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## Serving American Veterans: A Review and Analysis of Gaps in Service in the Needs of Veterans

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Serving American Veterans: A review and analysis of gaps in service in the needs of veterans.

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## Study Overview

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is the agency of the federal government that is responsible for providing benefits, health care, and cemetery services to US military Veterans and their families. About a quarter of the nation's population, approximately 70 million people, are potentially eligible for VA benefits and services because they are veterans, family members, or survivors of veterans.<sup>1</sup> Due to this expansive demand, the United States has developed the most comprehensive system of Veterans assistance programs in the World.<sup>2</sup> But many argue that the US VA still falls short of expectations and fails to fulfill the needs of American veterans completely. This is where American NGOs and nonprofit organizations step in. There are more than 45,000 nonprofits in the United States that are registered with the IRS and state to be dedicated to helping veterans and their families.<sup>3</sup> While this number seems significant, it does not represent the whole picture and may cause us to overlook the hundreds of thousands of veterans who are still in need of services and assistance. This report will provide an overview of the needs of the veteran community as outlined in relevant literature as well as updated information and analysis regarding the availability of services and programs to meet these needs. The question of what barriers are there to making these services more abundant/readily available will also be answered.

This study brings awareness to the modern needs and focuses of today's American veterans and their families as well as the evidence and reasoning for why these needs are unfulfilled due to gaps in the services provided by the US Department of Veterans Affairs as

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<sup>1</sup> *Veterans Benefits Administration*. Applying for Benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Office, V. A. H. (2021, January 26). *Veterans Affairs*. Go to VA.gov. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from [https://www.va.gov/HISTORY/VA\\_History/Overview.asp](https://www.va.gov/HISTORY/VA_History/Overview.asp)

<sup>3</sup> *Veterans' organizations*. Internal Revenue Service. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/other-non-profits/veterans-organizations>

well as gaps within the non-profit and philanthropic sector. This evidence seeks to encourage conversation, awareness, and action among the general population to foster increased support for American veterans and the service organizations that work to provide for the unmet needs of these individuals.

## The State of Veteran Affairs in the United States

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is an agency of the federal government that is responsible for providing benefits, health care, and cemetery services to US military Veterans and their families. These benefits include pension, education, disability compensation, home loans, life insurance, vocational rehabilitation, survivor support, medical care, and burial benefits. About a quarter of the nation's population, approximately 70 million people, are potentially eligible for VA benefits and services because they are veterans, family members, or survivors of veterans.<sup>4</sup> Due to this expansive demand, the US has developed the most comprehensive system of Veterans assistance programs in the world.<sup>5</sup> But many argue that the United States VA still falls short of expectations and fails to completely fulfill the needs of American veterans.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is an extremely large-scale operation that manages millions of individuals, companies, and healthcare providers daily.<sup>6</sup> While this

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<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2021, January 26). *VA History*. va.gov. Retrieved January 20, 2023, from [https://www.va.gov/HISTORY/VA\\_History/Overview.asp](https://www.va.gov/HISTORY/VA_History/Overview.asp)

<sup>5</sup> Breslauer, T. B., & Davis, C. D., Veterans Service Organizations (vsos): Frequently asked questions (n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> Breslauer, T. B., & Davis, C. D., Veterans Service Organizations (vsos): Frequently asked questions (n.d.).

scale is impressive, it is no surprise that the extreme scale often leads to gaps in the provision of care and services to veterans and their families.

The expanse of the VA is further broken up into three main administrations: Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is one of the largest integrated healthcare systems in the United States, consisting of more than 53,000 independent licensed healthcare practitioners who provide care to over 9.1 million veterans each year. VHA Medical Centers not only service an expansive number of patients but also offer a very wide variety of services including but not limited to general hospital services such as surgery, critical care, mental health, orthopedics, pharmacy, radiology, physical therapy, and dozens of other specialty services which may even include advanced services such as organ transplants and plastic surgery. The VHA is also responsible for biomedical research (under the Office of Research and Development), Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and Regional Medical Centers.<sup>7</sup>

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors Veterans and their families with final resting places in national shrines and with tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to the nation. The NCA is responsible for maintaining approximately 3.4 million gravesites at 131 national cemeteries, one national Veterans' burial ground, and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico.<sup>8</sup>

The Veteran Benefits Administration or VBA is responsible for initial Veteran registration eligibility determination and administration of the VA's five key lines of non-medical benefits which include; Home Loan Guarantee, Insurance, Vocational Rehabilitation and

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<sup>7</sup> Veterans Health Administration. (2008, April 29). *Veterans Health Administration*. va.gov/health. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from <https://www.va.gov/health/>

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (2008, April 29). National Cemetery Administration. Retrieved November 12, 2022, from <https://www.cem.va.gov/>

Employment, Education, and Compensation and Pension. The VBA is also the branch of the VA that veterans filing claims for disability benefits will likely have the most contact with. These benefits are critical to ensuring that veterans can make a smooth transition into civilian life as well as playing a critical part in ensuring their health, safety, and success following their transition.<sup>9</sup>

The VA consists of a total of 56 regional benefits offices and four main branches, all under the direct oversight of the Secretary of Benefits. The four main branches of the VBA include The Office of Strategic Planning, the Office for Disability Assistance, which works closely with the VA's 56 regional offices, The Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Field Operations. Each state has at least one regional office with some states having multiple locations as needed to meet the workload demand.<sup>10</sup> Some of the 56 regional offices handle specific claims, such as the VBA office in Louisville, Kentucky which handles claims related to exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune.<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup> Each of these VA regional offices is further broken down into seven different offices consisting of a Veterans Service Center, Finance Division, Support Services Division, Human Resources, Loan Guaranty Division, and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division.<sup>13</sup>

The Office of Disability Assistance within the VBA assigns each veteran who applies for disability compensation a disability rating as well as determines eligibility and administration of

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<sup>9</sup> *Veterans Benefits Administration*. Applying for Benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

<sup>10</sup> *Veterans Benefits Administration*. Applying for Benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

<sup>11</sup> Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, United States military training facility in Jacksonville, North Carolina

<sup>12</sup> Veterans Benefits Administration. (2022, August 19). *Louisville Regional Office*. [benefits.va.gov](https://www.benefits.va.gov/louisville/). Retrieved October 5, 2022, from <https://www.benefits.va.gov/louisville/>

<sup>13</sup> *What is the VA fully developed claim timeline 2022? here's 10 factors that can delay your VA claim*. VA Claims Insider. (2022, December 6). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://vaclaimsinsider.com/va-fully-developed-claim-timeline/>

non-disability related benefits.<sup>14</sup> It is currently taking an average of 90-150 days or 3 to 5 months for disability claims to be processed and decided on, meaning that veterans who have filed claims are going 3-5 months without compensation and funding.<sup>15</sup> As of March 25th, 2023, 26.5% of total pending benefits claims were considered backlogged<sup>16</sup> by the VBA.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, the VBA contains the Board of Veterans Appeals which is an appellate organization within the VA that handles claims and appeals from the VA regional offices. The board consists of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Principal Deputy Vice Chairman, as well as Veterans Law Judges. The board hears Veterans' appeals for VA benefits and makes decisions on these hearings. The board has the authority to make decisions on veterans, their dependents, and their survivors. There is only one board of Veterans Appeals.<sup>18</sup> As of February 2023, Veterans and appellants who appeal to the Board of Veterans Appeals are waiting an average of 440 days for a decision regarding their appeal.<sup>19</sup>

This summary only scratches the surface of the complexities of the VBA and filing claims. This can often be extremely confusing and frustrating for veterans and their families to understand. As of 2017, approximately half of all veterans did not utilize any form of VA benefit. This confusion regarding the availability and accessibility of benefits offered through the VBA is reflected in the most recent National Survey of Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, Demobilized National Guard and Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses.

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<sup>14</sup> *Veterans Benefits Administration*. Applying for Benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

<sup>15</sup> Based on analysis and average of recent media and legal coverage.

<sup>16</sup> Backlog: Claims pending longer than 125 days

<sup>17</sup> Veterans Benefits Administration. (2023, March 25). *Characteristics of Claims*. benefits.va.gov. Retrieved March 27, 2023, from [https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/characteristics\\_of\\_claims.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/characteristics_of_claims.asp)

<sup>18</sup> Team, N. C. C. S. (2020, April 6). *The Nonprofit Sector in Brief 2019*. National Center for Charitable Statistics. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://nccs.urban.org/publication/nonprofit-sector-brief-2019#the-nonprofit-sector-in-brief-2019>

<sup>19</sup> Reddy, M. (2022, September 16). *Decision wait times*. U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.bva.va.gov/decision-wait-times.asp#:~:text=Based%20on%20current%20data%20above,in%20more%20than%20440%20days>

This survey reported that less than half, or 41%, of veterans, understand their general benefits offered by the VA better than or equal to “some” understanding.<sup>20</sup>

## Limitations of the Veterans Administration

The US Department of Veterans Affairs is limited by the sheer number of veterans who require and are eligible for services. This expansive number of eligible service recipients means an expansive system of employees, buildings, and programs to keep up with which may result in individuals or organizations slipping through the cracks. Additionally the VA is facing cultural changes that it has never addressed to this level before, such as prioritizing women and minorities who have served and still serve in the military. A more recent limitation also comes in the form of the new secretary of Veterans Affairs, Denis McDonough, who is only the second nonveteran to take this position since the VA became a cabinet level department in 1988. McDonough’s status as a nonveteran will likely come with the challenges of not having first hand experience with the recipient's end of the VA as well as pushback from veterans across the country as well as some members of congress on McDonough’s qualifications.<sup>21</sup> The VA must also address the continually increasing VA budget which has grown rapidly since 9/11. This growing budget is a result of increased healthcare costs, the introduction of federal programs, and the aging veteran population. This funding has been deemed necessary by the VA to support the needs of American veterans, however, this budget can only grow so much before it is deemed

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<sup>20</sup> Dept. of Veterans Affairs, National Survey of Veterans, Active Duty Service members, Demobilized National Guard and Reserve members, family members, and surviving spouses: Final report, deliverable 27 (2010). Washington, DC.

<sup>21</sup> Hananel, Sam, et al. “The Challenges Facing the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2021.” *Center for American Progress*, Center for American Progress, 27 Apr. 2023, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/challenges-facing-department-veterans-affairs-2021/>.



a concern for the Congressional budget therefore making these budget concerns an additional limiter of the VA. These ideas only address a few of the challenges and limitations currently facing the VA. Amidst these challenges and limitations that the VA is experiencing, American veterans continue to face a myriad of issues that are not limited to a single generation or cohort. Living veterans from WWII to modern-day Gulf War veterans face many similar challenges, with emphasis placed on the generation of veterans returning from post-9/11 conflicts such as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq.

## Methodology

To better understand and identify the unmet needs of modern American veterans I conducted a literature review and analysis of 35+ cited pieces of academic literature published between 2008-2023 that focus on the experiences and needs of veterans and their families. The literature includes: scholarly reviewed articles, research studies, non-profit reports and mission statements, and congressional hearing transcripts and their supporting documents. This review collected and analyzed findings of over 35 relevant and cited sources in the fields of veterans and the needs of veterans' families to determine six of the most important reintegration needs of veterans and their families during and after the transition back into civilian life: employment/unemployment, housing/ shelter, mental health care, physical health, and education/ education services, family services.

Following my literature review I conducted a data review using the comprehensive database available through GuideStar USA to determine to what extent the American Non-profit and Philanthropic sectors are dedicated to the “veteran” community. Additionally, I identified the number of organizations within the cohort of “veterans” that work specifically to help fulfill at

least one of the above reintegration needs. The goal of this data review is to identify to what extent there are operations in place to fill the gaps left by the VA.

I performed an additional data collection and analysis of grants available for “veteran” related giving and funding to determine how much support is provided to the American non-profit and philanthropic organizations who are identified as explicitly focusing on the American population of “veterans”. This funding data briefly addresses both the public and private sectors of funding as both are critical in determining the success of veterans service organizations.

Through my literature review I was able to perform an analysis of obstacles specific to or increasingly experienced by veteran serving nonprofit organizations and philanthropic organizations that prevent the fulfillment of the six key reintegration needs of the veteran community.

## Gaps in Service

The veteran community faces many unique challenges that give insight to their challenges in fulfilling the needs of American veterans. Of the unique challenges that veterans face I have determined that the six most critical reintegration needs are: employment/unemployment, housing/ shelter, mental health care, physical health, education/ education services, and family services because they provide for the unique post service needs of veterans and are key to ensuring the reintegration success of veterans when they return home.

The following are some important aspects of how these reintegration needs serve and ensure the success of veterans. Veteran employment and reduction in unemployment is critical to ensuring reintegration success and overall health of returning veterans. Ensuring safe and affordable housing through homeless assistance for homeless veterans, or home loans for

veterans looking to establish themselves in civilian life post service. Mental health care is an incredibly prevalent issue in working to reduce veterans suicide rate and ensure overall reintegration success and health. Physical health is incredibly prevalent to America's veterans as 27% of all US veterans have a service connected disability as assigned by the VA or the DOD and even more have unreported disabilities and physical health concerns that may prevent or hinder them from reintegrating.<sup>22</sup> Education is a key reintegration need because it is oftentimes the gateway for veterans to reenter the civilian workforce and therefore feel more comfortable in civilian life as a whole. Finally, family services are critical because the family unit represents the most important social and emotional connection to civilian life. In addition, these families also sacrifice through their roles as part of a military family and oftentimes need similar support systems that are offered to veterans.

Because the VA leaves gaps in these six key veterans' service needs, American nonprofit and philanthropic organizations have acted to help fill in some of these gaps. However, these organizations and services may be more limited than the public believes. Out of the approximately 1.8 million nonprofit organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service, around 50,000 of these organizations have indicated that they are specially dedicated to serving the "veteran" community.<sup>23</sup><sup>24</sup> This means that less than 3% of our nation's nonprofit and philanthropic organizations are dedicated to serving a population of almost 18 million. It is, however, important to address that since veterans and their families are also members of

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<sup>22</sup> "Employment Situation of Veterans Summary - 2022 A01 Results." *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 21 Mar. 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Vespa, J. (2021, October 8). *Those who served: America's veterans from World War II to the War on Terror*. Census.gov. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.html>

<sup>24</sup> Candid. (2023). *Search, "Veterans"*. Guidestar Search. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://www.guidestar.org/search/>

American society, the true number of non-profit organizations that provide services to the “veteran” community is unknown.<sup>25</sup> A search and analysis of the Guidestar USA nonprofit database provides a more complete picture of which gaps in service and needs may be currently being filled by existing veteran-focused nonprofits as well as shining light on the limitations of these organizations.

Of the 1.8 million IRS-recognized tax-exempt organizations, 51,971 of these organizations indicated that they are specifically dedicated to serving the “veteran” community. However, 19,119 of these 51,971 organizations are classified as a “post or organization of war veterans”. This often means that the organization provides community and a place of meeting for veterans to discuss shared experiences and make friends.<sup>26</sup> While this is a valuable asset to modern veterans, these organizations are not always focused on providing services and filling gaps such as housing or health services. To be classified as a 501 (c)(19) “Post or organization of war veterans.” an organization needs only to operate for one or more of the following purposes<sup>27</sup>:

- to promote the social welfare of the community (e.g., to promote the common good and general welfare of the people of the community
- to assist disabled and needy war veterans and members of the United States Armed Forces and
- their dependents - and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans
- to provide entertainment, care, and assistance to hospitalized veterans or
- members of the United States Armed Forces

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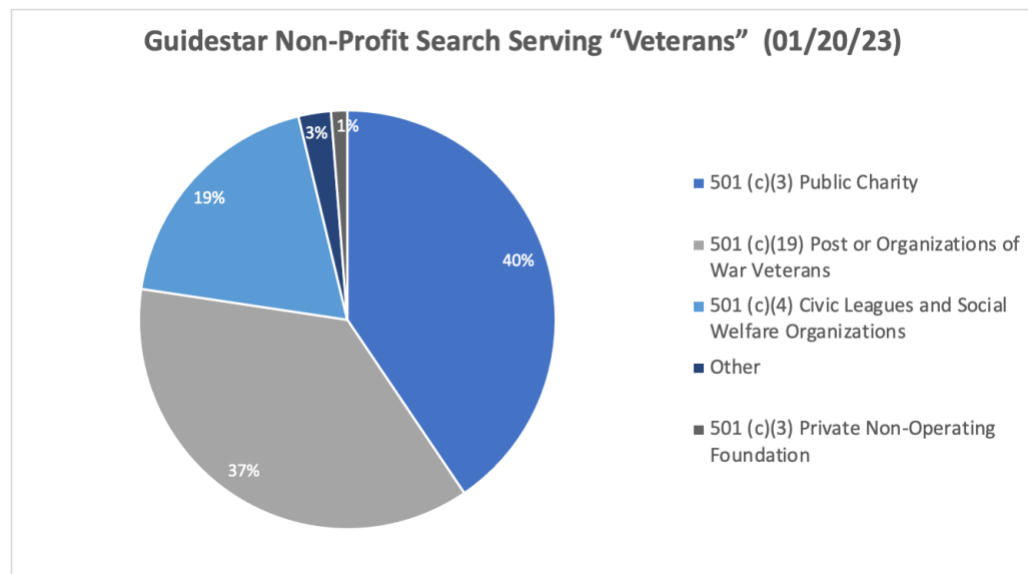
<sup>25</sup> The Bush Institute. (2014). (rep.). *Serving Our Post-9/11 Veterans* (pp. 1–104). Dallas, Texas.

<sup>26</sup> Candid. (2023). *Search, "Veterans"*. Guidestar Search. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://www.guidestar.org/search/>

<sup>27</sup> *Veterans' organizations*. Internal Revenue Service. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/other-non-profits/veterans-organizations>

- to carry on programs to perpetuate the memory of deceased veterans and members of the United States Armed Forces and comfort their survivors
- to conduct programs for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes
- to sponsor or participate in activities of a patriotic nature
- to provide insurance benefits for members or their dependents or
- to provide social and recreational activities for members <sup>28</sup>

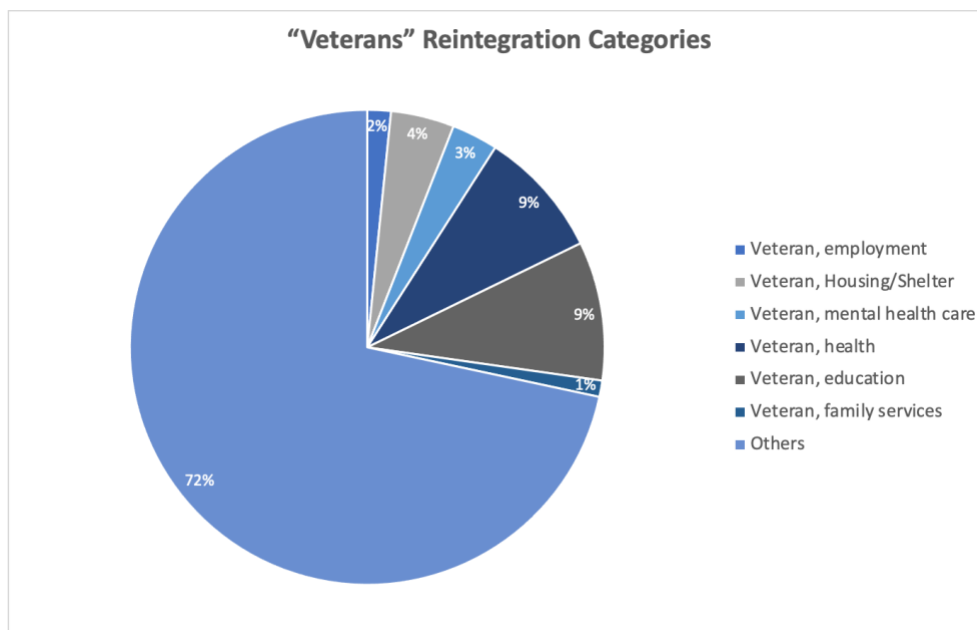
These relatively loose parameters mean that approximately a third of the already narrow field of veterans-oriented nonprofit organizations are not obligated or necessarily even oriented toward filling the specific service gaps that American veterans experience.



To further understand the services provided by the American Non-profit and Philanthropic services provided to veterans beyond this statistic I performed an analysis of the seven key reintegration needs through the Guidestar USA database. Of the 51,971 non-profit

<sup>28</sup> *Veterans' organizations*. Internal Revenue Service. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/other-non-profits/veterans-organizations>

organizations that are indicated to specifically serve the veteran population, 16,489 of these identified organizations worked specifically to help fulfill at least one of the identified reintegration needs. These 16,489 organizations are therefore responsible for fulfilling the unmet employment/unemployment, housing/shelter, mental health care, physical health care, education/education services, and family services needs of 70 million individuals. This data represents ideas such as the fact that there are only 835 nonprofit and philanthropic organizations dedicated to employment among veterans and 70 million individuals who are potentially eligible to receive these employment assistance services.<sup>29</sup>



The data identifies and outlines the extent of existing operations in place to fill the gaps left by the VA. This is a clear representation of the fairly significant gaps that still exist in the six key reintegration needs even after the service provisions of existing nonprofit and philanthropic organizations while "other" categories of needs take up a significant portion of nonprofit funding and resources. This disparity that leaves key integration needs unfilled is also represented in the

<sup>29</sup> Candid. (2023). *Search, "Veterans"*. Guidestar Search. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://www.guidestar.org/search/>

legislation. Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families suggests that “Extant policy is ‘crowding out’ meaningful collaboration by marginalizing the opportunity to allocate inherently constrained resources to their first, best use.” Their policy category summary data represents a significant discrepancy between the major post-service concerns of, education, employment, and health when compared to this “other” category much like the non-profit data.<sup>30</sup>

## Why Gaps in Service Exist

Now that we understand that there are clear gaps in service we can examine the question of why these gaps in service organizations exist and why these gaps are exacerbated.

Nonprofits and charitable organizations throughout America also have a unique set of challenges that their nonprofit counterparts in other sectors do not face to the same extent. This is because many of these challenges are rooted in the public’s perspective of both the military and veteran-oriented organizations. The American public may have an inaccurate, skewed, or incomplete view of the military and service members more so than in other service sectors as increasingly fewer members of the American population have any personal or social connection to the military such as through personal service or the service of a friend or family member.<sup>31</sup> This, along with a variety of cultural and experiential differences between civilian and military life has created an environment in which both veterans and the public agree that the American public does not fully understand the challenges faced by the nation’s veterans and military

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<sup>30</sup> Armstrong, N.A., Haynie, J.M. (2013). A National Veterans Strategy: The Economic, Social and Security Imperative. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University (IVMF) and Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism (INSCT)

<sup>31</sup> Pew Research Center. (2011a). The Military-Civilian Gap: Fewer Family Connections, Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/23/the-military-civilian-gap-fewer-familyconnections/>

families.<sup>32</sup> Nonprofit organizations, who must rely heavily on the financial and community support of the non-veteran community must manage this variation to retain support and succeed in their mission of supporting veterans' key reintegration needs. In addition to the variation in support and understanding regarding military and veterans' experiences, veteran-oriented nonprofits also experience shifts in the public consciousness as the nation moves past periods of sustained war<sup>33</sup> As public consciousness shifts so does the inflow of funding and support while the needs of war veterans will continue to increase for several decades after a conflict.<sup>34</sup> Veterans' service organizations must adapt to these varying shifts or risk worsening gaps in services provided to the veteran populations they serve. Finally, the veteran sector of the American nonprofit sphere has received significant and negative publicity over the past decade that has no doubt affected many organizations' ability to raise funds and provide services to veterans. Allegations from charity watchdogs and the media have left veterans' service organizations responsible for fighting against accusations of mismanagement of funds.<sup>35</sup> However, reputable research has found that veteran-serving nonprofit organizations handle funds and conduct very similar to the broad spectrum of American nonprofits, therefore, finding this claim relatively untrue. Unfortunately, this narrative is perpetuated by a few horror stories of extreme mismanagement by one or two large veteran charities that are picked up and spread by

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<sup>32</sup> Pew Research Center. (2011b). War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era, Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/>

<sup>33</sup> Armstrong, N.A., Haynie, J.M. (2013). *A National Veterans Strategy: The Economic, Social and Security Imperative*. Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University (IVMF) and Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism (INSCT)

<sup>34</sup> Bilmes, L. J. (2011). Current and Projected Future Costs of Caring for Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Cost of War Working Paper. Providence, RI: Costs of War Project. Retrieved from <http://costsofwar.org/sites/default/files/articles/52/attachments/Bilmes%20Veterans%20Costs.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Webb, & Abzug, R. (2016). Financial Dereliction of Duty: Are Charities That Aid Servicemen and Veterans Systematically Mismanaged? *Armed Forces and Society*, 42(4), 719–740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16629159>



the media.<sup>36</sup> These challenges exacerbate and create gaps that are part of preventing nonprofits from fulfilling the growing needs of American veterans.

Another critical aspect of successful nonprofit function and service is funding. The amount of funding received from both the private and public sectors is critical in determining how well supported a philanthropic category is as well as why they may be falling short of meeting the needs of the population they serve. The following analysis of this funding atmosphere looks at the current funding environment in order to better understand how this may be helping or hindering veterans. Through an analysis of the data reported by the IRS regarding the number of organizations reporting assets or income, and the total gross receipts of these organizations we notice that the 8,034 organizations that report assets or income under the tax exempt status of 501(c)(19)s or War Veterans Organizations sit at the middle of the data bringing in about average Total Gross Receipts.<sup>37</sup> However, when we sort the data by Total Gross Receipts / Number of organizations filing under 501(c)(19) status we get a more complete picture of the funding that each of these organizations is dealing with and we notice that 501(c)(19) War Veterans Organizations are receiving the least amount of Total Gross Receipts per organization. These 501(c)(19) organizations make up 37% of the Veteran oriented nonprofits in America and give us potential insight into the funding issues that Veterans service organizations may have. We also notice that 501(c)(23) organizations or Veterans Associations Founded Prior to 1880 which consists of the Navy Mutual Aid Association and the American

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<sup>36</sup> Webb, & Abzug, R. (2016). Financial Dereliction of Duty: Are Charities That Aid Servicemen and Veterans Systematically Mismanaged? *Armed Forces and Society*, 42(4), 719–740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16629159>

<sup>37</sup> Jones, Deondre'. "IRS Subsection Overviews." *National Center for Charitable Statistics*, Urban Institute ,2018, <https://nccs.urban.org/publication/overview-501c19s>.

Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association has the second highest Total Gross Receipts per organization. These two organizations make up less than 1% of nonprofit organizations working to serve veterans but control the majority of funding that is available among veterans oriented nonprofit organizations. It is also important to note and consider that depending on their organization and purposes, veterans organizations may also be recognized as tax-exempt under the following sections of the Internal Revenue Code:

- 501(c)(4) - social welfare organizations
- 501(c)(7) - social clubs
- 501(c)(8) - fraternal beneficiary societies
- 501(c)(10) - domestic fraternal societies
- 501(c)(2) - title holding corporations <sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Veterans' organizations*. Internal Revenue Service. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/other-non-profits/veterans-organizations>

Classification	Classification2	Number of organizations reporting assets or income	Total Gross Receipts	Total Assets	Total Gross Receipts/ # of Organizations
501(c)(19)	War Veterans Organizations	8,034	\$2,927,551,186	\$2,837,236,175	\$364,395
501(c)(20)	Legal Service Organizations	3	\$1,100,342	\$585,601	\$366,781
501(c)(15)	Mutual Insurance Companies or Associations	247	\$98,330,586	\$377,455,376	\$398,100
501(c)(10)	Domestic Fraternal Beneficiary Societies	1,995	\$1,015,213,522	\$3,055,760,652	\$508,879
501(c)(7)	Social and Recreational Clubs	18,047	\$16,809,854,532	\$27,423,092,714	\$931,449
501(c)(2)	Title holding corporation for a tax-exempt organization	2,783	\$2,835,837,649	\$13,070,752,100.00	\$1,018,986
501(c)(13)	Cemetery Companies	2,933	\$3,339,333,562	\$11,830,705,129	\$1,138,539
501(c)(5)	Labor, Agricultural, Horticultural Organizations	18,699	\$34,519,410,432.00	\$38,080,395,408	\$1,846,056.50
501(c)(6)	Business Leagues, Chambers of Commerce, Real Estate Boards, etc	34,566	\$68,290,416,295	\$84,646,096,059	\$1,975,653
501(c)(1)	Corporations originated under Act of Congress, including Federal Credit Unions	32	\$83,727,771	\$1,883,586,441	\$2,616,493
501(c)(16)	Cooperative Organizations to Finance Crop Operations	10	\$34,410,704	\$604,067,032	\$3,441,070
501(c)(8)	Fraternal Beneficiary Societies and Associations	8,577	\$36,346,021,348	\$124,356,002,505	\$4,237,615
501(c)(17)	Supplemental Unemployment Benefits Trusts	79	\$367,826,156	\$323,255,548	\$4,656,027
501(c)(4)	Civic Leagues, Social Welfare Organizations and Local Associations of Employees	26,339	\$132,592,873,015	\$92,833,477,656	\$5,034,089
501(c)(3)	Private Foundation	479,807	\$2,885,127,534,136	\$4,313,306,667,877.00	\$6,013,100
501(c)(25)	Title-Holding Corporations or Trusts for Multiple Parents	597	\$3,701,025,878	\$28,340,843,53	\$6,199,373
501(c)(26)	State-Sponsored High-Risk Health Coverage Organizations (IRS)	10	\$142,451,138	\$126,477,055	\$14,245,114
501(c)(12)	Benevolent Life Insurance Associations	3,800	\$63,896,050,131	\$144,435,363,097	\$16,814,750
501(c)(14)	State Chartered Credit Unions, Mutual Reserve Funds	1,720	\$37,685,921,474	\$481,178,230,313	\$21,910,419
501(c)(11)	Teachers Retirement Fund Associations	7	\$414,161,384	\$1,039,531,977	\$59,165,912
501(c)(9)	Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Associations	5,764	\$439,110,822,020	\$233,963,359,757	\$76,181,614
501(c)(23)	Veterans Associations Founded Prior to 1880	2	\$617,482,891	\$4,002,873,747	\$308,741,446
501(c)(18)	Employee Funded Pension Funds	1	\$554,100,605	\$1,016,248,695	\$554,100,605

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<sup>39</sup> Jones, Deondre'. "IRS Subsection Overviews." *National Center for Charitable Statistics*, Urban Institute ,2018, <https://nccs.urban.org/publication/overview-501c19s>.

Classification	Classification2	Number of organizations reporting assets or income	Total Gross Receipts
501(c)(20)	Legal Service Organizations	3	\$1,100,342
501(c)(16)	Cooperative Organizations to Finance Crop Operations	10	\$34,410,704
501(c)(1)	Corporations originated under Act of Congress, including Federal Credit Unions	32	\$83,727,771
501(c)(15)	Mutual Insurance Companies or Associations	247	\$98,330,586
501(c)(26)	State-Sponsored High-Risk Health Coverage Organizations (IRS)	10	\$142,451,138
501(c)(17)	Supplemental Unemployment Benefits Trusts	79	\$367,826,156
501(c)(11)	Teachers Retirement Fund Associations	7	\$414,161,384
501(c)(18)	Employee Funded Pension Funds	1	\$554,100,605
501(c)(23)	Veterans Associations Founded Prior to 1880	2	\$617,482,891
501(c)(10)	Domestic Fraternal Beneficiary Societies	1,995	\$1,015,213,522
501(c)(2)	Title holding corporation for a tax-exempt organization	2,783	\$2,835,837,649
501(c)(19)	War Veterans Organizations	8,034	\$2,927,551,186
501(c)(13)	Cemetery Companies	2,933	\$3,339,333,562
501(c)(25)	Title-Holding Corporations or Trusts for Multiple Parents	597	\$3,701,025,878
501(c)(7)	Social and Recreational Clubs	18,047	\$16,809,854,532
501(c)(5)	Labor, Agricultural, Horticultural Organizations	18,699	\$34,519,410,432.00
501(c)(8)	Fraternal Beneficiary Societies and Associations	8,577	\$36,346,021,348
501(c)(14)	State Chartered Credit Unions, Mutual Reserve Funds	1,720	\$37,685,921,474
501(c)(12)	Benevolent Life Insurance Associations	3,800	\$63,896,050,131
501(c)(6)	Business Leagues, Chambers of Commerce, Real Estate Boards, etc	34,566	\$68,290,416,295
501(c)(4)	Civic Leagues, Social Welfare Organizations and Local Associations of Employees	26,339	\$132,592,873,015
501(c)(9)	Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Associations	5,764	\$439,110,822,020
501(c)(3)	Private Foundation	479,807	\$2,885,127,534,136

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<sup>40</sup> Jones, Deondre'. "IRS Subsection Overviews." *National Center for Charitable Statistics*, Urban Institute ,2018, <https://nccs.urban.org/publication/overview-501c19s>.

Other than organization and categorical revenue we can also examine the current availability of Grants to American non-profit organizations in America. A search of Grants.gov, the database for available federal grants, revealed that among the other categories of most important reintegration needs among veterans, which also are some of the most important philanthropic needs of Americans as a whole, grants dedicated to helping nonprofits or undefined organizations serve veterans have one of the lowest levels levels of availability. This brief view of grant availability may gives us some insight into the availability or for that matter lack of availability of federal funding for existing and new veterans specific nonprofits and philanthropic organizations.<sup>41</sup>

<b>Grant Category</b>	<b>Number of Available Grants</b>
Physical Health	503
Family Services	409
Education	191
Mental healthcare	172
Veterans	93
Housing	70
Unemployment	47 <sup>42</sup>

The available data seems to paint a picture of an existing demand for funding among small but equally important veterans service organizations in the United States such as many 501(c)(19) organizations. Between the comparatively low statistic for Gross Receipt per organization as well as the comparatively low level of federal grants currently available to veterans related service organizations we can determine that it is possible that funding issues have helped create a barrier for a large portion of American nonprofits attempting to serve the

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<sup>41</sup> “Search Grants.” *GRANTS.GOV*, Grants.gov, 2023, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html>.

<sup>42</sup> “Search Grants.” *GRANTS.GOV*, Grants.gov, 2023, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html>.

veteran population. These smaller community organizations that are often included in the 501(c)(19) category play a critical role in building community and ensuring the wellbeing of American Veterans. These organizations can be supplemented by the few large organizations that fall under the financially strong 501(c)(23) category but cannot be replaced by them as they do not serve the same purposes. Restricted or limited funding not only makes it hard for existing service organizations to grow but also discourages the establishment of additional service organizations.

While funding is not the only issue that these organizations may be encountering, it certainly plays a part in creating barriers between American nonprofits and veterans who need assistance from these organizations.

## Consequences of these Gaps in Service

The above explained gaps in service reflect not only a statistical struggle among veteran oriented service organizations and nonprofits but also represent the real and incredibly prevalent struggles of American veterans working to make the transition from soldier to civilian. Almost half of Post-9/11 veterans say that readjusting to civilian life after their time serving was “very difficult” or “somewhat difficult”. 35% of veterans claim to have had trouble paying bills in the first few years after they left the military, and one-in-five veterans have admitted to struggling with alcohol or substance abuse in the first few years following their service.<sup>43</sup> These statistics illustrate the people and the real consequences behind these gaps in service. They also illustrate why the US needs to be concerned about these gaps and why these nonprofit organizations are so

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<sup>43</sup> Igielnik, Ruth. “Key Findings about America's Military Veterans.” *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/11/07/key-findings-about-americas-military-veterans/>.

important. These gaps in services causing unmet needs are part of the bigger picture of veterans health and quality of life measures such as suicide rates in America. Veterans commit suicide at a rate that is almost 2.5 times greater than the average suicide rate in the US.<sup>44</sup> Approximately 30% of veterans have service related disabilities, and about 30% of combat veterans suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.<sup>45</sup> This points to an overall life satisfaction issue that is oftentimes directly tied to the six reintegration needs such as unemployment, family issues, or general health struggles. These consequences of gaps in service are affecting the loved ones and communities surrounding veterans as well, contributing to overall struggles and stressors in the community.

## Legislation and Policy

The United States Congress has passed a significant amount of legislation regarding veterans over the past decade. However, this legislation is almost solely centered around the VA and VA funding. While the VA is incredibly important to the health and well being of veterans, it continues to leave large gaps in service despite increased funding and legislation as was discussed above. Much of the recent legislation regarding the VA is centered around the expansion of services or funding. One example of this is the STRONG Veterans Act of 2022 which addresses the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This act requires the following of the VA:

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<sup>44</sup> “2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report.” *Veteran Suicide Data and Reporting*, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, 14 Sept. 2018, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealth/suicide_prevention/data.asp).

<sup>45</sup> Pew Research Center. (2011b). War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era, Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/>

- ensure its medical centers have at least one full-time minority veteran coordinator and that such coordinators receive training on culturally appropriate mental health and suicide prevention services for American Indian and Alaska Native veterans;
- increase the number of full-time equivalent employees at Vet Centers and paid mental health trainees in the VA's workforce;
- expand specified scholarships and loan repayment programs for mental health providers and students;
- review and update the training for Veterans Crisis Line responders and social service assistants;
- designate a Buddy Check Week to organize outreach events and educate veterans on conducting peer wellness checks;
- update the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, including by conducting program outreach to justice-involved veterans;
- make permanent and expand the Peer Specialist Support program;
- expand eligibility for Vet Center services;
- offer mental health consultations to certain veterans;
- improve the assessment and treatment of veterans with sleep disorders; and
- perform various studies and research related to mental health issues and care.<sup>46</sup>

The goal of this piece of legislation is very similar to a multitude of other recent legislation such as the PACT Act, the BEST for Vets Act of 2023, and the Caring for Survivors Act of 2023, among a multitude of others. What you will not notice within the details of the

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<sup>46</sup> “H.R.6411 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Strong Veterans Act of 2022 ...” *Congress.gov*, 117th Congress, 11 July 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6411>.



STRONG Act or any of these other pieces of legislation is the mention of community outreach in the form of support for non-profit or philanthropic organizations working to serve the veteran community. In fact it is incredibly rare that Congress authorizes the VA to administer grants for Veterans Service Organizations.<sup>47</sup> As discussed above, the work of the VA is incredibly important but it is through the local community non profit organizations that the still unmet needs of the veteran community are fulfilled. Therefore, through the analysis of the data and the current state of veterans affairs in the US, I would recommend a transition of some of the allotted funding and resources of the VA to be used for increased grant funding by the VA for the use of Veterans Service Organizations. This increased funding would provide significant help to Veterans Service Organizations in fulfilling the reintegration needs of the veteran community and likely take some of the burden off of the VA. The act of allocating grant funding through the VA has been done before through programs such as the Veterans Transportation Program and their Highly Rural Transportation Grants, this knowledge and practice would make the transition possible and relatively simple in comparison to if programs like these had never been previously integrated.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, we are likely to see bipartisan support for increased grand funding for VSOs due to the clear history of bipartisan support of legislation regarding veterans services. Increased federal support of VSOs along with increased awareness and education within the public and private funding spheres would not only help to begin eliminating funding issues but would also bring increased awareness to the ongoing needs of veterans outside of periods of ongoing conflict.

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<sup>47</sup> *Veterans Service Organizations (Vsos): Frequently Asked Questions*. Congressional Research Center, 1 Nov. 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46412/1>.

<sup>48</sup> *Veterans Service Organizations (Vsos): Frequently Asked Questions*. Congressional Research Center, 1 Nov. 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46412/1>.

This intersection of public and governmental support is where the US will find the most success in supporting our American veterans and ensuring that their needs are met for current and generations to come.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The review and analysis of the data and information about veteran services has presented a clear indication that there are gaps in the key reintegration needs of veterans across America. Specifically, there are clear gaps in some of the most important services and needs including; employment/unemployment, housing/shelter, mental health care, physical health, education/education services, and family services. These gaps are left by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and are not able to be completely fulfilled by the veteran-serving nonprofit sector that currently exists in the United States. The data suggests that this is in part due to funding challenges as well as the unique challenges that veteran-oriented nonprofits face such as public perspective on the military and veterans as well as public consciousness of the continued needs of American veterans. Future research may scale down this data analysis and discussion to the state and/or local levels to gain a more in depth and clear understanding of the issues and potential solutions of a more homogenous community and less complex. Through the gathering and analysis of this data and information into a clearly understandable deliverable, I hope to clarify and present concise information on the challenges presented by American nonprofits and veterans as well as encourage a heightened public awareness and action regarding this issue. I believe that there is work to be done in multiple sectors and this issue is not the fault nor burden of a single organization or community.

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