



**National Coalition for the Homeless**

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## Homeless Veterans

### **NCH Fact Sheet #14**

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This fact sheet examines homelessness among U.S. veterans. A list of resources for further study is also provided.

### **BACKGROUND**

Approximately 40% of homeless men are veterans, although veterans comprise only 34% of the general adult male population. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans estimates that on any given night, 200,000 veterans are homeless (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2006).

Despite the overrepresentation of veterans in the homeless population, homelessness among veterans is not clearly related to combat military experience. Rather, studies show that homeless veterans appear less likely to have served in combat than housed veterans (Rosenheck, 1996). Similarly, despite the widespread perception that Vietnam-era veterans constitute the majority of homeless veterans, research indicates that the veterans who are at greatest risk of homelessness are those who served during the late Vietnam and post-Vietnam era (Rosenheck, 1996). These veterans had little exposure to combat, but appear to have increased rates of mental illness and addiction disorders, possibly due to recruitment patterns. Faced with a lack of affordable housing, declining job opportunities, and stagnating wages (see "Why are People Homeless?," NCH Fact Sheet #1), people with these disabilities are more vulnerable to homelessness.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Homeless veterans are more likely to be white, better educated, and previously or currently married than homeless non-veterans (Rosenheck, 1996).

Female homeless veterans represent an estimated 4% of homeless veterans. They are more likely than male homeless veterans to be married and to suffer serious psychiatric illness, but less likely to be employed and to suffer from addiction disorders. Comparisons of homeless female veterans and other homeless women have found no differences in rates of mental illness or addictions. Minorities are overrepresented among homeless veterans, just as they are among the homeless population in general. However, there is some evidence that veteran status reduces vulnerability to homelessness among Black Americans. Black non-veterans are 2.9 times more likely to be homeless than white non-veterans. Black veterans, on the other hand, are 1.4 times more likely to be homeless than white veterans (Rosenheck, 1996). The reduced risk of homelessness among Black American veterans is most likely the result of educational and other benefits to which

veterans are entitled, and thereby provides indirect evidence of the ability of government assistance to reduce homelessness.

## **PROGRAMS AND POLICY ISSUES**

The U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) administers two special programs for homeless veterans: the Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans program (DCHV) and the Health Care for Homeless Veterans program (HCHV). Both programs provide outreach, psychosocial assessments, referrals, residential treatments, and follow-up case management to homeless veterans. Past evaluations have found that these programs significantly improve homeless veterans' housing, psychiatric status, employment, and access to health services (Friesman et al., 1996; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 1995). In addition, the VA has initiated several new programs for homeless veterans and has expanded partnerships with public, private, and non-profit organizations to expand the range of services for homeless veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 1997).

In 1995, the VA conducted a national survey of VA homeless programs and community organizations to identify needs of homeless veterans. The survey found that long-term permanent housing, dental care, eye care, and childcare were the greatest unmet needs of homeless veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 1995). Similarly, participants in a National Summit on Homelessness Among Veterans sponsored by the VA identified the top priority areas as jobs, preventing homelessness, housing, and substance abuse/mental health treatment (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 1997).

In general, the needs of homeless veterans do not differ from those of other homeless people. However there is some evidence that programs which recognize and acknowledge veteran experience may be more successful in helping homeless veterans transition into stable housing. Until serious efforts are made to address the underlying causes of homelessness, including inadequate wages, lack of affordable housing, and lack of accessible, affordable health care, the tragedy of homelessness among both veterans and non-veterans will continue to plague American communities.

## **REFERENCES AND RESOURCES**

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[HUDVET](#). Established by HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) in consultation with national veteran service organizations, HUDVET is a Veteran Resource Center designed to provide veterans and their family members with information on HUD's community-based programs and services. HUDVET may be reached at 1-800-998-9999 (TDD 1-800-483-2209).