

American Legion Auxiliary
Department of California
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation
EOY Floor Report
2023-24 Convention

Good Morning Madame President, Officers, Members, and Guests:

The Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation met on June 27, 2024 in the Mineral King Room A at 10:30 AM. The statistical report of this Chairman appears on page 36 in the Book of Reports.

Robin Falkenberg, D28/U512 was appointed Secretary; Madeleine Lee, D16/U741 offered prayer, and Lucy Hunt, D23/U578 was appointed Sergeant-At-Arms. A total of 20 District Delegates answered roll call, and there were 9 visitors present.

The Committee agreed upon the following report:

The Code was reviewed and the following changes were proposed:

Proposal #1 – is to Add Item 2b, Page 65 VAR Code-Medical Center Representatives, to allow Representatives assigned to Cal Vet Homes the opportunity to report their volunteer hours for inclusion in Department year-end reporting.

Rationale for Inclusion: By adding this language to Department Code Representatives assigned to Cal Vet Homes would be able to report their annual Cal-Vet volunteer hours for inclusion in the end-of-year Department VAR report and Year-End Impact Report.

If adopted, this new item would be #2b and read: "Representatives assigned to Cal Vet Homes shall record their volunteer hours on a "Cal Vet Home Volunteer Hours Report" form. The completed form shall be signed by the Director of the Cal Vet Home and submitted to the Department VAR Chairman no later than May 1 of each year. The Cal Vet Home Volunteer Hours Report Form will be available on the Department website. Additionally, the Department VAR Chairman will distribute the form to Cal Vet Home Representatives annually. (2024).

By direction of the Committee I move for approval.

Proposal #2 - would amend Item #8, Page 66 which currently reads: "Applications for rehabilitation aid (casework) from Hospital Representatives or Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) shall be completed and signed by th Hospital Representative/CBOC Deputy . Checks for Temporary Financial Assistance shall be made

payable to the Unit or the CBOC Deputy. Additional checks shall not be issued until receipts for previous expenditures have been received by the Department Chairman. (2023)"

Rationale for Change: Checks for TFA are issued ONLY to the Unit of the Hospital Representative or DBOC Deputy. If adopted, removal of the clause "or the CBOC Deputy" will eliminate confusion about to whom the TFA funds are issued.

If approved Item #8 would read "Applications for rehabilitation aid (casework) from Hospital representatives or Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) shall be completed and signed by the Hospital Representative/CBOC Deputy. Checks for Temporary Financial Assistance shall be made payable to the Unit. Additional checks shall not be issued until receipts for previous expenditures have been received by the Department Chairman. (2024)"

By direction of the Committee I move for approval.

Discussion was held on possible Code changes to be addressed in the coming year by the VAR chairman.

Awards for 100% Reporting and 2nd and 3rd Place Best Unit and District Supplementals were announced.

A closing prayer was offered and the meeting was adjourned at 11:25 AM.

May I continue with my statistical report, Madame President?

STATISTICAL REPORT:

The Department of California Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation program, otherwise known as the Department of Health and Human Services, has enjoyed a very productive year, serving a group of people which are most dear to our hearts – our veterans and their families.

To begin, Department gave a total of \$7,330 in **Temporary Financial Assistance** to three veterans in need this year. These funds covered such things as back rent, food, and unpaid utility bills.

Forty-eight Units in twenty-six Districts reported actively promoting **Be The One**. A number of Units and Districts created "Awareness" Teams in collaboration with their Legion Family counterparts. Teams visited Post homes and Units, and participated in Community-wide events to create public awareness about veteran suicide.

Forty-nine Units and nineteen Districts reported participation in Wreaths Across America. A total of 3,066 wreaths were purchased at a cost of \$5,212, and both Junior and Senior members participated in wreath-laying ceremonies at veterans' cemeteries throughout the state on December 16, 2023.

Forty-three members in thirteen Districts volunteered fifty-two hours of their time to welcome home returning **Honor Flight** veterans. Signage was created and displayed, and American and military flags were waved during Honor Flight departures and arrivals back home.

Bakersfield Unit 26 in District 15 gifted 135 lap blankets to WWII, Korean, Viet Nam, and Native American Veterans who participated in Honor Flights last fall. Members of South Orange County Unit 281 in District 29 provided \$250 in Starbucks gift cards that accompanied the welcome home letters written by the 2023 Girls State delegates from that District.

Seventy-three members in twenty-one Districts gave a total of 12,354 volunteer hours to the **Military and Veteran Caregiver Network** program. A total of \$24,834 was spent for food, clothing, and toiletries. Caregivers drove 19,782 miles to provide meals, take their veterans to doctor appointments, grocery shopping, errands, and perform housekeeping chores. Abraham Lincoln Unit 241 in District 18 focused their efforts on providing assistance to veterans in the caregiver network by traveling 500 miles, donating 450 hours of time and spending \$400 on veterans in this program.

As for **Service for Veterans/Military**, members in twenty-three Districts reported a total of 128,296 volunteer hours while serving 16,648 veterans and military. Units and Districts reported spending \$111,337 on holiday parties, merchandise, and related goods. Reported in-kind donations for veterans amounted to \$220,805, and included a wide variety of items, including clothing, cots/blankets/bedding, and personal items. Units reported a total of 108 'Veterans in Community Schools' presentations made to California school children this year. And, Units reported offering 59,321 poppies and receiving \$90,357 in poppy donations during the 2023-24 year.

Members of San Anselmo Unit 179 in District 5 regularly volunteered at the Yountville Veterans Home. Members participated in the annual December Holiday Share with

donations of much needed items for the residents. This Unit also worked closely with VA social workers at Homeward Bound in Novato, CA, and provided "move-in" boxes for the veterans transitioning into housing.

Fair Oaks Unit 383 in District 6 celebrated "Our Women Veterans" at a Unit meeting. Each of the four female veterans in attendance received a certificate and flowers to honor their service to our nation. A reception in their honor was held after the meeting.

Merced Unit 83 in District 12 used Poppy donations to provide \$500 each to assist two veteran families with medical emergency expenses. An Army veteran's wife experienced a very difficult pregnancy and was ultimately diagnosed with a rare condition that required her to be hospitalized far from her husband and two children. This Unit also provided \$500 to a Navy veteran who was diagnosed with Stage 3 Esophageal Cancer and was experiencing depression. The Unit's generosity enabled the veterans' families to cover food and sundry costs.

Camarillo Unit 741 in District 16 organized a drive-by birthday party for a World War II Army veteran who was celebrating his 104th birthday. The event received local media coverage; more than 100 vehicles participated and US Army troops and vehicles joined in the celebration.

Allied Unit 302 in District 17 accomplishes the nearly impossible in their ongoing work with Deported Veterans who were honorably discharged from military service. To date the Unit has been instrumental in negotiating the return of more than 120 deported vets to their families in California, where all have been pardoned by Governor Newsom. The Unit works with a group of attorneys on the East coast who donate their time for this project. The repatriation process for each deported vet takes many months of communication and coordination with the VA, Consulates and Embassies.

This same Unit also works with Women Vets on Point – a mental health program that helps female vets with day-to-day life struggles. The Unit has connected with over 225 women vets in the program. Assistance ranges from help with housing needs to childcare, employment services, employment, and PTSD counseling. Two Unit members are Life Coaches and Trauma Debriefing Therapists, who provide guidance and a strategic plan to help female vets get back on track.

Units in several Districts advised they participated in Stand Downs for Homeless Veterans in their communities. Jackie Robinson Unit 252 Color Guard in District 23 presented the Colors at the Stand Down held at the West Los Angeles VA Campus, and their District members gave socks to all homeless vets who attended.

Members of Big Pine Unit 457 in District 27, a widow Unit, conducted community-wide services for both Veterans Day and Memorial Day and coordinated the distribution of flags on veterans' headstones at local cemeteries.

District 29 Units actively support the Veterans Resource Centers at three local community colleges, providing resource information on local VA hospitals, legal matter referrals, and financial assistance to more than 2,400 veterans this year. Last fall South Orange County Unit 281 in District 29 filled an urgent request for new beds and bedding for previously

homeless veterans housed in a non-profit veteran home. The Unit gave \$5,000 to purchase bunkbeds, mattresses and bedding for each of the 16-20 veterans housed there. Pillows and bath towels were donated by a Unit member.

Members in eighteen California Auxiliary Units reported 255,976 volunteer hours for **ALA Service for Military Families**. Additionally, these Units spent \$125,678 to serve 13,764 military families in their respective Districts.

All ten Units in District 18 worked together to host a Baby Shower for 'mommies-to-be' at the Ft. Irwin Military Base. Gifts totaling over \$3,000 were donated by the Units, and the event was a huge success.

Local competitions for **The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)** have been limited in California VA medical centers. Several facilities have finally re-implemented this wonderful program for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighteen Districts reported Unit and individual donations totaling \$2,360 to NVCAF this year.

Seventeen Districts reported active volunteer recruitment for the **VA Center for Development and Community Engagement**. Through ongoing, active recruitment, California ALA was able to add seven Representatives and Deputies to the VAVS rolls in 2023-24. Volunteers were also recruited for Cal Vet Homes. The Department of California ALA disbursed a total of \$9,300 to nine VA medical centers and six Cal Vet Homes for Patient Remembrance and Gift Shops last fall.

Antelope Valley Unit 311 and Palmdale Unit 348 in District 20 each donated \$500 to the Pete Knight Veterans Home for Christmas. In addition to the cash donations members provided gift bags filled with goodies and a \$50 bill for each veteran housed there. The National PowerPoint presentation – VAVS 101 2023 – is emailed to all prospective volunteers and used as a training tool for newly appointed VAVS volunteers.

This Chairman wrote monthly bulletins and contributed two articles to The Auxiliary News Hub. Zoom meetings were held with both the District VA&R chairmen, and Hospital Reps and Deps. The many facets of the VA&R program were shared with attendees at workshops and Leadership trainings. Additionally, this Chair created a special VA&R PowerPoint presentation for our Junior members at Junior Conference in April.

This concludes my statistical report, Madame President. May I continue with my first place awards?

1st Place Best District Supplemental goes to District 29, Cynthia Mayfield, Chairman
1st Place Best Unit Supplemental goes to Allied Unit 302, Rodi Andreescu, Chairman

In closing, the Department of California Auxiliary is proud to provide many opportunities that continue to improve the quality of life for our veterans and military who reside in The Golden State. As such, we remain connected and united as one with our military and veteran communities.

Thank you, Madame President, for this very challenging appointment. It has been my honor to serve the Department as your VAR chairman this year.