



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

HOMELESS VETERANS FACT SHEET

“As long as there are veterans or veteran family members searching for shelter on the streets...we have failed in our duty to honor the commitment of the brave men and women who chose to serve.”

Senator Barack Obama, 2007

Definition of Homeless

Public Law 100-77, signed into law on July 22, 1987, known as the “McKinney Act,” identifies a homeless person as one who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; and who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter, a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Why are Veterans Homeless?

In addition to the complex set of factors affecting all homeless individuals – extreme shortage of affordable housing, livable income, and limited access to health care – **a large number of displaced and at-risk veterans live with lingering effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse, compounded by a lack of family and social support networks.**

Recent VA data indicates that veterans are twice as likely as other Americans to be chronically homeless. In 2005, the VA Northeast Program Evaluation Center reported that male veterans are 1.3 times more likely to become homeless than non-veteran males; and female veterans are 3.6 times more likely to become homeless than non-veteran females.

Who are Homeless Veterans?

- ◆26% of homeless population are veterans.*
- ◆33% of male homeless population are veterans.
- ◆15% served before the Vietnam Era.
- ◆47% served during the Vietnam Era.
- ◆17% served after the Vietnam Era.
- ◆67% served three or more years.
- ◆33% were stationed in a war zone.

- ◆25% have used VA homeless services.
- ◆89% received an honorable discharge.
- ◆85% completed high school/GED compared to 56% of non-veterans.
- ◆79% reside in central cities.
- ◆70% suffer from substance abuse problems.*
- ◆45% suffer from mental illness.*
- ◆46% are age 45 or older compared to 20% of non-veteran homeless citizens.

Sources: “Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve,” Interagency Council on the Homeless, Dec. 1999. This was the last federal study conducted.

**“Vital Mission: Ending Homelessness Among Veterans,” The Homelessness Research Institute at the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Nov. 2007.*

How Many Homeless Veterans are There?

Accurate numbers, community-by-community, are not available. Some communities do annual counts; others do an estimate based on a variety of factors. The closest Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Homeless Coordinator, or office of the mayor or other presiding government can provide the most current information.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates nearly 196,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. According to the VA CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) Report, approximately 400,000 veterans experience homelessness during the year.

What Services do Veterans Need?

Homeless Veterans need a coordinated effort that provides secure housing and nutritional meals; physical health care, substance abuse aftercare and mental health counseling; and personal development and empowerment. Homeless veterans also need job assessment, training and placement assistance. NCHV strongly believes all programs to assist homeless veterans must focus on helping veterans reach their highest level of independence.



Who is Eligible for Services?

In general, most organizations use the VA eligibility criteria to determine which veterans can access services. Eligibility for VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Benefits vary according to type and length of military service. The current VA benefits and eligibility manual can be viewed at www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current_benefits.asp.

How do Programs Help Homeless Veterans?

The most effective programs for homeless and at-risk veterans are community-based, nonprofit, “veteran helping veteran” groups. Programs that work best feature transitional housing with the camaraderie of living in structured, substance-free environments with fellow veterans who are succeeding at improving themselves. The most successful programs include individualized case management support, employment training and job placement services.

Because government money for homeless veterans is currently limited and serves only about 60% of those in need, it is critical community groups reach out to help provide the support, resources and opportunities most Americans take for granted: housing, employment and health care.

There are approximately 300 community-based veteran organizations across the country that have demonstrated impressive success serving homeless veterans. These groups are most successful when they work in collaboration with federal, state and local government agencies, other homeless providers and veteran service organizations. A list of organizations helping veterans may be accessed by visiting www.nchv.org. Veterans who participate in these programs have a higher chance of becoming tax-paying, productive citizens again.

How Can You Help?

■ **Determine the need in your community.** Contact your mayor’s office for a list of local homeless veteran providers and meet with providers to see how you can help.

■ **Participate in local homeless coalitions.** Most states, large cities and many urban counties have homeless coalitions, but if veteran advocates are not at the table, homeless veterans are less likely to receive a fair share of available resources. If your community does not have a homeless coalition, this may be an opportunity to educate and mobilize citizens around this critical need.

■ **Make a charitable donation to your local homeless veteran provider.** Along with financial contributions, service providers often seek donated goods, including paper products, clothing, canned goods, personal hygiene products, furniture and kitchen appliances.

■ **Engage your state and local elected officials.** Here is where the real power rests on public assistance issues. Make homeless veterans a priority for state assemblies, mayors, county and city council members and commissioners. Involve your local media. Local newspapers, TV and radio stations are always looking for news and issues to cover. Make sure they know who you are and what you are trying to accomplish. Strengthen your voice by soliciting the support of local care providers, the faith community, and civic and veterans groups. Most importantly, follow up with continuing correspondence and personal meetings with local decision-makers.

■ **Volunteer at local homeless veteran service provider agencies and Stand Downs.** To locate service providers and Stand Downs in your area, go to www.nchv.org.

Tax-deductible Donations

NCHV is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and would be grateful for your donation. Donations are used to further NCHV’s mission “to end homelessness among veterans.”

To make a donation, go to www.nchv.org or make check payable to NCHV, and mail to: National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
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