

# Supporting Florida's Veterans

## Background

Many Veterans face unique challenges while transitioning from military life back into civilian society. These challenges include re-establishing family roles, loss of identity as a service member, entering the civilian workforce, enrolling into college, returning to a job, and adjusting to their responsibilities as a civilian. Service-related health issues can further complicate the transition process. If left untreated, posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries can lead to substance abuse, behavioral health problems, and homelessness. United Way's MISSION UNITED supports numerous efforts to assist the Sunshine State's 1.5 million veterans.



## Peer Support Network

Veterans throughout the U.S. face mental health and substance abuse issues. According to a 2008 study, between 5 and 15 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan returned with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and an additional 2 to 14 percent returned with major depression. PTSD attributed to combat has affected between 2 and 17 percent of all U.S. military veterans since the Vietnam War. By plugging into a centralized network in Florida that can respond and assist veterans in all 67 counties, a lifeline to connect individuals to much needed behavioral health services and peers will be available.

## Shared Database and System Navigation

By funding *\$2.5 million* to enhance gender-specific system navigators and peer support, MISSION UNITED will be able to assist *4,000 additional* veterans with housing, employment, healthcare access, and legal issues. This will provide an in person handoff that acts as a bridge to the 211 referral and support network. Additionally, the implementation and management of a statewide database that all MISSION UNITED's can utilize, share information, streamline referrals and monitor outcomes, will ensure transparency and accountability for all veteran serving agencies.

## Education

There is not an effective system for Veterans to transfer their military experience to college credit throughout Florida, leading many Veterans to repeat courses that they completed in the military and spend additional time in school before entering the workforce. This puts them at a disadvantage to their contemporaries who did not serve. In addition, the taxpayers are responsible to pay for earned credits that have already been paid for.

## PROPOSED CHANGES

Florida's United Ways urge the 2020 Florida Legislature to:

- **SUPPORT** creation of a centralized portal and peer support referral network through 2-1-1.
- **SUPPORT** a MISSION UNITED initiative to enhance system navigation utilizing peer support to ensure every Veteran and their family that needs assistance has an in-person contact that they can utilize to access services beyond the referral process to align with the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **SUPPORT** addition of language in the Military and Veterans Active Duty charter to standardize transfer of college credits.