

Vital Mission Ending Homelessness Among Veterans

2008 DATA AND POLICY UPDATE



New data from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) show that approximately 131,000 veterans were homeless at a point in time in 2008. This is a rate of 58 homeless veterans for every 10,000 veterans, more than double the rate of homelessness among the general population. New data on the demographics of veterans and homeless veterans also reveal that some veterans of the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are beginning to receive homeless services from the VA and that female veterans are increasingly represented in the pool of veterans who may face homelessness. The high prevalence of homelessness among veterans means that programs that serve homeless veterans must be expanded. Likewise, the emerging characteristics of the homeless veteran population indicate that the network of services intended to prevent and end homelessness among veterans must be adapted to accommodate female veterans and the anticipated wave of veterans returning from the current conflicts. This update uses the 2008 CHALENG data and presents selected demographics of the veterans served during fiscal year 2008 by the VA's programs for homeless veterans.

How Many Homeless Veterans?

In June 2008, the Homelessness Research Institute released a 2007 Data Update of *Vital Mission: Ending Homelessness Among Veterans*. Using 2007 CHALENG data from the VA, the update showed that approximately 154,000 veterans were homeless on a given night in 2007. In March 2009, the VA released the 2008 CHALENG data, reporting that approximately 131,230 veterans were homeless on a given night in 2008.¹ State estimates ranged from 85 homeless veterans in West Virginia to 29,807 homeless veterans in California (see Map 1). With over 22 million total veterans in the population in 2008,² the rate of homelessness among veterans is 58 homeless veterans for every 10,000 veterans. This rate, which is broken down for each state in Table 1, is more than double the rate of homelessness in the general population

The reduction from 154,000 homeless veterans in 2007 to 131,000 homeless veterans in 2008 is primarily the result of continued refinement of estimation and data collection methods, not reductions in the actual number of homeless veterans. In fact, the number of veterans counted during January point-in-time counts and the number of veterans served by the VA's Health Care for Homeless Veterans programs *increased* by 2 percent and 9 percent, respectively, between 2007 and 2008.

Characteristics of Homeless Veterans

For the first time in the *Vital Mission* series, this update reports on the characteristics of homeless veterans. Specifically, it details the characteristics at intake of over half of the approximately 70,000 veterans served by the VA's Health Care for Homeless Veterans programs clinicians in 2008. These data lead to a number of interesting observations about homeless veterans (see Exhibit 1),

¹ Kuhn, J. and Nakashima, J. 2009. *Community Homeless Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group (CHALENG) for Veterans*. Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs.

² U.S. Census Bureau; *American Community Survey, 2008 Summary Tables*; generated by M William Sermons; using American FactFinder; <http://factfinder.census.gov>; (15 October 2009).

Exhibit 1 Selected Characteristics of the Homeless Veteran Population³

The vast majority of veterans and homeless veterans are men.

	All Veterans	Homeless Veterans
Male	93%	96%
Female	7%	4%

Female veterans make up a larger fraction of younger veteran cohorts.

Percent female by age category.		
18–35	35–44	55 and older
18%	12%	3%

Middle-aged veterans are most likely to become homeless.

	All Veterans	Homeless Veterans
18–34	8%	6%
35–54	26%	61%
55–64	25%	29%
65 and older	40%	5%

Race/ethnicity distribution of the homeless veteran population is similar to that of the overall homeless population.

	All Homeless ⁴	Homeless Veterans
African American	42%	45%
White	38%	46%
Other	20%	6%

⁴ Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2009. *2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report*. Washington DC.

Map 1 Number of Homeless Veterans Reported by State

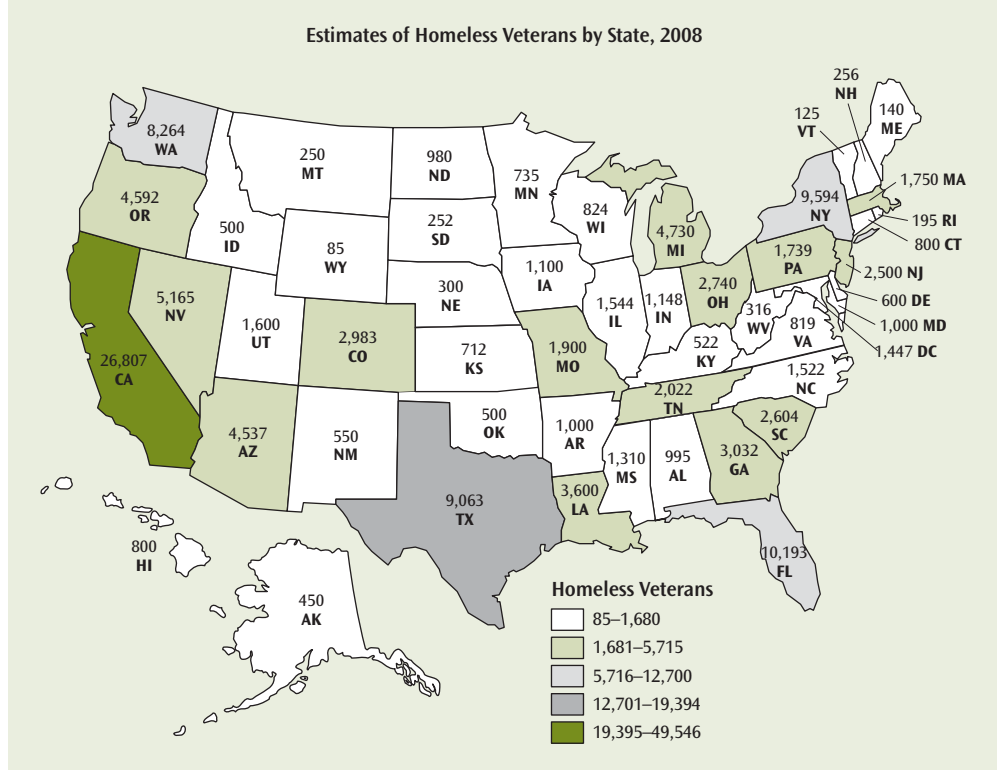


Table 2 Homeless Veterans by State

State	Homeless Veterans 2008 ¹	Total Veterans 2008 ²	Homeless Veterans Per 10,000 2008	Total Homeless Population 2008 ⁴	Homeless Veterans 2007	Homeless Veterans 2006	Homeless Veterans 2005
Total	131,230	22,547,341	58	664,722	153,584	195,827	194,254
AK	450	67,833	66	1,646	600	600	450
AL	995	402,072	25	5,387	750	824	816
AR	1,000	243,494	41	3,255	1,100	850	1,350
AZ	4,537	551,053	82	12,488	3,740	3,970	3,637
CA	26,807	2,034,700	132	157,321	29,400	49,724	49,546
CO	2,983	415,094	72	14,747	3,093	1,203	3,895
CT	800	237,074	34	4,627	3,000	5,000	4,675
DC	1,447	31,423	460	6,044	890	2,500	2,400
DE	600	75,987	79	933	582	550	500
FL	10,193	1,655,847	62	50,158	12,378	18,910	19,394
GA	3,032	709,363	43	19,095	3,299	3,297	5,715
HI	800	106,372	75	6,061	800	800	800
IA	1,100	245,912	45	3,346	1,008	547	615
ID	500	135,394	37	1,464	550	500	350
IL	1,544	782,182	20	14,724	1,475	2,197	2,243
IN	1,148	486,149	24	7,395	734	1,200	1,300
KS	712	231,810	31	1,738	689	601	620
KY	522	329,768	16	8,137	520	425	963
LA	3,600	304,756	118	5,481	10,162	9,950	10,897
MA	1,750	422,508	41	14,506	2,225	1,700	1,680
MD	1,000	445,742	22	9,229	4,000	3,300	3,100
ME	140	136,533	10	2,632	100	100	120
MI	4,730	720,840	66	28,248	4,825	3,513	3,110
MN	735	391,485	19	7,644	724	523	493
MO	1,900	508,839	37	7,688	2,893	3,325	4,800
MS	1,310	209,831	62	1,961	1,225	1,579	1,136
MT	250	100,543	25	1,417	245	232	247
NC	1,522	746,259	20	12,411	1,326	1,659	1,601
ND	980	54,688	179	615	950	1,000	1,000
NE	300	147,482	20	3,990	150	770	460
NH	256	121,145	21	2,019	250	257	350
NJ	2,500	485,053	52	13,844	3,500	6,500	6,500
NM	550	171,725	32	3,015	528	860	902
NV	5,165	227,277	227	12,610	3,254	4,715	4,600
NY	9,594	1,032,622	93	61,125	16,109	21,147	12,700
OH	2,740	926,863	30	12,912	2,156	1,710	1,698
OK	500	316,987	16	3,846	558	500	770
OR	4,592	349,013	132	20,668	3,617	5,891	6,940
PA	1,739	1,023,082	17	15,402	2,239	2,784	2,691
PR	38	122,629	3	3,541	85	80	75
RI	195	82,464	24	1,196	200	175	175
SC	2,604	391,275	67	5,660	357	1,375	1,375
SD	252	70,852	36	579	176	170	165
TN	2,022	503,323	40	10,682	2,050	2,844	2,500
TX	9,063	1,603,981	57	40,201	16,398	15,967	15,434
UT	1,600	146,547	109	3,434	202	530	585
VA	819	720,855	11	8,476	752	870	911
VT	125	53,175	24	954	125	30	20
WA	8,264	606,459	136	21,954	6,280	6,800	6,567
WI	824	438,533	19	5,449	866	828	915
WV	316	171,744	18	2,016	357	347	357
WY	85	50,704	17	751	92	98	111

particularly when compared to the characteristics of the general veteran population or to the overall homeless population:

- While the general veteran and homeless veteran populations are overwhelmingly male (93 and 96 percent, respectively), the representation of female veterans is much higher among younger veteran cohorts.
- Though 40 percent of veterans are in the 65 and older age category, most homeless veterans are between the ages of 35 and 54.
- Combat veterans of the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq represent 4 percent of the homeless veteran population. Most homeless veterans with combat exposure served in the Vietnam War.³
- The race/ethnicity distribution of homeless veterans is very similar to that of the overall homeless population. African Americans are overrepresented among both the homeless veteran and overall homeless populations.

Federal Program and Policy Solutions to Veterans Homelessness

Tragically, a large group of men and woman who have served our country are homeless, sleeping on streets and in emergency shelters. Fortunately, this is a solvable problem, and there are concrete actions the federal government can take to ensure that all veterans have access to affordable housing and the necessary supports to avoid homelessness. The Obama Administration recently vowed to end homelessness among veterans in five years, and Congress is exploring several legislative proposals to support that commitment. With veterans now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, Congress must act quickly to avoid making the same mistakes that were made when veterans in earlier generations returned home. Comprehensive legislation should:

- **Create a homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing program within the VA.** The VA must have the capacity to identify and provide assistance to all veterans who either have recently lost their housing or are in danger of doing so. Prevention and re-housing services include working with landlords and family members to resolve conflicts; connecting veterans with needed employment, benefits, health care, and other income and services; and providing short-term financial assistance for rent and/or eviction prevention.
- **Continue to expand the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH).** The HUD-VASH program provides rental assistance through HUD's Section 8 voucher program, as well as case management, treatment, and support services through the VA. It replicates the highly successful model of permanent supportive housing—getting veterans with the most severe, permanent disabilities off of the streets and into safe, affordable housing. Congress has already funded 20,000 HUD-VASH vouchers and should support proposals for funding 10,000 new vouchers. Funding 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers each year until a total of 60,000 vouchers are created will supply permanent supportive housing to all homeless veterans in need of an intensive, long-term intervention.
- **Ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing for veterans with low incomes.** An increase in affordable housing is needed to successfully expand the HUD-VASH program and to prevent homelessness among veterans with severe housing cost burden (paying over 50 percent of their income toward housing cost). A new program should be created within HUD to develop supportive housing and connect low-income veterans and their families to affordable housing.
- **Enhance and bring to scale existing VA homelessness programs.** Programs such as the Homeless Grant and Per Diem program—temporary housing assistance linked to support services—need policy adjustments in order to be part of a comprehensive system to end homelessness for veterans. Such adjustments include better alignment with other federal housing programs; more flexibility in service delivery; and a greater focus on outcomes and appropriate targeting. The programs must be sufficiently scaled to be able to do their part in preventing and ending homelessness.

³ Kaspro, W.J., Rosenheck, R.A., DiLella, D., Cavallaro, L.A., and Harelík, N. 2009. *Health Care for the Homeless Veterans Programs: Twenty-Second Annual Report*. Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs.