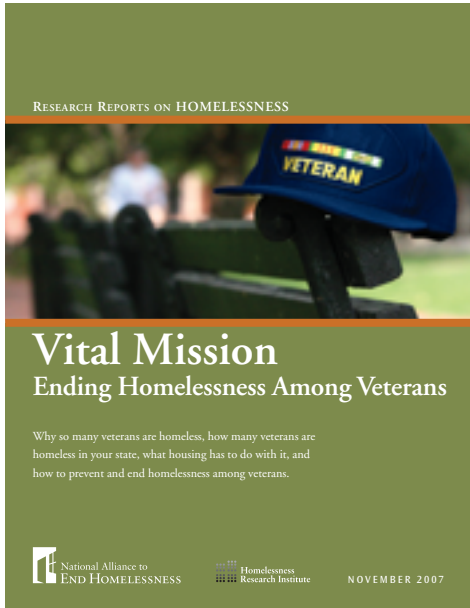


Vital Mission

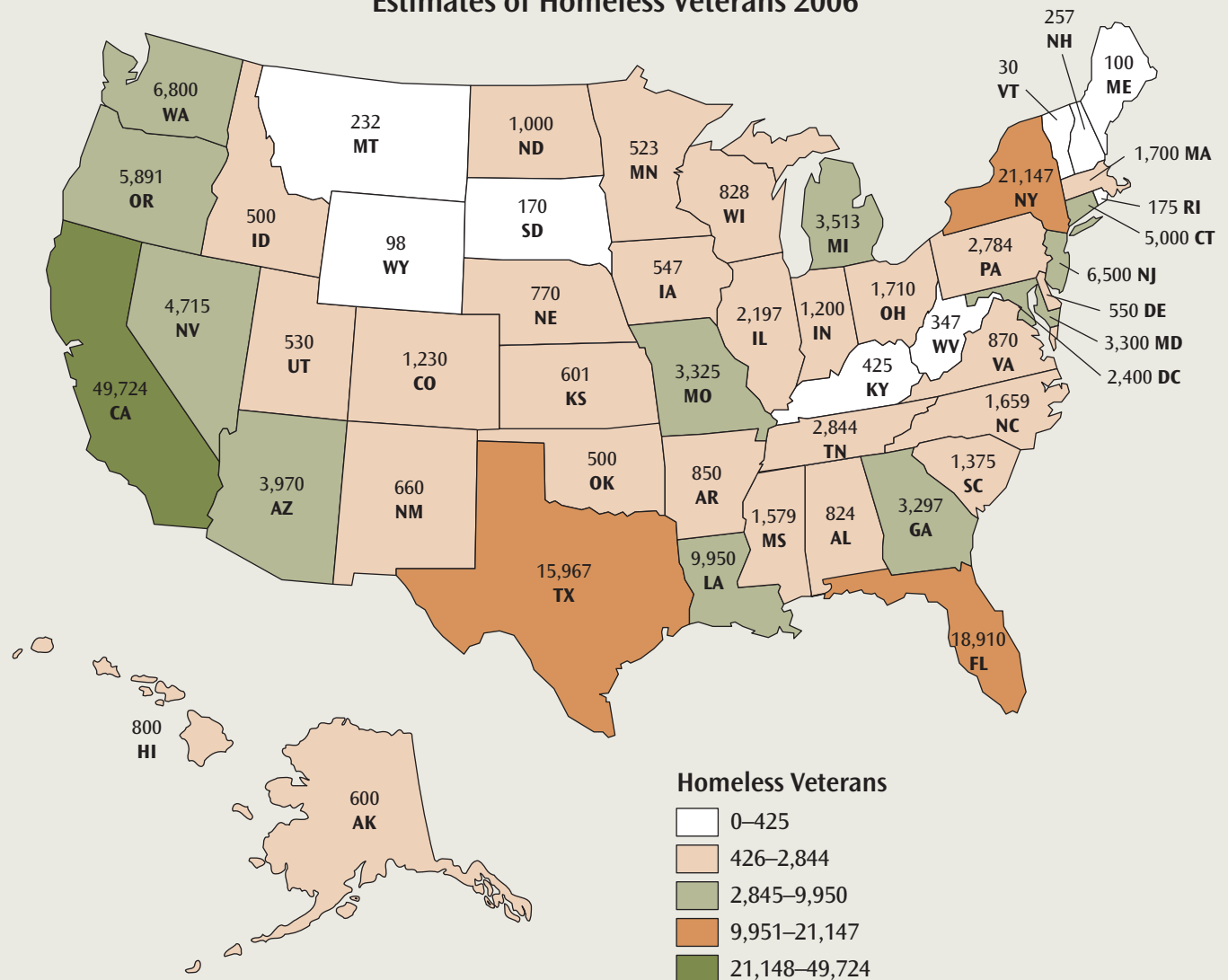
Ending Homelessness Among Veterans

Total Homelessness: 195,827 veterans*



Why so many veterans are homeless, how many veterans are homeless in your state, what housing has to do with it, and how to prevent and end homelessness among veterans.

Estimates of Homeless Veterans 2006



* on a given night

Vital Mission

Ending Homelessness Among Veterans

Summary

Far too many veterans are homeless in America. Homeless veterans can be found in every state across the country and live in rural, suburban, and urban communities. Many have lived on the streets for years, while others live on the edge of homelessness, struggling to pay their rent. We analyzed data from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Census Bureau to examine homelessness and severe housing cost burden among veterans. This report includes the following findings:

- In 2006, approximately 195,827 veterans were homeless on a given night—an increase of 0.8 percent from 194,254 in 2005. More veterans experience homeless over the course of the year. We estimate that 336,627 were homeless in 2006.
- Veterans make up a disproportionate share of homeless people. They represent roughly 26 percent of homeless people, but only 11 percent of the civilian population 18 years and older. This is true despite the fact that veterans are better educated, more likely to be employed, and have a lower poverty rate than the general population.
- A number of states, including Louisiana and California, had high rates of homeless veterans. In addition, the District of Columbia had a high rate of homelessness among veterans with approximately 7.5 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness.
- We estimate that in 2005 approximately 44,000 to 64,000 veterans were chronically homeless (i.e., homeless for long periods or repeatedly and with a disability).

Lack of affordable housing is the primary driver of homelessness. The 23.4 million U.S. veterans generally do not have trouble affording housing costs; veterans have high rates of home owner-

ship and appear generally well housed. However, there is a subset of veterans who have severe housing cost burden.

- We estimate that nearly half a million (467,877) veterans were severely rent burdened and were paying more than 50 percent of their income for rent.
- More than half (55 percent) of veterans with severe housing cost burden fell below the poverty level and 43 percent were receiving food stamps.
- Rhode Island, California, Nevada, and Hawaii were the states with the highest percentage of veterans with severe housing cost burden. The District of Columbia had the highest rate, with 6.4 percent of veterans paying more than 50 percent of their income toward rent.
- Female veterans, those with a disability, and unmarried or separated veterans were more likely to experience severe housing cost burden. There are also differences by period of service, with those serving during the Korean War and WWII more likely to have severe housing cost burden.
- We estimate that approximately 89,553 to 467,877 veterans are at risk of homelessness. At risk is defined as being below the poverty level and paying more than 50 percent of household income on rent. It also includes households with a member who has a disability, a person living alone, and those who are not in the labor force.

These findings highlight the need to expand homeless prevention and affordable housing programs targeted at veterans. Further the findings demonstrate that ending homelessness among veterans is a vital mission that requires the immediate attention of policymakers.

Solutions

1. *Establish a risk assessment process during the first 30 days of discharge and pilot a homelessness prevention program.* Using basic measures, this analysis shows that a high number of veterans are at risk of homelessness. To end homelessness among veterans, we have to prevent it from occurring in the first place. The number of veterans at risk of homelessness suggests the need for testing a risk assessment process and piloting a homelessness prevention program that targets veterans, particularly returning veterans, and provides them with prevention services including shallow subsidies, eviction prevention, and one-time assistance for veterans who fall behind on their rent. This pilot should be tested in at least three areas, including one rural location, and should be rigorously evaluated.
2. *Create permanent supportive housing options for veterans.* Approximately 44,000 to 66,000 veterans are chronically homeless. Homeless veterans who have been on the streets for a long time, have severe physical or mental disabilities, or have chronic substance abuse problems will need permanent supportive housing—housing linked with intensive supports—to help them maintain housing stability. A number of research studies show that permanent supportive housing is a cost-effective approach that helps people who have intensive needs maintain stable housing, and some evidence shows that once back in housing they are likely to access health and substance abuse treatment. We propose creating 5,000 units per year for the next 5 years; these units should be dedicated to chronically homeless veterans and should be linked to veterans' support systems. The cost of 25,000 permanent supportive housing units is approximately \$3 billion for capital costs to develop the units and another \$1.2 billion for operating

and service costs over 5 years. This would cut the number of chronically homeless veterans by more than half.

3. *Expand rental assistance for veterans.* Congress should fund an additional 20,000 housing choice vouchers exclusively for homeless veterans. The operating cost of 20,000 vouchers is approximately \$175 million annually and \$875 million over 5 years. Providing 20,000 vouchers would reduce homelessness among veterans by 10 percent. In addition to housing vouchers, Congress should create a shallow subsidy program that helps bridge the gap between income and rent. Providing a shallow housing subsidy of approximately \$250 per month to 89,000 veterans would cost approximately \$267 million per year and \$1.3 billion over 5 years.

Acting upon these recommendations would end homelessness for 45,000 veterans who are currently homeless (reducing homelessness among veterans by almost one-quarter) and would prevent homelessness among thousands more—costing approximately \$6.4 billion dollars from the federal government. This seems like an enormous cost, yet it is only slightly more than what the federal government is currently spending in Iraq and Afghanistan *per month* (around \$8 billion) and it is a fraction of what Congress plans to spend (upwards of \$1.2 trillion). Certainly we have the resources to significantly reduce homelessness among veterans.

Millions of veterans have served and protected our country. While most veterans are doing well and living in stable housing, a small subset are sleeping on streets and in shelters or other places that no one should have to endure. We are indebted to those who served our country, and at minimum our public policies should ensure that veterans have access to stable housing and the necessary supports needed to avoid homelessness.