



**Department of California  
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation  
September 2023 Bulletin**

Our country is currently facing two great tragedies – one is the population of homeless veterans. American Legion Auxiliary members are encouraged to volunteer at homeless veteran shelters and hold events such as “Stand Downs” which provide homeless veterans with basic needs such as food, clothing, medical, dental, showers and pet care.

The second is the alarming rate of veteran suicides. The Department of California has joined the National Auxiliary and The American Legion to promote “**Be The One**,” an initiative to reduce the rate of veteran suicide by destigmatizing the fear associated with seeking and receiving mental health treatment and empowering everyone to take appropriate action when they believe a veteran or servicemember may be at risk. The following are some hard facts about suicide, by the numbers:

- 30% increase in suicide in the US in the last 25 years;
- Each death by suicide affects an estimated 135 individuals;
- 70% of suicide deaths happen within one hour from first thought to action;
- Building time between the impulse and the act to harm oneself can save a life;
- 60% of veterans who die by suicide have not been seen by the VA in the last two years;
- Military suicides have risen;
- Active-duty suicides increased in 1<sup>st</sup> 3 months of 2023 vs. 1<sup>st</sup> 3 months of 2022.

Units and districts are asked to consider donations to the **National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)**. Since 2000, the Auxiliary has co-presented NVCAF, alongside the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Each year members, units, and departments make generous monetary donations to help underwrite this very different form of rehabilitative treatment – creative arts. Veterans enrolled at VA health care facilities showcase their talents in local creative arts competitions. There are 51 categories in the visual arts division, ranging from oil paintings to leatherwork to paint-by-number kits. In the performing arts division there are 100 categories related to all aspects of music, dance, drama, and creative writing. The festival provides veterans recovering from physical and emotional disabilities the opportunity to showcase their talents in local competitions. The winners of local competitions are ultimately invited to participate at the national level competition.

**December is Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Month!** Start planning now to celebrate your veterans during December. Let your heroes know how much their service to our country is appreciated by creating a special event or fundraiser to honor them.

Until next time, we remain United as One,

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