



National Coalition for the Homeless

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Homeless Veterans

Published by the National Coalition for the Homeless, September 2009

This fact sheet examines homelessness among U.S. veterans. A list of resources for further study is also provided.

BACKGROUND

Far too many veterans are homeless in America—between 130,000 and 200,000 on any given night—representing between one fourth and one-fifth of all homeless people. Three times that many veterans are struggling with excessive rent burdens and thus at increased risk of homelessness.

Further, there is concern about the future. Women veterans and those with disabilities including post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury are more likely to become homeless, and a higher percentage of veterans returning from the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have these characteristics.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 131,000 veterans are homeless on any given night¹. And approximately twice that many experience homelessness over the course of a year. Conservatively, one out of every three homeless men who is sleeping in a doorway, alley or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served this country.

Approximately 40% of homeless men are veterans, although veterans comprise only 34% of the general adult male population. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans estimates that on any given night, 200,000 veterans are homeless, and 400,000 veterans will experience homelessness during the course of a year (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2006). 97% of those homeless veterans will be male (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008).

DEMOGRAPHICS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) says the nation's homeless veterans are mostly males (four percent are females). The vast majority is single, most come from poor, disadvantaged communities, 45 percent suffer from mental illness, and half have substance abuse problems. America's homeless veterans have served in World War II, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon,

¹ National Coalition for homeless veterans: <http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm>

Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), Operation Iraqi Freedom, or the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America. 47 per cent of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam Era. More than 67 per cent served our country for at least three years and 33 per cent were stationed in a war zone.

Here are some statistics concerning the veterans homeless²:

23% of homeless population are veterans
33% of male homeless population are veterans
47% Vietnam Era
17% post-Vietnam
15% pre-Vietnam
67% served three or more years
33% stationed in war zone
25% have used VA Homeless Services
85% completed high school/GED, compared to 56% of non-veterans
89% received Honorable Discharge
79% reside in central cities
16% reside in suburban areas
5% reside in rural areas
76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems
46% white males compared to 34% non-veterans
46% age 45 or older compared to 20% non-veterans

Female homeless veterans represent an estimated 3% of homeless veterans. They are more likely than male homeless veterans to be married and to suffer serious psychiatric illness, but less likely to be employed and to suffer from addiction disorders. Comparisons of homeless female veterans and other homeless women have found no differences in rates of mental illness or addictions.

PROGRAMS AND POLICY ISSUES³

While most housing help available to veterans focuses on homeownership, there have been Federal investments in programs for homeless veterans. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) funds temporary housing for homeless veterans including:

- shelter and two-year transitional housing funded through the Grant and Per Diem Program,
- long-term care through the Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans Program, and
- skills programs such as the Compensated Work Therapy/Veterans Industries Program.

These programs do not meet existing need. For example, Grant and Per Diem only funds 8,000 beds. In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) works with VA to operate the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. HUD-VASH connects HUD Housing Choice Vouchers with VA case management and services. This is HUD's only program targeted directly to veterans. HUDVASH, a long standing and rigorously tested program, has been under-resourced in past

² National Coalition for homeless veterans: <http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm>

³ <http://www.signup4.net/Upload/NATI12A/2009194E/2009%20Policy%20Guide.pdf>

years, but the recent addition of 10,000 vouchers a year for two years has been a crucial step forward. The Administration did not request additional vouchers for 2010. However, the program is popular in Congress, and there is a strong possibility of additional vouchers this year.

VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program -

The Grant and Per Diem program is offered annually (as funding permits) by the VA to fund community-based agencies (up to 65% of a given project) providing transitional housing or service centers for homeless veterans.

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In VA's Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residence (CWT/TR) Program, disadvantaged, at-risk, and homeless veterans live in supervised group homes while working for pay in VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program (also known as Veterans Industries). Veterans in the CWT/TR program work about 33 hours per week, with approximate earnings of \$732 per month, and pay an average of \$186 per month toward maintenance and up-keep of the residence. The average length of stay is about 174 days. VA contracts with private industry and the public sector for work done by these veterans, who learn new job skills, relearn successful work habits, and regain a sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

Supported Housing -

In 2008, according to the annual homeless assessment report to Congress, 3% of the shelter's beds were reserved for the veterans.

Like the HUD-VASH program, staff in VA's Supported Housing Program provides ongoing case management services to homeless veterans. Emphasis is placed on helping veterans find permanent

housing and providing clinical support needed to keep veterans in permanent housing. Staff in these programs operate without benefit of the specially dedicated Section 8 housing vouchers available in the HUD-VASH program but are often successful in locating transitional or permanent housing through local means, especially by collaborating with Veterans Service Organizations.

In addition, the VA extends loans, funds Veterans Benefits Counselors, and operates drop-in centers where veterans can clean up and receive therapeutic treatment during the day.

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans estimates that the VA serves about 25% of veterans in need – a figure that would leave approximately 300,000 veterans each year to seek assistance from local government agencies and voluntary organizations.

In general, the needs of homeless veterans do not differ from those of other homeless people. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans suggests the most effective programs are “community-based, nonprofit, “veterans helping veterans” groups” (NCHV “Background and Statistics”). However there is some evidence that programs which recognize and acknowledge veteran experience may be more successful in helping homeless veterans transition into stable housing. Until serious efforts are made to address the underlying causes of homelessness, including inadequate wages, lack of affordable housing, and lack of accessible, affordable health care, the tragedy of homelessness among both veterans and non-veterans will continue to plague American communities.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Alker, Joan. Heroes Today, Homeless Tomorrow? Homelessness Among Veterans in the United States, 1991. National Coalition for the Homeless, 2201 P St. NW, Washington, DC 20037; 202/462-4822.

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Providing reasonable estimates of Homeless Veterans in America On Any Given Night in May, 1994, 1994. Available, free, from the [National Coalition for Homeless Veterans](#), 333-1/2 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20003-1148. Phone: 800-838-4357.

[National Coalition for Homeless Veterans](#), 333-1/2 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20003-1148. Phone: 800-838-4357; Fax: 888-233-8582; Email: nchv@nchv.org

[HUDVET](#). Established by HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) in consultation with national veteran service organizations, HUDVET is a Veteran Resource Center designed to provide veterans and their family members with information on HUD's community-based programs and services. HUDVET may be reached at 1-800-998-9999 (TDD 1-800-483-2209).

National conference on ending homelessness, policy Guide, 2009:
<http://www.signup4.net/Upload/NATI12A/2009194E/2009%20Policy%20Guide.pdf>