



FY 2023-2024

VETERANS

IN ORANGE COUNTY

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County of Orange Community Organizations and Partner Agency Stakeholders for the assistance in the data collection efforts of the Orange County Older Adults Needs Assessment Community Survey.

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INTRODUCTION

Veterans have made significant sacrifices in service to the United States (U.S.), committing themselves to defending freedom and upholding the nation's values. Their dedication deserves recognition, gratitude and support. A Veteran is a person who has served in the armed forces of the U.S. and has been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

The County of Orange (County) is dedicated to providing services to veterans who reside in Orange County (OC). The OC Veterans Service Office actively pursues and protects the rights of Veterans and their dependents to receive benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The office works collaboratively with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), national Veterans service organizations and others to ensure that Veterans and their dependents receive the entitlements they have earned for their military service. The services provided are essential, as the office provides hands-on assistance to help Veterans navigate benefits claims and access the wide range of available services from both local organizations and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In order to provide this support for OC Veterans, the office and services are primarily funded by the County through Net County Cost (NCC) allocations (69%), with additional funds being supplemented by the State of California (CA) and grant funding (31%). In addition to the OC Veterans Service Office, the Orange County Veterans Advisory Council (OCVAC) has played

a pivotal role since its inception in March 1978 in championing best practices and advocating for enhanced service delivery. By working closely with County agencies, nonprofit organizations and federal programs, the OCVAC strives to ensure that Veterans' voices are heard and that challenges are met by suggesting responsive, collaborative solutions.

This Veterans in Orange County report compiles data from various sources available to describe demographics, circumstances, and the thoughts and opinions of Veterans who reside in OC. Data is included for the following six categories:

- Health & Well-Being
- Housing
- Education
- Employment
- Social Connectedness
- Health Care & Services

The data provided within this report allows for evaluation of the condition of Veterans in OC and, when possible, allows for comparisons to CA or other Southern California counties. It is important to be able to highlight successful areas and determine areas where additional services may be needed for Veterans. By doing so, valuable insights can inform and guide the development, continuation and improvement efforts of targeted support programs and initiatives for OC Veterans.



REPORT DATA SOURCES

American Community Survey (ACS)

The 2023 American Census Survey 1-Year Estimate Data Profiles for Veterans are used within this report. The ACS, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, collects detailed demographic, social, economic and housing data and projects annual estimates.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The Veteran population estimates were published by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics as "VetPop 2023." VetPop 2023 provides data widely used by Veterans Affairs (VA) as the official estimate and projection of the total number of Veterans and their demographic and military characteristics.

Southern California Veterans Study

The Southern California Veterans Study was conducted between July 2022 and June 2023. It includes survey data from 3,188 Veterans across Southern California, including 606 (19%) who reside in OC. This study also gathered qualitative insights from focus group interviews.

Orange County Older Adults Community Survey

The OC Older Adults Community Survey (September 2023 - January 2024) collected input from older adults aged 55 and older in OC through in-person, online and paper surveys in different languages. Of the 5,657 responses, there were 451 participants who identified as Veterans. This sample closely represented the overall population of Veterans from OC within this age group (6.9%).



ORANGE COUNTY STRENGTHS

- Most surveyed Veterans were able to secure a place to live after leaving the military and approximately six out of ten Veterans aged 55 and over reported owning their own homes.
- Educational attainment is high among surveyed Veterans, with 43.9% holding a bachelor's or advanced degree. Among Veterans aged 55 and older, this percentage is even higher at 48.3%. This is slightly above the average for OC individuals with the same educational attainment aged 18 and over (41.2%).
- Job satisfaction among employed Veterans is generally high at 61.6%, showcasing the ability to find fulfilling careers after military service. In comparison, the Pew Research Center reports that roughly 50% of U.S. workers report high overall satisfaction with their jobs.
- There is a reliance on family and friends during transitions, with approximately five out of ten Veterans reporting living with family or friends upon leaving the military, highlighting the importance of support networks.
- Veterans aged 55 and over reported having been engaged in various social and community activities in the past 12 months, with most (83.8%) visiting or talking with friends or family and approximately half participating in religious, social or cultural activities.
- Access to diverse health care resources is evident, with almost all (99.2%) surveyed Veterans reporting having at least one form of health insurance.
- Surveyed Veterans report high health care satisfaction, particularly with Veterans Choice Program and state or federal health care providers where approximately eight out of ten reported high satisfaction. This satisfaction is higher than Veterans reporting from Los Angeles and San Diego counties.

Note: Strengths and Areas for Improvement were derived from survey results for Veterans self reporting residence in OC.



A photograph of a woman with short, grey hair, smiling and looking upwards and to the right. She is wearing a light blue t-shirt and holding a clear plastic water bottle with a blue cap. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

ORANGE COUNTY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

- Although lower than other counties, approximately four out of ten Veterans reported experiencing moderate to severe physical health symptoms.
- Though OC Veterans reported lower mental health concerns compared to other counties, PTSD (37.1%), depression (35.6%) and suicide risk (25.3%) remain prevalent.
- Cost of living or economic insecurity were reported as a major contributor to health issues for 35.0% of Veterans aged 55 and over, although lower than non-Veteran adults in this age group (39.0%).
- Employment transitions remain difficult, with nearly seven out of ten leaving the military without a job and some continuing to seek stable work within OC.
- Many Veterans reported social disconnection, with approximately four out of ten feeling disconnected, distant and having no sense of belonging. This aligns with broader trends in the U.S., where studies have shown a decline in social engagement and companionship.
- Older adult Veterans reported several barriers to accessing medical and behavioral health services. The most common challenges included lack of information, high copay costs and transportation difficulties.
- Veteran homelessness in OC increased by 17.1% between 2022 and 2024. According to the Office of Care Coordination's 2024 Point-in-Time Summary, several factors may have contributed to this rise. One major factor was the loss of key resources that were available in 2022. These included the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which provided \$300 million in rental aid, and the COVID-19 eviction moratorium.

Note: Strengths and Areas for Improvement were derived from survey results for Veterans self reporting residence in OC.

ORANGE COUNTY COMPARISON

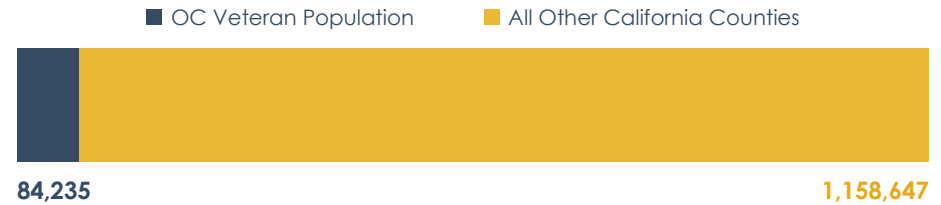
VETERANS POPULATION OVERVIEW

In CA, the Veteran population stands at 3,419 per 100,000 residents, ranking the state 47th nationwide. This figure is much lower than Alaska's leading rate of 7,921 Veterans per 100,000 residents. OC is the third most populous county in CA. However, when focusing specifically on the Veteran population, it ranks fourth—following Los Angeles County, San Diego County and Riverside County. Many OC Veterans served during the Vietnam War (36.8%), followed by those serving during or after September 2001 (24.0%), Gulf War (19.3%), Other periods (14.6%), Korean War (4.2%) and World War II (1.1%). According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, OC's Veteran population is estimated at 86,713 and CA's total Veteran population is estimated at 1,474,934. Census 1-Year estimates closely follow this projection, with a 2023 estimate of 84,235 OC Veterans and 1,242,882 total CA Veterans. Census 1-Year Estimates are annual figures from the ACS that provide detailed demographic data. Because these estimates include extensive demographic breakdowns, they will be used in this population overview.

The largest age group among Veterans in both OC and CA is 75 and over, representing 35.2% of Veterans in OC and 31.2% of Veterans statewide.

Following known trends, OC is home to mostly male Veterans where there are 91.3%, compared to 90.1% statewide as shown in the figure to the right. Although the percent for females is low, CA ranks second nationwide for the percentage of female Veterans, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

California Veteran Population: 1,242,882



California

31.2% Largest Age Group
75+ Years Old

90.1% Percentage of
Males

Orange County

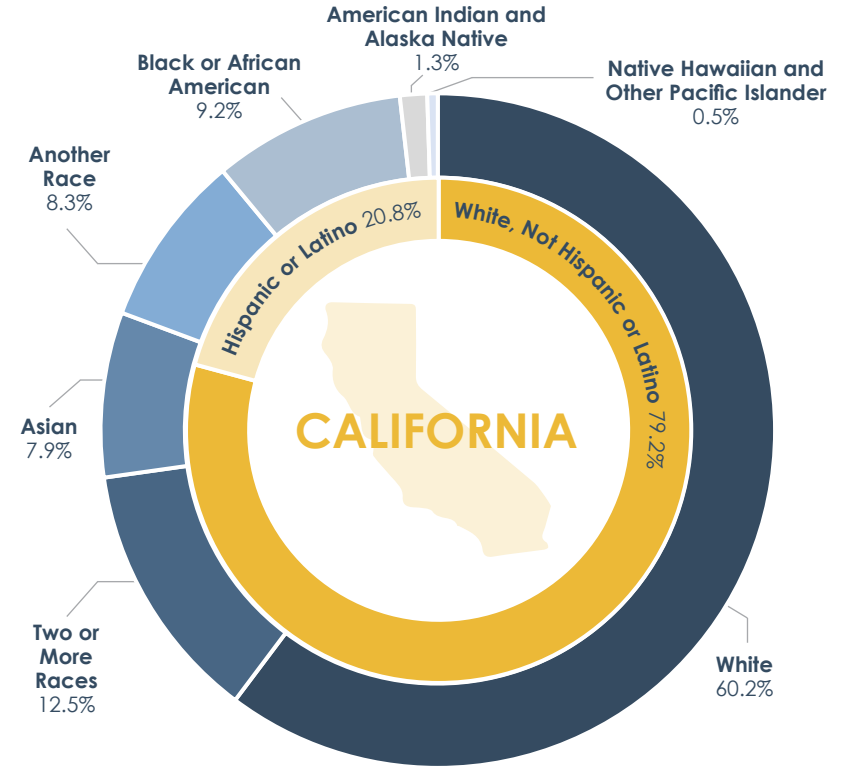
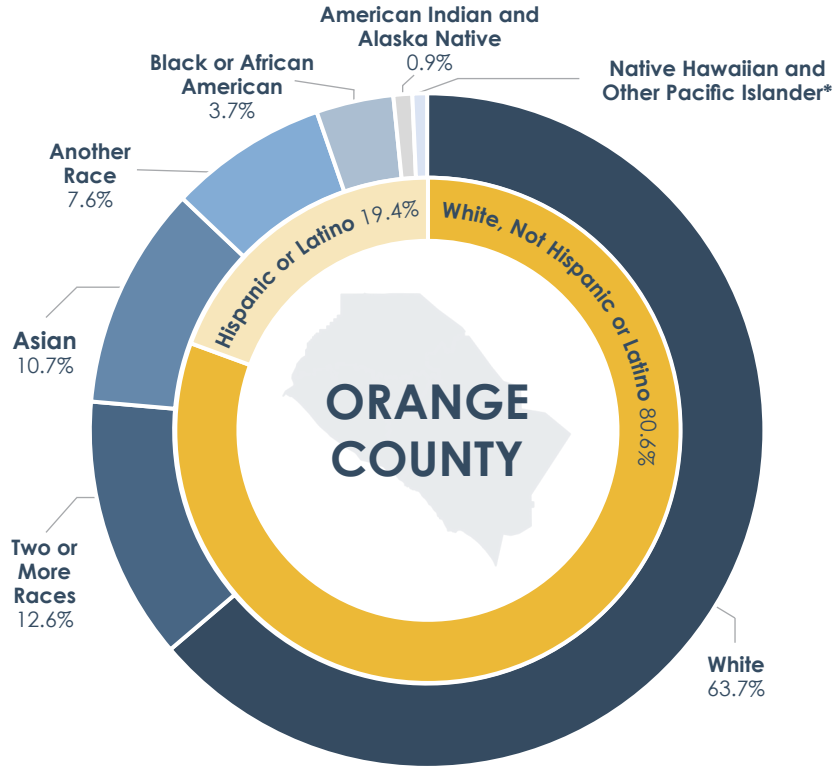
35.2% Largest Age Group
75+ Years Old

91.3% Percentage of
Males



Note: American Community Survey data does not provide information on gender or gender-identity.

VETERANS POPULATION OVERVIEW



*The estimate for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander cannot be displayed because there were an insufficient number of sample cases in OC.

Traditionally, those who identify as White, not Hispanic or Latino, are predominant within the Veteran population. According to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans who identify with this ethnicity category are projected to decline following the change in U.S. demographics. Based on the 2023 census estimate, in OC, 80.9% of Veterans are not Hispanic or Latino, slightly higher than CA's 79.2%. OC also has a slightly higher percentage of White and Asian Veterans compared to CA. Conversely, OC has a slightly smaller proportion of Black or African American and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Veterans than CA as shown above.

OC VETERANS POPULATION SNAPSHOT

The following represent the percentages of Veterans within OC population estimates:

6.3% of total males	13% of those aged 75+	3.4% of total population
0.6% of total females	2.4% of those aged 74<	4% of those Non-Hispanic
		2% of those Hispanic

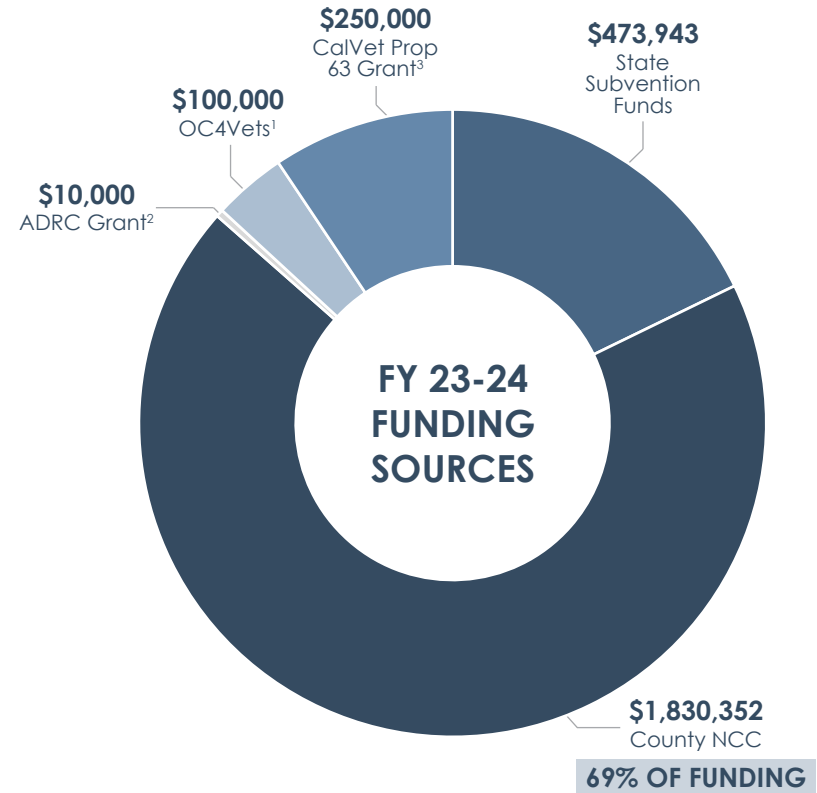


ORANGE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

The OC Veterans Service Office provides essential support to Veterans and their families, helping them access a wide range of benefits and resources. Those services include assistance with filing claims for benefits, offering counseling on available U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and CalVet benefits and providing referrals to other agencies. Their goal is to ensure Veterans receive the care, support and resources they need to lead fulfilling lives.

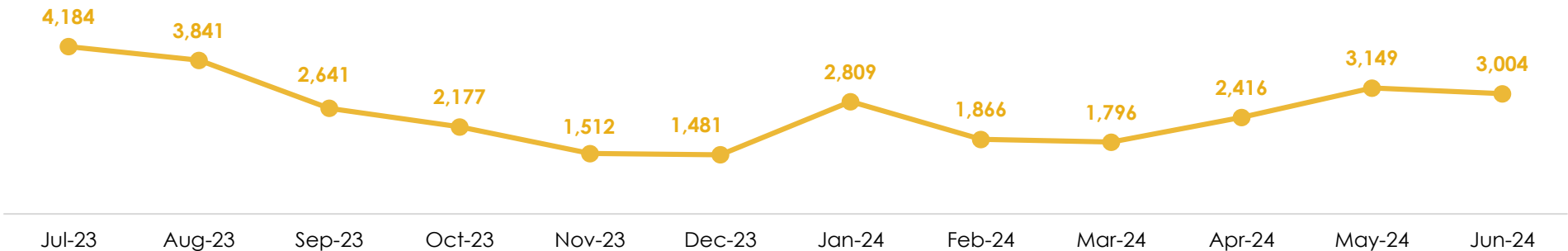
Providing for U.S. Veterans is fundamentally a federal and state responsibility, yet local governments often bear the financial burden to ensure these essential services remain accessible. The County remains committed to supporting Veterans and their families and dedicated 69% of the funds to operate the OC Veterans Service Office in FY 2023-2024 to sustain and enhance the services provided to Veterans and their families. In addition to the \$1,830,352 funded through the County's NCC, the office received \$473,943 in State Subvention Funds, \$100,000 was spent through OC4Vets Program in collaboration with the Health Care Agency (HCA) and other grant funding as shown in the figure to the right.

The OC Veterans Service Office received nearly 31,000 requests for assistance, including emails, calls and appointments for FY 2023-2024. The busiest month was July 2023, with 4,184 requests received.



¹\$100,000 OC4Vets is set to end June 30, 2025 | ²\$10,000 ADRC Grant is set to end March 31, 2026 | ³\$250,000 CalVet Prop 63 Grant is set to end June 30, 2026

Veterans Served*

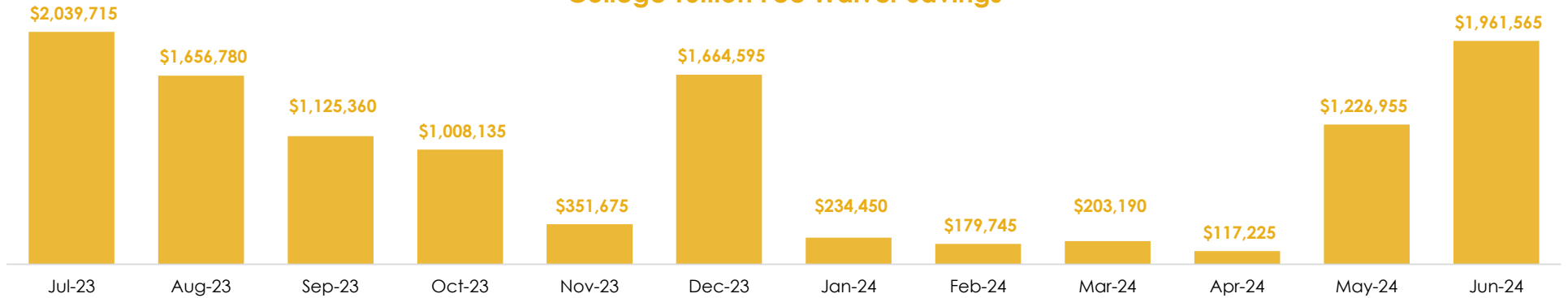


*Veterans served may include duplicate counts and therefore may not represent unique individuals.



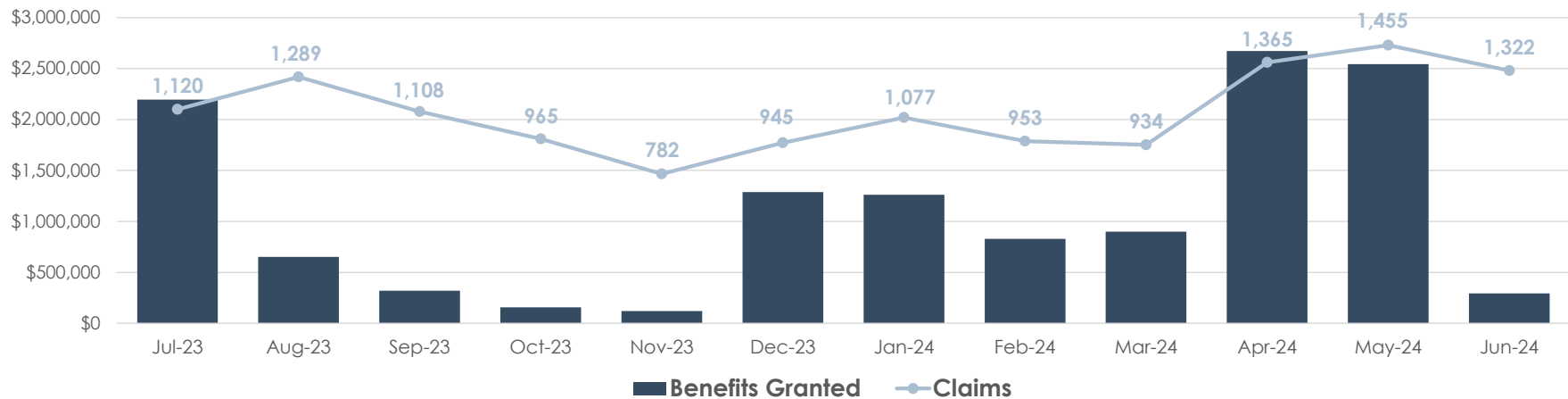
ORANGE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

College Tuition Fee Waiver Savings



Additionally, the OC Veterans Service Office provided Veterans with slightly over \$11.7 million in college tuition savings for FY 2023-2024. July 2023 had the highest savings with \$2,039,715, followed by June 2024. The total amount of financial relief distributed within the fiscal year underscores the commitment to supporting Veterans' families in pursuing their educational goals. Details are provided in the figure above.

Benefits Granted by Veterans Administration



Throughout FY 2023-2024, the office filed a total of 13,315 claims, according to VetPro Web System performance measures extracted on June 6, 2025, resulting in the distribution of slightly over \$13.2 million in benefits granted to Veterans. The highest number of claims filed was in May 2024, with 1,455 claims. Although there were fluctuations throughout the year, the highest amounts were distributed in April 2024 and May 2024 as shown in the figure above.

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

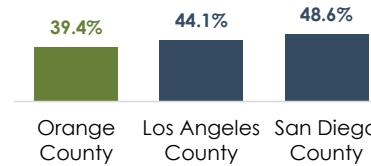
ORANGE COUNTY

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression are consistently among the most common mental health challenges reported by Veterans. These conditions also rank as two of the most frequently diagnosed mental health issues within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care system (Veterans Benefits Administration, 2022), underscoring their prevalence and impact on this population.

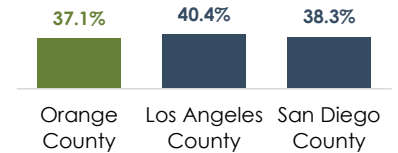
Despite reporting moderate to severe physical health symptoms, including PTSD, depression and suicide risk, Veterans in OC had generally lower rates of health concerns when compared to Veterans in Los Angeles and San Diego counties, as presented in the graph on the right.

Additionally, nearly seven out of ten surveyed Veterans in OC described their perceived health over the past 30 days as good, very good or excellent. All categories for perceived health are presented below.

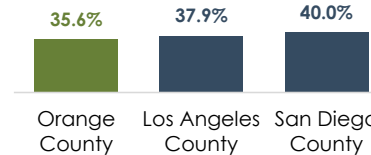
Moderate to Severe Physical Health Symptoms



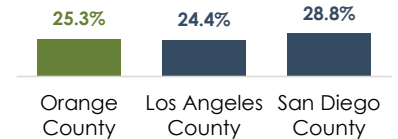
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



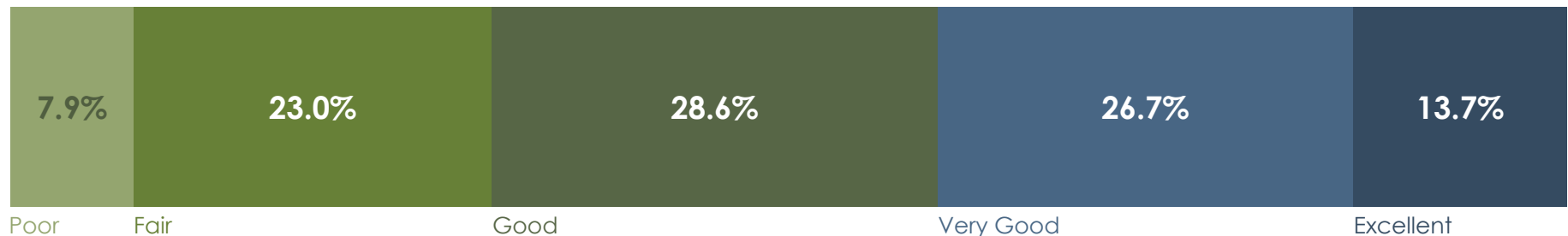
Depression



Suicide Risk



Perceived Health in the Past 30 Days



Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>

HEALTH & WELL-BEING ORANGE COUNTY 55+

Veterans aged 55 and over in OC encounter a range of health and mental health challenges, influenced by various factors commonly associated with aging and military service. This demographic often grapples with chronic conditions, mental health concerns and financial pressures that reflect broader trends across Veteran populations nationwide.

The OC Older Adult Community Survey assessed key factors that may be affecting Veterans' overall medical and behavioral health, such as cost of living, diet and fitness concerns, and fraud or scams, as presented on the right. Behavioral health stressors, including political climate, financial strain and feelings of isolation or lack of community support, are also reported contributors of behavioral health issues. These percentages are presented on the right. Together, these factors illustrate the multifaceted nature of health and wellness among Veterans in this demographic.

Besides the challenges related to medical and behavioral health contributors, approximately 30% of Veterans within this age group reported hospital stays. Over 70% of surveyed Veterans reported no hospital stays, underscoring resilience in managing their physical health.

Hospital Stay in Past 12 Months



Top 5 Health Issues Contributor(s)

Cost of Living/Economic Insecurity	35.0%
Diet/Fitness/Nutrition	26.8%
Fraud/Scams	25.1%
Caregiving	16.6%
Lack of Transportation/Distance to Services	15.7%

Top 5 Behavioral Health Issues Contributor(s)

Politics or Political Climate	27.9%
Cost of Living/Economic Insecurity	27.3%
Financial Stress	19.5%
COVID-19 Pandemic	11.3%
Lack of Community	10.4%

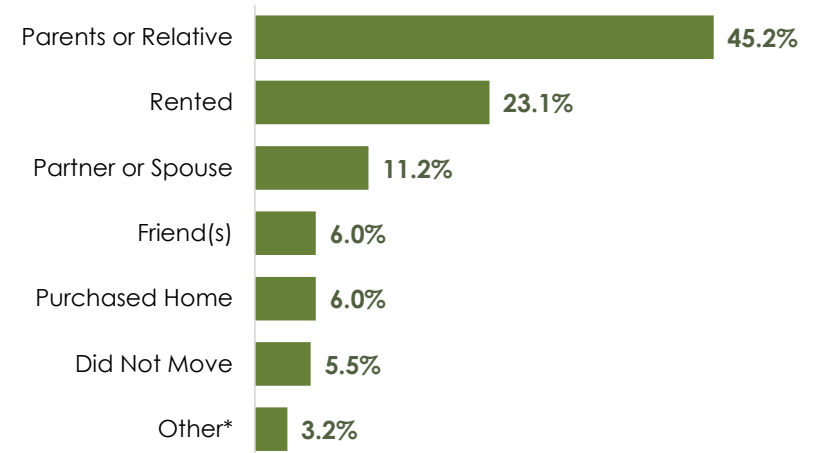
HOUSING ORANGE COUNTY

Housing stability is a critical aspect of transitioning to civilian life for Veterans. Many are faced with navigating the long-term viability of post-service housing.

Following their military service, a majority of surveyed Veterans in Southern California counties successfully secured housing, with OC showing a slightly higher rate compared to Los Angeles County and a similar rate to San Diego County as presented below.

In OC, while most Veterans found housing, the nature of these arrangements varied. A large portion transitioned to living with their parents, underscoring the critical role of family support during this period. Renting was another common choice, followed by smaller percentages for those who moved in with partners, lived with friends or purchased a home. A smaller percentage did not move or found alternative places to stay. These patterns reflect the diverse strategies Veterans employ to navigate housing during their transition to civilian life. Details for first housing after leaving the military are provided on the right.

First Housing After Leaving the Military



Place to Live After Leaving the Military



84.4%

Orange County



81.9%

Los Angeles County



84.1%

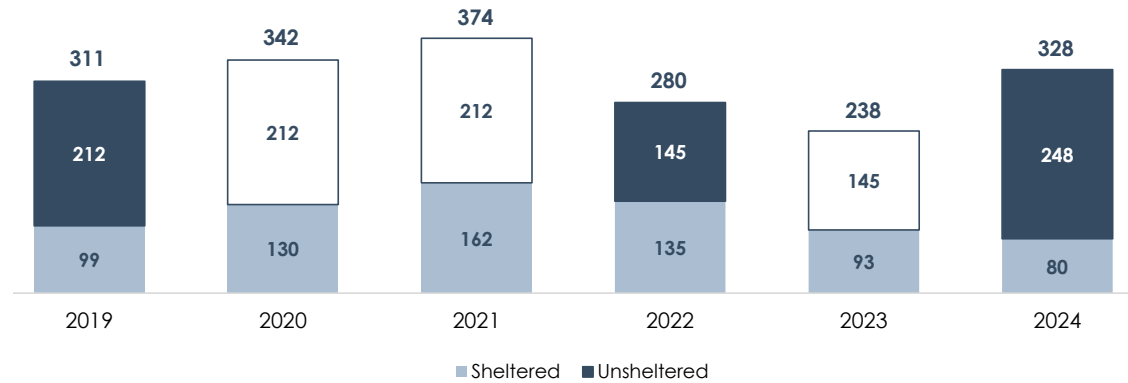
San Diego County

HOUSING ORANGE COUNTY

The 2024 Point in Time Count— released by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported a record low in Veteran homelessness in the U.S. since measurement began in 2009. However, this trend did not extend to OC, as the Point In Time counts revealed a 17.1% increase in homeless Veterans, rising from 280 in the 2022 count to 328 in the 2024 count as shown on the right.

Note: Unsheltered counts are conducted every other year and carry over. Additionally, In 2021, HUD excluded the unsheltered population sub-totals and all unsheltered sub-population data for this reporting period due to the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Point-in-Time Homeless Veterans in Orange County



The Office of Care Coordination collaborates closely with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and other community-based organizations throughout OC to identify Veterans experiencing homelessness. Veterans experiencing homelessness are placed on the Veteran Registry and enrolled in the Coordinated Entry System (CES), a mechanism to prioritize and allocate available housing resources based on need and vulnerability. The Office of Care Coordination also collaborates weekly with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Services Division, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and CalVet grantees, and other service provider partners to connect Veterans to Veteran-specific services and programs and other supportive services.

In addition, the Office of Care Coordination works with housing developers such as Jamboree Housing Corporation, property management companies like QMG and public housing authorities to connect Veterans to permanent supportive housing units throughout OC. The Office of Care Coordination also actively engages with Veteran-focused housing programs such as HUD-VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) and SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families), providing critical resources to Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including rental assistance, case management and supportive services.



Source: Hud Exchange (2024). CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports.
<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>

HOUSING

ORANGE COUNTY 55+

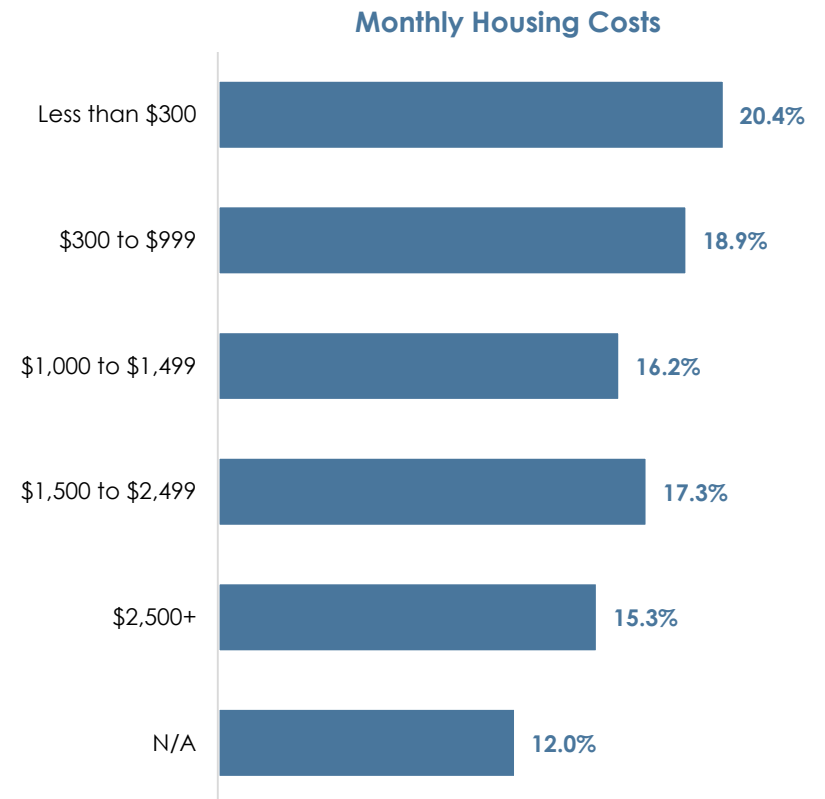
Housing remains a cornerstone of well-being for Veterans aged 55 and over, particularly as they navigate the financial and social shifts that come with aging.

In OC, the majority of surveyed Veterans in this age group reported owning their home or condo, reflecting a level of stability for many within the population. Though a substantial proportion benefit from home ownership, others rely on renting or alternative living arrangements. Some Veterans face greater instability, with 2.7% unhoused or experiencing temporary housing.

Current Living Situation

Own Home or Condo	64.7%
Renting	18.0%
Mobile Home	4.9%
Relative/Friend	3.5%
Unhoused or Temporary	2.7%
Correctional Institution	1.8%
Assisted Living or Retirement Community	1.6%

Monthly housing costs also differ significantly across this population, with some managing low expenses while others contend with higher costs exceeding \$1,500 or even \$2,500. The data below displays the variability of monthly housing costs reported by OC Veterans aged 55 and over.



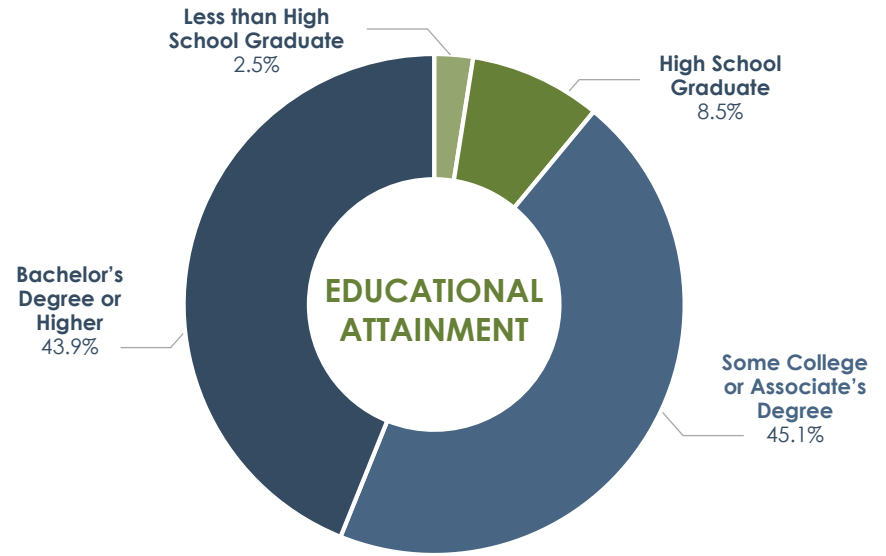
Source: Orange County Older Adult Needs Assessment – Community Survey

EDUCATION ORANGE COUNTY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides educational benefits through programs like the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Montgomery GI Bill, which have supported millions of Veterans pursue higher education.

Educational attainment among surveyed OC Veterans reveals that 43.9% hold a bachelor's degree or higher and 45.1% have attended some college or received their associate's degree. This underscores the importance Veterans have placed on education and highlights the value of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs programs in promoting access. Details are presented in the figure on the right.

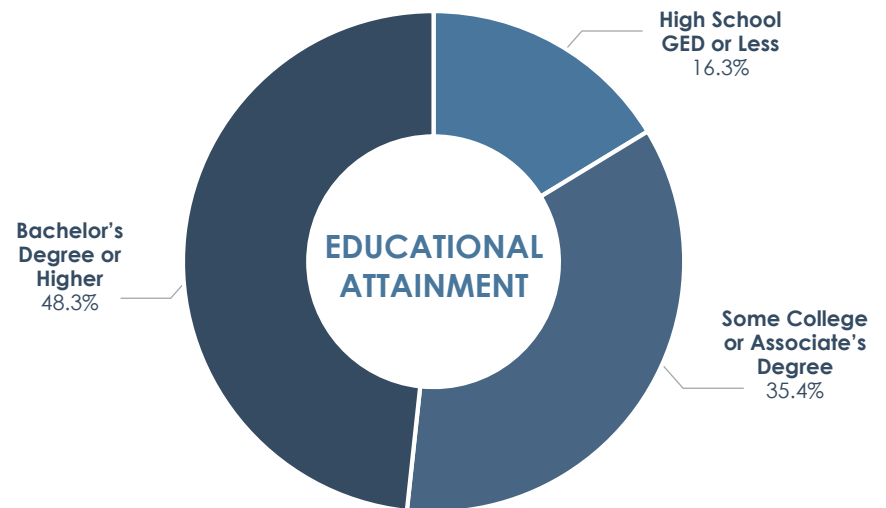
Note: The Southern California Veterans Study included Veterans aged 18 and older, therefore percentages may reflect individuals who are currently in school or have not yet had the chance to pursue higher education.



Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socalvetstudy.org/county-data/>

EDUCATION ORANGE COUNTY 55+

Educational attainment among surveyed OC Veterans aged 55 and over also shows a substantial proportion of this community is highly educated. Nearly half hold a Bachelor's degree or higher and 35.4% have attended some college or received their associate's degree. Details are presented in the figure on the right.



Source: Orange County Older Adult Needs Assessment – Community Survey

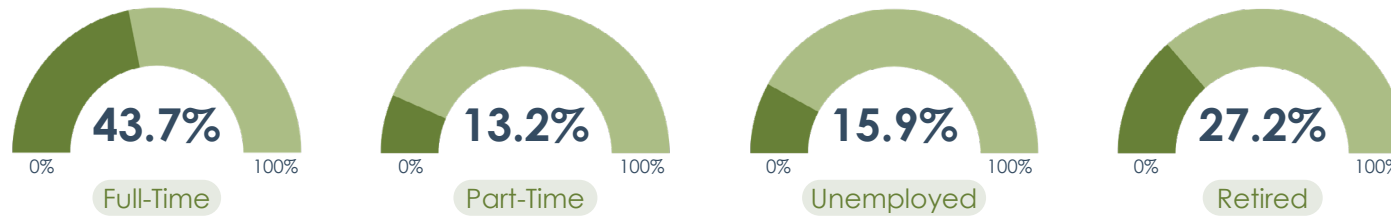
EMPLOYMENT ORANGE COUNTY

Securing employment after military service plays a crucial role in a Veteran's overall well-being and successful transition to civilian life. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, many Veterans face challenges in securing employment immediately upon leaving the military, including learning new skills like applying for jobs, creating resumes and translating military experience into civilian terms.

In OC, nearly 70% of surveyed Veterans did not have a job lined up when leaving the military. The employment rate for Veterans leaving the military in OC was 31.7%, slightly lower than Los Angeles County and San Diego County as presented on the right.

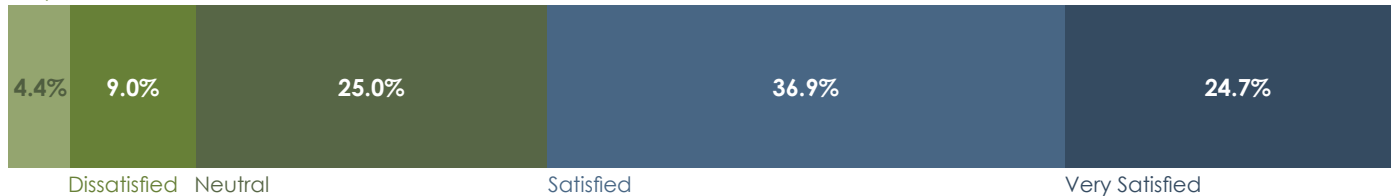
Of the Veterans currently employed, 43.7% hold full-time positions, and 13.2% work part-time. Among them, 61.6% report job satisfaction, highlighting a sense of fulfillment for many who find employment.

Employment Status



Job Satisfaction

Very Dissatisfied



Employment Upon Leaving the Military



31.7%

Orange County



33.9%

Los Angeles County



34.3%

San Diego County

Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>

EMPLOYMENT ORANGE COUNTY

The primary reasons why 68.3% of surveyed OC Veterans did not have a job lined up when they left the military included a lack of time to job search before discharge and the difficulty of job hunting while still serving, each cited by 29.6% of respondents. Others expressed a desire to pause and reflect on their next steps, highlighting the importance of transitional periods for personal planning. For some, job searching was not a priority, relaxation was needed or there was heightened confidence in the ease of finding employment later. Details for all self-reported responses are provided in the table on the right.

Reasons for not Having a Job After Leaving the Military

"I didn't have time to find a job before I left the military."	29.6%
"It was too difficult to find a job while still serving in the military."	29.6%
"I wanted to take time to figure out what I wanted to do next."	24.3%
"Finding a job was not a priority."	16.0%
"I wanted to take some time off to relax."	15.8%
"I waited because I thought it would be easy to find a job when I left the military."	15.8%

Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socalvetstudy.org/county-data/>

EMPLOYMENT ORANGE COUNTY 55+

Employment among surveyed OC Veterans aged 55 and over reveals that 76.1% are retired or not actively looking for work. A small portion remains engaged in the workforce, taking on full-time or part-time roles that may align with their skills and experience. Details for all self-reported categories are provided below.

Self-Reported Employment Status of Veterans Aged 55 and Over



Source: Orange County Older Adult Needs Assessment – Community Survey

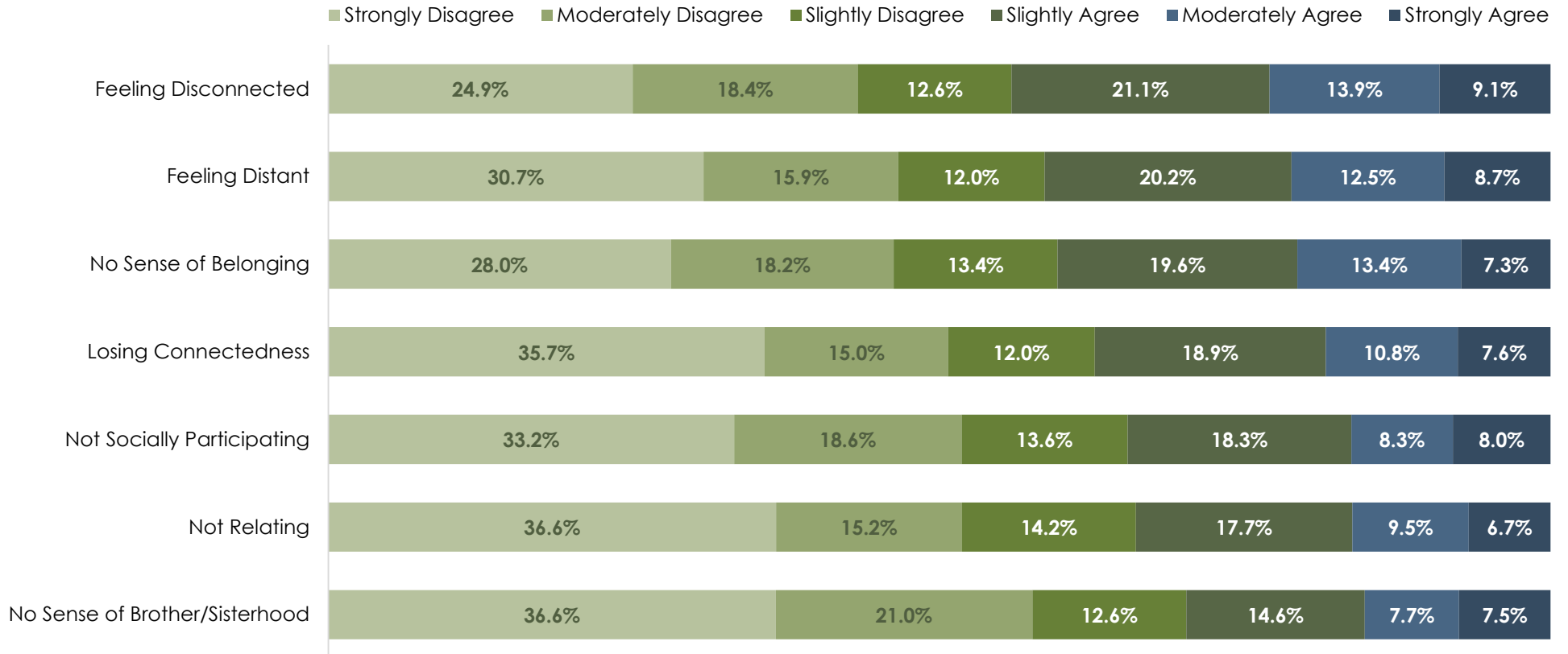
SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

ORANGE COUNTY

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, social connection plays a crucial role in overall well-being, contributing to better mental and physical health, higher self-esteem, greater empathy and even a longer lifespan. These connections provide an essential foundation for resilience, belonging and personal growth, especially for Veterans navigating the complexities of post-service life.

The survey responses reveal a nuanced picture: while a majority of Veterans tend to disagree with statements that imply lack of connectedness, a substantial portion reports feelings of disconnection, distance and a diminished sense of belonging. Others express sentiments such as losing connectedness, limited social participation, difficulty relating to others and an absence of brotherhood or sisterhood, underscoring the complexity of fostering social connections after military service. Details for all social connectedness responses are provided below.

Social Connectedness



Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

ORANGE COUNTY 55+

Social connectedness is especially important for Veterans aged 55 and over. Data from surveyed OC Veterans reveals that this group remains highly socially engaged. A majority have engaged with friends and family over the past year and nearly half have participated in religious, cultural or social activities. Beyond these personal interactions, many Veterans have utilized public services and engaged in civic and volunteer activities, further underlining their significant role in their communities. These diverse activities highlight the dynamic social presence of Veterans aged 55 and over. Details of their reported activities are provided in the table below.

Activities in the Past 12 Months

Talked or Visited with Friends or Family	83.8%
Participated in Religious, Cultural or Social Activities	49.9%
Used Public Services	41.5%
Participated in Civic Activity	36.6%
Participated in Volunteer Activity	32.6%
Provided Care to Someone 55+	29.3%
Received Assistance	15.1%
Created or Updated Plan for Aging	12.6%
Provided Care to Someone Younger than 55	8.4%



Source: Orange County Older Adult Needs Assessment – Community Survey

HEALTH CARE & SERVICES

ORANGE COUNTY

Access to quality health care is a fundamental element of well-being for Veterans, who often have unique medical needs shaped by their military service. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs underscores the importance of accessible health care services to support both the physical and mental health of Veterans, ensuring their long-term resilience and quality of life.

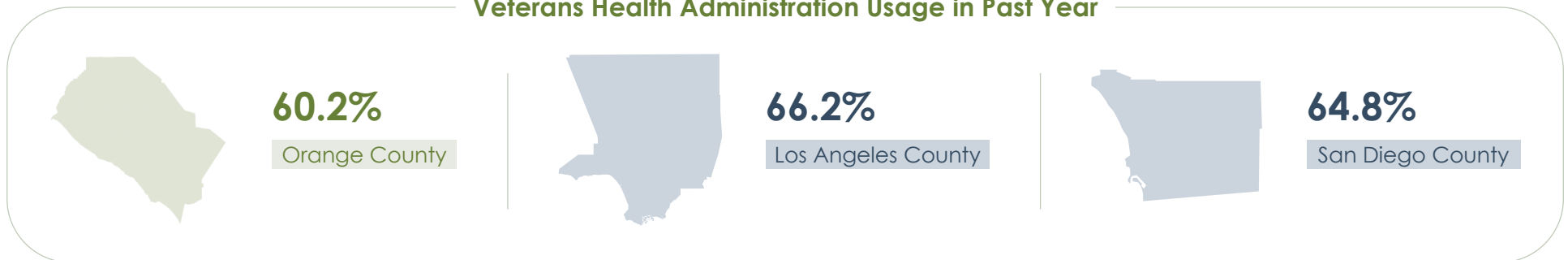
In OC, a significant portion of surveyed Veterans rely on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as primary source of health care, with the majority utilizing Veterans Health Administration (VHA) services within the past year (as shown below), although at lower rates compared to Los Angeles County and San Diego County.

Data also reveals that many Veterans turn to other health care sources, including employer-provided insurance, state or federal programs, and the Veterans Choice Program. A notable proportion of veterans also access Tricare or other sources, while a very small fraction report having no health care access. Details are provided in the table to the right.

Primary Source of Health Care

Veterans Affairs	53.7%
Employer Provider	17.1%
State or Federal	15.3%
Veterans Choice Program	5.3%
Other	4.6%
Tricare Provider	3.2%
No Access	0.8%

Veterans Health Administration Usage in Past Year



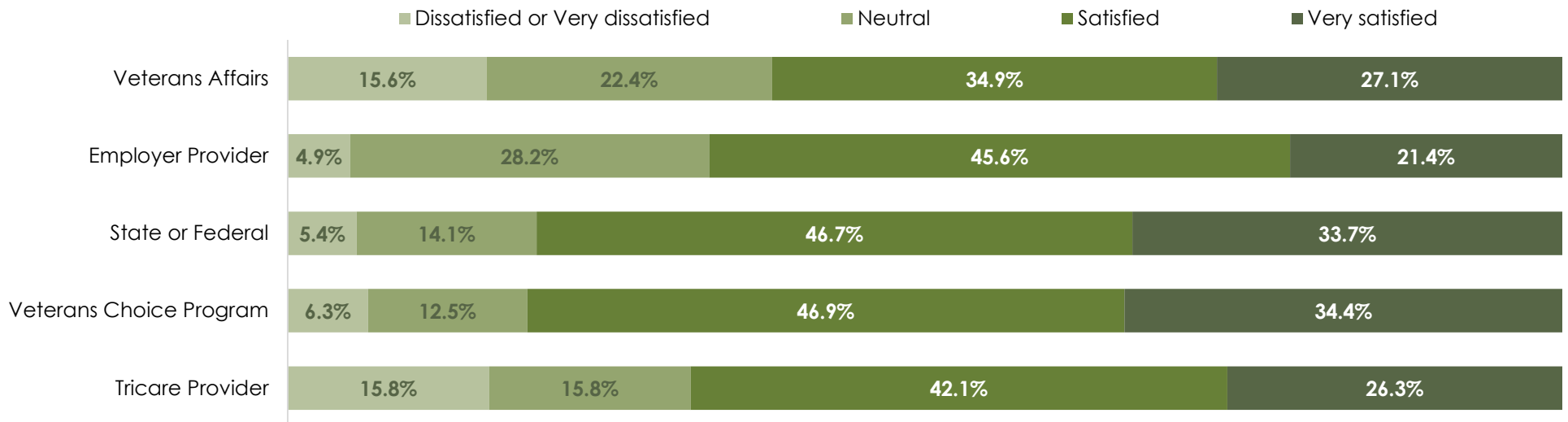
Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>

HEALTH CARE & SERVICES

ORANGE COUNTY

Findings from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs indicate that Veterans generally hold a positive perception of their health care experiences, both within U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities and through community providers. Surveyed OC Veterans reflect similar trends, with most reporting satisfaction or high satisfaction with the care they received, though their level of approval varied depending on the provider. Veterans utilizing the Veterans Choice Program and state or federal health care services reported the highest rates of satisfaction. Employer-provided health care also received positive responses, though a larger portion of Veterans expressed neutrality toward this option compared to others. Those relying on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Tricare services showed a range of opinions, with both groups reporting slightly higher levels of dissatisfaction compared to other options. Details related to satisfaction with health care providers are displayed in the graph below.

Satisfaction with Health Care



Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>



HEALTH CARE & SERVICES ORANGE COUNTY

From health care and financial concerns to employment assistance, there are a range of needs that reflect the complex realities Veterans navigate post-service.

Surveyed OC Veterans identified physical health as the most requested area for additional assistance. Disability ratings and mental health resources also ranked as high priorities, reinforcing the importance of accessible health care tailored to Veterans' unique experiences. Financial issues and employment challenges remain prevalent concerns, reflecting the economic difficulties some Veterans encounter as they transition into civilian life.

Beyond these top needs, Veterans also reported seeking support for relationship challenges, education benefits and legal assistance, demonstrating the broader scope of resources necessary. Family and child concerns were noted, as well as transition-related difficulties and requests for discharge upgrades, though at lower rates. These findings illustrate the wide range of assistance Veterans seek, underscoring the importance of comprehensive programs that address both immediate concerns and long-term well-being.

Areas of Assistance Requested

Physical Health Issues	27.7%
Disability Rating	23.9%
Mental Health Issues	21.3%
Financial Issues	18.5%
Employment Issues	15.0%
Relationship Issues	14.9%
Education Benefits	11.9%
Legal Issues	10.4%
Family/Child Issues	9.2%
Transition Issues	4.0%
Discharge Upgrade	3.0%

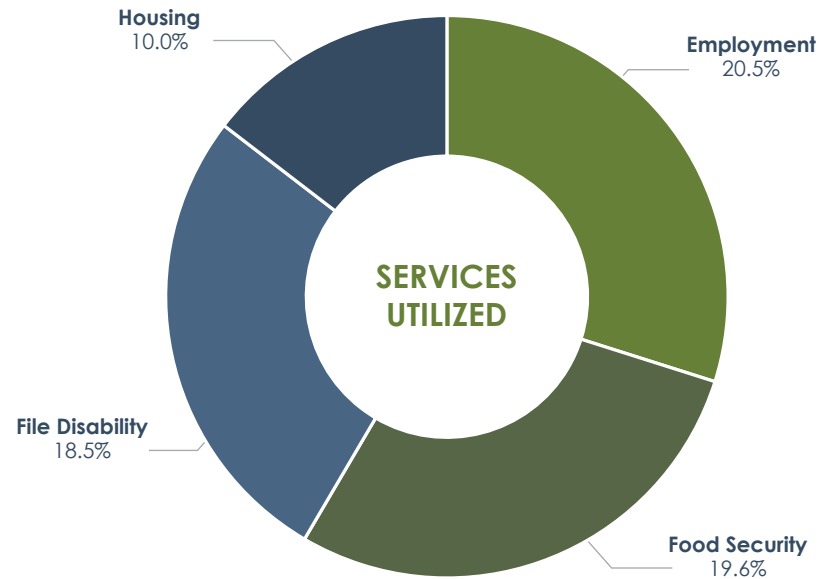
Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>

HEALTH CARE & SERVICES ORANGE COUNTY

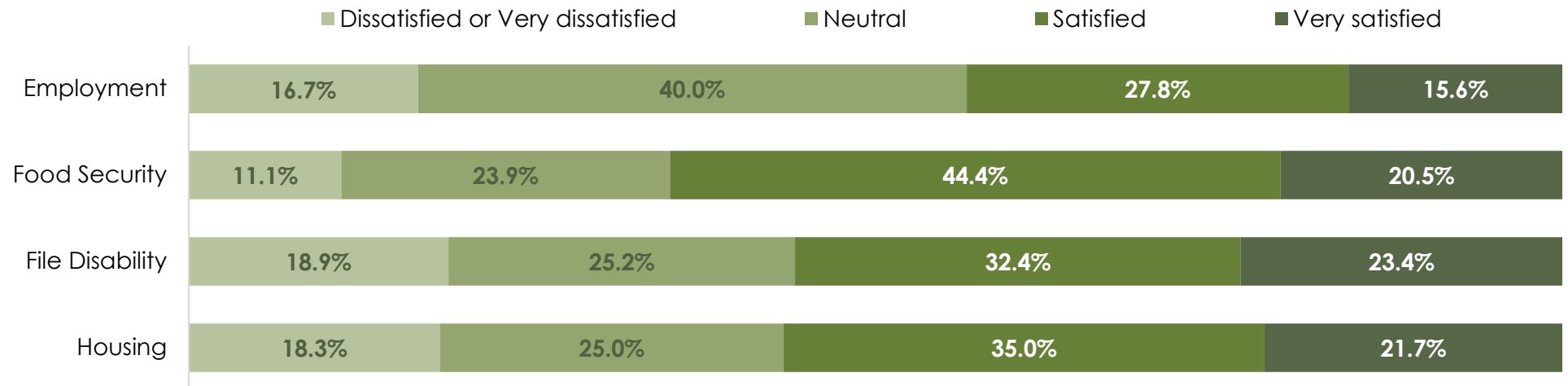
Veterans rely on a range of services to support their transition to civilian life, maintain stability and address unique challenges stemming from their military experience. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers a variety of programs tailored to meet these needs, including the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program and housing initiatives like the HUD-VASH program.

Surveyed OC Veterans reported utilizing a diverse array of services over the past year. Employment services were the most accessed, followed by food security and filing for disability. Housing services were lesser utilized as detailed on the right.

Satisfaction levels with these services vary across categories. Employment support received the lowest overall satisfaction ratings, suggesting challenges in effectiveness. Conversely, food security services reported the highest satisfaction levels, demonstrating strong efforts to address nutritional needs. Filing for disability benefits and housing assistance received mixed responses, with both positive feedback and dissatisfaction present among those who utilized these services. Details for satisfaction with all services is provided below.



Service Satisfaction



Source: Orange County Data. (2023, August 29). The Southern California Veterans Study. <https://socialvetstudy.org/county-data/>

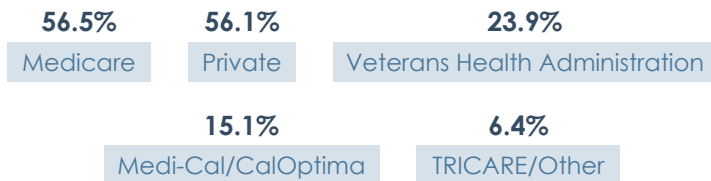
HEALTH CARE & SERVICES

ORANGE COUNTY 55+

As Veterans aged 55 and over navigate age-related health concerns and seek reliable medical support, access to comprehensive health care coverage and trusted sources of medical information becomes increasingly important.

In OC, surveyed Veterans in this age group have a range of health insurance options, with Medicare and private insurance being the most utilized forms of coverage. Many also rely on VHA, Medi-Cal/CalOptima, or TRICARE or other, reflecting the diverse health care resources available to this population.

Health Insurance Coverage



When seeking medical information, older Veterans primarily turn to in-person consultations with doctors or providers, emphasizing the importance of direct, professional guidance in managing their health. Virtual consultations and online resources also play a significant role, offering accessible ways to gather information and make informed health care decisions.

Primary Information Source



Managing health and accessing reliable resources is also essential to maintaining well-being and independence. Most surveyed OC Veterans aged 55 and over report confidence in managing their health and navigating available services, reflecting a strong sense of self-sufficiency within this population.

However, despite this overall confidence, some Veterans face challenges in securing the support they need. Among the most common barriers to accessing care is a lack of information, high costs and copays as well as logistical difficulties, which are heightened by the absence of a dedicated VA hospital in OC forcing residents to travel to Long Beach to use their Veteran's hospital care. Respondents also noted the digital divide and gaps in insurance coverage along with issues related to cultural misunderstandings with providers, caregiver relief and a lack of safe or inclusive health care environments. Addressing these barriers can help ensure Veterans receive the support they need to maintain their health as they age. Initiatives such as the Veterans Affairs Geriatrics and Extended Care Program aim to provide specialized assistance to older Veterans, reinforcing the importance of comprehensive and adaptive health care resources.

Reasons Preventing Veterans 55+ from Seeking Resources

Lack of information about where to get help	21.5%
High Cost of Services/Copays	13.3%
Appointments are not available at convenient times	9.8%
Service locations are too far away	8.6%
Lack of Transportation	7.8%
Digital Divide	5.5%
Lack of health insurance or coverage	4.7%
COVID-19 Pandemic	4.4%
Provider does not understand my culture	2.7%
Lack of Caregiver/Childcare Relief	2.4%
Provider does not have a safe, inclusive environment	2.0%
Provider does not speak my language/ Does not have translation available	1.3%

Source: Orange County Older Adult Needs Assessment – Community Survey

CONCLUSION

The Veterans in Orange County report provides insight into how Veterans are doing within six essential categories: Health & Well-Being, Housing, Education, Employment, Social Connectedness and Health Care & Services. Monitoring of these categories is important to support Veterans as they transition and continue their post-service lives. The survey data provided in this report reveals that, although OC is doing well in many areas within these categories, there are areas with less positive responses which can be improved. In addition, there may be underlying themes from these OC resident responses that may need further attention:

- Although the OC Veteran population has health care coverage, those who don't utilize services may not receive care to address their specific mental and physical health needs.
- Approximately six out of ten older adult Veterans reported owning a home, leaving nearly four out of ten reporting residence in less stable housing. Difficulty securing housing at an earlier stage may contribute to the risk of becoming homeless, potentially contributing to the trend of increased homelessness among OC Veterans.
- Supporting a smooth transition and stable employment for Veterans choosing to reside in OC can impact:
 - Economic security later in life, which may prevent long-term health impacts, as 35% of Veterans 55 and over have reported economic insecurity as a top reason for their health concerns.
 - As reported more frequently among OC Veterans compared to the U.S. civilian population, higher job satisfaction can potentially improve reported feelings of social disconnection as noted by four out of ten surveyed older Veterans. According to the 2023 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, workplaces play a role in facilitating social connections.

Exploration of how to incorporate data-driven insights from feedback into existing programs and support systems can potentially aid in better assisting Veterans in OC. Currently, these essential services rely heavily on the County's discretionary NCC funds, as federal and state funds for Veterans who reside in OC is minimal.

The OCVAC is charged with spreading awareness of available resources and support networks based on their bylaws. Additionally, the OCVAC is evaluating whether County-affiliated entities and cities have policies similar to the County's Veteran Employment Policy and Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise program. This may lead to increased employment opportunities, which in turn could positively impact economic security and foster social connection. By continuing to address areas for improvement, satisfaction and positive responses within these key categories can be improved over time.



