



## **NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS**

### ***“The Potential for Health-Related Uses of Mobile Phones and Internet with Homeless Veterans: Results from a Multisite Survey”***

McInnes, D. Keith, Leon Sawh, Beth Ann Petrakis, Sowmya R. Rao, Stephanie L. Shimada, Karin M. Eyrich-Garg, Allen L. Gifford, Henry D. Anaya, and David A. Smelson. / [Full Report](#)

#### Quick Takeaways:

- Access to, knowledge of, and utilization of mobile phones and smartphones among homeless veterans is increasing, particularly among young veterans.
- Homeless veterans show great interest in using mobile technology for health-related communications, including appointment scheduling and reminders.
- For homeless veterans, the biggest barriers to use of mobile technologies for health-related communications are maintaining a single phone number, keeping a working phone, and charging batteries.

#### Study:

A convenience sample of 102 participants was taken from VA and VA-related facilities in Massachusetts and interviewed for an hour. Status as a veteran and homelessness was assumed based on the survey location, and respondents had to be English speakers. Participants then completed a survey which collected information on demographics, access to and use of mobile technology, and attitudes towards using mobile technology for health-related communications.

#### Findings:

Researchers found that among those surveyed, 88.7 percent had a mobile phone (a third of those were smartphones), and 71.3 percent had used texting in the last 30 days. 76.4 percent of respondents had used the internet in the last 30 days, and 81.1 percent had an email address.

Support for using mobile technology for health communications was overwhelming with 92.5 percent of respondents willing to receive an appointment reminder via text or call, and 87.9 percent willing to have an invitation to schedule an appointment via text or call.

Common barriers to using mobile technology within the last 30 days included running out of call minutes (16%), reaching text message limits (6.5%), and running out of charge for the mobile device (35.1%). Long-term barriers included lost phones (19.8%), broken phones (27.7%), and stolen phones (16.8%). Difficulty maintaining a single phone number, often due to inability to pay for the number, was the most widespread problem as well as the most difficult technical problem.

#### Conclusion:

The study found a widespread acceptance of using technology for health-related communications, and indeed many homeless veterans already do just that. As access and comfort with mobile technology increases, particularly among younger homeless veterans, service providers can consider text and email as a valid way to schedule appointments and remind

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veterans of those appointments, while acknowledging that privacy concerns may remain. In order to improve this process, new initiatives that increase access to mobile communications, including providing phones and minutes, replacing batteries, and establishing a stable phone number that remains with a person even if they are unable to pay for a period.

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