



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence
County Manager



Date: December 9, 2014
Board Meeting Date: January 13, 2015
Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Iliana Rodriguez, Director of the Human Services Agency
Reyna Farrales, Deputy County Manager
Peggy Jensen, Deputy County Manager
Michael Callagy, Deputy County Manager

Subject: Report on San Mateo County Veterans Needs Assessment

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept the San Mateo County Veterans Needs Assessment and staff recommendations regarding veterans services over the next two-year budget cycle.

BACKGROUND:

There are approximately 32,000 veterans in San Mateo County. To support veterans who have served our country, there is a complex array of services provided by a wide variety of organizations, including federal, state and county agencies and community-based organizations. While some veterans are aware of the services available to them, others are not able to access these critical services for themselves and their families. This is especially an issue for vulnerable veterans who are homeless or in need of safety net services.

On July 23, 2013, your Board approved \$100,000 in Measure A funding in FY 2013-14 and \$100,000 in Measure A funding in FY 2014-15 to convene a stakeholder planning group to develop a plan for coordination and integration of comprehensive veterans services in San Mateo County. An additional \$158,306 in Measure A funding was allocated in FY 2014-15 to add two term positions to the Human Services Agency Veterans Services Office in FY 2014-15.

In 2014, the County embarked on a project to gather data and conduct a needs assessment of the veterans in San Mateo County. The County formed a Steering Committee comprised of over twenty-five stakeholders, including community-based organizations and County Departments to oversee the needs assessment and to conduct a veterans stakeholder summit.

With Measure A funding, the County partnered with Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct the needs assessment to learn more about the needs of veterans in San Mateo County, the services currently available, and any areas of unmet need. The needs assessment included data from more than twenty-five different sources, including the Census and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The assessment included interviews with key stakeholders and five focus groups of veterans in the community. In all, thirty-five veterans participated in these focus groups.

The County hosted a Veterans Summit on November 5, 2014 to convene stakeholders from across the County, share information about the initial assessment findings, and collect stakeholder input regarding the needs of veterans in the community. One hundred and seven stakeholders attended the summit, including veterans, service providers, community members, and elected officials and their representatives.

DISCUSSION:

The San Mateo County Veterans Needs Assessment 2014 (assessment), developed in coordination with ASR, includes needs identified through secondary data (Census data, VA data, etc.), primary data (focus groups, interviews), and the prioritization of needs by the stakeholders at the summit.

The assessment found that most veterans residing in San Mateo County are doing well. Many served their county years ago and have found stable employment, housing and social support networks. Yet, some veterans need additional support, including some who face physical, mental, or behavioral health challenges and some who need safety net services. Many of the findings in the assessment focus on veterans with the highest and most complex needs, in order to gain more information about services that could be enhanced to meet the needs of veterans.

Key findings from the assessment include the following.

- There are 32,000 veterans who reside in the County, which is approximately 6% of the population. The VA estimates that the veteran population in the County will drop by more than 50% by 2025.
- More than half of veterans in San Mateo County are age 65 or older.
- Veterans are over-represented in the homeless population, comprising approximately 12% of the County's homeless population.
- The most important needs identified in focus groups were employment, education and training, housing, mental health, and disability benefits.

In order to address the identified needs, staff has developed recommendations of actions to be taken over the next two-year budget cycle to better meet the needs of veterans. Recommendations include the following:

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Phase 1 (remainder of FY 14-15)

1. Create a Veterans Advisory Group to assist the County in planning and implementing the following recommendations
2. Increase outreach and education efforts to inform veterans about services and benefits that are available to them
3. Implement training for County staff and partners who work with veterans on veterans needs and services available to them
4. Improve data collection regarding veterans

Phase 2 (FY 15-17)

1. Explore creating a multi-disciplinary team to serve veterans with complex needs
2. Explore a housing locator program and other housing support for veterans
3. Explore working with partners to provide additional housing options, educational opportunities, and employment support for veterans

A copy of the final report from ASR is included in Attachment A to this memo. A more detailed explanation of the recommendations for the next two fiscal years is included in Attachment B to this memo.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Measure A funds totaling \$358,306 were allocated in FY 13-14 and FY 14-15 for veterans services. The recommendations for the first phase will be implemented using the remaining funds for the needs assessment, which are approximately \$110,000. No additional funds are being requested at this time for FY 14-15. Additional funds to continue implementation of the recommendations will be included in future budget or Measure A funding requests.

Attachment B

Recommendations Regarding Veterans Services

In order to address the identified needs, staff is recommending the following steps.

Phase 1 (FY 14-15)

- 1. Create a Veterans Advisory Group to assist the County in planning and implementing the following recommendations.**

A Steering Committee was established for the needs assessment. The County will expand this committee to include additional stakeholders and will continue to convene the group to advise on implementation of the recommendations. The Veterans Advisory Group can also work to help the County identify any areas where additional collaboration and advocacy with state and federal partners could improve services to veterans.

- 2. Increase outreach and education efforts to inform veterans about services and benefits that are available to them.**

The County will utilize the existing allocation of Measure A funds for the veterans project to develop outreach materials, increase outreach to reach more veterans and increase education to inform veterans about the benefits available to them and how to access those benefits, especially VA benefits which can be challenging to access.

HSA will continue to provide assistance through the Veterans Service Office to assist veterans with applying for VA benefits and to refer veterans to County programs (such as CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and General Assistance) and other services for support while waiting for their VA application to be processed. A suggestion to have group information sessions for veterans will be explored.

- 3. Implement training for County staff and partners**

HSA provides some training to staff on veterans' resources and how to connect veterans to services. The County will expand the training to additional staff from additional County departments and to partners who serve veterans, such as Homeless Outreach Teams, Core Service Agencies, shelters, and others.

- 4. Improve data collection regarding veterans**

Staff will work with County departments and partners to begin to implement additional data collection regarding veteran status of clients in order to connect veterans with appropriate services and to create additional data about the specific needs of veterans in the community.

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Phase 2 (FY 15-17)

1. Explore creating a multidisciplinary team to serve veterans with complex needs

This multi-disciplinary team could work to identify and address the needs of the veteran, including access to benefits, housing, and behavioral health and recovery services. The team would include staff from the Human Services Agency, Health System, Housing Department, Probation, the Sheriff's Office, Veterans Treatment Court, and partner organizations.

As part of the planning process, staff will collect and review data from County programs to identify veterans who are utilizing multiple safety net services and examine a multidisciplinary team approach to resolving issues.

Staff will also explore how this team could support specialized populations such as older adult veterans, female veterans, chronically homeless veterans, veterans with mental health and/or substance abuse needs, and others. Staff will explore the resources needed to form this multi-disciplinary team and additional resources may be requested in future budget requests.

2. Explore a housing locator program and other housing support for veterans

County departments will work together to support veterans through the application process to apply for housing programs. The County will explore a housing locator program and include veterans who are seeking housing in a pilot of the program to assist them in locating housing that meets their needs (such as affordable housing, housing options that accept VASH housing vouchers, and support regarding landlord-tenant issues.) Additional resources to implement these programs may be requested in future budget requests.

3. Explore working with partners to provide additional housing options, educational opportunities, and employment support for veterans