



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Identifying Mental and Physical Health Correlates of Homelessness Among First-Time and Chronically Homeless Veterans” |Suzannah K. Creech et al.

Quick Takeaways:

- Self-reported history of substance abuse was significantly associated with chronic homelessness and repeated shelter in emergency or unsheltered housing.
- Health disorders such as hypertension, heart disease, and joint pain, as well as socioeconomic status were associated with first time, as opposed to chronic, homelessness.

Study:

This study measured the associations between several chronic medical conditions and substance use with housing status. Researchers used data from a questionnaire, administered by nurses in a clinical setting, to 352 veterans who were either unsheltered at the time of intake, staying in emergency shelter or transitional housing units, or doubled-up with family or friends without contributing to the household. Based on their responses veterans were divided into two status groups; first-time (169) and chronic or repeat homeless (183). Veterans were asked specific questions with regard to four categories of self-reported health and mental health factors: substance use, mental health problems, medical problems, and pain disorders. This data, along with demographic characteristics, was then evaluated in relationship to lifetime housing status.

Findings:

Overall, the results revealed an important pattern of differences between the first-time homeless and chronic or repeat homeless veteran groups that is consistent with the larger body of literature. Researchers concluded that chronic and repeat homelessness is associated with higher rates of self-reported substance abuse and serious mental illness. In contrast to this, first-time homelessness was associated more with housing costs, post incarceration, self-reported diagnosis of mental health disorders, and a variety of other health problems such as hypertension, heart disease, or chronic pain. These findings were also consistent with the broader literature that economic variables such as unemployment or low wages can be linked to the development of physical health problems.

Conclusion:

This study highlighted the broader need for health and rehabilitation services in order to stem homelessness among veterans. Job retraining, wraparound health services, and supportive housing may greatly prevent first-time homelessness. Engaging veterans early in employment programs may also curb the risk of veterans falling into homelessness.

Creech, Suzannah K., Johnson, Eric, Borgia, Matthew, Bourgault, Claire, Redian, Stephen and O’Toole, Thomas. “Identifying Mental and Physical Health Correlates of Homelessness Among First-Time and Chronically Homeless Veterans. *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 43, No.5, 619-627 (2015).