



COMMISSION FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PRESENTATION

May 22, 2025

Who we are

The California Association of Veteran Service Agencies (CAVSA) is a consortium of six nonprofit organizations dedicated to serving California's veterans and their families.

Member agencies include Nation's Finest, Swords to Plowshares, U.S.VETS, Veterans Village of San Diego, New Directions, California Veterans Assistance Foundation — each with deep roots in local communities across the state.



Who we serve

Veterans across California, with a focus on those facing behavioral health challenges, housing insecurity, substance use disorders, and complex barriers to reintegration.

Populations served include justice-involved veterans, women veterans, veterans of color, those in rural areas, and veterans experiencing homelessness.

Vets helping vets.



Veterans and Mental Health Needs

- Veterans have a higher rate of poor mental health compared to nonveterans, and women veterans have a poorer mental health compared to their male counterparts.
- Cultural and bureaucratic bars prevent veterans from accessing VA healthcare and benefits.
- Not all veterans are eligible for VA mental health services.
- Stigma associated with mental healthcare including fears about the effect on a military advancement are barriers.



Our Work

Comprehensive Support Across the Continuum of Care:

- Mental health counseling, substance use treatment, and peer support
- Transitional and permanent housing linked with supportive services
- Workforce readiness and employment placement
- Holistic case management and benefits navigation

Advocacy

- CAVSA works to elevate veteran needs and insights to local agencies and the state legislature through reports, policy recommendations, and engagement with state agencies.
- Member agencies are embedded in local communities with firsthand experience



Why Community-Based Veteran Services Agencies are Vital Partners in Care

CAVSA members provide low-barrier, culturally competent care that meets veterans where they are, especially those in crisis or transition.

- Many veterans are not eligible for or do not engage with VA services—due to discharge status, geographic barriers, or mistrust.
- Local veteran service agencies offer wraparound services the VA often cannot provide - like housing, legal support, reentry navigation, and family inclusive programming.
- Our staff includes veterans and peer specialists who understand the lived experience and foster trust and sustained engagement.
- We complement and collaborate with VA providers but also fill critical service gaps.



Year 1 highlights

- Lobby Day and Assembly Resolution presentation
- Annual Report release and veteran with lived experience roundtable
- Combat to Community Training
- Suicide Prevention and Awareness Virtual Summit
- Stand Downs
- Held numerous listening sessions
- Development of Advocacy Toolkit
- Participation in Assembly Military and Veteran Affairs Committee Informational hearing



Lobby Day and Assembly Resolution presentation

June 2024



Combat to Community

Combat to Community® (C2C) is an accredited curriculum developed by Swords to Plowshares that is proven to help providers and advocates:

- define how cultural factors of military service may impact the veteran's transition to their community, education and employment, and their mental and behavioral health;
- incorporate new skills to identify and engage veterans;
- apply new treatment approaches, practices, and procedures; and
- identify veteran-specific resources and referrals.



Suicide Prevention and Awareness

In California, after a high of 640 veteran suicides in 2019, the number per year has remained generally stable with 526 reported in 2020, 559 in 2021-22, and now 570 in 2023.



Stand Downs

Stand Downs are designed to guide homeless veterans, and those at risk of homelessness, to services that rapidly remove barriers caused by medical, legal, mental health, and substance use concerns.

CAVSA Members participate in 4-5 Stand Downs per year.



Annual Report Release and Roundtable

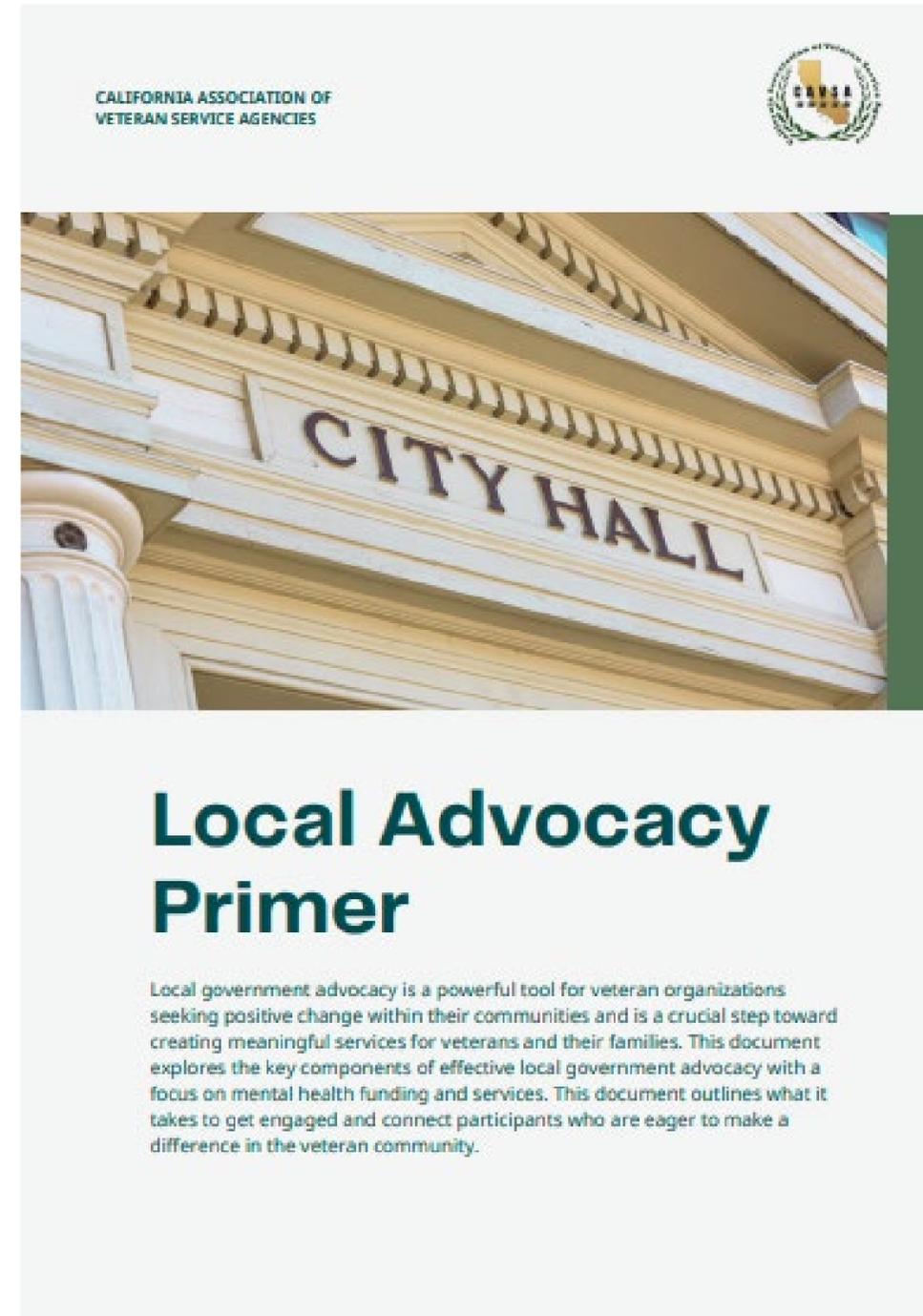
January 2025

CAVSA hosted Legislators, Capitol Staff and Consultants for a roundtable event focused on the findings of the 2024 Annual Report. We also had a panel focused on Veteran mental health, where Veteran panelists with lived experience shared their stories.



Development of Advocacy Toolkit

CAVSA agencies and staff came together to build an advocacy toolkit. The toolkit breaks down different ways to engage in policy making, as well as steps to put ideas into action.



Participation in Assembly Military and Veteran Affairs Committee Informational hearing

March 2025

Topic:
The Changing
Landscape of
Veterans Benefits in
California

