

Serving those who have served the Nation.

Chicago is home to nearly 66,000 veterans. There are about 1860 veteran-owned businesses with employees. Active duty military personnel receive privileges on U.S. airlines, and special recognition at many sporting events along with veterans, National Guard, reservists, and other service personnel. We honor the fallen on Memorial Day and their service on Veterans Day. Soldier Field commemorates the memory of those who fought in World War I. Today, the city's only formal recognition of this community is the Advisory Council on Veteran Affairs and basic resources and referral services for inquiring former military service personnel.

Veterans' needs intersect with those who have not served in the military. There are veterans with disabilities that were acquired in the course of their duties. There are veterans who have served during the Vietnam War or before who now are older adults. There are many veterans in need of affordable housing along with support services addressing their particular physical and mental health needs. Our proposed plans are inclusive of veterans and can serve their needs well.

There are three areas where the City can and should take a direct role in serving veterans.

Reinstate the Office of Veterans Affairs The office was disbanded in 2019. As Mayor, I would reinstate the office. 68,000 veterans are in Chicago and thousands are returning every year. We need to welcome them back to Chicago with the resources that they've earned and to which they are entitled.

Facilitation of employment. The City and Cook County jointly support the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. Although technically an independent not-for-profit corporation, the Partnership comes under the purview of the Mayor and Cook County Board President. National Able in Chicago leads the region with respect to veteran employment. My administration will facilitate the addition and allocation of resources for veteran employment programs by the Partnership and National Able. In particular, we will direct agencies under the Mayor's control or oversight, such as the Chicago Transit Authority, to develop programs with the Partnership and National Able to recruit and train veterans to fill the numerous job vacancies at CTA and other agencies.

Entrepreneurship. Chicago's 1871 helped to establish Bunker Labs, a veteran entrepreneurship incubator with the mission to provide "community, programs, and courses to help military veterans and military spouses start and grow successful businesses and startups." Bunker Labs is now present in 37 cities and virtually across the rest of the country. My economic and community development plans identify entrepreneurship as key to Chicago's success. Bunker Labs and other initiatives supporting businesses by military veterans and their spouses will be explicit parts of my overall entrepreneurship efforts.

Veteran Housing, Veteran Mental Health, and Wellness Housing is a critical need for veterans and I will ensure that our housing programs and related funding include programs to construct and support supportive housing for veterans. Many people who are unhoused are veterans who have service-related health and mental health problems and require more

comprehensive services and coordination between agencies. For example, my transportation plan calls for cooperation between the city and the Chicago Transit Authority for support services for the unhoused taking shelter in stations and on the L. We will require better integration with veterans agencies to make sure all unhoused people, especially veterans who find themselves unhoused, get the wraparound and housing services they need.

Mental health challenges, in general, are not unique to veterans, but there are issues that arise for veterans, their spouses, or children that can be tied back to the veteran's service. As we establish comprehensive community development plans, I will also work to include health, including mental health, and other support services in housing for veterans. In my health plan, I call for a deal with Cook County to collectively use our health and mental health resources of 24 City Clinics and 15 County clinics to expand access to comprehensive health resources including mental health. This will practically add another \$20 Million in services to the city budget.

In addition, with respect to the police, I propose transitioning mental health and certain other interventions to civilian teams that are appropriately trained for the purpose. Experts across the country agree, this provides a more effective response to non-threatening incidents and increases departmental capacity to respond to violence.

With respect to veterans specifically and their mental health concerns, I will look for guidance from and find ways for the City to collaborate with Rush University's Road Home initiative. That program supports the wellness and mental health of veterans, service members, the National Guard, reservists, and families, regardless of discharge status.