

Supporting Florida's Veterans

Background

Many Veterans face unique challenges while transitioning from military life back into civilian society. These challenges include re-establishing family roles, loss of identity as a service member, entering the civilian workforce, enrolling into college, returning to a job, and adjusting to their responsibilities as a civilian. Service-related health issues can further complicate the transition process. If left untreated, posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries can lead to substance abuse, behavioral health problems, and homelessness. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the economic and mental health concerns already existing within the Veteran population.

United Way's MISSION UNITED supports numerous efforts to assist the Sunshine State's 1.5 million Veterans. Mission United helps ease the transition to civilian life and address the unique needs of Veterans. By connecting them to a coordinated network of community partners, we empower Veterans and their families to lead productive lives in our community

Peer Support Network

Veterans throughout the U.S. face mental health and substance abuse issues. According to a 2008 study, between 5 and 15 percent of Veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan returned with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and an additional 2 to 14 percent returned with major depression. PTSD attributed to combat has affected between 2 and 17 percent of all U.S. military Veterans since the Vietnam War. By plugging into a centralized network in Florida that can respond and assist Veterans in all 67 counties, a lifeline to connect individuals to much needed behavioral health services and peers will be available.



Shared Best Practices

The 2020 Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs *Forward March* report identified gaps in services for Florida's Veterans – and at the same time upheld the services provided through MISSION UNITED as a best practice to mitigate these gaps. Some of the recommendations include: a statewide information system linking Veterans to resources and services in their communities; health and mental health treatment and therapy and support for suicide prevention efforts; funding for homelessness prevention initiatives and permanent housing solutions.

PROPOSED CHANGES

Florida's United Ways urge the 2021 Florida Legislature to:

- **SUPPORT** a MISSION UNITED initiative to enhance system navigation utilizing peer support to ensure every Veteran and their family that needs assistance has an in-person contact that they can utilize to access services beyond the referral process to align with the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **SUPPORT** recommendations of the 2019 Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs *Forward March* report to reinforce best practices, reduce redundancies and implement solutions to fill gaps.