

## Riverside County Department of Mental Health

### Plans and Actions

#### Veterans Services Liaison

Vision: Riverside County Department of Mental Health (RCDMH) is dedicated to integrity; we are equally committed to the people who seek our assistance in their time of need. RCDMH honors the principle that every Veteran and his or her family are inherently entitled to the highest quality of life with dignity and honor. We are dedicated, as President Lincoln so eloquently echoed in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Inaugural Address *“to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.”*

Mission: California has the largest concentration of veterans anywhere in the country. Approximately 134,000 veterans call Riverside County home. The Department’s Veterans Services Liaison (VSL) exists to assist the Department in identifying strategies for improving our work with Veterans who experience difficulties related to mental health. In addition, the Liaison will provide support to Families of Veterans in making and respecting decisions in regard to the needs of military families.



## **Section I: Representation and Advocacy**

### **Action #1 – Reduce Stigma and Improve Veteran Access to Mental Health Care**

**Description:** Research and our own anecdotal experiences tell us that the stigma associated with mental illness is a very real barrier to mental health service access. This stigma may be even more real for our military veterans who are generally at more risk for suicide, substance abuse, and homelessness due to unresolved mental health needs than their civilian brothers and sisters. Community events in Riverside County serve as forums to inform the public on RCDMH's mission, planning, and services and to educate on the truths of mental illness and with seeking help. These events serve as an opportunity to engage veterans and their families and educate on veteran mental health, as well as, inform the general public on RCDMH's commitments to addressing the needs of returning veterans and their families. The VSL will network with community and veteran organizations to ensure RCDMH representation at community forums in order to be a visible face to those veterans in need of mental health care.

#### **Objectives:**

1. Increase public and veteran awareness of the importance of mental health support for vets and their families
2. Improve general knowledge on signs and symptoms of mental illness, especially regarding returning veterans
3. Provide mental health resources to the community to improve veteran access to mental health care
4. Outreach veterans and their families and normalize access to mental health services to decrease stigma encountered with seeking care
5. Establish good working relationship with VA and Vet service organizations to optimize mutual referral process, problem solve access problems, and understand trends and changes in vet services delivery



## **Action #2 – Expand Veteran Mental Health Services with Community Mental Health Service Providers**

**Description:** It can be a difficult first step to request mental health care. Multiple doors and frustrated attempts to receive help can discourage engagement. For the best possible opportunity for recovery, vets need to be appropriately served at whatever agency door they enter. Veterans have their own language, culture, and worldview. For veterans to be properly served, providers need to understand the world of the vet, their norms, and their training. The VSL will outreach community mental health organizations to promote the necessity of veteran cultural competency, provide military mental health education, and problem-solve veteran engagement and service issues. The VSL will encourage, support and assist with the development of veteran specific mental health care and help increase awareness of such programs once they become operationalized.

### **Objectives:**

1. Network and build professional relationships with mental health and community service organizations
2. Support the development and promotion of veteran specific mental health services within RCDMH as well as community providers
3. Assist and promote with Mental Health Prevention and Early Intervention strategies to reach veterans before the onset of a mental health crisis



## **Section II: Training the Public Mental Health Service System**

### **Action #3 – Improve RCDMH Staff Knowledge on Service to Veterans and Veteran Cultural Competency**

**Description:** As we encounter more and more veterans and families entering the public mental health service system, RCDMH staff will need to better understand how to engage and support veteran mental health recovery. Veterans have their own unique service needs. In order to best engage and serve our military service consumers, staff will need to become more familiar with the military experience. The VSL will develop and provide training that will include educating staff on culture, customs, language, and everyday norms of veterans and their families. Workforce development will span from students in RCDMH's GIFT Program to Department employees and volunteers. The identification and dissemination of appropriate veteran support resources will also be included.

#### **Objectives:**

1. Present comprehensive training to RCDMH staff that is based from current VA research findings
2. Research related resource material for Department dissemination
3. Alert RCDMH staff to existing care systems and resources available for veterans and their families and how to utilize these resources in the course of treatment delivery
4. Research and recommend additional veteran specific mental health trainings to RCDMH and encourage the scheduling of subject matter experts. Collaborate closely with RCDMH Cultural Competency unit to assist in the development of veteran cultural competency standards
5. Enhance services to veterans by the RCDMH Cultural Competency outreach and engagement teams through advisement and consultation



#### **Action #4 – Military Service Members and Military Family Volunteer Recruitment**

**Description:** Volunteers and interns throughout RCDMH have greatly enhanced services to consumers and their family members. Volunteers and interns with a lived experience have become a vital component in RCDMH's transformation to a more strength-based, solution focused service delivery system. Veterans as volunteers and interns would therefore support service transformation, as well as, serve as informal consultants to Department employees on veteran culture and experience. Spouses and other family members of our veteran and active duty service members also provide a valuable lived experience for serving the families and children impacted by the adjustment, fears, and realities of deployment and a vet's return home.

#### **Objectives:**

1. Increase the number of volunteers and student interns with military or military family experience
2. Network with university and vet service organizations to recruit veteran and family member volunteers and interns for RCDMH. Veterans who carry a mental health diagnosis would be most encouraged to apply.
3. Assist RCDMH GIFT Program and Volunteer Services Coordinator with developing training and support to best utilize veteran and family member volunteers and interns.



### **Section III: Resource and Program Development**

#### **Action #5 – Optimize Network of Care (NOC) as a Resource Portal for Veterans, Families, and Service Providers**

**Description:** Riverside County Network of Care (NOC) site is an electronic, web-based application that serves as a vehicle of information for consumers, family members, and staff when managing and accessing mental health and allied services. The Network of Care has recently created a separate application that is specific to meeting the needs of veterans. Once strengthened and regularly monitored for updates and changes, the Veterans' NOC would be an outstanding tool to support veterans in need. Riverside County's NOC is maintained by the RCDMH.

#### **Objectives:**

1. Ensure that the NOC site is veteran user-friendly and that language, context, and services are reflective of the veteran experience
2. Ensure that listed resources are accurate and current.
3. Promote and educate on the Veteran NOC as a useful tool to veterans, families, and service providers

**<http://riverside.networkofcare.org/veterans/>**





### **Action #6 – Improve Resources and Mental Health Support for Veterans' Families**

**Description:** Following the guidelines, mission, and mandate given by both the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) and California's Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), the involvement of family is critical to a person's mental health wellness and recovery. Collaborating with RCDMH Family Advocate and Parent Partner programs will be crucial for individual, family, and community recovery of Riverside veterans. This collaboration will be ongoing and will need to adjust to the fluctuating and trending needs of veterans and their families, which will hopefully and inevitably assist in the reintegration process of returning veterans into their families and communities.

#### **Objectives:**

1. Increase awareness of family perspective in service delivery, program, and resource development
2. Integrate family perspective into military related training
3. Interface with Front-Line (NAMI) and other community partner organizations to gather feedback and input on veteran family needs around Riverside County
4. Routinely attend Parent Partner and Family Advocate meetings; provide updates and receive any feedback

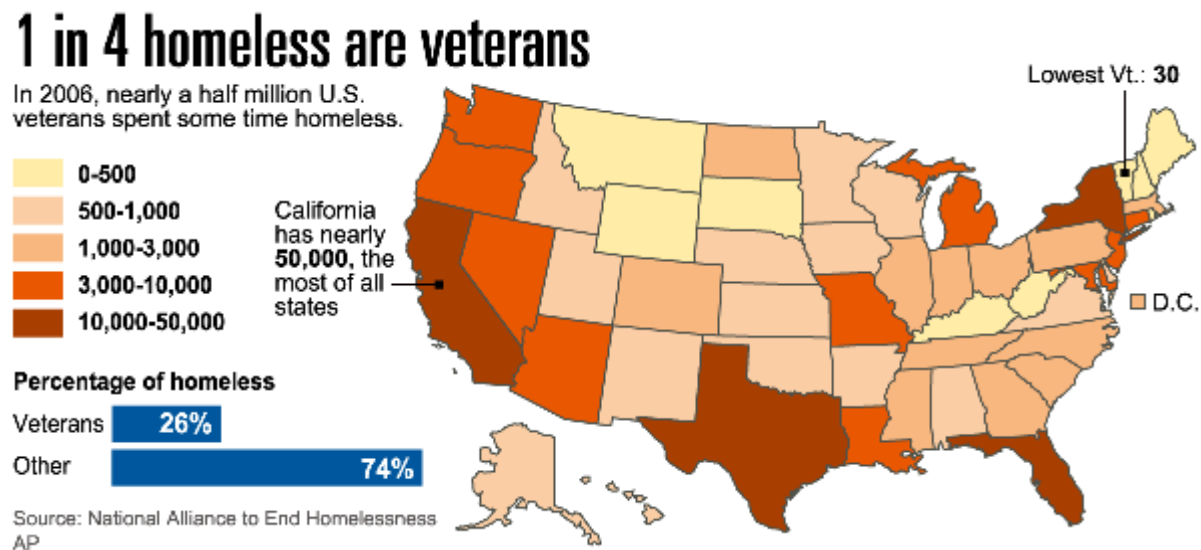


## **Action #7 – Improve Recovery Outcomes for Homeless Veterans**

**Description:** Only 7% of the general population can claim veteran status, but nearly 13% of the homeless adult population is composed of veterans. Approximately 1 in every 4 homeless people in the United States is a military veteran; 50% of them experience symptoms of a mental disorder and 70% struggle with substance abuse. RCDMH H.H.O.P.E program created an Outreach Veterans Specialist position to address the growing problem of homelessness among veterans. The VSL will collaborate with H.H.O.P.E, Outreach Veterans Specialist, in order to ensure that the special needs of homeless veterans remain visible.

### **Objective:**

1. Routinely meet with H.H.O.P.E to discuss roles, planning, and current and future project
2. Collaborate with other RCDMH programs currently involved with homeless outreach and service to enhance support of homeless veterans and families county-wide
3. Develop a committee that will help define and address strategies to meet the mental health needs among homeless veterans and their families





**Action #8 – Improve Recovery Outcomes for Veterans in the Legal System**

**Description:** As of January 2013, Riverside County started a Veterans' Mental Health Court. Riverside recognized that many vets encounter the legal system due an unsuccessful reintegration into our communities after returning from war. Veterans' Mental Health Court assists Veterans in permanently resolving the factors that lead to incarceration, expunging their conviction records, and becoming independent and contributing member of society once again. The VSL will advise, provide feedback, and support this developing program. Riverside County also continues to address the integration of inmates released due to AB 109, which may include parolees and probationers who once served in the military and retain their veteran status. RCDMH programs designed to meet the needs of AB 109 consumers may require assistance in accessing the provisions and entitlements guaranteed to all persons meeting criteria to be classified as Veteran.

**Objectives:**

1. Serve as a resource to staff in the Veterans' Mental Health Court, as well as other agencies that are involved in serving vets who have a legal history
2. Assist with the development of staffing or other supports for these programs
3. Advise and Consult with AB 109 services programs in regards to creating reintegration strategies for veterans identified as AB 109 consumers.

