

# *The Military to Civilian Transition 2018*

*A Review of Historical, Current, and Future Trends*





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***Foreword by***  
***Paul R. Lawrence, Ph.D.***

***Under Secretary for Benefits, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs***



*Each year, nearly 200,000 Service members transition from the military back to their civilian communities. I am humbled by and proud of VA's ongoing commitment and partnership with our interagency partners and our local communities who collaborate to foster successful military to civilian transitions for each of those Service members and their families.*

My understanding of the potential challenges that transitioning Service members and their families face is informed by my personal life experience as a former Army officer, and as the current Under Secretary for Benefits at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Tens of millions of Americans have borne the battle since the founding of our nation, including the more than 19 million men and women who identify as today's Veterans. VA strives to connect with transitioning Service members throughout the military to civilian transition process, because we know that Veterans who use Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for health care and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for benefits will reintegrate more easily into their communities.

Veterans contribute greatly to business, community, and educational institutions through their uniquely honed mix of work ethic, leadership, and resilience, and we all play a role in facilitating their contributions by improving the military to civilian transition. While the men and women of our armed forces are better trained, better educated, and better prepared for transition than ever before, they still face unique challenges in accessing health care, attaining education, and establishing careers that necessitate definitive action to help take care of their special needs. As transitioning Service members prepare for the jobs of today and tomorrow, support may involve apprenticeships as a gateway to a well-paying job or business ownership. For those planning to pursue higher education, we can facilitate informed decision-making by providing data about educational institutions, corresponding debt loads, and projected earning potential. The newly created Office of Transition and Economic Development (TED) specifically focuses on Veterans transitioning back into the workforce and is leading the effort to answer, "What more can we do to help Veterans?"

I want to recognize and commend the efforts of the federal partners who, along with VA, strive to integrate transition assistance into the Military Life Cycle transition model, improve access to health care and mental health resources, and partner with community organizations, private industry, and academic institutions.

At VBA, we help Veterans navigate post-service life and realize the American Dream through benefits and services that support their career, educational, and financial goals. VA Secretary Wilkie and I call upon all of our partners — both public and private — to foster a culture of collaboration that will continue to make the dream a reality for our nation's heroes.



*“We will not rest until all of America’s  
great Veterans receive the care they’ve  
earned through their incredible service  
and sacrifice to our country.”*

**-Donald J. Trump, President of the United States  
January 9, 2018**





*“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”*

*-Abraham Lincoln, 1865*

# Executive Summary

## Defining Transition

*Transition is a period of adjustment, which includes the planning and preparation accomplished during military Service, when Service members and their families explore and embark on endeavors in the civilian world upon leaving active duty.*

*Every year, approximately 200,000 men and women leave U.S. military service and return to life as civilians, a process known as the military to civilian transition.*

The military to civilian transition occurs within a complex and dynamic network of relationships, programs, services, and benefits, which includes transition planning and assistance efforts by individual Service branches, the interagency Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and community resources delivered through local government, private industry, and nonprofit organizations. This network (or ecosystem) (**Figure 1**) delivers a holistic approach to help transitioning Service members and their families succeed at a critical juncture in their life journey.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with our interagency partners, is proud to provide this overview of the military to civilian transition through the lens of historical transition support, current transition assistance services and programs, and the key drivers shaping the near future of the transition assistance process.

## A HISTORY OF TRANSITION

For the first 150 years of our nation's history, the government delivered Veterans' benefits and incidental medical care after military service, but largely left Service members to navigate their transition on their own. After World War I, Congress established a new system of benefits that included disability compensation and insurance for Service members and Veterans. During World War II, the government implemented the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the original GI Bill®. The legislation provided tuition benefits and stipends for educational pursuits, unemployment benefits, home loan guarantees, and medical care to millions of Veterans returning to civilian life from service during WWII.

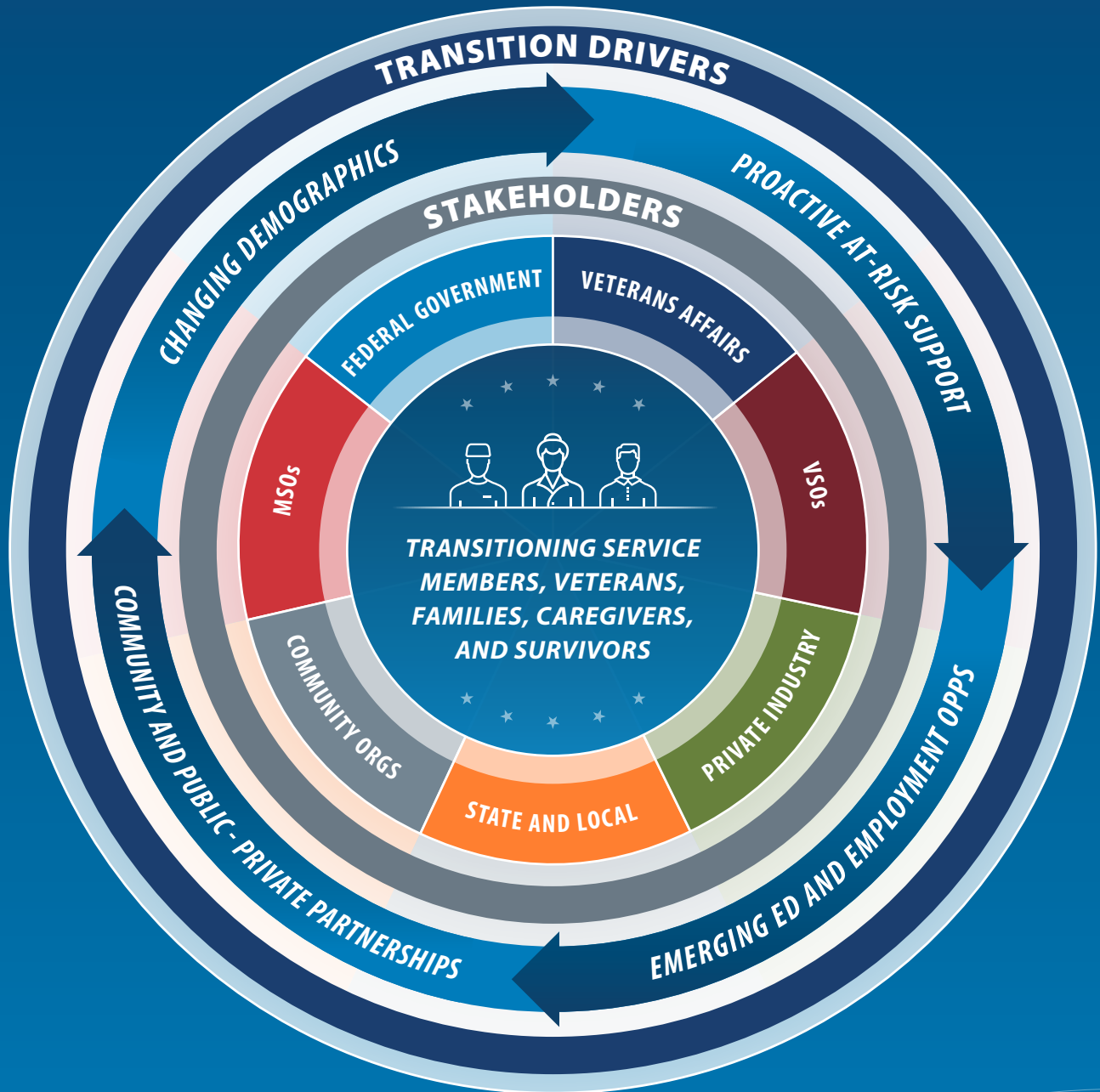
Over the next four decades, this "bundle of benefits" approach to transition assistance gave transitioning Service members and their families support for education, homeownership, insurance, and physical well-being. However, in the early 1990s, as the United States again faced a massive demobilization of the military due to planned post-Cold War reduction that coincided with the end of the Gulf War, Congress recognized the need for a more holistic approach to transition assistance.

The Fiscal Year (FY) 1991 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) ushered in a modern era of transition assistance and transformed the journey from military service to civilian life. FY 1991 NDAA authorized a program of comprehensive transition assistance counseling for separating Service members and their spouses. This was a major improvement to the bundle of benefits approach.



FIGURE 1

## The Transition Ecosystem



## **MODERN TRANSITION ASSISTANCE**

*In 2011, the Veteran unemployment rate was 12.1 percent, considerably higher than the non-Veteran unemployment rate of 8.7 percent.*

This was fueled by the lingering effects of the 2008 global economic crisis along with unique employment challenges faced by Post-9/11 Veterans. Congress responded to this multifaceted crisis by passing the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. The VOW Act became a major driver for the evolution of transition assistance.

In addition to pre-separation counseling, the Act mandated participation of all eligible transitioning Service members in the previously optional TAP employment, benefits, and job training assistance sessions. In response to the VOW Act, interagency partners redesigned TAP into a cohesive, modular, outcomes-based program that standardized transition opportunities, services, and training to better prepare the nation's Service members to achieve their post-military career goals.

Since the VOW Act, the interagency partners, along with other federal agencies, continue to expand transition assistance support based on the ever-changing needs of transitioning Service members and their families. The integration of transition planning throughout the Military Life Cycle (MLC) creates a career-ready military and provides Service members — from the start of their military careers — a continuous opportunity to prepare for civilian career success. MLC encompasses a Service member's period of service, from accession to retirement or separation. The MLC transition model gives Service members opportunities to align their military career with their civilian goals at various key touch points, beginning at their first permanent duty station.

No two transitions are the same. While some transitioning Service members, Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors experience a successful transition into quality educational institutions, gainful employment, or entrepreneurial ventures, others face significant challenges after leaving service. The military to civilian transition ecosystem must be prepared for everyone's individual journey. As described in **Figure 2**, our analysis revealed several drivers that are shaping that ecosystem.

## **THE MILITARY TO CIVILIAN TRANSITION ECOSYSTEM: LOOKING AHEAD**

*VA and the interagency partners are committed to doing the right thing at the right time in supporting the military to civilian transition.*

We acknowledge the key drivers influencing the military to civilian transition and continue to leverage data from academic studies, government statistics, industry reports, and input from community organizations to address those drivers to improve the processes and outcomes for transitioning Service members and their families.

To identify emerging needs, we listen to the voices of our Veterans through TAP participant feedback, reports, design thinking, and other data collection methods.

Furthermore, a planned post-separation survey will provide data on long-term outcomes and will foster a deeper understanding of transition assistance needs.

The programs, services, and methodology of military to civilian transition assistance continue to evolve with data-driven research and stakeholder experiences. VA, along with interagency and community partners, is committed to a holistic, integrated approach to support transitioning Service members and their families as they plan for and strive to achieve a successful transition to civilian life.





FIGURE 2

## *Drivers that Influence the Military to Civilian Transition Ecosystem*



***Changing demographics of transitioning Service members impact the structure, content, and mode of transition assistance.***

More than 4.4 million individuals have served in the military since September 11, 2001 — the Post-9/11 cohort of Veterans. They are younger, more racially diverse, and include more women than any other period of military service in history.



***Increasing populations of at-risk transitioning Service members need proactive support.***

In 2015, Veterans accounted for 14.3 percent of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults (ages 18 and older). In January 2018, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13822: Supporting Our Veterans During Their Transition from Uniformed Service to Civilian Life. The EO intends to address gaps in access to care, especially mental health services, as Service members transition to Veteran status.



***Emerging economic and employment opportunities for Veterans vary across Veteran groups.***

Available statistics indicate that certain subgroups — such as women, minorities, Post-9/11 Veterans and younger Veterans (ages 18-24), and those with service-related mental disabilities — have difficulties transitioning successfully.




***Engaging community and public-private partners into the transition ecosystem is important to improve and adapt transition assistance.***

No single agency or organization has the manpower, resources, or intellectual capital to provide a lifetime of care and support to our military family. A 2015 study (Zoli, Maury, & Fay) indicated one of the leading gaps in Veterans and military family services is not a lack of resources or capacity, but a lack of collaboration, coordination, and collective purpose.

# Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>1 Introduction</b> .....   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>2 Supporting Our Service Members' Transition: From A Bundle of Benefits to Holistic Assistance</b> ..... | <b>3</b>  |
| 2.1 Early Transition Assistance: World War I through the Gulf War .....                                     | 3         |
| 2.2 Modern Transition Assistance Takes Shape: The Gulf War to the Present .....                             | 6         |
| <b>3 Current State of Transition</b> .....  | <b>11</b> |
| 3.1 Key Drivers Shaping the State of Transition .....   | 18        |
| <b>4 Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time</b> .....  | <b>35</b> |
| 4.1 Listening to the Voice of the Veteran .....   | 35        |
| 4.2 Evaluation Efforts and Long-Term Outcomes.....  | 36        |
| <b>5 Conclusion</b> .....   | <b>38</b> |
| <b>6 Bibliography</b> .....   | <b>40</b> |





***“It is clear that the Veteran population and their needs are changing faster than we realize.***

***For the first time in 40 years, half of our Veterans are under the age of 65. Of 20 million Veterans, 10 percent are women and the number of Women Veterans receiving care has tripled. The new generation is computer savvy and demands 21st-century service efficiently delivered and available when needed.”***

**-Secretary Robert Wilkie, September 2018**

# Introduction

*The transition from military to civilian life is widely recognized as a sometimes challenging and stressful process for Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.*

Transitioning out of the military often includes a series of adjustments, such as geographic location, career, relationships, family roles, support systems, social networks, and community (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014).

No two transitions are the same — every transitioning Service member has his or her own individual needs and unique transition journey. While most Service members successfully transition to civilian life, many will experience challenges. In a November 2015 study (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015), more than 8,500 Veterans, active duty Service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and military dependents identified their most significant transition challenges: navigating VA programs, benefits, and services (60 percent); finding a job (55 percent); adjusting to civilian culture (41 percent); addressing financial challenges (40 percent); and applying military-learned skills to civilian life (39 percent).

As the needs and challenges of transitioning Service members have evolved over time, so too has the nation's approach to transition assistance. In the early years of our nation's history, assistance to separated Service members primarily consisted of pensions and incidental medical care. Throughout the 20th century, transition assistance expanded to include benefits that better prepared Veterans for their transition to civilian education and employment opportunities. More recently, the delivery of transition planning services and counseling has transformed how Service members and their families receive support before, during, and after transition.



Today, the military to civilian transition occurs within a complex and dynamic network of relationships, programs, services, and benefits, which includes transition planning and assistance efforts by individual Service branches, the interagency Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and community resources delivered through local government, private industry, and nonprofit organizations. This network (or ecosystem) delivers a holistic approach to help transitioning Service members and their families succeed at a critical juncture in their life journey.

Interagency partners, including the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Defense (DoD), Labor (DOL), Education (ED), Homeland Security (DHS)/U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and Small Business Administration (SBA), work together and with Military Service Organizations (MSOs), Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), Veterans peer groups, and community organizations to support Service members and their families before, during, and after their transition. Stakeholders recognize that military to civilian transition is not a moment in time — it is a process that begins well before a Service member leaves the military and lasts long after becoming a civilian.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the history of transition support, describe the current state of the military to civilian transition, and document key drivers that continue to shape

transition assistance. Sources for this report include academic studies, historical documents and records, and interviews with interagency partners.



*In a November 2015 study, more than 8,500 Veterans, active duty Service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and military dependents identified their most significant transition challenges:*

**60%** *Navigating VA programs, benefits, and services*

**55%** *Finding a job*

**41%** *Adjusting to civilian culture*

**40%** *Addressing financial challenges*

**39%** *Applying military-learned skills to civilian life*

*Source: Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015*



# ***Supporting Our Service Members' Transition: From A Bundle of Benefits to Holistic Assistance***



*Since the founding of our nation, those who have served in the military eventually face the transition back to civilian life.*

When General George Washington issued his farewell orders to the Continental Army on November 2, 1783, he brought specific transition guidance to his troops' attention (Washington, 1783). At the end of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln reflected on the implications of war and the nation's recovery. With the words, "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan," President Lincoln affirmed the government's obligation to care for those injured during the war and to provide for the families of those who perished on the battlefield (Lincoln, 1865). For the first 150 years of our nation's history, the government delivered Veterans' benefits and incidental medical care after military service, but largely left Service members to navigate their transition on their own. It was not until World War I that our nation began to understand a broader societal need to prepare, inform, and assist Service members before they transitioned back into civilian life.

Both government and nongovernmental organizations developed programs that grew into a vibrant ecosystem of preparation and assistance that now begins early in a Service member's Military Life Cycle and lasts until the transitioning Service member and his or her family have successfully met their transition goals. To this day, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs) continue to advocate for and deliver community support to Veterans. Historically, federal programs providing transition assistance were a reaction to Service members returning from war. Today, support for transitioning Service members is a proactive, holistic, and continuous approach. We recognize that each transitioning Service member is unique and Veterans now have more options when it comes to their lives after the military.

## ***Early Transition Assistance: World War I through the Gulf War***

In 1917, as the United States entered World War I (WWI), Congress established a new system of benefits that included programs for disability compensation, insurance for Service members and Veterans, and vocational rehabilitation for disabled Veterans. In 1918, just before the end of the war, Congress passed the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which provided vocational rehabilitation training for the "return to civil society" for any eligible disabled Veteran. In 1921, just two and a half years after the Armistice of November 11, 1918 ended WWI and fostered the largest generational mass transition of Service members back to civilian life since the Civil War, Congress combined many disparate Veterans programs and boards to create the Veterans Bureau.



*“... it is earnestly recommended to all the Troops that with strong attachments to the Union, they should carry with them into civil society the most conciliating dispositions; and that they should prove themselves not less virtuous and useful as Citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers.”*

**-George Washington, 1783**



*In 1930, President Herbert Hoover elevated the Veterans Bureau to a federal administration to consolidate even more government activities that supported Veterans. This initiative established the Veterans Administration, providing the foundation for the modern-day Department of Veterans Affairs, the world's most comprehensive system of Veterans assistance.*

During World War II (WWII), the Federal Government realized that Service members transitioning to civilian life would greatly impact the national labor market. DOL estimated in the early 1940s that 15 million Service members would be unemployed after the war ended (Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944). To prevent a major economic depression, the Federal Government recommended training and educational programs for returning Service members based on anticipated postwar manpower needs. This was further echoed by President Franklin Roosevelt during an address to Congress in November 1943: "What our service men and women want, more than anything else, is the assurance of satisfactory employment upon their return to civil life" (Roosevelt, 1943).

***The GI Bill® had significant impact between 1944 and 1956:***

***By 1947:***

***+ Half of all college students were Veterans***

***By 1956:***

***+ 7.8 million WWII Veterans participated in education or training programs (~50 percent)***

***+ VA guaranteed 5.9 million home loans***

***+ 42 percent of WWII Veterans owned homes versus 34 percent of non-Veterans***

The passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 actualized this recommendation. Signed by President Roosevelt, the original GI Bill® provided tuition benefits and stipends for educational pursuits, unemployment benefits, home loan guarantees, and medical care to millions of Veterans returning to civilian life from service during WWII (Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944). As time went on, the Federal Government continued to respond to the needs of transitioning Service members by increasing services and support available in the bundle of benefits provided to Veterans.

In 1955, President Dwight Eisenhower tasked the President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions with studying different types of non-medical benefits granted to Veterans. Commonly known as the Bradley Commission, the group's 1956 report (The U.S. President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions, 1956) established the framework for decades of national policy on the need to support Service members during their transition to civilian life.

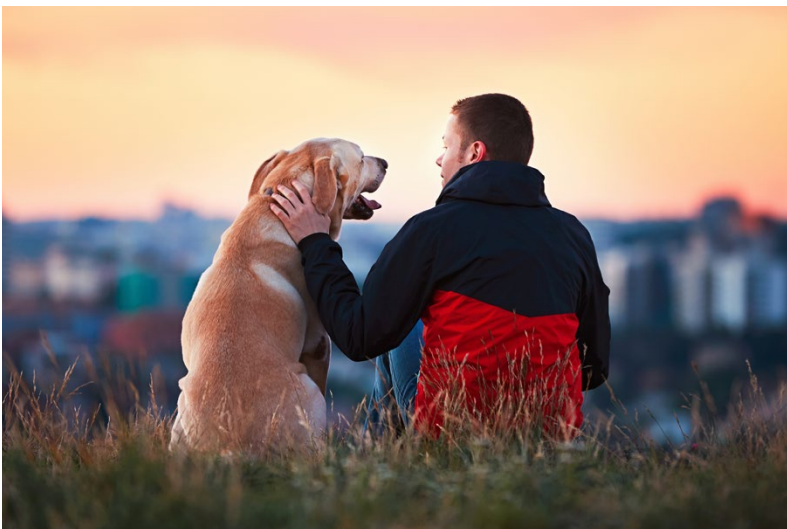
While the original GI Bill® expired the same year the Bradley Commission released its report, it subsequently inspired similar benefits legislation multiple times over the next 40 years to promote Veteran economic development. For example, in 1984—nearly a decade after the compulsory military draft expired in 1973—Congress passed the Montgomery GI Bill® to aid recruitment and retention of an all-volunteer force (Dortch, 2017). This legacy significantly increased the number of Americans with college degrees and substantially contributed to the creation of the American middle class through improved educational opportunity and increased homeownership.



## ***Modern Transition Assistance Takes Shape: The Gulf War to the Present***

*In 1990 and 1991, the United States again faced a massive demobilization of its military—this time, a planned post-Cold War reduction of the military that coincided with the end of the Gulf War (Gordon, 1990).*

The Federal Government responded with new ways to help Service members during their transition to civilian life — ways that transcended Veterans benefits and services. The Fiscal Year (FY) 1991 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) amended Title 10 of the U.S. Code, authorizing a program of comprehensive transition assistance counseling for separating Service members and their spouses (U.S. Congress, 1990). This was a major innovation to the benefit-centric transition support that previous generations of Veterans received.



DoD developed a robust and comprehensive transition assistance program (TAP). Initial elements of the program included: pre-separation counseling, which covered a prescribed list of topics, including available benefits and resources; employment assistance; job training assistance; and other transitional services. The 1991 law established a time frame of 180 days prior to separation from active duty to deliver employment and job training assistance and other transitional services to Service members. It mandated pre-separation counseling (and involved a checklist) for transitioning Service members and offered optional sessions to cover benefits, employment, and job training assistance. Implementation of TAP, as required by FY 1991 NDAA, created the foundation for modern-day interagency collaboration. In 1991, VA, DoD, and DOL signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) (Schroetel, et al., 1997) to develop and smoothly execute transition assistance. USCG (then with the Department of Transportation) implemented the program in 1994. Over time, ED, SBA, and OPM joined the interagency partnership.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (as Title V of the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008, P.L. 110-252) expanded educational benefits for Veterans who served for at least 90 days active duty after September 10, 2001.

### ***Gulf War-Era II Veterans of All Ages Faced High Unemployment in 2011***

|                   | <i>Veterans</i> | <i>Non-Veterans</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| <b>Overall</b>    | <b>12.1%</b>    | <b>8.7%</b>         |
| <b>Ages 18-24</b> | <b>30.2%</b>    | <b>16.1%</b>        |
| <b>Ages 25-34</b> | <b>13%</b>      | <b>9.3%</b>         |
| <b>Ages 35-44</b> | <b>6%</b>       | <b>7.3%</b>         |

Non-Veterans: Defined as never served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Source: "Employment Situation of Veterans – 2011,Z" USDL-12-0493, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, March 20, 2012. [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet\\_03202012.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03202012.pdf)

Known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill®, the law provided for up to 36 months of tuition at public universities and cost-sharing (through the Yellow Ribbon Program) with private schools; increased the period of eligibility to 15 years after end of active duty; and allowed for transfer of unused benefits to a spouse or child (with certain service requirements). In 2010, Congress passed the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010 (Post-9/11 GI Bill® 2.0) (Dortch, 2011), which expanded eligibility to National Guard members; provided a housing stipend for distance learning; and capped benefits for private tuition at \$17,500. Additionally, the law added on-the-job, apprenticeship, flight, and correspondence training and programs to the approved list of education programs.

With each of these pieces of legislation, the Federal Government responded to the evolving needs of Service members separating from the military, resulting in a more comprehensive bundle of benefits.

*In 2011, in the aftermath of a global economic crisis, Veterans of all cohorts continued to experience high unemployment rates, and transitioning Service members — many of whom served in Iraq or Afghanistan — faced increasing challenges as they returned to civilian life.*

During this time, the unemployment rate for Post-9/11 Veterans was 12.1 percent overall, and the younger Post-9/11 Veterans faced unemployment rates of 30 percent (Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

In response to this multifaceted crisis, Congress passed, and President Barack Obama signed, the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. The VOW Act spurred the evolution of transition assistance in recent years and prompted the Federal Government to address Veteran

unemployment by better preparing transitioning Service members for post-separation careers. It directed DOL to assess the skills that Service members acquire in the military and improve how those skills translate into civilian-sector certifications. Furthermore, the VOW Act authorized VA to provide 12-months of retraining assistance to certain unemployed Veterans and 12 additional months of VR&E services and benefits to Veterans who had completed a rehabilitation program and had exhausted their right to regular unemployment compensation and to expand the Special Employer Incentives Program to encourage employers to hire and train eligible Veterans on the job.

The VOW Act mandated that all eligible Service members (with limited exceptions) must participate in the previously optional employment, job training assistance, and benefits sessions, in addition to required pre-separation counseling. As a result of the VOW Act, interagency partners redesigned TAP into a cohesive, modular, outcomes-based program that standardized transition opportunities, services, and training to better prepare the nation's Service members to achieve their post-military career goals (Devlin, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, 2017).



The interagency partners, VA, DOL, DoD, DHS/USCG, SBA, ED, and OPM, signed a Statement of Intent in 2013, executed a MOU in 2014 codifying TAP Governance, and revised the MOU in 2016. The MOU coordinated the execution of the redesigned TAP to provide comprehensive transition benefits and services counseling, help strengthen and expand information, and facilitate support for transitioning Service members (MOU, 2014). The MOU formally outlined the roles of the seven interagency partners.

*In the years following execution of the MOU, the interagency partners, along with other federal partners, continue to expand transition assistance support for transitioning Service members and their families.*

Details of the current state of military to civilian transition support, including established and emerging programs, appear in the following section. In 2018, President Donald Trump signed FY 2019 NDAA into law, which significantly alters TAP for the first time in many years. It includes a process to better identify Service members with a high risk of unsuccessful transition and provide them more intensive pre-separation counseling. In the years ahead, the interagency partners will continue to work together to improve transition services.

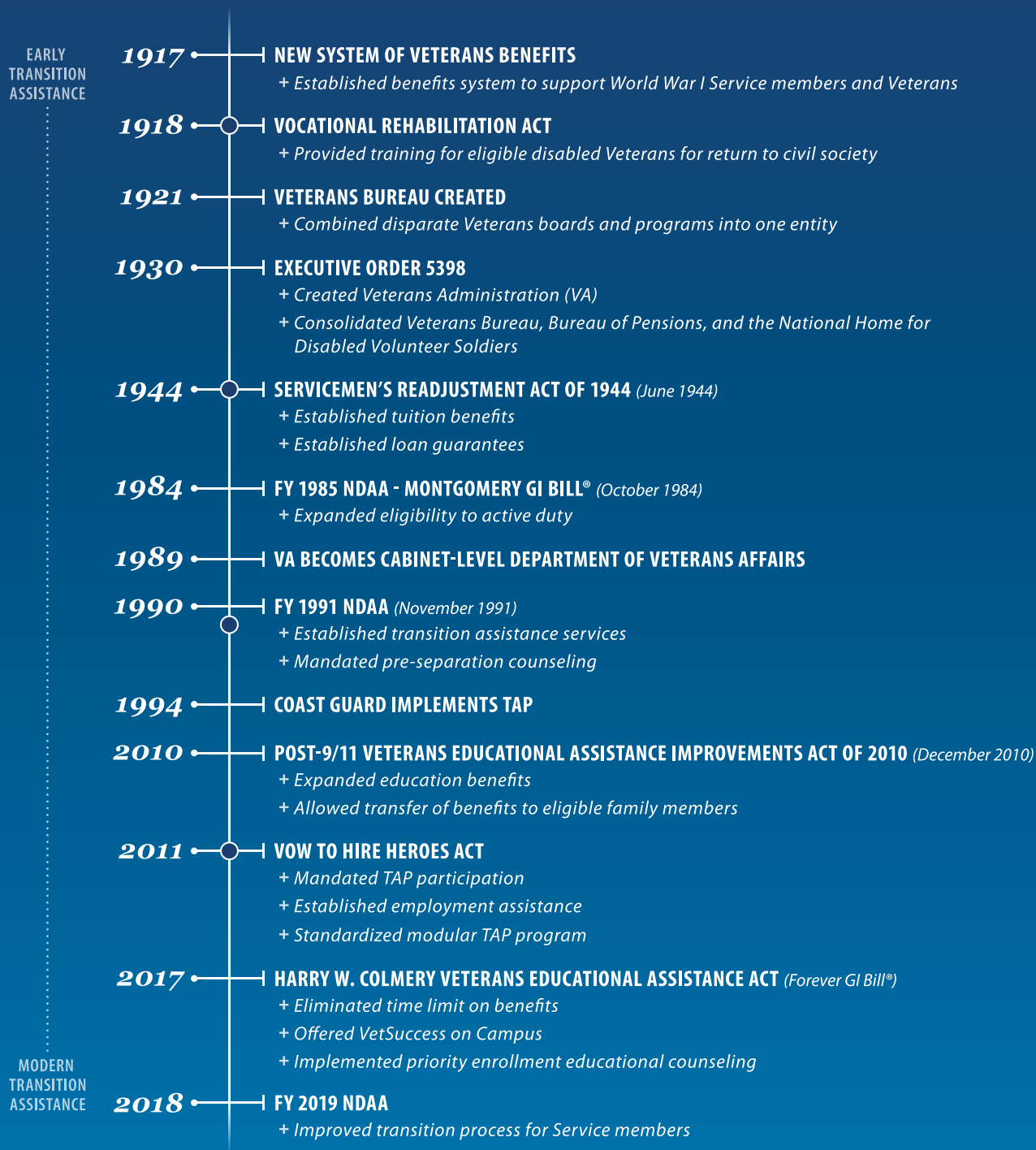
**Figure 3** documents key milestones that facilitated the progression of transition assistance from a bundle of benefits to holistic assistance. The military to civilian transition ecosystem and the approach to supporting each Service member's unique journey continues to evolve to ensure success.





FIGURE 3

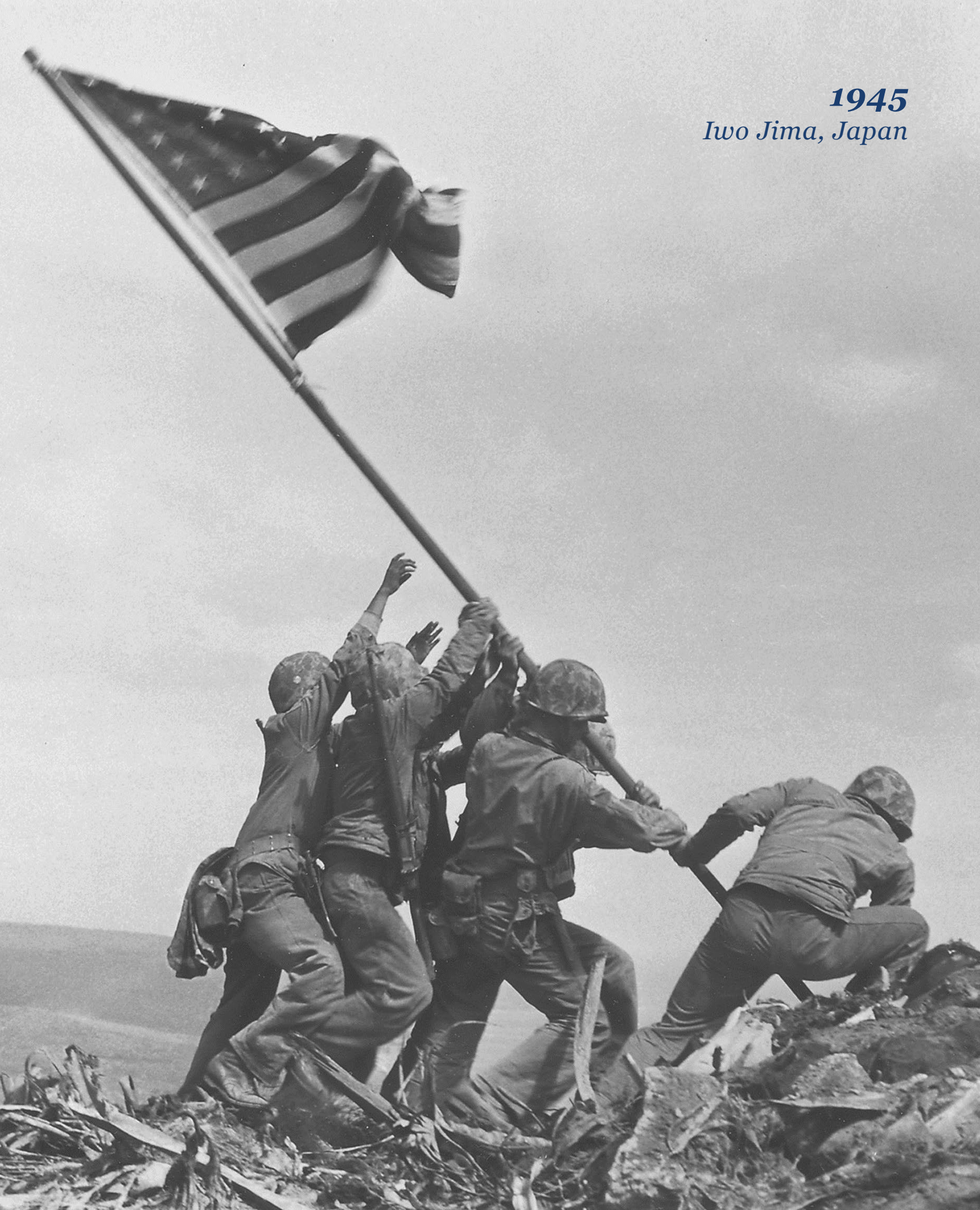
# Key Historical Milestones that Shaped Transition Assistance



○ Period of Massive Military Demobilization (1918, 1944, 1991, 2011)

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**1945**  
*Iwo Jima, Japan*



## Current State of Transition

*Transition assistance evolved over time to meet the changing needs of the Service members and Veterans. Today's approach to transition assistance involves a collaborative effort between federal entities and external stakeholders, driven by the changing needs and challenges of transitioning Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.*



The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is a mandatory component of the military to civilian transition. Initially established in 1991, TAP's scope and requirements were expanded in 2011 by the VOW Act. The interagency partners developed and implemented the TAP curriculum (**Figure 4**), known as Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS), which provides the skill building, resources, and tools that Service members need to meet career readiness standards (CRS).

TAP focuses on supporting transitioning Service members throughout their transition journey. Service members are eligible to begin TAP as early as two years prior to retiring or one year prior to separation.

Beginning with pre-separation counseling, transitioning Service members work with their Commanders and counselors to develop an Individual Transition Plan, which serves as guide throughout TAP completion.

**Transition GPS includes four components:**

- + **Pre-separation Counseling**
- + **Transition GPS Core Curricula**
- + **Transition GPS Tracks**
- + **Capstone**

The core courses cover a range of topics, including personal finance, employment workshops, military skills crosswalk, and benefits available for Veterans. The optional two-day transition training tracks cover higher education; employment and vocational training; and entrepreneurship.

Transition GPS employs current best practices in adult learning theory and enables individuals to apply what they have learned to their personal transition goals (TAP Transition Brochure, n.d.). The curriculum is revised consistently based on feedback, outcome measures and indicators, and research provided by Service members, facilitators, and subject matter experts.

In 2016, DoD and VA designed a new curriculum specific to the needs of National Guard and Reserve members and their families (Devlin, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, 2017). The curriculum was updated again in 2018 based on stakeholder feedback.

Transition GPS has been revised several times since TAP's inception to address changing needs. Early course formats delivered information via thick binders filled with briefing materials. The current curriculum features interactive elements to effectively share information to address the transition journey.



FIGURE 4

## Transition GPS Components

### **Pre-Separation Counseling**

- + *Individual Transition Plan*

### **Transition GPS Core Curriculum**

- + *Transition Overview (administered by DoD)*
- + *Resilient Transition (administered by DoD)*
- + *Military Occupation Code (MOC) Crosswalk (administered by DoD)*
- + *Financial Planning for Transition (administered by DoD)*
- + *VA Benefits Briefings I and II (administered by VA)*
- + *DOL Employment Workshop (administered by DOL)*
- + *Individual Transition Plan (ITP) Review (administered by DoD)*

### **Transition GPS Tracks**

- + *Accessing Higher Education (administered by DoD)*
- + *Career Exploration and Planning Track (administered by DOL)*
- + *Entrepreneurship (administered by SBA)*

### **Capstone Event Exercises with Participating Agencies**



From FY 2013 to FY 2016, VA supported over 1.8 million Service members and family members as a part of TAP (Devlin, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, 2017). In FY 2017, VA provided more than 63,000 events to educate more than 500,000 transitioning Service members and family members as a part of TAP (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

DOL delivers the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW), a three-day workshop that provides employment counseling, information, skills building, and training and education to meet the employment-related CRS. DOL maintains the Office of Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS), which provides critical resources, expertise, and training to assist Veterans in locating and obtaining meaningful

careers at over 2,500 American Job Centers nationwide.

Approximately 200,000 Service members are expected to transition to civilian life each year over the next four years (The Veterans Metrics Initiative, 2018), and after 17 years at war, the United States has the largest population of young Veterans since the Vietnam War (Zimmerman, 2018). A majority of these Post-9/11 Veterans report they need time to figure out what they want to do with their lives (Castro & Kintzle, 2017). For transitioning Service members who are uncertain about the future, the Individual Transition Plan component of the TAP curriculum serves as a guide to set and achieve realistic goals based upon their unique skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities. Using the transition journey map (*Figure 5*) resource throughout the military to civilian transition



## *Voice of the Veteran*

*Approximately 90 percent of transitioning Service members have provided positive feedback about TAP.*

*“The most valuable part of SFL-TAP is the assistance in developing my résumé and learning how to do the interview process... I am now competitive with my civilian peers and know how to market myself.”*

**-Former Army First Lieutenant**

*“The course was truly wonderful —my wife and I both loved it! Really appreciate the passion you put into developing and delivering one of the most important training seminars our Service has to offer.”*

**-Former U.S. Coast Guard Captain**

*“Even if a person is unsure of their career path, there is still value in the exercises. I used the questions and interview techniques for my first interview and I got the job!”*

**-Retired Air Force Officer**

*“The program was very helpful... It brought forth a lot of information and resources that I knew nothing about. I wish that I would have taken this class sooner.”*

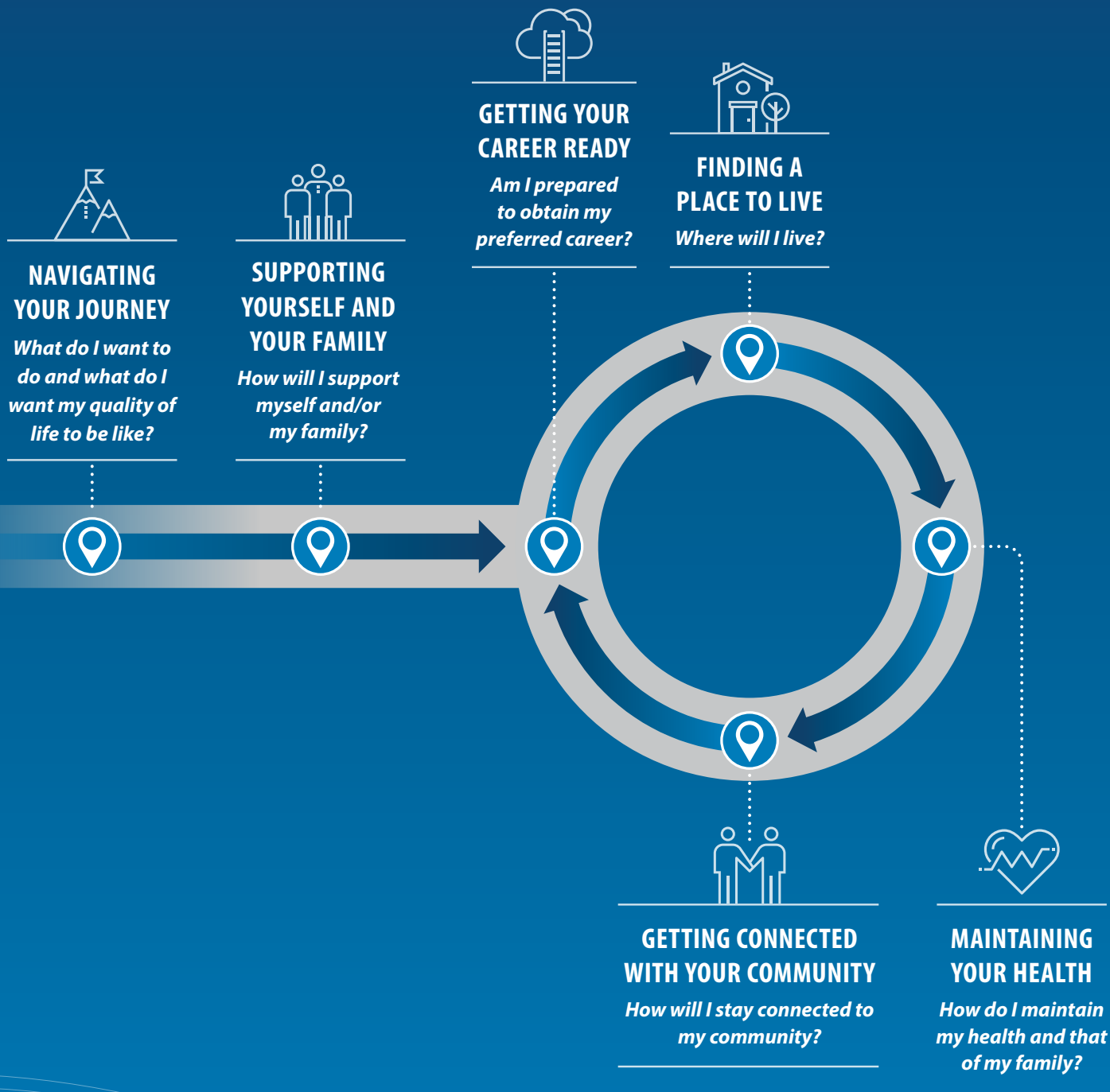
**-Former Navy Petty Officer Second Class**





FIGURE 5

## VA Transition Journey Map



can help Service members identify possibilities for the future. Transitioning Service members have provided positive feedback about TAP and consider it as a useful resource while searching for employment (Transition Assistance Program for Military Personnel, 2016).

*The interagency partners recognize that, in addition to career and educational assistance, transitioning Service members increasingly need support for health care access and resources, including those for mental health and suicide prevention.*

As developed by a council of executives at VA, DoD, and DOL, the MLC transition model emphasizes transition preparation for Service members over the entire span of their military careers, not just during the last few months of their military service (TAP Executive Council: The Military Life Cycle Transition Assistance Program Implementation Plan, 2014). The goal of the MLC transition model is to create a career-ready military and give Service members — from the very start of their military careers — continuous opportunities to prepare for civilian career success (TAP Executive Council: The Military Life Cycle Transition Assistance Program Implementation Plan, 2014). The benefits are three-fold: this model enhances Service members' readiness and ability to progress in their military careers; it provides skills and tools they can use to position themselves for their eventual return to the private sector; and is a recruitment and retention tool.

Emphasizing the alignment of military skills with civilian skills empowers the pool of highly trained Veterans to contribute to the nation's civilian workforce (TAP Executive Council: The Military Life Cycle Transition Assistance Program Implementation Plan, 2014). A 2017 RAND Corporation study underscores the assertion that, "Veterans have a great deal to offer to potential civilian employers, including valuable nontechnical skills, such as leadership, decisionmaking,

being dependable, and attention to detail." The study, sponsored by DoD's Transition to Veterans Program Office, culminated in publication of a prototype toolkit designed to help Veterans communicate to employers about nontechnical skills developed in the military. The study also produced an employer-focused toolkit to help civilian employers understand the full value Veterans can bring to their organizations.

*In addition to TAP, there are multiple programs, services, resources, and opportunities to prepare and assist transitioning Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.*

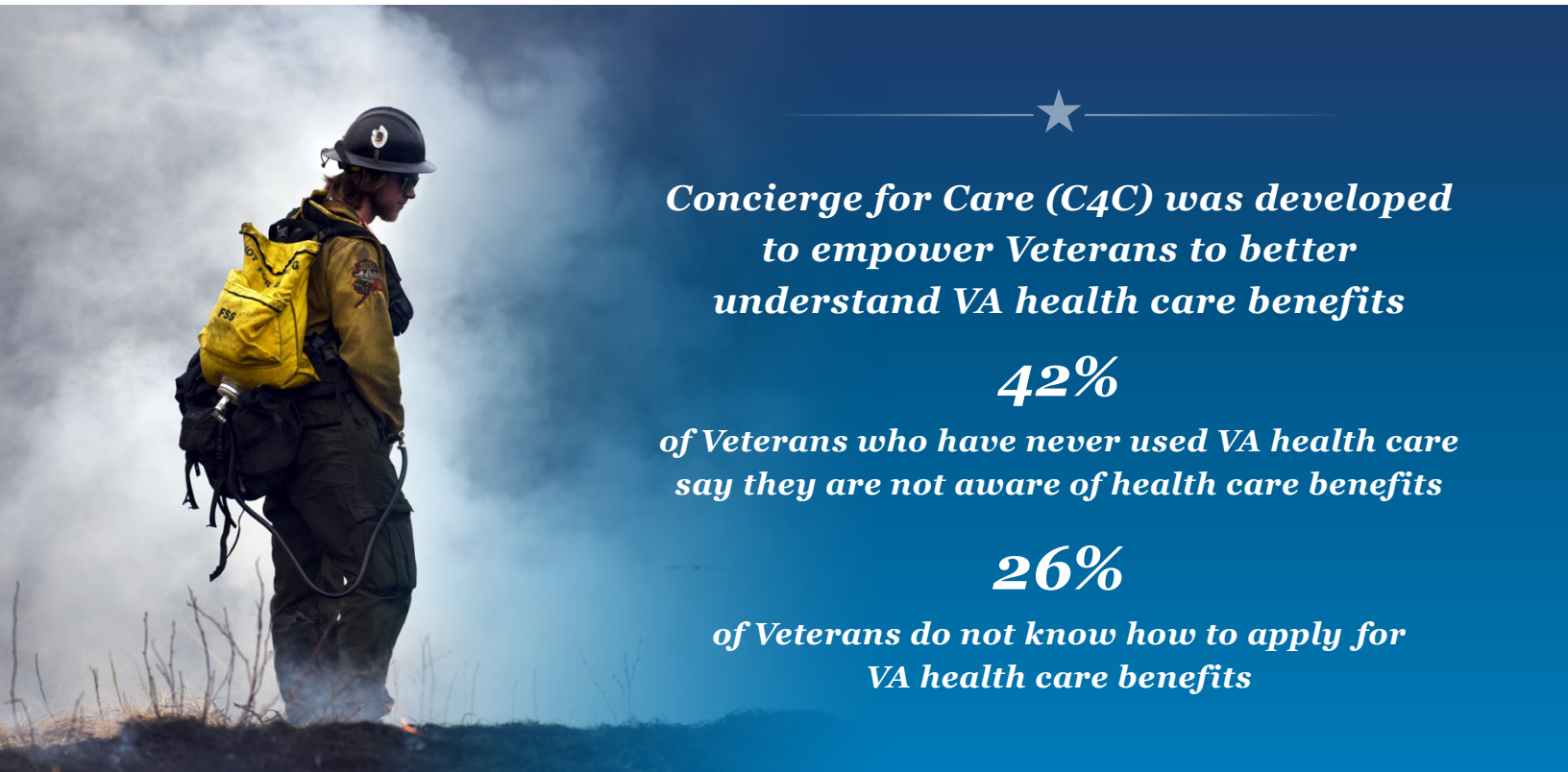
- + ***In 2014, DoD and VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) piloted a career skills training session*** that leverages DoD's SkillBridge program to guide Veterans into post-service employment as Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) at VA. VSRs serve as VA disability claims processors. Many Veterans in the program have experienced the disability claims application process themselves, which gives them a unique dual-sided perspective on and incentive to improve the process. The program, known as the Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC) today, boasts a hiring rate above 85 percent and graduated hundreds of Veterans from the program successfully (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- + ***Every VA Medical Center offers a Transition and Care Management Team*** to support Post-9/11 Veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), or Operation New Dawn (OND). The Transition and Care Management Team provides Case Managers to help coordinate patient care activities and navigate the VA health care system (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).
- + ***VA's Vet Center Program provides community-based readjustment counseling*** to eligible Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and

survivors to facilitate successful transition from military to civilian life. Originally established in 1979 to support Vietnam Veterans, program eligibility expanded multiple times (1991, 1996, 2003) to include Veterans from armed conflicts and wars after the Vietnam era. The Vet Center Call Center is one of the many support services provided. 1-877-WAR-VETS is a 24-hour, confidential call center where combat Veterans and their families can talk about their military experience or other issues they face as they readjust to civilian life. Vet Centers are located throughout the United States and in the territories of U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

+ ***In 2017, VA launched its Concierge for Care (C4C) health care enrollment initiative*** to connect with transitioning Service members within 30 days of separation to educate and empower them to better understand their VA health care benefits. According to the latest National Survey of Veterans, more than 42 percent of Veterans who have never used VA

health care say they were not aware of VA health care benefits and over 26 percent do not know how to apply for VA health care benefits (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). C4C agents personally help Veterans navigate VA health care enrollment application processes to include providing help over the phone and scheduling their first VA medical appointment.

- + ***Military Service Organizations (MSOs)*** are a critical component of the overall framework of care for Service members throughout all phases of their military service, especially during the transition to civilian life and Veteran status.
- + ***Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)***, and Veteran Peer Organizations, are private organizations that provide resources and support to Veteran peer groups in a variety of ways, including claims and benefits, training, counseling, and related programs. VSOs may advocate certain issues and some Veteran peer groups act in an advisory capacity on policy issues impacting Veterans.



★  
***Concierge for Care (C4C) was developed to empower Veterans to better understand VA health care benefits***

***42%***

***of Veterans who have never used VA health care say they are not aware of health care benefits***

***26%***

***of Veterans do not know how to apply for VA health care benefits***

*These programs and organizations represent a small sample of the resources available to transitioning Service members. In addition to VA, other federal agencies, including ED, DOL, OPM, and SBA, offer specific programs for Veterans.*

The challenges facing Service members continue to evolve with the impacts of each deployment. Over time, some of those challenges were addressed through pensions, health care, and education benefits,

but other challenges remain. And new challenges emerge for transitioning Service members: the demographics are changing, mental health issues and suicide risks are increasing, the economic and employment landscape for Veterans continues to evolve, and transitioning Service members are seeking more community-based resources for support. The following sections describe the key drivers and how the transition ecosystem continues to respond to those drivers.



## ***Key Drivers Shaping the State of Transition***

*The military to civilian transition is a dynamic landscape with a multitude of entities — from government, private, and nonprofit sectors — committed to supporting transitioning Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.*

The needs of transitioning Service members are changing due to the monumental shifts in both their individual profiles (age, education, family status, health status) and the civilian environment (government policy, economic conditions, technology, community support). Formal research and evaluation efforts are uncovering detailed information on feedback from and outcomes for transitioning Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. These shifting aspects of supply, demand, and impact are shaping the future state of transition. Some compelling key drivers shaping the future of transition are detailed in the following sections.

## ***Changing Demographics of Transitioning Service Members***

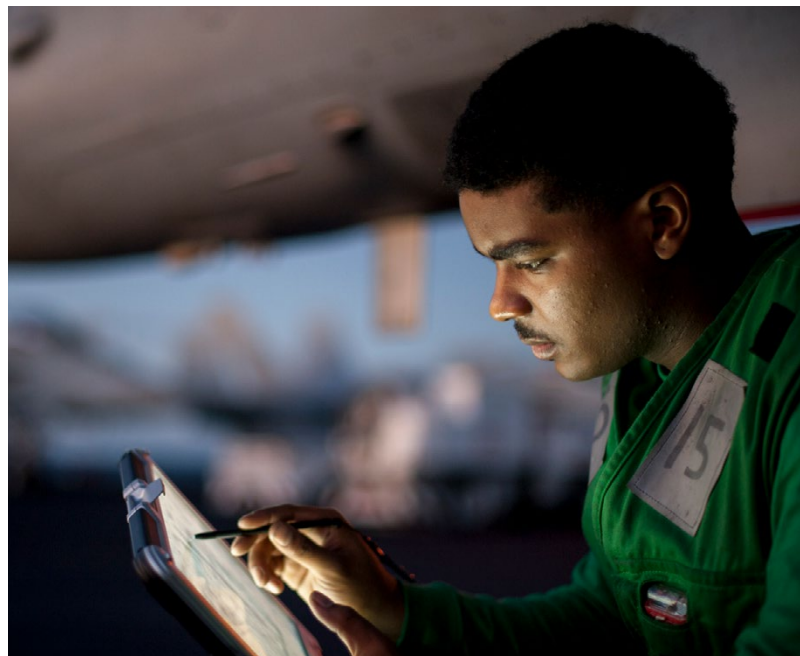
Today's all-volunteer force varies in gender, age, employment, education history prior to active duty service, and health status (including mental health). More than 4.4 million individuals have served in the military since September 11, 2001, making up the Post-9/11 cohort of Veterans. This cohort is younger, more racially diverse, and includes more women than any other period of military service in history (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

Military experience affects every Service member differently, resulting from a unique combination of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), rank, active duty experiences, and service-connected disability, among other factors.

When planning for separation, Service members may require specific assistance based on their character of discharge and post-separation plans, such as where they plan to live in the United States or around the world. Currently, 25 percent of all Veterans (5.2 million) live in rural communities. Many rural Veterans live in isolated areas with few employment, education, or health care options available to improve their health and provide economic security. This trend of rural migration is expected to continue (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018) (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2016).

A higher percentage of Post-9/11 Veterans used compensation and pension, education, home loan, and vocational rehabilitation than their counterparts (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2016).

Interagency partners monitor the demographic shifts among the transitioning Service member and Veteran populations to refine structure, content, and mode of delivering transition assistance. For example, in 2018, VA redesigned its TAP sessions to provide a more interactive learning experience.



The sessions focus on helping Service members make informed decisions about their health care, employment, housing, and other benefits. DoD and DOL also updated their curricula in 2018.

Ongoing data collection and analysis of demographic shifts, such as in **Figures 6 and 7**, enables VA to respond by designing personas, profiles, and pathways. These tools are essential to meet transitioning Service members where they are on their journey and to customize benefits information, services, and support for a successful transition. This understanding also influences the development of public-private partnerships, especially at the local level.

### ***Proactive Support for At-Risk Service Members***

*The interagency partners provide added transition support to Service members deemed most at risk of not obtaining employment due to factors such as a lack of postsecondary education, low military rank, or an unclear post-transition plan.*

Other at-risk populations that receive increased consideration during TAP include Service members who: fail to meet one or more Career Readiness Standard (CRS)<sup>1</sup>; lack a post-transition housing or transition plan; receive other than honorable discharge; are in the services' Wounded Warrior Programs; are experiencing an abbreviated transition period; lack a health care plan or access to health care; lack stable social relationships. As such, Service members with identified risks, or who do not have a viable Individual Transition Plan (ITP), must receive a warm handover to the appropriate interagency partner such as VA or DOL. The warm handover addresses the specific gaps for transitioning Service members (Transition Assistance Program Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.).

It may mean setting up a one-on-one assistance appointment between the at-risk Service member and a Benefits Advisor to customize a plan for a successful transition (Guide for Transition Counselors: Script on Pre-separation/Transition Counseling, 2018). VA and DoD coordinate to provide the warm handover and counseling resources as part of the briefings for transitioning Service members. The recently signed FY 2019 NDAA provides additional support to strengthen the warm handover process.

To further support at-risk transitioning populations, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13822: Supporting Our Veterans During Their Transition from Uniformed Service to Civilian Life in January 2018. The EO intends to address the gap in access to care, especially mental health services, that Service members face during their transition to Veteran status. DoD, VA, and DHS developed a Joint Action Plan that describes how the agencies will provide seamless access to mental health care and

### ***The Joint Action Plan sets forth goals to better support transitioning Service members***

- + ***Goal 1: Improve actions to ensure all transitioning Service member are aware of and have access to mental health services.***
- + ***Goal 2: Improve actions to ensure the needs of at-risk Veterans are identified and met.***
- + ***Goal 3: Improve mental health and suicide prevention services for individuals that have been identified in need of care.***

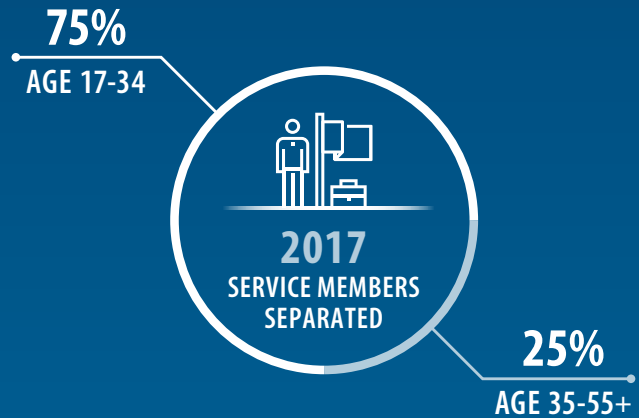
<sup>1</sup> Career Readiness Standards (CRS) are a set of career preparation activities Service members must complete to depart from active duty and be considered "career ready." The standards provide Service members with a clear, comprehensive set of activities to ensure they have the training and skills needed to transition successfully into civilian life. All Service members who are retiring, separating, or being released after 180 days or more of continuous active duty must complete CRS activities. Commanders or their designees verify CRS completion during a mandatory event called Capstone.

FIGURES 6 AND 7

## Key Statistics of Changing Demographics

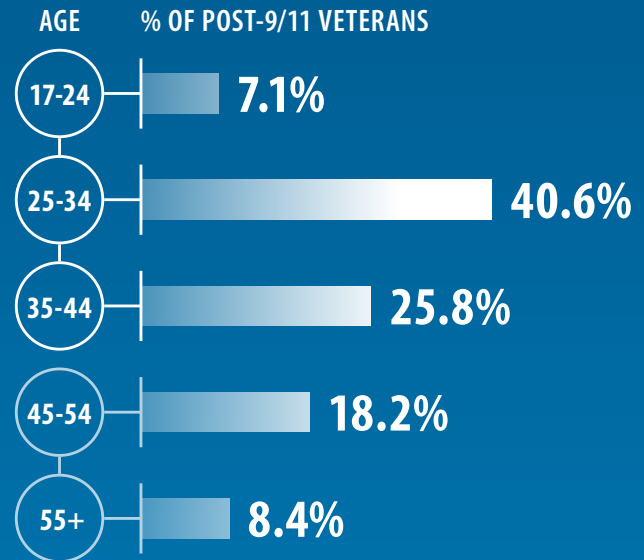
Approximately **75%**  
of Service members  
who separated in 2017  
were ages 17-34.

In 2018, VA revised its TAP curriculum to better meet the needs of this younger, more diverse population.



Approximately **75%**  
of Post-9/11 Veterans  
are under age 45.

A higher percentage of Post-9/11 Veterans used compensation & pension, education, home loan, and vocational rehabilitation than their counterparts.



Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



***“Mental health services are critical for people showing signs of suicide risk in their thoughts or behavior, but we must go beyond engaging mental health providers and involve the broader community.”***

**-Joint Action Plan for Supporting Veterans During Their Transition From Uniformed Service to Civilian Life, May 2018**







suicide prevention resources for transitioning Service members, with an emphasis on access to care during the critical first year following discharge, separation, or retirement from military services. The Joint Action Plan is organized around a goal-based framework informed by the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) prevention strategies and will ensure transitioning Service members and Veterans have knowledge of, and access to, mental health care and suicide prevention resources.

## ***Suicide Prevention and Risk***

*A crucial component of Veteran wellness and successful transition is mental health and suicide prevention. Suicide is a serious public health issue that causes unmeasurable pain to communities, their families, and individuals nationwide.*

Statistics show that Veterans are especially vulnerable. In 2015, Veterans accounted for 14.3 percent of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults. After adjusting for age, suicide rates increased for Veteran and non-Veteran populations from 2005 to 2015. In 2016, the rate of suicide was 1.5 times higher among Veterans compared with non-Veteran adults, after adjusting for age and sex. For male Veterans, the suicide rate was 1.4 times higher compared with non-Veteran adult men, after adjusting for age.

For women Veterans, the suicide rate was 1.8 times higher compared with non-Veteran adult women, after adjusting for age (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). From 2005 to 2016, there was a lower increase in the suicide rate among Veterans receiving care from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) (13.7 percent) than among Veterans who were not receiving



***“By building a process to help our Service members discover a post-military path to empowerment, we set them on the trail opposite from the desolation and despair that currently encumbers our Veteran community.”***

**- Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Suicide Prevention, 2016**



health care from VHA (26.0 percent) (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). Veterans with a history of homelessness are five times more likely to commit suicide (Hathaway, 2018).

*The literature reviewed for this report indicates early prevention and intervention is key to reducing these statistics. Therefore, it is vital that the military to civilian process prepare each Service member to embrace an empowering and fulfilling life after the military.*

To be most effective, this preparation should begin early in the Service member's military career: "By building a process to help our Service members discover a post-military path to empowerment, we set them on the trail opposite from the desolation and despair that currently encumbers our Veteran community" (Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Suicide Prevention, 2016).

**Efforts underway to address these issues include:**

- + **The Joint Action Plan for EO 13822** outlines the actions to ensure knowledge of and access to mental health care and suicide prevention resources for transitioning Service members and Veterans.
- + **Implementing the MLC transition model** to support Service members at critical touch points throughout their military career, like major life events, the transition process, and their post-transition integration into communities as civilians.
- + **In response to EO 13822 mandating access to mental health care** for 12 months following discharge for every transitioned Service member, TAP now includes information about the mental health resources available during the first year post-separation and beyond. These efforts will help at-risk populations and potentially decrease rates of homelessness and suicide.



- + **The updated TAP curriculum includes "facilitated registration,"** which encourages transitioning Service members to submit their online application for VA health care before their formal transition, limiting gaps in coverage of health services.
- + MLC training modules, such as the Community Integration Resources, increase Service members' awareness of and access to community resources that provide local, integrated support to Veterans once they have fully transitioned.

Collaboration on this issue occurs within the broader ecosystem. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides technical assistance, consultation, and training to address the behavioral health needs of America's military members and their families. In partnership with TRICARE, DoD, and VA, SAMHSA facilitates innovative community-based solutions that foster access to evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery support services for military Service members, Veterans, and their families at risk for or experiencing mental or substance use disorders by providing state-of-the-art technical assistance, consultation, and training (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.).

## ***Emerging Economic and Employment Opportunities for Veterans***

*The Bradley Commission's 1956 report established the framework for decades of national policy on the need to support Service members during their transition to civilian life.*

The Commission noted that the main obligation of the government to nondisabled Veterans is to assure their successful reintegration into civilian life, should be discharged at the time when the aid is needed most — soon after service — rather than by benefits in later life. It is clear that the readjustment benefit program made a greater contribution to the successful readjustment of Veterans than would have been made by any system of uniform payments to all Veterans. The Bradley Commission set the stage for subsequent legislation to promote Veteran economic development. Decades later in 2011, the VOW Act required transitioning Service members to begin thinking about employment and job training assistance earlier in their military careers.

### **EMPLOYMENT**

In November 2011, the Veteran unemployment rate for Gulf War-era II Veterans was 12.1 percent. By 2017, the unemployment rate for Gulf War-era II Veterans was 4.5 percent, demonstrating a reduction by more than half (Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). From an income perspective, military service is associated with sizable long-run earnings gains, however, there is an initial dip in earnings upon separation from the military (Borgschulte, Daugherty, Martorell, & Miller, 2013). Many Veterans face challenges in finding employment aligned to their skill set and often accept entry-level positions with low wages, leading to financial issues and instability

(Castro & Kintzle, 2017) (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014). In addition, employment statistics indicate that certain subgroups — such as demographic, geographic, and age groups — have trouble transitioning into quality educational institutions and potentially rewarding careers (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). These populations include women, minorities, Post-9/11 Veterans, and younger Veterans (ages 18-24), and those with service-connected mental disabilities (Christensen, McMahon, Schaefer, Jaditz, & Harris, 2007) (Hiring Our Heroes, 2016).

### ***Employment Growth Trends for Gulf War-Era II Veterans***

**12.1%**

***Unemployment rate in 2011***

**4.5%**

***Unemployment rate in 2017***

There are identified challenges that may impact a Veteran's ability to gain meaningful employment. One such challenge is the cultural impact of transitioning from a military "employer" to a civilian career. As Service members transition out of the military and into civilian life, they are leaving an organization with a well-defined culture of expectations and behaviors that trained them in very specific skills. When seeking post-military employment, they may find themselves unprepared for employment in the civilian world. For example, research indicates that some Veterans have unrealistic expectations of the transferability of the skills obtained while serving and feel frustrated by having to "start over" in entry-level positions (Zogas, 2017).

*Many private sector companies recognize the value of Veterans, and, as such, offer programs and incentives, including military skills translation, to attract and retain talent. For example:*

- + ***A trucking and transportation logistics services company whose workforce is 28 percent Veterans*** earned the rank of best company for Veterans in 2016. Over a quarter of all employees are Veterans, in part because the company accepts driving certifications through the Military Skills Test Waiver initiative (Hess, 2017). The Military Skills Test Waiver partnership between DoD, DOL, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and state licensing offices allows Veterans to obtain a commercial driver's license based on their military experience.
- + ***An American multinational corporation*** that designs, manufactures, and sells airplanes, rotorcraft, rockets, satellites, and missiles offers personal and professional network support and skills transition opportunities that ease the burden of the military to civilian transition process. With a workforce that is composed of 15 percent Veterans, this company offers skill development and training for workforce transition; supporting recovery and rehabilitation programs that focus on post-



traumatic stress, mental and physical injuries, and suicide prevention; and employee volunteerism in veteran-specific communities.

- + ***A freight hauling railroad company, whose workforce is 17.5 percent Veterans***, hosts regional Military Leadership Hiring programs to place Veterans in management positions and sponsors UPVETS, which provides support, networking, and mentorships to Veteran employees (Hess, 2017). Their recruiters connect with military transition and education offices; actively participate in career fairs, information sessions, and employer panels; and serve on local military committees and boards.
- + ***A Fortune 500 financial service company, whose workforce is 15 percent Veterans***, set a 2018 goal that 30 percent of new hires be Veterans or military spouses. This company offers a 12-month Veteran Transition Leadership Development program, which offers classroom training and executive mentorship (Hess, 2017).

Interagency partners have made various program changes in recent years to begin addressing the outlined challenges that transitioning Service members face in obtaining and keeping meaningful employment. DOL, through the leadership of its Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS [www.dol.gov/vets](http://www.dol.gov/vets)), facilitates a number of programs and activities during and after transition that are aimed specifically at helping Veterans and their spouses obtain meaningful employment. DOL is a significant contributing partner responsible for the employment assistance portion of TAP.

***These include (but are not limited to):***

- + ***The Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW)***, a three-day workshop that provides employment counseling, information, skills building, training, and education to meet the

employment-related CRS. Programmatic changes in response to the VOW Act made the program easier to manage, increased consistency, and provided DOL the capabilities to manage the large volume of participants.

- + ***Partnerships with the American Job Centers, state-level installation centers, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies*** provide support in finding employment at the local level. DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) funds the American Jobs Centers (AJC) system. The AJC system is both a local and a nationwide resource, and Veterans receive priority of service at those AJCs.
- + ***Providing information and resources to spouses*** on employment and license transfers.
- + ***The Honoring Investments in Recruiting and Employing American Military Veterans Act of 2017*** (HIRE Vets Act) recognizes employer efforts and promotes the recruitment, hiring, and retaining of Veterans in the corporate sector.
- + ***In partnership with the Army, DOL facilitates employment workshops*** tailored for the Wounded Warrior Program. The employment workshop for Wounded Warriors is delivered over an extended period to allow wounded Veterans to learn at their own pace.

***Additional activities from interagency partners include (but are not limited to):***

- + ***OPM provides guidance and clarity to Service members*** on employment, including the federal hiring process, buying back military time, and the federal application process. OPM tracks federal hiring practices, finding in FY 2016 there were 635,266 Veterans employed by the Federal

Government (Office of Personnel Management, 2017). This includes an increase of 11,000 Veterans employed by the Executive Branch agencies compared to the previous year (Office of Personnel Management, 2017). OPM drives hiring culture for the Federal Government and federal contractors to more actively engage agencies in outreach efforts to target Veterans.

- + ***Navy partners with several organizations to assist Sailors with their career development interests,*** resulting in Onward-to-Opportunity (O2O), Veterans in Piping (VIP) apprenticeship program, and employment skills training provided by companies like Amazon and Microsoft.
- + ***Air Force provides enlisted members with a regionally accredited associate's degree*** through the Community College of the Air Force that leverages Air Force technical training, industry credentialing for select programs, and civilian academic institution coursework to earn an Associate of Applied Science degree in an Airmen's Air Force job. The Air Force also partnered with industry for a variety of apprenticeship programs to provide training and employment in technical careers.

***Outside of the interagency partners, the Federal Government provides additional support for transitioning Service members and Veterans, including:***

- + ***U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the Veterans Employment Program Office (VEPO)*** in 2009 as a result of President Obama's EO 13518 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.).
- + ***Hire Heroes USA provides personalized job search assistance*** for transitioning Service members, Veterans, and spouses (Hire Heroes USA, n.d.).

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Veteran entrepreneurship is a growing trend, with over 2.5 million Veteran-owned business in the United States (comprising about 9 percent of business ownership) (Maury & Boldon, 2017). Military service gives Veterans an advantage for self-employment; Veterans are 45 percent more likely to be self-employed than non-Veterans (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2012). While this path has been successful for many, Veteran entrepreneurs still face unique challenges. For example, geographic mobility and limited civilian community connections during their military service can lead to different foundations for their entrepreneur journey.

Challenges include lack of social capital (limited or no network), lack of business and management skills, and difficulty developing mentorships with other business owners. More research is required to better understand the barriers that Veterans face and how service organizations can best support them (Boldon, Vasquez Maury, Zahra, & Van Slyke, 2018).



*Examples of actions the interagency partners have taken to address these challenges and better support transitioning Service members on the path to entrepreneurship include:*

- + **SBA developed the Boots to Business (B2B) program**, a partnership with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. B2B educates transitioning Service members and spouses interested in starting their own business about the challenges small businesses face. Upon completing the B2B track, SBA provides Service members the opportunity to be matched to a successful businessperson as a mentor.
- + **SBA runs the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Program** to provide entrepreneurial development services such as business training, counseling, and resource partner referrals to transitioning Service members, Veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, and military spouses interested in starting or growing a small business. Twenty-two organizations participate in this cooperative agreement and serve as VBOCs (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d.).

*Support programs exist within the broader transition ecosystem, for example:*

- + **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service**, funded in part by USDA, provides Armed to Farm workshops to give Veterans the opportunity to learn about sustainable small-scale farming practices and visit working agribusinesses to learn from them first-hand (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.).
- + **Syracuse University provides the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV)**, a program designed to leverage the skills, resources, and infrastructure of higher education to offer training in entrepreneurship and small business management to Post-9/11 Veterans and military family members who serve in a caregiver role to a Veteran with a service-connected disability (Institute for Veterans and Military Families , n.d.).

## **EDUCATION**

Veterans are increasingly taking advantage of the GI Bill® and transitioning from military service to college and university. When compared to civilians, Veterans have a different pattern of educational attainment, depending on age. Young Veterans are much less likely to have completed college than young civilians, but the Veterans continued their education later in life. By ages 35 to 44, slightly more Veterans than civilians (36 percent compared with 32 percent) have at least a bachelor's degree (Congressional Budget Office, 2017). Age demographics aside, studies have shown that Veterans are more likely to graduate than their peers, with graduation rates for student Veterans far outpacing civilian students in similar age groups and life situations (Student Veterans of America, 2017).

A recent study, *Missing Perspectives: Service members' Transition from Service to Civilian Life*, "highlights significant barriers to realizing the



★  
*When compared to civilians, Veterans have a different pattern of educational attainment, depending on age.*

*A 2017 study concluded that Veterans are more likely to graduate than their peers, with graduation rates for student Veterans far outpacing civilian students in similar age groups and life situation.*



potential individual and societal gains from our country's massive investment in Veterans' education. For example, while most Veterans perceived that their military-learned skills and leadership would contribute positively to an educational setting (84 percent), a majority (53 percent) voiced the belief that the colleges and universities they attend (or aspire to attend) do not recognize the value of these specific and military-learned skills.

"Further, Veterans cite inadequate financial resources or a financial burden (56 percent); conflict with personal or family obligations (28 percent); expiration of GI Bill® benefits prior to degree completion (25 percent); issues related to wellness or disability (23 percent); and conflict between employment and school (22 percent) as barriers to educational persistence and attainment" (Fay, Maury, & Zoli, 2015).

In 2017, Congress passed the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (Forever GI Bill®), which led to changes such as the elimination of the 15-year limitation for use of education assistance benefits and authorized use of benefits for independent

study at technical schools, and restored eligibility to Reservists who had lost it under the Reserve Education Assistance Program. Additional program changes include the establishment of pilot programs for high technology courses, 100 percent benefits to Purple Heart recipients, extension of the Yellow Ribbon Program to Fry Scholarship and Purple Heart recipients, and authorization of an additional nine months of benefits to eligible recipients enrolled in STEM programs.

*In addition to changes mandated by the Forever GI Bill®, and in an effort to address these challenges, the interagency partners developed or enhanced the following programs:*

- + **ED partners with various organizations**, such as Veterans Upward Bound and Student Veterans of America, and just had a grant competition to help Veterans enroll in and complete a program of postsecondary education.
- + **DoD administers the Accessing Higher Education track** as part of the Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) curriculum. This course helps Service members pursuing higher education and focuses on topics such as how to achieve academic success, research and compare institutions, align education to career goals, and finance higher education.
- + **The DoD SkillBridge initiative** promotes the civilian job training authority available for transitioning military Service members. Service members meeting certain qualifications can participate in civilian job and employment training, including apprenticeships and internships with government or industry partners (Department of Defense, n.d.).
- + **DOL offers resources to military spouses** on license transfers associated with relocation (<https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses>).



+ *As part of a joint service initiative to promote civilian credentialing opportunities* for military Service members, and in keeping with DoD guidance to increase efficiency by combining joint functionality, each branch provides online credentialing known as Credentialing Opportunities On-Line, or COOL. Each COOL site helps Service

members find information on certifications and licenses related to their Military Occupational Specialties, enhancing the Service member's ability to transition to the civilian workforce.



*In a 2017 study, Veterans identified some of the major barriers associated with educational persistence and attainment:*

**56%**

*Inadequate financial resources or other financial burdens*

**28%**

*Conflict with personal or family obligations*

**25%**

*Expiration of GI Bill® benefits prior to degree completion*

**22%**

*Conflict between employment and school*

**23%**

*Issues related to wellness or disability*



## ***Importance of Community and Public-Private Partnerships for Transition Success***

*A key component of the MLC transition model focuses on increasing awareness of and access to transition resources at the community level. The goal is to ensure transitioning Service members have access to resources in their community and to provide the skills necessary “to navigate the sea of goodwill” (Berglass & Harrell, 2012).*

Complementing TAP curriculum with additional support at the community level is of critical importance. A 2010 seminal white paper written by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s Office of Reintegration noted that no single agency or organization has the manpower, resources, or intellectual capital to provide a lifetime of care and support to our military family (Berglass & Harrell, 2012). Partnerships with a common goal, committed to best practices, and operating in a scalable way in the communities to which Veterans return are critical to reintegrating Veterans as successful, healthy citizens (Berglass & Harrell, 2012).

The same report analyzed a large variety of community-based models across the nation and determined that each one revolves around the specific needs of their local population. According to the analysis, the most effective models for delivering appropriate local care and services to Veterans are based at credible, local, nonprofit organizations that coordinate and deploy resources and stakeholders to address the needs and recognize the skills of Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors (Berglass & Harrell, 2012).



***In further support of increased emphasis on community integration and community resources, the 2014 State of the American Veteran study out of the University of Southern California found that:***

- + Over two-thirds of today’s Veterans reported difficulties adjusting to civilian life and said that they do not know where to go or who to contact to get help.***
- + Nearly 8 in 10 Service members leave the military without a job, expecting to quickly find meaningful employment that provides adequate remuneration.***
- + Nearly 1 in 4 employed Veterans in Los Angeles County, California, are earning at or below the poverty level. More than three-quarters of those Veterans without a job are not receiving assistance in finding one. At the same time, Veterans report needing time to figure out what they want to do in life once they leave the military.***
- + More than 40 percent of Service members leave the military without having identified permanent housing.***

The study recognizes that TAP makes significant progress in addressing these issues, and emphasizes the strong need for integration of and increased access to community resources to ensure continued support and success of Service members once they have fully transitioned (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014).

*Public-private partnerships are another key mechanism for ensuring transitioning Service members and Veterans have awareness of and access to resources that facilitate a successful transition into civilian life.*

Per VA policy, a public-private partnership is a “voluntary, collaborative, and working relationship with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in which the goals, structures, governance, roles, and responsibilities are mutually determined to deliver the best possible services” (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Other definitions of public-private partnerships from Federal Government, private industry, and nonprofit sectors are similar in goals but vary in terms of geographic scope, duration, defined relationships, and desired outcomes. Each definition agrees, however, that public-private partnerships

allow organizations to better leverage their existing expertise and efficiently meet the challenges of new, urgent, and emerging Veteran needs. Such partnerships help organizations quickly identify and adopt new ways of doing business by incorporating creative and innovative ideas from external stakeholders (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).

Studies indicate that one of the leading gaps in Veterans and military family services is not a lack of resources or capacity, but a lack of collaboration, coordination, and collective purpose (Armstrong, McDonough Jr., & Savage, Driving Community Impact, 2015). The *Expanding Public-Private Partnerships* white paper further emphasizes the value of public-private partnerships: “None of the myriad organizations, foundations, or government offices can tackle every obstacle alone. Expanded public-private partnerships can reinvigorate local organizations, help navigate through a complex bureaucratic landscape, and synchronize efforts to affect real change. In a fiscally constrained environment, close coordination across the Veteran and Military Family landscape in pursuit of a unified effort becomes critical within the inter-agency, private, and philanthropic landscapes. Coordination and synchronization of

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*“None of the myriad organizations, foundations, or government offices can tackle every obstacle alone. Expanded public-private partnerships can reinvigorate local organizations, help navigate through a complex bureaucratic landscape, and synchronize efforts to affect real change.”*

- The Office of Warrior and Family Support,  
Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff



similar efforts offers an opportunity for a timely unity of effort — one that could more comprehensively address Veteran and Military Family needs across the entire population” (The Office of Warrior and Family Support, Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff).



*Interagency partners already leverage public-private partnerships to support transitioning Service members and plan to increase these partnerships in the future. Examples include:*

- + **VA, DoD, and DOL partner with the National Resource Directory (NRD)**, a resource website that connects wounded warriors, Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors to programs and services that support them.
  - NRD provides access to services and resources at the national, state, and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation, and community reintegration (National Resource Directory, n.d.).
- + **VA partners with numerous organizations and agencies via public-private partnerships** to enable awareness of community resources.
  - For example, the development of the Community Integration Resources (CIR) MLC module will instruct Service members where to get help within their community. This MLC module will explain to Service members how to research

organizations that provide resources to Veterans. The module does not focus on accessing resources, but instead prepares and equips Service members to find and use resources for themselves.

- VA will leverage public-private partnerships for data gathering and analysis to help Service members make meaningful community connections.
- + **VA, as part of its FY 2018 – FY 2024 Strategic Plan, “will ensure Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors know about and understand the full range of Veteran benefits, care, and services available to them through VA**, as well as resources available from other Federal, State, Tribal, Local Government entities, and Veteran servicing organizations,” to facilitate Strategy 1.2.1: VA Helps Veterans Navigate the Full Array of Care, Benefits, and Services (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).
  - In addition, VA “will advocate for Veterans by exploring and establishing partnerships to address Veterans’ needs, enrich their experience, augment options for Veterans, drive innovative practices, and enhance Veteran outcomes” to facilitate Strategy 1.2.3: VA Advocates for Veterans (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).
- + **SBA’s Boots to Business program** partners with Syracuse University’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF). IVMF is the sole instructor for Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) offerings of the entrepreneurship track. IVMF and Mississippi State University now offer follow-on virtual tracks to the entrepreneurship track for OCONUS Service members.
- + **The Marine Corps partners with American Corporate Partners (ACP)** to provide additional resources for transitioning Service members, such as live chats on LinkedIn.

+ ***DOL partners with American Job Centers, state-level installation centers, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies*** to provide support in finding employment at the local level. DOL partners with U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation on Hiring Our Heroes program, which launched in March 2011 as a nationwide initiative to help Veterans, transitioning Service members, and military spouses find meaningful employment opportunities.

As the challenges that Veterans face evolve, the Federal Government and nongovernmental organizations are proactively working together to provide countless options for transitioning Service members during their military to civilian transition. Today, Veterans have many options and resources at their fingertips: they can start a business or find a job in addition to continuing their education. These options for transitioning Service members are the foundation for providing a holistic, integrated approach to transition.



# Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time

*Considering the multitude of factors that affect successful transition to civilian life, the interagency partners collaboratively define transition success as a transitioning Service member that has obtained employment; started a business; or enrolled in an educational program.*

These factors are part of the transitioning Service members' overall success. The interagency partners strongly believe that the impact on Veterans beyond the 12 months post-TAP completion is likely to be influenced by much more than TAP; therefore, the most valid measures of the effectiveness of TAP are those that focus on the first 12 months post-separation. The interagency partners actively listen to Veterans and are developing methods for evaluating long-term outcomes to continually improve the military to civilian transition experience.

## Listening to the Voice of the Veteran

Understanding the military to civilian transition from a Veteran's perspective and that of their families, caregivers, and survivors provides a unique lens into the most important needs of transitioning Service members. The Transition GPS Participant Assessment collects feedback from transitioning Service members and spouses who complete TAP. Veteran feedback is incorporated into VA programming, such as revising the TAP curriculum and partnering with community organizations to scale programs in communities across the nation.

Listening to the voice of the Veteran sheds light on the challenges that Veterans face as they leave the military and creates opportunities to improve transition assistance. In addition to the Transition GPS Participant Assessment feedback, the interagency partners seek input from transitioning Service

members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors through ongoing dialogue such as listening sessions and Military to Civilian Summits. Numerous studies and reports use Veteran feedback as the basis for their research and subsequent recommendations.

### Observations gathered from published studies and reports include:

- + **Many Veterans find it challenging to identify support services within their community** after they have transitioned (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014) (Castro & Kintzle, 2017).
- + **Recent research suggests that Veteran families transitioning to civilian life desire program content that includes assistance for family members and children** in the form of information, practical skills, support, and parenting programs (Castro & Kintzle, 2017) (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014) (Guo, Pollak, & Bauman, 2016).
- + **A support network of both family and peers is an important foundation** for navigating the military to civilian transition (Ahern, et al., 2015).



+ ***Mental and physical health issues impede a successful transition and can impact all facets of civilian life***, such as obtaining employment or education, finding housing, and accessing necessary care. One-third of Veterans surveyed have experienced suicidal thoughts (Castro & Kintzle, 2017) (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014).

We recognize that no two transitions are the same and that success is personal. Listening to the voice of the Veteran provides critical input in shaping the future of transition assistance to ensure that each Veteran has a personal transition success story.

## ***Evaluation Efforts and Long-Term Outcomes***

*Evaluation efforts of TAP provide critical data needed to make evidence-based decisions as to what improvements should be made and how best to make them.*

As part of this effort, TAP undergoes periodic reviews and examinations — not only by implementing agencies, but also through reviews by our independent oversight partners, including the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Offices of Inspector General. These reviews and their subsequent reports generate external feedback to continuously improve TAP and the entire military to civilian transition experience.

To further understand the needs of transitioning Service members and to strengthen the program, interagency partners will implement a post-separation assessment to collect reliable feedback on post-separation outcomes (Devlin, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, 2017).

The interagency partners are developing a shared approach for evaluating the performance of transition



assistance services. The overarching framework for TAP evaluation is a logic model with distinct methods and tools for evaluating processes, outputs, and outcomes of TAP. Process and output evaluations were developed early and are the most mature; outcome indicators and future outcome measurements continue to be defined (FY 2017-FY 2018 TAP Interagency Evaluation Plan).

Canada provides an example of other countries' long-term outcome evaluations. In 2010, 2013, and 2016, Veterans Affairs Canada conducted the Life After Service Survey (LASS), which evaluated several factors related to Veterans transition experiences.

In the 2016 study, 52 percent of Canadian Veterans reported an easy adjustment to civilian life; however, 32 percent reported difficult adjustment due to low rank at release, less than 10 years of service, unemployment, and chronic health conditions (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2018).

Once data from the U.S. planned post-separation assessment is available, it may be possible to compare long-term outcomes between the United States and Canada to identify lessons learned and opportunities for improvement in transition assistance (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2018).

The interagency partners acknowledge the importance of tracking and measuring long-term outcomes associated with implementation of military to civilian transition programming, MLC transition model, TAP modules, and transitioning Service members support activities. To achieve this, the partners are currently creating a Long-Term Roadmap to assess and report on long-term outcome measures that link to

employment and income, entrepreneurship, education and training, VA benefits and support services, and program processes such as warm handovers for at-risk individuals. The Roadmap will encompass not just the assessment of the programs but all the associated supporting activities, such as data sharing, research activities, and other functions, to allow the continuous improvement of the assessment framework.





## Conclusion

*This report establishes that the military to civilian transition occurs within a complex and dynamic network of relationships, programs, services, and benefits.*


This network, or ecosystem, includes transition planning and assistance efforts by individual Service branches, the interagency Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and community resources delivered through local government, private industry, and nonprofit organizations. This ecosystem delivers a holistic approach to help transitioning Service members and their families succeed at a critical juncture in their life journey and set them up for future successes.

The programs, services, and methodology of military to civilian transition assistance continue to evolve with

data-driven research and stakeholder experiences, and VA and the interagency partners are committed to doing the right thing at the right time in supporting the military to civilian transition.

We acknowledge the key drivers noted in this report and continue to leverage data from academic studies, government statistics, industry reports, and input from community organizations to improve the processes and outcomes for transitioning Service members and their families.

Our nation has built a legacy of lasting service and support to our nation's heroes, and that legacy includes a commitment to supporting a smooth and successful navigation from military service to civilian life.

A photograph of a young woman in a military uniform, wearing a dark blue beret and a green flight jacket, saluting with her right hand. She is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in uniform.

*“As we continue to focus on how we can improve the lives of Service members, Veterans, their families, and their caregivers, VA remains committed to ensuring a path to whole health and economic stability for those transitioning to civilian life. We’re proud of the progress we’ve made, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration with community organizations and our many Federal agency partners in the years ahead. We know that we can’t solve every problem, and we know that no two transitions are the same—but we are certain that we can continue improving transition to meet the needs of those who have served our country, and of those families who served alongside them.”*

**-Margarita Devlin, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits  
November, 2018**



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## Your Emergency Resources

### Get help right now

Contact the resources below to get immediate help for yourself or a friend.

These resources are designed to support Veterans during difficult times.

| <i>What services can VA provide?</i>   | <i>Visit us online</i>  | <i>Give us a call</i>   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Veterans Crisis Line</b>  | <a href="http://www.veteranscrisisline.net">www.veteranscrisisline.net</a><br><i>(click "chat")</i>       | <b>(800) 273 - 8255</b><br><i>(press 1)</i><br><b>text 838255</b><br><i>24 hours a day/<br/>7 days a week</i>           |
| <b>National Suicide Prevention Lifeline</b>  | <a href="http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org">suicidepreventionlifeline.org</a><br><i>(click "chat")</i> | <b>(800) 273 - 8255</b><br><i>24 hours a day/<br/>7 days a week</i>   |
| <b>Military Sexual Trauma Support</b><br><i>(VA offers free counseling services for Military Sexual Trauma survivors. You don't have to be enrolled in VA Health Care to access MST services.)</i> | <a href="http://va.gov/find-locations">va.gov/find-locations</a><br><i>(find a VA facility)</i>           | <b>Call your local Medical Center or Vet Center.</b><br><i>At Medical Centers, ask to speak to the MST coordinator.</i> |
| <b>National Call Center for Homeless Vets</b>  | <a href="http://www.veteranscrisisline.net">www.veteranscrisisline.net</a><br><i>(click "chat")</i>       | <b>(877) 424 - 3838</b><br><i>24 hours a day/<br/>7 days a week</i>   |
| <b>Women Veterans Call Center</b>  | <a href="http://www.womenshealth.va.gov">www.womenshealth.va.gov</a><br><i>(click "chat")</i>             | <b>(855) VA WOMEN</b><br><i>(855) 829 - 6636</i><br><i>M-F, 8 AM-10 PM EST</i><br><i>Sat, 8 AM-6:30 PM EST</i>          |
| <b>VA Caregiver Support Line</b>   | <a href="http://www.caregiver.va.gov">www.caregiver.va.gov</a>  | <b>(855) 260 - 3274</b><br><i>M - F, 8 AM-8 PM EST</i>  |

### Where can I find in person help?

To locate your nearest VA Medical Facility, Regional Benefits Office, Regional Loan Center, Vet Center, National Cemetery, and other VA facilities, visit [va.gov/find-locations](http://va.gov/find-locations)

### Hear from other Veterans

To hear stories from Veterans who sought help, visit [www.maketheconnection.net](http://www.maketheconnection.net)



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