

American Legion Auxiliary  
Department of California

**Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation  
Mid-year Report  
2023-24**

Good Morning Madame President, Officers, Chairmen, Members and Guests!

This Chairman is happy to report that the Department of Health and Human Services – otherwise known as the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation program has had a very successful first six months!

A big thank you to the twenty-six District chairmen who submitted mid-year reports for VA&R. I am delighted to be able to share with you today, some examples of the amazing and diverse work done by Units and Districts in this program.

California Districts and Units are actively promoting Be The One, the special project of both our National President Lisa Williamson, and Department President Glenda Schultz. A number of Districts have created "Awareness" Teams in collaboration with their Legion Family counterparts. Teams visit Post homes and Units to provide information and raise awareness on depression and veteran suicide. Several such Teams have participated in Community events, including county fairs and National Night Out to create public awareness.

Sixteen California Districts reported participation in Wreaths Across America this year. A total of 327 wreaths were purchased by Units and members at a cost of \$5,575. California Auxiliary members attended wreath-laying ceremonies at veterans' cemeteries around the state on December 16<sup>th</sup>. Individual members also purchased wreaths to place at veteran burial sites in local cemeteries not associated with WAA. This is a great beginning for a first-year Auxiliary-sponsored program.

Auxiliary members in ten Districts participated in the Honor Flight, Inc. program. Members in District 2 wrote cards and letters to a local veteran who participated in the program in Missouri. Unit members in Bakersfield Unit 26/ District 15 participated in 'welcome home' ceremonies at airports. Signage was created and displayed and American and military flags were waved as the veterans deplaned. This same Unit gifted lap blankets to 135 WW II, Korean, Viet Nam, and Native American Veterans who participated in Honor Flights this past fall.

Units in eleven Districts reported participation in the Military and Veteran Caregiver Network. Some 5,070 hours were given by Auxiliary members, and included taking veterans to doctor appointments, grocery shopping, running errands, and preparing meals and performing housekeeping chores. More than 24,432 miles were driven by caregivers, and a total of \$18,293 was spent for related costs.

California members volunteered 28,950 hours in service for 10,206 California veterans and military. Units and Districts spent \$78,842 on holiday parties, merchandise, and goods. In-kind donations received by Units for veterans amounted to \$140,579. Units reported a total of 83 "Veterans in Community Schools" presentations made to children in California schools this last fall.

Members in District 19 donated 1,000 pairs of Bombas socks for troop shipping; 750 pairs were shared with two Units in neighboring Districts; and 500 pairs were donated to the Camp Pendleton Words of Comfort Holiday Shop.

Several members in District 20 regularly visited with patients in VA medical facilities. They logged 1,114 travel miles and donated more than 150 volunteer hours.

A Unit in District 21 purchased 600 "Patriot Bucks" at their local VA hospital to benefit veterans in need of additional supplies while in recovery or rehabilitation there.

Charter Grove Unit 755 in District 18 purchased two flags for the Field of Valor Remembrance Ceremony in honor of all veterans who have served, and all veterans who are serving. Two members in that same Unit also crocheted 204 beanies with a value of \$2,000 for holiday distribution to the veterans at the West Los Angeles Medical Center.

Several Units and Districts volunteered at local Veteran Standdowns. Items donated by the Auxiliary included insulated beverage tumblers, crocheted hats, scarves, men's and ladies' gloves, T-shirts, and blankets created from plastic bags.

Allied Unit 302 in District 17 works closely with Women Vets on Point – a mental health program that helps women vets with day-to-day life struggles. Unit members have connected with over 225 women vets within the program. Assistance provided includes help with housing needs, childcare, employment services, employment, and PTSD counseling. The Unit is blessed to have two Life Coaches and two Trauma Debriefing Therapists who provide guidance and a strategic plan to help female vets get back on track.

This same Unit is currently working with nineteen deported veterans who were honorably discharged, to bring them home to their families. Pardoned by California Governor Gavin Newsom these nineteen veterans now have full US citizenship and have been reunited with their loved ones here in California. The Unit is also working through the repatriation process with another seven deported vets, who will hopefully return home to their families and US citizenship this Spring.

And for the fortieth year in a row, a Unit member in District 22 donated 40 towels and washcloths to the Jennifer Moreno Medical Center San Diego ASPIRE Center, a special facility that maintains 40 beds (30 men and 10 women) to help veterans with traumatic brain injury – TBI or PTSD. The facility provides 24-hour therapy for a 90-day period.

One Unit in District 27 works closely with Operation Paperback, an organization that allows active duty military and veterans to register and request books of all kinds. Upon request from the Unit, Operation Paperback sends them a list of recipients and books requested. The Unit then purchases the books and mails them to the veterans.

District 26 Units regularly donate funds to Menlo Park VA Building 331 to cover the costs associated with food for special BBQs and holiday meals. This year they also provided 'wish list' gifts for the Menlo Park VA patients in Building 331 during the holidays.

The California Auxiliary served 19,783 military families and spent \$32,086 for holiday meals and gifts, toys, and foodstuffs.

Members of several Units around the State reported donating baby supplies and cash totaling \$3,000 for a District-wide baby shower to honor expectant military mothers at a nearby military base.

District 17 members regularly provide food, water, blankets, and jackets to homeless veterans and their families. Additionally, the District has donated to them, 195 scarves and beanies, 189 sweatshirts, 279 jackets, food, gift cards, toys, shoes, 250 towels, 95 tents, 100 sleeping bags and plastic rolls used to cover the tents during the rainy season.

Six Districts reported donations totaling \$3,615 to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival so far this year. It was noted that some Unit members will be volunteering their time and resources to assist with competitions at their local VA facilities this coming Spring.

Fourteen Units reported active recruitment of volunteers to serve at Community Based Outpatient Clinics that do not currently have Auxiliary representation. So far this year National has approved one Representative and three Deputies for our Department VAVS roster. The PowerPoint presentation – VAVS 101 2023 – is utilized as a recruiting and training tool for prospective and newly appointed VAVS volunteers.

Madame President, with your permission I would like to have the Hospital Reps and Deps line up in front of the dais and be recognized...

The Department of California Auxiliary is proud to provide numerous opportunities that continue to improve the quality of life for our veterans and military who reside in The Golden State. This Chairman is really looking forward to learning about the VA&R activities that will be recorded in your year-end reports – April 12<sup>th</sup> is just around the corner!

This concludes my report.

Susan Baker, Chairman

