, expressed disappointment in the current statistics. He emphasized the importance of destigmatizing the process of seeking help for Veterans.

The American Legion, through its "Be the One" program, seeks to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health treatment and encourage proactive intervention when a Veteran's life is at risk.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, the Veterans Crisis Line is available 24/7 at 988 (Press 1) or online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.



NEW PROGRAM ADDRESSES HOUSING CHALLENGES FOR AGING HOMELESS VETERANS IN CALIFORNIA

HOMELESS VETERANS
page 1

Veterans who once faced struggles with addiction, poverty, or mental health issues credit the stability provided by peer mentorship and coordinated care for helping them navigate the challenges of aging, such as increased risk of heart disease, diabetes or

lost vision. The success of this pilot could significantly influence the approach of homeless service providers toward housing older individuals: critical, considering that nearly 30% of unhoused individuals identified in the 2023 Point-in-Time count were 55 or older.

Despite a 7.4% increase in Veteran homelessness last year, California has seen a 17.8% reduction over the past decade. Supportive Services for Veteran Families and HUD-VA Supportive Housing played a role by placing 46,500 Veterans in permanent housing in 2023.

While retention rates in the first year of permanent supportive housing are

generally high, as many as 25% of Veterans may lose their homes again, particularly those with complex health needs. The VSSR program, administered by CalVet, has awarded \$20 million in grants to four organizations, including Swords to Plowshares and U.S. Vets, to improve existing housing sites with mental health specialists, occupational therapists, and additional support staff.

California, home to the largest number of Homeless Veterans, 11,400 people, faces a situation where almost a third of the nation's homeless Veteran population resides. Aging Veterans, often dealing with post-traumatic stress and chronic pain, require

specialized care to address a range of health issues. With the VSSR program, the state hopes to provide intensive support, including transportation specialists and geriatric social workers, to enhance the well-being of aging Veterans.

The concept of permanent supportive housing with extra support is not entirely new, exemplified by the Colma Veterans Village near San Francisco. The 65-unit village, a collaboration between HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing and VA's Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care, offers on-site nursing, art therapy, social work, employment programs, and financial assistance.

U.S. Vets and Swords to Plowshares plan to enroll 100 and 125 Veterans, respectively. However, the voluntary nature of the pilot may result in a gradual trust-building process before the most vulnerable Veterans fully engage with the program.

The VSSR program is a significant step in addressing the challenges faced by aging Veterans experiencing homelessness, ensuring they can age in place with dignity and improved well-being. As the pilot progresses, its success may pave the way for broader changes in homeless services nationwide.



Homeless Veterans can be found residing on Skid Row, an area in Downtown Los Angeles (Photo: Airman Magazine)

SURGE IN NATIONWIDE HOMELESSNESS PROMPTS HUD AND VA ACTION, WITH FOCUS ON ALARMING RISE IN VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Recent data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, revealed a surge in homelessness among Veterans and throughout the nation, prompting urgent responses from HUD and VA.

HUD reported a 12% surge in the total number of homeless Americans, reaching over 650,000, from January 2022 to January 2023—a record increase. Among the total count of 650,000 individuals experiencing homelessness, approximately 35,570 were identified as Veterans lacking permanent housing, indicating a 7.4%

surge compared to 2022. Of this Veteran population, an estimated 15,500 are classified by the VA and HUD as “unsheltered,” residing in cars, parks, abandoned structures, and on the streets — an uptick of 14.3% from the previous year.

Various factors contributed to the surge in Veteran homelessness, including escalating rents nationwide, the resumption of eviction proceedings paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a shortage of affordable housing.

According to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, the increase in Homeless Veterans reflects a broader crisis in

housing affordability, signaling the need for urgent intervention.

“Homelessness is solvable,” declared HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge in a statement, emphasizing the need for immediate support and proven strategies to reverse the unsettling upward trend.

The unexpected rise in Veteran homelessness has taken the VA by surprise, as the department had reported in November that its programs had surpassed the goal of housing 38,000 homeless Veterans in 2023. Despite this achievement, it became apparent that the demand for homeless assistance resources exceeded the existing capacity.

To combat this growing challenge, VA is seeking funding approval from Congress to enhance spending on Supportive Services for Veteran Families, or SSVF, Grants. These funds would be allocated to organizations across the nation dedicated to assisting Veterans and their families at risk of losing their homes or aiding them in securing more suitable housing options.

In addition to the increased funding for SSVF Grants, the VA plans to allocate over \$26 million to organizations providing legal representation for Veterans facing eviction and defending them in criminal cases related to homelessness.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough expressed the importance of these proposed grants, describing them as critical components in the agency’s overarching efforts to provide expanded housing and services to homeless and at-risk Veterans.

As the nation grapples with the housing affordability crisis, the proposed funding increase comes at a crucial time, seeking to address the immediate needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness while also preventing future instances through targeted and proven strategies. VA Secretary McDonough affirms their dedication to working tirelessly until Veteran homelessness is eradicated.



U.S. Marines dispose of trash in a burn pit, Afghanistan 2012 (Photo: Cpl Alfred V. Lopez)

VETERANS AND SUPPORTERS ADVOCATE FOR THE ADDITION OF BLOOD CANCERS TO SERVICE-CONNECTED CONDITIONS UNDER THE PACT ACT

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Veterans and supporters are pushing for the addition of certain blood cancers to the list of service-connected conditions under the PACT Act, a move that could grant expedited healthcare and benefits to Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veterans.

The VA is conducting a scientific review to determine if acute leukemias, chronic leukemias, and multiple myeloma should be covered by the PACT Act, which expanded benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxins during their military

service.

The PACT Act, enacted in 2022, has facilitated over \$1.6 billion in benefits to Veterans and survivors, with over 700,000 benefit applications.

While multiple myeloma is already included if it originates in the head or neck, advocates argue that leukemias, similar to lymphoma, should also be covered. Advocates argue for the inclusion of these blood cancers, citing instances of affected Veterans, with concerns heightened by the HunterSeven Foundation reporting 145 leukemia, myeloma, or sarcoma-related deaths among 1,239

represented Veterans.

The Stronghold Freedom Foundation revealed three multiple myeloma deaths among its 411 Veteran members, with an average diagnosis age of 32 and death at 35, highlighting the youth of those affected.

The VA's internal process for determining presumptive conditions seeks to alleviate Veterans from proving service-related illnesses. The recent addition of respiratory conditions to the presumptive list raised awareness on the impact of burn pits and pollutants.

Advocates argue that proposed additions to

the PACT Act don't go far enough, stressing the broader impact on Veterans exposed to chemicals or jet fuel beyond listed geographic locations. If approved, eligible Veterans would include those serving in specific regions since the Gulf War or Post-9/11.

Retired Air Force Col. Vincent Alcazar suggests expanding the scope beyond Southwest Asia, echoing concerns from the Wounded Warrior Project, which emphasizes the prevalence of neurological issues, high blood pressure, and multi-symptom illnesses among Post-9/11 Veterans. The ongoing VA review,

prompted by Secretary Denis McDonough, seeks to establish connections between blood cancers and military service.

McDonough encourages Veterans with leukemia or multiple myeloma not to wait for the review's conclusion to apply for benefits, emphasizing the commitment to understanding the connection between these conditions and Veterans' service.

The ongoing effort reflects the administration's dedication to addressing toxic exposure issues and recognizing the long-term health effects of military service.



**Veterans
Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT

JANUARY 2024

By Seth Reeb and Dana Nichol
Reeb Government Relations

The California Legislature has reconvened, marking a period of vigorous legislative activity. This report highlights key events and updates relevant to veterans' affairs in Sacramento.

NEWLY APPOINTED CAL VET SECRETARY:

Lindsey Sin was appointed by Governor Newsom as Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). She was confirmed by the Legislature on January 16, 2024.

Prior to her appointment as Secretary of CalVet she served as the Deputy Secretary for Women Veterans Affairs, focusing on addressing the unique needs of women veterans. Additionally, she held the position of Deputy Secretary of Communications.

These roles underline her dedication and extensive experience in serving veterans and their communities through diverse responsibilities within the department.

She enlisted in the U.S. Navy after high school and served from 1997 to 2005, achieving the rank of Petty Officer First Class with Naval Aviation and Naval Aircrew

designations. During her service, she completed two flight tours in Rota, Spain, contributing to Operations Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

PROPOSITION 1

Prop 1, which would issue \$6.380 billion in bonds, set for the March 2024 ballot, is a critical measure impacting veterans. It aims to funnel more funds into housing and treatment for homeless residents, with a significant focus on those struggling with mental illness, a group that includes many veterans.

Prop 1 is expected to bring new resources to California's most vulnerable veterans without redirecting funds from existing programs, ensuring an additive impact on the fight against veterans' homelessness. California veterans will be entitled to \$1.05 billion of the \$6.380 billion for permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans who have mental health or substance abuse disorders.

BUDGET CHANGE PROPOSALS

Currently CalVet has submitted four Budget Change Proposals that request funds from the budget for:

- **California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education**

Funding increase
CalVet requests \$265,000 Federal Trust Fund beginning in 2024-25 to address the increased workload within the California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education/Title 38 program.

- **CalVet Electronic Health Record Project**
CalVet requests \$902,000 General Fund, \$618,000 for the final year of implementation and \$284,000 for 11 months of maintenance and operating (M&O) costs in 2024-25 and \$415,000 General Fund beginning in 2025-26 for full year M&O costs for its new long-term care electronic health record system in the Veterans Homes of California and Headquarters.

- **Strategic Realignment for the Barstow Veterans Home**
CalVet requests a reduction of 30 budgeted Domiciliary (Dom) beds, 2 positions, and \$265,000 General Fund beginning in 2024-25 as part of the census milestone reductions at the Veterans Home of California-Barstow as outlined in the 2021-22 Strategic Realignment of the Barstow Home.

- **Yountville Skilled Nursing Facility Support**
CalVet requests \$5,389,000 General Fund and 40.2 positions in 2024-25, and \$12,129,000 General Fund and 108 positions annually thereafter, for staffing of a new Skilled Nursing Facility at the Veterans Home of California – Yountville.

A Budget Change Proposal (BCP) is a formal request

to change how money is allocated in the California state budget. The process involves multiple steps, including submission, review by the Governor's office, legislative review, negotiation, approval, and implementation.

Veterans should be aware of this process and engage with their representatives to advocate for funding and programs that benefit them.

THE LATEST LEGISLATIVE UPDATES FROM THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY AND SENATE:

These bills and resolutions cover a wide range of topics related to veterans, mental health, taxation, education, and more.

To view all legislation text, amendments, analyses, votes, and status from 2000 to the present: <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billSearchClient.xhtml>

AB 46 (Ramos D):
This bill, if enacted, would exclude retirement pay received by a taxpayer from the federal government for service in the uniformed services from gross income for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2024, and before January 1, 2034. It would also exclude annuity payments from the United States Department of Defense Survivor Benefit Plan for qualified taxpayers during the same period.

AB 1882 (Villapudua D):
This bill modifies the definition of "disabled veteran" for special license plates in the Vehicle Code to include veterans who cannot walk without the use of an assistant device or have other specified conditions.

AB 1899 (Cervantes D):
This bill makes it a misdemeanor to charge or

receive an unreasonable fee for preparing, aiding, or advising veterans in securing public social services, including veterans pension benefits. It also makes certain advertising related to veterans benefits a misdemeanor.

ACR 126 (Patterson, Joe R):
This resolution designates a portion of State Route 80 in the County of Placer as the Sergeant Nicole Gee, United States Marine Corps Memorial Highway.

SB 726 (Archuleta D):
This bill addresses property taxation and provides exemptions for disabled veteran homeowners.

SB 871 (Archuleta D):
This bill makes changes related to homeowners' exemptions, veterans' exemptions, and disabled veterans' exemptions in property taxation.

SB 916 (Seyarto R):
This bill prohibits public postsecondary education institutions from charging tuition or fees for certain extended education courses for veterans who meet specific requirements.

SB 943 (Ochoa Bogh R):
This bill addresses veterans' preference in civil service positions by allowing a waiver of the bachelor's degree requirement for certain veterans.

SCA 6 (Archuleta D):
This constitutional amendment would allow a dwelling that receives veterans' exemptions to also receive homeowners' exemptions and authorizes the Legislature to exempt property eligible for veterans' exemptions.

SCR 98 (Umberg D):
This resolution proclaims March 2024 as Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month.



Capitol Hill (Photo: Wally Gobetz)

CONGRESSIONAL HEARING EXPLORES PSYCHEDELIC TREATMENTS FOR VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

In November, lawmakers and VA officials discussed the potential of psychedelic drugs in treating mental health conditions and preventing Veteran suicide. A House Veterans Affairs panel held a hearing, one of the first in Congress on psychedelics since 1966, focusing on treatments using MDMA, commonly known as molly or ecstasy, and psilocybin, better known as magic mushrooms.

In July, the House passed a resolution urging the VA to investigate the possibility of utilizing federal funds for MDMA research. However, concerns were raised about the drugs' illegal status under federal law and potential dangers if used recreationally. Representatives emphasized the

need for scientific exploration of the medicinal properties of psychedelics in a clinical setting with assisted therapy.

Two Veterans testified at the hearing, expressing the positive impact of MDMA-assisted therapy on their lives. While the treatment showed success, it is not without risks, as participants experienced "treatment-emergent adverse events," including symptoms like heart palpitations and anxiety.

Some lawmakers raised concerns about potential addiction and the comparison between marijuana and MDMA therapy. However, advocates argued that the positive impact on mental health, as seen in the research, justifies exploring these treatments further.

The VA is actively exploring emerging treatments, with plans to fund its own studies on psychedelic research. Dr. Carolyn Clancy, the VA's assistant under secretary, highlighted the importance of safety in research and treatments, especially considering the unique challenges faced by Veterans with mental and physical health issues.

The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, has been researching the safety and effectiveness of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD since 2004. A recent clinical trial showed significant improvement in PTSD symptoms, with 87% of patients experiencing positive outcomes four months after treatment. The FDA designated this treatment as a "breakthrough

therapy" in 2017, allowing for additional research.

MAPS plans to seek FDA approval for its therapy as early as next year, but the process may take time, considering the controlled substance and the entire protocol, including therapy, requires approval.

Despite promising research, the VA faces challenges in conducting studies due to regulatory restrictions from the FDA and DEA. The VA is currently involved in several studies related to psychedelics, with a focus on MDMA and synthetic psilocybin, but none are funded by the VA.

The congressional hearing brought attention to the pressing need within the Veteran community for effective treatments for PTSD and the reduction

of suicide rates. While evidence suggests the potential benefits of psychedelic drugs, the regulatory landscape and safety concerns highlight the need for further research and a careful approach to implementing these treatments within the VA system.



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California
email updates:
bit.ly/calegion-emails

Anyone Can Be the One

Please familiarize yourself with both sides of the card

Step 1: Just Ask – Clearly and Directly
 Because I want the best for you, in the past month have you:

- 1 Wished you were dead or wished you could go to sleep and not wake up?
- 2 Had any thoughts about killing yourself?
 If YES, ask questions 3-6 below
 If NO, ask question 6 below
- 3 Thought about how you might kill yourself?
- 4 Had any intention of acting on those thoughts of killing yourself (As opposed to having the thoughts but would not act?)
- 5 Started to work out or have worked out the details on how to kill yourself? Do you intend to carry out the plan?
- 6 In the PAST 3 MONTHS have you done anything, started to do anything, or prepared to do anything to end your life?

Step 2: Be There – Listen with Empathy
 Listen, be present, be judgement free, and avoid minimizing language, pushiness, or harsh tones

Step 3: Make Connections Based on Responses
 Based on the answers to Step 1 provide the following:
 If YES to only question 1 and/or 2: Provide the Veterans Crisis Line to the Person to call for support: **Veterans Crisis Line Dial 988 then press 1 or text 838255 24/7 or go online to www.veteranscrisisline.net**
 If YES to question 3, 4, and/or 5: Call the veterans Crisis Line and have the individual speak to a professional OR call 911 if you feel immediate Mental Health Services are needed
Never transport someone yourself having mental crisis issues

American Legion Department of California | caLegion.org

ANYONE CAN BE THE ONE

By Veterans Mental Health Committee

The Veterans Mental Health Committee has provided this downloadable card to be used for suicide prevention.

The card details three steps that can be used to help understand the situation, determine the scope of the crisis, and decide the best course of action.

This card can be downloaded, printed, cut out,

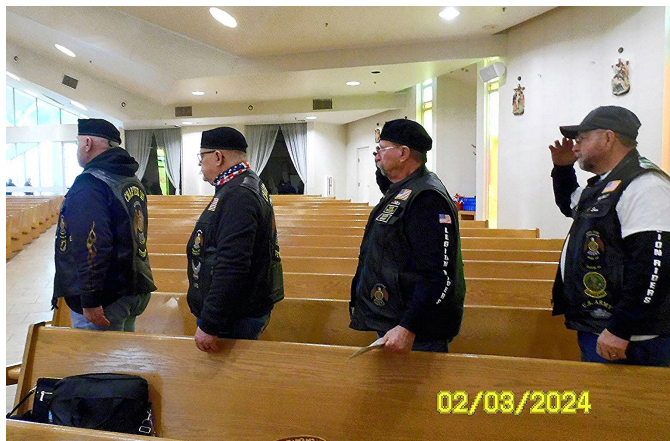
and then kept with you.

Remember, anyone can Be the One!

Visit caLegion.org/anyone-can-be-the-one/ to download today.

FOUR CHAPLAINS DAY INTER-FAITH SERVICE

By Auggie Galaviz
 Department Historian



NATIONAL VETERANS SUMMER SPORTS CLINIC 2024 REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

By Rikki Almanza
 Staff Writer

The application window for the VA's National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic is officially open and will continue through March 1. The clinic, scheduled for August 25-30 in the city of San Diego, offers an opportunity for Veterans to participate in adaptive sports.

Eligible Veterans can apply to attend the 2024 Summer Sports Clinic by visiting the website at www.department.va.gov/veteran-sports/national-veterans-summer-sports-clinic/

Accepted Veterans will be eligible to receive a complimentary round-trip flight to attend this event, courtesy of the Fisher House Foundation Hero Miles.

ABOUT NVSSC

In its 17th year, The National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic is a hands-on sporting event for Veterans with disabilities, including amputations, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, or TBI, and more. Tailored activities like sailing, surfing, adaptive fitness, kayaking, cycling, yoga, and meditation cater to participants.

Beyond sports, the clinic

fosters a support network and camaraderie, positively impacting the physical and mental well-being of attendees.

ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION

Participation is open to Veterans actively engaged in VA healthcare, including physical rehabilitation, mental health, blind rehabilitation, spinal cord injury, and more. Eligible disabilities include amputations, PTSD, TBI, poly trauma, visual impairments, multiple sclerosis, cerebrovascular or spinal cord injuries.

SPONSORS AND SUPPORT

Wounded Warrior Project proudly serves as the presenting sponsor, working alongside the VA to support Veterans in their fitness and rehabilitation journey through sports.

The Veterans Canteen Service is a founding sponsor for the event, providing merchandise and services to Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare.

Veterans interested in learning more about National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic 2024, visit www.summersportsclinic.va.gov



(photo: VA.gov)



(Photo: mark6mauno)

RAND RESEARCH FINDS, DESPITE POSITIVE STEREOTYPES OF VETERANS, MOST AMERICANS DISCOURAGE MILITARY ENLISTMENT

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

Research by RAND found that despite Americans holding overwhelmingly positive stereotypes about Veterans, most would discourage a young person close to them from enlisting in the U.S. Military.

The study revealed that Americans hold overwhelmingly positive opinions of Veterans, with endorsement rates ranging from 30% to 80% for positive opinions and only 3% to 20% for negative opinions. Yet despite this view, a significant majority, 54.4%, would discourage a young person close to them from enlisting in the military.

The research highlighted variations in perceptions based on respondents' demographics, such as age, political affiliation, military service history, family members' service, and race or ethnicity. Interestingly, while a majority would discourage enlistment, 61.2% would encourage a young

person to join the military through Reserve Officers' Training Corps, ROTC, or a service academy.

Having a higher tendency to embrace negative stereotypes about Veterans correlates with a reduced likelihood of supporting a young person's decision to join the military and an increased likelihood of perceiving widespread negative views toward the military. Democrats show a lower inclination than Republicans to endorse military enlistment but exhibit similar attitudes toward encouraging participation through ROTC or a service academy.

Examining the decline in the number of adults with military service experience, the study aimed to understand how the public thinks about Veterans and military service. The percentage of the population with military service experience dropped from 10% to 7% over 12 years. This decline is attributed to the mortality among large cohorts of Veterans from

previous conflicts.

Individuals with military service experience are more prone to believing that the general public holds a negative perception of the military compared to those without military backgrounds.

RAND researchers conducted an analysis of the 2022 American Life Panel surveys consisting of over 6,000 members aged 18 and older. The results indicated that military service remains a predominantly male experience, with men more likely to report having served and having friends who served.

The survey explored respondents' perceptions of Veterans, revealing that positive stereotypes were more commonly endorsed, such as being disciplined, responsible, loyal, and self-reliant. Notably, demographic differences influenced stereotype endorsements, with older individuals, white respondents, Veterans or their family members, and

Republicans endorsing positive stereotypes more frequently.

The study also addressed public opinions on the treatment of Veterans, with a majority believing the country could do more for Veterans. When asked to choose program areas needing improvement, over half identified mental health care services for Veterans as a priority.

Despite positive perceptions, a paradoxical finding emerged regarding concerns about Veterans' potential for self-harm. While approximately two-thirds viewed Veterans as more reliable and hardworking, over 40% believed a Veteran could engage in self-harm. The research looked at Americans' willingness to support programs for Veterans, showing that mental health care services received the highest endorsement, followed by housing support, physical health care, and employment-related help.

The study concludes by emphasizing the complex relationship between public opinion and policy, asserting that public views on Veterans and the military could shape policy decisions in the future. Understanding these perceptions are significant, especially in the context of potential policy changes and advocacy for Veterans. Overall, the findings suggested that while concerns about negative stereotypes exist, the public largely holds positive perceptions of Veterans and acknowledges the need for government support in addressing Veterans' challenges.

Further research is needed to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind Americans discouraging military enlistment, understanding the factors contributing to lower enlistment rates, and exploring the perceptions of younger individuals. have left a mark on the sport.



On Monday, August 14, at Veterans Field in Keeter Stadium, Shelby, N.C., Lincoln, NE, Post 3 team competed in Game 13 of The 2023 American Legion World Series. (Photo: Chet Strange, The American Legion)

2024 AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL SEASON REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

By **Rikki Almanza**
Staff Writer

The 2024 American Legion Baseball season is now accepting registrations on baseball.legion.org.

To simplify things, The American Legion has introduced a single sign-on system, allowing users to use one username and password for Legion.org, baseball.legion.org, and other national websites.

For those planning to start a new team or become a team administrator, register a user email account. Returning team administrators don't have to re-register. Teams registering after May 15 might face a department late fee until the final deadline on June

1. Keep in mind that individual American Legion departments may have earlier registration deadlines, so it's wise to check with your department chairman for specific state fees and deadlines.

Register for 2024 American Legion Baseball season at baseball.legion.org

American Legion Baseball is a well-known amateur athletic league with an alumni base that includes over half of current Major League Baseball players. With about 3,500 teams participating each year, there's room for new players and coaches to get involved. The league also relies on many umpires and volunteers.

Legionnaires interested in playing should reach out to their local Legion post. Contact details can be found on legion.org/baseball. Use the "Find a Post" feature by entering the city, state, and ZIP code. Players who didn't make a team or were cut during tryouts can play for the post closest to their residence or keep trying with the next-closest posts until they find the right fit.

Coaches wanting to establish a team should contact the department baseball chairman in their state. Find a list of chairmen at legion.org/baseball/contacts. The department will send a new team packet, including state and national rules, insurance details, and registration

forms. Start the team registration process at baseball.legion.org.

Local umpire associations usually supply umpires to departments. Department chairmen can nominate umpires for the national tournament, and umpires can also nominate each other.

Legion Baseball appreciates volunteers in various roles, from statisticians to game support like providing Gatorade. For more details on playing, coaching, umpiring, or volunteering, Legionnaires should reach out to their local Legion post.

As part of NEC Resolution No. 17 from October 2023 and the educational

requirements of Public Law 115-126, the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017, all adult participants (coaches, managers, volunteers, and players aged 18 or older) must complete the Abuse Awareness course through either Protect Youth Sports or USA Baseball. A background check is also required. You can download The American Legion Baseball Risk Management Guidebook at legion.org/publications/212564/risk-management-guide-baseball for more information.

For additional resources, visit The American Legion Baseball website at legion.org/baseball

BACKBONE One Giveaway

Take our survey for a chance to win this mobile gaming device

CaLegion.org/gaming



M1 Garand Rifle

POMONA AMERICAN LEGION DEVASTATED BY THEFT OF WWII-ERA RIFLES, PROMPTING URGENT CALLS FOR ENHANCED SECURITY

By Rikki Almanza
Staff Writer

Pomona's American Legion Post 30 has fallen victim to a relentless wave of burglaries, leaving the historic building in shambles and its irreplaceable war memorabilia destroyed.

The most recent incident occurred on December 30, when nine WWII-era rifles, used for ceremonies like the 21-gun salute, were stolen. The theft adds to the extensive damage inflicted during a series of break-ins that have plagued the post since its closure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Javier Hinostroza, the Commander of the American Legion Post, expressed the severity of the situation, highlighting the disappearance of

ceremonial M1 Garands. Loaded with blanks, these rifles pose a safety concern as they can be modified to accommodate live ammunition. The theft was captured on security cameras, revealing at least one intruder jumping over a bar inside the building.

The post has faced escalating challenges since closing its doors due to the pandemic. Transients, addicts, and thieves have taken over the property, leaving behind needles, condoms, and feces. The burglaries began with minor incidents, but as the post remained closed, criminals disabled alarms, ripped doors off hinges, and vandalized rooms that had hosted Veterans for over a century.

Despite the installation of numerous security

cameras, Veterans say that police response times are slow, allowing criminals to wreak havoc on the historic building. Bob Radcliff, a Vietnam Veteran, described the loss of not only the physical items but also the historical value associated with the post. The destruction includes historical Vietnam photos displayed on a wall, which were torn down and trampled on.

This incident reflects a broader trend affecting American Legion Posts. "This is certainly not the first time an American Legion Post has lost their Honor/Color Guard weapons," U.S. Army Veteran Eric Measles, who served in Korea and is a Life Member of Ronald Reagan-Palisades Post 283, pointed out.

In the year 2020, thieves targeted American Legion Post 289 in Riverside, making off with approximately \$30,000 worth of equipment. Similar incidents have been reported across the nation, including at American Legion Post 18, where a chainsaw, Glock pistol, seven military rifles, and two custom doors, valued at a thousand dollars each, were stolen.

"It is important that all Posts that have these weapons should have them properly recorded and secured," stated Measles, emphasizing the need for enhanced security measures. "The local authorities should be notified immediately upon discovery of any loss."

Measles, with over 30 years as a Legionnaire, urges

Legion Posts to conduct complete inventory checks regularly to safeguard valuable and collectible weapons.

With the Pomona Legion Post 30 now planning to sell the building due to financial constraints, the broader call for increased vigilance and security measures echoes across American Legion Posts. Despite the challenges, American Legion Post 30 remains determined to relocate within the city, continuing its mission of serving Veterans.

Those willing to assist American Legion Post 30 can contact Javier.Hino@americanlegionpomona30.org for more information.

NEW LAWS IN 2024 IMPACTING CALIFORNIA VETERANS

NEW LAWS page 1

Another adjustment pertains to the College Fee Waiver for Veterans Dependents benefit, where changes in eligibility criteria, including adjusted gross income and the state poverty threshold, will better support the

educational pursuits of Veterans' children.

Furthermore, there's a concerted effort to improve the dissemination of information about policies, resources, and services for student Veterans, as well as members of the California State Guard and the California National Guard, along with their dependents.

Recognizing the need for complete data, the California Department of Public Health will now compile

information on drug overdoses involving Veterans, providing insights to both the Legislature and the California Department of Veterans Affairs annually. Additionally, collaboration between CalVet and the state Department of Housing and Community Development will streamline the tenant referral process for Veterans' housing, ensuring that deserving Veterans have access to affordable homes.

In a bid to foster transparency, new laws

require venture capital firms in California to disclose demographic information about their founding teams, including representation from Veterans, Disabled Veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and diverse racial and gender identities.

Moreover, a dedicated account managed by CalVet will track private-sector donations earmarked for the maintenance and repairs of existing memorials in

Sacramento's Capitol Park, emphasizing the importance of preserving historical tributes. Other legislations open avenues for groups to construct monuments honoring Veterans of specific wars, including those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and recognizing the challenges faced by blind Veterans.

For information, readers can visit gov.ca.gov/2023/12/29/new-laws-going-into-effect-on-january-1st/

I am revolutionary
I am not invisible
 I am resourceful
 I am resilient

I am a veteran

Let your voice be heard.
 Take the survey.

CALVET
 Women Veterans

CALVET SURVEY INVITES PARTICIPATION FROM CALIFORNIA WOMEN VETERANS TO HELP SHAPE SUPPORT SERVICES

By **Rikki Almanza**
 Staff Writer

CalVet is calling on California Women Veterans to participate in a survey designed to capture their perspectives and experiences. The survey offers an opportunity for Women Veterans across the state to have their voice heard and contribute to the improvement of support and services.

The survey, estimated to take 20–30 minutes to complete, ensures flexibility for participants to take breaks as needed and return to it later. CalVet emphasizes the confidentiality of responses, assuring participants that all answers will remain anonymous, safeguarding their identities and specific

answers from publication.

Covering diverse topics such as basic demographic information, specific service experiences, awareness of state-based benefits and services, housing, healthcare, childcare, caregiver respite, and employment services, the survey provides an overview of the challenges and requirements of Women Veterans. Additionally, the survey includes a section addressing more sensitive issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, service-related disabilities, military sexual trauma, mental health issues, and behavioral health challenges. CalVet acknowledges the sensitivity of these topics, offering participants the option to skip questions they may find

uncomfortable.

If you are interested in taking the survey, visit qrco.de/CAWomenVetsSurvey.

The primary objectives of the survey are to establish connections between Women Veterans and those dedicated to serving their needs, while also collecting data to create a more supportive and inclusive environment. CalVet recognizes the invaluable role that Women Veterans play in shaping the direction of support services, and their active involvement is important to that success.

By taking part in the survey, Women Veterans can not only share their experiences with CalVet,

but with legislators and service providers. This engagement also opens avenues for potential connections with earned state and federal benefits and resources, which will help to positively shape the Veteran community.

Survey results are anticipated to directly impact the enhancement of services and programs offered to Women Veterans. The analysis and summary of survey results, scheduled for delivery in the summer of 2024, will be shared with California legislators, veteran service providers, and relevant governmental organizations.

Although CalVet has conducted surveys of Women Veterans in the past, the urgency for current

information prompts this latest survey, with the most recent one dating back to 2013. To ensure up-to-date insights into the experiences of California's Women Veterans, active participation in this survey is imperative. Therefore, CalVet is encouraging California Women Veterans to seize this opportunity to contribute to the continuous improvement of support and services tailored to their needs.

For more information about the survey, Women Veterans can visit CalVet's webpage about the California Women Veterans Survey at calvet.ca.gov/CAWomenVetsSurvey. Inquiries can also be directed to CalVet at womenveterans.survey@calvet.ca.gov.