

California Veterans in the Workforce 2023



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Executive Summary

In 2023, there were approximately 17.9 million veterans in the United States, with California housing around 1.32 million of them.¹ California's veterans have served in a range of military conflicts, from pre-1941 to present-day engagements. Notably, 145,900 of California's veterans served for over ten years during their enlistment periods. The largest segments of the State's veteran population in 2023 served in the following military branches: Army (465,200), Navy (367,000), and Marine Corps (184,200).²

Trends in 2023

State-to-State Comparison Trends

- In 2023, 32.1% of the nation's veterans lived in five states: Texas (1.6 million), Florida (1.4 million), California (1.3 million), Virginia (740,400), and Pennsylvania (687,200).
- California accounted for 7.4 percent of the nation's veteran population, with 1.2 million men and 102,000 women.

Labor Force Trends

- The number of veterans in the civilian labor force decreased from 635,100 to 597,500 over 2023. Employment among veterans also dropped from 610,000 in January to 579,100 by December. Conversely, the number of unemployed veterans fell from 25,000 to 18,400 during the same period. Over the course of 2023, the unemployment rate for the State's veterans declined by 0.8 percentage point, from 3.9 to 3.1 percent.

Industry and Occupational Trends

- From December 2022 to December 2023, veterans saw the most significant employment increases in the following industries: public administration (+15,500); transportation and utilities (+14,900); and manufacturing (+6,400).
- As of December 2023, the largest concentration of the State's veterans was employed in the following occupational groups: professional and related (122,700); management, business, and financial (122,600); service (65,200); and sales and related (43,500) occupations.

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

² Army (467,000), Navy (340,900), Marine Corps (192,200), Air Force (169,300) (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Veterans Supplement August 2023)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Executive Summary	ii
Trends in 2023	ii
State-to-State Comparison Trends	ii
Labor Force Trends	ii
Industry and Occupational Trends	ii
Table of Contents	iii
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

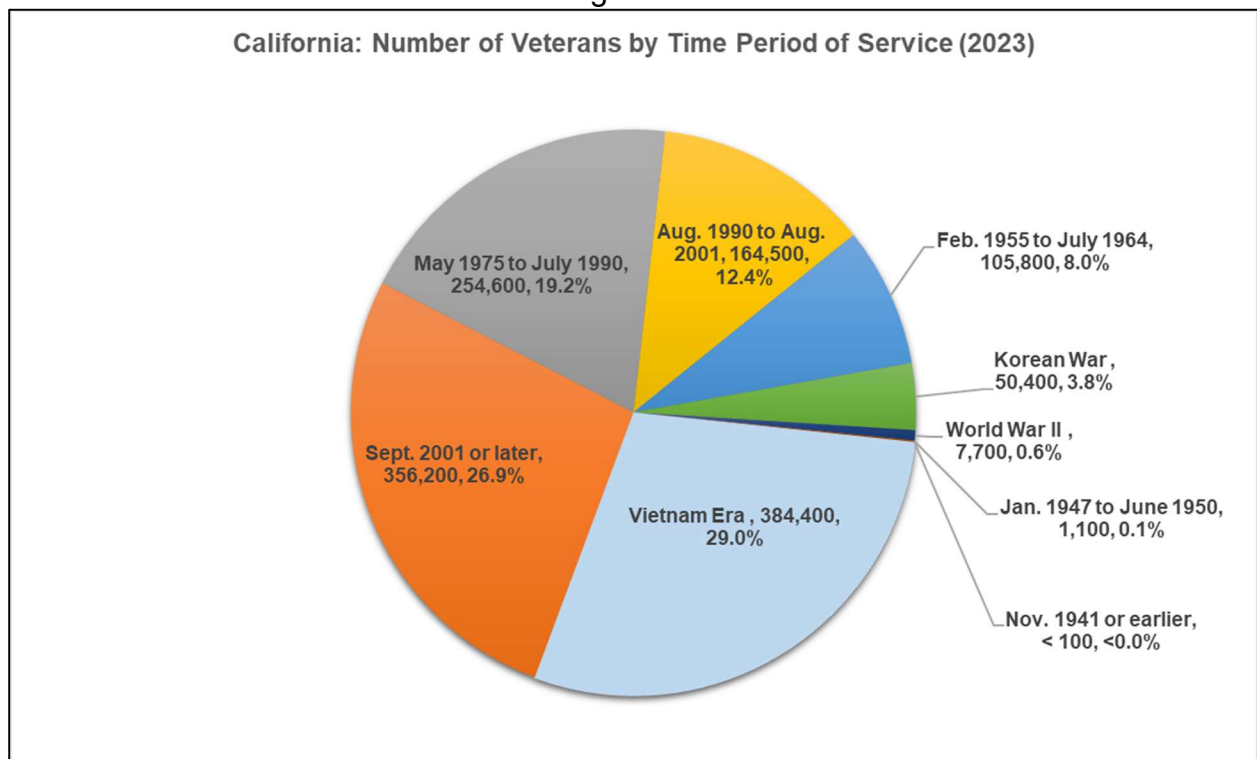
Figure 1 California: Number of Veterans by Time Period of Service	1
Figure 2 California Veterans: Highest Level of Education Completed	2
Figure 3 California Veterans: Unemployment Analysis	3
Figure 4 California’s Employed Veterans: Industry Analysis	4
Figure 5 California’s Employed Veterans: Occupational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

State-to-State Comparisons and Time Period of Service

In 2023, there were 17.9 million veterans living in the United States. Texas (1.6 million), Florida (1.4 million), California (1.3 million), Virginia (740,400), and Pennsylvania (687,200) had the largest number of veterans in 2023. These five states alone were home to 32.1% of the nation's veterans. California accounted for 7.4 percent of the nation's veteran population: 1.2 million men and 102,000 women. Most of California's veterans (64.3%) were aged 55 or older. Specifically, 855,800 were 55 and older, 324,300 were between 35 and 54, 128,300 were aged 25 to 34, and 22,900 were between 18 and 24.

California's veterans served in wars ranging from World War II to recent conflicts. The largest percent share of the State's veterans, 29.0 percent, served during the Vietnam Era, and almost 27 percent (26.9 percent) served in September 2001 or later. As the State's veterans age, the percent share of veterans that served prior to 1951 continues to decline. These time periods are as follows: World War II (0.6 percent), January 1947 to June 1950 (0.1 percent), and November 1941 or earlier (less than 0.0 percent).³

Figure 1



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

³ Military Time Periods: World War II (1939-1945), Korean War (1950-1953), and Vietnam Era (1964-1975).

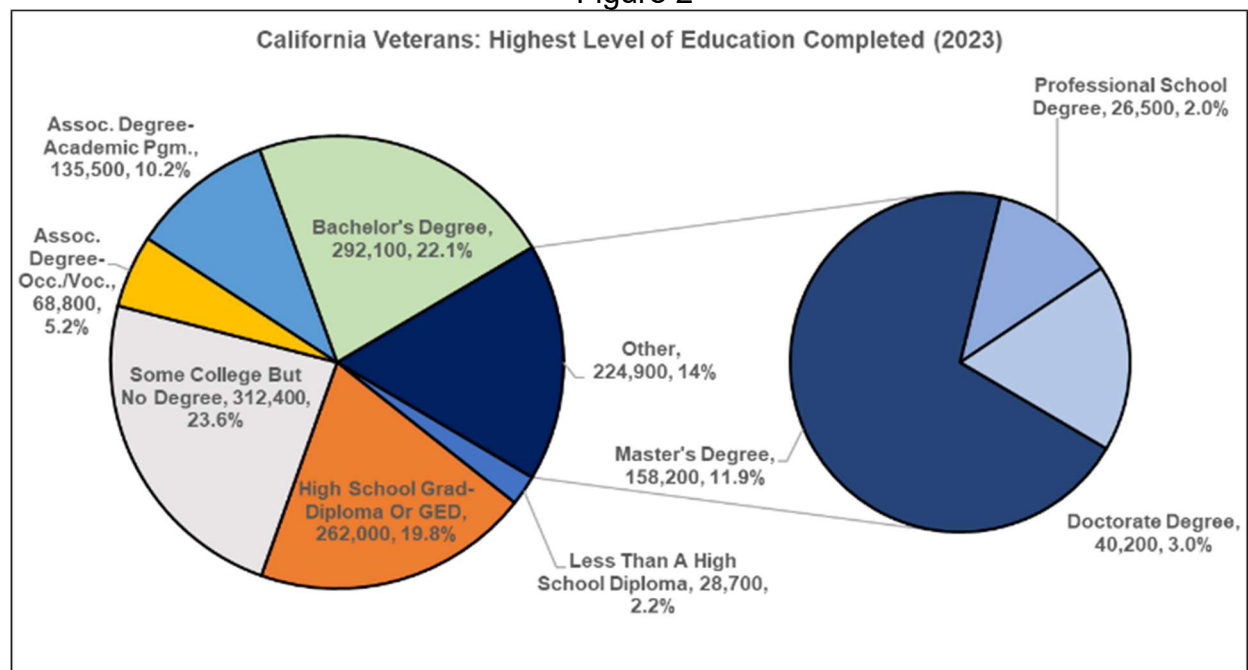
Skills and the Educational Attainment of Veterans

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Transition Assistance Program, about 200,000 veterans transition from military to civilian life each year.⁴ According to the Department of Veterans Affairs' undersecretary for benefits, veterans who take advantage of their earned benefits tend to be healthier, have higher earnings, and are more effectively prepared for a successful transition to civilian life.⁵

McKinsey and Company research suggests that veterans are a largely untapped source of skilled labor, given their extensive experience and training from military service. They acquire technical skills, perform well under pressure, and build strong interpersonal abilities, making them fit for a wide range of civilian jobs. While some military roles may not directly translate to civilian positions, many of their skills are relevant, especially in sectors like infrastructure (e.g., construction) and manufacturing that are facing labor shortages. McKinsey and Company research suggests that effectively utilizing veterans' skills through targeted hiring could create nearly \$15 billion in economic value for employers over the next ten years.⁶

In 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 517,000 veterans in California, or 39 percent, held a bachelor's degree or higher, including 292,100 with a bachelor's degree, 158,200 with a master's, 40,200 with a doctorate (Ph.D.), and 26,500 with a professional degree (M.D., D.D.S.). Just under 24 percent of veterans (312,400) had some college experience but no degree.

Figure 2



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

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service. [DOL Transition Assistance Program](#).

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. [Military Well Prepared for Civilian Transition, Official Says](#).

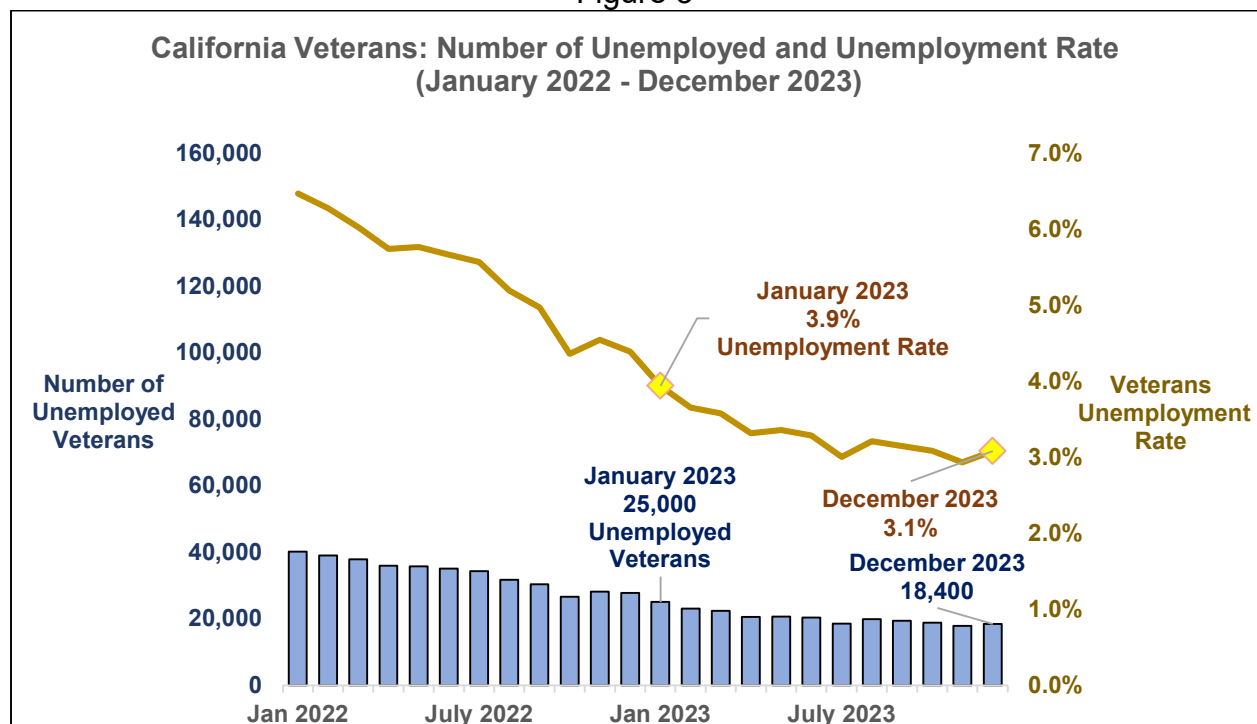
⁶ McKinsey and Company. [From the military to the workforce: How to leverage veterans' skills](#).

California Veterans in the Civilian Labor Force

California's 45-month economic expansion, from April 2020 to December 2023, saw the addition of 3 million nonfarm jobs and an 11.0 percentage point drop in the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate. However, during 2023, the civilian labor force for veterans decreased from 635,100 in January to 597,500 by December. Similarly, the number of employed veterans fell from 610,000 to 579,100 during the same period, while the number of unemployed veterans decreased from 25,000 to 18,400. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau suggests that the decline in the number of employed veterans may be attributed to the overall decline in the number of veterans eligible to participate in the workforce. The number of veterans in California has declined by 86,000 veterans between calendar years 2022 and 2023. Furthermore, over that period of time, the number of veterans who are not in the labor force due to a disability has increased from 41,700 to 56,800.

Despite these declines, the unemployment rate for veterans improved, dropping by 0.8 percentage points between January 2023 and December 2023. Generally speaking, a labor force trend such as this is often associated with a healthy labor market for veterans who remained in the workforce.

Figure 3



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

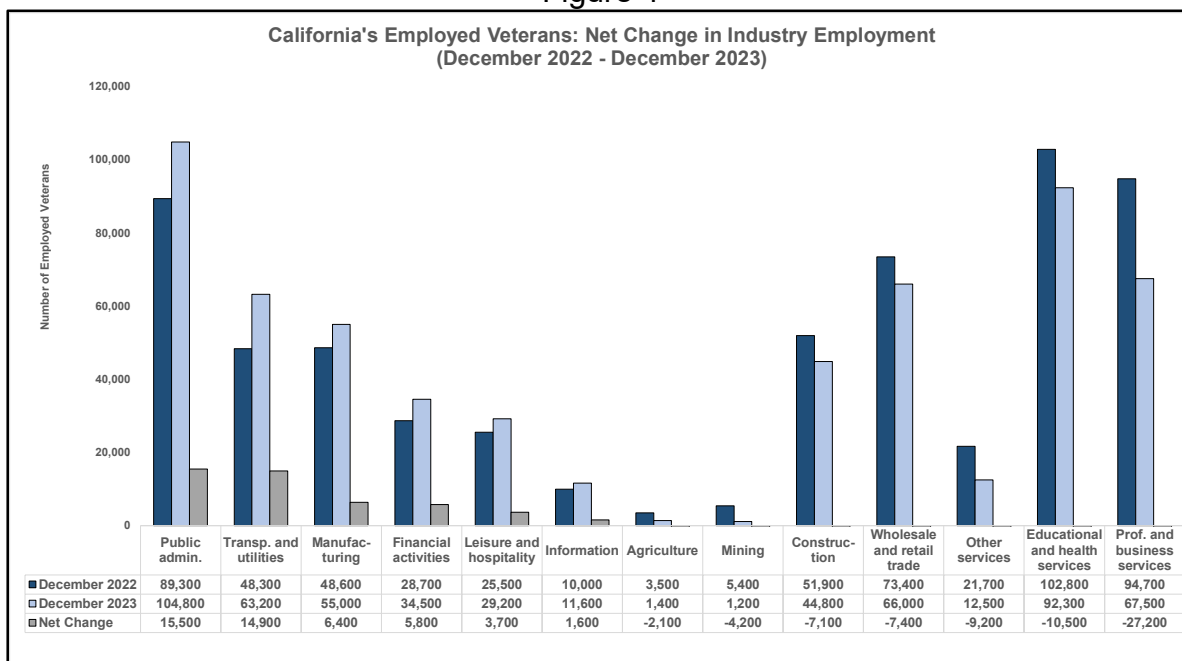
California Veterans: Industries and Occupations

Industries

In terms of the State’s veterans, they are employed in a variety of goods-producing industries such as manufacturing, and high-tech, service-producing industries such as information.⁷ Year-over, between December 2022 and December 2023, the employment levels of veterans within six of the State’s industry sectors increased, and in seven of the industry sectors, employment levels decreased. Industries in which veterans experienced the largest net gains in employment were the public administration (+15,500); transportation and utilities (+14,900); and manufacturing (+6,400) industries. The largest decreases in employment levels for veterans were within the professional and business services (-27,200); and educational and health services (-10,500) industries.

According to the EDD’s 2022-2032 industry employment projections, segments of the State’s employed veterans held jobs within industries that are forecasted to grow at a faster rate than the statewide average (9.3 percent). For example, the educational and health services industry, which had 92,300 employed veterans within it, is forecasted to grow by 21.9 percent over the ten-year projection period. Likewise, the professional and business services (11.8 percent), construction (11.1), and leisure and hospitality (10.5) industries where veterans held gainful employment are forecasted to grow at a faster rate than the statewide average. However, job opportunities for veterans are forecasted to be on the decline within the State’s mining industry (-10.8 percent) over the next ten years.

Figure 4



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

⁷ Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). [Goods Producing and Service Producing Industries](#)

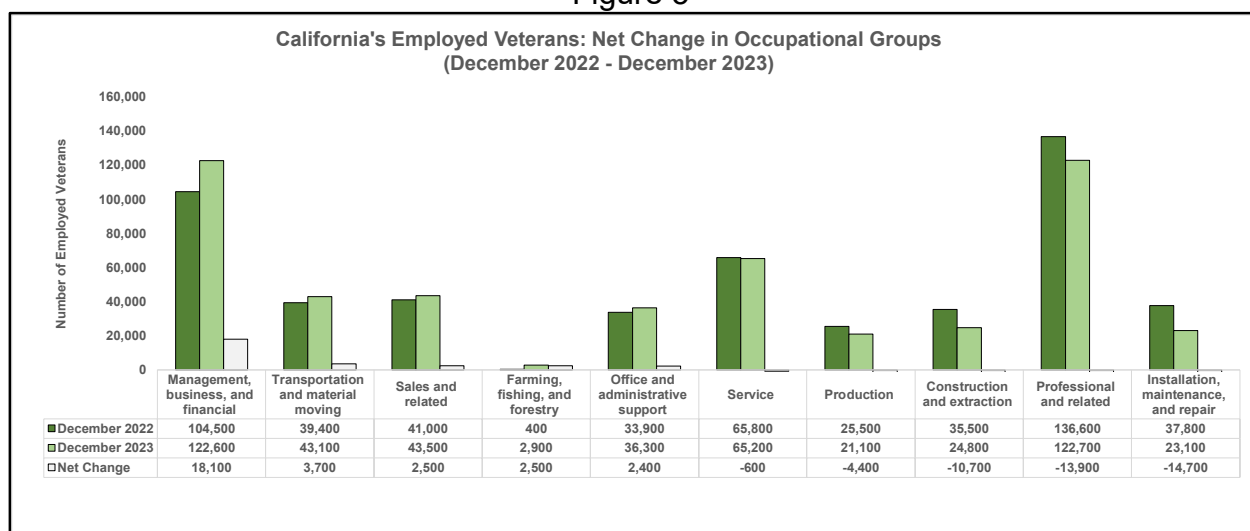
Occupations

The nation's veterans often face a host of challenges when transitioning back to civilian life; one of them being their reentry into the workforce. According to Pew Research Center survey data, 48.0 percent of the nation's veterans did not have a job lined up after leaving military service but were actively seeking one.⁸ However, among those veterans that did attain employment after leaving the military, six out of every ten veterans (61.0 percent) found that their military service helped their ability to get a job.⁹ Today's employers know that military veterans are a rich talent pool that often possess skills, attitudes, and abilities beyond their civilian counterparts.¹⁰

By the end of calendar year 2023, many California veterans were employed in careers related to a job they held during their enlistment period, such as service occupations. Occupations within the services segment include, but are not limited to, firefighters and members of law enforcement. According to the EDD's Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data, generally speaking, occupations such as these earned wages in excess of the statewide annual average wage for all occupations (\$79,346): first-line supervisors of firefighting and prevention workers (\$138,839); detectives and criminal investigators (\$119,481); police and sheriff's patrol officers (\$115,213); and correctional officers (\$91,278).¹¹

In December 2023, the largest number of the State's veterans were employed in the following occupational groups: professional and related (122,700); management, business, and financial (122,600); service (65,200); and sales and related (43,500) occupations. In addition, seven out of every ten (70.0 percent) employed veterans were in one of the aforementioned occupational groups. Veterans held the fewest number of jobs in the following careers: construction and extraction (24,800); installation, maintenance, and repair (23,100); production (21,100); and farming, fishing, and forestry (2,900) occupations.

Figure 5



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

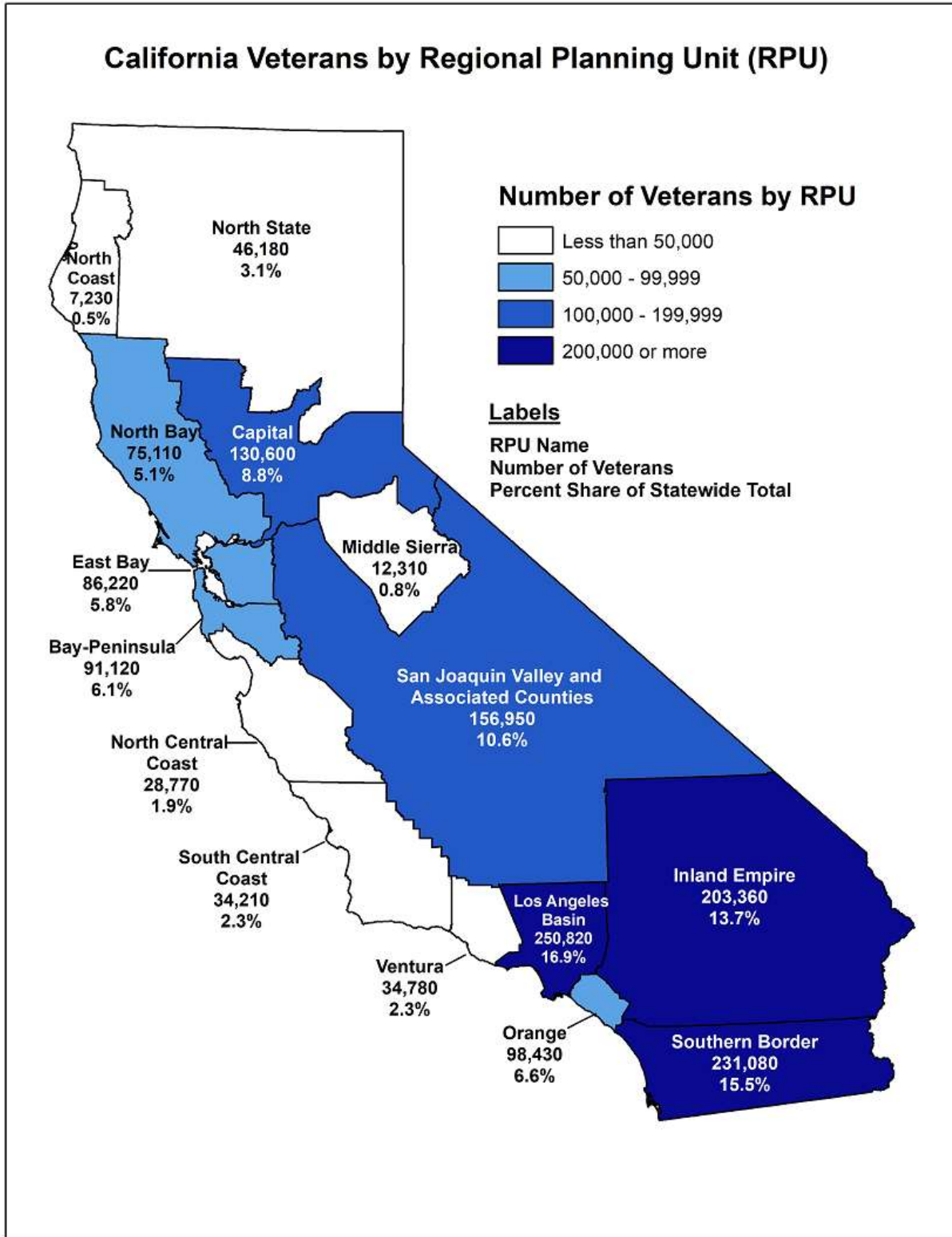
⁸ Pew Research Center. [The American Veteran Experience And The Post-9/11 Generation](#)

⁹ Pew Research Center. [The American Veteran Experience And The Post-9/11 Generation](#)

¹⁰ Recruit Military. https://recruitmilitary.com/employer_resource/what-veterans-really-want-in-their-civilian-careers/

¹¹ California Employment Development Department. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS).

Figure 6



Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Population Model, September 2023

Table 1
Number of Veterans and Percent Share of U.S. Total (2023)

States	Number of Veterans	Percent Share of Total
Alabama	360,600	2.0%
Alaska	61,500	0.3%
Arizona	455,100	2.5%
Arkansas	210,900	1.2%
California	1,324,400	7.4%
Colorado	370,000	2.1%
Connecticut	149,800	0.8%
Delaware	74,900	0.4%
District of Columbia	23,600	0.1%
Florida	1,391,600	7.8%
Georgia	639,600	3.6%
Hawaii	87,500	0.5%
Idaho	122,800	0.7%
Illinois	503,800	2.8%
Indiana	397,800	2.2%
Iowa	205,300	1.1%
Kansas	165,800	0.9%
Kentucky	258,100	1.4%
Louisiana	282,300	1.6%
Maine	103,800	0.6%
Maryland	326,900	1.8%
Massachusetts	240,000	1.3%
Michigan	511,100	2.9%
Minnesota	273,400	1.5%
Mississippi	185,600	1.0%
Missouri	384,200	2.1%
Montana	99,900	0.6%
Nebraska	113,000	0.6%
Nevada	214,000	1.2%
New Hampshire	100,400	0.6%
New Jersey	290,900	1.6%
New Mexico	149,600	0.8%
New York	666,500	3.7%
North Carolina	684,400	3.8%
North Dakota	46,400	0.3%
Ohio	686,000	3.8%
Oklahoma	263,300	1.5%
Oregon	269,700	1.5%
Pennsylvania	687,200	3.8%
Rhode Island	56,700	0.3%
South Carolina	443,900	2.5%
South Dakota	58,000	0.3%
Tennessee	469,200	2.6%
Texas	1,607,400	9.0%
Utah	144,900	0.8%
Vermont	36,400	0.2%
Virginia	740,400	4.1%
Washington	470,900	2.6%
West Virginia	121,300	0.7%
Wisconsin	315,500	1.8%
Wyoming	47,800	0.3%
United States Total	17,894,000	100.0%

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

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