NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

"Unsheltered Homelessness Among Veterans: Correlates and Profiles"
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Quick Takeaways:

- Among homeless veterans, older age, white race, male gender, having a substance use disorder, and residing in the Western region of the U.S. were correlated with unsheltered housing status.
- Homeless veterans living in the West were almost three times as likely to be unsheltered as those living in the East.

Study:

Researchers analyzed administrative data collected from more than 35,000 individuals accessing Veterans Health Administration (VHA) outpatient care between October 1, 2012 and September 13, 2013 that self-identified as being unsheltered on the Homeless Screening Clinical Reminder (HSCR). The HSCR identifies veterans as homeless or at-risk based on questions regarding housing stability. Veterans who screened positive were asked about their living situation for the previous two months. The results were connected to demographic information including, age, gender, race, and VHA eligibility group extracted from the VA's Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) and examined to 1) identify correlates of veteran's unsheltered homeless status and 2) identify and describe distinct subgroups within the unsheltered homeless veteran population.

Findings:

Of the more than 35,000 veterans screened, 4,034 (11.2 percent) were identified as unsheltered homeless. Compared to their sheltered counterparts, unsheltered homeless veterans were more likely to be white, male, between 40 – 60 years old, live in the Western region of the U.S., and have a Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Almost half of all unsheltered veterans resided in the West, and homeless veterans living in the West were almost three times as likely to be unsheltered as those living in the East. Veterans with a SUD, both with and without co-occurring Serious Mental Illness (SMI), were more likely to be unsheltered. SMI on its own, that is, without a co-occurring SUD, was not associated with an increased likelihood of being unsheltered. Unsheltered veterans were more likely to have no service-connected disability rating while sheltered veterans were more likely to have a rating of 50 percent or more.

The researchers conducted a latent class analysis (LCA) to identify subgroups within the unsheltered homeless veteran sample. The LCA identified six classes of unsheltered veterans with distinct characteristics and VHA care use patterns:

1. *Tri-morbid frequent users* – complex needs including co-occurring SUD and SMI and chronic health conditions (14.5 percent)
2. *Older outpatients with chronic health problems* – aged 60 and older, chronic health conditions (21.5 percent).
3. *Middle-age outpatients with SMI or SUD* –aged 50-59, low hospitalization rates but fairly high outpatient utilization (24.8 percent).
4. *Low service users* – very limited use of VA healthcare in previous year (26.6 percent).

5. *Young healthy veterans* – defined in contrast to their peers in class six (6.8 percent)
6. *Young disabled veterans* – high rates of behavioral and chronic health conditions and service-connected disabilities (5.7 percent).

Conclusion:

Unsheltered homeless veterans are a diverse population of individuals with varying service and health care needs. A systematic approach that includes multiple intervention strategies is necessary to provide an array of services based on the spectrum of need. Programs like HUD-VASH may be especially well-suited for high-need individuals, while other less-intensive program models may be more effective for those with less complex barriers.