



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Evaluating the Impact of Dental Care on Housing Intervention Program Outcomes Among Homeless Veterans”

Nunez, Elizabeth, Gretchen Gibson, Judith A. Jones, and John A. Schinka / [Full Report](#)

Quick Takeaways:

- Dental care is one of the top unmet needs according to homeless adults, and a lack of dental care is associated with lower quality of life among homeless adults.
- Proper dental care is associated with improved housing and employment outcomes.

Study:

Researchers examined data from the VA Northeast Program Evaluation Center and the VA Office of Dentistry of veterans who entered a VA housing intervention programs from August 2008, through September 2009, with dental data coming from the VA Homeless Veteran Dental program. This program is typically the only VA-provided dental care that veterans in VA transitional housing may qualify for, and it provides full dental services. The data that researchers used included dental history, demographic information, mental and physical health history, employment and housing history, and information related to the housing intervention program. Researchers excluded veterans who left the housing program before ten days or after two years, as well as veterans who left the program due to deteriorating physical or mental health. This gave researchers a data set of 9,870 veterans of which 45.5% received dental care.

Findings:

Even after controlling for non-dental care variables, researchers found that veterans who received dental care stayed in the housing program longer, were more likely to complete the housing program, were more likely to find housing after leaving the program, and were more likely to find employment and financial stability. Additionally, some veterans who did not report dental problems were found to have dental problems. Due to the progressive nature of dental problems, researchers felt that this early intervention was less costly and a notable upside to regular dental care.

Conclusion:

In this study, veterans who received necessary dental care were more likely to complete the transitional housing program, achieve housing after the program, and to find financially stable employment. Researchers believe that more study is needed on the effects of dental care on housing and employment outcomes in order to both determine the best ways to deliver dental care, and to understand why dental care is associated with better outcomes.

When considering the cost of providing dental care in relation to its benefits, different methods of delivery may prove to be more cost-effective than others. Understanding how the provision of dental care affects outcomes, whether through improved perceived quality of life and improvement of appearance, reduction of pain, oral health's effect on other health outcomes, or for other reasons, may provide guidance on providing services in the future.

Nunez, E., Gibson, G., Jones, J. A., & Schinka, J. A. (2013). Evaluating the Impact of Dental Care on Housing Intervention Program Outcomes Among Homeless Veterans. *American journal of public health*, 103(S2), S368-S373.