

Michael Blecker
Executive Director, Swords to Plowshares
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Michael Blecker has been associated with Swords to Plowshares since 1976 and served as Executive Director since 1982. The agency was started in 1974 by returning Vietnam veterans and VISTA volunteers assigned to the VA Regional Office in San Francisco. The founders wanted to help their peers through the difficulties of readjusting to civilian life, primarily by helping them obtain employment and access to VA health care and disability benefits. Initially, Mr. Blecker worked on the case that led to Swords to Plowshares being recognized by the VA to represent veterans seeking benefits, the first new group in 32 years to be certified.

In the 1980s when homelessness exploded, Swords to Plowshares started a transitional housing program with funding support from the VA and the City and County of San Francisco. Swords to Plowshares continues to provide housing, employment, case management and benefits advocacy for veterans from offices in San Francisco and Oakland. In 2005, the Iraq Vet Project, was established to help veterans of those wars and to shape policies affecting them; now known as the Institute for Veteran Policy (IVP), the program works to share our expertise and best practices to improve veterans' access to care. We continue to work with our partners on the local, state and national level to end veteran homeless.

Under Mr. Blecker's leadership, Swords to Plowshares' annual budget has grown from \$75,000 to over \$30 million, 40% of which supports nearly 500 beds in stabilization and permanent supportive housing. He has a nationwide reputation for dedicated service and as an authority on veterans' services and veterans' rights. He served on the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (2002-2007) which advises the Secretary; he is co-founder of both the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans and the California Association of Veterans' Service Agencies. He has served on the Congressional Commission on Service Members and Veterans Transition Assistance, the California Senate Commission on Homeless Veterans, the San Francisco Mayor's Homeless Planning Committee, the National Agent Orange Settlement Advisory Board, the Agent Orange Information Center, and the Veterans Speakers Alliance. From 2015 to 2016 he served on the federal Commission on Care, examining veteran access to VA care.

Professional Experience

Swords to Plowshares, 1982 to the present, San Francisco, CA

Executive Director. Administers a multiservice nonprofit agency with an \$11.8 million annual operating budget and staff of 110, providing employment and training services, legal advocacy, counseling and referral services, and housing programs for homeless low-income veterans.

Swords to Plowshares, 1976 to 1982, San Francisco, CA

Advocate Specialist. Assisted veterans with VA benefits and discharge upgrading; administrative hearings; social service counseling, legislation review.

Long Beach Community Treatment Center, 1974 to 1975, Long Beach, CA

Community Liaison Officer. Counseled recently released federal offenders regarding employment and social services.

Military Service

U.S. Army 1967 to 1970, Combat Infantry Vietnam 1968 to 1969

Honorable discharge with rank of Sergeant (E-5).

Education

New College of California School of Law

J.D. degree, 1980

University of California at Berkeley
A.B. degree with Honors, 1974

Major Affiliations

Long Term Care Coordinating Council

2016 to present. A 40-member committee that advises the Mayor and City on policy, planning, and service delivery issues for older adults and people with disabilities to promote an integrated and accessible long-term care system.

Federal Commission on Care

2015 to 2016. A 15-member committee tasked with evaluating the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system. Mr. Blecker was appointed to the Commission by Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

Coalition for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

2007 to 2012. A 52-member national coalition of agencies providing services for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans

2002 to 2007. A 15-member committee created by Public Law 107-95 to provide advice and make recommendations to the Secretary of the VA concerning homeless veterans. The committee has issued annual reports to Congress since 2003.

Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance

1996-1999. This 12-member congressionally chartered commission was created by Public Law 104-275. The Commission's review of benefits and services is the most comprehensive since that of the Bradley Commission in 1956. The report was issued in 1999.

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

1989 to present, founding Executive Board member.

California Association of Veteran Service Agencies

1995 to present, founding Executive Board member.

California Legislature, Senate Commission on Homeless Veterans

1990 to 1991.

San Francisco Mayor's Homeless Planning Committee

1986 to 1988.

National Agent Orange Settlement Advisory Board

1984 to 1986. Convened to advise the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York in settling the Agent Orange class action lawsuit against manufacturers of herbicides used in Viet Nam, these 25 leading veterans distributed a major portion of the \$184 million settlement by funding human services projects across the nation.