

# DRIVING COMMUNITY IMPACT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE CASE FOR LOCAL,  
EVIDENCE-BASED  
COORDINATION IN VETERAN  
AND MILITARY FAMILY  
SERVICES AND THE  
AMERICASERVES INITIATIVE

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## About “Driving Community Impact”

This paper serves two purposes. First, it leverages an extensive foundation of public health and public management research to underscore the need for and value of locally led and collectively organized delivery models of veteran-focused supportive services. Second, the paper outlines the Institute for Veterans and Military Families’ (IVMF) ongoing collective impact initiative, AmericaServes, and highlights preliminary outcomes from its first pilot network in New York City (NYCServes). The first-of-its kind in the nation, NYCServes is a public-private coordinated network of comprehensive services, resources, and care for separating service members, veterans, and their families.



### THE PREVAILING VIEW

There is a serious gap in how American communities care for their veterans and military families. This gap does not exist, however, due to a lack of public concern or resources. Rather, this gap lies between the organizations – public, private, and nonprofit – that serve veterans and their families. It persists due to a lack of coordination and collective purpose and threatens the long-term wellbeing veteran and their families.

- More than 40,000 nonprofit organizations provide services exclusively to veterans and their families, and thousands more to the public. Yet, a scare few organizations are equipped to provide a comprehensive range of “wrap-around” supportive services.
- **Navigation of benefits and services** is the **#1 cited transition challenge** in a recent Institute for Veterans and Military Families survey of nearly 8,500 current and prospective student veterans.

### CONSIDER THAT ...

- Veterans, when in need, express **multiple needs** for clinical and social services at once. Numerous studies by the RAND Corporation, the University of Southern California’s School of Social Work, and others have repeatedly made this observation.
- Veterans’ needs extend well beyond the resources provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Community-based social service delivery systems are equally critical to addressing the challenge.

### THE CALL TO ACTION

Given the quantity and fragmentation of actors across the veterans’ services landscape, local communities confront a challenge and opportunity to maximize and sustain positive impacts on their veterans and military families through improved, evidence-based coordination of resources, services, and care. We argue that collective impact, an innovative and tested approach to cross-sector collaboration on complex social problems, presents an opportunity for communities, in partnership with the VA,

other federal, state, and local government agencies, and private industry, to improve outcomes for veterans, transitioning servicemembers, and their families.

### COLLECTIVE IMPACT—THE BASICS

Collective impact is motivated by the view the status quo alternative – that is, the isolated impact of one or a few organizations – is typically insufficient to address complex social problems that cross sectors of society and the economy and demand continuous learning or adaptation.<sup>1</sup> Collective impact initiatives unite groups of actors from different sectors through a formalized, long-term commitment and common agenda to address a particular social problem. Unlike public-private partnership models that are often confined to the delivery or production of a single public good or service, collective impact models engage the full range of stakeholders around a specific social issue of great need.

At least five conditions drive success in collective impact initiatives.

- 1. Shared commitment to a common agenda.** To work, participating organizations must find consensus around a set of shared goals, objectives, and actions.
- 2. Jointly developed performance measurement system.** Defining collective success and performance indicators to measure safeguard long-term goal alignment and accountability.
- 3. Mutual reinforcement.** Individual programs, data collection, evidence-based information sharing must all complement, inform, and drive a central plan or framework.
- 4. Continuous communication.** Constant interaction and information exchange are necessary to build trust and promote group learning and problem solving.
- 5. Backbone organization.** Driven by the common agenda, backbone organizations guide vision and strategy, support aligned activities, establish shared measurement practices, build public will, advance policy, and mobilize funding for the group as whole.

<sup>1</sup>See Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). *Collective Impact*. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 1(9), 36-41. Available at [http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)