

Supporting Veteran Truckers Through a “Whole Health” Approach to Work and Life

In the trucking industry, the “last mile” of delivery describes the process that moves a product from the warehouse shelf to the customer’s doorstep. Oftentimes, a Veteran is driving that last mile. [According](#) to the United States Census Bureau, 10% of the nation’s truck drivers are Veterans, making it one of the most common career choices for individuals transitioning out of active duty.

“[Veterans are] service oriented, mission oriented, community focused – there is a lot of alignment between military service and trucking, the concept of delivering critical things for our nation’s security and for citizens,” says Elizabeth Martin, Senior Vice President of the Innovation Department at Optum Serve, which provides health solutions and services to military service members and their families in the transition to civilian life.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the last mile became a lifeline for many citizens, as they depended on trucking and drivers to deliver groceries, medications and other necessities to their homes when the majority of the nation was socially isolating. But a shortage of truckers, and those able to train them, put the nation’s supply chain at serious risk.



In response, the Biden-Harris released the [Trucking Action Plan](#) in late 2021, which acknowledged that “approximately 70,000 Veterans ... are likely to have certified trucking experience in the last five years” and called for increased Veteran-focused outreach and recruitment in the industry.

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Elizabeth Murray-Belcaster
Senior Advisor of Communications and Public Relations, Task Force Movement

This call to action drove a bi-partisan coalition of military life cycle experts from DOL Veterans’ Employment and Training Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Service Organizations and Military Service Organizations, as well as industry specialists from unions, industry trucking associations, training providers, and private partners to form a supporting nonprofit initiative called the [Task Force Movement](#) (TFM).

Officially launched in April 2022, TFM has a primary focus in connecting transitioning service members, Veterans and military families with sustainable, lucrative supply chain opportunities. The task force also provides free training and skill building in all aspects of the industry, from driving mechanics to backend support like routing truck schedules. One of the most important facets of training is upskilling the expertise Veterans had during their service and applying it to the commercial delivery industry.

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Taking a ‘Whole Health’ Approach to Care

Many Veterans who chose a career in trucking are, in addition to the challenges of adjusting to civilian life, facing the unique obstacles of the transportation field, including lack of access to a nutritional diet, stress and loneliness from driving long hours.

Understanding that layering those experiences might make it difficult for Veterans to adjust and succeed, TFM and Optum Serve introduced their “Whole Health” approach to their mission.

Maintaining a career is just one piece of the puzzle. A Whole Health approach looks at the individual as part of a larger ecosystem, ensuring Veterans have the resources they need to maintain health and stability in all aspects of their lives.

“Our health and how we live, labor and love in the world, is instrumental to how we are productive citizens, how we are productive employees, how we are supported by our families at large,” says Martin. “Whole Health recognizes that nutrition, primary care, behavioral health, even financial and legal advice might be helpful in order for individuals to live a productive and healthy life.”



Optum Serve and TFM developed several recommendations for participating employers based on a Whole Health philosophy, including:

- Aligning jobs to lifestyle preferences, ensuring workers are home with their families 3-4 nights per week and that employers have Veterans resource groups available for additional support.
- Implementing driver healthcare and safety programs like zero employee contribution.
- Prioritizing family engagement, such as regular communication via letters and family day events, as well as special attention/support for families of long-haul drivers.
- Ensuring competitive wages, benefits and collective bargaining, sign-on/merit bonuses.



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With support from Optum Serve, and their long-standing connections and partnerships with healthcare organizations across the private and public sectors, TFM is able to deliver on these Whole Health solutions and meet the broad spectrum of Veteran healthcare needs.

“They’re coming out of an environment where there’s a fragmented approach, they might have benefits under the VA, or benefits under their private employer,” explains Martin. “Navigating those challenges and understanding what opportunities are best for them and their family can be daunting, we want to make it as easy for them as possible.”

Paving the Way for a Bright Future

In just their first year, TFM has made significant strides. The organization has several partnership programs with colleges and universities that help transitioning service members get the certifications necessary to thrive in their chosen careers.

“We have scholarships for commercial driver’s licenses in trucking with a local community college in Pennsylvania,” says Murray-Belcaster. “We’ve also set up 50 cybersecurity scholarships with Villanova University for Veterans and transitioning service members.”

In addition to the trucking industry, TFM is working to match Veterans with other supply chain and national security careers, such as cybersecurity, maritime, aviation and health care.

“Those groups have come together to try to tackle the supply side issue on all fronts, opening up skill, opportunity and training for Veterans,” says Martin.

The future is brighter than ever, Murray-Belcaster notes that calls come in almost every day from supply chain organizations that want to partner with TFM. And with Optum Serve helping to implement a Whole Health approach, Veterans and their families can sustain employment and lead healthy lives.

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Learn more about how Optum Serve is supporting Veterans.

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