



VA research on **HOMELESSNESS**

VA research looks at the causes and risks of homelessness among Veterans, and ways to prevent Veterans from becoming homeless.

ABOUT HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

- HUD [reported](#) in 2017 that just over 40,000 Veterans were experiencing homelessness (including those living on the street or in a shelter, temporary safe haven, or any place unfit to reside in) on a given night in January 2017— compared to a total population of more than 18.5 million living Veterans. Of those homeless Veterans, 91 percent were men and 9 percent were women. Veteran homelessness has declined by 45 percent between the years 2009–2017.
- VA's [National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans](#) (NCHAV) works to promote recovery-oriented care for Veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness by developing and disseminating evidence-based policies, programs, and best practices.
- [Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams](#) (H-PACTs) at VA medical centers throughout the nation provide homeless Veterans with comprehensive, individualized care, including services that lead to permanent housing.
- The [Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans](#) program has been providing medical services to disadvantaged Veterans since the close of the Civil War.

- [The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) (1-877-4AID-VET) is staffed by trained responders providing support and resources to Veterans and their families who lack secure housing. Live chat with trained responders is available at the Veterans Crisis Line [website](#).

VA RESEARCH ON HOMELESSNESS: OVERVIEW

- VA is developing new research and is supporting ongoing work on health conditions and risk factors that relate to homelessness. These risk factors include mental health issues, opioid addiction, and trauma.
- Researchers help develop interventions to improve homeless Veterans' health and provide resources and training to those who work with them.
- VA researchers have helped VA implement the Housing First approach, which aims to get homeless people into safe, stable housing even if they are still coping with substance use or mental health issues.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

- **1987** – Initiated the [Northeast Program Evaluation Center](#) (NEPEC) to serve homeless Veterans

1991 – [Established](#) that, in Vietnam Veterans, there does not appear to be a causal relation between homelessness and military service, including exposure to combat

2013 – [Determined](#) there is an association between homelessness among Veterans and childhood problems such as abuse and family instability

2015 – [Learned](#) that 30 percent of female and 9 percent of male homeless Veterans have children in their custody

2015 – [Found](#) that Veterans who had been discharged from the military for misconduct had dramatically higher rates of homelessness than those who left under normal circumstances

2016 – [Determined](#) that Veterans who had experienced sexual trauma while in the military were more likely to experience homelessness

2017 – [Found](#) that Veterans' mental health and housing improved when they accessed free legal services in a VA facility

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

Homeless Veterans at VHA facilities with tailored primary care teams had better care experiences than non-homeless

(Continued on back)



Veterans, according to a National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans study. In facilities without homeless-tailored teams, homeless patients had more negative and fewer positive experiences than non-homeless patients. In facilities with H-PACTs, this was reversed. ([Medical Care](#), July 2018)

PTSD can limit the effectiveness of peer mentor programs to help homeless Veterans, found a study by researchers from several VA systems. The researchers conducted focus groups with homeless Veterans. They found that Veterans with PTSD often felt a sense of disconnectedness, which resulted in fewer benefits from the peer mentor program. When PTSD disrupted a person's ability to form social bonds, peer mentorship did not work as effectively as it does in homeless Veterans without PTSD. ([Psychological Services](#), Jan. 25, 2018)

There has been an increase in compassion and liberal attitudes toward homelessness in the past two decades, according to a VA Connecticut Healthcare System study. Researchers compared a 2016 online survey to public surveys conducted in 1990. The new survey showed more compassion, endorsement of government support, and understanding toward homeless

individuals by the public. The largest changes were related to increased support for homeless individuals using public spaces for sleeping and panhandling. ([American Journal of Community Psychology](#), December 2017)

Medical-legal partnerships at VA medical centers improve conditions for homeless Veterans, found the VA New England MIRECC. The study followed homeless Veterans who accessed legal services at VA facilities for help with problems related to VA benefits, housing, family issues, and consumer issues. Those who used the legal services had significant improvements in housing, income, and mental health. ([Health Affairs \(Millwood\)](#), December 2017)

Veterans with anxiety disorders or PTSD were more likely to experience homelessness than other Veterans, in a VA New England MIRECC study. Of more than 300,000 Veterans referred to VA anxiety or PTSD clinics, 5.6 percent experienced homelessness in a one-year period. The homelessness rate for the entire Veteran population is about 3.7 percent. Veterans who were unmarried or diagnosed with a drug use disorder were more than twice as likely to become homeless as others. ([Psychological Services](#), May 2017)

Engagement in clinical medical care can lead to housing stability for homeless Veterans, according to a study by the VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans. The study found that patients who accessed primary care were more likely to find stable housing than those who did not. Patients who accessed primary care within one month of the beginning of the study found stable housing after an average of 85 days. Those who did not use primary medical care had an average of 166 days before they found stable housing. ([Psychological Services](#), May 2017)

Women who experience intimate partner violence are more likely to also experience housing instability, according to a study led by a VA Birmingham VA Medical Center researcher. Odds of housing instability were more than two times higher among the patients who reported an experience of intimate partner violence in the past year. The study did not find a significant link between unhealthy alcohol use and housing instability in women Veterans. ([Psychological Services](#), May 2017)

For more information on VA studies on homelessness and other key topics relating to Veterans' health, please visit www.research.va.gov/topics

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