

Executive Summary: External Data and Trends of Veterans in Colorado and Metro Denver

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Any opinions in this document are those of Nathalia Magri, and not of The Denver Foundation.

Executive Summary

External Data and Trends of Veterans in Colorado and Metro Denver

Introduction

Communities around the country are working to meet the needs of veterans across many generations and from wars around the globe. Thousands of veterans across the country are looking for ways to reintegrate back into their ‘civilian’ lives after serving the country. Although we know communities are committed to supporting returning veterans, their families, and families of the fallen, indicators show that additional services and supports are needed, and that many communities are still discovering those needs.

While supporting returning veterans and their families is not a new concept, the issues facing the current generation of returning veterans and their families present unique challenges that are different and more complex than those faced by our communities in the past. Since October 2000, approximately 2 million troops (approximately 1% of America’s population) have served in combat - the majority in Iraq and Afghanistan. The enduring wars in the Middle East and Southwest Asia have redefined what it means to serve in the military. The shortage of manpower and the complex counterinsurgency environment have led to thousands of troops serving multiple and extended tours, creating tremendous strain on the military, the soldiers, and their families. Many of the issues veterans are facing today are much deeper “Invisible Wounds.” Statistically, fewer casualties occur in combat now than any other time in history. Unfortunately, many soldiers face massive challenges stateside following combat tours, including: tremendous difficulties when trying to reintegrate into civilian life, psychological injuries - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), high rates of unemployment, and many times, homelessness, and drug and alcohol addiction.

According to members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, many local-level organizations across the nation are stepping up to ensure that combat veterans and their families have access to the services and support they need to succeed during transition and reintegration into civilian life. A recent publication from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Sea of Goodwill*, exemplifies how societal reintegration requires linked and integrated approaches to basic needs as well as education, meaningful employment, and access to health care. Our veterans do not live in silos; their challenges, success, and reintegration process deeply affect those around them and their community. Having the community’s support not only empowers veterans and their families to live a more productive life, but it gives them the means to continue serving in a meaningful way, and allows for an easier reintegration into the life they left behind to serve the country.¹ Absence of this support exacerbates the problem and diminishes the potential of veterans.

It is The Denver Foundation’s hope that with access to relevant data specific to military veterans, the Metro Denver community can collaborate to continue and build upon the efforts already in place to support veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen.

¹ Major John W. Copeland, and Colonel David Sutherland, *Sea of Goodwill*, white paper. www.fifnc.org/Sea_of_Goodwill.pdf

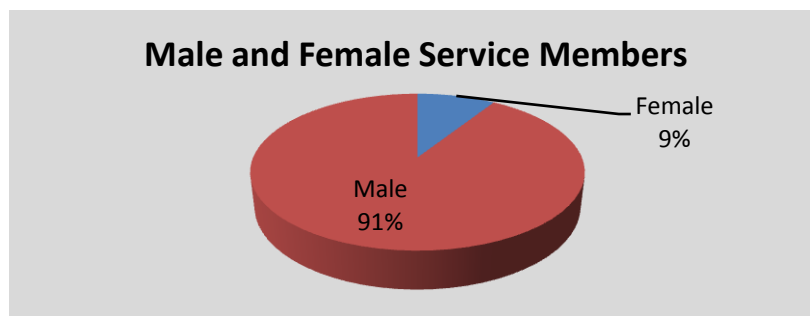
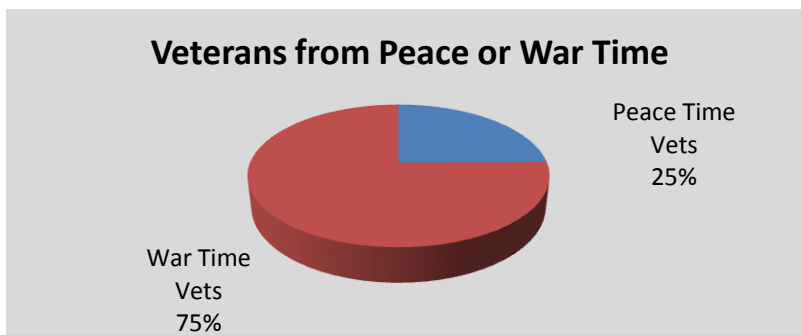
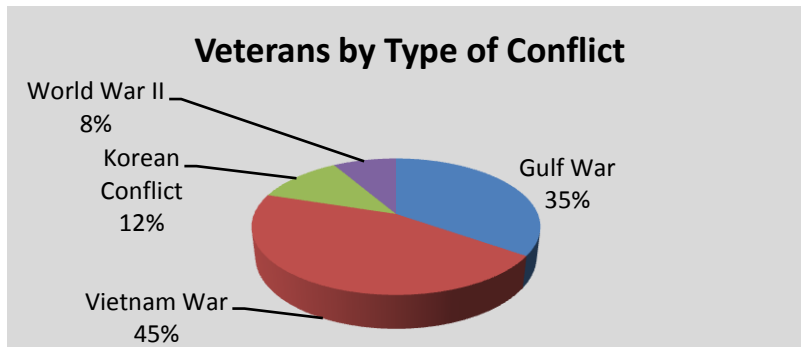
Key statistics for Colorado and Metro Denver

Sources: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Colorado Board of Veterans²

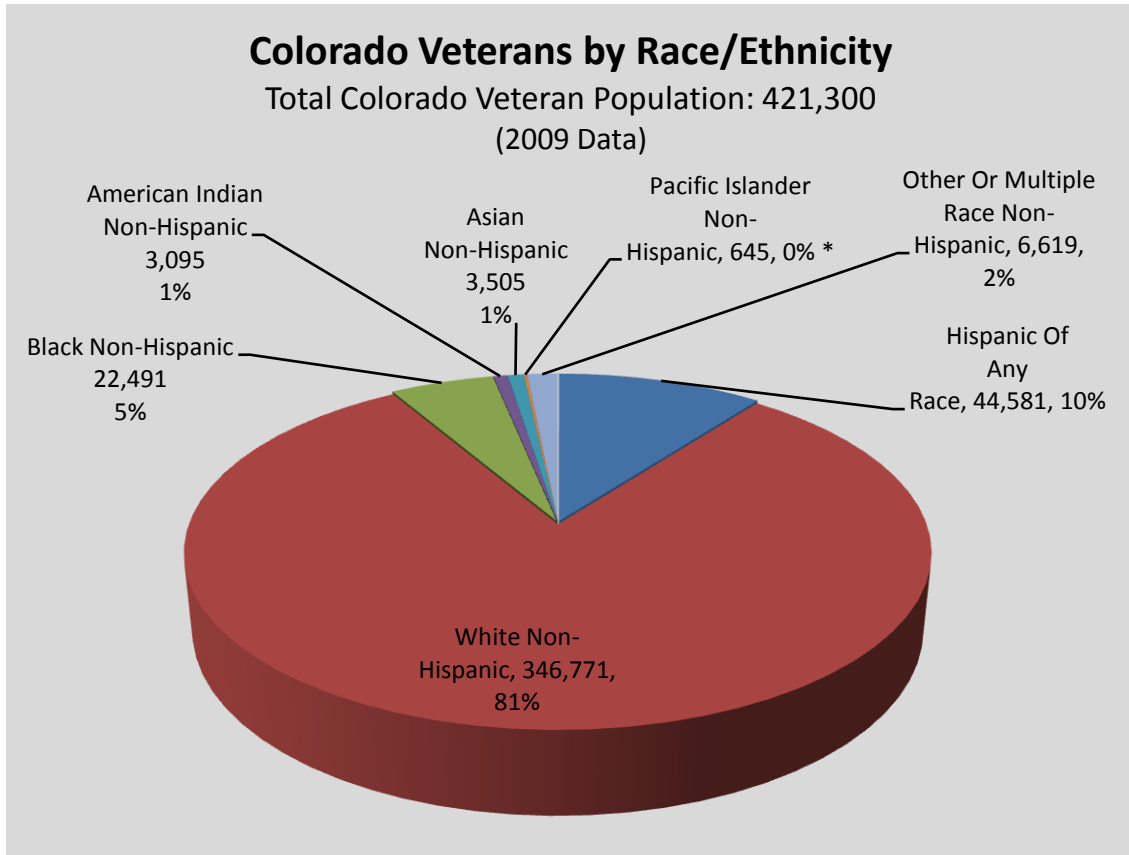
Veterans in Colorado

Type	Number of Veterans
Gulf War I and II*	116,300
Vietnam War	151,600
Korean Conflict	39,100
World War II	28,400
Peace Time Vets	104,900
War Time Vets	316,500
Female	38,100
Male	383,200
Total (As of 9/2010)	421,300

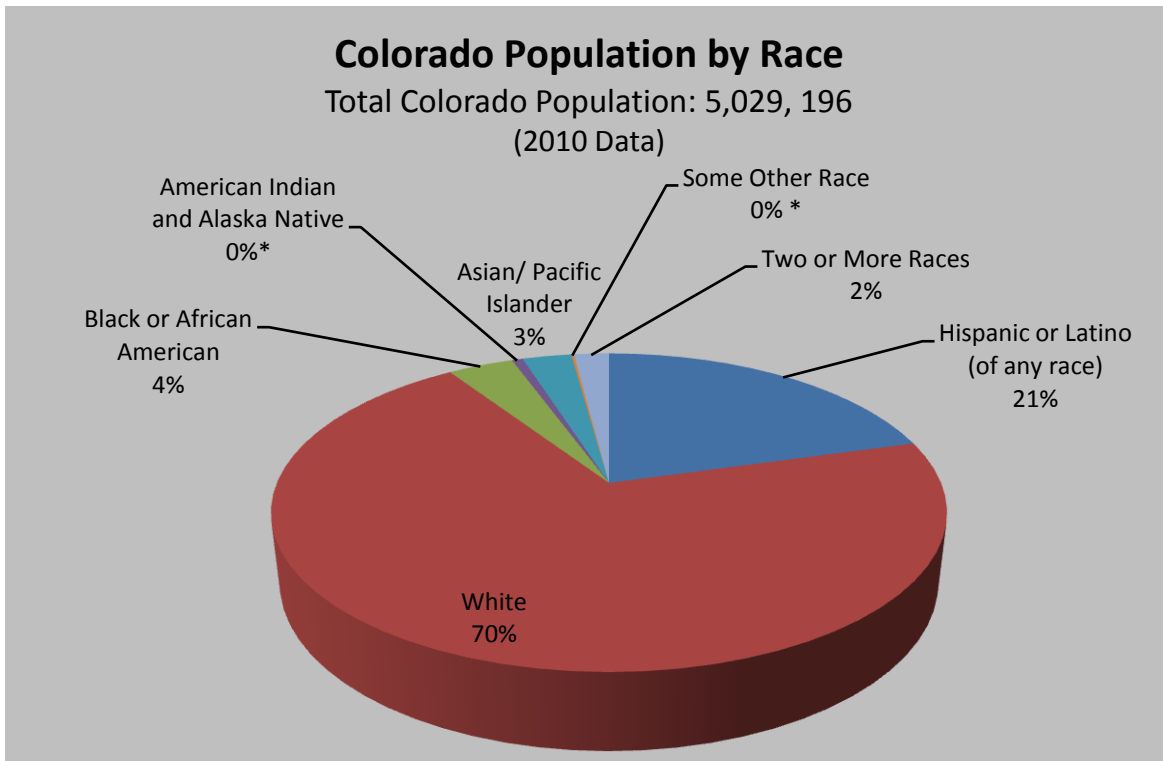
*Gulf War II includes: Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) – War in Iraq; and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) – War in Afghanistan



² Retrieved at: www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp

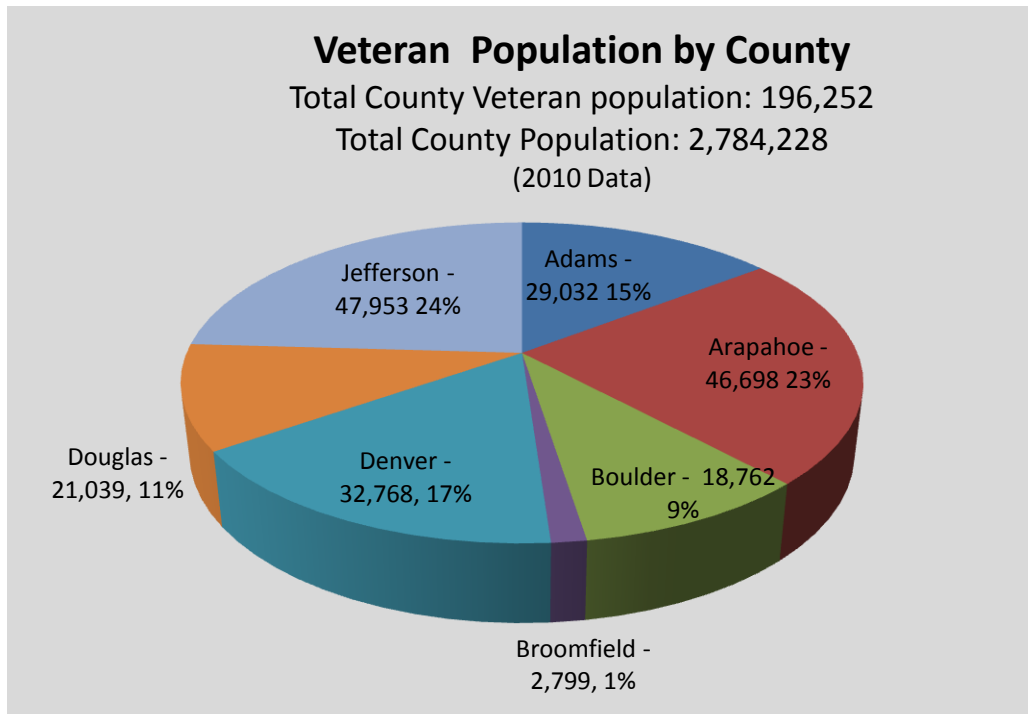


*Percentage is less than one



*Percentage is less than one

Veterans in Metro Denver



What do these statistics mean for Metro Denver?

While the Vietnam veteran population is currently the largest veteran population in Colorado, Gulf War (Gulf War I, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom) veterans are rapidly increasing in number. According to the Veterans Affairs office, Gulf Wars veterans will surpass in number and needs the Vietnam veterans in Colorado in the next few years.

In an effort to understand the consequences and impact of the Gulf Wars in our community, it is imperative to understand the macro-level issues affecting veterans. Since October 7, 2001, America has been at war, and approximately 2 million U.S. troops have served in combat. Serving our country is neither the concern nor the challenge; the challenges and the concerns come with the striking differences between our current soldiers and those who served in previous wars and the ability of our communities to come together and help government agencies assist veterans and their families.

Businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies are challenged every day by new issues, concerns, and problems related to returning soldiers, veterans, and their families that arise with these recent wars. The most significant difference between Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and earlier generations of service members is that at least 600,000 have served multiple and extended combat tours. These long and multiple tours have a silent, yet very powerful, toll on the lives of returning service members, veterans, families, and communities. While the veteran population equates to less than one percent of the American population, it is imperative to create awareness across our communities in order to avoid returning troops or veterans feeling isolated.

Although in recent years more emphasis has been invested into studies assessing the challenges that service members, veterans, and their families face, the existing data are limited at best. The vast majority of the studies focus on the U.S. population as a whole or on urban areas, excluding the small and more rural populations. While the large-scale studies provide a baseline understanding of the problem from a strategic level, the data are not necessarily representative of the veterans that reside in the Metro Denver community. Also in recent years, the focus of national level studies has targeted the collection of information tied to mental illnesses and the correlation of soldiers serving in combat zones.

In 2009, under Governor Bill Ritter, the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs conducted a survey about veterans' needs, and services available to those veterans who have registered with the VA offices throughout the state. Below are some key findings:

Key findings from surveys include:³

- Colorado's veteran population over 75 years of age, eligible for Veterans Nursing Home beds, will increase by 31 percent between 2010 and 2025. This equates to the need for 786 beds, in comparison to the 606 beds available today.
- In spite of more than doubling the General Fund appropriation for the Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs from \$416,772 (\$0.97 per veteran per year in 2006) to \$977,692 (\$2.32 per veteran per year in 2010), Colorado still ranks last in funding compared to 31 other states surveyed (including all neighboring states).
- 34 percent of Colorado veterans surveyed are not registered with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). Registrations drive region funding from the federal government.
- Only 12 percent of Colorado veterans surveyed are aware of the existence of the Colorado State Veteran Trust Fund's grants to help veterans.
- The major issues Colorado veterans have with the USDVA are:
 - Delays in getting medical appointments (30+days)
 - The length of time required to process claims (150+ days)
- Vietnam-era veterans are still the largest veteran group nationally and in Colorado (36 percent). Gulf War veterans (Gulf War 1, OIF & OEF) are now the second largest veteran group nationally and in Colorado. They comprise between 28 percent and 35 percent of all Colorado veterans.
- The State of Colorado does not have a program specifically designed for homeless veterans.

Veterans in the United States - Mental Health

According to a 2008 RAND study, *Invisible Wounds of War*, at least 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan troops and veterans have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or major depression. Since 2003, suicide among service members has increased every year, making this particular subject a growing concern for the country, Congress, and federal agencies. Currently, there is no agency tracking veterans' suicides, but the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that among veterans of all U.S. wars, more than 18 take their own lives each day. Some

³ Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs, Strategic Plan 2010 – 2014. Retrieved at: www.dmva.state.co.us/pages/34/data/00344D5EEB5B15A3.pdf

even assure that veterans' suicide rate is many times the national average.⁴ According to the Associated Press, 22,000 veterans called the VA suicide hot line in 2008, and of the 30,000 suicide related death each year, 20 percent are estimated to be among veterans.⁵ Some of the efforts by the Federal Government to provide assistance to veterans suffering from PTSD include the Veteran Mental Health Act that was signed in 2008; the Act requires the VA to partner with community behavioral health centers to increase capacity and expand mental health services to include marriage and family counseling. However, a recent survey by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare found that veterans still face significant roadblocks to accessing mental health and substance use treatment.

Key findings from surveys include:⁶

- **Access to Care:** Almost two-thirds of respondents said veterans and their families experience long delays to get initial appointments when in crisis and excessive waits in between appointments.
- **Long Distances:** Veterans often must travel long distances to the VA or a military base. Travel times can be as long as five hours in rural areas. Others do not have access to a vehicle or to public transportation, or may be unable to drive or take public transportation because of physical and mental limitations.
- **Stigma:** Many veterans are concerned that seeking treatment from the VA or military will be noted in their personnel records, negatively impact their careers, and label them as “weak” or “crazy.”
- **Lack of Family Involvement:** Though the Act specifically includes marriage and family counseling, few family members are involved in treatment. Respondents suggested these services are either not being provided or have not been widely promoted.

Other Challenges Facing Veterans

Mental health issues are not the only problem affecting returning soldiers, veterans, and family members. Elevated rates of unemployment, substance abuse, and homelessness are estimated to cost \$5 to \$7 billion per year in direct and indirect effects.⁷

Unemployment

High unemployment is a threat to veterans' overall psychological and physical well-being. This suggests that job placement, education, and vocational training might be a good and effective way to improve veterans' well-being, as well as an opportunity for communities to provide assistance. According to a March 2010 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report, the unemployment rate for veterans who served in the military at any time since September 2001, a group referred to as Gulf War-era II veterans, was 11.5 percent compared to a 9.4 percent of non-veterans in 2010.⁸

⁴ Devin Holmes, personal communication, May 2011

⁵ The Vets Prevail Program. Retrieve at: <http://www.vetsprevail.org>

⁶ The National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare survey report

⁷ Advancing Colorado's Mental Health Care. 2011 Update. TriWest Group.

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report. 2010. Retrieved at: www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2011/ted_20110316.htm

Key findings of the report include⁹:

- In 2010, young male veterans (ages 18 to 24) who served during Gulf War era II had an unemployment rate of 21.9 percent compared to a 19.7 percent of male non-veterans of the same age.
- Male Gulf War-era II veterans ages 18 to 24 were more likely to participate in the labor force in 2010 than were their nonveteran counterparts: 74.0 percent compared to 67.5 percent.
- Among all veterans, those with a service-connected disability had an unemployment rate of 9.1 percent in July 2010, about the same as the rate for veterans with no disability at 8.7 percent.
- Gulf War-era II veterans who were current or past members of the Reserve or National Guard had an unemployment rate of 14.0 percent in July 2010, compared with a rate of 12.1 percent for those veterans who had not been members.
- Regardless of their period of service, unemployment rates in 2010 for veterans with higher levels of education were lower than for those with less education.

Homelessness

In 2010 the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) departments published an analysis of the extent of homelessness among military veterans. According to HUD and VA's assessment, nearly 76,000 veterans were homeless on any given night in 2009, while roughly 136,000 veterans spent at least one night in a shelter during that year.¹⁰ According to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, providing assistance in mental health, substance abuse treatment, education, and employment goes hand-in-hand with preventative steps to avoid homelessness and promote permanent supportive housing.

Key findings of the report include¹¹:

- Veterans are 50 percent more likely to become homeless compared to all Americans, and the risk is even greater among veterans living in poverty and poor minority veterans.
- More than 3,000 cities and counties reported 75,609 homeless veterans on a single night in January of 2009. 57 percent were staying in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program, while the remaining 43 percent were unsheltered.
- Veterans represent about 12 percent of all homeless people counted nationwide during the 2009 assessment.
- During a 12-month period in 2009, about 136,000 veterans, or about 1 in every 168 veterans, spent at least one night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program.

⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report. 2010. Retrieved at: www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2011/ted_20110316.htm

¹⁰ Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. 2010. U.S. department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and The National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans

¹¹ Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. 2010. U.S. department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and The National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans

The vast majority of sheltered homeless veterans (96 percent) experienced homelessness alone.

- Sheltered homeless veterans are most often single white men between the ages of 31 and 50 and living with a disability.
- Most veterans who used emergency shelter stayed for only brief periods. One-third stayed in a shelter for less than a week; 61 percent used a shelter for less than a month; and 84 percent stayed for less than three months. The report also concluded that veterans remained in shelters longer than did non-veterans.
- Sheltered homeless veterans are far more likely to be alone rather than be part of a family household; 96 percent of veterans are individuals compared to 66 percent in the overall homeless population.

Education

A 2009 study published by the American Council on Education (ACE) reports that college campuses are experiencing an influx of military service members due to the financially generous “Post 9/11 GI Bill” that took effect on August 1, 2009.¹² While pursuing an education seems like a natural and easy transition into the civilian life, many veterans are struggling to fit in and complete their education. According to Chad Storlie, author of *Combat Leader to Corporate Leader*, 88 percent of veterans drop out of college in their first year because they do not fit in.

Some of the key challenges veterans reported in the ACE study included:

- Meeting academic expectations that were different from what they had encountered in the military.
- Balancing academic requirements with other responsibilities, including supporting their families.
- Relating to non-veteran peers, and particularly to students who recently graduated from high school.
- Managing service-connected injuries, including bodily injuries, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Other statistics show that one in five of today's veterans are attending college, with a 3 percent graduation rate compared to a 30 graduation rate for civilian students.¹³

Examples of Models for Collaboration

In response to the needs of veterans and their families, several communities have created collaboratives or programs to address challenges. Information about some of these models can be found in **Appendices A and B**

¹² American Council on Education. 2009. Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education

¹³ Alabama Veterans Initiative fact sheet

Appendix A

National Models for Collaboration – Foundations		
Organization	Program Available	Website
California Community Foundation	The Iraq Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund (IADIF) was created in 2006 to provide funding to nonprofit organizations that offer direct services and other forms of assistance to American military personnel and/or their families who have been impacted by deployment to Iraq and/or Afghanistan	www.calfund.org/learn/iadif.php
The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven	Doesn't have a dedicated staff or program but recently funded the CT Veterans Legal Center which helps veterans navigate through the legal system by connecting them with lawyers (all volunteers) and other services	www.cfgnh.org/
Madison Community Foundation	In April 2011, awarded a service agency \$35,000 to recruit, train, and support 150 new volunteer drivers for transport of military veterans and senior citizens, providing services they need to stay independent. The organization awarded was: RSVP of Dane County	www.madisoncommunityfoundation.org
San Antonio Area Foundation	Runs a grant program with a focus on veterans. Collaborates with the Dallas Foundation	www.saafdn.org
Orange County Community Foundation	Runs a modest grant program with a focus on veterans. It has two endowed funds that provide some of the grantable funds, and board allocates discretionary dollars as well. Coordinated a meeting (May) for all our donors who have expressed an interest in supporting veterans and their families to discuss possible collaborative granting ideas	www.oc-cf.org

Cont. Appendix A

Organization	Program Available	Website
Maine Community Foundation	<p>Develop a capacity building approach that is described on their website http://www.mainecef.org/dobyfund.aspx</p> <p>The Tibor and Anna Doby Veteran Support Fund seeks to address the needs of rural veterans, their families, and the nonprofit providers that serve them. Awards are made to help organizations more effectively deliver programs and services to veterans and their families living in rural regions of Maine. The grant program is particularly interested in helping to build the capacity of community-based organizations to offer programs and case management services that provide support to veterans affected by mental and behavioral health issues</p>	www.mainecef.org
Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation	<p>Developed a collaborative program with the County Veterans Service Offices in the two counties served. It is a Veterans Gap Fund that utilizes the expertise of both the Foundation and the Veterans offices. Foundation provided the creation of a specific fund. Organization issues gift cards (for food, gas) to the Veterans Officers to utilize as veterans qualify/need. Also created an account with an area motel for emergency housing – at the discretion of the Veterans Affairs office</p>	www.areafoundation.org
The Luzerne Foundation	<p>A volunteer-run nonprofit was created under the Foundation. The Northeast PA Veteran Multi-Care Alliance (NEPA) was established to address the needs of veterans as they attempt to access all of those services, filling out complex forms and more. Bringing together community service organization, NEPA provides an additional wave of support that represents the new direction for comprehensive care for our returning veterans and for those who have served in previous wars who are still in need. It is a one-stop resource that bridges the gap between veterans' programs and non-veterans' programs - on the Federal, State, County and private levels. Richard Wren, Executive Director of NEPA</p>	www.luzfdn.org http://nepavma.org

Cont. Appendix A

Models for Collaboration – Nonprofits		
Organization	Program Available	Website
AspenPoint, Colorado Springs	The Peer Navigator created in El Paso County translates and coordinates civilian systems to former military personnel, and provides a “friendly face” to help guide them, thus giving veterans and their families’ meaningful pathways to improve their lives	www.aspenpointe.org/ddnav/AspenPointe+Peer+Navigator-4-16.html
The Network of Care, El Paso County, Colorado	The Network of Care for Service Members, Veterans & Their Families is part of a growing awareness and effort to take a community approach to the needs of returning veterans, to ensure that they are a valuable part of a healthy community and that the community is a meaningful part of the health of the veteran. The Network of Care for Service Members, Veterans & Their Families is a one-stop-shop for virtually all services, information, support, advocacy, and much more. This public service is an attempt to bring together critical information for all components of the veterans' community, including veterans, family members, active-duty personnel, reservists, members of the National Guard, employers, service providers, and the community at large	http://pikespeak.co.networkofcare.org/veterans/home/index.cfm
Wounded Warrior Care Project	Collaborates and cooperates with current wounded warrior programs and explores new medical, housing, transportation, vocational training and family support roles for the Augusta area. The Augusta Model focuses on Unique Assets, Increasing Information Flow, and Coordination and Reintegrating Warriors after Combat	www.projectaugusta.org

Appendix B

Resources Available (U.S. & Colorado)		
Name	Description	Location
Arapahoe County Veteran's Service Office	Veteran 's service office provides information and assistance in obtaining V.A. benefits for Arapahoe County veterans, their survivors and dependents. This office can also provide information and referrals for educational programs	CO
Aurora Veterans Home - Aurora Mental Health Center	Aurora Veterans Home is a 15-bed facility serving honorably discharged veterans struggling with homelessness, substance use disorder and mental health issues. This program is open to veterans who are eligible for and referred through the Grant and Per Diem program from the Veterans Administration	CO
Broomfield Health and Human Services Department- Self-Sufficiency, Employment and Public Assistance Division	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	CO
Community Blueprint	The Community Blueprint Initiative has brought together a coalition of leading non-profit organizations serving veterans and their families to develop an online tool to help local community leaders assess and improve support available in their community	U.S.
Denver Options	Denver Options' Colorado Connections TBI Program has been working with individuals with brain injuries since 2006 through the State of Colorado Traumatic Brain Injury Trust Fund Program. Effective April 2008, will be launching a TBI program specifically for military personnel that served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)	CO
Denver Veterans' Service Office - Denver Department of Human Services (DHS)	Offers information about military veterans ' benefits to veterans, widows and dependents. Assists widows and dependents in filing for their earned veterans' benefits. Some of the major programs serving veterans and their survivors are: DDHS General assistance / Homeless Unit Program	CO
Family Readiness Groups (FRG)	Within the United States Army, the United States Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard communities. It is a command-sponsored organization of family members, volunteers, soldiers and civilian employees associated with a particular unit. They are normally organized at company and battalion levels, and fall under the responsibility of the unit's commanding officer	U.S.
Fitzsimons Nursing Home - Colorado State Veterans Home	Provide nursing home care for veterans or spouses of veterans	CO

Cont. Appendix B

Name	Description	Location
Give an Hour	Was founded in September 2005 with the mission to develop national networks of volunteers capable of responding to both acute and chronic mental health conditions. As of Spring 2011, Give an Hour had developed a network of over 5,000 mental health professionals willing to donate at least an hour of their time each week to provide free mental health services to military service members and veterans	U.S.
Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program - Denver Department of Human Services (DHS)	Homeless veterans able to and looking for work contact the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program	CO
Operation TBI Freedom	Operation TBI Freedom assists veterans and service members with service related traumatic brain injuries that occurred on or after 9/11/01 to achieve their optimum independence, productivity and successful re-integration into civilian life, effectively develops and coordinates community and veterans resources available to our clients and their families, and is a free, statewide program in Colorado	CO
Support Our Family in Arms	The Support Our Family in Arms program has been established to provide pro-bono services for National Guard and Reserve veterans and their family members. Many CPA members have volunteered to help by providing individual, couples, family and child/adolescent therapy. There will also be opportunities to provide group therapy and support group facilitation	CO
The Home Front Cares	The Home Front Cares is an all volunteer corporation that provides emergency financial assistance, goods and services to families of Active Duty, Activated Reserves and National Guard troops based in CO serving in harm's way	CO
The Redistribution Center	Gathers and distributes millions of dollars worth of food, clothing, building supplies, toys, furniture, household goods and other items. These donations serve a wide variety of groups, including members of the armed forces and their families. The Center, which is run entirely by volunteers, picks up donations, warehouses donations until appropriate recipients are identified and distributes the items	CO
Veteran Counseling - Denver Vet Center	Counseling is provided to combat veterans and their families living in the metro Denver area. Counseling services include individual, group, and marital/family counseling. Also provides counseling for trauma-related post-trauma stress disorder and counseling at Denver VA Hospital	CO

Cont. Appendix B

Name	Description	Location
Veterans' Advocacy - Veterans of Foreign Wars	The VFW advocates on behalf of veterans and their families to the Veterans' Administration. Services include: forms preparation for disability claims, widow's claims and pensions	U.S.
Veterans' Services (Boulder) - Boulder County Veterans Service Office	Offers assistance to veterans and their dependents in making applications for veterans benefits, including: disability compensation, pension, education, home loan, medical, insurance, widow's pension, burial benefits, nursing home placement, records requests, and discharge upgrades	CO
VetsPrevail	provide an anonymous, easily accessible entry into support and care that uses peer outreach by specially trained veterans to overcome stigma and provide 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week access to online peer support using chat technology	U.S.
Victory House - Colorado Veterans for Housing, Inc.	Transitional housing with supportive services for homeless male veterans	CO
Warrior Gateway	Connects individuals in the military community with organizations and programs (non-profit, government, educational or employment-related) in their neighborhood that are there to support them. By harnessing state-of-the art technology and community collaboration, today's veterans can make better decisions about what service providers they can go to for help, and have a public forum to share their experiences about the quality and effectiveness of those services	U.S.

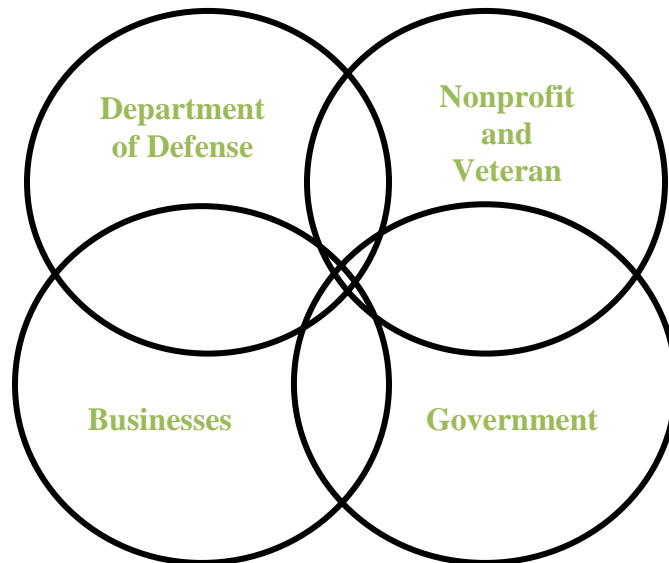
Plan for Action
&
Additional Information

(This section could be added or deleted depending on the audience)

Plan for Action

In an effort to mobilize resources to strengthen the community, and welcome back those who have served our country, The Denver Foundation would like to implement the following plan for action:

1. Educate and inform the local Metro Denver public about issues facing veterans and their family members, and the impact this particular population has in the community.
2. Convene and coordinate a meeting with local organizations (for profit and nonprofit), Department of Defense representatives, and government agencies, in order to discuss services and resources, as well as models for better partnership.



Possible Next Steps

We have made progress in recent years to support our troops, veterans, and their families. However, without continued collaboration between the Department of Defense, the Veteran Affairs office, and increased investment from the public and nonprofit sector, the challenges faced by veterans and their families will only increase with time. Possible next steps, after a cross-sector meeting, could include:

1. Creation of public service announcements
2. Creation of a task force
3. Larger meeting of key agencies and support systems
4. Creation of a resource book
5. Conduct a study of veterans for the Metro Denver area
6. Establishment of a veterans-focused fund

The data, trends, and future next steps are meant to build on existing efforts and resources in order to strengthen the capacity of grantmakers, nonprofits and government agencies.

Understanding the Veterans Affairs System

- I. **The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** - is a government-run military veteran benefit system with Cabinet-level status. It is the United States government's second largest department, after the United States Department of Defense. The VA employs nearly 280,000 people at hundreds of Veterans Affairs medical facilities, clinics, and benefits offices and is responsible for administering programs of veterans' benefits for veterans, their families, and survivors.

The benefits provided include disability compensation, pension, education, home loans, life insurance, vocational rehabilitation, survivors' benefits, medical benefits and burial benefits.

- II. **The Colorado Department of Military and Veterans Affairs** - is a state agency of the Government of Colorado. It supervises both the Colorado National Guard (including the Colorado Army National Guard and Colorado Air National Guard), and non-military state safety agencies.

The Department consists of the *Department of Military Affairs*, and the *Division of Veterans' Affairs*, and is headed by the Adjutant General of Colorado.

- III. **The Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs** - is the state agency that is mandated by state statute to assist veterans and their family members and survivors in securing any benefits they may be entitled to because of service in the military. The Division does this by serving as a central source of information on veterans' benefits, rights and issues; and by training, directing and assisting the county veterans service officers who are the local veterans assistance agencies in every county in Colorado.

The Division can assist any claimant for federal or state veterans benefits in applying for and securing benefits. The Division can also assist in initiating and prosecuting appeals to the Board of Veterans Appeals or the Military Discharge review Boards.

Colorado State Veteran's Benefits

The state of Colorado provides several veteran benefits. This section offers a brief description of each of the following benefits.

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits

Colorado Veteran Housing Programs

- State Veterans' Home

Admission preference is given to Veterans, spouses, widows, and mothers at State Veterans Center, Homelake, CO.

 - 40 operating beds in the domiciliary unit and 60 beds in nursing care service.
- State Veterans Nursing Home
 - The Colorado State Veterans Nursing Home at Florence, CO with a bed capacity of 120 beds.
 - Colorado State Veterans Nursing Home at Rifle, CO with a capacity of 100 beds.
 - Colorado State Veterans Nursing Home at Walsenburg, CO with a capacity of 120 beds.
 - Colorado State Veterans Home, located in Denver, CO. It has a capacity of 180 beds.

Colorado Financial Assistance Benefits

- Colorado State Tax Advantage

Provides a Property Tax Exemption for 100% disabled veterans.
- Retired Military Pay: Members of the Armed Forces can exclude up to \$20,000 in any one taxable year from their retirement pay.

Eligibility: U.S. Armed Forces Retiree over 55 years or older.
- Military Disability Retired Pay: Disability Portion - Length of Service Pay; Member on September 24, 1975 - No tax; Not Member on September 24, 1975 - Taxed, unless combat incurred. Retired Pay - Based solely on disability: Member on September 24, 1975 - No tax; Not Member on September 24, 1975 - Taxed, unless all pay based on disability and disability resulted from armed conflict, extra-hazardous service, simulated war, or an instrumentality of war.
- VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation: Not subject to federal or state taxes.
- Motor Vehicle Tax; No fee shall be charged to certain disabled Veterans or Ex-POWs who have established their right to benefits under public laws.

- Burial Allowance: County allowance of up to \$50 for burial and up to \$50 for setting markers for pauper Veterans.

Colorado Veteran Employment Benefits

- Employment Assistance
State Active Duty employee receives 15 days of paid military leave per year.
Eligibility: Colorado National Guard
- Employment Preference
Disabled Veterans shall have 10 points added to their grades and non-disabled Veterans shall be credited with an additional 5 points for "state employment". For city and county governments that have a "Merit System" in place.

Colorado Veteran Education Benefits

- Tuition Assistance
Any member of the Colorado National Guard is eligible for state tuition assistance, up to 100% tuition paid at any CO state-funded school depending on funding available. State funding can be used in conjunction with Federal Tuition Assistance.
Eligibility: Colorado National Guard member must serve 2 years for each year granted.
- Tuition Assistance for Children of POWs, MIAs, or Disabled/Deceased ARNG
Free tuition in certain State-support schools for children of prisoners of war or persons missing in actions who were Colorado residents when they entered the Armed Forces, or for children of Colorado National Guardsmen who died or were permanently disabled while on State active duty limited to dependents who do not qualify for Federal Education benefits.
- Operation Recognition
Award high school diplomas to deserving and qualified WWII, Korea and Vietnam Era Veterans. Operation Recognition is authorized by Colorado State Law and is offered by the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs in cooperation with the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Association of School Boards.

Other Colorado State Veteran Benefits

- Special Vehicle License Plates
The State provides plates at no cost to the Veteran including: recipients of the Medal of Honor, recipients of the Purple Heart, to certain disabled wartime Veterans, special disabled (50%+) Veterans license plates, and special license plates for former POWs. Plates for honorably discharged Veterans may be purchased for nominal fee.
- Medical Benefits
 - Dental coverage and full medical for line-of-duty
 - Eligibility: Colorado National Guard