

★ CALIFORNIA'S

Veterans Workforce 2020



Executive Summary

In 2020, an estimated 18.5 million veterans lived in the United States, including 1.5 million that consider California their home.¹ Among the state's veterans, 512,000 have served in combat or an active war zone.² The largest numbers of California's veterans last served in the Army, followed by the Navy and Air Force branches of the U.S. armed forces.³ In terms of total active duty in the armed forces, most veterans served either 2 to 3 years (428,200) or 3 to 4 years (417,800).⁴

Key Findings in 2020

State-to-State Comparison

- Nationwide, the largest number of veterans lived in the following states: Texas (1.6 million), California (1.5 million), Florida (1.4 million), Pennsylvania (757,400), and Ohio (716,100). These five states accounted for 31.8 percent of the nation's veteran population in 2020.

Skills and Educational Attainment of Veterans

- In California, thirty-seven percent of the state's veterans held a bachelor's degree or higher in 2020. Levels of educational attainment within this segment of veterans is as follows: bachelor's degree (324,800), master's (151,700), doctorate (PhD) (35,500), and professional (MD, DDS) (28,700).

Veterans in the Workforce

- In January 2020, 723,400 veterans participated in the state's civilian labor force and by December the number stood at 664,900, a net decrease of 58,500.⁵
- In 2020, the number of employed veterans declined across most industries, as a result of the pandemic, with the largest net losses in employment occurring within the professional and technical services; construction; public administration; arts, entertainment, and recreation; durable goods manufacturing; and health care and social assistance industries.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average.

² U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Veterans Supplement, August 2020.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, et al., August 2020.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, et al., August 2020. Total active duty: 6 months to 2 years (116,100), 2 to 3 years (428,200), 3 to 4 years (417,800), 5 to 9 years (246,900), 10 to 14 years (51,700), 15 to 19 years (less than 100), 20 years and over (116,800).

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average.

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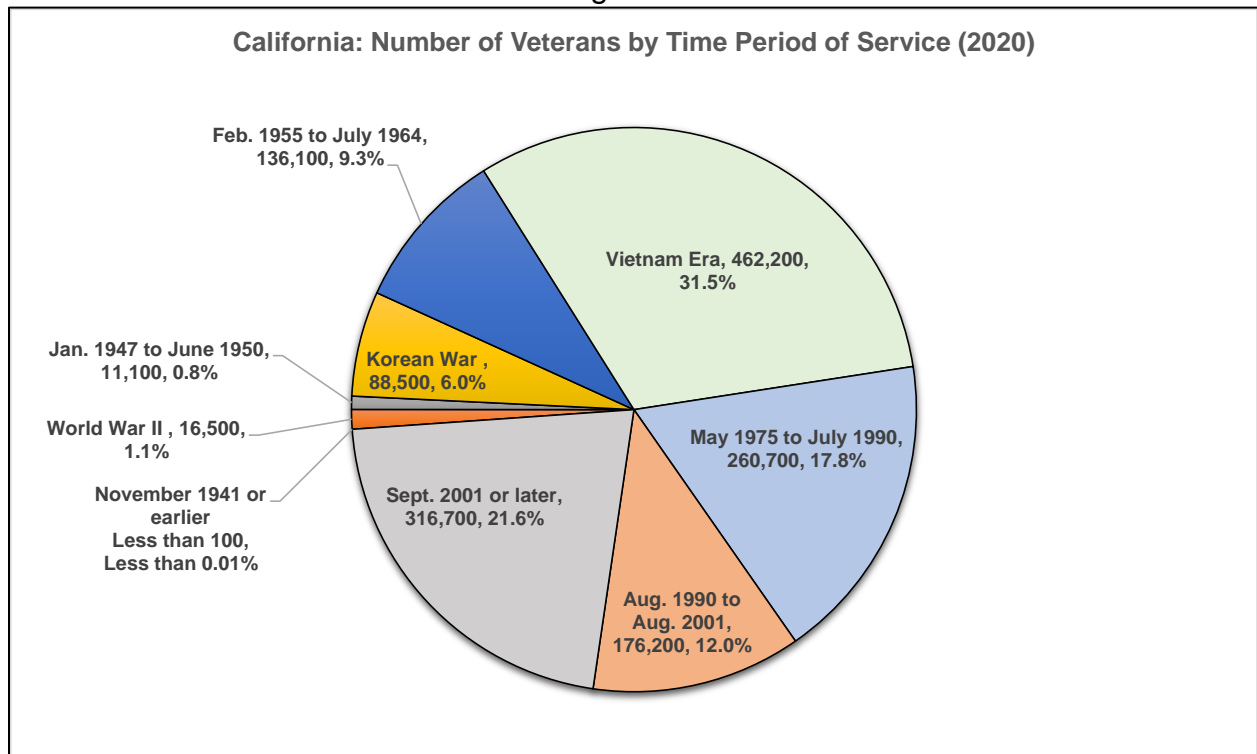
State-to-State Comparisons and Time Period of Service

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 18.5 million veterans lived in the United States in 2020. Nationwide, the largest number of veterans lived in the following states: Texas (1.6 million), California (1.5 million), Florida (1.4 million), Pennsylvania (757,400), and Ohio (716,100).⁶ These five states accounted for 31.8 percent of the nation's veteran population in 2020.

In 2020, California held a 7.9 percent share of the nation's veteran population and veterans 55 years and older accounted for more than two-thirds of the state's veteran population (67.2 percent). An age breakout of California's veterans is as follows: 986,600 were 55 years and older, 320,000 were between the ages of 35 and 54, and 161,500 were less than 34 years old.

In terms of time period of service, California's veterans have served in military operations from earlier than November 1941 to present day conflicts abroad (i.e., Afghanistan). One out of every three (31.5 percent) of the state's veterans served during the Vietnam Era (August 1964 – April 1975). More recently, one out of every five veterans (21.6 percent) had a tour of duty during the time period of September 2001 or later. The share of veterans who served prior to 1950 continues to shrink as this segment of the population ages. Time periods of their service is as follows: World War II (1.1 percent), January 1947 to June 1950 (0.8), and November 1941 or earlier (less than 0.01 percent).

Figure 1



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

⁶ See Table 1 (p. 8).

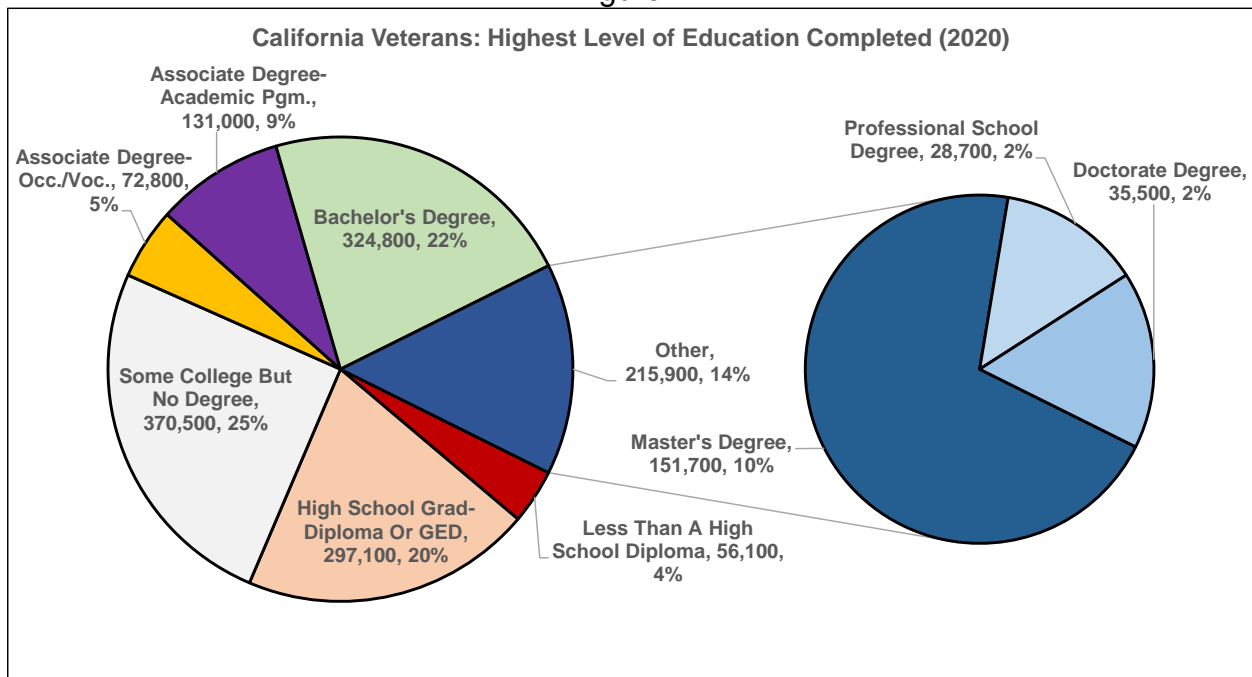
Skills and the Educational Attainment of Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that nearly 200,000 U.S. service members transition from the military back into their civilian communities each year. The men and women of our armed forces are better trained, better educated, and better prepared for transition than ever before.⁷ Research suggests that veterans with bachelor's degrees enter the workforce with twice as much total work experience than nonveterans with bachelor's degrees.⁸

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans bring a host of qualities and traits that today's employers demand from their respective workforce. These qualities and traits include, but are not limited to: trust, self-motivation, confidence, being mission-driven, having gold-standard work ethic, loyalty, respect, ability to improvise, discipline, teamwork, and the ability to lead. These traits coupled with technical skills and varying levels of education make this segment of California's workforce highly valued by employers.

In California, 540,700 of the state's veterans, or 37 percent, held a bachelor's degree or higher in 2020, including 324,800 with a bachelor's degree, 151,700 with a master's, 35,500 with a doctorate (Ph.D.), and 28,700 with a professional degree (M.D., D.D.S.). In addition, one out of every four veterans (25 percent) had attended some college, but had not completed a degree (370,500).

Figure 2



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average, total will not sum due to rounding.

⁷ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The Military to Civilian Transition 2018. [The Military to Civilian Transition 2018](#)

⁸ LinkedIn. Veteran Opportunity Report. 2019. [Veteran Opportunity Report](#)

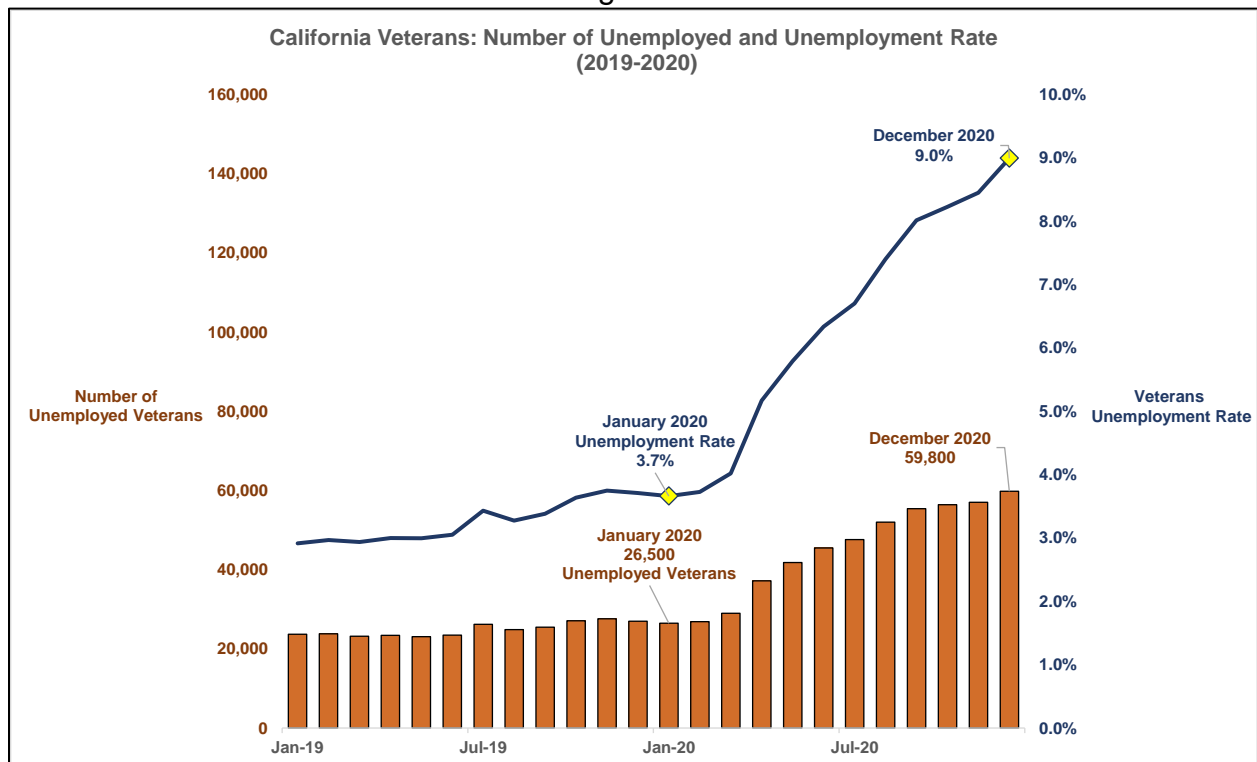
California Veterans in the Civilian Labor Force

In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 recession, the veterans civilian labor force experienced significant changes that ranged from declines in the number of employed to increases in its respective unemployment rate. During the public health shutdown period, which extended from February 2020 through April 2020, the state's economy lost 2.7 million jobs and its unemployment rate rose to 16.0 percent. All segments of the state's workforce were impacted by the severe economic conditions caused by the pandemic.

The civilian labor force is the number of people who are either working (employed) or actively looking for work (unemployed). In January 2020, 723,400 veterans participated in the state's civilian labor force and by December the number stood at 664,900, a net decrease of 58,500.⁹ In addition, the number of employed veterans experienced a net decrease of 91,800, going from 696,900 to 605,100 over the 12-month period. As the number of employed declined over this period, the number of unemployed more than doubled, rising to 59,800 by the end of the year (Figure 3).

The unemployment rate is an economic indicator used to assess the economic health of the state economy during periods of economic expansion and contraction. The unemployment rate represents the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the labor force. The unemployment rate for veterans rose by 5.3 percentage points between January 2020 (3.7 percent) and December 2020 (9.0 percent).

Figure 3



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average.

California Veterans: Industries and Occupations

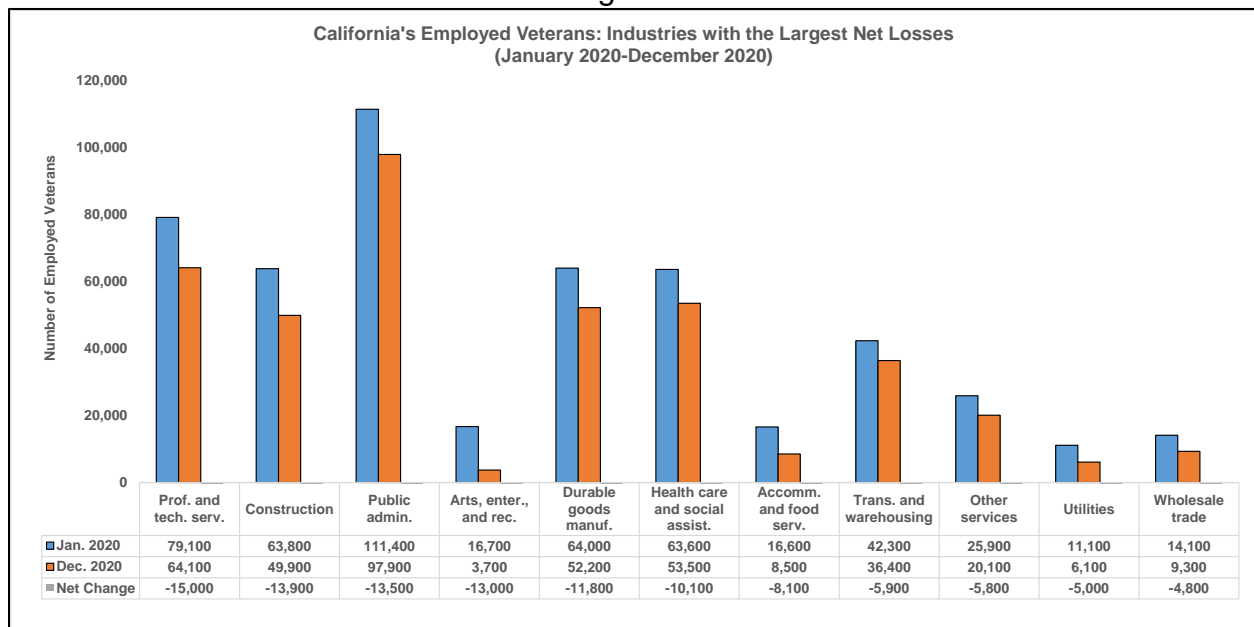
Industries

In 2020, California issued public health safety orders to contain the spread of COVID-19 that impacted all industries across the state. As a result of mandated business closures and/or limitations on operations, all of California’s major industry sectors experienced a loss of jobs. Accordingly, between January and December, the largest net losses in employment were within the professional and technical services; construction; public administration; arts, entertainment, and recreation; durable goods manufacturing; and health care and social assistance industries.

Before the pandemic, veterans acquired employment in these aforementioned industries because their educational background, technical skills, and personal traits meshed well with the demands of the jobs within these industries. However, firms within these industries, as well as others, were required to downsize as a result of lost revenue and reductions in customer foot traffic associated with public health restrictions.

Between January 2020 and December 2020 the number of employed veterans declined from 79,100 to 64,100 within the professional and technical services industry. This industry provides products and services that include, but are not limited to: computer design; architectural engineering; legal; and accounting services. In addition, the number of employed veterans decreased by at least 13,000 within the construction (13,900); public administration (13,500); and arts, entertainment, and recreation (13,000) industries (Figure 4).

Figure 4



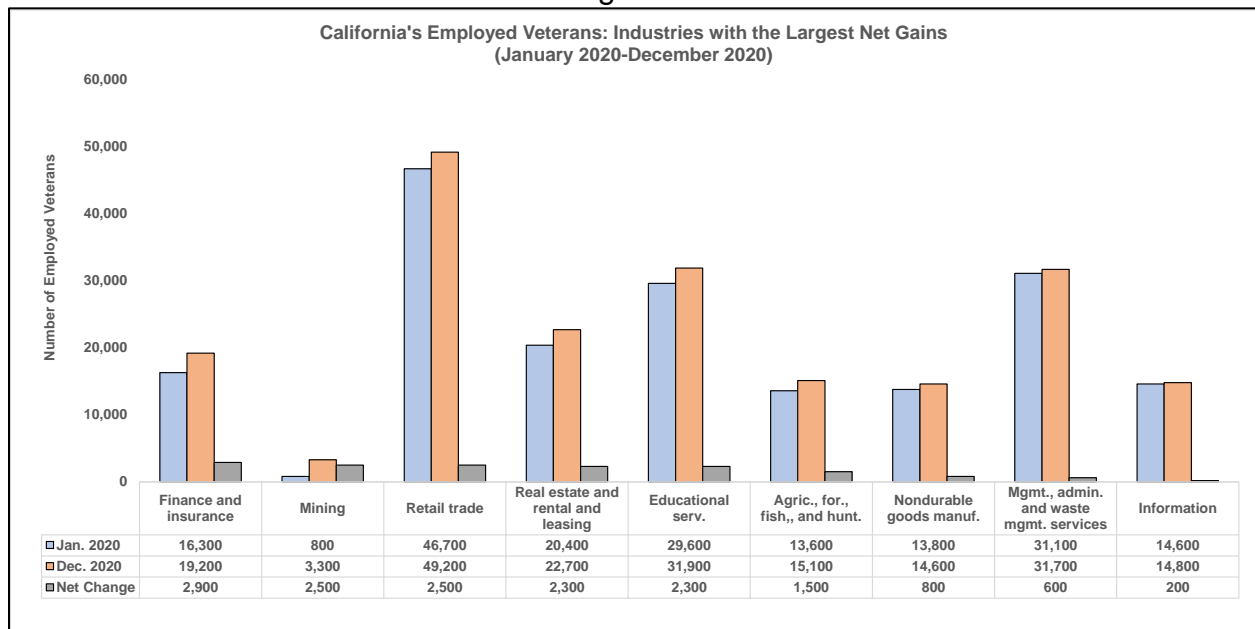
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

Despite the challenging economic landscape facing the state, veterans were able to experience some nominal gains in employment, in certain industries, over the course of

2020. The largest 12-month gains were seen in the finance and insurance; mining; retail trade; real estate and rental and leasing; and educational services industries (Figure 5).

The number of employed veterans within the finance and insurance industry increased by 2,900 over the course of 2020. Firms within this sector provide services that range from commercial banking to insurance policy development. Some aspects of the retail trade industry (such as grocery stores and pharmacies) were deemed essential to the infrastructure of California’s economy during the pandemic, which opened up job opportunities for veterans.¹⁰ The number of employed veterans in retail trade increased from 46,700 in January 2020 to 49,200 by the end of the year.

Figure 5



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

Occupations

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, about 55 percent of transitioning veterans want to do something totally different than what they did in the military.¹¹ California veterans transitioning from military service were employed in a host of jobs both closely related to their previous experience in the military (e.g., protective service) and jobs, that traditionally, are not as closely related to their previous experience (e.g. farming, fishing, and forestry). Over the course of 2020, a majority of the jobs held by veterans experienced decline. However, there were gains made in a few of the state’s occupational groups.

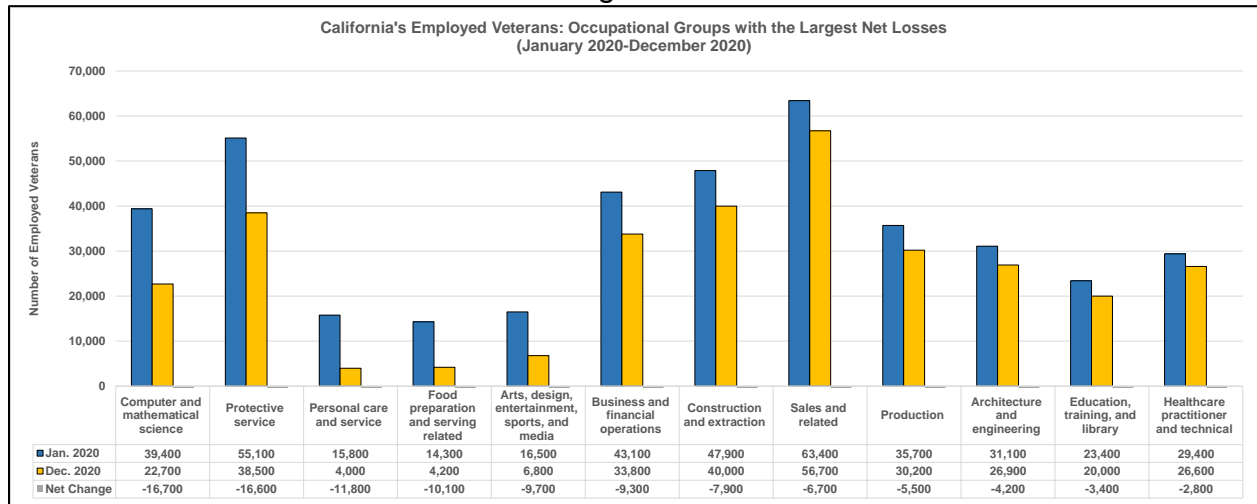
The largest employment decreases among veterans occurred in the computer and mathematical science; protective service; personal care and service; and food

¹⁰ California for All. Essential Workforce. [California's Essential Workforce](#)

¹¹ The New York Times. Veterans Are Working, but Not in Jobs That Match Their Advanced Training. [Veterans Are Working, but Not in Jobs That Match Their Advanced Training](#)

preparation and serving occupations, each of which had losses of more than 10,000 persons over the course of 2020. In addition, significant declines also occurred within arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media (9,700); business and financial operations (9,300); and construction and extraction (7,900) jobs between January 2020 and December 2020 (Figure 6).

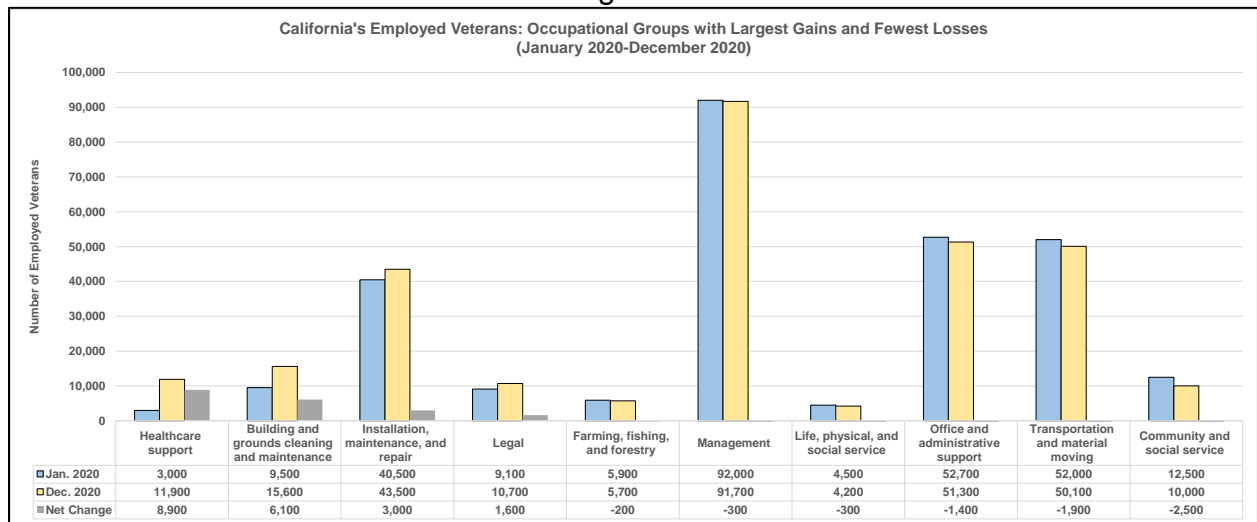
Figure 6



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

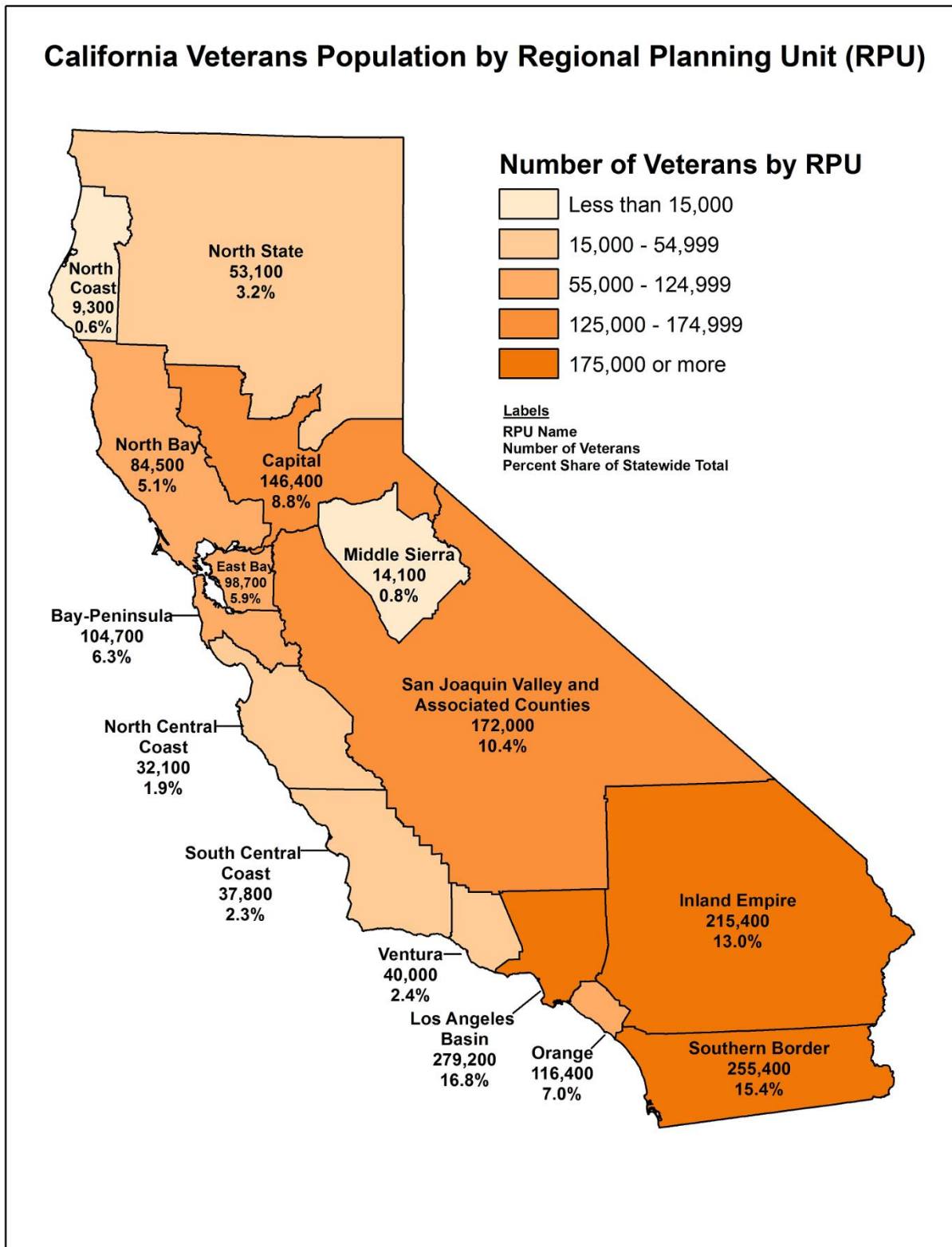
A few occupational groups did increase their number of employed veterans in 2020. Veteran employment in healthcare support occupations increased from 3,000 at the start of the year to 11,900, a net gain of 8,900 employed veterans. Employment gains for veterans were also seen among building and grounds cleaning and maintenance (6,100); installation, maintenance, and repair (3,000); and legal (1,600) occupations in 2020 (Figure 7).

Figure 7



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

Figure 8



Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Population Model, September 2020

Table 1
Number of Veterans and Percent Share of U.S. Total

States	Number of Veterans	Percent Share of Total
Alabama	327,000	1.8%
Alaska	61,600	0.3%
Arizona	506,600	2.7%
Arkansas	199,100	1.1%
California	1,468,200	7.9%
Colorado	373,500	2.0%
Connecticut	148,700	0.8%
Delaware	75,200	0.4%
District of Columbia	25,300	0.1%
Florida	1,363,100	7.4%
Georgia	679,700	3.7%
Hawaii	97,600	0.5%
Idaho	110,800	0.6%
Illinois	560,100	3.0%
Indiana	412,500	2.2%
Iowa	210,200	1.1%
Kansas	169,300	0.9%
Kentucky	257,100	1.4%
Louisiana	272,100	1.5%
Maine	108,700	0.6%
Maryland	374,600	2.0%
Massachusetts	301,500	1.6%
Michigan	512,000	2.8%
Minnesota	304,300	1.6%
Mississippi	171,800	0.9%
Missouri	392,800	2.1%
Montana	90,100	0.5%
Nebraska	130,100	0.7%
Nevada	218,400	1.2%
New Hampshire	95,000	0.5%
New Jersey	336,900	1.8%
New Mexico	167,300	0.9%
New York	689,400	3.7%
North Carolina	710,100	3.8%
North Dakota	44,100	0.2%
Ohio	716,100	3.9%
Oklahoma	276,400	1.5%
Oregon	314,100	1.7%
Pennsylvania	757,400	4.1%
Rhode Island	52,700	0.3%
South Carolina	418,600	2.3%
South Dakota	55,700	0.3%
Tennessee	468,900	2.5%
Texas	1,575,200	8.5%
Utah	135,300	0.7%
Vermont	39,600	0.2%

States	Number of Veterans	Percent Share of Total
Virginia	678,300	3.7%
Washington	511,700	2.8%
West Virginia	124,300	0.7%
Wisconsin	340,600	1.8%
Wyoming	49,400	0.3%
United States Total	18,479,100	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average.

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