



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **County Program Continues to Assist Veterans in Need of Transportation to Medical Appointments**

PALM DESERT – In the first three months of this year, a Riverside County program provided 50 trips to medical appointments for 19 veterans from 13 cities and unincorporated communities across the county.

The Riverside County Veteran Transportation & Supports (VeTS) Program is one of Riverside County’s new efforts to meet the needs of veterans, providing rides and transportation options to veterans to access health care. VeTS offers a number of ridership options, including bus tickets, taxi service, ADA paratransit service such as Sun-Dial, and escorted transportation, to veterans who don’t have means of transportation to health care. The average age of the veteran utilizing the program is 74 years old, and the service is available throughout the county.

The program was launched in February 2020 as a pilot program and was renewed, with funding from the Riverside County Office on Aging and the Riverside County Department of Veterans’ Services. Funding is still available for veterans to utilize the program.

“For veterans without vehicles or unable to drive themselves, transportation can be a real challenge, especially to the Loma Linda VA Hospital,” said Supervisor V. Manuel Perez. “VeTS helps address that gap. It is a holistic program that offers safety, security and dignity to our veterans who have given so much to our country and community. I want our veteran community to know this wonderful resource is available, and it is already making a life-improving impact for local veterans.”

VeTS is designed to be easy for veterans and is open to veterans residing anywhere within Riverside County who need transportation to medical appointments. All the veteran needs to do is call 1-877-932-4100 to reach the Riverside County Office on Aging's HelpLink. An operator will ask a few questions and walk the veteran through transportation options. If the request is approved, the VeTS program will fund the transportation, at no cost to the veteran, and work closely with the veteran to coordinate the transportation service. Through a partnership with the Independent Living Partnership, the Office on Aging can also refer a veteran to the TRIP program, which may be able to compensate family members, friends, and neighbors to provide trips using their vehicles.

Grant Gautsche, a U.S. Navy veteran and director of the Riverside County Department of Veterans' Services, states: "The VeTS program is an excellent solution for helping veterans who don't have means of transportation to get to their medical appointments. I am grateful for the support of Supervisor Perez and the partnership with the Office on Aging and SunLine in making this important service available to veterans in Riverside County."

All 50 trips provided during this report period (January 2021 through the end of March 2021) were through escorted transportation, which provides additional support to the veteran with accessing the vehicle, throughout the medical appointment, and getting back home to ensure client safety.

Most trips in this quarter were for follow-up appointments for clients.

In addition to the support provided by the Riverside County Office on Aging, the Riverside County Department of Veterans' Services and Supervisor Perez, VeTS has also been an effort in collaboration with U.S. Representative Raul Ruiz, State Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia and the SunLine Transit Agency.

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*Supervisor V. Manuel Perez represents the eastern two-thirds of Riverside County on the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. Stretching from Palm Springs and Desert Hot Springs, south to the Salton Sea and east to Blythe and the Colorado River, the 4<sup>th</sup> District is the largest geographical district in the county.*

*Supervisor Perez's office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.*