The State of Student Veterans in California Community Colleges

2021-2022 STATEWIDE STUDY

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2018, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) awarded a $2M innovation grant to Irvine Valley College (IVC) to enhance the success of student veteran programs in the state's community colleges. To inform this work, the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) collected data on Veteran Resource Centers (VRCs) and student veterans throughout California to understand the unique academic experiences and needs of this population. Now, in the wake of enhanced government funding to support student veterans and in the context of evolving COVID-19 pandemic impacts, our group conducted a follow-up study in 2022 to examine the current state of student veterans' experiences, identify unmet needs, and spotlight promising programs and practices.

This report provides findings from a statewide student veteran survey. Where available, we draw comparisons between current findings and results from a similar 2017-2018 survey. Results from additional student veteran focus groups are interspersed throughout the report to provide valuable context to the survey findings and highlight useful approaches for student veteran support. We additionally feature ideas for promising practices that emerged during VRC staff interviews that colleges can consider when determining ways to strengthen their student veterans' success. By addressing the critical issues identified throughout this report, colleges can have a powerful impact on the lives of student veterans.

Methodology

We used a mixed-methods evaluation model to collect data and information that provide a snapshot of how California Community Colleges (CCC) are serving their student veteran population. These methods include a student survey of 1,170 veterans from across 81 colleges, two focus groups with student veterans, and interviews with VRC staff at four colleges that demonstrated high levels of success in serving their veterans based on an analysis of student satisfaction results and academic outcomes.

Key Findings and Recommendations

1. The rates of illness, injury, and disability are very high among student veterans, even slightly higher than what was found in the 2018 study.

Student veterans have unmet needs related to their mental and physical health that can threaten their college success. While health services may be available on campus or in the local community, student veterans may be unaware of their options or unsure how to access care. VRCs are well-positioned to help connect student veterans to the services and resources they need to address these concerns. As rates of health needs were higher in the current study than

2018, it will be important to track rates in the coming years to determine the degree to which the increase was related to the pandemic and whether rates decrease (or potentially increase) in the pandemic's aftermath.

Recommendation 1.1: VRCs should leverage multiple and varied online platforms, communication devices, and outreach activities (e.g., veteran resource webpage, newsletter, campus health fair) to promote existing services by providing student veterans with information on how to access care and who to contact to learn more. Such services on campus include use of College Health Centers and food centers, outside services include connecting with VA CBOCS to bring medical vans to campus and provide on-site medical and mental health services and enrollment into VA healthcare on site.

Recommendation 1.2: VRCs can help student veterans eliminate some of the guesswork in accessing health services available through their military benefits by offering greater hands-on assistance enrolling in Veterans' Administration (VA) Healthcare. Provide information in your VRC–VA Medical enrollment forms, train your VA Work-study to assist with the application and provide flyers/hand-outs with VA medical/mental health direct phone numbers for access to services. Train VA Work-study and VRC staff how to make appointments for veterans and provide case-management to assure calls are made and appointments are accessed.

2. Student veterans struggle to maintain an appropriate school-life balance.

Nearly two-thirds of student veterans indicated difficulty maintaining a balance between schoolwork and personal demands and half have difficulty dealing with stress due to class demands. Student veterans must juggle numerous responsibilities outside of school–working, parenting, managing a household–that can present scheduling challenges and may impact the amount of time they have available to devote to their studies.

Recommendation 2.1: Colleges should consider offering courses in multiple modalities (e.g., in-person, online, and hybrid) beyond the pandemic to mitigate scheduling issues and help student veterans maintain a better school-life balance.

Recommendation 2.2: VRCs should continue offering and expanding upon web-based wraparound services available to student veterans via virtual meetings, live chat, help desks, webinars, online appointment scheduling, document uploading, and electronic signatures.

Recommendation 2.3: Utilize college funds to support childcare funding, or free childcare on campus (or vouchers), support with tutoring on-line and in person in your VRC, time-management classes, provide financial assistance for veterans, promote applying for financial aid each semester and foundation grants, provide gas cards, food cards, emergency funds and address other needs throughout the year with donated funds for veterans.

3. While many Veteran Resource Centers offer comprehensive services to help students, the pandemic impacted students' awareness of and access to these valuable supports.

Colleges need to promote greater awareness of the benefits currently available through VRCs and improve accessibility to these benefits. Student veterans who entered college for the first time during the pandemic as well as those who primarily attend classes in the evening or online may not have knowledge of or access to all the services and supports available.

Recommendation 3.1: VRCs need to ensure the college website reflects the full scope of benefits and resources available to student veterans on-campus and through community partnerships with local veterans' organizations to help streamline the flow of information.

Recommendation 3.2: As colleges transition back to on-campus programming, VRCs should consider hosting welcome back events and other outreach activities such as new student veteran orientation, transition support seminars, social hours, meet-and-greets, and barbeques and pancake breakfasts to help connect with student veterans.

Recommendation 3.3: To accommodate students who are not able to come to campus during regular working hours, VRCs should restructure their service availability to extend the hours of operation to include evening and weekend hours each month and make available an online contact form in which student veterans can request assistance virtually.

Recommendation 3.4: Implement female veterans specific services, financial aid for housing, stress relief programs, provide group meetings, clothing giveaways, and use funds to support female veteran specific events (e.g., lunches, holiday events) and promote mental health (employ female mental health providers on campus) and support at each event using outside collaborating partners for funding and support.

4. Student veterans face the unique challenge of navigating college administrative processes while coordinating with the Veterans Administration to initiate and maintain their benefits.

The complexity inherent in navigating Veterans' Administration can make enrolling in college an arduous endeavor. Since most students attending college are not service members and most college personnel have limited experience supporting student veterans, student veterans may not know who can answer their specific questions. Providing a supportive environment for incoming student veterans can ease their transition from military to civilian life.

Recommendation 4.1: VRCs should facilitate student involvement by leveraging work-study programs and developing a peer-to-peer mentor program, matching seasoned student veterans with incoming student veterans who could benefit from guidance/mentorship.

Recommendation 4.2: Provide a robust orientation with sustained follow-up to ensure student veterans get and stay on track with respect to leveraging their benefits.

5. Student veterans are experiencing difficulties accessing in-person classes due to the pandemic.

The pandemic had a profound impact on college operations. While in-person courses are becoming more available, the transition back to on-campus programming has been a slow and unpredictable process for many colleges. The lack of face-to-face instruction is particularly problematic for student veterans who must meet certain stipulations in the GI Bill that require them to enroll in at least one in-person course each term.

> **Recommendation 5.1**: VRC personnel should connect with campus administrators to design a plan for ensuring that faculty and administrators are aware of the special circumstances affecting student veterans' financial support so college leadership can identify solutions to ensure students are not penalized for factors beyond their control.
>
> **Recommendation 5.2:** Develop a system of constant communication with student veterans and continuously assess their ever-changing and evolving needs.

Concluding Remarks

The RP Group's research continues to strongly suggest that student veterans face a unique set of challenges as they navigate out of the role of servicemember and into the role of college student that can impede their ability to have maximal success in the classroom. Colleges should keep the unique needs of student veterans top of mind when enrolling and serving these students, most notably as it relates to their physical and mental health. Further, while the CCC have made significant progress with respect to the supports offered through Veterans Resource Centers over the past few years, there is still room for improvement, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As colleges around the state emerge from the pandemic and settle into a "new normal," that includes a mix of both in-person and hybrid services and instruction, it is all the more important to ensure student veterans are prioritized such that they can still receive the supports necessary to be successful students.

One final, positive, note to remember, all VRCs should be aware of how to access and support our veterans and that there is an abundance of funding to support our veterans in mental health needs, sustainable positions in the VRCs and access to assistance with academic tutoring along with health care on campus. Each college must initiate an algorithm of how to access these services and how to address the needs and build supports for our veterans who may need more assistance once enrolled in our college system.

Introduction

In 2018, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) awarded a $2M innovation grant to Irvine Valley College (IVC) to enhance the success of student Veteran programs in the state's community colleges. To inform this work, the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) collected data on Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs) and student veterans[1] throughout California to understand the unique academic experiences and needs of student veterans. Now, in the wake of enhanced government funding to support this historically underserved population and in the context of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, The RP Group conducted a follow-up study to examine changes in student veterans' experiences, identify unmet needs, and spotlight promising approaches to supporting this important student group.

Reader's Guide

This report provides VRC directors and other stakeholders seeking to improve the experiences student veterans with a snapshot of the state of the veteran population across the California Community Colleges (CCC). We offer these findings to bring awareness to new or existing challenges student veterans face and how colleges can strengthen programs and practices that serve them. The report begins with a brief overview of the study's methodology. Following, we summarize the results from a 2022 survey of student veterans, adding context where possible with findings from student veteran focus groups. Where available, we draw comparisons between current findings and results from a similar 2017-2018 report. Then, we summarize findings from interviews with VRC staff, highlighting effective practices for colleges to consider when working to strengthen services for student veterans. We conclude with key recommendations for improving student veterans' success via the VRCs and other on-campus approaches.

[1] Note: Throughout this report, we use the term "student veterans" to encompass both veterans as well as active military/reserves and National Guard.

Study Methodology

To examine the experiences of California community college student veterans, we employed a mixed-methods research design. We list the data collection methods used for this study below, along with brief descriptions of the types of data collected.

1. **Student Veteran Survey:** Between November 2021 and February 2022, an online survey was administered to student veterans across 115 California community colleges. Information collected included questions paralleling those asked in the 2017-2018 study with respect to students' demographics, military background, and access, usage, and experiences with services at the VRC and the college. Additional questions asked student veterans about their mental health and food and housing insecurity, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their well-being and success as a student.

2. **Student Veteran Focus Groups:** In April 2022, The RP Group conducted two virtual focus groups with student veterans from a subset of four colleges identified as being particularly successful in serving student veterans based on higher academic outcomes and satisfaction with their local VRC . An RP Group researcher facilitated the focus groups using a protocol that asked student veterans about the services and resources currently used on campus, their unmet needs, and their overall educational experiences at each of their respective colleges. A total of seven student veterans participated in the focus groups.

3. **Veteran Service Staff Interviews:** At the same colleges where we selected students for the focus groups, The RP Group researcher also interviewed VRC staff to identify promising practices and program attributes believed to have a positive impact on student veterans' success. These staff held job titles such as Certifying Official, VRC Director/Coordinator, Veterans Counselor, and Program Specialist. A consistent interview protocol explored VRC staff perceptions of student veterans' experiences, challenges, resources, and continuing needs. Seven veterans services professionals participated in these interviews.

Study Findings

Student Veteran Survey and Focus Group Results

Demographics

Ultimately, we received responses from 1,170 veterans at 81 colleges (70% of CCC). As Table 1 demonstrates, comparison of the demographics of the survey sample in 2021-2022 to that of 2017-2018 reveals that while the age groups of the two samples were quite similar, the proportion of female respondents increased since the last study. In terms of race/ethnicity, the majority of 2021-2022 respondents identified as either White (41.9%) or Hispanic or Latina/o/x (41.5%), while over one-third of the sample identified as first-generation college students.

Find a full list of participating colleges in Appendix A and further detail on the demographics of 2021-2022 survey respondents in Appendix B.

Table 1. Student Veterans' Gender, Age, Race/Ethnicity, Military Branch, Service Length, and Service-Related Injury/Illness, Comparison over Time

	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ
Gender			
Male	71.3%	80.7%	-9.4%
Female	28.0%	19.1%	8.9%
Other	0.7%	0.2%	0.5%
Age			
18-20	2.4%	2.3%	0.1%
21-40	75.0%	78.3%	-3.3%
>40	16.6%	19.4%	-2.8%
Military Branch(es) Served In*			
Army	38.5%	35.0%	3.5%
Marine Corps	25.1%	32.0%	-6.9%
Coast Guard, Airforce, Navy	45.4%	43.0%	2.4%
Length of Service in Military			
1-8 Years	77.0%	80.0%	-3.0%
9-12 Years	8.4%	9.0%	-0.6%
>12 Years	14.6%%	11.0%	+3.6%
Have you suffered any illness or injury because of your service?			
Yes	72.3%	70.0%	2.3%

Note. *Could check all that apply

Table 2 shows that most respondents were veterans; a small subset were either members of the national guard, active military, or active reservists. Nearly two-thirds of respondents had been deployed at least once and roughly two-fifths having served in a combat zone. Respondents varied greatly with respect to the theater or era in which they served, though nearly one in three participated in Operation Enduring Freedom, and one in five participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Table 2. Student Veterans' Military Status, Deployments, Combat Experience, and Theater/Era

Demographic	%	*n*
Current Military Status		
Veteran	88.3%	1,015
National Guard	2.8%	32
Active Military	1.7%	20
Active Reservist	7.2%	83
Number of Deployments to Date		
0	36.0%	414
1	31.3%	360
2	15.6%	180
3-5	12.5%	144
6-10	3.6%	42
>10	1.0%	11
Have you served in a combat zone?		
Yes	40.5%	462
In what theater or era have you served?*		
World War II	0.0%	0
Korea	2.5%	29
Vietnam/Southeast Asia	2.2%	26
Gulf War	6.3%	74
Gulf War II	4.7%	55
Iraq	16.1%	188
Afghanistan	19.6%	229
Operation Enduring Freedom	30.3%	354
Operation Iraqi Freedom	20.8%	243
Operation New Dawn	8.8%	103
Operation Inherent Resolve	3.9%	46
Global War on Terrorism	0.8%	9
Peacetime	0.6%	7

**Could check all that apply*

Table 3 shows that student veterans utilized a range of Veterans Affairs Educational Assistance Programs, with more than half leveraging Chapter 33 (the Post 9/11 GI Bill). Similarly, student veterans ranged greatly with respect to their primary health insurance provider, with the greatest proportion using either Veterans Administration (VA) insurance or VA Health Care. More than two-thirds of veterans currently receive Veteran Affairs Services.

Table 3. Student Veterans' Use of VA Educational Assistance, Primary Health Insurance, and VA Services

Demographic	%	*n*
Veteran Affairs Educational Assistance Programs Used		
Chapter 31 (Vocational Rehab)	17.6%	201
Chapter 33 (Post 9/11 GI Bill)	59.9%	685
Montgomery GI Bill	3.7%	42
CH 1606 (Montgomery GI Selected Reserve)	3.0%	24
Other (most common: Chapter 35; *n* = 22)	15.9%	182
Primary Health Insurance		
Campus Student Health Center	0.8%	9
Veterans Administration	26.1%	305
VA Health Care	22.9%	267
Employer's Health Insurance	12.2%	142
TRICARE	16.6%	194
Other (Most common: Medicare, Medi-Cal)	14.1%	164
No Health Insurance	7.4%	86
Do you currently receive Veteran Affairs Services?		
Yes	68.9%	802
No	25.5%	297
Applied, but haven't received service yet	5.6%	1164

Table 4 highlights the need for assistance programs, given not only high rates of illness, injury, and disability in the student veteran population, but also the fact that these rates are trending upward compared to the 2017-2018 study.

Table 4. Student Veterans' Disability Status, Comparison over Time

% of student veterans who…	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ
Suffered an illness or injury because of their service	72.3%	69.5%	2.8%
Are rated for a service-connected disability*	78.2%	60.4%	17.8%
Have applied for a service-connected disability*	84.1%	65.1%	19.0%
Need accommodations for their disability*	33.2%	21.4%	11.8%
Percentage service-connected disability**			
0%	0.7%	2.1%	-1.4%
1-25%	12.0%	13.4%	-1.4%
26%-50%	16.3%	23.4%	-7.1%
51%-75%	21.0%	21.8%	-0.8%
75%-99%	22.8%	24.9%	-2.1%
100%	27.2%	14.2%	13.0%

*Only asked of those who suffered illness or injury

**Only asked of those who indicated having a service-connected disability

Mental and Physical Health

The survey asked student veterans whether they were aware of fellow veterans who experienced concerns about various mental health conditions[2] and whether they had their own concerns about such conditions. As is often seen in the broader veteran population, student veterans reported high rates of mental health concerns. As can be seen in Figure 1, over two-thirds of student veterans reported knowing a fellow veteran who experienced concerns about anxiety and depression, while more than half experienced anxiety and depression themselves. Further, more than half of veterans knew a fellow veteran who experienced concerns about posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while over one-third had their own such concerns. Over one-third of veterans knew fellow veterans who were concerned about suicidal thoughts, while over one-quarter knew a fellow veteran who had attempted suicide. Further, 6% of respondents indicated that they themselves had attempted suicide – 1% in the past 30 days alone.

[2] With respect to having suicidal thoughts or attempting suicide in the past 30 days, student veterans were only asked about themselves, not their fellow veterans.

Figure 1. Student Veterans' Own Mental Health Concerns and Awareness among Fellow Veterans

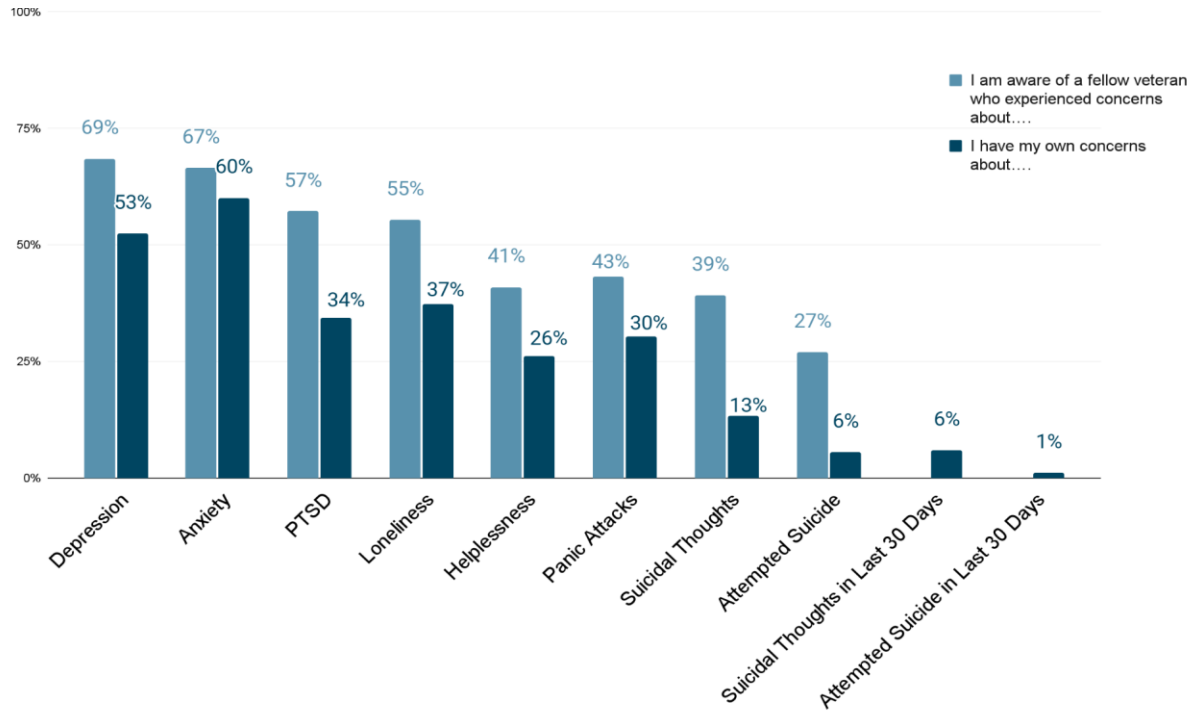


Table 5 compares the proportion of student veterans in the 2017-2018 study versus the 2021-2022 study who indicated that they or their fellow veterans had concerns about various mental health conditions. Table 5 captures that the prevalence of mental health concerns across all conditions is greater in the 2021-2022 sample than in the 2017-2018 sample. The largest gains are in the areas of anxiety and depression.

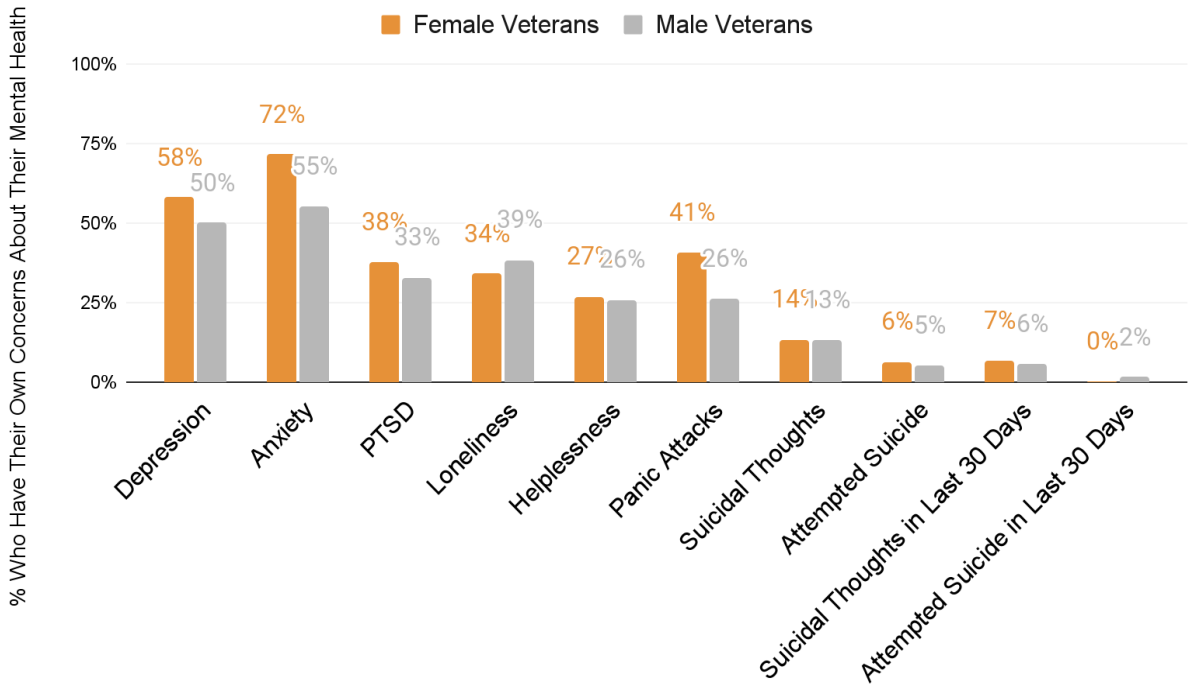
Table 5. Student Veterans' Mental Health Concerns, Comparison over Time

	I am aware of a fellow veteran who experienced concerns about….			I have my own concerns about….		
	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ
Loneliness	55.4%	44.6%	10.8%	37.3%	24.1%	13.2%
Depression	68.5%	52.8%	15.7%	52.5%	37.4%	15.1%
Anxiety	66.5%	53.6%	12.9%	60.1%	44.0%	16.1%
PTSD	57.2%	50.2%	7.0%	34.4%	26.3%	8.1%
Suicidal Thoughts	39.2%	32.6%	6.6%	13.3%	11.0%	2.3%
Attempted Suicide	27.0%	22.3%	4.7%	5.6%	3.7%	1.9%
Helplessness	41.0%	31.9%	9.1%	26.2%	16.5%	9.7%
Panic Attacks	43.3%	36.1%	7.2%	30.4%	20.8%	9.6%

Note: Participants could check all that apply

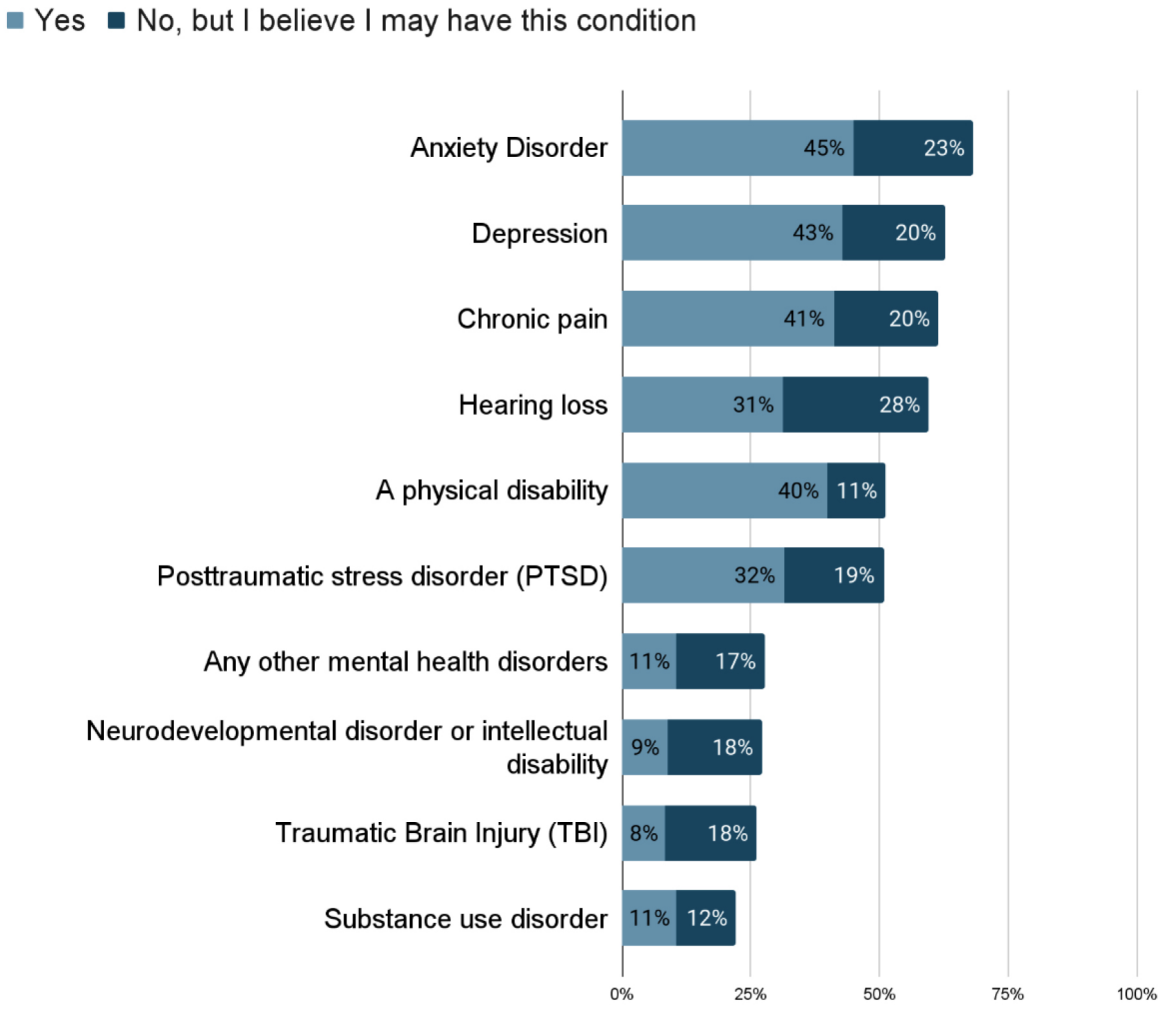
Previous research by The RP Group specifically explored the mental health concerns of female veterans. Disaggregating the data in Figure 2 by gender reveals that female student veterans were more likely to report concerns about depression, anxiety, PTSD, and panic attacks than their male student veteran counterparts. For context, in the general population in the United States, rates of these mental health conditions are higher in females than in males, so this result is not entirely surprising. However, among this student veteran population, rates among both males and females are much higher than in the general population.

Figure 2. Student Veterans' Mental Health Concerns, by Gender



Additional survey questions attempted to unpack student veterans' mental and physical health concerns. Questions asked whether students had an official diagnosis of a given condition and, if not, whether they believed they may have a given condition. As Figure 3 shows, results revealed that student veterans were most likely to have an officially diagnosed anxiety disorder (45%); nearly one-quarter more indicated they did not have a diagnosis but believe they may have an anxiety disorder. Rates were similar when it came to depression. With respect to physical health issues, nearly one-third had an official diagnosis of hearing loss, yet almost as many believed they may have this condition.

Figure 3. Student Veterans' Physical and Mental Health Concerns



Given the high rates of reported and suspected PTSD in the student veteran population, follow-up questions asked about specific PTSD symptomology to gain a better understanding of the student experience among those with diagnosed or suspected PTSD that may be impacting their educational experience. Table 6 shows that the most reported symptoms of PTSD among the 2021-2022 population included difficulty falling asleep and difficulty concentrating. A comparison of the prevalence of these symptoms amongst participants in the 2021-2022 study relative to the 2017-2018 study reveals that student veterans who completed the recent survey were more likely to report these symptoms than those in the prior study.

Table 6. Student Veterans' PTSD Symptoms, Comparison over Time

	I frequently experience the following …		
	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ
Difficulty falling asleep	43.9%	39.4%	4.5%
Difficulty concentrating	34.5%	26.4%	8.1%
Feeling distant from other people	33.0%	26.6%	6.4%
Avoiding situations because they remind me of military experiences	21.0%	16.7%	4.3%
Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts	20.2%	18.6%	1.6%
Disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of military experience	18.6%	15.8%	2.8%
Physical reactions (e.g., increased heart rate, trouble breathing)	16.6%	13.5%	3.1%

Note. Participants could check all that apply

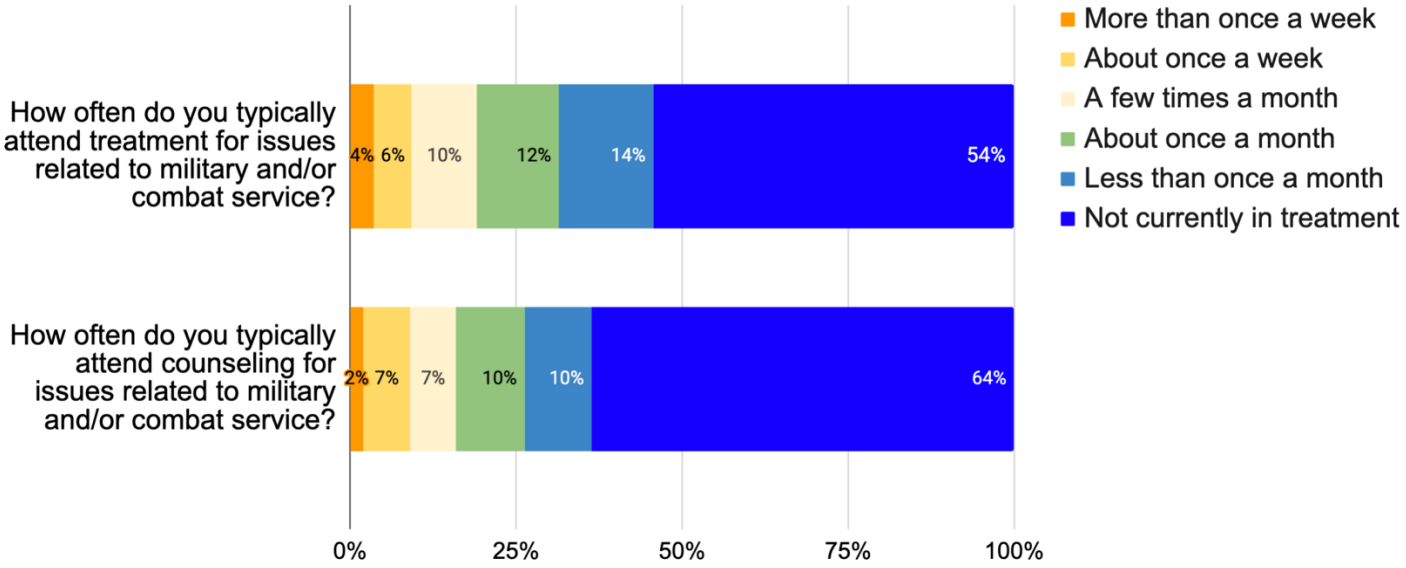
Table 7 and Figure 4 provide the frequency with which student veterans received treatment and/or counseling for issues related to military and/or combat services. Despite the high rates of mental and physical health conditions indicated previously, over half of student veterans reported that they were not currently in treatment for issues related to military and/or combat service; nearly two-thirds reported that they were not currently attending counseling for issues related to military and/or combat service. Of those who were receiving mental health treatment, most reported receiving such treatment off-campus.

Table 7. Student Veterans' Use of Counseling and Treatment

	How often do you attend **treatment** for issues related to military/combat service?		How often do you attend **counseling** for issues related to military/combat service?	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Frequency				
More than once a week	3.6%	38	2.0%	21
About once a week	5.7%	60	7.1%	73
A few times a month	9.8%	102	6.9%	71
About once a month	12.3%	129	10.3%	106
Less than once a month	14.2%	149	10.1%	104
Not currently in treatment	54.3%	568	63.7%	659
Where veterans are receiving mental health treatment				
Not currently receiving treatment	62.6%	675		
On campus	1.7%	18		
Off campus	31.6%	341		

Note. Participants could check all that apply

Figure 4. Student Veterans' Use of Counseling and Treatment



Additional Concerns

While mental and physical health concerns are extremely prevalent in the student veteran population, survey questions also probed about additional challenges student veterans may experience in their lives. Table 8 shows that over one-third of veterans currently had concerns about employment, and nearly half of veterans currently had concerns about their financial obligations. These rates are higher than what student veterans reported in the 2017-2018 study.

Table 8. Other Concerns, Comparison over Time

	I am aware of a fellow veteran who experienced concerns about….			I have my own concerns about….		
	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ
Employment	43.5%	40.3%	3.2%	34.4%	28.3%	6.1%
Financial obligations	48.0%	40.8%	7.2%	47.4%	36.3%	11.1%
Healthcare for self or family	36.1%	31.3%	4.8%	29.4%	23.4%	6.0%
Relationships	51.3%	41.8%	9.5%	41.2%	29.5%	11.7%

The College Experience for Veterans

Student veterans were asked about the supports they have received at their community college and their general sentiments about being a veteran on campus. As Figure 5 and Table 9 show, veterans were generally quite positive about their campus experiences, with most indicating that they feel their college supports veterans and that they feel comfortable being on their campus. While quite positive, a comparison of these rates to the 2017-2018 survey (Table 9) reveals a slightly more positive perception of campus climate in the earlier study.

Figure 5. Student Veterans' Perceptions of College Support and Assistance

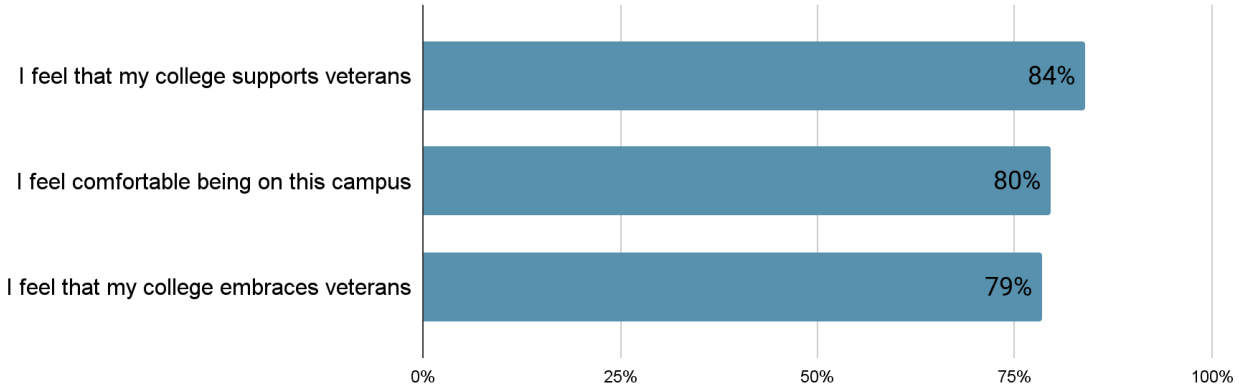
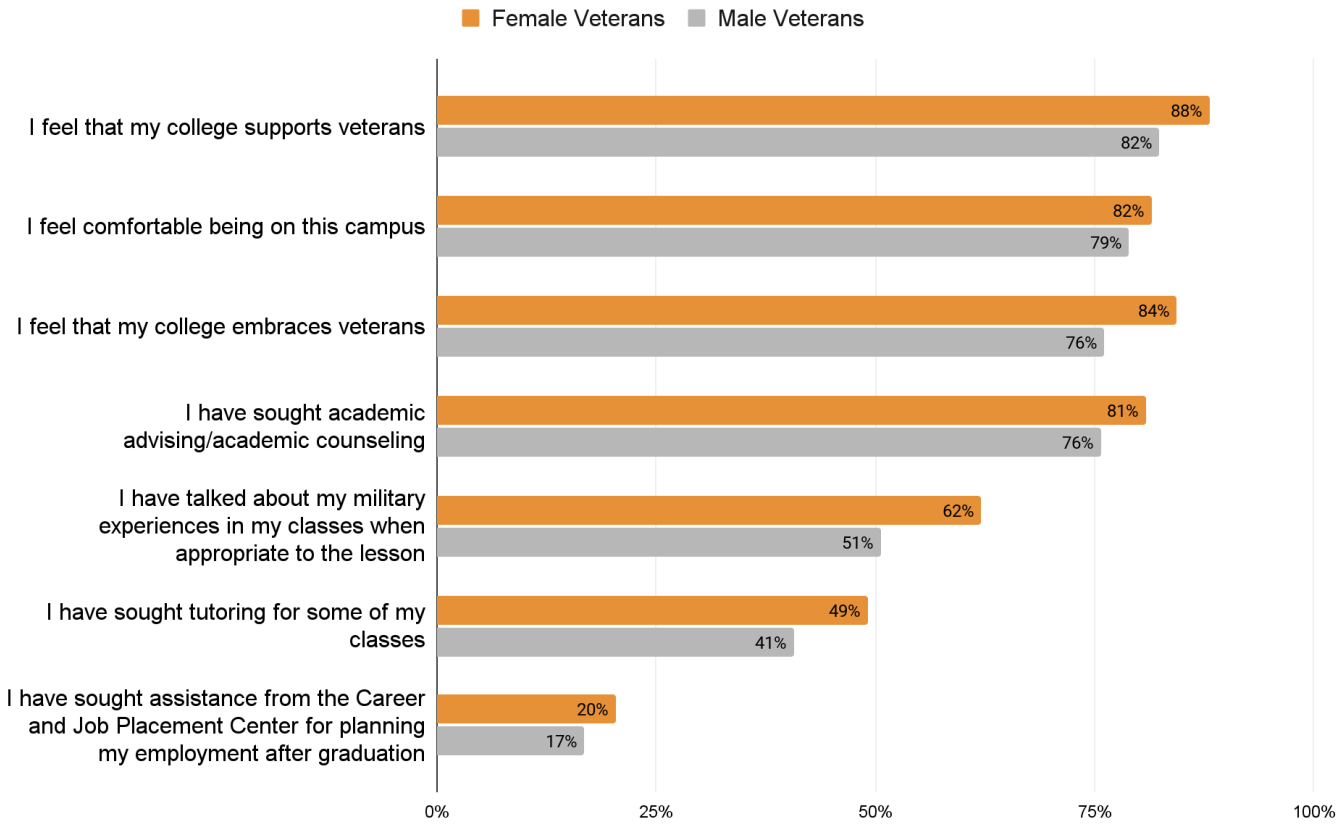


Table 9. Student Veterans' Perceptions of College Support and Assistance, Comparison over Time

	Yes 2021-2022	Yes 2017-2018	Δ
I feel that my college supports veterans	84.0%	87.6%	-3.6%
I feel comfortable being on this campus	79.6%	87.6%	-8.0%
I feel that my college embraces veterans	78.5%	89.1%	-10.6%

As Figure 6 shows, disaggregating the data by gender reveals slightly more positive experiences for female veterans relative to male veterans, as well as a greater frequency of use of campus services among female veterans than male veterans. Female veterans were substantially more likely than male veterans to indicate having spoken about their military experiences in class and having sought tutoring for their classes.

Figure 6. Student Veterans' Perceptions of College Support and Assistance, by Gender



Figures 7 and 8 document that student veterans are struggling to maintain an appropriate school-life balance. Nearly two-thirds of veterans indicated difficulty maintaining a balance between schoolwork and personal demands, and half have difficulty dealing with stress due to class demands. These rates are higher among female veterans than male veterans.

Further over one-third of student veterans indicated that they have thought about dropping out of school, with rates identical among males and females. While concerning, Table 10 shows that these concerns are similar to the results from the 2017-2018 study.

Figure 7. School-Life Balance Issues Faced by Student Veterans

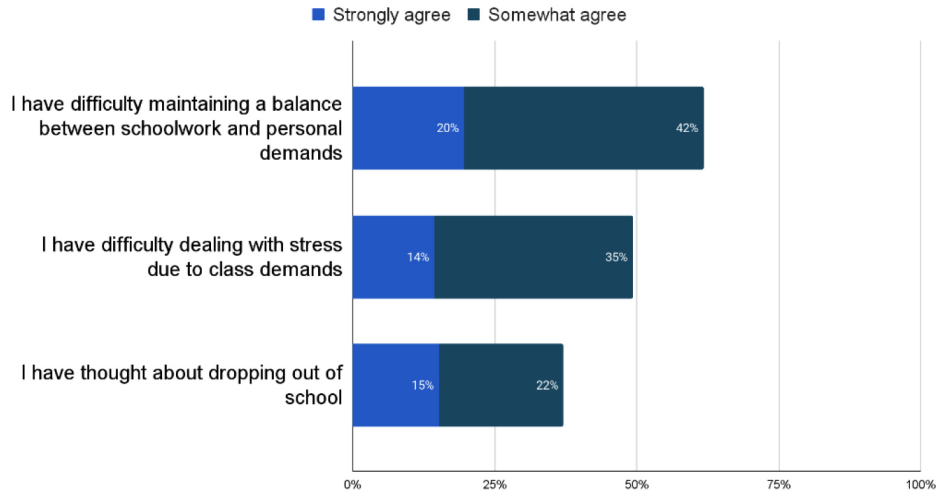


Figure 8. School-Life Balance Issues Faced by Student Veterans, by Gender

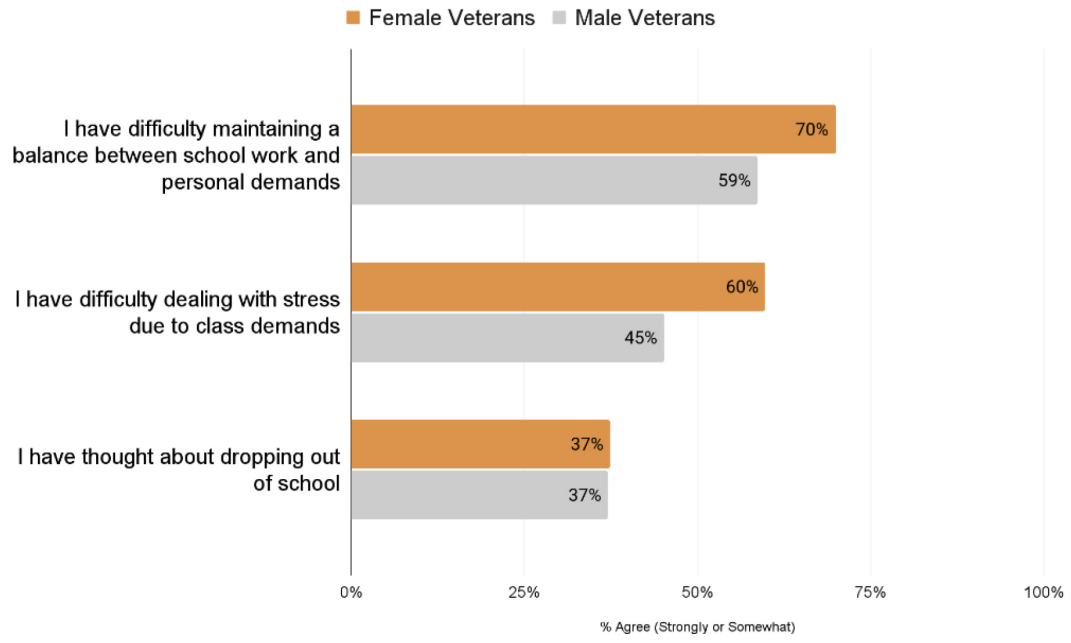


Table 10. School-Life Balance Issues Faced by Student Veterans, Comparison over Time

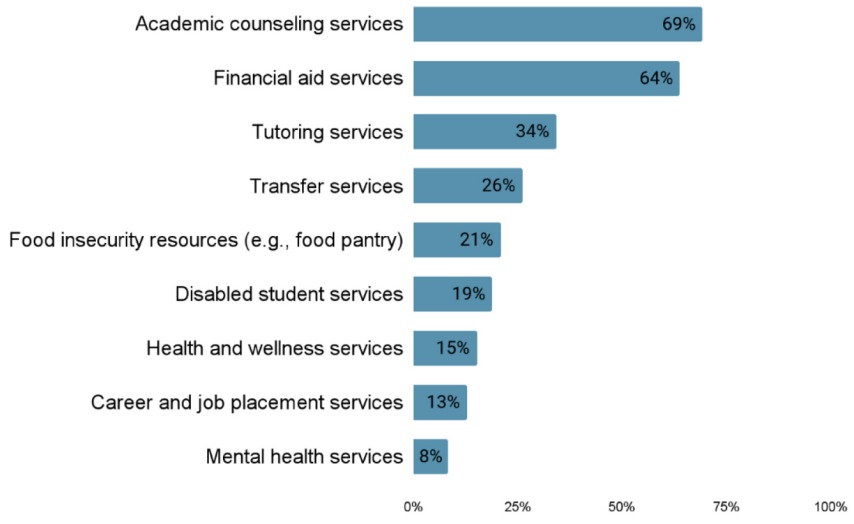
	Strongly or somewhat agree		
	2021-2022	2017-2018	Δ
I have difficulty maintaining a balance between schoolwork and personal demands	61.8%	57.6%	4.2%
I have difficulty dealing with stress due to class demands	49.3%	46.6%	2.7%
I have thought about dropping out of school	37.1%	33.5%	3.6%

Additional questions revealed that, while over three-quarters of student veterans are leveraging academic advising/academic counseling, they are far less likely to indicate seeking tutoring for their classes (43%) or assistance from the Career and Job Placement Center for planning for their employment after graduation (18%).

Leveraging College Supports

Community colleges typically offer a variety of services designed to help students navigate the many facets of their life during their academic journey. Student veterans were asked whether they had accessed such services in the past year. Figure 9 shows that roughly two-thirds of student veterans utilized academic counseling and financial aid services (respectively) in the past year. Just over one-third of student veterans indicated having used tutoring services in the past year, while roughly one-quarter had indicated using transfer services. Lastly, despite the previously high reported levels of physical and mental health disabilities among student veterans, fewer than one in five indicated leveraging on-campus disabled student services or mental or physical health services.

Figure 9. College Services Utilized by Student Veterans in the Past Year



Comparison of current college service utilization to that in the 2017-2018 study in Table 11 reveals that results were relatively similar, with the exception that just over one-third of respondents to the 2021-2022 survey were less likely to indicate having used tutoring services in the past year than students in the 2017-2018 survey. However, it is important to note that this reduction is likely related to the pandemic and the overall reduction in utilization of student services.

Table 11. College Services Utilized by Student Veterans in the Past Year, Comparison over Time

	Yes 2021-2022	Yes 2017-2018	Δ
Academic counseling services	69.3%	73.5%	-4.2%
Career and job placement services	12.8%	17.5%	-4.7%
Disabled student students	18.9%	19.2%	-0.3%
Financial aid services	63.9%	62.2%	1.7%
Food insecurity resources (e.g., food pantry)	20.9%	12.1%	8.8%
Health and wellness services	15.2%	18.7%	-3.5%
Mental health services	8.2%	11.0%	-2.8%
Tutoring services	34.2%	50.9%	-16.7%
Transfer services	26.1%	31.4%	-5.3%

Give our prior research on student engagement with VRCs on CCC campuses, we deployed a set of questions to examine current use and benefits. When asked about VRC usage, as shown in Table 12, over one-third of student veterans had visited their VRC six or more times since spring 2020, while one-half used it an average of three times. Of note, a small but significant percentage (18%) did not use their college's VRC at all.

Table 12. Student Veterans' Use of VRCs

	%	*n*
Since spring 2020, how many times have you visited or contacted your college's VRC?		
0 times	17.8%	159
1 time	9.9%	88
2 times	12.2%	109
3 times	12.4%	111
4 times	8.1%	72
5 times	4.5%	40
6 or more times	35.1%	313

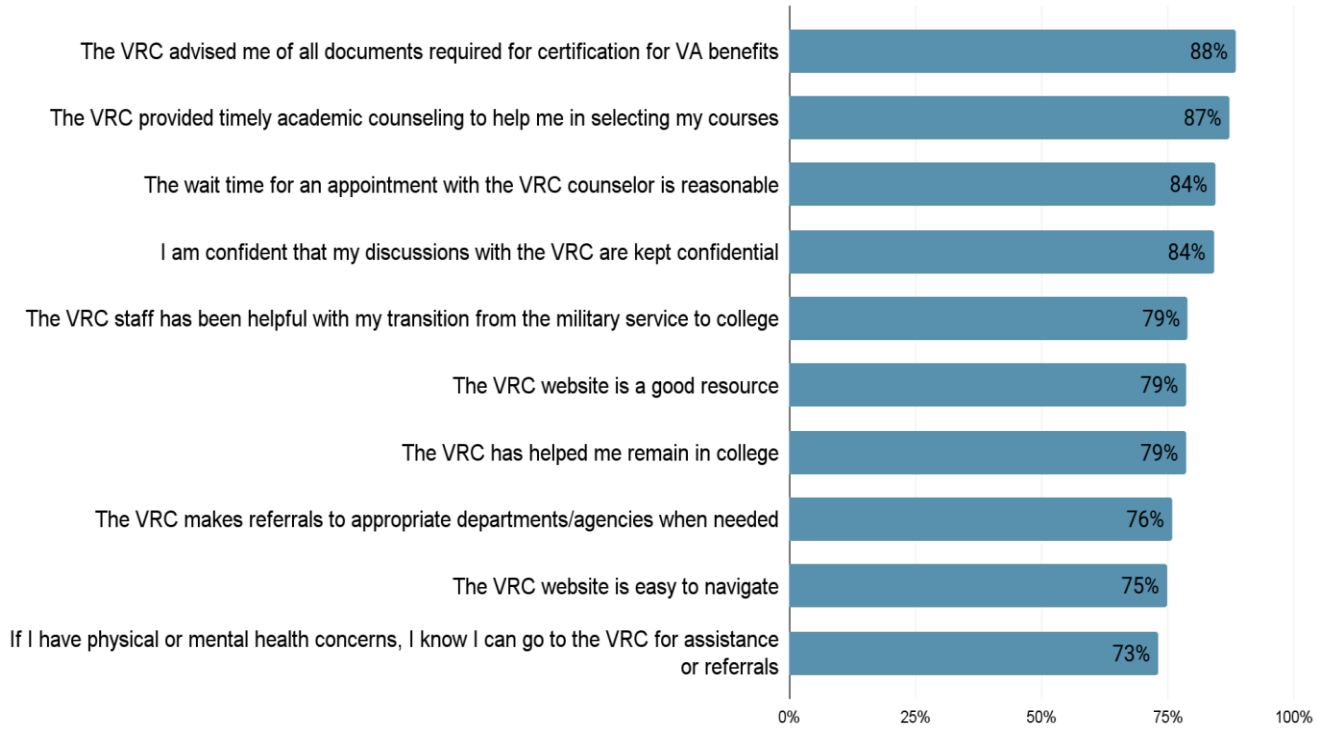
VRCs host a variety of events and sporting activities to promote student engagement and increase awareness of the services they offer. Outreach events help service members connect with one another on campus and facilitate introductions to VRC staff who help them get connected to valuable resources and supports. During the focus groups, student veterans explained how VRCs sometimes partner with community-based organizations to provide fun freebies like t-shirts, promotional items, and school supplies for students who participate.

Moreover, these activities illustrate the inclusive culture embodied by VRCs that make them inviting to all students. Focus group participants explained how both veterans and non-veterans are encouraged to attend VRC events. One focus group participant revealed:

> *We have a big cornhole game every so often, usually bi-weekly, a lot of the guys in the Veterans Center just go outside in the grassy area of the campus, and they're playing it, and anyone's welcome, even if you're not a veteran.*

Generally, the majority of those who did indicate leveraging the services of their VRC at least once in the past year reported a wide range of positive benefits (see Figure 10). Nearly nine in 10 student veterans indicated that their VRC advised them of all the documents required for certification for VA benefits and provided them with timely academic counseling to help them in selecting their courses. Nearly four in five veterans indicated that the VRC helped them remain in college.

Figure 10. Student Veterans' Perspectives on VRC Benefits



Findings from the focus groups conducted with student veterans underscore the importance of creating an environment where all students feel welcome and supported. When asked what they liked best about their VRC, student veterans emphasized the friendly culture and people. According to focus group participants, the VRC staff and students are like family and have a tight bond. Counselors offer kind and caring support and are readily available to speak with student veterans. One focus group participant explained:

> *Counselors are very friendly and easy going and easy to talk to as well. [They] make you feel very comfortable.*

Student veterans view the VRC as a refuge from the demands of class, and the casual setting within VRCs make them more student-friendly than other spaces on campus. Focus group participants shared how they appreciate having a place on campus where they can hang out in-between classes and meet up with friends. Student veterans enjoy connecting with fellow service members at the VRC who understand and relate to their unique experiences and challenges. Focus group participants described the VRC as a place where they can relax, play games, and watch movies without having to think about the pressures of class. Some VRCs provide free meals and snacks for visitors. One focus group participant commented:

> *[The VRC] has a refrigerator with sandwiches and stuff that you can just take. Sometimes I would go in there if I didn't really have much time in between classes, I just go in there, get [a sandwich], and sometimes people strike up conversation.*

Student veterans also appreciate the dedicated support they receive from the staff and students who work at the VRC. Focus group participants explained how the VRC provides hands-on assistance to student veterans to help them take the guesswork out of enrolling in college, accessing VA benefits, and applying for services and supports. VRC staff walk student veterans through the benefit certification process and help them initiate their GI Bill so they can pay for college courses and living expenses. Two focus group participants described their experience working with their VRCs:

> *I was having trouble registering online. I went to the Veterans Resource office, and they helped lead me through the whole system. And then, I had trouble with the bursar office for some reason. [The VRC] helped me resolve that.*

> *I registered for a summer semester, and I was planning on paying out-of-pocket for this one, instead of using my GI bill, and they actually called me, and was like, "Hey, we noticed that you registered for your summer semester, but you haven't applied for your GI bill this semester. Are you having problems?" I was like, "Oh that's actually pretty nice!" They reached out and made sure that I wasn't having problems on my end.*

Improving VRC Services to Student Veterans

The survey asked participants how their college's VRC could better serve them. Out of 348 responses, 145 (42%) opted to sing the praises of their college's VRC instead of giving a suggestion. Among those who did give suggestions, the top desires were support with pathway navigation (*n* = 17), more space and/or a more desirable physical location of the VRC on campus (*n* = 15), more/different hours (*n* = 11), better communication (*n* = 11), more events to connect with fellow veterans (*n* = 10), and increased proactive outreach (*n* = 10), with some respondents noting that veterans are conditioned not to ask for help, but will take it if proactively offered. Table D1 in Appendix D provides the most common responses and a representative quote or two for each response.

Focus groups conducted with student veterans additionally helped identify successful strategies, promising practices, and future considerations for enhancing the supports and services available through VRCs. The focus group discussion brought to light the need to promote greater awareness of the benefits currently available through VRCs and improve accessibility to these benefits. While many VRCs offer excellent services and supports, some student veterans may still be unaware of these valuable supports or may have difficulty accessing them. When student veterans were asked what their VRC could do to better support them, several focus group participants expressed surprise when they learned about the comprehensive suite of services that already exists at their college. One focus group participant shared:

> *I had to go hunt for [the VRC] on the college's website. But they don't predominantly advertise themselves or their services. I've been attending since the spring semester of 2019 and I have never talked to the office that handles a lot of that from my college because I don't know where they are, I don't know what they do…it was literally 14 different clicks to get to [the VRC] webpage on the campus' website. They don't exist. So, for me, they need to be more out there. They need to be more of a presence.*

One way student veterans identified for VRCs to expand their presence on campus and connect to more student veterans is to restructure their hours of operation. Like most college services, VRCs are typically open Monday through Friday during normal business hours. While this schedule works well for full-time students who attend classes during the day, it is less conducive to student veterans who attend classes in the evenings or online. One focus group participant shared their experience accessing services through the VRC:

> *That was actually a really big problem for me because, since I work 8:30-5:00, and the Veteran Center closes at 5:00, I pretty much couldn't [go] at all.*

Alternatively, student veterans indicated that VRCs should leverage virtual support options. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, student veterans primarily accessed VRC services in-person; however, many colleges began offering virtual supports following the transition to remote instruction due to campus shutdowns. During the focus groups, student veterans explained how they were able to stay connected to their college during the pandemic by making

appointments with counselors and staff through their VRC website. Two focus group participants described:

> *I actually just had a Zoom call with my counselor to get me started for my summer courses, so when you're not going to campus, you can tap into your counselor and also make an appointment on Zoom.*
>
> *So, with COVID going on and everything, I have actually never been in person to the Veteran Resource Center. I've only been emailing them back and forth, but they've been really good about getting back to me. I haven't had a problem where I waited more than like a day or two for them to respond to me. I know with the [campus] opening up back now, I can probably go in. But for me, my online interactions with the VRC have been pretty timely.*

These virtual options helped expand access to many student veterans and made it easier to connect with certain services that were historically only available on campus. Based on the focus group discussion, student veterans would like VRCs to continue offering virtual support services beyond the pandemic.

Improving College Support to Student Veterans

The survey also asked how the *college* could better serve active military and student veterans, and out of 403 responses, 111 (28%) opted to sing the praises of their college's supports instead of giving a suggestion. Among those who did give suggestions, the top desires were more proactive outreach by the college (*n* = 25), support navigating and accessing benefits (*n* = 22), more events for veterans (*n* = 16), better visibility of services offered (*n* = 11), and increased counseling services (*n* = 11). Table D2 in Appendix D provides the most common responses and a representative quote or two for each response.

Focus group findings indicate that a peer mentoring program may offer a potential approach to addressing many suggestions for improving college support to student veterans raised by survey respondents. Students often learn about the services and resources available at their college by speaking with other students. Word-of-mouth can have a powerful impact on how students perceive the legitimacy or value of a service or support. Information that is conveyed by a fellow student may resonate more authentically as a trusted and reliable source.

We asked focus group participants to share their experiences working with peer mentors. While none of the student veterans in the focus groups had ever participated in such a program, the majority said they could benefit from having a peer mentor designated specifically for service members. They discussed the value of connecting with a fellow student who also comes from a military background, especially for students who are new to the college environment and may need assistance navigating their first year. One focus group participant described how a peer mentor program could help student veterans:

> *[A] mentor program would be super awesome because the first year and a half I had no idea that there were veteran scholarships, and I had no idea how to use the GI bill or*

pretty much any of that. It's a very specific process that unless you know someone that knows, you don't even know it's a thing.

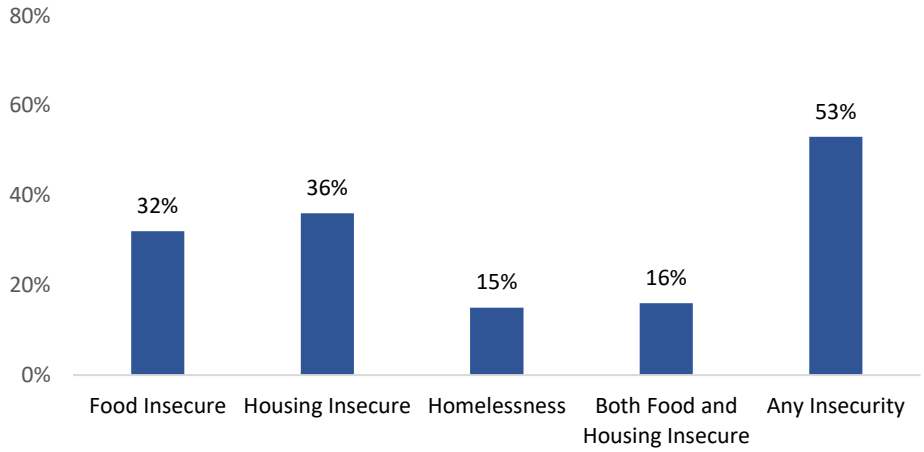
College administrative processes can be daunting to any student, but veterans have the unique challenge of also having to coordinate with the Veterans Administration to initiate and maintain their benefits. This added complexity can make enrolling in college an arduous endeavor. Most students attending college are not service members and most college personnel have limited experience supporting student veterans; as a result, student veterans may not know who can answer their specific questions. Providing a supportive environment for incoming student veterans can ease their transition from military to civilian life. Working with a designated peer mentor who has gone through the same process can be a tremendous help to student veterans. Peer mentors can share their insights and the lessons they learned from their own personal experience, including how to navigate common roadblocks. Such a program would help student veterans complete the enrollment process more efficiently and set them up for success for the remainder of their college career.

Basic Needs and the Impact of the Pandemic

It is well known that community college students face numerous challenges that threaten their ability to give school the attention needed to be successful. Basic needs insecurities, notably food and housing insecurities, are all too prevalent in this population. Surveys questions related to such insecurities revealed that 53% of student veterans are experiencing some form of basic needs insecurity. More specifically, as seen in Figure 11:

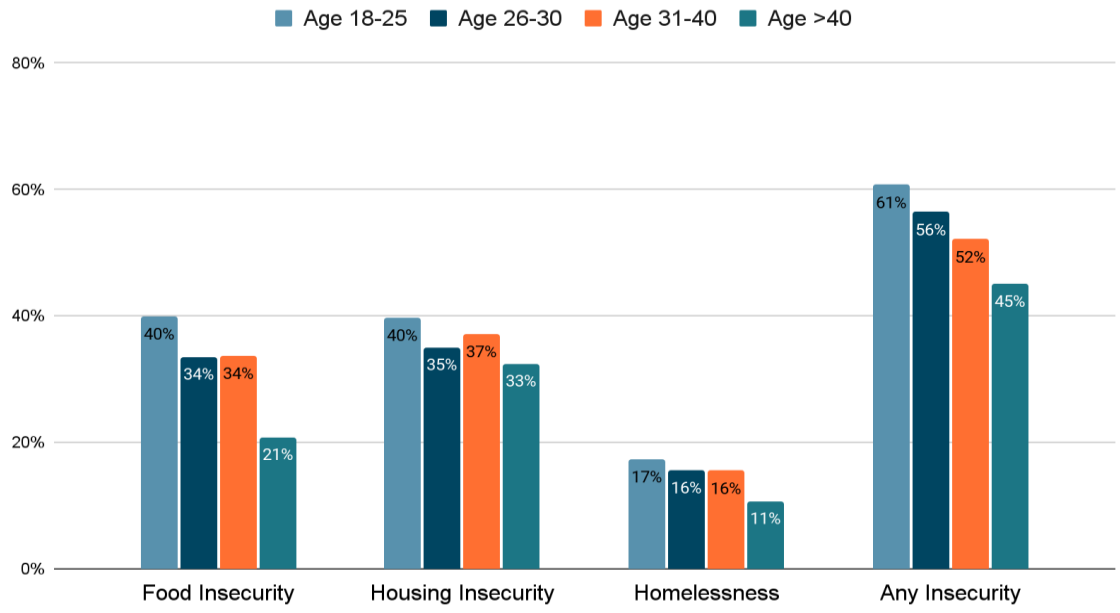
- 32% of student veterans are experiencing food insecurity
- 36% of student veterans are experiencing housing insecurity
- 15% of student veterans are experiencing homelessness
- 16% of student veterans are experiencing both food and housing insecurity

Figure 11. Basic Needs Insecurities among Student Veterans



Further examination of these data, as seen in Figure 12, found that food and housing insecurities are highest among younger student veterans, with 61% of student veterans between ages 18-25 experiencing at least one basic needs insecurity compared to 45% of those over age 40.

Figure 12. Basic Needs Insecurities among Student Veterans, by Age



Additional survey questions on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic highlight how student veterans struggled to access a variety of services in the past year, with two in five student veterans unable to access medical appointments, and over one-quarter of student veterans unable to access mental health and/or counseling services (See Table 13).

Table 13. Impacts of Pandemic on Student Veterans' Access to Services

	Yes %	Yes *n*
Has the COVID-19 pandemic prevented you from accessing any of the following in a timely manner?		
Medical appointments	39.8%	299
Mental health/counseling services	27.7%	208
Financial aid services	17.2%	129
Transfer services	8.8%	66
In-person classes	51.5%	387
Other	4.3%	32

A 2020 study by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research revealed the importance of comradery and strong social networks in supporting student veterans as they transition from the military to a university setting. With VRCs having to shut down on-campus operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, student veterans no longer had a designated space to meet with fellow service members. Remote instruction made it difficult for student veterans to establish and maintain the same level of comradery they had experienced while on campus. According to focus group participants, dealing with campus closures and communities going into complete lockdown created a sense of isolation that made it difficult to learn and connect with other students. Focus group participants explained the challenges with online learning, as reflected in the following comment:

> *I definitely struggled in the beginning, switching to online completely. Being in-person helps my learning process, so yeah, online just wasn't that great. It took a minute to get used to it and work through it, so yeah, COVID kind of threw me for a loop for a bit.*

While many student veterans felt their military service prepared them for the discipline and time management needed to be successful in online courses, some still preferred in-person learning environment. These focus group participants expressed how they missed the classroom experience and the ability to interact face-to-face with instructors and students. In the words of two focus group participants:

> *It's getting to the point where everything is opening back up, and I enjoy that because I enjoy meeting my professors and going to the campus, the class, and seeing who I'm in class with, who's teaching me, who I'm learning with. I'm also a visual learner, so I like class instruction that way.*

> *I feel like I'd still do better in an in-person environment, I just prefer that over online, but I do like the fact that for online I'm basically pacing myself, and with the military helping to reinforce the discipline of getting your work done, I find myself having an easier time doing that, compared to my non-veteran peers.*

Other focus group participants felt there were benefits to both learning modalities. Student veterans discussed how in-person engagement can make it easier to maintain focus because there are fewer distractions. On the other hand, taking online courses is a great way to develop and improve computer skills. Some student veterans had never taken an online course prior to the pandemic. Using learning management systems like Canvas and video conferencing platforms like Zoom was an entirely new experience and forced many student veterans to expand their technological skills and knowledge.

Student veterans, who are generally older than traditional college students and often balance work and family obligations while attending college, can find it challenging to fit in-person courses into their schedule. Furthermore, student veterans took on new responsibilities during the pandemic that may have influenced their ability to resume in-person courses. For these students, instructional modality is not a matter of preference but of necessity due to scheduling constraints.

One focus group participant explained how their availability changed during COVID-19 after starting a new job:

> *Prior to COVID, I didn't really have a full-time job, but now, I have a job that's strictly full time. I don't have the option to do many in-person classes because most of them are during the day. Fortunately, I'm an Information Systems major, so a lot of the classes are at night. But it's very, very limited in the amount of classes I can do that are in person at night. Now that things are online, if they're asynchronous [classes], I can pretty much do them while I'm working and watch the Zoom videos of the class session later on.*

Focus group participants remarked on the added flexibility that came from having their courses online during the pandemic. As colleges transition back to campus, it will be important to carry over some of the flexible course options students appreciated during the pandemic. As two focus group participants summarized:

> *[I like] the asynchronous aspect of it, where I do it on my [own] time. There's not a set schedule of the day, so I can juggle things around better and get my workload done.*

> *I was reluctant to start doing online courses. I thought it was gonna be more of a hassle than just going to the location during the class. But as it went on, I started liking [online courses] more. I ended up taking more courses because there were more available online, and I didn't have to travel to the college.*

In addition to the added flexibility from taking courses entirely online, remote instruction also improved accessibility to courses that had previously only been available in person prior to COVID-19. Two focus group participants shared their experiences:

> *[The pandemic] made it a lot more convenient being in the Reserves and going to college at the same time. Previously, there [were] only in-person classes. Summer semester, since I'm also working, I just couldn't take it. Some classes are only offered once a semester, so [I'm] kind of screwed if I miss [them]. But now that a lot of classes are online, I can pretty much [get the classes I need].*

> *I took a lot of asynchronous classes [during the pandemic] just because I could do [them] on my own time and knock [them] out, and then I saved all the in-person classes that I want to take or need to take for after.*

VRCs helped student veterans stay connected and informed about next steps and college operations during the pandemic. According to focus group participants, student veterans received information from their VRC in a variety of ways including virtual meetings, emails, text messages, and veteran-specific newsletters. In the words of one focus group participant:

> *I thought [the VRC] was fairly accessible. I had contact with them – email, text message – and I went in a couple of times, but COVID definitely played a role in kind of hindering all that.*

VRC Staff Interview Results

To complement the input and perspectives gathered through the student survey and focus groups and add additional context regarding how to strengthen support for student veterans, The RP Group interviewed a group of VRC staff from a subset of colleges identified as being particularly successful in serving student veterans based on student satisfaction ratings and an analysis of academic outcomes. These conversations centered around VRC attributes and practices believed to have a positive impact on student veteran success.

The RP Group synthesized the information gathered during these interviews to identify successful strategies, promising practices, and future considerations that could be shared with other VRCs to help improve outcomes for student veterans. When asked to share what factors had the greatest impact on student satisfaction and the staff's ability to successfully support veterans at their college, the following five themes emerged:

- Creating a one-stop-shop to streamline services,
- Fostering a welcoming environment,
- Establishing a presence on campus through student engagement and outreach activities, developing strong working relationships, and
- Receiving support from college leadership.

One-Stop-Shop

VRC staff from all of the colleges interviewed explained how they have worked to integrate traditional enrollment services with a wide variety of student supports, outreach events, and recreational activities. By collaborating with campus and community partners, this one-stop-shop model creates an environment in which student veterans can learn about and connect to a multitude of valuable supports and resources all in one spot. VRC staff from all of the colleges described how their center provides assistance completing steps in the college onboarding and enrollment process, including how to establish priority registration and access military benefits such as their GI Bill. Additionally, student veterans have the opportunity to engage in academic and peer advising, connect to disability specialists, and learn about organizations in the community that are dedicated to veterans. Student veterans appreciate the convenience of having a centralized location where they can take care of a wide variety of college and military-related requirements, that doubles as a place for them to study, relax, or meet other service-connected people. Packaging everything under one roof enabled these VRCs to serve as the primary access point for any academic, personal, or professional need their student veterans may have.

Welcoming Environment

During the interviews, VRC staff emphasized the value and importance of establishing a friendly and inclusive space in which student veterans feel comfortable to gather and spend time between classes. For example, VRC staff from two colleges described how they offer free

snacks, television, movies, and games at their center for student veterans to enjoy while on-campus. A VRC staff member from one college explained how student veterans are encouraged to take ownership in the space and incorporate special touches to make the VRC their own. All almost VRC staff interviewed emphasized how they strive to go above-and-beyond to support student veterans by providing one-on-one assistance, facilitating connections with other departments or services through warm hand-offs, and ensuring adequate follow-up communication takes place, to ensure student veterans receive the support they need.

Veteran Outreach and Campus Engagement

Interviews additionally revealed that VRCs host a variety of events and activities to promote awareness of their location on campus and increase student engagement. These outreach efforts also help student veterans connect with other service members at the college and bring attention to an assortment of community-based organizations and programs. For example, two VRCs offer goodie bags to student veterans who drop by the center or attend an event. According to VRC staff at these colleges, providing free school supplies and campus gear helps encourage frequent contact with the VRC and boosts student participation in veteran-sponsored activities. All VRCs interviewed shared how they regularly partner with non-profit organizations and regional programs to create opportunities for student veterans to learn about resources in the community while increasing their civic engagement.

Collegiality and Strong Working Relationships

VRC personnel interviewed emphasized the importance of having strong working relationships with fellow staff, faculty, and administrators at their colleges, noting a variety of positive impacts that have resulted from the connections they have made with their colleagues. VRC staff interviewed described engaging in interdisciplinary teamwork to strengthen comradery and establish a sense of community. They explained the different ways they share information across departments and divisions to improve the coordination and delivery of services to student veterans. Interviews also surfaced the ways VRC staff embody a service-minded attitude to help foster a supportive and caring culture that facilitates collaboration across the college.

Support from College Leadership

VRC staff interviews also emphasized the importance of support from college leadership to the success of the VRC and ultimately student veterans themselves. Several VRC staff shared ways they receive the necessary support from senior leadership to optimize their operations and effectively serve the unique needs of student veterans. VRC staff interviewed described how administrators are open to new ideas and work toward improving collaboration across departments and divisions, and how they amplify the unique challenges and needs of student veterans to ensure they are served equitably. VRC staff from two colleges described how their senior leadership is open to new ideas on how to enhance VRC services and embraces a cooperative spirit based on shared values. Advocacy for student veterans ensures adequate funding goes toward sustaining robust wraparound services for this population.

Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

In many ways, findings from the current research study parallel those observed in the previous study conducted in 2018 on student veterans in the CCC. Overall, student veterans from both studies shared similar demographic characteristics, military backgrounds, and experiences accessing and utilizing services through the VRC and at the college. One notable difference in terms of student demographics was the larger proportion of female respondents in 2022 (28%) compared to 2018 (19%), which provided a better understanding of the challenges faced by women veterans and how colleges can support them.

Questions added to the 2022 survey helped gauge the current state of VRCs and the student veteran experience in the CCC system by examining student veterans' mental health, food and housing insecurity, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their well-being and college success. The results from this study demonstrate colleges responded swiftly to the unexpected challenges brought on by the pandemic; however, student veterans continue to face unique obstacles that can impede their academic progress, many of which were exacerbated by the global health crisis and abrupt transition to remote instruction.

By addressing some of the unmet needs identified throughout this report, colleges can have a powerful impact on the lives of student veterans. The interviews conducted with VRC staff focused on high-impact practices and strategies that colleges have implemented to improve the experience of student veterans in the CCC. VRC staff shared what changes or innovations they believe have had the most significant influence on their ability to effectively serve this population. Throughout these rich conversations, the importance of relationship-building and fostering a student-centered campus environment was emphasized.

The following key findings reflect some of the current challenges student veterans in the CCC system experience based on the results of this study. Recommendations drawing on both student veterans' input and VRC staff interviews are offered to assist colleges in identifying ways they can respond to these critical issues to help strengthen outcomes for all student veterans.

1. The rates of illness, injury, and disability are very high among student veterans, even slightly higher than what was found in the 2018 study.

Student veterans have unmet needs related to their mental and physical health that can threaten their college success. While health services may be available on campus or in the local community, student veterans may be unaware of their options or unsure how to access care. VRCs are well-positioned to help connect student veterans to the services and resources they need to address these concerns. As rates of health needs were higher in the current study than 2018, it will be important to track rates in the coming years to determine the degree to which the increase was related to the pandemic and whether rates decrease (or potentially increase) in the pandemic's aftermath.

Recommendation 1.1

VRCs should leverage multiple and varied online platforms, communication devices, and outreach activities (e.g., veteran resource webpage, newsletter, campus health fair) to promote existing services by providing student veterans with information on how to access care and who to contact to learn more. Such services on campus include use of College Health Centers and food centers, outside services include connecting with VA CBOCS to bring medical vans to campus and provide on-site medical and mental health services and enrollment into VA healthcare on site. VRCs should consider including phone numbers, website links, responses to frequently asked questions, and information on costs, if available, to further facilitate access to these services.

Recommendation 1.2

VRCs can help student veterans eliminate some of the guesswork in accessing health services available through their military benefits by offering greater hands-on assistance enrolling in Veterans' Administration (VA) Healthcare. Helping student veterans get connected to services could be achieved via one on-one appointments or in small-group workshops held in a VRC computer lab. Alternatively, VRC staff may consider creating a how-to video tutorial that walks student veterans through the steps needed to enroll in VA Healthcare and answers to common questions about forms, documentation, and information they will need to provide to confirm their eligibility. Also considering providing VA healthcare information in your VRC–VA Medical enrollment forms, training your VA Work-study to assist with the application and providing flyers/hand-outs with VA medical/mental health direct phone numbers for access to services. Train VA Work-study and VRC staff how to make appointments for veterans and provide case-management to assure calls are made and appointments are accessed.

2. Student veterans struggle to maintain an appropriate school-life balance.

Nearly two-thirds of student veterans indicated difficulty maintaining a balance between schoolwork and personal demands and half have difficulty dealing with stress due to class demands. Student veterans must juggle numerous responsibilities outside of school–working, parenting, managing a household–that can present scheduling challenges and may impact the amount of time they have available to devote to their studies.

Recommendation 2.1

***Colleges* should consider offering courses in multiple modalities (e.g., in-person, online, and hybrid) beyond the pandemic to mitigate scheduling issues and help student veterans maintain a better school-life balance.** The added flexibility that online courses afforded student veterans during the pandemic freed up time that would normally be spent commuting to and from campus and provided more control over how and when they could engage in coursework.

Recommendation 2.2

VRCs should continue offering and expanding upon web-based wraparound services available to student veterans via virtual meetings, live chat, help desks, webinars, online appointment scheduling, document uploading, and electronic signatures. Many colleges began offering virtual supports following the transition to remote instruction due to campus shutdowns. These virtual options made it easier for student veterans to connect with certain services (e.g., counseling, tutoring, career and transfer services, financial aid assistance) through video conferencing applications and collaboration platforms such as Cranium Café which is designed specifically for student support.

Recommendation 2.3

VRCs should leverage all available college funds to assist in meeting student veterans' basic needs. For example, funds could be used to develop childcare funding, or free childcare on campus (or vouchers), support with tutoring on-line and in person in your VRC, time-management classes, provide financial assistance for veterans, promote applying for financial aid each semester and foundation grants, provide gas cards, food cards, emergency funds and address other needs throughout the year with donated funds for veterans.

3. While many Veteran Resource Centers offer comprehensive services to help students, students' awareness of and access to these valuable supports were impacted by the pandemic.

Colleges need to promote greater awareness of the benefits currently available through VRCs and improve accessibility to these benefits. Student veterans who entered college for the first time during the pandemic as well as those who primarily attend classes in the evening or online may not have knowledge of or access to all the services and supports available.

Recommendation 3.1

VRCs need to ensure the college website reflects the full scope of benefits and resources available to student veterans on-campus and through community partnerships with local veterans' organizations to help streamline the flow of information. In the wake of the pandemic, students are turning evermore to online source of information. VRCs should prioritize ensuring their website is easy to navigate and serves as a comprehensive source of information for student veterans.

Recommendation 3.2

As colleges transition back to on-campus programming, VRCs should consider hosting welcome back events and other outreach activities such as new student veteran orientation, transition support seminars, social hours, meet-and-greets, and barbeques and pancake breakfasts to help connect with student veterans. These social events to meet fellow veterans are especially important for those who entered college for the first time during the pandemic and may be unfamiliar with the services available. Posting information about upcoming events on the college's veteran resource website as well as social media platforms can help get the word out and boost student engagement.

Recommendation 3.3

VRCs should restructure their service availability to extend the hours of operation to include evening and weekend hours each month, and make available an online contact form in which student veterans can request assistance virtually. Expanding hours will help accommodate students who are not able to come to campus during regular working hours and will hopefully increase the overall uptake of support services as a result.

Recommendation 3.4

Consider the unique needs of female veterans and offer tailored supports. Implement female veterans specific services, financial aid for housing, stress relief programs, provide group (lunch) meetings, clothing giveaways, use funds to support female veteran specific events i.e. lunches, holiday events and promote mental health (offer mental health female providers on campus) and support at each event using outside collaborating partners for funding and support.

4. Student veterans have the unique challenge of navigating college administrative processes while coordinating with the Veterans Administration to initiate and maintain their benefits.

The complexity inherent in navigating Veterans' Administration can make enrolling in college an arduous endeavor. Since the majority of students attending college are not service members, most college personnel have limited experience supporting student veterans; as a result, student veterans may not know who to turn for answers to their specific questions. Providing a supportive environment for incoming student veterans can ease their transition from military to civilian life.

Recommendation 4.1

VRCs should facilitate involvement by leveraging work-study programs and matching seasoned student veterans with incoming student veterans who could benefit from guidance/mentorship. Student veterans can benefit from participating in a peer mentor program designed specifically for service members. Having a fellow student that comes from a military background and is well versed in the VA system could be beneficial to student veterans who are new to college and need assistance navigating in the first year. Trainings should be provided to the Peer Mentors prior to the start of each semester and provided binders with answers to questions so they may accurately assist incoming veteran students.

Recommendation 4.2

Provide a robust orientation with sustained follow-up to ensure student veterans get and stay on track with respect to leveraging their benefits. Each term, provide an intense orientation including all Student Service representatives explaining what and how to access each service. Host social events over the course of each term right from the start (e.g., weekly lunches, meet and greets) that include individuals who are ready and willing to answer any questions veterans may have.

5. Student veterans are experiencing difficulties accessing in-person classes due to the pandemic.

The pandemic had a profound impact on college operations. While in-person courses are becoming more available, the transition back to on-campus programming has been a slow and unpredictable process for many colleges. The lack of face-to-face instruction is particularly problematic for student veterans who must meet certain stipulations in the GI Bill that require them to enroll in at least one in-person course each term.

Recommendation 5.1

VRC personnel should connect with campus administrators to design a plan for ensuring that faculty and administrators are aware of the special circumstances affecting student veterans' financial support. so college leadership. Leadership's prioritization of veteran supports and amplification of student veterans' needs among all campus constituents is necessary in the identification of solutions to ensure this population is served equitably and not penalized for factors beyond their control.

Recommendation 5.2

Develop a system of constant communication with student veterans and continuously assess their ever-changing and evolving needs. Access enrolled veterans via email, text and phone calls using work-study to complete short surveys monthly to assess well-being, class issues or faculty issues. Set in place a process of issues that may arise and who the issues will then go to for assistance. This could be the Department Chair, Dean of the Department, or Vice President.

Concluding Remarks

The RP Group's research continues to strongly suggest that student veterans face a unique set of challenges as they navigate out of the role of servicemember and into the role of college student. The results of this study provide strong evidence that student veterans face significant hurdles with respect to their physical and mental health that can impede their ability to have maximal success in the classroom. Colleges should keep the unique needs of student veterans top of mind when enrolling and serving students, ensuring student veterans have access to supports for both diagnosis and treatment. Further, while the CCC have made significant progress with respect to the supports offered through Veterans Resource Centers, there is still room for improvement, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. These supports were designed to be in person and would benefit from consideration of ways to offer a hybrid model of support.

The interviews conducted with VRC staff helped identify promising practices that could be shared with colleges across the state to improve the experiences of all student veterans. Many of the strategies found to be most important to student veteran success parallel those from The RP Group's research under Student Support (Re)defined, which demonstrated students are

more likely to succeed when they are directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued. These six success factors have a profound impact on students' ability to reach their educational goals and should be kept foremost in mind when serving student veterans.

Regardless of the mode of delivery, colleges should work to ensure student veterans have a clear understanding of the wide array of military and non-military benefits available to them and are afforded the same flexibility in course-taking as their civilian peers. As colleges around the state emerge from the pandemic and settle into a "new normal," that includes a mix of both in-person and hybrid services and instruction, it is all the more important to ensure student veterans are kept in mind such that they can still receive the supports necessary to be successful students.

One final, positive, note to remember, all VRCs should be aware of how to access and support our veterans and that there is an abundance of funding to support our veterans in mental health needs, sustainable positions in the VRCs and access to assistance with academic tutoring along with health care on campus. Each college must initiate an algorithm of how to access these services and how to address the needs and build supports for our veterans who may need more assistance once enrolled in our college system.

Appendix A: List of Participating Colleges and Number of Survey Respondents

College	#	College	#	College	#
ALLAN HANCOCK	14	DEANZA	21	NAPA VALLEY	6
AMERICAN RIVER	25	DIABLO VALLEY	1	OHLONE	9
ANTELOPE VALLEY	5	EAST LOS ANGELES	11	ORANGE COAST	4
BAKERSFIELD	16	EVERGREEN VALLEY	11	OXNARD	5
BARSTOW	7	FOLSOM LAKE	1	PALOMAR	10
BUTTE	23	FRESNO CITY	33	PASADENA CITY	58
CABRILLO	30	FULLERTON	6	PORTERVILLE	14
CALBRIGHT	1	GLENDALE COMMUNITY	25	REEDLEY	18
CAÑADA	2	GOLDEN WEST	7	SACRAMENTO CITY	1
CERRITOS	10	GROSSMONT	6	SADDLEBACK	3
CHABOT	3	HARTNELL	8	SAN BERNARDINO VALLEY	21
CHAFFEY	9	IMPERIAL VALLEY	20	SAN DIEGO MIRAMAR	24
CITRUS	13	IRVINE VALLEY	52	SAN JOAQUIN DELTA	19
CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO	55	LAS POSITAS	45	SAN JOSE CITY	14
CLOVIS	12	LASSEN	1	SANTA ANA	15
COASTLINE	9	LONG BEACH CITY COLLEGE	3	SANTA BARBARA CITY	4
COLLEGE OF ALAMEDA	7	LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE	7	SANTA MONICA	19
COLLEGE OF MARIN	1	LOS ANGELES MISSION	2	SANTA ROSA	28
COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO	6	LOS ANGELES PIERCE	15	SANTIAGO CANYON	6
COLLEGE OF THE DESERT	12	LOS ANGELES TRADE-TECH	18	SHASTA	13
COLLEGE OF THE REDWOODS	1	LOS ANGELES VALLEY	25	SIERRA	11
COLLEGE OF THE SEQUOIAS	29	MADERA	3	SKYLINE	1
COMPTON	3	MERCED	21	SOUTHWESTERN	20
COSUMNES RIVER	2	MODESTO	14	VENTURA	24
CRAFTON HILLS	3	MOORPARK	4	VICTOR VALLEY	31
CUYAMACA	12	MT SAN ANTONIO	89	WEST HILLS LEMOORE	8
CYPRESS	2	MT SAN JACINTO	22	WEST VALLEY	1

Appendix B: 2021-2022 Student Veteran Survey Sample Demographics

Table B1. Student Veterans' Gender, Age, Race/Ethnicity, and First-Generation Status

Demographic	%	#
Gender		
Male	71.3%	833
Female	28.0%	327
Other	0.7%	8
Age		
18-20	2.4%	27
21-25	21.6%	247
26-30	23.5%	269
31-35	16.8%	192
36-40	13.1%	150
41-45	6.1%	70
46-50	4.1%	47
51-55	3.5%	40
56-60	3.9%	45
>60	5.1%	58
Race/Ethnicity*		
African American/Black	10.1%	118
Native American/Alaska Native	4.1%	48
Asian (South)	2.6%	31
Asian (Southeast)	7.4%	86
Asian (East)	7.0%	82
Hispanic or Latina/o/x	41.5%	485
Middle Eastern/North African	0.9%	11
Native Hawaiian/Other PI	3.1%	36
White	41.9%	490
Other	6.1%	71
First Generation		
Yes	35.4%	413
No	62.1%	724
I don't know	2.5%	29

*Respondents could check all that apply.

Table B2. Student Veterans' Military Branch and Length of Service

Demographic	%	#
Military Branch Served In*		
Army	38.5%	451
Marine Corps	25.1%	294
Navy	22.9%	268
Air Force	11.4%	133
Coast Guard	1.9%	22
National Guard	5.5%	64
Activated Reservist	3.7%	43
Length of Service in Military		
1-4 Years	44.8%	515
5-8 Years	32.2%	370
9-12 Years	8.4%	97
13-16 Years	3.7%	43
17-20 Years	4.9%	56
21+ Years	6.0%	69

*Respondents could check all that apply.

Appendix C: Additional Table Details

Appendix C provides data in table format that are presented in figure format in the main body of the report.

Table C1. Services Utilized in the Past Year

	Yes	No	I don't know/Not Applicable
Academic counseling services	69.3%	25.1%	5.7%
Career and job placement services	12.8%	78.5%	8.7%
Disabled student students	18.9%	73.4%	7.7%
Financial aid services	63.9%	31.6%	4.5%
Food insecurity resources (e.g., food pantry)	20.9%	72.9%	6.2%
Health and wellness services	15.2%	77.8%	6.9%
Mental health services	8.2%	84.5%	7.2%
Tutoring services	34.2%	60.9%	4.9%
Transfer services	26.1%	67.4%	6.5%

Table C2. Physical and Mental Health Concerns

	Yes	No, but I believe I may have this condition	No, and I don't believe I have this condition
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	8.4%	17.8%	73.9%
Substance use disorder (e.g., alcohol or drug abuse)	10.5%	11.6%	77.9%
Depression	42.8%	20.0%	37.2%
Anxiety (e.g., generalized anxiety disorder, phobias)	44.9%	23.4%	31.7%
Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	31.5%	19.3%	49.1%
Any other mental health disorders (e.g., bipolar, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorder)	10.5%	17.2%	72.4%
Neurodevelopmental disorder or intellectual disability (e.g., attention deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorder)	8.8%	18.4%	72.8%
A physical disability	39.9%	11.3%	48.8%
Chronic pain	41.1%	20.4%	38.4%
Hearing loss	31.2%	28.4%	40.4%
N	100%		

Table C3. College Support and Assistance

	Yes	No	I don't know
I feel that my college embraces veterans	78.5%	7.4%	14.1%
I feel that my college supports veterans	84.0%	6.3%	9.7%
I have talked about my military experiences in my classes when appropriate to the lesson	53.8%	40.4%	5.8%
I feel comfortable being on this campus	79.6%	7.5%	12.9%
I have sought tutoring for some of my classes	43.0%	52.3%	4.7%
I have sought academic advising/academic counseling	76.9%	20.5%	2.5%
I have sought assistance from the Career and Job Placement Center for planning my employment after graduation	17.7%	77.9%	4.4%

Table C4. School Life Balance

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I have difficulty maintaining a balance between school, work, and personal demands	19.6%	42.2%	18.7%	15.1%	4.4%
I have difficulty dealing with stress due to class demands	14.4%	34.9%	26.0%	20.4%	4.3%
I have thought about dropping out of school	15.2%	21.9%	15.1%	44.2%	3.5%

Table C5. Veterans Resource Centers

	Yes	No	I don't know/Not Applicable
Does your college have a Veterans Resource Center	90.2%	1.3%	8.5%
The VRC provided timely academic counseling to help me in selecting my courses	87.2%	6.3%	6.4%
The VRC advised me of all documents required for certification for VA benefits	88.4%	5.2%	6.4%
The VRC website is a good resource	78.6%	6.2%	15.2%
The VRC website is easy to navigate	74.9%	8.2%	16.9%
The VRC makes referrals to appropriate departments/agencies when needed	75.9%	5.2%	18.8%
I am confident that my discussions with the VRC are kept confidential	84.1%	4.1%	11.8%
If I have physical or mental health concerns, I know I can go to the VRC for assistance or referrals	73.1%	7.3%	19.6%
The wait time for an appointment with the VRC counselor is reasonable	84.4%	6.2%	9.5%
The VRC staff has been helpful with my transition from the military service to college	79.0%	5.6%	15.4%
The VRC has helped me remain in college	78.6%	6.0%	15.4%

Table C6. Housing Insecurity

	%	N
Current Living Situation		
Live alone in my own home (house, apartment, condo, etc.) that I rent or own	17.8%	169
Live in my own home (house, apartment, condo, etc.) with a partner and/or children that I rent or own	45.8%	435
Live with my parents	19.7%	187
Live with my roommates	10.0%	95
Temporarily staying with a relative or friend	5.4%	51
Temporarily staying in a shelter or homeless	1.3%	12
In the past 30 days, have you slept in any of the following places?*		
Temporarily stayed with a relative, friend, or couch surfing until I find other housing	8.8%	85
Temporarily at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to (not on vacation or business travel)	2.6%	25
In transitional housing or independent living program	1.6%	15
At a group home such as a halfway house or residential program for mental health or substance abuse	0.6%	6
At a treatment center (such as detox, hospital, etc.)	0.5%	5
In a camper or RV	3.1%	30
Outdoor location such as street, sidewalk, or alley, bus or train stop, campground or woods, park, beach, or riverbed, under bridge or overpass	0.5%	5
In a close area/space with a roof not meant for human habitation such as abandoned building, car or truck, van, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement	2.2%	21

Table C7. Housing Insecurity (continued)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The place where I am living is only temporary, even if I wanted to stay	43.1%	18.6%	18.0%	12.2%	8.1%
I feel confident about my ability to pay for this play so I can stay here next month	8.0%	9.0%	16.9%	28.8%	37.3%
I am safe where I am living	4.7%	2.6%	8.7%	33.3%	50.7%
I can study and engage in classes where I am living	5.7%	5.4%	9.1%	36.6%	43.3%

Table C8. Food Insecurity

	Never True	Sometimes True	Often True
The food that I bought didn't last and I didn't have money to get more	67.3%	26.8%	5.9%
I couldn't afford to eat a balanced meal	68.3%	24.6%	7.1%

Appendix D: Representative Quotes

Table D1. Representative Quotes Regarding How Veterans Resource Centers Can Better Serve Student Veterans

Topic	*n*	Representative Quotes
Help navigating their academic pathway	17	*Appropriate check-ins with enrolled students after a few weeks to get an update on how students are handling the class. Also being provided all the information needed for the semester such as drop out dates or dates to enroll etc.* *It'd be great if I could have an assigned academic advisor that I could ask questions to throughout the semester. As of now, I think they just give me someone on a case-to-case basis, which makes it difficult since I always have to reestablish what my goals are and what I've been doing.*
Larger/difference space and/or location of VRC	15	*The VRC needs to be larger. There are too many Veterans trying to use that small office at the same time. The VRC should be more like a USO and act as a safe space to decompress and relax too. Not just a place to drop off and pick up stuff.*
Hours of VRC availability	11	*I know that it would be a strain on funding, but I wish there was one night a week where they were open for student services past 6 pm. I would make the extra trip to campus just to take advantage of it, as it is difficult to take time off the full-time job to go during the current hours even when services are virtual.* *The limited days and hours that the VRC had during COVID really affected me. It was my safe place to study, use the computer and have a snack. I don't like going to the library or other places to study. It was hard not feeling like I had that safe zone to hang out in because days and times were very limited and there were no more snacks too. I always looked forward to seeing other veterans and feeling the camaraderie.*
Better communication	11	*Maybe putting a message when they are out of the office for the semester and giving an alternative contact for someone who can help in the meantime.*

Topic	*n*	Representative Quotes
Increased outreach	10	*They could occasionally reach out to veterans for any needs. Due to their experience in the military, veterans historically do not ask for help. If the VRC reaches out, it would demonstrate a higher level of care.* *It would be helpful if they did check-ins with me. I'm not sure if that is something that is possible, but I tend to get stressed out with classes and can forget that I have resources available.*
More events for veterans to interact with one another	10	*They should have more veteran events where we can connect and meet with each other.*
Increased ease of appointments	9	*Sometimes I have simple questions, but I have to make appointments. Maybe a hotline for quick answers would be helpful. If the question cannot be answered on the hotline, then it can be referred to an appointment with a counselor.*
Better website	7	*College website does not have a direct link to the VRC. The link is difficult to find on the school website.*
Increased staffing	6	*Have a dedicated Certifying official. Right now, they are borrowing one and even after an appt with counselor & emails back and forth, the issue is still not fixed.*
Help with navigating Veterans Affairs and benefits	5	*It would be nice to have a permanent person aboard to help us the vets with documents to fill out. That understands all the ins and outs of military procedures from claim adjustments to medical treatments.*
Tutoring	4	*More math tutoring exclusive to veterans.*
Textbook loans	4	*More textbooks on file for loan to veterans. Textbooks can be very expensive.*
Snacks	4	*If there were surprise food days or snacks for the veterans.*
Academic support	4	*More academic counselors trained to help veterans with VA or other questions regarding benefits. One just is not enough.*
General positive comment	145	*They are the ones that keep me going with the civilian world. I would not have any changes with them. They are the best. I just wish I had that type of support in Afghanistan.*

Table D2. Representative Quotes Regarding How Colleges Can Better Support Student Veterans

Topic	*n*	Representative Quotes
More outreach	25	*The college needs to identify veterans from day one and help them understand what is available to them. I was only told by a fellow veteran - not from the school, though my application indicated I was prior military.* *I think that promoting a place where veterans can meet and just get together would create a great catalyst for them to find resources that they may need. It would be a great start for seeking assistance for more personal needs in helping them feel not as a veteran in need, but rather a student seeking advice. I know that sounds ambiguous, but Vets have been conditioned to be independent in problem resolution, OR they seek each other out to meet challenges. I am a long retired senior officer; it would not benefit me as much as it would benefit the younger troops. When I came off active duty the first time, I found it difficult to contact fellow vets.*
Assistance with benefits and supports	22	*Inform [students] more about what's available to us. I just got diagnosed with PTSD and panic attacks from the military. The military never told me the signs or symptoms when I was getting out of the military or that my concentration/ memory issues may stem from this disability. It would be nice to know what could be offered to me to assist with what I'm going through.* *The VA constantly changes the rules for the GI bill and my school only has one designated counselor for veterans. It's hard to find time to meet with that counselor because of all the other veteran students that need help too.*
More events for veterans to interact with one another	16	*When conditions permit, more get-togethers. Many veterans are a bit older than community college students and share different experiences. The VRC community better reflects our concerns and needs.*
Increased visibility of offerings	11	*Advertise the VA office more. I've seen several college websites where the VA links were all the way down on the web page or under many tabs. The more obvious the more Vet friendly the colleges come off.*

Topic	*n*	Representative Quotes
Counseling	11	*More or better veteran counselors with a better idea of programs that are available rather than sending a veteran off to a website on their own to fend for themselves.*
Larger/difference space and/or location of VRC	10	*Keep the VRC where it's at. The space is nice and welcoming. From what I've observed when I'm there using the computer workstations, veterans seem to feel at home. They seem to feel free to be themselves. Continue letting the VRC have its own space that's dedicated to the military and veteran community, and not have it share space with, say for example, another program.*
Financial Support	10	*Maybe give us a tuition waiver.*
Greater understanding of the unique needs and obligations of veterans	10	*Understand that they still have commitments to the army and not drop them for classes if they have duty to attend as long as they do the work.* *Have a program for us, run by us and to help us. Stop lumping us with 18-year-olds with no issues, no families, and no bills.*
Increased staffing to support veterans	9	*Increase the personnel to help and assist active duty and veterans. There's not enough staff.*
Priority registration	8	*I greatly appreciate the priority registration provided to military veterans. I hope that will be available in the future.*
Support transitioning out of the military and into the role of college student	7	*It would be great if there was literally a 'transition' class where veterans could meet regularly with other veterans. When I returned from the service it was extremely disorienting and designated time with other veterans would have helped me a lot. When you leave the military, there are transition services at one's final duty station but then you go home and you're the only one. It's especially isolating for women veterans.*
Faculty education as to the unique needs of veterans	7	*Recommend professors to be a bit more lenient towards attendance i.e. tardiness/absence due to VA medical appointments and some accommodations for those that have a difficult time walking.* *Better training for professors who see military service as a negative, or who do not take into account that student backgrounds may impact actual thoughts and how we see the world. I've had interactions with a number of professors who are ignorant of military service and have a negative view of service members.*

Topic	*n*	Representative Quotes
Credits for prior learning	6	*Better transparency of how military experience goes towards or not applicable to degree paths.* *I would like to have an advocate to help me apply my military school transcripts to civilian school credits.*
Better communication	6	*I think it should be a little easier to get in touch with an academic counselor, especially before the priority registration date because it has been difficult to get into the right classes when I'm told that my classes aren't certifiable, and I have to switch after everyone is registered.*
Increased accessibility of supports	6	*By making it easier to find things for us military students.*
Help navigating their academic pathway	5	*For vets whose academic goals go beyond the community college, the counselors need to be knowledgeable about offerings at the UCs and CSUs in the surrounding areas & possible elsewhere in CA. I was told I could transfer, but that was not the case because I already had a bachelor's degree & UC and CSU have very few programs for 2nd bachelor's. Thankfully, I started prerequisites for a Master's degree and was able to use those towards my application to a current program at CSULA.*
Recognition	4	*One of the things that I really appreciated about military bases is that every chain of command leader was expected to hang out with the service members at least once a year. Think about that for a moment--- the base commander is the equivalent of a mayor, and even they were expected to hang out with the citizens of their town from time to time. This campus has had similar events, to their credit, yet I know for a fact that other colleges have invited me for events specific for veterans (because, let's be honest, veterans are assured money since the government will never run out of money). It's sad that I have personally hung out over zoom with the presidents of other colleges, yet the president of my college probably doesn't even know we exist.*

Topic	*n*	Representative Quotes
Partnership with veterans organizations	3	*Maybe having a better and direct relationship with the Dept of Veterans Affairs counselors so paperwork would flow a lot smoother. Sometimes veterans do not know what needs to happen and timelines for certain paperwork, payments, etc... And it's left up to the veteran. Well, veterans are sometimes lost in this regard because it's not communicated to them, or they simply do not know what to do. If the college Veterans Resource Specialist/SCO have direct contact with the Dept of VA Counselor...in addition to the student, this will provide a better sense of direction and support for those that are lost in the sauce... (per se)*
Peer mentoring and/or counseling	3	*Have the students that have migrated from military life to civilian life advise new students.*
Funding for veterans support services	3	*It can be better supported by having more funding because then we can expand the VRC and have more local events for veterans to make them feel more at welcome.*
Inclusion	3	*Since veterans come from all races, genders, and social and economic classes more emphasis could be made on inclusion.*



As the representative organization for Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness (IRPE) professionals in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, the RP Group strengthens the ability of CCC to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

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