



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

Elaine M. Howle, State Auditor

FACT SHEET

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The California State Auditor released the following report today:

California Department of Veterans Affairs

Although It Has Begun to Increase Its Outreach Efforts and to Coordinate With Other Entities, It Needs to Improve Its Strategic Planning Process, and Its CalVet Home Loan Program Is Not Designed to Address the Housing Needs of Some Veterans

BACKGROUND

As of September 2008 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (federal VA) estimated that approximately 2.1 million veterans resided in California, making up nearly 9 percent of the total estimated national veteran population. The mission of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (department) is to serve these veterans and their families, and it generally organizes its efforts into three divisions—the Veterans Homes division (Veterans Homes), the CalVet Home Loan program (CalVet program), and the Veterans Services division (Veterans Services). The department receives funding from various sources, including the State's General Fund, federal funds, and special funds, and spends approximately 98 percent of the funding that it receives on its Veterans Homes and CalVet program.

KEY FINDINGS

During our review of the department's efforts to address the needs of California veterans, we noted the following:

- The department relies on other entities to provide many of the direct services that veterans need, such as homeless or mental health services, and has only recently decided that Veterans Services should take a more active role in informing veterans about available benefits and coordinating with other entities that provide such services.
- With the State's participation in federal disability compensation and pension benefits (C&P benefits) below the national average, the department has made increasing veterans' participation in these benefits a primary goal for Veterans Services. However, Veterans Services ability to meet this goal is hampered by various barriers, including veterans' lack of awareness of the benefits, the complexity of the claims process, and its lack of coordination with the County Veterans Service Officer programs (CVSOs).
- The department has not formally assessed veterans' needs or included key stakeholders such as the CVSOs in its strategic planning process, and it has not effectively measured its progress towards meeting the goals and objectives in its strategic plan.
- As of March 2009 the CalVet program served 12,500 veterans; however, the program is generally not designed to serve homeless veterans or veterans in need of multifamily or transitional housing.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The department should ensure that Veterans Services continues its various initiatives related to gathering veterans' contact information, and increasing veterans' awareness of the benefits available to them. It should also ensure that Veterans Services continues its efforts to collaborate with other entities and implements a more systematic process for identifying and prioritizing the entities with which it collaborates.
- Veterans Services should formally communicate its goal to increase veterans' participation in C&P benefits to the CVSOs. It should also require the CVSOs to submit information on the number of C&P benefit claims filed in their offices, and use this and other available data to better coordinate outreach efforts with the CVSOs.
- The department should conduct a formal assessment of veterans needs, including soliciting input from the CVSOs, and should develop measurable strategic plan goals and objectives that are directly aligned with veterans' needs.
- If the Legislature believes that the department should play a larger role in funding multifamily housing for veterans, providing transitional housing to veterans, or addressing the housing needs of homeless veterans through the CalVet program, it should modify or clarify state law to authorize the department to provide such services.

