



Presentation to the House Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs: HHS Veterans Services & Initiatives

**Dr. Suzanna Gratia Hupp,
Associate Commissioner for Veterans Services**

February 18, 2015

Veteran Population in Texas

- In 2013, Texas was home to approximately 1.5 million veterans, ranking second to California with approximately 1.7 million veterans
 - This number represent approximately 1.339 million men and approximately 144,000 women
- Texas veterans include approximately 1.3 million wartime veterans
- Many veterans either entered service in Texas or were stationed at one of the military bases located across the state, and remained in the state after discharge

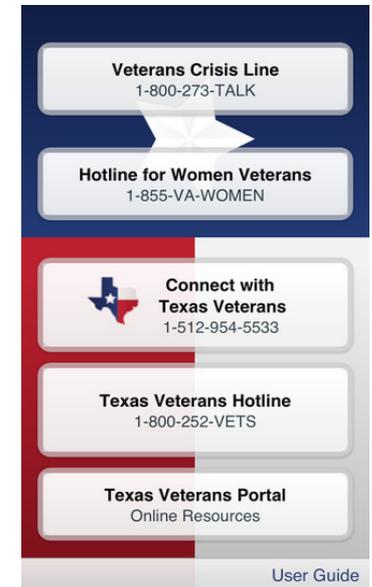
HHS Veterans Initiative

- The HHS Veterans Initiative is a cross-agency partnership that promotes policy changes and identifies opportunities to better serve Texas veterans
- It is our goal to increase knowledge of veteran services and supports and provide improved coordination of these services and supports to veterans and their families
- The HHS Enterprise works with members of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services, which was created by S.B. 1796, 82R, 2011, to enhance veteran awareness and services
- HHS Enterprise offers services and initiatives that are tailored to veterans and cover a wide range of domains, including:
 - Connecting veterans to available resources and services
 - Providing faith-based assistance
 - Providing mental and behavioral support
 - Providing awareness of and access to employment opportunities

Connecting Veterans to Resources

- **Texas Veterans Phone App**

- In March 2014, HHSC launched a free mobile application designed to be used by veterans, active duty personnel, military families, and service providers for quick, easy, and portable access to crisis lines, online resources, personal connections with local/regional veterans, and assistance with services
- Offers access to: Veterans Crisis Line, Hotline for Women Veterans, Connect with Texas Veterans, Texas Veterans Hotline, and the Texas Veterans Portal managed by TVC



- **Texas Veterans Portal (TVP)**

- As a resource for veterans, their families, and survivors, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) manages the website, which includes helpful information from many government agencies regarding assistance, services, and benefits
- HHSC coordinates with TVC to ensure that all state agency websites include the portal
- HHSC is also working with county governments to include the portal in their websites and to expand at the local level, extending TVP to city government and private industry

Connecting Veterans to Resources

- **Employed Veteran Email System**

- The HHS employed veteran email system was created to enable employed veterans to communicate with each other regarding any issue that affects them as veterans, including family members of veterans

- **2-1-1 Texas Military-Related Referral Resources**

- 2-1-1 Texas maintains a database of services, including over 250 organizations that specifically target service members and their families
- Information Center staff receive veteran-specific training to help disseminate resource information including details about hours of operation, eligibility criteria, fees (if applicable), documentation requirements, and accessibility
 - Several 2-1-1 Texas Area Information Centers received Texas Reintegration of Iraq and Afghanistan Deployment (TRIAD) and Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) grants to add staff that provide outreach and service coordination for veterans, military members and their families
- 2-1-1 Texas works with members of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services to enhance veteran awareness and services
- Referral services accessible via phone and on the web

2-1-1 Texas Website Access:

www.211texas.org



Veterans Assistance in Texas

includes information and referral agencies, home and land loans, vocational resources, and more.

VETERANS RESOURCES

[TexVet: Information, Referral & Advocacy >>](#)
[Texas Veterans Portal >>](#)
[Texas Veterans Commission \(TVC\) >>](#)
[Texas Veterans Smartphone App >>](#)

HOUSING/LAND ASSISTANCE

[Veterans Land Board: Land & Home Loans >>](#)
[Veteran Homes: Long-term Nursing Care >>](#)
[Disabled Veteran Property Tax Exemption >>](#)
[Mortgage Delinquency Counseling >>](#)

VOCATIONAL RESOURCES

[Planning for College >>](#)
[Veteran Tuition Exemption >>](#)
[Veteran Education Benefits >>](#)
[Veteran Employment Programs >>](#)

HEALTH CARE

[Veterans Affairs Medical Centers >>](#)
[Veteran Outpatient Clinics >>](#)
[Health Insurance Options >>](#)
[TRICARE Health Care Program >>](#)
[Aid and Attendance Monthly Pension >>](#)

MENTAL HEALTH

[Veterans' Crisis Line >>](#)
[Vet Centers: Combat Call Center >>](#)
[National Center for PTSD >>](#)
[Veteran Reintegration Counseling >>](#)
[General Counseling & Outreach >>](#)

VETERANS AFFAIRS BENEFITS

[Life Insurance >>](#)
[Dependent/Survivor Benefits >>](#)
[Burial Benefits >>](#)
[Compensation for Disease or Injury >>](#)
[Veteran Benefits Assistance >>](#)

2-1-1 Texas Top Caller Needs Calendar Year 2014

General Callers		Total
1	Food Assistance Benefits (SNAP)	990,428
2	Medicaid	648,890
3	Utility Payment	290,721
4	Rent Payment	156,080
5	Food Pantries	131,074
6	Subsidized Housing	66,315
7	Medicare Savings	66,188
8	CHIP**	58,979
9	Child Care Expense	39,499
10	Prescription Expense	33,621

Military Callers		Total
1	Utility Payment	14,858
2	Food Assistance Benefits (SNAP)	9,154
3	Rent Payment	7,475
4	Food Pantries	6,173
5	Medicaid	5,594
6	Subsidized Housing	1,886
7	VA Benefits Assistance	1,734
8	Medicare Savings	1,550
9	VITA* Programs	1,303
10	Prescription Expense	1,176

*Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

**Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

Faith-Based Initiatives

- **Faith-Based Outreach**

- HHSC is coordinating with the Texas Veterans Commission's new Faith and Community-based Liaison, Craig Combs, a retired National Guard Chaplain, to enhance veteran and family member support throughout Texas

Mental and Behavioral Support

- **Ongoing Pilot Therapy Programs**

- HHSC has partnered with the University of Texas at Dallas to explore non-drug therapies for the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in veterans
- Treatment through the pilot therapy program combines transcranial magnetic stimulation with cognitive processing therapy and is showing great promise

- **Veterans Tactical Response (VTR) Training**

- Through the Office of Acquired Brain Injury, law enforcement, mental health, and brain injury professionals developed VTR training for officers responding to incidents
- VTR training addresses behaviors commonly observed in returning combat veterans, specifically related to PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and homelessness
- VTR Training calls for awareness and sensitivity whether in response to crisis or calls for service
- VTR training program can be used in police departments of all sizes - from rural and frontier offices to major metropolitan departments at the state and federal levels
- The Office of Acquired Brain Injury is beginning to distribute training materials to law enforcement and is preparing to schedule training webinars

Mental and Behavioral Support

- **Texas Veterans Initiative**

- The public-private partnership between HHSC and the non-profit Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) serves to expand and evaluate community-based mental health programs serving veterans and their families
- HHSC commits more than \$1 million to match local and private funds
- Projects funded by the Texas Veterans Initiative are selected through a competitive statewide request for proposal process, administered through a memorandum of understanding between HHSC and MMHPI
- Using private funding, MMHPI will evaluate the outcomes of projects funded by the Texas Veterans Initiative, and will provide technical support and operational oversight to the program
- Grant applications have been received and are currently being evaluated both by HHSC and MMHPI
- Awards should be announced within the next few weeks

Human Resources Veteran Advocacy

- **Hired an HHS Veterans Advocate in January 2014**
- **Updated Human Resources Policy:**
 - Veteran Employment Preference
 - Veteran Re-employment Rights & Time Limits
 - Military Leave
 - Understanding Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act (USERRA)
 - Promote the use of veteran-friendly language
- **Added “Veteran Hiring” link to HHSC website**
- **Continuous updating reporting data**
- **Updating the Centralized Accounting Payroll/Personnel System (CAPPS) Training Program for Managers (CTPM):**
 - Added revisions to CTPM to reflect HR policy changes:
 - New hire training for managers within 60 days of hire
 - Current managers will be notified of revisions
 - Updated Interview & Hire curriculum

Human Resources Veteran Advocacy

- **Targeted veteran recruiting**
 - Developed partnerships with military out-processing centers (OPCs)
 - Utilizing virtual awareness opportunities:
 - Critical job postings circulation throughout OPCs
 - Scanned posting sent to military installations
 - OPCs circulate posting through federal database
 - Provide recruiters visibility on military installations events
- **Awareness of HHS Veteran Initiatives going forward**
 - HHS Veteran program reached combat zone (Afghanistan)
 - Hiring event for state agencies being developed by TVC instead of career fair
 - Need to address training and growth opportunity (2nd Career)
 - Will continue to assist hiring managers in strategies for recruitment and hiring
 - There is no shortage of veteran applicants:
 - Veterans need assistance with state applications
 - Managers need assistance with understanding veteran applications
 - Cultural changes affect hiring initiatives