



**BOB WOODRUFF  
FOUNDATION**

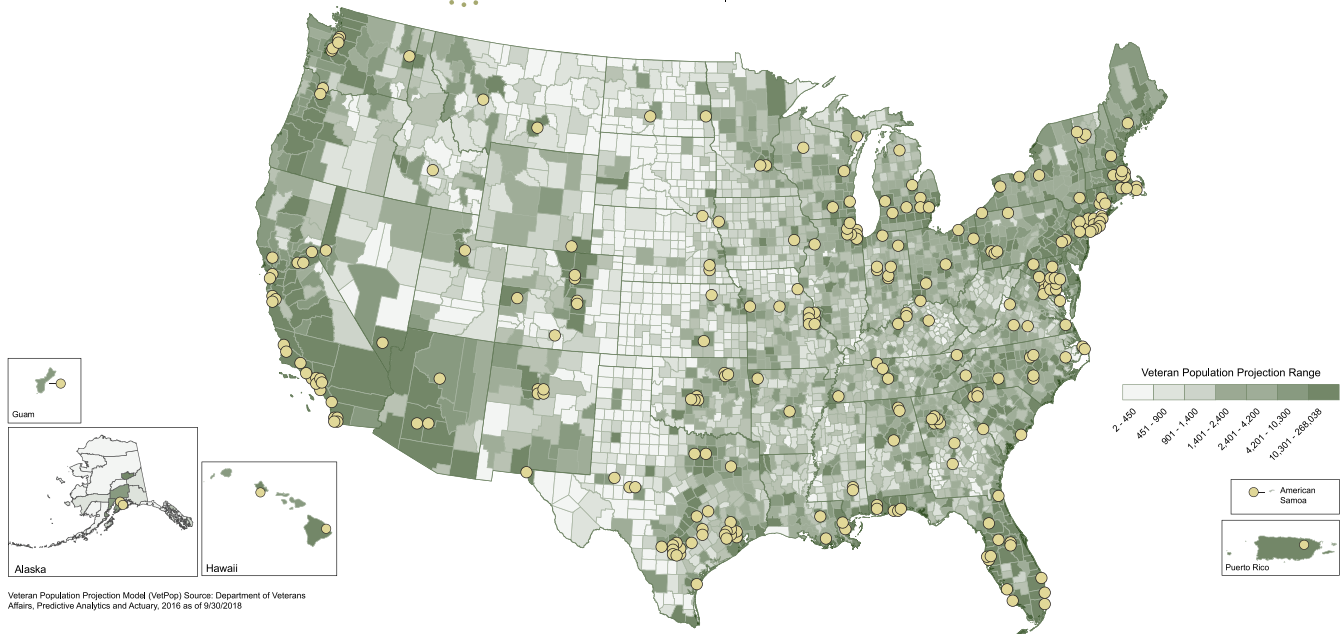
## **The Got Your 6 Network: Quantifying and Addressing Veterans' Needs in 2023**





**Got Your 6 Network**

● Got Your 6 Network Partner



**Acknowledgements**

The Bob Woodruff Foundation is appreciative of the exceptionally generous and visionary support of Craig Newmark Philanthropies, whose support facilitated our Got Your 6 Community Survey, as well as our preceding data collection efforts. These insights would not have been possible without the data from BWF’s Got Your 6 partners. We appreciate their active participation, daily engagement, and selfless commitment to improving the lives of veterans in American communities. Kirsten Bech, Karl Wingenbach, and Augustus (Gus) Wingenbach provided invaluable analysis of the data from the survey responses. We also appreciate the careful edit from Christian Howlett.

**About the Bob Woodruff Foundation**

The Bob Woodruff Foundation was founded in 2006 after reporter Bob Woodruff was wounded by a roadside bomb while covering the war in Iraq. Since then, the Bob Woodruff Foundation has raised awareness about the tough challenges veterans and military families are facing, and has invested in solutions to help support them in the next chapter of their lives. To date, the Bob Woodruff Foundation has invested over \$159 million to ensure that our nation’s veterans, service members, and their families — those who stood for us — have stable and successful futures. Visit the [Bob Woodruff Foundation](http://BobWoodruffFoundation.org) for more information.

## Introduction

The Bob Woodruff Foundation's Got Your 6 Network encompasses about 350 primary organizations that serve the military and veteran populations in all 50 states and three U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa). Some of those primary Got Your 6 partners are best-in-class organizations that provide a focused service, such as help with mental health, employment, legal services, or homelessness. But many are the front-facing organizations in community efforts that can include up to 100 organizations offering a wide range of services and supports. In those community collaboratives, public and private organizations and private individuals work together to serve their local military and veteran population. Including the collaborative partners of primary member organizations, the extended BWF Got Your 6 Network comprises thousands of participant organizations.

The Bob Woodruff Foundation regularly surveys its primary Got Your 6 partners about their experiences in working to meet their clients' needs. BWF publicizes those findings to inform the broader community of service providers, policymakers, and philanthropists. This report describes the results of the most recent survey, which was conducted in the winter of 2023 (see the box below).

This report outlines the needs that service members, veterans, and their families and caregivers expressed to Got Your 6 partners, as well as the capability of those partners to meet the identified needs. The Got Your 6 Network covers a geographic area that is home to 97 percent of the U.S. military and veteran population. Thus, the survey's findings provide comprehensive insights into the needs of service members and veterans across the country and the ability and capacity of American communities to address those needs.

## BWF's Got Your 6 Community Survey

This report provides data collected through the Bob Woodruff Foundation's Got Your 6 Community Survey (previously called the Local Partner Self-Assessment Tool). BWF surveys organizations in its network of partners that provide a wide range of services and supports to their local military and veteran population. The Got Your 6 Community Survey does not ask about individuals' likelihood of experiencing specific challenges or needs. Instead, it asks about the extent to which community-based organizations receive requests for specific services and about the extent to which communities can address those needs. As such, the responses reflect the needs of service members and veterans who seek assistance rather than the needs of the entire military and veteran population.

The survey aims to identify the strengths and areas of improvement of BWF's nationwide network of community-based partnerships that support veterans, service members, and their families and caregivers. Data from the survey illustrate the ways in which American communities across the spectrum of locations, economies, cultures, and infrastructure are trying to meet the needs of those populations.

BWF conducted the survey in the fall of 2019, the summer of 2021, and most recently the winter of 2023.<sup>1</sup> The surveys have benefited from very high response rates, including 91 percent in 2021 (102 participating organizations) and 94 percent in 2023 (130 participants). The Bob Woodruff Foundation's continuing goal is to analyze the experiences of Got Your 6 Network community partners and contribute to national and local discussions about how best to serve U.S. veterans. By amplifying the needs of veterans and the organizations that serve them, BWF will inform the national effort to support Americans who are collaborating to have an impact on the lives of veterans.

# Key Findings

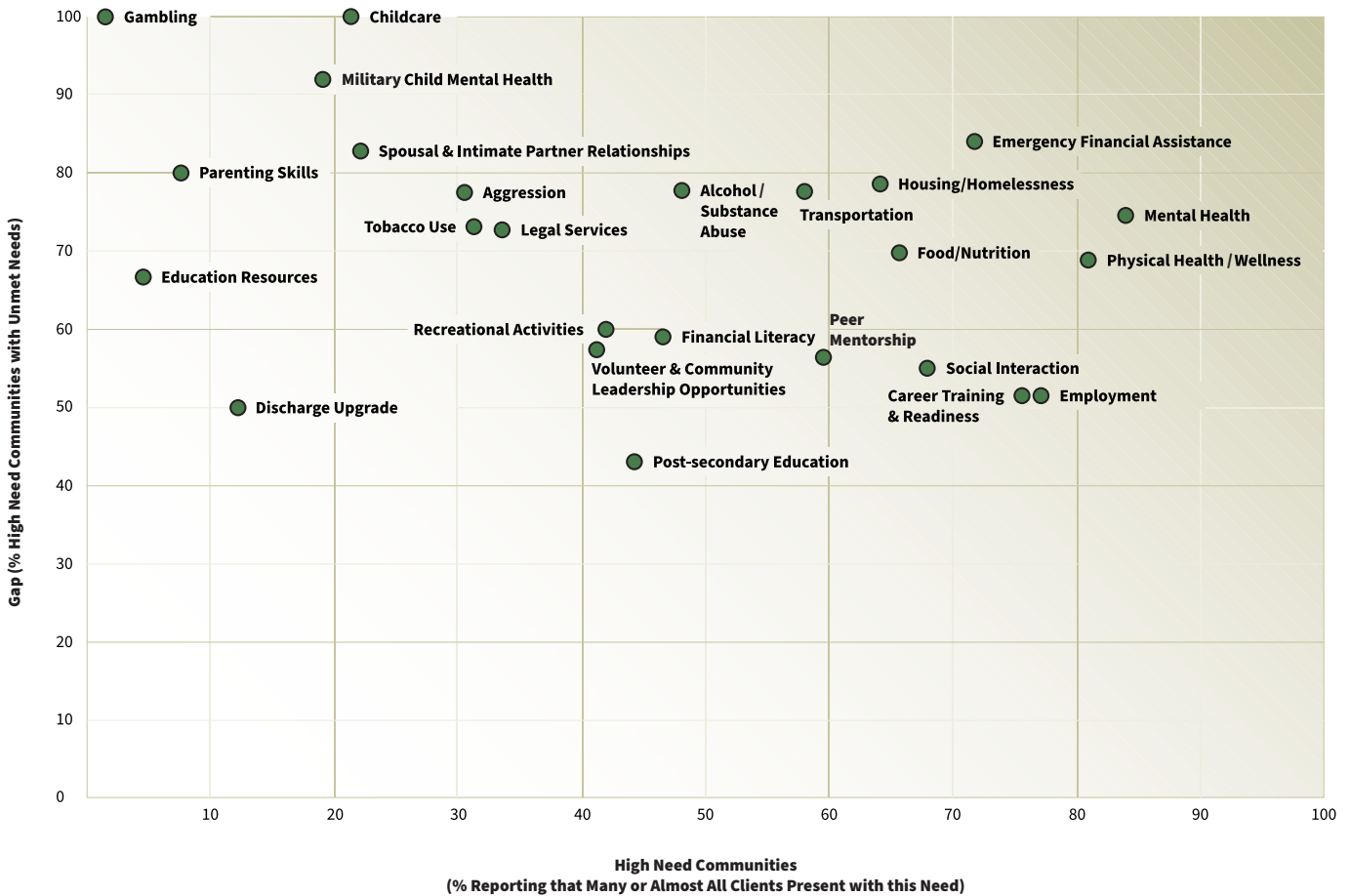
Communities across the United States reported high levels of need among their military and veteran population in early 2023, exceeding the capabilities of many communities. BWF's survey includes questions about an array of needs and asks Got Your 6 organizations whether "almost all," "many," "some," or "no" clients they serve face those needs. The survey also asks whether those organizations "do not address," "partially address," or "completely address" a given need.

Figure 1 summarizes the needs of military and veteran clients who sought assistance from Got Your 6 partners.

The horizontal (X) axis indicates the percentage of responding Got Your 6 partners that indicated that many or almost all of their clients presented with a particular need. The vertical (Y) axis indicates the percentage of those partners' communities that were unable to address that need completely.

The data points located toward the upper right corner of Figure 1 are the most concerning: They represent both relatively high levels of need and significant gaps in the availability of services. For example, 84 percent of responding organizations reported that many or almost all clients present with a need for mental health services. However, 71 percent of those respondents indicated that the partner organizations in their community cannot fully address that need.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1:**  
**Overview of Clients' Unmet Needs**



Similarly, 72 percent of partners indicated that many or almost all clients request emergency financial assistance, but 80 percent of those partner organizations are unable to meet all of that need. And although 64 percent of partners said that many or almost all clients request food assistance, 68 percent of those respondents have insufficient food resources to meet that demand.

The prevalence of most needs among the military and veteran population held steady or increased only slightly between the summer of 2021 (when the previous survey was conducted) and the winter of 2023, suggesting the durability of BWF's survey results over time.

Some needs increased more significantly, however, such as the needs for emergency financial assistance; peer or mentor support; and help with housing or homelessness, transportation, aggression, and post-secondary education. In addition, more veterans are seeking recreational activities and volunteer opportunities. Needs for employment and career training have decreased slightly since 2021.

The full array of needs covered by BWF's survey, and changes in clients' needs and service providers' capacity between 2021 and 2023, are discussed in more detail in the rest of this report.

## Basic Needs

Some of the biggest gaps between the demand for and supply of services continue to involve basic needs, such as food, financial assistance, transportation, and shelter. In Figure 2, the needs for transportation, legal services, and financial literacy showed horizontal changes from 2021 to 2023, indicating that although more organizations indicated that many or almost all of their clients presented with those needs, communities' capabilities to address those needs stayed roughly the same.

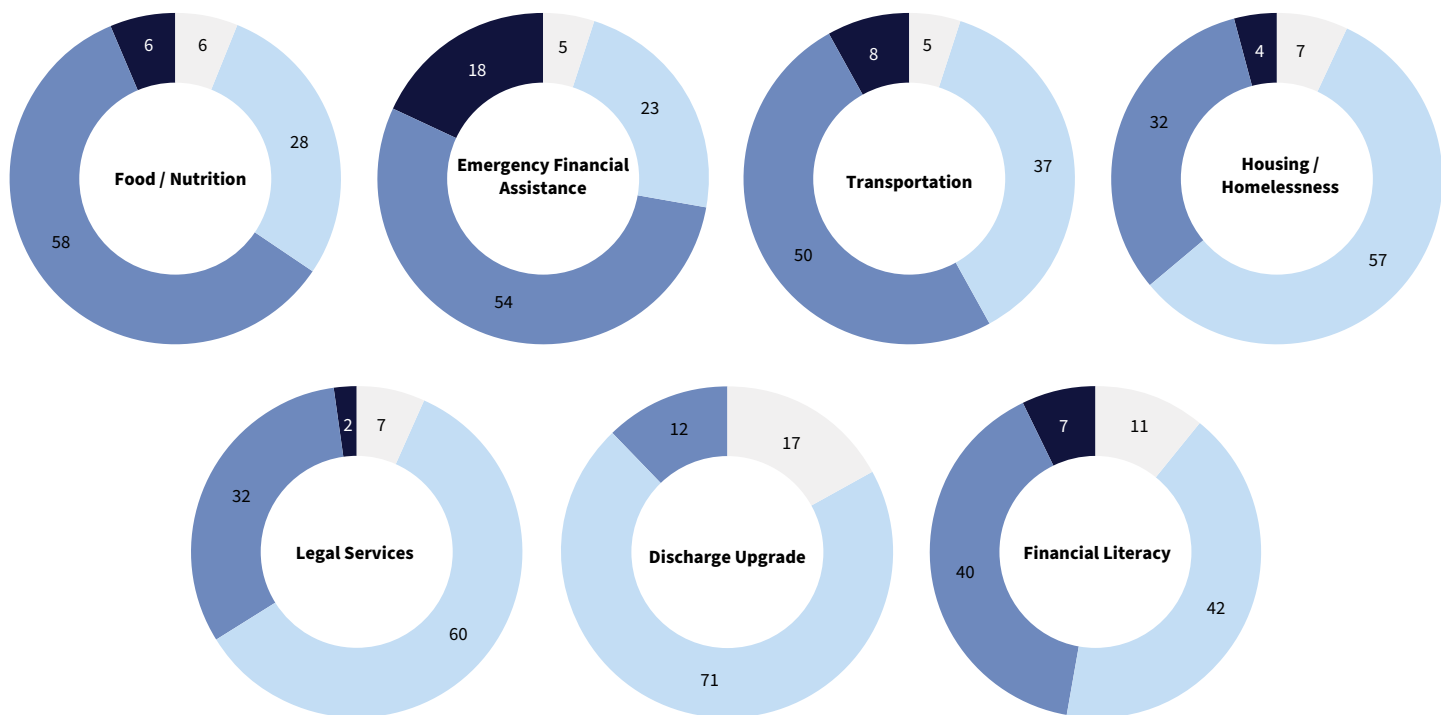
However, the majority of those communities are still unable to satisfy those needs completely. For other basic issues, the change from 2021 to 2023 was diagonal in Figure 2, meaning that more Got Your 6 partners indicated in 2023 that many or almost all of their clients present with that need and more partners are unable to meet that need fully. For example, 72 percent of partners reported in 2023 that many or almost all of their clients need emergency financial assistance (up from 62 percent in 2021), and 84 percent of those partners (up from 76 percent) said they are unable to completely address that need.

**Figure 2:**  
Changes in Basic Needs from 2021 to 2023



**Figure 3: Clients' Basic Needs**  
(Percentage of Partners)

"No" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need
  "Many" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need
  "Some" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need
  "Almost All" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need



Although emergency financial assistance is the most common basic need of the military and veteran clients who requested services from Got Your 6 partners in 2023, needs for food and transportation are close behind. Sixty-four percent of partners said that many or almost all of their clients need food and nutrition services, and 58 percent said many or almost all clients need help with transportation (see Figure 3).

Communities are struggling to address those basic needs of their military and veteran population. Only 27 percent of Got Your 6 partners said they fully address their clients' need for food and nutrition assistance, and only 15 percent completely satisfy the need for emergency financial assistance (see Figure 4).

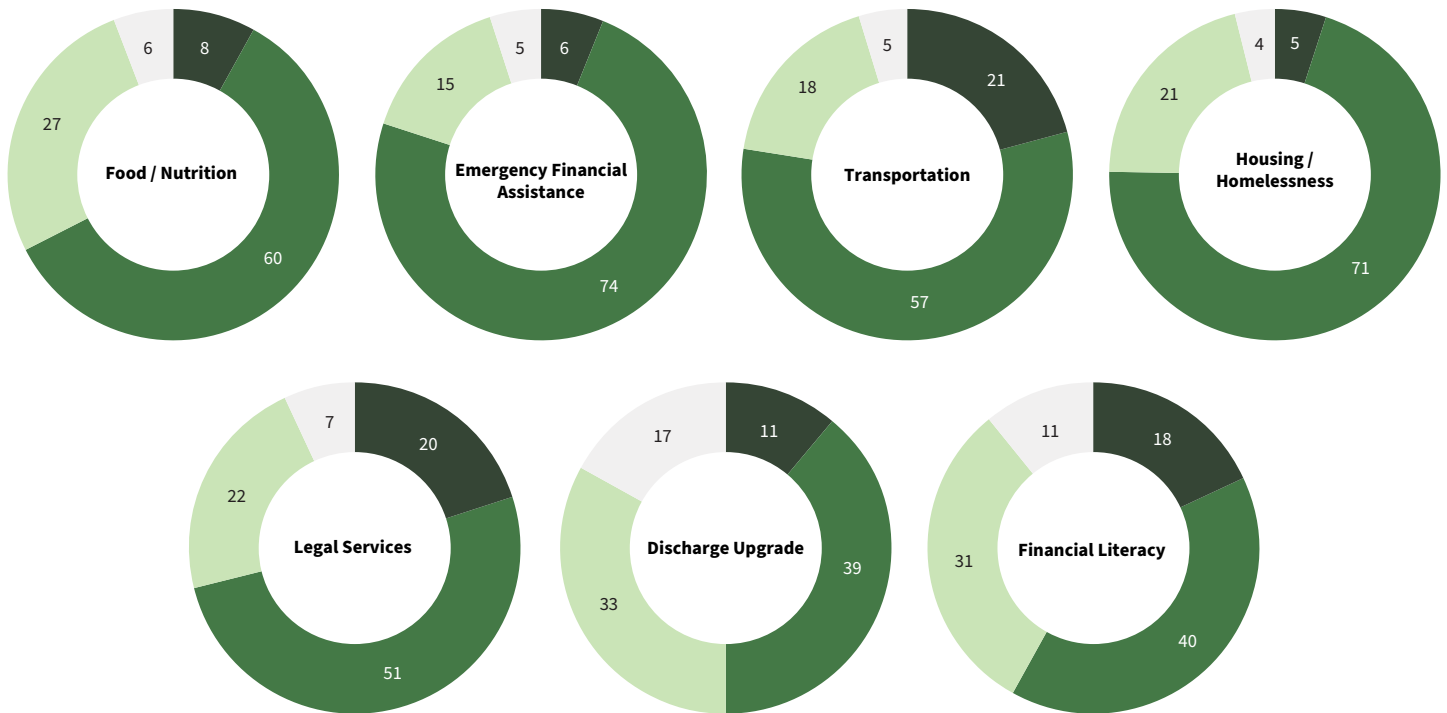
The vast majority of partner organizations said they either do not address those needs at all or only partially address them: 68 percent for food and nutrition assistance, and 80 percent for emergency financial help. (The rest reported that they do not encounter those needs.)

Robert Notch, President of the Greater Boston Veterans Collaborative, sees many clients who need help with food and nutrition. "Massachusetts remains a high-cost-of-living state," he explained. "The cost of housing alone can strap many families. Rent or mortgage, electric and heating bills, plus cell phone bills tend to get paid first, and food is paid out of what is left over. While it is hard to quantify the need, we can see that food distribution, free meals, and grocery card distributions see high participation rates."

In the area of transportation, only 18 percent of communities reported being able to meet all the needs of their military and veteran population. Twenty-one percent said they do not provide any transportation support.

**Figure 4: Got Your 6 Communities' Capacity to Meet Basic Needs**  
(Percentage of Partners)

No Need
  Do Not Address the Need
  Partially Address the Need
  Completely Address the Need



Help with housing or homelessness and legal services are requested at similar rates (about 35 percent of partners reported in 2023 that many or almost all of their clients have those needs). That similarity is not surprising, given that legal services are among the top needs of homeless veterans. Communities also have similar rates of resolving housing and legal needs. However, 20 percent of communities reported that they do not have a partner that can address veterans' legal needs. That situation has not improved since 2021.

The need to upgrade a military discharge is a specific legal and administrative issue that, if resolved, can have a tremendous impact on veterans, giving them access to life-changing medical care and financial benefits. Got Your 6 partners reported encountering that need less frequently than other basic needs, which is not surprising given that the issue does not apply to most veterans.

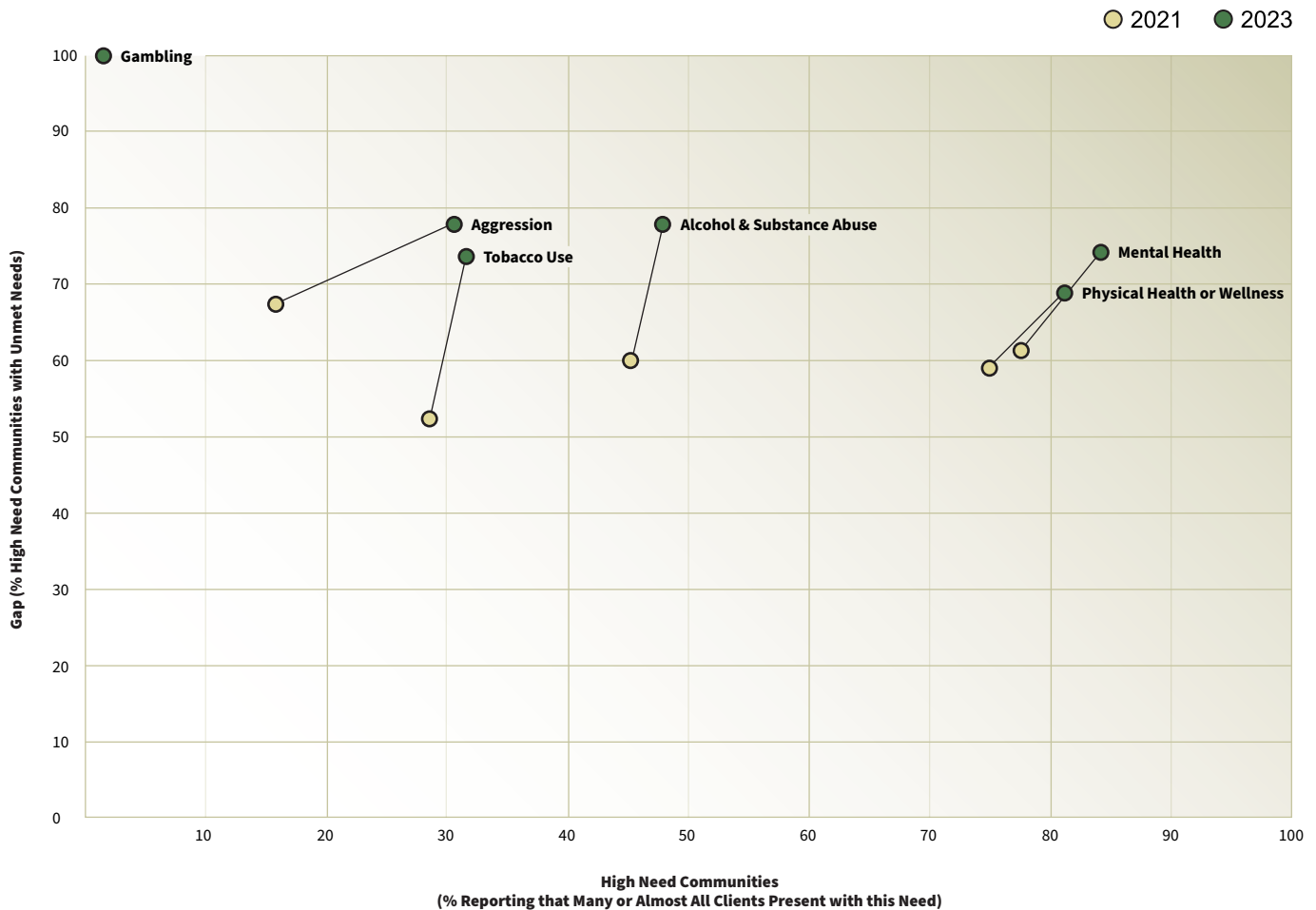
In 2023 (the first year that need was included in BWF's survey), 17 percent of partners said none of their clients need discharge upgrades. Consistent with legal resources, only one-third of partners reported being able to address that need fully, leaving gaps for the most vulnerable veterans in half of U.S. communities.

The need for financial literacy training is much less common than the need for emergency financial assistance, but financial literacy is likely to be an important resource for clients once their immediate financial crises are addressed. Although only 5 percent of Got Your 6 partners reported encountering no need for emergency financial assistance, 11 percent reported encountering no need for financial literacy resources. Thus, it is possible that organizations are not screening for financial literacy needs when providing urgent financial services.



# Health-Related Needs

**Figure 5: Changes in Health-Related Needs from 2021 to 2023**



**The need for health-related support has increased among the military and veteran population since 2021.** For most health-related issues in BWF’s survey, more organizations are reporting that many or almost all of their clients face those needs than was the case two years ago (see Figure 5). The gap in services—that is, the percentage of communities that are not completely satisfying those needs—has increased even more significantly since 2021.

Mental health challenges are the most common health-related need seen in the military and veteran populations that seek help from organizations in the Got Your 6 Network. Eighty-four percent of Got Your 6 respondents said in 2023 that many or almost all of their clients require mental health services (see Figure 6).

Nearly as many, 81 percent, reported that many or almost all clients need physical health services. However, only about 30 percent of communities said they are able to meet those needs completely (see Figure 7), down from about 40 percent in 2021.

The unmet need for services addressing alcohol and substance abuse is even greater and has also grown in recent years. Fifty percent of communities indicated that many or almost all of the veterans seeking support have that need, and an additional 47 percent said that some veterans have that need. But only 24 percent of communities reported being able to address that need fully, compared with 37 percent in 2021.

Travis Gladhill, Executive Director of the East Texas Veterans Community Council in Tyler, TX, explained, “As a rural community, we have seen continued issues with alcohol and substance abuse. Veterans in our area seek help from our organization with alcohol abuse and addiction to methamphetamine, which has become easily obtainable in east Texas. Recovery centers are always at capacity. Unfortunately, this means addicts will often be sent to jail for a petty crime. There is an overwhelming need for more treatment options to ensure these veterans receive adequate care to address their alcohol and substance abuse and do not become repeat offenders.”

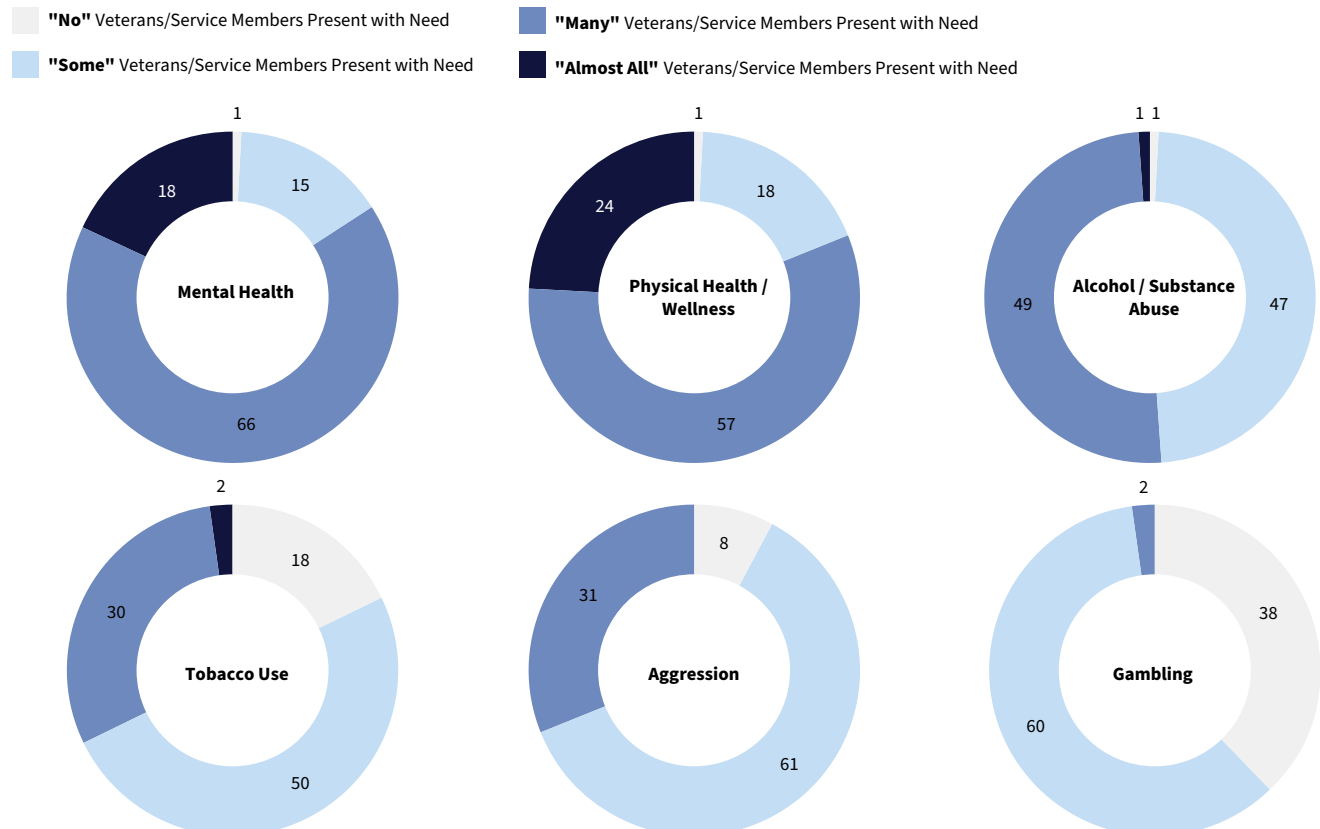
The need for tobacco addiction programs has also increased. However, just 23 percent of community partners in the Got Your 6 Network said they can fully satisfy that need, and an even larger share, 27 percent, lack any tobacco addiction services.

The need for help with addressing aggression has soared among the military and veteran population in the past two years. Thirty-one percent of respondents in 2023 said many of their clients present with that need—almost double the percentage in 2021. (In both years, no respondents said almost all of their clients need aggression-related services.) In total, 92 percent of communities indicated some level of need for aggression-related programming. But only 25 percent of communities said they can completely address that need.

Gambling addiction is a less frequently reported issue. Only 2 percent of Got Your 6 organizations said many or almost all of their clients need help with gambling addiction, but 60 percent said some of their clients have that need. Nevertheless, just 8 percent said they can fully satisfy the need for programs addressing gambling addiction.

With the exception of gambling, 23 percent to 32 percent of communities reported being able to completely address the health-related needs of veterans and service members seeking assistance.

**Figure 6: Clients' Health-Related Needs** (Percentage of Partners)



**Figure 7: Got Your 6 Communities' Capacity to Meet Health-Related Needs**  
(Percentage of Partners)



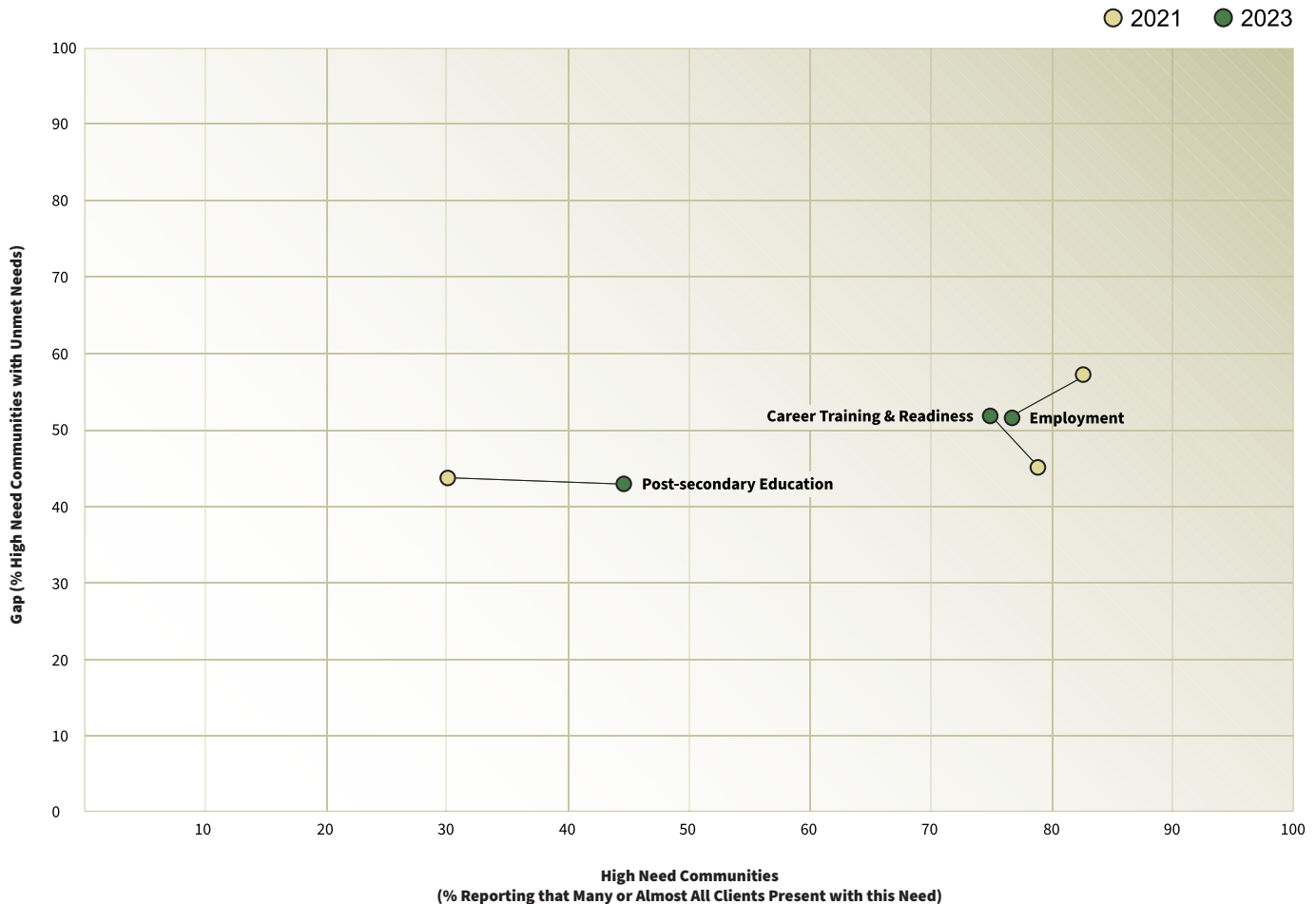
## Civilian Employment and Education Needs

The demand for employment services and career training and readiness has decreased slightly since 2021, with fewer community partners reporting that many or almost all of their clients present with those needs (see Figure 8). Conversely, **communities are seeing more requests for assistance with post-secondary education**, probably because more people are seeking to attend school as the COVID-19 pandemic has abated. Overall, roughly half of communities are unable to satisfy the high-need for employment and education services, a similar share as in 2021. About three-quarters of communities reported that many or almost all veterans seeking help need assistance with employment or career services (see Figure 9), and nearly half saw that level of demand for post-secondary education.

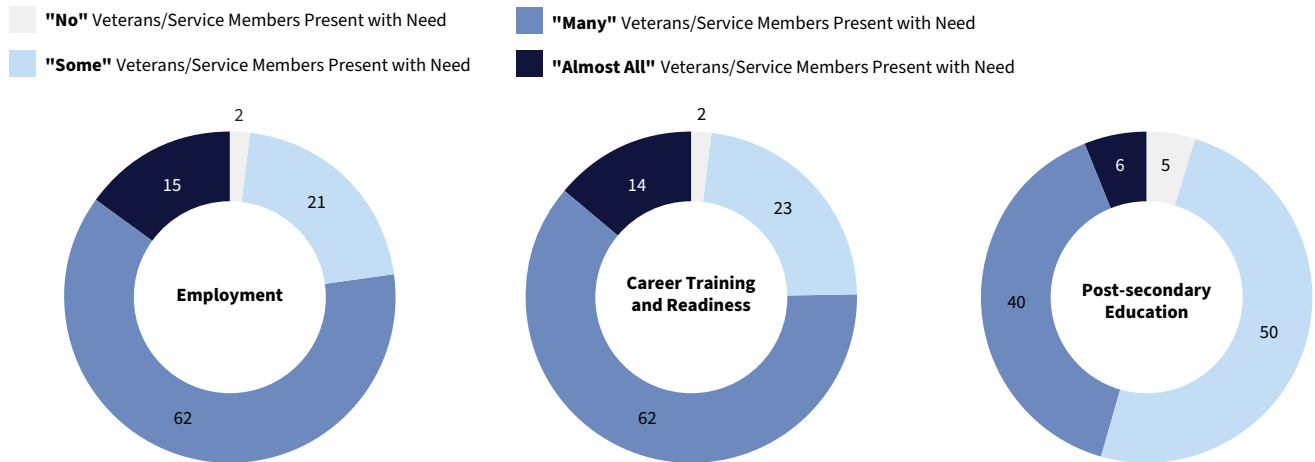
BWF's 2023 survey was conducted at a time of low national unemployment: The overall unemployment rate for veterans was 2.5 percent in February 2023, compared with 3.9 percent for nonveterans.<sup>3</sup> However, unemployment rates differ for different categories of veterans. Those ages 18 to 24 generally have a higher unemployment rate than their older counterparts; in February 2023, 5.7 percent of young veterans were unemployed. Black veterans and Hispanic veterans also experienced higher unemployment rates than other veterans.

More than 40 percent of Got Your 6 respondents reported being able to fully satisfy their clients' needs for employment, career training, and post-secondary education services (see Figure 10). But roughly half of communities cannot completely address those needs. Anecdotally, BWF hears from its Got Your 6 partners that vulnerable veterans, especially those with histories of homelessness, are more difficult to place in employment.

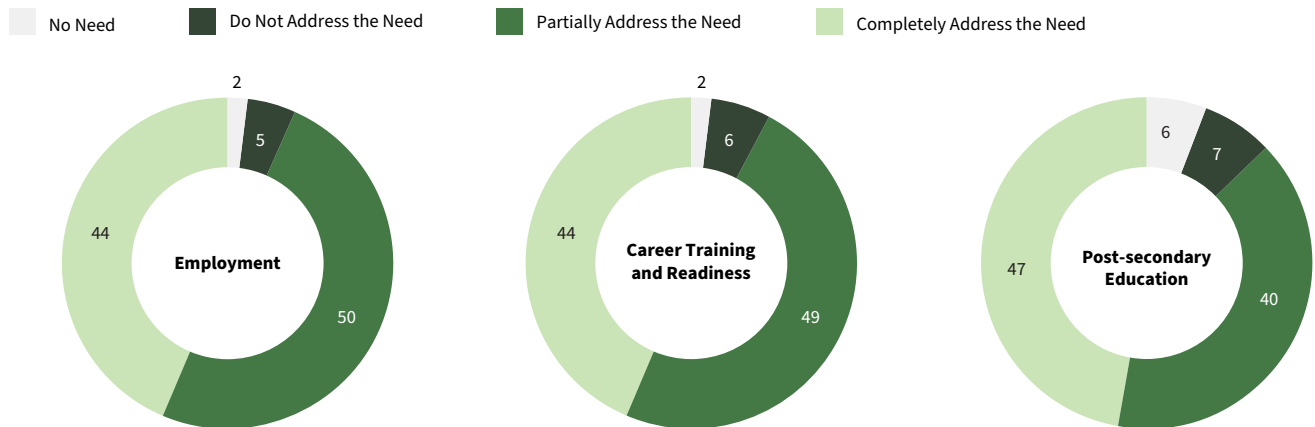
**Figure 8:**  
**Changes in Employment and Education Needs from 2021 to 2023**



**Figure 9: Clients' Employment and Education Needs (Percentage of Partners)**



**Figure 10: Got Your 6 Communities' Capacity to Meet Employment and Education Needs (Percentage of Partners)**



## Social Needs

As the COVID-19 pandemic has waned, interest in making social connections has grown among the military and veteran population since 2021 (see Figure 11). The majority of communities indicated in early 2023 that many or almost all of their clients want opportunities for peer mentorship and social interaction, and 41 percent of communities indicated that almost all or many veterans seek ways to volunteer and contribute to their community (see Figure 12). Despite the recent increase in demand, communities are addressing those needs at rates similar to prior years, although more communities are able to provide peer mentorship opportunities.

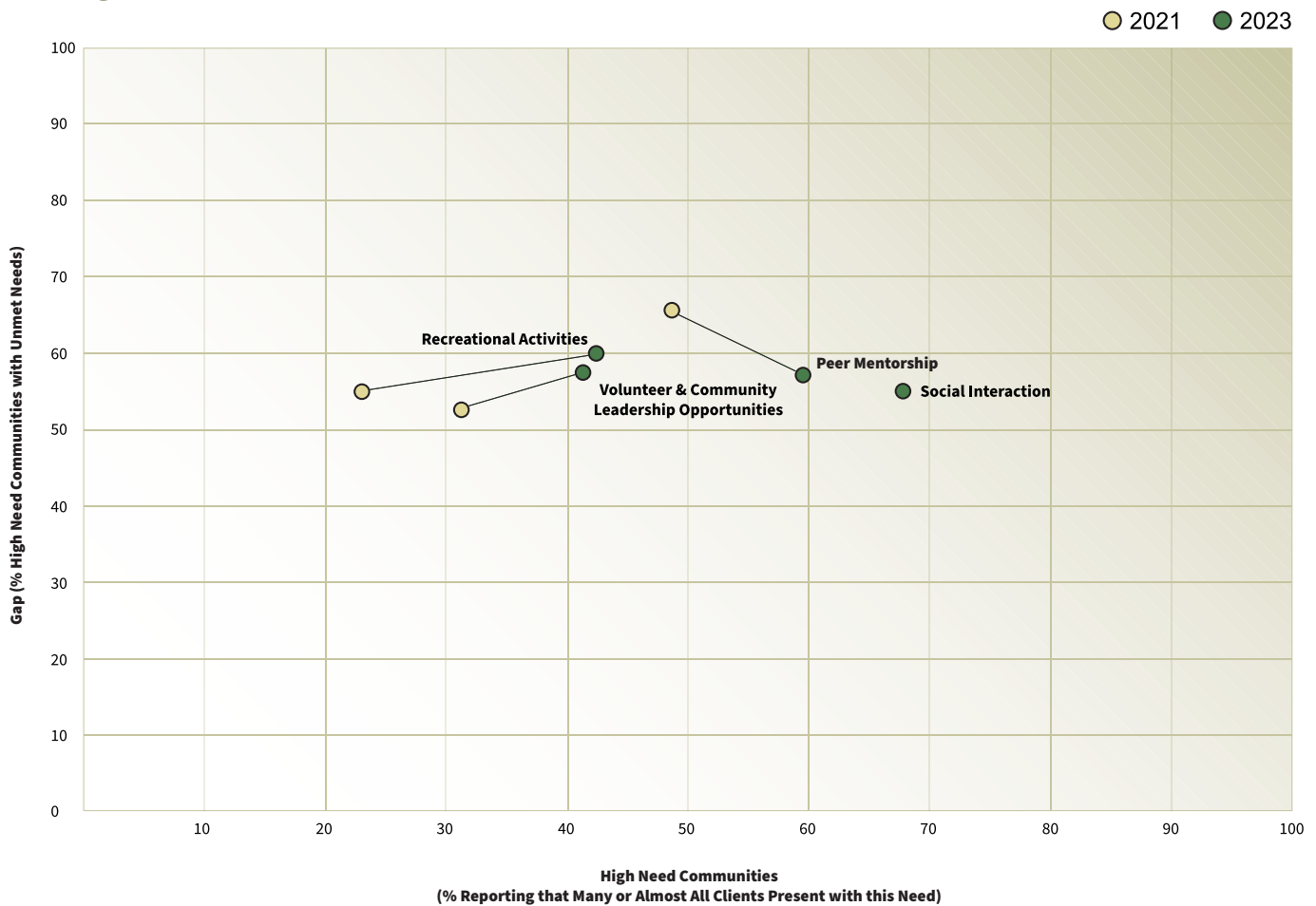
Roughly 90 percent of communities said they can partially or completely address clients' needs for peer mentorship, social interaction, and opportunities for volunteering and community leadership (see Figure 13).

Steve Yamamori, President and CEO of the Reveille Foundation in Goodyear, AZ, indicated that almost all veterans and service members they serve have a need for peer mentorship: "We have clearly seen that having a peer veteran mentor allows for easier connection to clients. Our veterans want to give back, and many of our peer support mentors are previous clients."

The need for recreational activities varies more widely among communities. Seventeen percent of respondents said none of their clients express that need, while 10 percent indicated that almost all veterans they serve want recreational activities. Altogether, 27 percent of communities either do not see that need or do not address it.

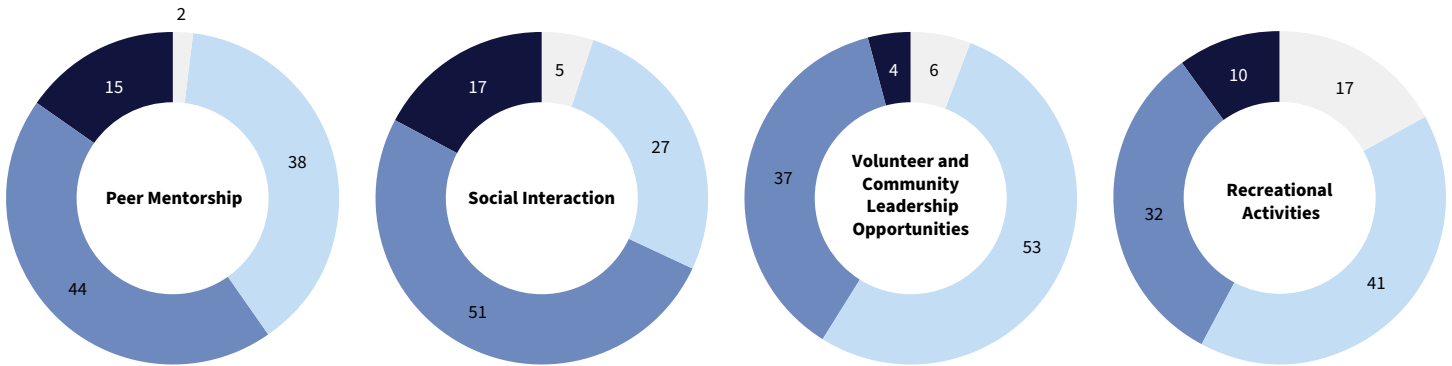
The desire for recreational activities may be a bellwether of overall well-being and a reflection of the types of individuals who seek support from Got Your 6 organizations. Vulnerable people who need help with basic needs and health issues may not be able to afford the time or resources to participate in recreational activities. Likewise, communities that focus on addressing more critical needs may not have the capacity to commit resources to recreational opportunities.

**Figure 11:**  
**Changes in Social Needs from 2021 to 2023**



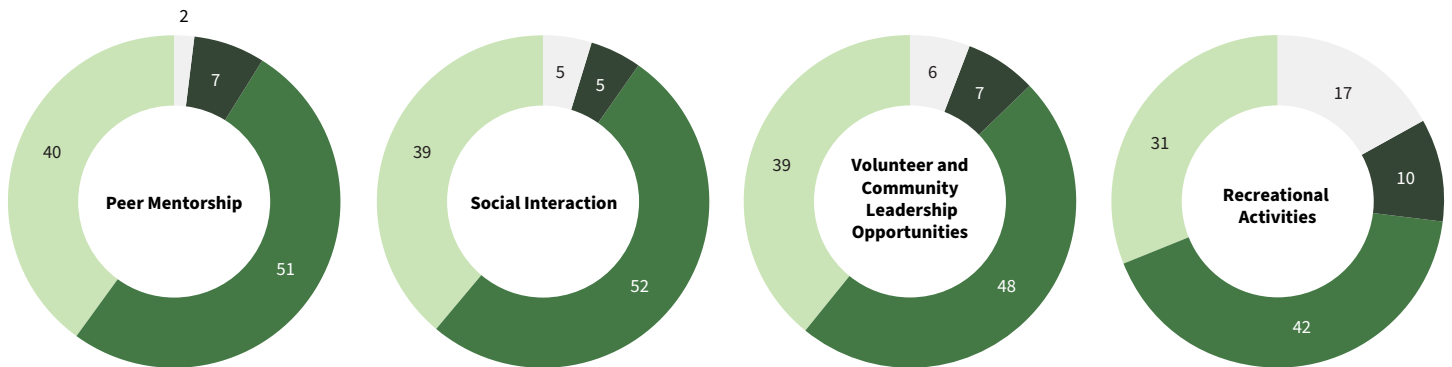
**Figure 12: Clients' Social Needs** (Percentage of Partners)

"No" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need
  "Many" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need
  "Some" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need
  "Almost All" Veterans/Service Members Present with Need



**Figure 13: Got Your 6 Communities' Capacity to Meet Social Needs** (Percentage of Partners)

No Need
  Do Not Address the Need
  Partially Address the Need
  Completely Address the Need



## Family-Related Needs

Although demand has increased since 2021, relatively few people seeking assistance from Got Your 6 community partners indicate a need for family services, such as those involving childcare, children's education, or domestic violence (see Figure 14). Some BWF partners, such as Bastion Community of Resilience in New Orleans, indicate that many veterans who seek services have other needs that they prioritize as more urgent than family-related needs.

The prioritization of needs unrelated to family issues may reflect the demographic groups that some Got Your 6 partners predominantly serve. For example, partners such as Welcome Home in Columbia, MO, indicate that they serve an older demographic of veterans, whereas Alpha Omega Veterans Services in Memphis, TN, mainly serves individual veterans, who do not have families.

Other indicators, however, suggest that family-related issues are real needs for the military and veteran population. For example, given that the share of communities reporting a frequent need for aggression-related services has almost doubled since 2021 (see Figure 5 on page 6), resources to help with parenting skills and intimate partner violence should also be increasing.

Amy Arambulo, Chair of the Orange County (CA) Veterans and Military Families Collaborative Resource Committee, reports that organizations in her community-based partnership cannot satisfy the entire demand for spouse and partner relationship support or mental health services. "Behavioral health needs of veterans and their families are not fully being met by the VA, as the closest one is in Long Beach and can be a challenge for veterans to access," she said. "Nonprofit pro bono behavioral health services are in high demand in Orange County."

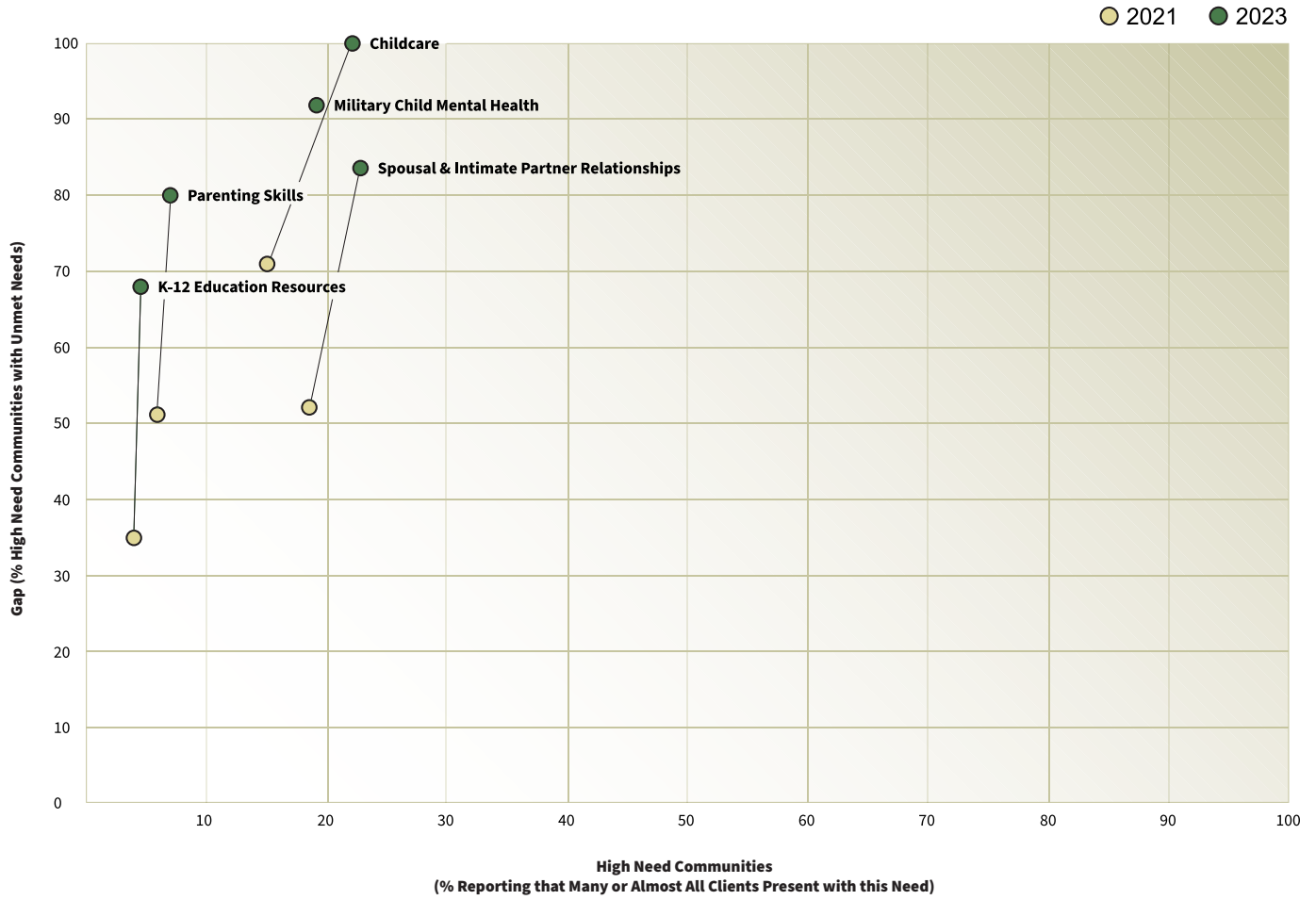
This year, for the first time, BWF's survey included questions about the mental health needs of children in military and veteran families.<sup>4</sup> More than two-thirds of responding organizations (72 percent) said they encounter clients who need mental health services for their children (see Figure 15). But only 13 percent said their community partners can fully address that need (see Figure 16).

Childcare is a consistent need for many American families and one of the top three needs of homeless veterans.<sup>iv</sup> Twenty-one percent of Got Your 6 respondents said many or almost all of their clients need childcare (up from 15 percent in 2021) and none of those high need communities fully address that need. Overall, amongst all Got Your 6 respondents, just 5 percent reported having the capacity to completely meet that need (down from 9 percent in 2021).

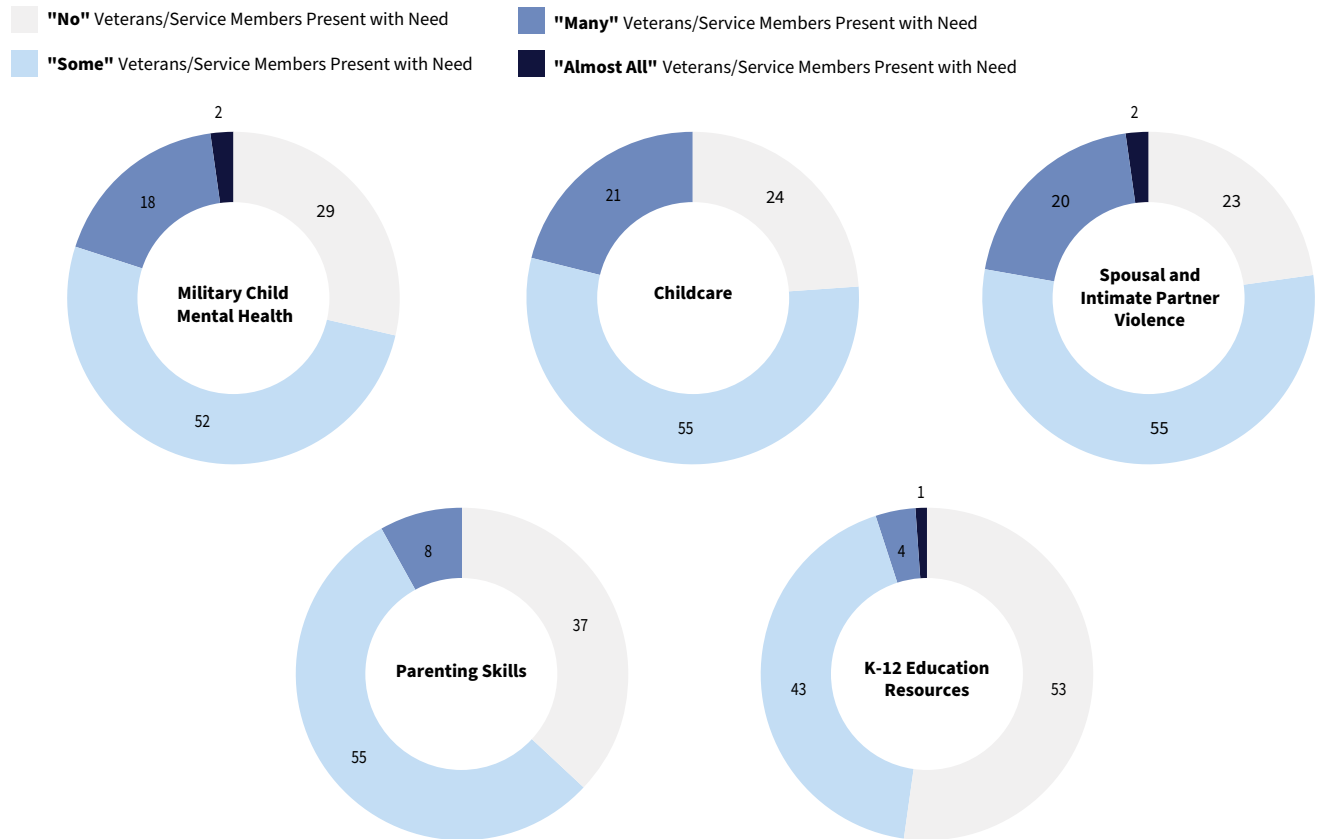
BWF's survey findings probably underestimate the extent of family-related needs among the military and veteran population. Got Your 6 partners are primarily focused on that population's other needs and do not prioritize resources for family-related services. As a result, they are generally less equipped to address family needs, and they may not screen clients for those needs. Clients, in turn, may not think to request those types of support.



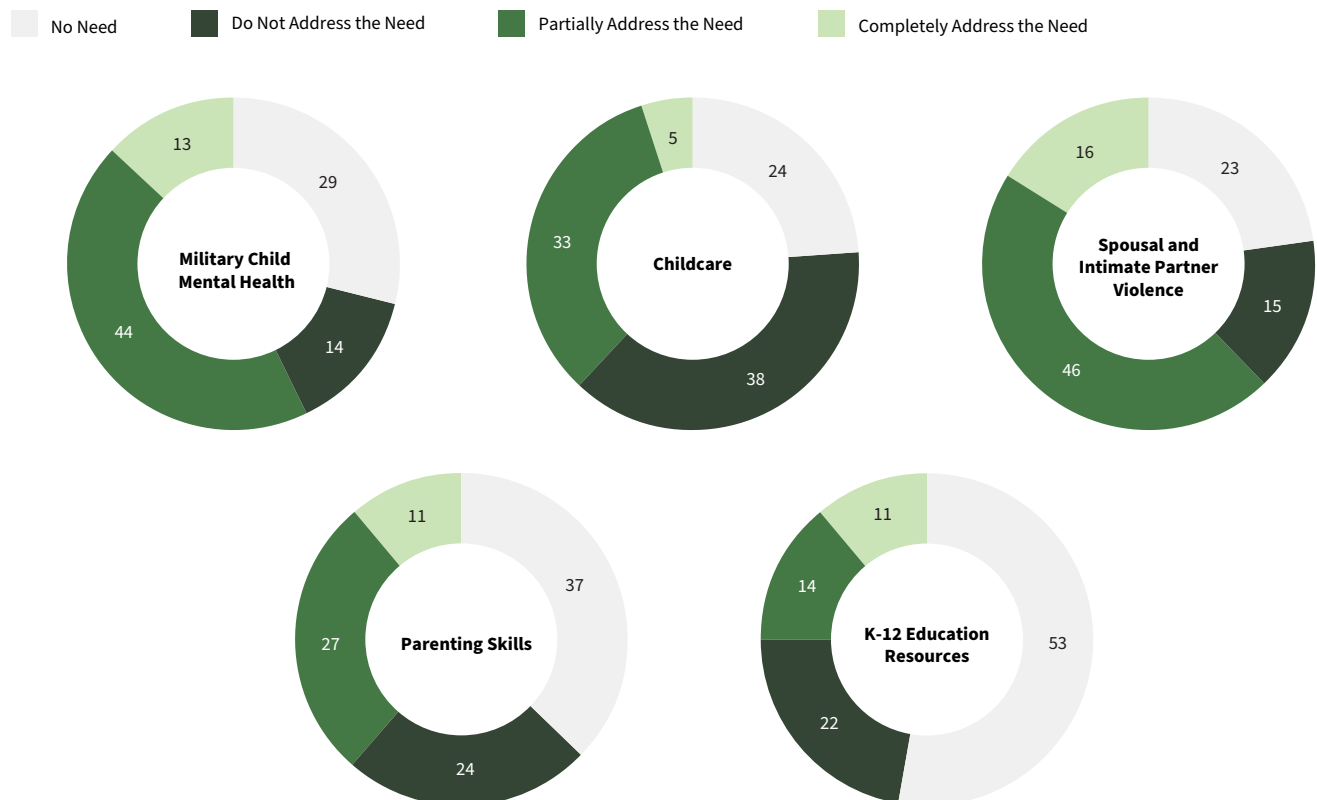
**Figure 14:**  
**Changes in Family-Related Needs from 2021 to 2023**



**Figure 15: Clients' Family-Related Needs** (Percentage of Partners)



**Figure 16: Got Your 6 Communities' Capacity to Meet Family-Related Needs** (Percentage of Partners)



## Conclusion

The Got Your 6 Network continues to address a wide range of significant needs for service members, veterans, and their families across the United States. Although different in each community, Got Your 6 partners are local coalitions of nonprofit, for-profit, public, and private organizations committed to ensuring that their military and veteran neighbors integrate into the civilian community and thrive after military service. This survey reflects the needs of the military and veteran clients who seek support, rather than the needs of the entire military and veteran population.

Compared with the previous survey, in 2021, the latest findings indicate that most needs are holding steady or worsening. Communities' ability to fully satisfy those needs is likewise holding steady or worsening. Improvements in the job market and the lessening of the COVID-19 pandemic have probably contributed to increases in some needs, such as the need for post-secondary education, as well as increasing opportunities for peer mentorship, social interaction, and recreation. Reductions in unemployment have probably also contributed to the increase in the number of communities able to completely meet clients' employment needs, although an employment gap persists in many other communities.

BWF's data collection effort quantifies the needs expressed by veterans who require assistance and local communities' ability to address those needs. The 2021 data told a sobering story about the challenges faced during a pandemic. Despite an environment of improved employment prospects, the current data show a worsening, rather than an improvement, for many of the most urgent and basic needs, such as help with housing and homelessness, emergency financial assistance, transportation, legal issues, mental health, physical health, and alcohol and substance abuse. In the face of those increased needs, communities are stretched to serve military personnel, veterans, and their families, with fewer communities able to satisfy those needs fully. Most issues that veterans experience are only partially resolved in American communities.

The Bob Woodruff Foundation applauds the continuing effort of our Got Your 6 partners as they expand their capacity and ability to serve the needs of the military and veteran population. We will continue to learn from our partners and to monitor, address, and resolve the needs of people who have served our nation.

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<sup>1</sup> The results of the previous surveys are described in Bob Woodruff Foundation, *Community Collaboration for America's Veterans: Insights From the Bob Woodruff Foundation's Local Partner Self-Assessment Tool* (June 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/t6tpk9rm>, and *The Got Your 6 Network: Quantifying and Addressing Veterans' Needs* (June 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/yymdhkf9>.

<sup>2</sup> The remainder of respondents either indicated that they were able to satisfy that need fully (28 percent) or that clients did not present with that need (1 percent). Subsequent figures in this report provide more complete detail.

<sup>3</sup> D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families, *The Employment Situation of Veterans* (Syracuse University, February 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/ce59we7w>.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about mental health and children in military and veteran families, see Bob Woodruff Foundation, *Spotlight on Military Children's Mental Health* (April 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/2vynsewr>.

<sup>5</sup> Bob Woodruff Foundation, *Bridging the Gap: How Existing Systems of Care Can Collaborate to Address Homelessness Among Veterans* (March 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/7ejyvbzf>.