



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing”

U.S. Government Accountability Office / [Full Report](#)

Overview

This report and presentation from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) make the case that, when understanding homeless women veterans, service providers are disadvantaged by the current field of data. The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) provides a total count of homeless veterans broken down by gender, however, there are no distinctions made beyond these statistics for the homeless female veteran population. Drawing conclusions through surveys, site visits, and discussion groups, the report and presentation also detail how female veterans’ navigation toward housing options is fraught with negative experiences.

What Are The Negative Experiences?

- Many resources are available to the homeless veteran population. However, connecting people to the most suitable outlets for their individual situations remains a challenge. The GAO analysis confirms that knowledge of programs among homeless female veterans remains low.
- Unfortunately, housing programs do not always involve the immediate moving of homeless veterans into housing. Being without housing in the meantime proves troubling for female veterans, as the subpopulation regularly falls into residential limbo. The report notes, ***“About 24 percent of VA Medical Center homeless coordinators reported not having referral plans or processes in place to ensure homeless women veterans have temporary housing while they wait for HUD-VASH or GPD housing.”*** This complicates an already delicate, unpredictable housing situation.
- When children enter the situation, homeless female veterans with dependents can often expect setbacks with housing procurement. If housing complexes do not factor in such dependents, it closes many doors to stability for female veterans in need, as they will be unable to include their families in these new housing situations. The report contends, ***“Over 60 percent (90) of GPD programs we surveyed with a capacity to serve women reported that they do not house children.”*** Acknowledging the needs of children along with a homeless female veteran is a critical, and often neglected, component to the process of moving veterans off the streets.
- When placed into transitional housing facilities alongside men, female veterans’ need for security requires special attention. For example, in the past, photographic evidence regarding shower stall location, video surveillance, and open entrances illustrated how some residences did not optimally create a suitable atmosphere for those receiving their services. It is critical for housing providers to keep this in mind as they arrange to make the safest possible living situations for female veterans.



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What Are The Solutions?

Though four problems prevent a smooth and effective transition for homeless female veterans into housing, the report provides ideas to address the issues. First, the report calls for future statistical investigations of veteran homelessness (e.g. 2014 Point-In-Time Count) to delve into greater detail regarding the female subpopulation. In addition, homeless coordinators must be equipped with proper tools to make sure women maintain housing at all times leading up to their final goal of achieving stable housing. When women are seeking potential housing, their children are a necessary aspect of the move. The need to better communicate this message to all entities involved in the housing process is critical. Finally, once female veterans do access housing, the creation and inclusion of measures to physically protect them must remain a priority.

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2011). Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing. Washington, DC. Accessed from: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/587334.pdf>.