

March 15, 2022

R-16

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and file the Citywide Strategic Plan on Veterans. (Citywide)

DISCUSSION

The City of Long Beach (City) took the first step towards recognizing its rich military history, spanning more than a century, and its vibrant Veterans' community, comprised of nearly 17,000 Veterans, when the City Council signed an Ordinance officially establishing a citywide Veterans Affairs Commission (Commission), on February 9, 2016. The Commission began holding monthly meetings in January 2017, and on November 7, 2017, the City Council directed the City Manager to work with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Commission to develop a Veterans Strategic Plan (Plan).

The Commission engaged in a strategic planning process from September 2018 through March 2020. As part of this process, the Commission carried out extensive research on the challenges and opportunities Veterans face and reviewed and analyzed demographic data on the City's Veteran population. It also conducted interviews with 46 Veterans' community stakeholders, engaging 180 Veterans in five separate community input sessions. Stakeholders included leaders of local Veteran-serving organizations and elected officials. Sessions were held at places where Veterans gather to determine and refine the goals, objectives, and strategies identified in the Plan. The four core goals are as follows:

1. Long Beach recognizes Veterans for their strengths and as valued members of our community, and regularly celebrates and honors them.
2. Veteran-serving organizations and agencies coordinate well to ensure that Veterans successfully transition from military service to civilian life.
3. Veterans, including traditionally underserved Veteran populations such as women, seniors, low-income, LGBTQ, and Veterans with disabilities, readily access the resources and services they need in the areas of housing, education, employment, and mental and physical health and well-being throughout their lifetimes.
4. Veterans who are precariously housed or who are experiencing homelessness have access to affordable housing, and the supportive services they need to remain housed.
5. An Office of Veterans Support is established in the Health and Human Services Department to serve as the infrastructure to carry out the goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in the strategic plan.

The Veterans Affairs Commission is pleased to present the Veterans Strategic Plan, which represents the most comprehensive portrait of the vibrant Long Beach Veterans' community published to date. The Plan serves as a visionary document and does not include any direct funding.

This matter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Taylor M. Anderson on December 15, 2021 and by Budget Analysis Officer Greg Sorensen on January 3, 2022.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

City Council action is requested on March 15, 2022, to receive and file the Strategic Plan on Veterans, which serves as a guiding document to coordinate the City's efforts to serve those who have served our country well into the future. The Plan is intended to be an ongoing effort over the next two to three years with the understanding that the Plan will be regularly reviewed, evaluated, and reported on over the same timeframe.

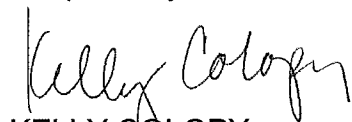
FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommendation. The Strategic Plan on Veterans provides a blueprint for the two to three-year effort to serve veterans who have provided service to the country. The plan is a visionary document with no direct funding to implement the recommended strategies. If the City moves forward with some of the Plan's recommendations, funding will be identified, and cost estimates will be developed as part of the implementation. The Plan was developed using existing staff time currently budgeted in General Fund in the Health and Human Services Department. This recommendation has minimal staffing impact beyond the normal budgeted scope of duties and is consistent with the existing City Council priorities. There is no local job impact associated with this recommendation.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Approve recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,



KELLY COLOPY
DIRECTOR
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

APPROVED:



THOMAS B. MODICA
CITY MANAGER

Veterans Strategic Plan





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Dear City of Long Beach Colleagues and Veterans' Community,

The City of Long Beach has a rich military history spanning more than a century.

The City took the first step towards recognizing its vibrant Veterans' community, which is comprised of **nearly 17,000 Veterans**, when it established the Long Beach Veterans Commission.

Housed in the City's Department of Health and Human Services, the Long Beach Veterans Commission was formed to:

- Honor Veterans' service and highlight the many achievements of those who have dedicated their lives to protecting the country
- Serve as an advisory board to the City Council regarding the well-being of military Veterans in Long Beach
- Provide recommendations on all matters pertaining to the affairs of Veterans residing within the City
- Evaluate and recommend programs, policies, and practices to assist Veterans in multiple capacities
- Act as a central clearing house for information, programs and services relating to Veterans in the Long Beach community



To fulfill its mission and to better understand Veterans' needs, strengths and the opportunities that exist to better serve them, the Long Beach Veterans Commission and the Department of Health and Human Services embarked on an 18-month strategic planning process that took place primarily between August 2018 and March 2020. As Health Department staff were called upon to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the plan was put on hold. Work on the plan resumed in the fall of 2021.

The results of the staff and the Veterans' Commission's efforts represent the most comprehensive report on the vibrant Long Beach Veterans' community presented to date. It is the Commission's intent that this plan serves as a guiding document, a blueprint of sorts, to coordinate the City's efforts to serve those who have served our country.

Kelly Colopy
Director, Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intent of this strategic plan is to inform decision-making and resource coordination with and on behalf of the Long Beach Veterans' community.

What are the major strengths of the Veterans' community in Long Beach? What are their needs? Where do opportunities exist to further support and celebrate Veterans and how can they best be prioritized?

The Long Beach Veterans Commission has examined data gathered directly from the Veterans' community, as well as secondary data sources such as the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate 2015-2019, to determine the goals, objectives, and strategies most likely to uplift and support our local Veterans.

“

As no two service members' experiences are exactly the same, there is no one size fits all approach to connecting Veterans to resources and services both as they transition from military to civilian life and throughout their lifetimes.

”



Major Trends

1. Long Beach Veterans are thriving for the most part with employment and education rates comparable with those of non-Veterans

The proportion of Veterans participating in the labor force is 73.4 percent compared to 76.7 percent of non-Veterans. The proportion of Veterans with college degrees is 31.6 percent, compared to 30.9 percent for non-Veterans. Fewer Veterans than non-Veterans live below the poverty line: 11.6 percent for Veterans compared to 14.5 percent for non-Veterans).

2. Housing in Long Beach is unaffordable for Veterans.

Post-9/11 Veterans under the age of 40 frequently cited the lack of affordable housing as an obstacle to returning or relocating to Long Beach upon their transition from military to civilian life, as well as remaining in Long Beach post-transition. The lack of affordable housing in Long Beach may be causally related to a shrinking Veterans' population. Between 2012 and 2019, the Veteran population declined by 6,500. Over the same timeframe, the number of Veterans over the age of 55 increased.

3. The Veteran population in Long Beach is aging at a faster rate than the non-Veteran population.

Sixty-six percent of Veterans in Long Beach are over the age of 55. Within this group, the percentage of Veterans age 65 and older increased by nearly seven points, from 40.9 to 47.6, between 2012 and 2019. By comparison, the percentage of non-Veterans over age 65 increased by just over a percentage point from 9.4 to 10.8 percent over the same timeframe.



Goals

The Long Beach Veterans Commission identified major areas of opportunity from the data. These areas of opportunity were synthesized into the following goals for this plan and drove the development of the specific objectives and strategies to achieve these goals. An overview of the basic goals, objectives and strategies follows.

Goal 1: Long Beach recognizes Veterans for their strengths, as valued members of our community, and regularly celebrates and honors them.

This will be accomplished through a multimedia Long Beach Veterans Stories Campaign to preserve the history of those who served and by bringing Veterans and non-Veterans together to celebrate Veterans in creative and inclusive ways. These celebrations will take place in City parks and public spaces named for Veterans or containing Veterans-related markers and monuments. The City will also organize high-profile opportunities for Veterans to volunteer for projects that improve and enhance public spaces throughout our City.



Goal 2: Veteran-serving organizations and agencies coordinate well to ensure that Veterans successfully transition from military service to civilian life.

The transition is defined as the two-year period following active duty wherein Veterans return and readjust to their lives, taking into account the impacts of their time in the service on virtually every aspect of their lives. Helping Veteran-serving organizations to coordinate well will be accomplished by convening a summit focused on improving access to transition-related resources and services across the board, particularly for traditionally underserved Veteran subpopulations, including low-income, women, LGBTQ and Veterans with disabilities.

Many agencies serve Veterans, and it is sometimes confusing to find the right local services at the right time. A transition-focused summit will help build the foundation for leveraging an existing referral platform to

connect Veterans to the local resources and services they need. This platform, called Unite Us, is currently used as a tool for connecting callers to the Health Department’s Resource Line to providers of the resources and services they seek. Developing Unite Us for Veterans will enable local providers of resources and services to join, regularly update, refer and track Veteran referrals in real time. Establishing a Veterans resource line backed by the Unite Us platform is a worthwhile and cost-effective endeavor.

In addition, the City will lead and promote events for transitioning Veterans that connect them to networking, education, job-training, and career-building opportunities.



Goal 3: Veterans readily access the resources and services they need in the areas of housing, education, employment, and mental and physical health and well-being post-transition and throughout their lifetimes.

The City should take the lead on convening the organizations that provide resources and services for Veterans at different stages of their lives through a variety of summits. This is separate and distinct from a summit that focuses on the transition.

Both the transition and lifestage-focused summits serve as starting points for conversations focused on identifying key needs, service gaps, and exploring solutions that improve access to resources and services across the board. Such conversations will focus

as well on traditionally underserved Veteran subpopulations, including low-income, women, LGBTQ and Veterans with disabilities.

In addition, the summits foster stronger connections between Veteran-serving organizations and agencies. These connections build the foundation for collaboration and resource coordination. As more organizations join the Unite Us platform, for example, it becomes a more efficient and effective tool for referring Veterans to the right people and the right services.



Goal 4: Veterans who are precariously housed or who are experiencing homeless have access to affordable housing and the supportive services they need to remain housed.

The City will accomplish this by supporting strategies, programs, and policies to reduce barriers to housing Veterans, increase access to affordable housing and prevent homelessness.

Goal 5: An Office of Veterans Support is established in the Health and Human Services Department to serve as the infrastructure to carry out the goals, objectives and strategies outlined in the strategic plan.

- 1. Coordinate City-wide efforts to recognize Veterans through public celebrations that bring Veterans and non-Veterans together and provide opportunities for Veterans to volunteer for a City improvement project.
- 2. Serve as lead convener of local public and private and non-profit and for-profit organizations and agencies that serve Veterans at transition and throughout their lifetimes for the City of Long Beach.
- 3. Establish a referral platform that connects Veterans to the local resources and services they need when they need them.
- 4. Partner with resource and service providers to connect Veterans to local education, networking, job training, and career-building opportunities.
- 5. Serve as the “go-to” for up-to-date information on all local Veterans-related resources, services, programs, policies, public celebrations and demographic data for the City of Long Beach and the Veterans’ community.

- 6. Make or support policy recommendations at the state and federal level in the areas of affordable housing, homelessness, education, employment and mental and physical health and well-being for our local Veterans.



The Veterans Commission and City staff are pleased to present this vision. We look forward to working with the City to fully implement this plan to make Long Beach even more welcoming and whole-heartedly supportive of Veterans.



PORTRAIT OF THE LONG BEACH VETERANS COMMUNITY

The City's vibrant Veterans' community is comprised of nearly 17,000 Veterans and numerous for-profit and non-profit Veteran-serving organizations.

The largest and most well-known Veteran-serving institution in the City serves as "the healthcare provider of choice" for 50,000 Veterans from Long Beach and surrounding cities each year. Located on the east side of the City, it is the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center, the formal name of the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, more commonly known as the VA Long Beach.

On the west side of the City, American Gold Star Manor once housed Gold Star Mothers (mothers of fallen service members) only, but now also houses low-income seniors, including more than 100 Veterans. Century Villages at Cabrillo (CVC) is also located on the west side. CVC is a large residential community that provides transitional and permanent housing and supportive services

for formerly homeless and precariously housed individuals and families. More than 600 Veterans currently call Century Villages at Cabrillo home.

Veterans are active and engaged in service to the community through newer non-profit organizations, such as People of the Earth (POTE) Krew, Music Is The Remedy (Rock for Vets), and the Veterans Independence Day Celebration, long-established non-profits, such as Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles and the Long Beach Veterans Day Committee, and traditional Veterans' support organizations, such as Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America and the American Legion, which have active chapters here.

Need for Recognizing Veterans

Public Perception of Veterans

Public portrayals of Veterans often focus on the negative. A common sentiment among Veterans' community stakeholders is that the media and popular culture portray Veterans as "afflicted" by their service. While it is true that some Veterans experience hardships because of

the impacts of their time in the service on their mental and physical health, it is also true that many Veterans do not experience such hardships. Quipped one interviewee, "*Veterans are not a plague of locusts.*"



How Service Eras Define Recognition

Veterans of different service eras define what it means to honor, recognize, and celebrate Veterans in different ways.

Older generations of Veterans, often referred to as pre-9/11 Veterans, may define celebrations as parades, and commemorations as permanent plaques or plazas wherein bronze statues and military artifacts are installed. Younger, post-9/11 Veterans seek opportunities to serve their communities through the camaraderie of mission-driven activities and friendly competitions with their fellow Veterans.

Said one post-9/11 Veteran who participated in a community input session,

“ *I don't want to be honored with hoopla. I don't need a plaque or a parade. I want a purpose or a project. I want a job to do.* ”

Need for Improving Coordination between Agencies for a Successful Transition

A common belief among Veterans' community stakeholders is that if there were more effective and intentional coordination between the agencies that serve Veterans at the transition, it could smooth the way to greater access to resources and services throughout a Veteran's lifetime.

Said one interviewee, *"Greater coordination between agencies at transition prevents the 'systems failure' that results in harder-to-fix problems down the road,"* such as long-term unemployment and underemployment, drug addiction and homelessness.

The City can play a leading role in bringing Veterans' service providers together. The Veterans' Commission selected these transition-related areas as priorities: employment, education, housing, and mental and physical health and well-being.

Another interviewee put it this way, *"Even before addressing unemployment and homelessness is being supported at the transition."*

Veterans' service providers need to talk to each other. Service providers who participated in community input sessions appreciated the opportunity to engage with other providers. Said one such participant, *"It was refreshing to engage with other service providers, and we need to communicate with each other more often."*



Need for Improving Access to Resource and Services: Coordination

Veterans' service providers need a place to quickly access information about other available local services and resources and who to contact at these agencies. When a service provider doesn't have what a Veteran is seeking, that provider needs to be able to connect the

Veteran to the right local resource and the right local person right away. Having one place where such "hyperlocal" information may be stored, accessed, and updated is essential.

Need for Improving Access to Resources and Services: *Employment*

“Veterans have jobs, but not careers.”

One interviewee said that Veterans come out of the military “poorly prepared and unrealistic about their employment prospects.” Underemployment, defined as not having enough paid work or not doing work that makes full use of one’s skills and abilities, is common among Veterans.

Veterans’ community stakeholders consistently pointed to the need for Veterans to connect with each other and with employment opportunities. They identified “Vet-to-Vet” mentoring as a means of doing just that.

“Vets already in the workforce need to help other Vets transform themselves from warrior to worker. They need to know how to dress, how to talk, how to do a great resume, and more.”

They also pointed to a need for leadership and initiative on the part of the business community. *“We need synergy between employers and businesses to put together programs that identify available jobs and recruit Veterans for these positions.”*



Need for Improving Access to Resources and Services: *Education*

Veterans underutilize the GI bill for career education and training. Veterans can access the GI bill to pay tuition and housing expenses for 36 months of enrollment in a degree program at a college or university. The GI bill may also be used to pay for vocational training, work-study programs, apprenticeship trainings, licensing and certification programs, and more.

Some Veterans use up their GI bill benefits quickly and run out the clock before they have a degree in-hand. Local Veterans in one community

input session shared that they were either in this predicament themselves or knew of other Veterans who did not finish their studies. Stated one interviewee, *“Veterans need to use the GI bill effectively towards employment, not just to pay for bills and a couple of classes, but with the goal of a career.”*



*Need for Improving Access to Resources and Services: **Mental Health and Physical Health and Well-Being***

Suicide

The percentage of suicides for Veterans under 40 is more than three times higher than that of the general population in Long Beach.

This is a new and surprising finding. Mental health challenges, substance use disorders, chronic medical conditions, and chronic pain left poorly treated or untreated altogether, are causally related to suicide. We must understand more about this phenomenon and the City can play an important role in bringing Veteran-serving organizations together to address it.



Medical Care

Some Veterans reported that they do not receive or pursue adequate care for their mental or physical health conditions. Eligibility for VA health care may be one factor in why Veterans are leaving their mental or physical health conditions untreated. While there are some exceptions, a service member must have served for 24 months and must have received an honorable discharge from the service to qualify for care. If a Veteran who doesn't qualify for VA

health care cannot afford health insurance or lacks employer-subsidized insurance, they have little access to the care they need. Feelings of shame about and the stigma associated with certain experiences and health conditions, from military sexual trauma to substance use disorder, prevent some Veterans from seeking professional help or following through on a treatment plan.

Need for Improving Access to Resources and Services among Veteran Subpopulations in Long Beach

Accessing resources and services poses challenges for some Veteran subpopulations, including women, seniors, low-income, disabled and LGBTQ Veterans. Seniors need access to resources like transportation and housing that can accommodate their unique needs.

Seniors and people with disabilities are also more likely to experience loneliness and isolation, which negatively impacts their mental and physical health and well-being. These populations need extra outreach and support.

Women and LGBTQ Veterans may have endured discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual abuse while in the military. They are less likely to admit they served in the military or to access their VA benefits, including health care services, to which they are entitled. It is important to note here that Veteran subpopulations are intersectional; for example, a senior Veteran may also have a disability and be low-income.



Vets Helping Vets

In key informant interviews and community input sessions, participants pointed to Veterans helping other Veterans, also called “peer-to-peer” and “Vets to Vets” mentoring, as a model for bridging service gaps among older Veterans and those with disabilities.

In a Vets-to-Vets volunteer program, Veteran volunteers help other Veterans with daily activities, connect them to resources and services or simply visit them regularly to check on their well-being.

These initiatives not only represent a cost-effective way to reduce the isolation and loneliness these Veterans experience but also complement the work of case managers and social workers at places like Century Villages at Cabrillo and American Gold Star Manor where formerly homeless and precariously housed senior Veterans and Veterans with disabilities now live in permanent housing.





Not Another Website

Directly connecting Veterans to resources and services is more important than just providing information via a website. This is the case both at transition and throughout a Veteran's lifetime. Said one community input session participant,

“ *Websites connect people to information, not to people. They can point you in the right direction, but you still have to dig around to get connected to an actual person who can help you with what you need.* ”

Service providers want to connect with Veterans and Veterans want to connect with service providers. Both Veterans and service providers consistently said that connecting with each other, via the Internet or in-person, is challenging.

The Long Beach Veterans Commission determined that neither establishing itself as a direct service provider nor creating another website would effectively address the disconnect between Veterans and service providers. The Long Beach Veterans Commission sees helping Veterans' service providers as one of the most effective ways to help Veterans in our community.

These organizations could use a platform like Unite Us, a referral platform already being utilized in the Long Beach Health and Human Services Department, as a knowledge base to connect local Veterans to the resources and services they need more quickly. A knowledge base is different from a database because it is dynamic, interactive and “hyperlocal.” Service providers use the knowledge base to communicate with each other to pinpoint what services a Veteran needs, refer the Veteran to the right local service provider, and to track the outcome.

Long Beach Veterans Population at a Glance



16,927

Veterans in Long Beach

3.6%

of Long Beach's adult population are Veterans of the U.S. military

Service Era

4.2%

World War II



7.1%

Korean Conflict



35%

Vietnam



15%

Gulf War I



17%

Gulf War II (Iraq & Afghanistan)

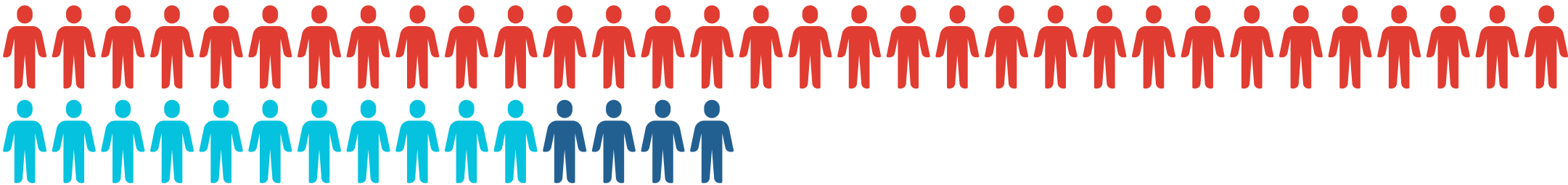


24%

Between Conflicts



Race



63% White

22% Black/African American

7% Asian

Ethnicity



Hispanic or Latino

Need for Housing Opportunities for Precariously Housed and Homeless Veterans

Even as the number of homeless Veterans has decreased over the last several years, finding affordable housing and remaining housed is a problem in Long Beach, not just for Veterans, but for many individuals and families. The City of Long Beach has been recognized as a leader for its efforts to end Veterans' homelessness. Observed one interviewee, *"I think this is where Long Beach has shone. The City has done a great job of working with local providers and getting homeless Veterans off the streets."*

The City was nationally recognized for the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in November of 2016. Through this one-year inter-agency initiative, 660 homeless Veterans obtained the support services they needed to find permanent housing. The City achieved functional zero for Veterans experiencing homelessness, meaning that any Veteran experiencing homelessness who was seeking housing could be housed.

Even as the number of homeless Veterans has decreased, an affordable housing crisis in Long Beach due to rising housing costs and low vacancy rates continues. For example, the number of older apartment buildings being purchased by investors and rehabilitated increased by 170 percent between 2012 and 2019. This has resulted in greater numbers of lower-income renters having to vacate their units. These conditions, in turn, decrease the availability of housing units for which Veterans with Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH) vouchers and non-Veterans must compete.

One solution for the affordable housing crisis as it affects Veterans, is to set aside units specifically for Veterans in new low-income housing developments. In recent years, the City has increased the number of low-income housing units available for Veterans, including those with dishonorable discharges, with the development of Anchor Place in Century Villages at Cabrillo in ZIP code 90810 and Beacon Pointe in ZIP code 90813.

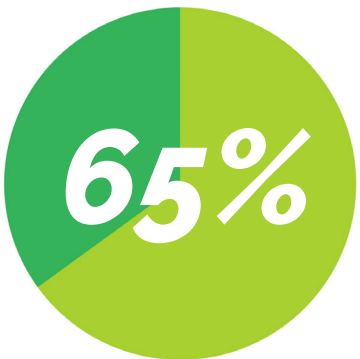
The Long Beach Veterans Commission will support innovative local programs that make housing more affordable for everyone or result in set asides for Veterans in low-income housing projects. It will also support policies at the City, state and federal levels that address the lack of affordable housing, low-income housing development and transitional and permanent housing for precariously housed and homeless Veterans.



Long Beach Veterans Population: A Closer Look

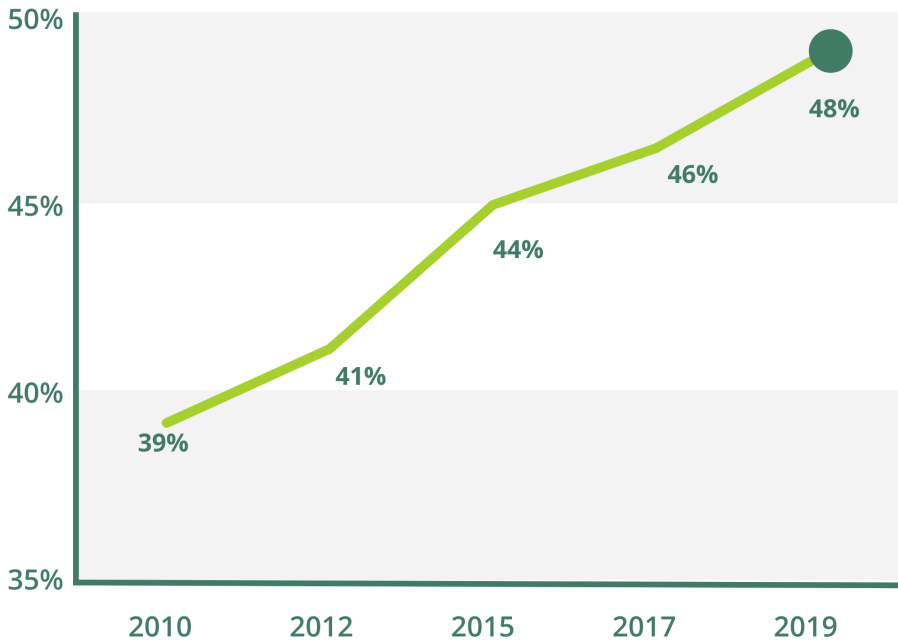
Fewer Veterans in Long Beach as Senior Veteran Population Increases

The Long Beach Veterans' population is aging along with the rest of the City, *but at even more dramatic rates*. The percentage of 65 and older Veterans is more than four times than that of the 65 and older non-Veteran population.



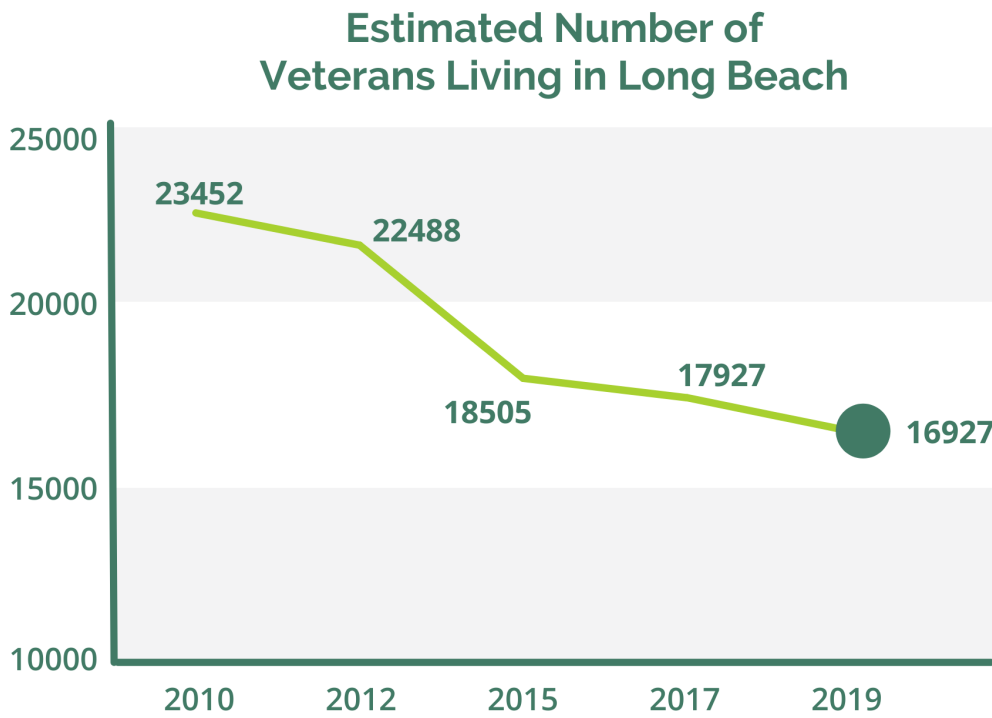
of Long Beach Veterans are 55 years of age or older

Veterans 65 and Over



Long Beach Veteran age distribution: 12% are ages 18-34; 23% are ages 35-54; 18% are ages 55-64; 25% are ages 65-74; 22% are ages 75+

Decreasing Veterans Population



Economic and Physical Well-Being

While both the decrease in the numbers of Veterans overall and the graying of the Veterans population aligns with state and national trends, increasingly, these trends are linked to the affordable housing crisis. Veterans who were interviewed or who participated in strategic plan community input sessions linked the shrinking of the Veterans' population to a lack of affordable housing in Long Beach, especially for younger

Veterans, defined here as Veterans under 40 (Gulf War II/Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans). A lack of affordable housing is not only an obstacle for Veterans returning home after serving in the military or seeking to relocate in Long Beach, but also for Veterans who already live here who must vacate their rental units due to rent increases.

11.6%

living below the poverty line

5.3%

unemployed

8.6%

experiencing homelessness

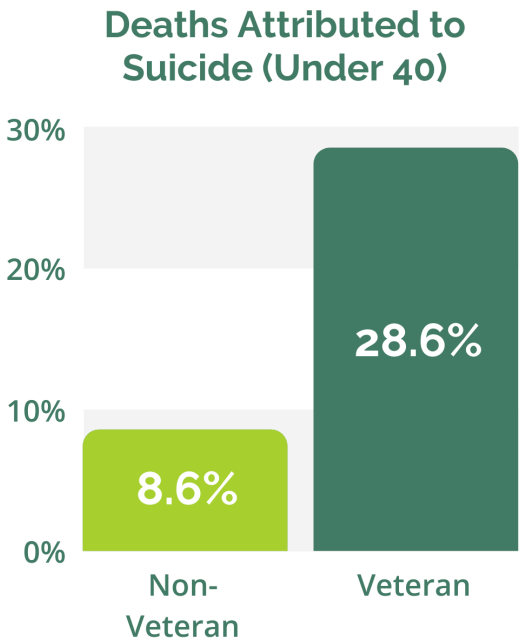
49.7%

use the VA Long Beach

17.1%

have service-related disabilities

Suicide Rates among Veterans in Long Beach



A total of 51 Veteran suicides were reported in Long Beach between 2014 and 2020. While suicide accounts for less than three percent of all deaths among both Long Beach Veterans and non-Veterans, *it represents 28.6 percent of all Veteran deaths among Veterans under the age of 40.*

In comparison, suicide makes up 8.6 percent of all non-Veteran deaths under the age of 40. *In short, the percentage of deaths by suicide among the Veteran population under 40 is more than three times higher than of the non-Veteran population under 40.*



Nearly 1 in 3 deaths among Veterans under the age of 40 are caused by suicide



Sources:
City of Long Beach 2020 Point In Time Homeless Estimates (PIT)
Housing Assistance Council Tabulations of the Census Bureau’s 2015-2019 American Community Survey
Los Angeles County Coroner’s Office, Death Certificate Data
United States Census Bureau’s 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates
VA Long Beach Healthcare System

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

*The goals, objectives and strategies presented here are not only informed by data collected through research, interviews, conversations and community input sessions but also by the likelihood that they will be achieved because of a **strong network of relationships now in place, access to available City resources, and the possibility of establishing a City of Long Beach Office of Veterans Support.***

The City and the Veterans Commission have forged strong relationships with local Veteran-serving institutions and organizations large and small, from the VA Long Beach to City HeART, a local non-profit that operates out of Century Villages at Cabrillo.

These relationships build the foundation for collaborations and partnerships to realize this plan.

Members of the Veterans' Commission are both members and leaders of local, Long Beach-based Veterans-related non-profits as well as neighborhood, business and real estate associations. They are active in their communities, availing themselves of volunteer service opportunities either as Veterans or ordinary citizens. They have their fingers on the pulse of events and activities and the network of Veteran-serving organizations in the Greater Long Beach area, including North Orange County, and South Los Angeles County.

Members of the Veterans Commission and the Commission's staff person have also forged strong working relationships with various City departments including the Economic Development Department, Parks, Recreation and Marine, the City Manager's Public Information Office and the City's non-profit, Partners of Parks.





Goal 1
Long Beach recognizes Veterans for their strengths and as valued members of our community, and regularly celebrates and honors them.

OBJECTIVE 1.1

Promote positive portrayals of Veterans by highlighting their strengths and achievements in public.

1.1a

Launch an annual Veterans Public Relations Campaign to take place around the Veterans’ Day holiday, leveraging available City resources including robust social media outlets and an electronic billboard.

1.1b

Highlight equity, diversity and inclusion in the campaign and feature profiles of women, LGBTQ, seniors, and Veterans with disabilities from different service eras.



OBJECTIVE 1.2

Recognize Long Beach Veterans of different service eras utilizing a light pole banners program.

OBJECTIVE 1.3

Launch the multimedia Long Beach Veterans Stories Campaign.

1.3a

Develop a multimedia campaign which could include video interviews, a documentary, a publication, and a blog.

1.3b

Focus on equity, diversity and inclusion as part of the campaign and feature women, LGBTQ, seniors, and Veterans with disabilities from different service eras.



OBJECTIVE 1.4

Bring Veterans and non-Veterans together to celebrate Veterans in City parks and public spaces where Veterans-related markers and monuments are located.

1.4a

Identify new forms of celebration that reflect the interests and values of younger generations of Veterans.

1.4b

Plan, deliver and promote events and activities in these spaces, leveraging the use of available City resources from robust social media outlets to an electronic billboard.



OBJECTIVE 1.5

Enhance public awareness of and engagement with parks named for Veterans and existing Veteran-related monuments and public art throughout the City utilizing an interactive digital map that shows the locations of each of these sites and tells the stories behind them.

OBJECTIVE 1.6

Launch the “Veterans Work Detail” program to provide volunteer service opportunities for Veterans.

1.6a
Work with the City and the Veterans’ community to plan Veterans’ Work Detail projects, such as City beach clean-ups and park improvement projects.

1.6b
Promote Veterans Work Detail events by leveraging the use of free, available resources, from the City’s robust social media outlets to an electronic billboard.





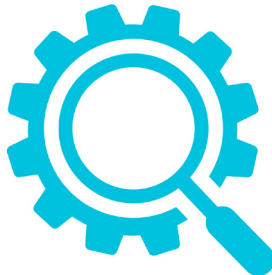
Goal 2
Veteran-serving organizations and agencies coordinate well to ensure that Veterans successfully transition from military service to civilian life.

OBJECTIVE 2.1

Establish mechanisms to connect and coordinate local organizations that provide transition-related resources and services for Veterans.

2.1a
Lead a summit that brings together local organizations and agencies that provide transition-related resources and services to envision and explore a more coordinated local response. Focus on organizations that address employment, workforce development, education, and mental and physical health and well-being.

2.1b
Form a Veterans’ Commission-led task force that provides a structure for continuing the transition-related conversation and making recommendations to City Council that focus on improving Veterans’ access to resources and services at the transition.



Goal 3
Veterans readily access the resources and services they need in the areas of housing, education, employment, and mental and physical health and well-being post-transition and throughout their lifetimes.

OBJECTIVE 3.1

Lead a summit that brings together local providers of resources and services as a starting point for conversations focused on improving Veterans access to these resources and services.

OBJECTIVE 3.2
Form a Commission-led task force to provide the structure for continuing the conversation and making recommendations to City Council that focus on improving Veterans’ access to resources and services throughout their lifetimes.



OBJECTIVE 3.3
Ensure services and supports are readily accessible and culturally supportive for underserved Veteran subpopulations such as women, seniors, low-income, LGBTQ and Veterans with disabilities.

3.3a
Establish task force subcommittees to focus on identifying key needs and service gaps among underserved Veteran subpopulations and exploring solutions.

OBJECTIVE 3.4

Work with local providers of transitional and permanent housing for senior Veterans to explore options for Veteran-to-Veteran volunteer support programs.

3.4a

Identify best practices for recruiting and training for Veteran-to-Veteran volunteer initiatives to help bridge service gaps among senior Veterans.

OBJECTIVE 3.5

Bring together organizations and agencies that focus on Veterans’ mental health and suicide prevention to explore options for improving access to these resources for Long Beach Veterans under the age of 40.

3.5a

Use the City’s robust social media platforms and other available resources to increase public awareness of the high percentage of suicides among Veterans under 40 in Long Beach.

3.5b

Partner with the Long Beach VA and LA County to ensure access to crisis lines and necessary supports to reduce Veteran suicides.

OBJECTIVE 3.6

Build and strengthen the network of relationships and information needed to develop the Unite Us information and referral platform to connect Veterans to the local resources and services they need quickly and effectively.



OBJECTIVE 3.7

Offer Veterans Employment Training Sessions (VETS) for Veterans seeking new employment, education, job training, career-building, and networking opportunities.

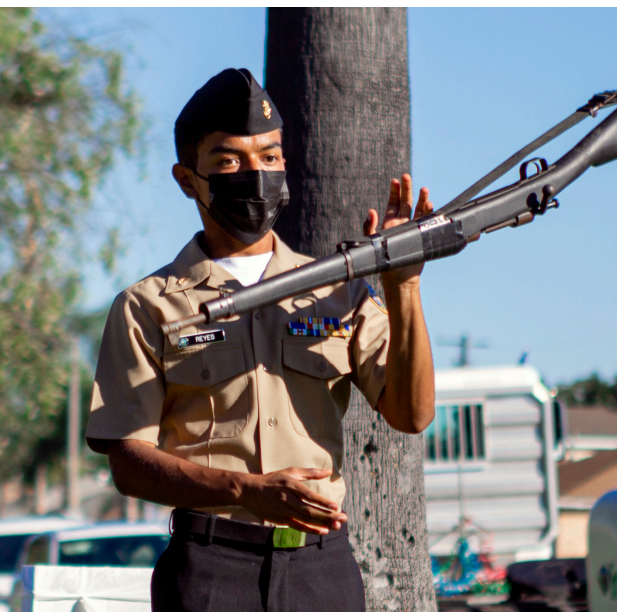
3.7a

Work with the City’s Economic Development Department to plan and deliver a VETS event at least once each year.

3.7b

Strengthen, expand and diversify the Commission’s VETS initiative to connect Veterans to the industry-related resources and services they need to succeed. (The Long Beach Veterans Commission created and organized two successful VETS events, one in 2018 and the other in 2019, comprising panel discussions and a resource fair.)





OBJECTIVE 3.8

Act as a clearing house of information on “all things Veteran” in Long Beach.

3.8a

Closely and regularly track and monitor information in the areas of:
Closely and regularly track information about: Veterans-related policies, programs, resources and services at the municipal, county, state and federal level and local and regional public commemorations, celebrations, activities and events that celebrate Veterans, bring Veterans and non-Veterans together or offer volunteer service opportunities for Veterans. Disseminate information to the Veterans community via social media and a quarterly e-newsletter.

3.8b

Establish mechanisms for disseminating tracked information to the Veterans’ community.

3.8c

Launch and extensively promote a City Veterans’ hotline to Veterans seeking resources and services. The hotline connects the Veteran to a City staff person who will use the Unite Us platform to connect them to the right person at the right local service provider and to track these referrals.

3.8d

Collect and analyze data on the Long Beach Veterans’ population and present it to the public and City Council on a regular basis.

3.8e

Evaluate the effectiveness of the summits, task forces, hotline, Unite Us referral platform, newsletter and other communications and any other activities, report on findings and implement improvement strategies as needed.



Goal 4
Veterans who are precariously housed or who are experiencing homelessness have access to affordable housing and the supportive services they need to remain housed.

OBJECTIVE 4.1

Work with the Veterans’ community to make or support policy recommendations to increase access to affordable housing and prevent homelessness at the local and federal levels.

4.1a

Track legislation related to affordable housing access, homelessness and the precariously housed in general, and specifically for Veterans at the city, county, state, and federal levels.

4.1b

Coordinate with the City’s housing and homeless services providers to make policy recommendations and support these recommendations at the state and federal level.

4.1c

Ensure that the City’s legislative efforts include Veterans as part of their legislative agendas related to the precariously housed, homelessness and access to affordable housing.



OBJECTIVE 4.2

Support innovative strategies, programs, and policies to reduce barriers to housing Veterans.

4.2a

Support efforts to incentivize public/private partnerships that result in the development of Veteran-specific affordable housing projects in Long Beach.

4.2b

Support efforts to modify eligibility standards and requirements for housing and supportive housing programs so that Veterans may be housed more quickly.

4.2c

Support innovative policies and programs at the local and federal levels that ensure that Veterans have access to the supportive resources and services they need to remain housed.



Goal 5

An Office of Veterans Support is established in the Health and Human Services Department to serve as the infrastructure to carry out the goals, objectives and strategies outlined in the strategic plan.

This office would plan, oversee, and manage the City's efforts to uplift and support Veterans by:

1. Coordinating City-wide efforts to recognize Veterans through public celebrations that bring Veterans and non-Veterans together and provide opportunities for Veterans to volunteer for a City improvement project.
2. Serving as lead convener of local public and private and non-profit and for-profit organizations and agencies that serve Veterans at transition and throughout their lifetimes for the City of Long Beach.
3. Establishing a referral platform that connects Veterans to the local resources and services they need when they need them.
4. Partnering with resource and service providers to connect Veterans to local education, networking, job training, and career-building opportunities.
5. Serving as the "go-to" for up-to-date information on all local Veterans-related resources, services, programs, policies, public celebrations and demographic data for the City of Long Beach and the Veterans' community.
6. Make or support policy recommendations at the state and federal level in the areas of affordable housing, homelessness, education, employment and mental and physical health and well-being for our local Veterans.





APPENDICES

The Long Beach Veterans Commission: Member Profiles



Jesse Blanco, Commissioner for District 1

Commissioner Jesse Blanco was born in Orange, California, but raised in Rhode Island. He served in the United States Navy from 2009 to 2014 as a submarine sonar technician. Jesse relocated to Southern California in 2014 to attend Coastline Community College where he received his Associate Degree. While at Coastline, he worked in the Veterans Resource Center and served as president of the Veterans Club. In 2017, he transferred to California State University, Long Beach, to complete his degree in accountancy. Jesse now works at Windes in the Audit and Assurance Department.



Mike Shaknovich, Commissioner for District 2

Commissioner Mike Shaknovich, a Long Beach resident and entrepreneur since 2013, has produced numerous events for the City. In addition, he has owned and operated retail and event-related businesses and served on associations, including the Historic Old Pine Avenue Business Association and the Long Beach Music Council. Mike served in the United States Marine Corps from 2001 to 2006, during which time he was stationed in 29 Palms, Okinawa and Camp Pendleton. As a local realtor, he works with Homes for Heroes and helps Veterans, law enforcement, healthcare workers, firefighters, and educators to achieve home ownership.



Gustavo Orozco, Commissioner for District 3

Commissioner Gus Orozco, a Long Beach native, joined the United States Army in 2005, deployed to Iraq in 2007, and earned a Combat Action Badge during the Battle for Sadr City. In 2010, he returned to Long Beach, joined the Army Reserve and graduated from the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy in 2012. He earned his Associate of Arts degree from Long Beach City College in 2015, where he helped re-start the Veterans Club. In 2017, he completed his Bachelor of Science in Geography from California State University, Long Beach, where he also served as president of the Veterans Network and on the Associated Students Inc. Executive Cabinet. Gus is an avid camper and environmentalist. He is currently employed by the Department of the Army at the Armed Forces Reserve Center in Bell, California and serves as a Senior Drill Sergeant in the Army Reserve.



Josh Smith, Commissioner for District 4

Commissioner Josh “Smitty” Smith joined the United States Army Reserve right out of high school. He deployed to Kuwait in 2003, during his senior year of undergraduate studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. He served 12 months in country and returned home to earn his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. He then earned a Master of Arts in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from Alliant International University in San Diego. In 2009, Smitty moved to Long Beach and joined the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) as a Health Care Education Specialist. Smitty serves as president of the Nevada Alumni of Southern California, as a member at-large for his chapter of the Combat Vets Motorcycle Association, and as a master brewer with Long Beach Homebrewers.



Ricky Fernandez, Commissioner for District 5

Commissioner Ricky Fernandez served in the United States Marine Corps from 2000 to 2008. As a Southern California native, born and raised in Garden Grove, Ricky was enamored with Long Beach because of musical acts like Sublime and Snoop Dogg. Upon completion of active duty in 2004, Ricky relocated to Long Beach, became tour manager for a local band called Bargain Music, and met his future wife, third-generation Long Beach native Jenn Metz, at a concert aboard the Queen Mary. Ricky, a locksmith by trade, is the wholesale branch account manager for Allegion, the largest door hardware manufacturer in the U.S. As an Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veteran, Ricky knows first-hand some of the challenges associated with the transition from active duty to civilian life and is committed to empowering his fellow brothers- and sisters-in-arms.



Lance Santiago, Commissioner for District 6

Commissioner Lance Santiago served in the United States Marine Corps from 2011 to 2015. An Embarkation and Logistics Specialist, Lance deployed to Afghanistan and Romania in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). After his enlistment, he earned his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a double concentration in Operations and Supply Chain Management and Business Management from California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). Lance is presently employed by an American multinational aerospace and defense technology company in El Segundo. An avid runner and cyclist, Lance has participated in half-marathons, marathons, and triathlons. Lance is a volunteer mentor to CSULB students through the non-profit America Needs You.



Ryan Antes, Commissioner for District 7

Commissioner Ryan Antes was born and raised in Long Beach. After graduating from Long Beach Polytechnic High School in 1999, he enlisted in the United States Army and served in the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment from 1999 to 2004. He saw combat in both Afghanistan and Iraq. After his enlistment, he returned home to Long Beach and received his Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology at California State University, Long Beach. He then obtained his Juris Doctorate from Loyola Law School. Ryan presently works as a trial lawyer and is a partner in a civil litigation firm in Orange County.



Sylvia N. Contreras, Commissioner for District 8

Commissioner Sylvia N. Contreras worked in administration for Fortune 500 companies for more than 30 years before becoming a licensed realtor. Sylvia’s husband, United States Air Force Veteran Emilio Contreras Jr., specialized in avionic communications during his four years in the service (1980 to 1984). This prepared him well for his career of more than 30 years in Information Technology. The pair met in the technical support department of a software development company in Santa Monica in 1993, married the following year, and relocated to Long Beach. Sylvia and Emilio simultaneously earned their Bachelor of Science in Business Management from the University of Phoenix at its former satellite location in Long Beach. They always enjoy an opportunity to travel and immerse themselves in their heartfelt interests in military and Southern California history.



Juanita Doplemore, Commissioner for District 9

Commissioner Juanita Doplemore enlisted in the United States Army in 2001. After completing her basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, she was assigned to the Finance Battalion in Würzburg, Germany, and then deployed to Kosovo in 2002. After active duty, she joined the Army Reserve in 2004, and served in the Regional Readiness Command in Bell, California. Juanita is the founder of the Collins Neighborhood Association in North Long Beach. As a board member of the International Association of Military Women of Color, she advocates for military service members and their families. Juanita has been recognized by the Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles for serving as a troop leader and mentor for more than a decade.

Defining the “Veterans’ Community”

The “Veterans’ community” is defined as a subpopulation of former service members, together with their immediate and extended families, and the government agencies and for-profit and non-profit organizations that serve them. The “Veterans’ community” is not a singular, monolithic entity into which all Veterans and all Veterans’ issues fit neatly. While former service members share the overall experience of

military culture, Veterans’ needs, aspirations, and interests vary greatly, as no two service members are exactly alike. Veterans’ post-service lives are shaped by their service era, the impacts of their service duties on their mental and physical health, and their experience of the transition from active duty to civilian life and the sometimes-complicated employment, education, housing, and family relationship-related adjustments this entails.

Methodology & Sources of Data for the Strategic Plan

The Long Beach Veterans Commission

The nine-member Long Beach Veterans Commission is comprised of a panel of experts appointed specifically for their energy, experience, and knowledge of the local community. Their input on how to support our local Veterans continues to be an ongoing conversation.

Commissioners identified Veterans’ community stakeholders for key informant interviews, revised the interview protocol and conducted interviews.

They also reviewed and filtered extensive amounts of data to develop draft goals, objectives, and strategies. Finally, the Commissioners led community input sessions at places where Veterans gather to refine the goals, objectives and strategies and suggested improvements that made the plan stronger.

Literature Review, Demographic Data, and Input from Veterans’ Community Stakeholders

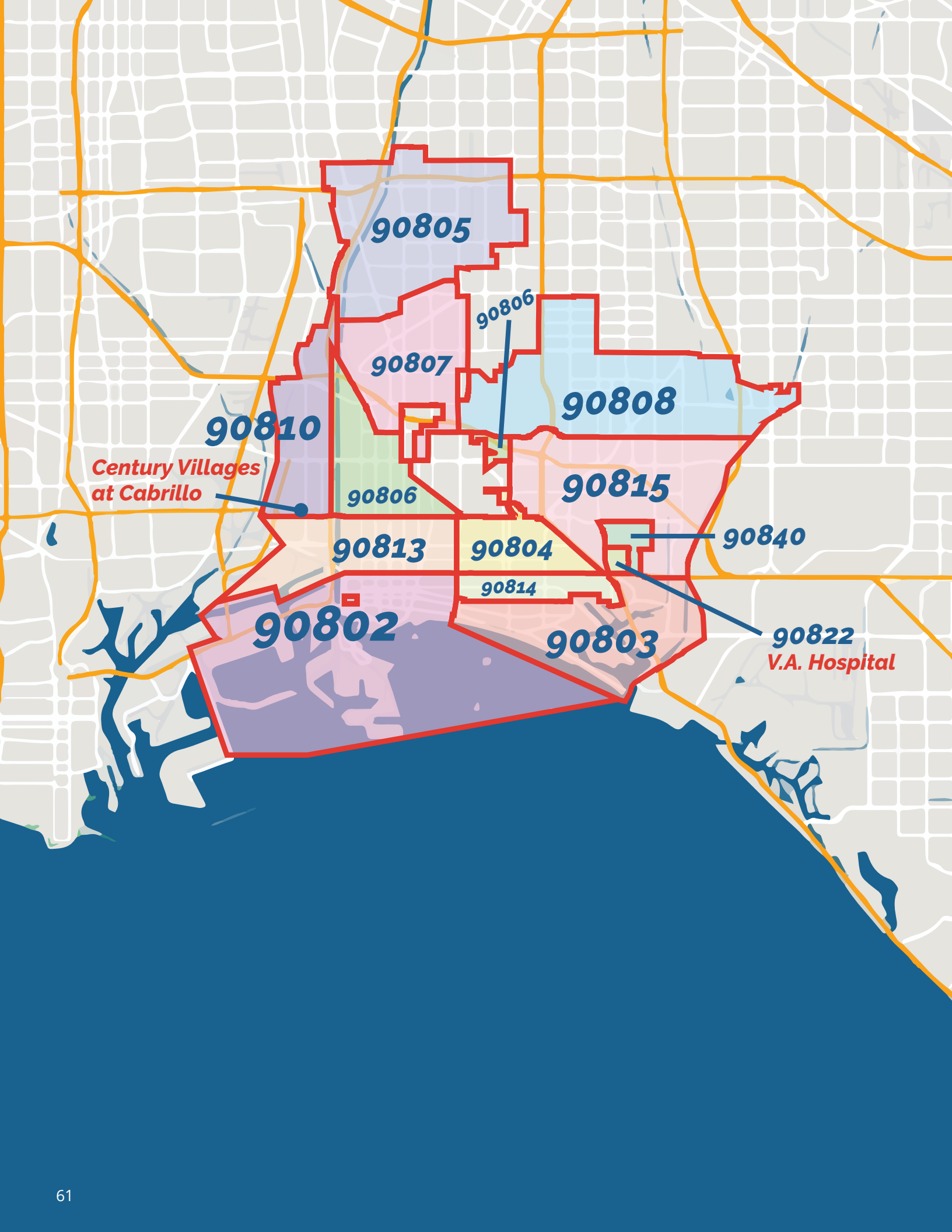
An extensive literature review was conducted that explored the challenges and opportunities Veterans face. Demographic data on the City’s Veteran population, collected from the American Community Survey, the annual survey carried out by the US Census Bureau, served as another major data source. Additional data sources included the Los Angeles County Coroner Department and the VA Long Beach. Raw data sets were analyzed by the Long Beach Health and Human Services Department.

Input from Veterans’ community stakeholders was collected in four ways: through structured interviews with 30 key informants, at community input sessions held at places where Veterans gather, through follow-up conversations with selected interviewees, and informal interviews with approximately 16 additional key informants. Structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed for major themes. At its strategic planning retreat, the Veterans’ Commission reviewed this analysis of key informant interview data as well as the literature review and an analysis of demographic data to determine four priority areas.

At five separate community input sessions held at places like the American Legion Post 496, the Veteran Services Office at Long Beach City College, and Century Villages at Cabrillo, Commissioners engaged other Veterans in an interactive process. Approximately 180 Veterans participated in these sessions and identified issues which deepened our understanding of the priorities, which became goals, and shaped the objectives and strategies for each of these goals. This process was an iterative one, with suggestions and comments from community input sessions informing and improving subsequent drafts of the plan.

Follow-up conversations with selected interviewees and informal interviews with 16 additional Veterans’ community stakeholders provided opportunities to further address how the objectives and strategies for the five main goals may be carried out.

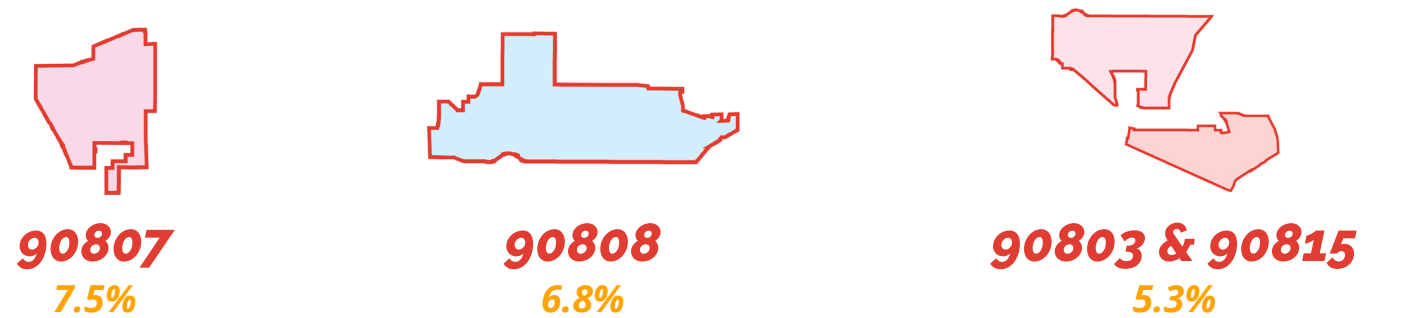
The plan also reflects an understanding of the programs, resources, services, activities, and events that are currently available to Veterans in our community and the organizations and agencies involved.



Long Beach Veterans Population: ZIP Code Comparisons for Selected Demographics

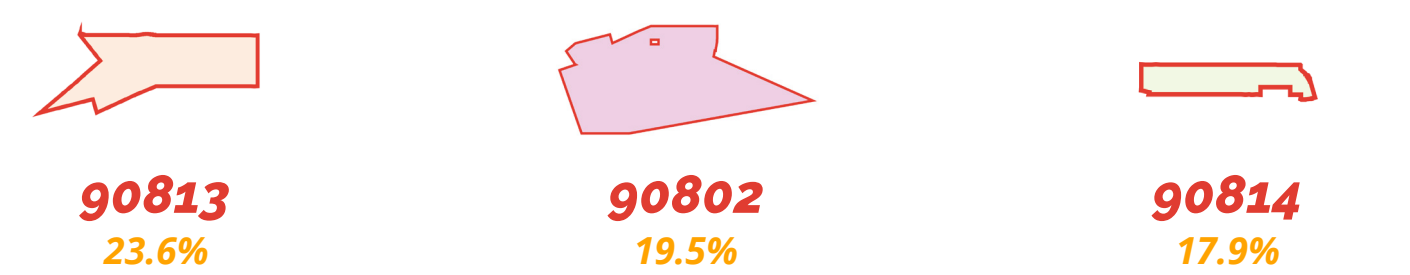
Long Beach ZIP Codes with Highest Proportion of Veterans

The proportion of Veterans who live in the City's 11 ZIP codes ranges from 2.6 percent to 7.5 percent.



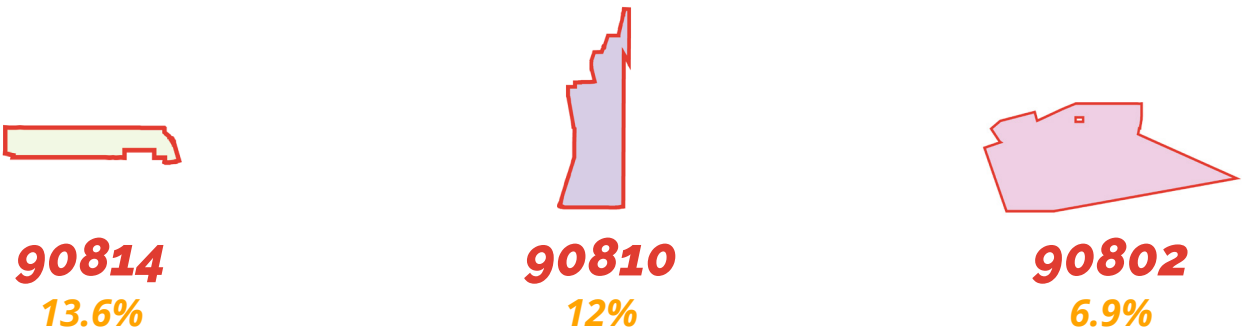
Long Beach ZIP Codes with Highest Proportion of Veterans Living Below Poverty

The proportion of Veterans who live below the federal poverty line in the City's 11 ZIP codes ranges from 4.1 to 23.6 percent.



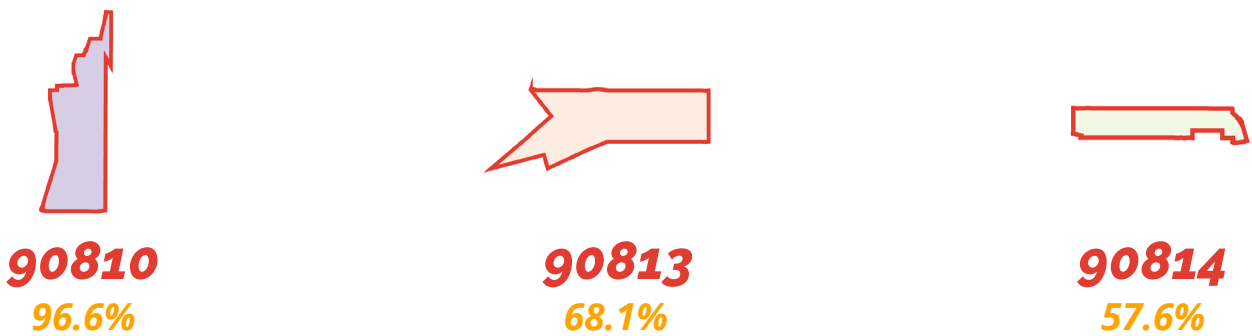
Long Beach ZIP Codes with Highest Proportion of Unemployed Veterans

The proportion of unemployed Veterans who live in the City’s 11 ZIP codes ranges from 1.7 percent to 13.6 percent.



ZIP Codes with Highest Proportion of Veterans Served by the VA

The proportion of Veterans with service-related disabilities who live in the City’s 11 ZIP codes ranges from 8.2 percent to 33.9 percent.



Note: Nearly one hundred percent (96.6%) of the Veterans in 90810 (West side) have been served by the VA. ***This correlates with the location of a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) at Century Villages at Cabrillo, which provides transitional and permanent housing and supportive services for up to 700 Veterans.***

Data Relationships

In certain ZIP codes, some demographic data points may correlate such as the percentages of Veterans who live below the poverty line, who may also be service-disabled, unemployed or served by the VA Long Beach. Further research is required to make the connections.

1. At 23.6 percent, 90813 has the highest percentage of Veterans living in poverty as well the highest percentage of people living in poverty in the City of Long Beach at 34 percent. ZIP code 90802 has the second highest percentage of Veterans living in poverty at 19.5 percent and the second highest percentage of people living in poverty in Long Beach at 28.2 percent.
2. Not only does Long Beach ZIP code 90813 have the highest percentage of Veterans living below the poverty line at 23.6 percent, but also the second highest percentage of service-related disabilities at 28.3 percent, and the third highest percentage of Veterans who are served by the VA Long Beach at 68.1 percent.
3. Long Beach ZIP code 90814 has the highest percentage of unemployed Veterans at 13.6 percent, the second highest percentage of Veterans living below the poverty line at 17.9 percent, and the fourth highest percentage of Veterans served by the VA Long Beach at 57.6 percent.

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USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families
VA Long Beach Healthcare System
Veterans for Peace
Veteran Strong



Dedicated to Val Lerch





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