

# Eradicating U.S. Veteran Homelessness through Rapid Rehousing Programs

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## Statistical Importance

On any given night, there are approximately **37,878** veterans experiencing homelessness in the United States.<sup>2</sup>



11%

of the total homeless population are veterans<sup>3</sup>



68%

of homeless veterans are located in major cities<sup>4</sup>



91%

of homeless veterans are males<sup>5</sup>



51%

of homeless veterans have disabilities<sup>6</sup>



50%

of homeless veterans have serious mental illnesses<sup>7</sup>



70%

of homeless veterans have substance abuse problems<sup>8</sup>

## 1.4 million

Additional veterans are currently at risk of becoming homeless<sup>9</sup>

*“Planes and tanks and guns are a cost of war. So is taking care of the men and women who use those weapons and fight our wars. If we can spend \$600 billion a year on the military, we can spend 2 percent of that on legislation that will significantly improve the lives of our veterans and their families.”*

*- Sen. Bernie Sanders (speaking on the Sanders-Miller veterans bill)<sup>1</sup>*

According to the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**,

a **Homeless Person** is

*“an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;”*

and, a **Veteran** is

*“any person who served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States.*

*This includes Reserves and National Guard members who were called up to active duty.”<sup>10</sup>*

These definitions are important because they are used for collecting data for policy recommendations, and are used to determine who qualifies for assistance.

## Risk Factors and Future Concerns for U.S. Homeless Veterans

Besides the universal risk factors affecting all homeless (*lack of affordable housing, unemployment, poverty*, etc), homeless and at-risk veterans often struggle with residual factors from their military careers, including *post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse*, and *other mental illness*.<sup>11,12,13</sup> *Without strong support systems* and with the *lack of civilian job experience*, even more veterans are at risk of becoming homeless.<sup>14,15,16</sup>

Furthermore, changes in military policies are creating new groups of veterans that face their own unique challenges upon returning from combat. Particularly, *more women are serving than ever before*, and as of 2015, are permitted to engage in combat.<sup>17,18</sup> As female veterans return from service in Iraq and Afghanistan, *the percentage of homeless veterans that are female is expected to increase*.<sup>19,20</sup>

Another growing concern of the evolving veteran population concerns the *rising age of homeless veterans*. While homeless veterans have served in the Korean War, Cold War, Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq, and other military efforts, *over 50%* of all currently homeless veterans served during the *Vietnam War*.<sup>21</sup> This means that as the homeless veteran population ages, there will be even more challenges, particularly concerning *chronic and other age-related health issues*.<sup>22,23</sup>

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**Research shows that stable housing is one of the strongest correlating factors to veterans utilizing V.A. resources they need, including job training, physical and mental healthcare, and drug rehabilitation.**<sup>24</sup>

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## Rapid Rehousing: What it is and Why it Works

Rapid rehousing programs, also called Housing First programs, aim to *get homeless veterans off the streets as quickly as possible* so that they can be integrated into society. They do this by focusing on *lowering barriers to obtaining housing, partnering with landlords*, and *creating support groups* for at-risk veterans.<sup>25</sup> They serve as a critical first step in preventing and ending the cycle of homelessness.

Once in a stable housing situation, veterans can *take advantage of other resources*, like drug rehab, mental healthcare, and employment training and opportunities, that allow them to avoid homelessness in the long-term. For these types of *long-term assistance*, the most effective programs for homeless veterans are *community-based, nonprofit, veteran-partnership groups*.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps due to the bonds fostered through their active military service, programs that focus on *camaraderie and companionship in a structured living situation* tend to work the best for keeping veterans from returning to unstable street living.<sup>27</sup>

Congress created the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, which is implemented by the VA, to fund rehousing and prevention efforts for veterans. Thousands of homeless veterans have already benefited from these programs.<sup>28</sup> However, *increased funding is needed in order to scale these programs to reach all homeless veterans*.

Rapid Rehousing Programs have already been implemented and have successfully eradicated veteran homelessness in many communities across the U.S., including...



Lancaster County, PA



New Orleans, LA



Houston, TX



Las Cruces, NM

... and many more!<sup>29</sup>

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**Rapid Rehousing Programs Work. Increase Funding Now to Eradicate US Veteran Homelessness.**

## Notes

1. Bernie Sanders, "Tell Congress to Pass the Veterans Bill," *Bernie Sanders US Senator for Vermont*, <https://www.sanders.senate.gov/voteforvets>
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3. "FAQ About Homeless Veterans," *National Coalition for Homeless Veterans*, [http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background\\_and\\_statistics/](http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/)
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11. "Veteran Homelessness," *End Homelessness*, National Alliance to End Homelessness, <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/veteran-homelessness/>
12. "7 Common Misconceptions About Veterans (& Why They're Harmful)", *Leaderquest*, <https://www.leaderquestonline.com/blog/misconceptions-about-veterans/>
13. Emily Brignone, "Risk for Homelessness Among US Veterans After Military Sexual Trauma," *JAMA*, American Medical Association, [jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2515956](http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2515956).
14. Brignone, "Risk for Homelessness Among US Veterans After Military Sexual Trauma"
15. Brignone, "Risk for Homelessness Among US Veterans After Military Sexual Trauma"
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18. "7 Common Misconceptions About Veterans (& Why They're Harmful)"
19. Tsai, "When health insurance is not a factor: national comparison of homeless and nonhomeless US veterans who use Veterans Affairs Emergency Departments"
20. "Veteran Homelessness"
21. Henry, "The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress"

22. “FAQ About Homeless Veterans”

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24. Naeh, “Here are 5 Ways We’re Ending Veteran Homelessness,” *EndHomelessness*, National Alliance to End Homelessness,” <https://endhomelessness.org/here-are-5-ways-were-ending-veteran-homelessness/>

25. Naeh, “Here are 5 Ways We’re Ending Veteran Homelessness”

26. “10 Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness”

27. “10 Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness”

28. “10 Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness”

29. Naeh, “Here are 5 Ways We’re Ending Veteran Homelessness”