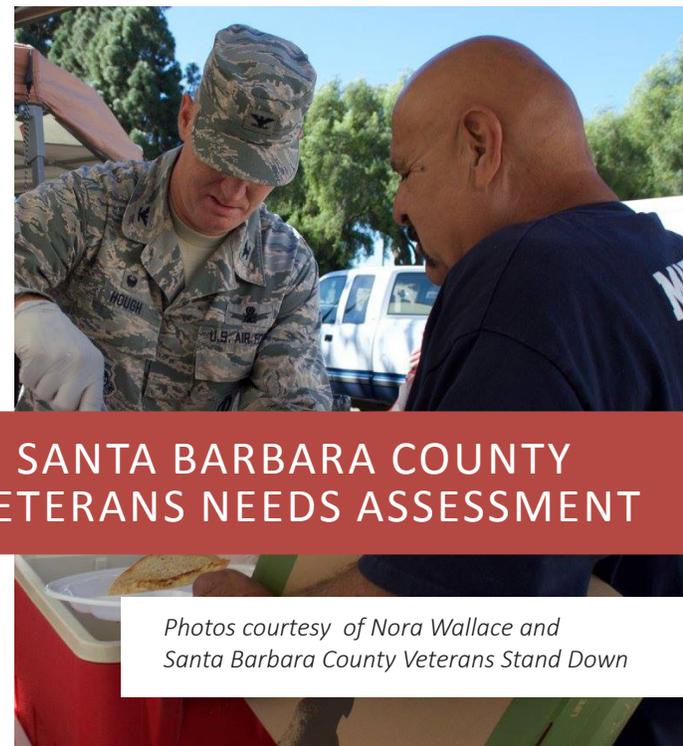




# SERVING THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
VETERANS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*Photos courtesy of Nora Wallace and Santa Barbara County Veterans Stand Down*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**NANCY BERGLASS** is Principal of Los Angeles - based Berglass Community Investment Consulting, which works to strengthen communities by helping grantmakers, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies to engage effectively with each other and those they serve. Her work designing and leading the groundbreaking \$275MM Iraq Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund afforded Ms. Berglass the opportunity to innovate at the crossroads of philanthropy and veterans affairs, earning her the US Department of Defense's Distinguished Civilian Humanitarian Award, the Council on Foundation's Award for Critical Impact in Grantmaking, and several opportunities to leverage philanthropic impact in the realm of research, advocacy, and policy change affecting veterans. Earlier in her career, Ms. Berglass was a leader in the arts and public health, and went on to become the Executive Director of two of the nation's most prominent grantmaking foundations. She is an Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, where she co-founded the Military, Veterans, & Society research program. She sits on the boards of or serves as an advisor to several nonprofit and academic organizations.

**PHILLIP CARTER** is currently Senior Fellow, Counsel and Director of the CNAS Military, Veterans & Society research program at the Center for a New American Security. His research focuses on issues facing veterans and military personnel, force structure and readiness issues, and civil - military relations. Mr. Carter began his career as an Army officer, serving for several years in the active and reserve components as a military police and civil affairs officer, and later served as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration. In addition to his military and government experience, Mr. Carter has worked in the private sector as an attorney and business leader. Mr. Carter writes extensively on veterans and military issues for Foreign Policy, the Washington Post, and other publications, and serves on numerous boards and advisory councils in the veterans and military community. He also teaches as an adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University, on the topic of veterans and military personnel policy.



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November 9, 2017

Dear Friends,

The Santa Barbara Foundation has a proud history of supporting veterans and veterans' issues. Past funding support includes a World War II veterans' historical project, Santa Barbara County Veterans Treatment Court, and the Santa Barbara County Veterans' Stand Down effort. More recently, we have partnered with Highland Santa Barbara Foundation, Inc. to fund veterans' resource centers at Allan Hancock College, Santa Barbara City College, and the University of California at Santa Barbara.

In our work we saw a need to obtain data that would lead to creating evidence-based strategies that could ultimately result in healthier, better integrated and more civically engaged veterans. We believe this needs assessment is necessary, given the tightening of the Santa Barbara County budgets coupled with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ongoing review of their partnerships and operations. The goals of the project were as follows:

- To identify stakeholders providing services for the veteran population in Santa Barbara County
- To gain a comprehensive understanding of specific demographics of veterans living here and to identify gaps in service or inefficiencies
- Through research, identify the needs and assets of the veteran population that may have yet to be realized, and
- To build a communal effort that will work to the development of tools and recommendations to better support Santa Barbara County veterans.

In March 2017, 85 stakeholders gathered to learn about the assessment and its goals. Following this initial meeting, focus groups and one on one interviews were conducted by consultants Nancy Berglass and Phillip Carter. All background research was performed with information from the Department of Defense, VA, Department of Labor, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics as well as other relevant, peer-reviewed work on the subject.

This Executive Summary is an overview of the complete report which may be found at [SBFoundation.org/SBCVeterans](http://SBFoundation.org/SBCVeterans). We welcome your thoughts and feedback, as it is our sincere desire that this data will allow all of us to focus on veterans' issues more efficiently. We believe this work will ultimately strengthen the continuum of care, cross-sector collaboration and provide the opportunity for strategic philanthropic partnerships that will benefit the entire community.

The Santa Barbara Foundation wishes to express our sincere gratitude to our partners, who provided financial and in kind support, and to the many participants for their honesty and passion for the veterans in our county. We remain committed to working with nonprofits, donors, and public and private organizations to improve the well-being of our veterans.

Ronald V. Gallo, Ed.D.  
President & CEO

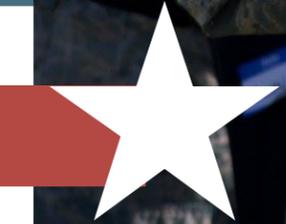
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# SANTA BARBARA COUNTY VETERANS ASSESSMENT PROJECT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NANCY BERGLASS AND  
PHILLIP CARTER, CONSULTANTS



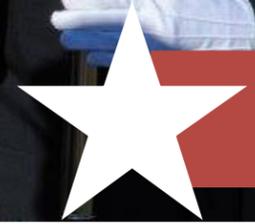
## OVERVIEW

Santa Barbara County is home to approximately 22,270 veterans, whose profile as a community largely reflects the national veteran population. While slight variations are noted where the demographic, economic, and social composition of the Southern California region and the Central Coast in particular are evident, in general, veterans in Santa Barbara County tend to do relatively well after service. Santa Barbara County's veterans earn more income than do non-veterans, enjoy among the lowest unemployment rates in the region, and benefit appreciably from the gratitude and support of a caring and patriotic civic community.

This said, in addition to the general economic, aging and other issues all people face, many veterans in Santa Barbara County also face challenges specific to both their military service, and to life in Santa Barbara County. Chief among the challenges faced by local veterans are:

- ★ **Inadequate access to US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other healthcare resources, both for physical and mental health;**
- ★ **Inadequate access to affordable housing; and**
- ★ **A veterans-services landscape that is robust and well-intentioned but fragmented, uncoordinated, and inefficient.**

As part of its efforts to best serve and engage others most effectively in service to veterans in Santa Barbara County, the Santa Barbara Foundation commissioned an assessment of the county's veteran population. The Santa Barbara County Veterans Assessment Project aimed to define the demographic and other attributes of the local veteran population, describe the landscape of services available to them, and identify opportunities through which the local community can make an impact in the lives of those who have served in uniform. The authors utilized a mixed-methods approach that included: extensive review of national, state and local literature relating to veterans; compilation and review of government data; compilation and review of nonprofit data; analysis of existing literature describing the national veteran population, California-specific studies, and local reports and stories from Santa Barbara - based public agencies and media; facilitation of two large-scale, geographically-based working groups of stakeholders in Santa Barbara County; and scores of individual interviews.



## DEMOGRAPHICS AND VA UTILIZATION SNAPSHOT

The profile of Santa Barbara County's veterans is significant insofar as age, sex, race, health and wealth inform the determination of need, access to resources, and connectivity within a community. Based on Census, Department of Defense, and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) data, the following profile emerges:

**Veteran population size.** Santa Barbara has a relatively small veteran population (22,270 based on VA data) relative to larger counties like Los Angeles or the state as a whole. This population will shrink over time based on the aging of World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam-era veterans, who are not being replaced at the same rate by All Volunteer Force-era veterans. Veterans constitute approximately 5 percent of Santa Barbara County's population, above the statewide percentage (4.5 percent) but significantly below the national per capita percentage (6.6 percent).

**Geography.** Most of Santa Barbara's veterans reside in the more populous southern parts of the county, including downtown Santa Barbara. However, the northern parts of the county, and the area surrounding Vandenberg AFB, are home to many veterans too, and have denser veteran populations than that of south Santa Barbara.

**Age and Period of Service.** Approximately 52 percent of the Santa Barbara County veteran population is above

the age of 65, making the Santa Barbara veteran cohort slightly older than the national average. Similarly, Vietnam-era veterans represent Santa Barbara County's largest group (33.7 percent); together, Gulf War-era and post-9/11 veterans (28.1 percent) represent the next largest group of veterans.

**Sex.** Men constitute 89 percent of Santa Barbara County's veteran population; women constitute 11 percent. However, women are the fastest growing demographic segment within the national veteran population.

**Race.** Santa Barbara's veterans are mostly white (71.2 percent), with Latino veterans (14.7 percent) and African-American veterans (4.9 percent) representing the next largest groups.

**Income.** Overall, veterans in Santa Barbara County earn significantly more, on average, than nonveterans: \$46,708 compared to \$25,836. This likely reflects the demographics of the veteran population, which tilts towards older white men. Six percent of Santa Barbara's veterans live below the poverty line, as compared to 15.6 percent of the overall county population.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND VA UTILIZATION SNAPSHOT (CONTINUED)

**Employment.** There is no definitive data measuring veteran unemployment in Santa Barbara specifically. However, all unemployment is fairly low in the county, notwithstanding seasonal employment dynamics that affect the workforce at large. Veteran employment was not reported as a major issue during the interviews and working groups conducted for this assessment.

**VA Expenditures.** The VA spends substantially less per veteran in Santa Barbara County than it does nationally or statewide, particularly on health care and education. These low expenditure figures suggest many veterans in the county do not utilize VA services such as health care or education benefits.

**VA Disability Status and Health Care Utilization.** Santa Barbara County has a slightly higher rate of veterans drawing VA disability than the national average – 21.26 percent in Santa Barbara as compared to 20.01 percent nationally. However, fewer veterans in Santa Barbara use VA health care than the national average – 23.97 percent as compared to 27.75 percent.

"Never before has such data been compiled to address the landscape of veterans in Santa Barbara County."

Kathy Simas  
NORTH COUNTY DIRECTOR  
SANTA BARBARA FOUNDATION



## MAJOR FINDINGS

Major findings of the Santa Barbara County Veterans Assessment include:

- ★ Like veterans nationally, most of Santa Barbara's veterans do well after service. However, some veterans, a relatively small but persistent number, struggle for reasons related or unrelated to their service.
- ★ Access to health care is the dominant issue facing veterans in need in Santa Barbara County. The VA operates two outpatient clinics in Santa Barbara County: one in Santa Maria, and one in Santa Barbara. Wait times for Santa Barbara's two VA clinics are reported by the VA to be relatively short. However, stakeholders reported much longer wait times in practice, as well as significant difficulties gaining access to VA health care appointments at Los Angeles locations, or through VA contracted providers.
- ★ Santa Barbara County's two VA clinics have very limited capacity and clinical capability; neither meets the needs of Santa Barbara's veterans. When veterans need medical care beyond the most basic of services, such as for mental health or specialty care, they must navigate a difficult VA bureaucracy based in Los Angeles to get appointments, and travel 4-6 hours roundtrip to obtain such care.
- ★ Mental health is a significant issue facing veterans in Santa Barbara County. Veterans in Santa Barbara struggle to access care from qualified mental health professionals. A plurality of the county's veterans who were chronically involved with the criminal justice system, or homeless, struggle with a mental health issues, many of which appear to be undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, untreated or poorly treated because of difficulty with timely access to VA care or eligibility issues.
- ★ Housing affordability and availability affects all residents of Santa Barbara County, including veterans. The cost of living (including housing) is high, affecting veterans of all ages who must earn a considerable amount to afford housing. Although the average income of county veterans is relatively high, a single income is often insufficient to provide for a family in such a high-cost area.
- ★ Unemployment is relatively low in Santa Barbara County, however good data specific to veteran unemployment does not exist. Stakeholders suggested that most county veterans have jobs and would be disinclined to live in such a high-cost area otherwise; unemployment is not a top concern for area veterans. Underemployment, however, and support to veterans recently out of service, may still be concerns.



## MAJOR FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

- ★ While supportive in general, Santa Barbara County's business community appears less formally engaged with veterans, than is the case in comparable communities across the country.
- ★ Santa Barbara County's veterans out-earn non-veterans by a considerable amount. This likely reflects the area's demographic tilt in the veteran population towards older white men. However, 6 percent of Santa Barbara's veterans live below the poverty line.
- ★ Several hundred veterans attend college in Santa Barbara County with VA support, with the vast majority concentrated at UCSB, Santa Barbara City College, and Allan Hancock College. Each of these three public schools have established successful veteran support centers, funded significantly by philanthropy.
- ★ Homelessness affects a small but persistent segment of Santa Barbara County's veteran population. The 2016 "point in time" (PIT) count found there were 122 homeless veterans in Santa Barbara County, down from a recent high of 173 in 2012. There exists a robust community to provide shelter and supportive services, however this community needs more resources to serve all who need it. Also, high housing costs and limited availability affects the ability of the homelessness community to house veterans (and non-veterans too).
- ★ Law enforcement agencies and the courts have adopted a proactive stance for supporting Santa Barbara veterans who come in contact with the criminal justice system. Police officials across the county were nearly unanimous in their compassionate approach to veterans; the County has also hosted a successful veterans' treatment court for several years. However, there does not appear to be a large legal community supporting Santa Barbara veterans outside of these public sector efforts focused on criminal justice.
- ★ Informal, personalized efforts to support veterans characterize the approach taken by the public sector in Santa Barbara. The Santa Barbara Veterans Memorial Building in downtown has spontaneously become a hub for veteran-related activity, but without any deliberate commitment of resources or staffing, whether by government or organized philanthropy, and with little connectivity to veterans in north county.
- ★ There is a lack of infrastructure and sustainable collaboration among stakeholders and service providers in Santa Barbara County. This lack of a "center of gravity" for the local veterans' community impedes the ability of public, private and nonprofit sector organizations alike to work collectively and effectively in service to veterans. Information sharing is a particular shortfall among community service providers.



- ★ Philanthropy plays a role within Santa Barbara County, albeit relatively small and less strategic than in other similar communities, in catalyzing and funding efforts to serve veterans. However, there are disagreements within and among funders and the nonprofits that serve veterans, over what approach(es) to take, and how best to serve and support veterans within the county.
- ★ Veterans' organizations play a largely informal, personalized role in supporting veterans in Santa Barbara County. Older, legacy-type veterans' organizations play a traditional role by offering meeting spaces, providing guidance on navigating the complex VA bureaucracy, and raising funds to help veterans in crisis. Smaller or newer veterans' groups play a more active role in local advocacy, the provision of peer support, case management, and like their older peers, crisis support.
- ★ Private and nonprofit sector organizations have significant difficulty accessing and leveraging federal resources to support veterans. There was particular frustration expressed by community providers about access to DoD and VA health care dollars, which generally run through DoD TRICARE or VA Choice Act contracted care providers. These difficulties push community providers to use other sources of funding to support veterans, contributing to a concern that serving veterans is especially costly and may sometimes drain resources that might otherwise be directed more efficiently.



"Those who served this nation don't ask for much, but their sacrifice and commitment to our freedom deserve all of our gratitude and respect."

Ronald V. Gallo, Ed.D.  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
SANTA BARBARA FOUNDATION

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

This assessment identified a number of potential opportunities for the public, private, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors alike to better serve Santa Barbara County's veterans, including:

★ **Develop a mechanism for cooperation and coordination of veteran services.**

A neutral or third party organization that is best suited to convene stakeholders and help coordinate their activities should host or serve as a platform for creating a central point of activity and communication for the veteran community.

★ **Facilitate cooperation, collaboration and communication among and between public, private and nonprofit sector organizations serving veterans.**

Just as veterans move between organizations and agencies, so too must information to serve them. A better information infrastructure must be built to serve Santa Barbara veterans. Sharing information among organizations – both at a macro level with respect to trends among veterans, and at a micro level to facilitate case management across organizations – will contribute significantly to efficacy in services to veterans.

★ **Improve military/veterans cultural competence among community stakeholders and service providers.**

Many, if not most, veterans seek support from non-veteran-specific organizations like private health care facilities or general social service agencies. These organizations can easily provide better, more efficient, and more effective services to veterans by increasing their understanding of and ability to reference the terms, needs, values and conditions that define veteran "culture". Well-vetted resources for cultural competence training can be found as an addendum to the full report of the Santa Barbara County Veterans Assessment Project.



★ **Expand health care access for veterans in Santa Barbara County.**

The opening of a new clinic with private or philanthropic funding to operate alongside the VA clinics, development of a "virtual VA" capability in Santa Barbara County, or additional telehealth sources to help project health care resources into the area, are some of the options available.

★ **Build capacity to attract and leverage external funding, particularly federal dollars.**

There are many funding sources available to support veterans but local providers expressed frustration at accessing this money – particularly through VA or DoD health care contracting mechanisms. Building local capacity to leverage these funds could have outsized impact.

★ **Educate and engage the Santa Barbara County business community about veterans.**

Efforts to inform and engage the local business community more proactively in the lives of veterans could drive more positive economic activity, increase the profile of business leaders at the community level, and also promote more grantmaking from business to the veterans' community.



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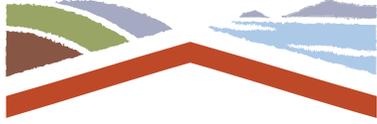
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The Santa Barbara Foundation led a community wide effort to conduct an assessment of veterans, and those who provide services to them, throughout Santa Barbara County. The foundation commissioned Nancy Berglass, Principal of Berglass Community Investment Consulting, and Phillip Carter, Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, to conduct the assessment that aimed to define the demographic and other attributes of the local veteran population, describe the landscape of services available to them, and identify opportunities through which the local community can make an impact in the lives of those who have served in uniform. The full report is available for download at: [SBFoundation.org/SBCVeterans](http://SBFoundation.org/SBCVeterans).