

Migration by Veterans Who Received Homeless Services From the Department of Veterans Affairs¹

Overview:

- For the studied VISNs and VAMCs, in-migration and out-migration roughly balanced out, combatting anecdotal concerns over in-migration and its local impact on service demand.
- Of 113,400 homeless veterans in the study, only 15.3 percent migrated across VISNs.
- Those who were homeless for the full two year period of the study had the highest migration rate, at over 20 percent.

Study:

Researchers in this study tracked the migration of veterans experiencing homelessness using data from two major sources that indicate use of VA homeless and health care services with corresponding location codes. Records came from the Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES), which specifically tracks VA homeless service usage, and the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS), which tracks all medical records to include some fields on homelessness.

Migration was indicated by homeless service usage in multiple Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). The study tracked 114,300 homeless veterans in this study to look at overall migration rates based on length of time homeless, timing of migration during the studied homelessness episode, and geographic distribution of migration.

Findings:

On average, the migration rate was 15.3 percent for all veterans in the study. However, the extent of the migration varied widely by length of time homeless, with those homeless longest showing the highest migration rates. Those homeless the longest in the study (two full years) had a homelessness rate over 20 percent, while those homeless for a shorter length of three months had a migration rate fewer than three percent. The researchers also found that veterans were most likely to move within the first few months of a homelessness episode.

The researchers found that levels of in-migration and out-migration varied widely across VISNs, with VISN 5 (Capitol Area) having the largest proportional net gain and VISN 9 (KY,

NVTAC Insights:

Staff members at your HVRP can operationalize the learnings from this study by having concrete, action oriented discussions with veterans about their stability and plans for relocation. Overall, the majority of homeless veterans in your HVRP will stay put in your community, or at least in your VAMC catchment area and VISN. But, you can still have a productive conversation to make sure everyone is on the same page, you don't lose track of the veteran if they move to a new area, and the veteran has continuity of care should they decide to move.

Through the case management process, case managers and job developers should ask veterans in HVRP, especially those who recently became homeless within the last few months, about their goals for location. Veterans intending to relocate may receive services through your agency, but could also benefit from a referral to an HVRP and VAMC in the new location should they choose to move to ensure continuity of care. You may want to build these questions into your intake process prior to enrollment.

For HVRPs working with veterans with long histories of homelessness and criminal records, case managers should ask about previous living locations, both during and prior to this homelessness episode. Agencies that do background checks to help veterans talk constructively about their past legal issues may need to conduct checks in multiple states to obtain a full picture. This extra step can help your team identify issues before they come up, helping the veteran with confidence and preparation in job interviews.

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TN, AR) having the largest proportional net loss of homeless veterans due to in- and out-migration. Overall, the levels of migration in and out of VISNs roughly even out. Looking at the VA Medical Center (VAMC) level, the researchers found that only eight of the 128 VAMCs had a net loss or gain above 10 percent. The researchers found that the in- and out-migration for each VAMC also roughly matched in most VAMCs. The researchers found some preliminary evidence connecting migration to climate and weather shifts, an issue requiring additional research.

¹ Metraux, S., Treglia, D., & O'Toole, T. (2016). Migration by Veterans Who Received Homeless Services From the Department of Veterans Affairs. *Military Medicine*, 181(10), 1212-1217. Retrieved July 13, 2017.