



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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**DATE:** November 7, 2023

**08**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**RECEIVE UPDATE ON PRIORITIZING OUR VETERANS: ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN REINTEGRATION IN EAST COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### **OVERVIEW**

According to the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers, San Diego County has the largest concentration of military personnel in the nation, with nearly 120,000 active-duty personnel, and nearly 250,000 Veterans. Military members may face challenges associated with transitioning from military service to civilian life. With a long-standing commitment to ensuring that San Diego County is a region in which military personnel, Veterans, and their families are supported through various programs and initiatives, on September 27, 2022 (29), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) directed staff to explore establishing a Center for Military and Veteran Reintegration (CMVR) in East County. As part of this action, the Board directed staff to identify potential sites within the County's Second Supervisorial District to establish a reimagined CMVR, including Veterans housing, and to return to the Board with an implementation plan within one year. Today's action requests the Board receive an update on these efforts.

This item supports the County of San Diego's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as our ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. This will be accomplished by exploring opportunities to support the reintegration of Veterans into the community, including through expansion of Veteran facilities as one-stop hubs that provide services tailored to the needs of this population.

### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

#### **CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Receive update on exploring the feasibility of implementing the Center for Military and Veteran Reintegration model and expanded and novel services at existing County Military and Veteran Resource Centers, as well as establishing an East County Veterans Center.

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**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Military members are willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice to keep the nation safe yet may face challenges associated with transitioning from military service to civilian life. Community reintegration is a dynamic process that involves resuming roles in one’s community of choice, and for Veterans, that transition is usually their transition from military to civilian life or their journey following an injury or illness. According to 2020 data available through the Veterans Metrics Initiative, many Veterans struggle with day-to-day life after separation from military service, affecting their relationships, jobs, and health. The longitudinal research initiative that followed a cohort of 9,566 Veterans identified that nearly half of Veterans reported having a physical health condition, one-third reported seeking additional education but struggled with educational functioning and satisfaction, and one-third reported having a mental health condition, many of whom also experienced declined social well-being. Services tailored to the needs of Veterans can enhance their transition back into the community by providing mental and healthcare supports, offering opportunities to develop transferable skills and assistance for job training and navigation, social and emotional support, housing navigation, and financial assistance. Today’s action will inform the County of San Diego’s efforts to provide access to equitable and trauma informed services for all populations, specifically Veterans in San Diego County, to achieve health and social well-being following their military service.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Today’s actions support the County of San Diego’s (County) Sustainability Goal #1 to engage the community, Sustainability Goal #2 to provide just and equitable access to County services, and Sustainability Goal #4 to promote health and well-being. Throughout the process of exploring the local implementation of a Center for Military and Veteran Reintegration model and expansion of services to East San Diego County, the County collaborated with existing Veteran organizations and community partners to gather information on available resources and identify opportunities to enhance equitable access to services for the region’s Veterans. It is anticipated that doing so would improve the health and well-being of this population, who may need specialized services following the completion of their military service.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s recommendation. There may be future fiscal impacts based on future actions. Any such recommendations would return back for consideration and approval by the Board. Upon return by staff, funding for future costs will need to be identified by the department and will proceed once identified. At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

The recommended actions may positively impact businesses by expanding opportunities for job navigation and training for Veterans, as well as services related to entrepreneurship and associated technical operational assistance. These efforts will help to grow the workforce in various trades and fields and stimulate the local economy through commerce and the creation of jobs.

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### **ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

The San Diego Military and Veterans Advisory Council reviewed this item as an informational item at its regular meeting on October 19, 2023.

### **BACKGROUND**

According to the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers, San Diego County has the largest concentration of military personnel in the nation, with nearly 120,000 active-duty personnel, and nearly 250,000 Veterans. Military members may face challenges associated with transitioning from military service to civilian life. Thus it is essential to engage military members and Veterans to identify services that will support reintegration into the community and transition to civilian life. Centers for Military and Veteran Reintegration (CMVR) may be an effective avenue of delivering services to this population. CMVRs serve as hubs for military personnel, Veterans, and their spouses, to access the services they need in order to successfully prepare for civilian life. Services may include education and employment assistance, entrepreneurship, wellness, home ownership, and financial assistance, and are tailored to the needs of this population and provided through a coordinated approach.

With a long-standing commitment to ensuring that San Diego County is a region in which military personnel, Veterans, and their families are supported during and after completing their military service duty, on September 27, 2022 (29), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) directed staff to explore establishing a CMVR in East County. Specifically, the Board directed staff to:

- Competitively procure consultant services specializing in Veterans wellness and services to explore the feasibility for the implementation of the CMVR model and expanded and novel services at existing County Military and Veteran Resource Centers (MVRCs), as well as the establishing of an East County Veterans Center;
- Identify potential sites within the County's Second Supervisorial District to establish a reimagined CMVR, including Veterans housing, and to return with an implementation plan within one year;
- Implement a pilot program to reimagine Veterans services and centers in a new East County facility with plans for future expansion to all other County MVRCs; and
- Foster partnerships, seek funding, collaborate with the California Department of Veterans Affairs, local military leadership, and state and federal agencies to establish recognition of County-operated Veterans service facilities as primary hubs of services for military personnel transitioning to civilian life.

Today's action requests the Board receive an update on the status of efforts in response to the September 27, 2022 (29) directive:

*Authorize Competitive Solicitation for consultant services specializing in Veterans wellness and services to explore the feasibility for the implementation of CMVR model and expanded and novel services at existing MVRCs, as well as the establishing of an East County Veterans Center*

Efforts to seek local, State, and federal funding for establishing a reimagined CMVR in the East County began following the Board action. Concurrently, the County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) engaged the County Department of Purchasing and

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Contracting to initiate the competitive procurement process to pursue a contract for consultant services specializing in Veterans wellness and services to explore the feasibility for the implementation of CMVR model and expanded and novel services at existing MVRCs, as well as the establishing of an East County Veterans Center. After completion of the Request for Proposal process, a Notice of Intent to Award was posted on September 15, 2023 recommending a contract to National Veterans Transition services, Inc. and services are anticipated to begin January 2024. It is expected that the contracted consultant will assess current County resources available to Veterans, identify gaps in services and ways to expand services, evaluate the CMVR model and its potential local implementation, identify the differences in services at County-operated MVRCs in comparison to a CMVR, and provide recommendations to improve the facilities. It is expected that the contracted consultant final recommendations will assist in identifying new partnerships, resources, and opportunities.

*Identify potential sites and existing County facilities within the County's Second Supervisorial District to establish a reimagined CMVR, with associated Veterans housing, and return with an implementation plan in one year for consideration*

HHSA in partnership with the County Department of General Services (DGS) have completed a review of existing County-owned and -leased facilities. As part of this review, real estate searches were conducted for lease, co-location, and other facility opportunities to provide coordinated services and programs to support the military and veteran community for a CMVR and/or Veteran housing. Outreach efforts included contacting local military bases to inquire about facilities available for use. While no available facilities that would be appropriate for this purpose have yet been identified, the County will continue to seek out facility opportunities for a CMVR and Veteran housing.

Establishing an ideal CMVR with associated Veterans housing can be accomplished through different pathways. One option is via the combined use of surplus land, affordable housing, and vouchers. The Edgemoor excess property parcels are potential sites for establishing an affordable housing development and CMVR. Under this option, DGS, in partnership with HHSA would work with the selected developer, who will identify funding to construct and operate the affordable housing development. The selected developer would then partner with a service provider that would operate the CMVR. It is aimed that a percentage of resulting affordable housing units may include the County Housing Authority use of federally funded Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) project-based vouchers. VASH vouchers provide a valuable resource for homeless Veterans including housing stability, case management, and clinical services, which are crucial resources when coupled with permanent supportive housing. Any consideration of federal funding, including VASH Vouchers, would be contingent upon completion of the environmental review on the specific property(s) per 24 CFR Part 58 Environmental Regulations.

Alternatively, another option for a portion of this parcel is via County development of a CMVR. While there are currently no known federal or State funding available to establish a CMVR in San Diego County, there may be future opportunities for the County to maintain ownership of this parcel pending potential federal earmarks that would support such development efforts.

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In addition to the efforts to establish a CMVR, the County Housing Authority anticipates releasing a Notice of Funding Availability in late 2023 for affordable housing developments throughout the Housing Authority jurisdiction that dedicate rental housing units for the VASH program. This is a continuation of existing efforts by HHSA to create and expand housing opportunities, which has brought over 175 affordable units dedicated for Veterans across the region, with an additional 25 units that have been awarded and/or are under construction. HHSA's most recent endeavors include such developments like Genesis Apartments in El Cajon that has eight VASH project-based vouchers, and Apollo Senior Apartments in Poway, which includes priorities for low-income Veterans.

Once available, additional information will be provided to the Board regarding results of contracted consultant's findings and recommendations and updates on identifying funding opportunities. HHSA and DGS will continue to seek out facility opportunities for a CMVR and advocate for and seek federal and State funding opportunities in partnership with the County Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs. These efforts, combined with insights gathered by the contracted consultant will assist in identifying new partnerships, resources, and opportunities, toward implementing a pilot program to reimagine Veterans services and centers in a new East County facility with plans for future expansion to all other County MVRCs. HHSA will continue to foster partnerships, seek funding, collaborate with the California Department of Veterans Affairs, local military leadership, and State and federal agencies to establish recognition of County-operated Veterans service facilities as primary hubs of services for military personnel transitioning to civilian life. Future updates on these efforts will coincide with significant developments.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed actions support the County of San Diego's (County) 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Initiatives of Community (Quality of Life) and Equity (Health) and the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities, by exploring opportunities to expand equitable and accessible services to Veterans. Additionally, establishment of a CMVR aligns with the Prevention and Sustainment component of the County's Leave No Veteran Homeless initiative, a collaborative effort of Veteran-serving organizations led by the County of San Diego to achieve "Functional Zero" where Veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

Respectfully submitted,



FOR

HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER  
Interim Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A