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## **IE Veterans Struggle to Find Existing Benefits and Services Across Vast Region, According to New Report**

*Study points out lack of awareness and access among Inland Empire's veteran community that is double that of Los Angeles County*

**RIVERSIDE, Calif.:** Today, the Inland Empire Community Foundation (IECF) announced the release of a new study examining the existing benefits and services available for military veterans and their families in the Inland Empire. The study, titled the ["IE State of Veterans Report,"](#) and commissioned by the [Friends of Veterans Fund](#) at IECF, sheds light on the challenges IE veterans face when seeking programs, resources, and organizations and the call for a more inclusive and responsive system to their evolving needs.

While many benefits and services are available to veterans and their families, finding them in the Inland Empire can be daunting, and this highlights the need for our community to take a proactive role in supporting those who served.

Over several months, the study involved extensive research, surveys, and interviews with veterans, service providers, and stakeholders across the Inland Empire. The findings reveal crucial insights into the current state of veteran support services, identifying gaps, successes, and areas for improvement, and propose short- and long-term solutions toward enhancing the lives of veterans within the Inland Empire community.

### **Key highlights from the study include:**

- When combined, the veteran population percentage in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties nearly doubles that of Los Angeles County
- The IE is home to a diverse population of veterans who have unique needs and challenges
- IE veterans are less aware of where and how to access the benefits and services they earned
- The population of women Veterans has seen remarkable growth, increasing by over 30%
- Staff turnover is a big issue with work focused on veterans because of compassion fatigue

"This report comes at a crucial juncture in our ongoing efforts to care for our Veterans," said Rep. Mark Takano (D-Riverside). "With countless heroes returning from deployments around the world and making the Inland Empire their home, we must remain vigilant in addressing their needs."

Added Mayor of Riverside Patricia Lock Dawson, “In partnership with our neighboring cities in the Inland Empire, we recognize the importance of a united effort in addressing the challenges our Veterans face and enhancing the benefits and services available to them.”

### **Key Recommendations**

Consistent themes emerged during this study, which align with established best-practices seen in neighboring counties are summarized below:

- **Awareness** – Veteran awareness of where and how to access the benefits and services they earned. Community awareness of challenges and opportunities of our Veterans and their families.
- **Access** – Providing wrap-around services through a public-private partnership and multi-solvers, relying on a “no wrong door” policy for benefits and services.
- **Engagement** – Create a movement of community support to embrace our Veterans so they have a better sense of belonging, which in turn strengthens our civic muscle.

These three areas are the basis for a community-based network of Veteran-serving organizations that relies on the power of peer-support, similar to Los Angeles Counties Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN).

### **FRiENDS of Veterans Fund**

The FRiENDS OF Veterans Fund was established by IECF in 2022 to benefit veterans residing in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties whose needs include but are not limited to legal aid services, post-military education and skills-building, housing, basic needs, and physical and mental health. To ensure a purposeful and efficient use of those funds, IECF commissioned a study to develop a better understanding of the environment as it relates to veteran programs and services and the need for continuum of care for veterans and their families.

“This report is a valuable resource for organizations, policymakers, and individuals dedicated to the well-being of our veterans,” said Michelle Decker, IECF CEO. “Our goal here is to ensure veterans and their families are thriving in the IE and that they receive the recognition, support, and care they earned through their service.”

The release of the study marks the beginning of a concerted effort by IECF and its partners to address the gaps identified and implement positive change for veterans in the Inland Empire. The Foundation will be hosting a series of community forums and workshops to further discuss the findings and collaborate on actionable solutions.

Download the [State of Veterans Report](#) in full and view the [video here](#).

For donors and businesses interested in supporting the FRiENDS OF VETERANS Fund, contact Brie Griset Smith, SVP of Charitable Giving at [bgrisetsmith@iegives.org](mailto:bgrisetsmith@iegives.org).

*Founded in 1941, the Inland Empire Community Foundation is the oldest and largest community foundation in Inland Southern California. We partner with individuals, families and corporations to build a culture of philanthropy. Since inception, we have given out over \$159 million in grants and scholarships. For more information visit the IECF’s website at [www.iegives.org](http://www.iegives.org). Be a part of our conversation on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.*