

**Identifying the Unmet Needs of Texas Veterans and Their Families:**

**A Statewide Needs Assessment**

Prepared By

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**Executive Summary**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) administered by the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) needed objective and reliable data to gain a better understanding of the unmet needs of Texas veterans and their families. The FVA provides grant funding to a variety of organizations dedicated to providing veterans in Texas with services that they need and deserve. However, the FVA has limited resources and the TVC contracted the Texas State University Center for Social Inquiry (CSI) to conduct a needs assessment to inform how they can best distribute funds to have the maximum impact on improving veterans' lives.

Obtaining direct input from Texas veterans and their families through surveys was highly important in understanding their needs and the CSI used multiple data sources to supplement and validate the survey findings. For this project, conclusions are based on the analysis of 5 sources of data:

1. Surveys of veterans and family members conducted by web and mail.
2. Focus groups of veterans.
3. Inventory analysis to identify the characteristics of organizations that serve Texas veterans and their families.
4. Data about the demographic and geographic composition of Texas veterans obtained from the *Veterans in Texas: A Demographic Study* report by the Texas Workforce Investment Council.
5. A review of the literature and other documentation of previous research about the needs of veterans.

Using all data sources, the CSI team identified funding priorities based on three aspects of veteran service providers: type of service(s) provided, geography, and sub-population of veterans served. These findings and recommendations based on these findings are summarized below.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Overall Priorities

The data for this report covered three main dimensions of needs. In order of estimated priority, these dimensions were: (1) types of services, (2) geographic areas, and (3) characteristics of veterans and families served. These dimensions were prioritized in this order based on the variability across the categories within each dimension. Dimensions where the individual categories had more variation suggested a more unequal distribution of needs and therefore a potentially higher overall priority. However, this analytic approach is limited and the available data did not support a more definitive approach. Also, the decision as to which dimension of need to prioritize is largely a matter of TVC's organizational policy goals rather than something that can be conclusively determined by data analysis.

### #1 - Priorities based on types of services

For veterans:

1. Funding programs that provide assistance with **rent, mortgage and utilities** will address an important need that is largely unmet, is perceived as relatively unavailable, and has a large impact on quality of life.
2. While the need for **transportation** was not highly prevalent, transportation needs are largely unmet and have a large impact on veterans' quality of life. Some data support that transportation is a particularly important need for veterans in rural areas.
3. **Living expenses other than housing or food and legal services** are also relatively prevalent needs that are largely unmet and perceived as relatively unavailable.
4. Funding programs that focus on **mental health and addiction** will continue to address the most widespread and serious need among veterans.
5. While medical care and higher education services for veterans (and sometimes their families) are provided at the federal level, some veterans encountered frustration related to getting good information about these services and getting access to these services. The TVC should consider prioritizing programs and organizations that provide **information and referral services** so that veterans and their families can receive the full benefit of these services.

For families of veterans:

1. While availability of assistance with **rent, mortgage, and utilities and other living expenses** is perceived as good and many families report they are receiving these types of assistance, there remains a prevalent need.
2. While many families do not need **child care and child mentoring**, those that do need this type of assistance have trouble finding services.

3. As with child care and child mentoring, the need for **home improvements/modifications** is somewhat low and has a relatively low impact on quality of life, but this need often goes unmet.

## **#2 - Geography-based priorities**

1. Funding organizations that **operate statewide** will likely have the widest impact. However, more locally-focused organizations may be able to provide more in-depth services with equivalent funding.
2. When considering funding for organizations that serve specific regions (or counties), funding priorities should be:
  - **Areas with high numbers of veterans**
  - **Areas with high concentrations of veterans**
  - **Organizations serving the East Texas and Alamo regions**
  - **Organizations that meet key needs in rural areas**

## **#3 - Priorities based veteran/family characteristics**

For veterans:

1. Analysis of survey data indicated that funding organizations and programs that focus on **women, younger veterans, and low-income** veterans should be a priority.
2. While the geographic analysis suggested that the **Gulf Coast region** is relatively well-served, veterans from this region reported a higher level of need for services.
3. Preliminary data from the focus groups suggest that veterans have a particularly high need for a variety of services for themselves and their families during their **transition from military to civilian life**. In addition to the stress that can accompany this transition, many military benefits have a lag and getting the correct paperwork to demonstrate eligibility can be a challenge. Funding programs that target veterans in transition could address an important but overlooked need.

For families of veterans:

1. As with veterans, data analysis of family member survey responses suggested prioritizing organizations and programs that serve younger **family members (under age 45)** and households with low incomes. Unlike veterans where women had higher levels of need, male and female family members showed about the same level of need
2. The geographic analysis of available services indicated that the **North Texas region** was relatively well-served, family members in this region indicated a higher level of need for services.
3. While veterans in rural areas reported slightly lower need levels than those in urban areas, **family members of veterans in rural areas** reported considerably higher need levels, suggesting that funding organizations and programs serving family members in rural counties should be a priority.

## SELECTED DATA TABLES

### Average level of need by need type

Need	Veteran average	Family average
Mental Health services (including addiction and substance abuse)	<b>1.91</b>	1.54
Food	1.54	1.70
Transportation (including assistance with transportation expenses)	1.54	1.65
Child Care	1.30	1.21
Child Mentoring	1.23	1.24
Legal Assistance	1.67	1.45
Assistance with finding employment or jobs	<b>1.81</b>	<b>1.72</b>
Living expenses other than housing or food (clothes, furniture)	1.76	<b>1.75</b>
Paying rent, mortgage, or utilities	<b>1.80</b>	<b>2.02</b>
Home improvements or modifications due to disability	1.45	1.41

### Factors associated with high need for specific services

	Veterans	Families
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Texas Region</li> <li>• Ages 35-54, Female</li> <li>• Separated 8-14 Years Ago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Texas Region</li> <li>• Age 35-44 Or 65+</li> <li>• Rural County</li> </ul>
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$25K</li> <li>• Gulf Coast Region, Age 18-34</li> <li>• Reserve/Guard Service</li> <li>• Separated 0-3 Years Ago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$10K</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$25K</li> <li>• Gulf Coast Region, Age 18-34</li> <li>• Reserve/Guard Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Texas Region</li> </ul>
Child Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$10K</li> <li>• Age 18-44</li> <li>• Kids In Household</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Separated 4-7 Years Ago,</li> </ul>	NONE
Child Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$10K Or \$25K-\$40K</li> <li>• Age 35-44</li> <li>• Kids In Household</li> <li>• Separated 4-7 Years Ago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age 35-44</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$10K</li> <li>• Separated 4-7 Years Ago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income \$10K-\$25K</li> <li>• North Texas Region</li> <li>• Age 55-64</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$25K</li> <li>• Gulf Coast Region</li> <li>• Age 18-34, Served 8-14 Years</li> <li>• Separated 4-7 Years Ago</li> <li>• Served In Coast Guard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income \$10K-\$25K</li> <li>• North Texas Region</li> </ul>
Living Expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$40K</li> <li>• Gulf Coast Region</li> <li>• Age 18-34</li> <li>• Served 8-14 Years</li> <li>• Separated 0-7 Years Ago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Less Than \$10K</li> <li>• North Texas Region</li> </ul>