



MESSAGE FROM THE VEEP



There Are Still Homeless Veterans Among Us

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FOR MANY REASONS it is difficult to fully account for the actual number of homeless (including veterans) in the US. Many sleep in their cars, in the woods, or other hard to locate areas, and many veterans do not use VA / VA affiliated services.

The difficulty in accurately counting the homeless is compounded by the fact that the numbers do not include those living with others due to economic need or in motels due to lack of adequate housing. Furthermore, the definition of homeless is in itself problematic. For example, some definitions, and therefore statistics, exclude those who are in prison or jail and those residing in housing for the homeless. Many of our incarcerated veterans are homeless. There is not a national database to help track our homeless vet. Most available statistics don't include the many that are at risk of becoming homeless.



Approximately 1/3 of homeless adults (one out of every three) in this country are veterans, yet veterans represent only 11% of the civilian population. On any given night 107,000 - 300,000 veterans are homeless. Based on various estimates, 500,000 - 840,000 veterans are homeless at some time during the year. It has been estimated that Iraq & Afghanistan veterans represent 1.8% of the homeless veteran population. In 2008, 44% of those surveyed reported being homeless for the first time. This number was 37% in 2007. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs the number of homeless Vietnam era veterans exceeds the number of fatalities that occurred during the war.

Recent studies revealed that almost one-half of all homeless veterans were located in Florida,

California, Texas & New York, while only 28% of all veterans were located in those same states.

Homeless Veterans

- Males account for 97-98% of the homeless veteran population
- 56% are African American or Hispanic
- 76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems (inc. PTSD)
- 45% suffer from mental illness
- 50% have substance abuse problems
- More than 67% served our country for at least three years
- 33% were stationed in a war zone
- 47% of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam Era
- 17% served after the Vietnam era
- 15% served before Vietnam

An increasing percentage served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Many of our homeless veterans served in WW II, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Desert Storm and the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America.

Comparison to Non-Veteran Homeless

- Homeless vets tend to be older - 46% are age 45 or older compared to 20% of non-veterans
- Homeless vets are more educated - 85% completed High School or have a GED compared to 56% of non-veterans
- 46% are white males compared to 34% of non-veterans

Why Veterans Are Homeless

Veterans become homeless and are at risk for homelessness for the same reasons as non-veterans, including due to the rising foreclosure and unemployment rates, as well as due to veteran specific issues. Mental Health issues (e.g., PTSD, mood disorders and substance use) have been deemed among the primary risks for homelessness among veterans.

- Severe shortage of affordable housing, livable income, & access to health care
- Drug and alcohol abuse problems

- Physical and mental illness
- Combat related physical and mental illnesses (e.g., PTSD, TBI)
- Reduction in educational benefits
- Lack of adequate family and social support

Veteran unemployment rates are higher than non-veterans, especially those who joined post 9/11. The effects of PTSD, including addiction, interpersonal problems and job loss, were also associated with homelessness. The effects of combat exposure do not disappear as the years go by. Recent studies reveal that 10% of Vietnam veterans still suffer from severe PTSD symptoms and that their combat exposure continues to place them at risk for negative social and psychological consequences.

Stand Downs are one way to address the needs of homeless veterans in communities.

What is a Stand Down?

In times of war, exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative security and safety. Today, Stand Down refers to a community-based intervention program designed to help the nation's estimated 200,000 homeless veterans "combat" life on the streets.

Vietnam Veterans of San Diego organized the nation's first Stand Down in 1988. Since then, the program has been widely replicated nationwide. Today, more than 200 Stand Downs take place across the country every year. *"The program has become recognized as the most valuable outreach tool to help homeless veterans in the nation today,"* according to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

Stand Down's philosophy is a hand up, not a hand out. The hand up is made possible each year by the dedication of thousands of volunteers and numerous sponsors.

What happens at a Stand Down?

At a Stand Down hundreds of homeless veterans will be provided a wide range of necessities including:

- They will be greeted with respect and open arms They will be offered breakfast and coffee and fresh fruit

- Picture IDs will be made for those who need them
- The VA and EDD will assist with registration
- Tents will be assigned with tent leaders who are there to assist them in accessing services

Their immediate physical needs will be addressed. A visit to the clothing tent; a hot shower, barbers; medical and dental services.

There are the many other services:

- Homeless court
- Counseling
- Veterans benefits
- Employment and job counseling services
- Recovery providers
- Shelters
- Chaplains services
- 12-step meetings for everyone



And last but not least meals prepared by organizations and local food distributors. Perhaps most important of all is the feeling of safety. For the first time in possibly days, weeks or even months our homeless brothers and sisters can leave their possessions in the care of others and rest.

On September 21 and 22, 2013 the City of Compton is hosting its 10th Annual Homeless Veteran Stand Down at 700 N. Bullis Road in Compton. Scores of volunteers and professionals give their time and expertise to address the needs of the homeless veterans here in our area.

If you have an hour or so on Saturday or Sunday, do something that won't cost you anything but a little of your time but will reap a reward that you cannot put a price on; stop by the Stand Down, walk up to one of the homeless men or women and thank them for their service.



Clarence Hatcherson is Vice-President of the Montford Point Marine Association L. A. Chapter