

# California Veterans in the Workforce 2021

**EDD** Employment  
Development  
Department  
State of California

June 2022

## **Executive Summary**

In 2021, an estimated 18.5 million veterans lived in the United States, including 1.3 million that consider California their home.<sup>1</sup> California's veterans have served in time periods that extended before 1941 to the latest armed conflicts in the Middle East. Over 500,000 of California's veterans were deployed into combat or an active war zone during their enlistment periods. According to the latest figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, the largest segments of California's veterans last served in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps branches of the U.S. armed forces.

## **Key Findings in 2021**

### **State-to-State Comparison**

- Nationwide, the largest number of veterans lived in the following states: Texas (1.67 million), Florida (1.39 million), California (1.35 million), North Carolina (730,300), and Pennsylvania (727,100). These five states accounted for 31.8 percent of the nation's veteran population in 2021.

### **Demographics**

- California accounted for 7.3 percent of the nation's veteran population with 1.23 million men and 118 thousand women who served. In terms of age cohorts, nearly seven out of every ten veterans (67.1 percent) in the state were 55 years and older.

### **Veterans in the Workforce**

- Recent research suggests that employers value the hard and soft skills that veterans have, such as technical work experience, resilience, and leadership skills.
- Employers also recognize that veterans have a deep understanding of teamwork, a strong work ethic, and can adapt quickly to changing circumstances and situations.
- In 2021, 513,600 of the state's veterans, or 37.8 percent, held a bachelor's degree or higher, including 321,300 with a bachelor's degree, 142,500 with a master's, 26,000 with a professional degree (M.D., D.D.S.), and 23,800 with a doctorate (Ph.D.).

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

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	i
Key Findings in 2021 .....	i
State-to-State Comparison.....	i
Demographics.....	i
Veterans in the Workforce.....	i
Figures and Tables.....	ii
State-to-State Comparisons and Time Period of Service .....	1
Skills and the Educational Attainment of Veterans.....	2
California Veterans in the Civilian Labor Force .....	3
California Veterans: Industries and Occupations .....	4
Industries .....	4
Occupations .....	5

## Figures and Tables

Figure 1 California: Number of Veterans by Time Period of Service .....	1
Figure 2 California Veterans: Highest Level of Education Completed.....	2
Figure 3 California Veterans: Unemployment Analysis .....	3
Figure 4 California’s Employed Veterans: Industry Analysis .....	4
Figure 5 California’s Employed Veterans: Occupational Analysis.....	5
Figure 6 California Veterans by Regional Planning Unit (RPU).....	6
Table 1 Number of Veterans and Percent Share of U.S. Total.....	7

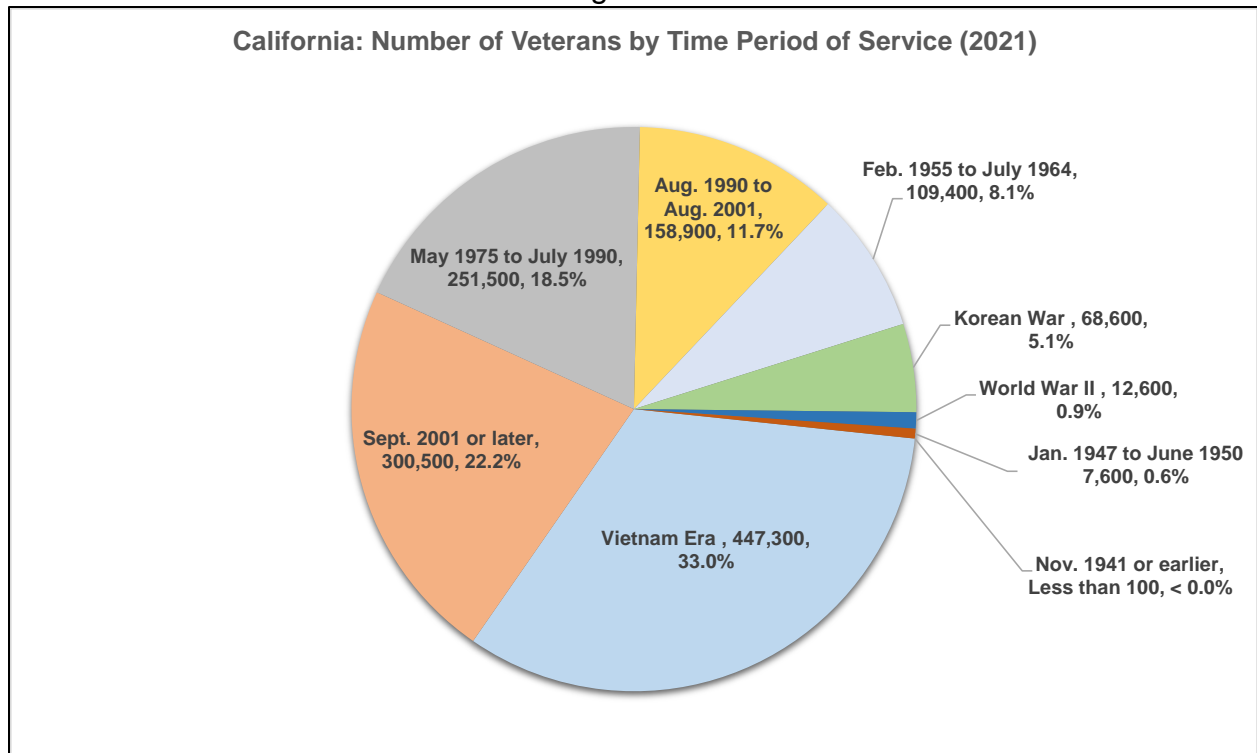
## State-to-State Comparisons and Time Period of Service

In 2021, there were 18,511,200 veterans residing in the United States. Texas (1.67 million), Florida (1.39 million), California (1.35 million), North Carolina (730,300), and Pennsylvania (727,100) had the largest number of veterans in 2021. Just over 30 percent (31.8 percent) of the nation's veterans resided in one of these five states.

California accounted for 7.3 percent of the nation's veteran population: 1.23 million men and 118 thousand women. In terms of age cohorts, nearly seven out of every ten veterans (67.1 percent) in the state were 55 years and older. The following provides a detailed breakout of veterans by age in 2021: 55 years and older (909,400), between 35 and 54 (315,200), between 25 and 34 (111,200), and between 18 and 24 (18,000).

California's veterans have served in military operations from November 1941 and earlier to present day conflicts abroad. The largest percent share of the state's veterans, 33.0 percent, served during the Vietnam Era and just over 22 percent (22.2 percent) served in September 2001 or later. As the state's veterans age, the percent share of veterans that served prior to 1950 continue to decline. Time periods of their military service are as follows: World War II (0.9 percent), January 1947 to June 1950 (0.6 percent), and November 1941 or earlier (less than 0.0 percent).

Figure 1



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

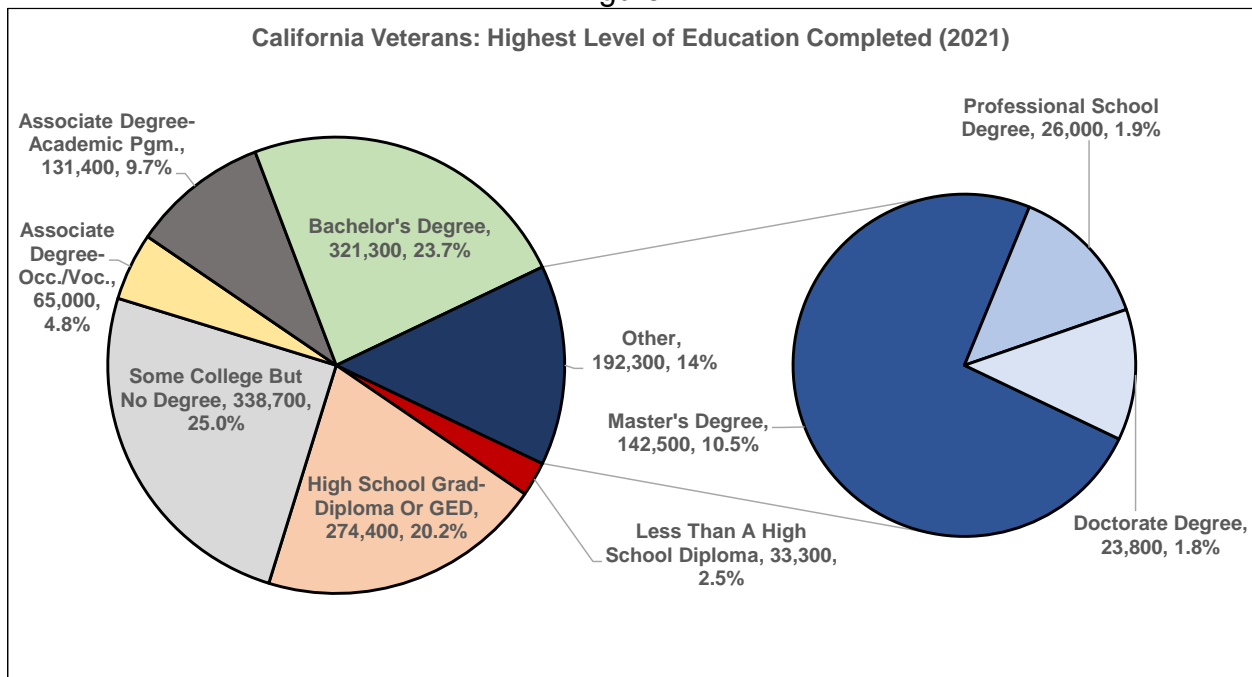
## Skills and the Educational Attainment of Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that annually nearly 200,000 U.S. service members transition from the military back into their civilian lives, which more often than not, includes a return to the workforce. Recent research conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the United Services Automobile Association (USAA) found that employers recognize and value their experience and transferable skills and view employing veterans as appealing to their businesses.<sup>2</sup>

The SHRM and USAA research also suggested that employers value the hard and soft skills that veterans have, such as technical work experience, resilience, and leadership skills. Employers also recognize that veterans have a deep understanding of teamwork, a strong work ethic, and can adapt quickly to changing circumstances and situations. In addition to the wide spectrum of skills and experiences that veterans bring to the civilian workforce, a large number of employers stated the talent pool of veterans is embedded with diversity of gender, race, and age.<sup>3</sup>

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2021, 513,600 of the state's veterans, or 37.8 percent, held a bachelor's degree or higher, including 321,300 with a bachelor's degree, 142,500 with a master's, 26,000 with a professional degree (M.D., D.D.S.), and 23,800 with a doctorate (Ph.D.). In addition, one out of every four veterans (25.0 percent) had some college experience, but no degree.

Figure 2



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

<sup>2, 3</sup> Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and United Services Automobile Association. [Unlocking the Potential of the Veteran Workforce, March 13, 2021.](#)

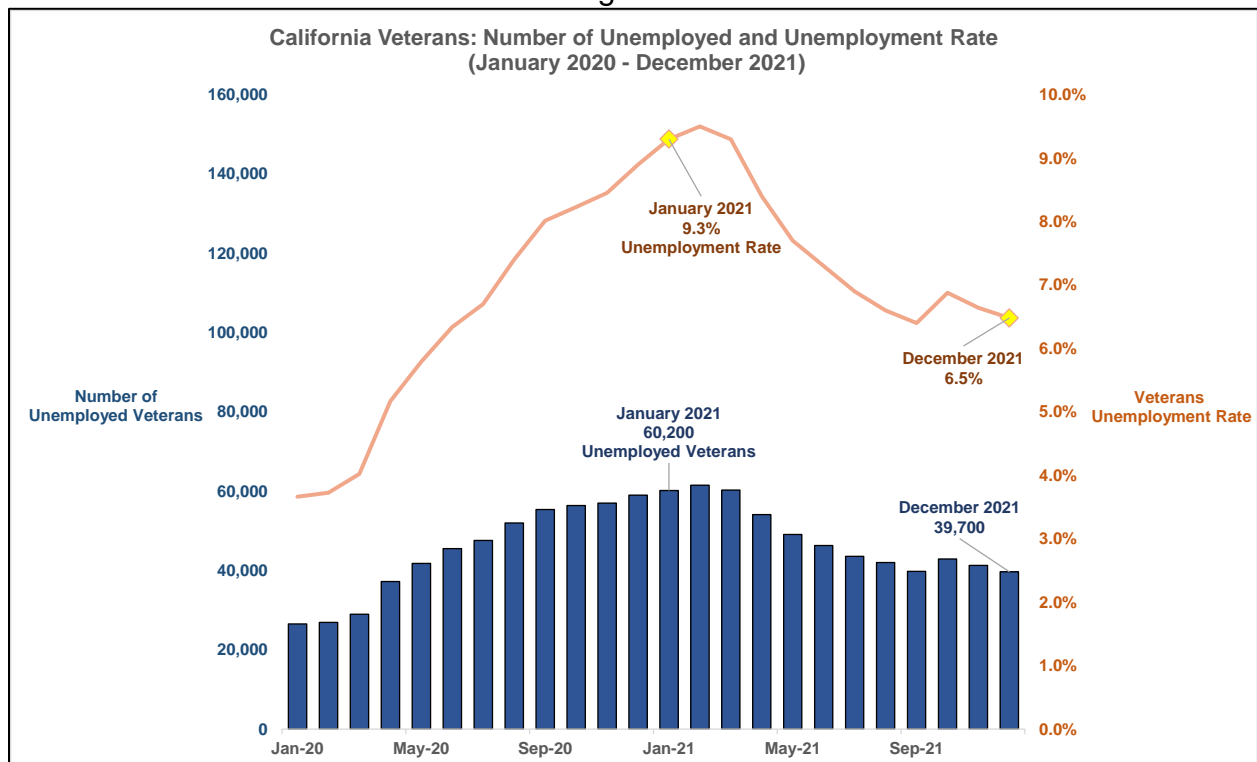
## California Veterans in the Civilian Labor Force

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. However, since April 2020, California’s economy has been in a period of economic expansion and the state has experienced the addition of over 2.2 million nonfarm jobs and a decline in the statewide seasonally adjusted unemployment rate from 15.9 percent to 5.8 percent from April 2020 through December 2021.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the civilian labor force is the number of people who are either working (employed) or actively looking for work (unemployed). In January 2021, 647,900 veterans participated in the state’s civilian labor force and by December 2021 that figure stood at 612,400, a net decrease of 35,500 persons.<sup>5</sup> Over calendar year 2021, the number of employed persons experienced a net decrease of 15,000 persons, going from 587,700 to 572,700 over those twelve months. In addition, the number of unemployed persons declined by 20,500 persons moving from 60,200 persons in January 2021 to 39,700 persons in December 2021.

One of the economic indicators used to make assessments on the economic health of a state economy during periods both recession and expansion periods is the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for veterans declined by 2.8 percentage points between January 2021 (9.3 percent) and December 2021 (6.5 percent).

Figure 3



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

<sup>4</sup> California Employment Development Department’s (EDD) Labor Market Information Division (LMID), [EDD-LMID web page](#).

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

# California Veterans: Industries and Occupations

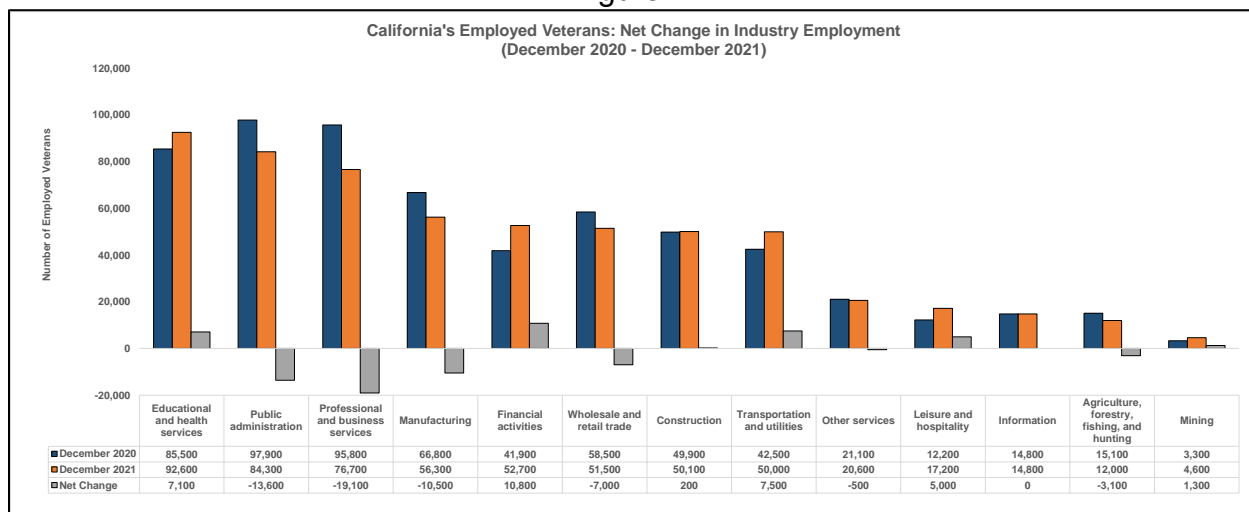
## Industries

In 2021, California’s economy was experiencing continued momentum as the state lifted public health safety orders enacted to contain the spread of COVID-19. As a result, the economic expansion from April 2020 to December 2021 moved further along. The number of employed workers, meaning persons who did any work for pay or profit, increased by 2.1 million employed persons over this period of time.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in increased job opportunities for veterans and non-veterans alike.

Between December 2020 and December 2021, the number of employed veterans declined by 21,900 persons, however there were significant gains made as reflected in the year-over changes in industry employment.<sup>7</sup> Among the thirteen industries analyzed in Figure 4, veterans had net gains in six industry sectors, net losses in six industry sectors, and experienced no change in one industry sector.

The largest year-over gains in the number of employed veterans were experienced in the following industries: financial activities (10,800), transportation and utilities (7,500), education and health services (7,100), and leisure and hospitality (5,000). The heaviest losses were found within the professional and business services (-19,100) and public administration (-13,600) industries. There was no net change in the number of employed veterans within California’s information sector between December 2020 and December 2021.

Figure 4



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

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics definition of employed persons: People who, during the reference week, did any work for pay or profit; did at least 15 hours of unpaid work in a family-operated enterprise; or were temporarily absent from their regular job(s) because of illness, vacation, bad weather, an industrial dispute, or various personal reasons.

<sup>7</sup> Please note: the U.S. Census Bureau data used for these calculations is calculated as a 12-month moving average and is not seasonally adjusted on a month-to-month basis like the statewide data. This makes the data lag workforce trends within the state on the whole.

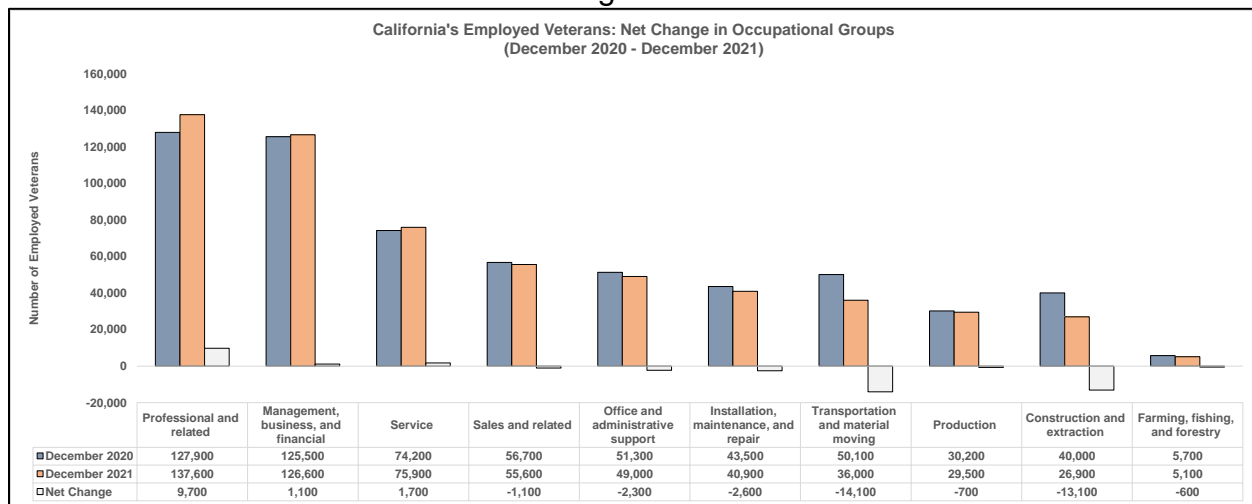
## Occupations

Veterans started their military careers as either enlisted personnel or officers depending on a military recruiter’s assessment of their level of education, personal goals, and qualifications.<sup>8</sup> Enlisted personnel are technical experts that have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to ensure the success of their unit’s missions. Officers manage enlisted personnel, plan missions, provide orders, and assign tasks.<sup>9</sup> These unique roles are key to the functioning of our armed forces and provide the foundation for a career upon their reentry into the civilian workforce.

In 2021, California veterans were employed largely in occupational groups closely tied to their previous military careers such as professional and related occupations. Occupations within the professional and related segment include, but are not limited to, the following: computer and mathematical, healthcare practitioners, legal, and postsecondary teaching occupations.

By the close of calendar year 2021, the largest number of California’s veterans were employed in the following occupational groups: professional and related; management, business, and financial; service; and sales and related occupations. In December 2021, four out of every five veterans, or 45.3 percent, were employed in either a professional and related; or management, business, and financial occupation. The lowest concentrations of employed veterans were in the following occupational groups in 2021: production; construction and extraction; and farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.

Figure 5



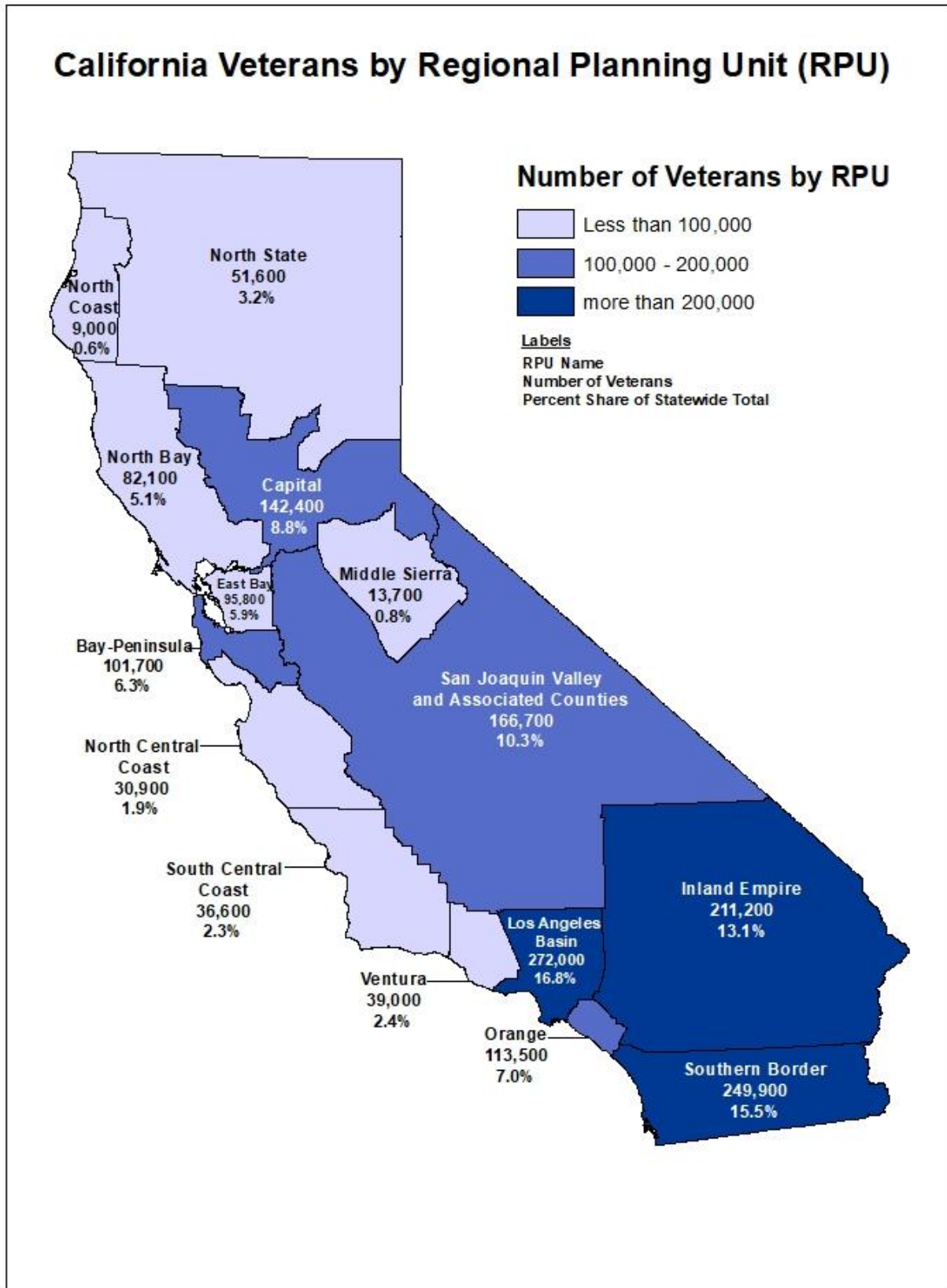
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey of Households, 12-month moving average

<sup>8</sup> Military OneSource. [Understanding the Roles of Military Officers and Enlisted Service Members](#)

<sup>9</sup> Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Program. What's the Difference? Enlisted VS. Officer. [What's the Difference? Enlisted VS. Officer.](#)



Figure 6



Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Population Model, September 2021

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

States	Number of Veterans	Percent Share of Total
Alabama	359,900	1.9%
Alaska	59,600	0.3%
Arizona	502,300	2.7%
Arkansas	217,200	1.2%
California	1,356,500	7.3%
Colorado	384,200	2.1%
Connecticut	145,000	0.8%
Delaware	72,400	0.4%
District of Columbia	26,600	0.1%
Florida	1,398,500	7.6%
Georgia	619,500	3.3%
Hawaii	91,000	0.5%
Idaho	119,100	0.6%
Illinois	531,000	2.9%
Indiana	411,400	2.2%
Iowa	205,600	1.1%
Kansas	175,400	0.9%
Kentucky	265,400	1.4%
Louisiana	255,100	1.4%
Maine	109,800	0.6%
Maryland	401,000	2.2%
Massachusetts	285,300	1.5%
Michigan	551,400	3.0%
Minnesota	304,400	1.6%
Mississippi	179,400	1.0%
Missouri	381,400	2.1%
Montana	98,400	0.5%
Nebraska	138,600	0.7%
Nevada	237,500	1.3%
New Hampshire	100,000	0.5%
New Jersey	304,400	1.6%
New Mexico	169,100	0.9%
New York	656,300	3.5%
North Carolina	730,300	3.9%
North Dakota	45,800	0.2%
Ohio	719,200	3.9%
Oklahoma	266,500	1.4%
Oregon	324,100	1.8%
Pennsylvania	727,100	3.9%
Rhode Island	60,600	0.3%

South Carolina	412,700	2.2%
South Dakota	59,400	0.3%
Tennessee	474,400	2.6%
Texas	1,675,100	9.0%
Utah	131,600	0.7%
Vermont	34,100	0.2%
Virginia	703,400	3.8%
Washington	518,700	2.8%
West Virginia	136,700	0.7%
Wisconsin	328,100	1.8%
Wyoming	50,700	0.3%
<b>United States Total</b>	<b>18,511,200</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

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

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