



Veteran Homelessness

Executive Summary

Missouri is home to approximately 443,000 veterans, which accounts for approximately 7% of the state population. Veterans face unique challenges when searching for safe and affordable housing as a result of factors such as poverty, multiple deployments, and mental health conditions that increase the risk of experiencing homelessness. While substantial progress has been made to reduce veteran homelessness over the last decade, service programs have an important role in reducing veteran homelessness. In 2021, 22 states including Missouri filed legislation pertaining to the reduction of veteran homelessness.

Highlights

- Between 2012 and 2020, Missouri veteran homelessness decreased by approximately 50%. Currently, 453 individuals experiencing homelessness in the state are veterans.
- Compared to non-veteran homeless populations, homeless veterans are more likely to report at least one chronic medical condition and multiple mental health conditions, including substance abuse.
 - Homeless female veterans have higher rates of military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and are more likely to have dependent children.
- There is a link between homelessness and incarceration; incarcerated veterans have a higher rate of homelessness compared to other incarcerated subpopulations.
- State legislation that addresses veteran homelessness has predominantly focused on home loans, rental protections, adapted housing developments, and grant programs for developing housing.

Limitations

- Existing data provide a snapshot of veterans experiencing homelessness on one day rather than over the course of a year.
 - The 2020 *Report for the Balance of State Continuum of Care* indicates that 20% of the homeless veteran population live in rural areas. Most recent reports for the remaining seven *Continuum of Care*s are not yet available.
 - These data were collected in January 2020, before COVID-19 was declared a national public health emergency. The data presented does not reflect any housing changes caused by the pandemic.
- These data do not provide statistics that combine multiple demographic categories, such as race and gender. It is not possible to conclude which subgroups are most affected by homelessness (e.g., black males) in Missouri beyond *either* race or gender.
 - Female veterans experiencing homelessness may be under-identified in research studies; more research may be warranted to improve homeless services to female veterans.

Research Background

For more general information on homelessness, please see the previously published Science Note: [Homelessness in Missouri](#).

Veteran Homelessness in Missouri

Veteran homelessness across Missouri has decreased between 2012 and 2020 by approximately 50%.¹ In 2020, 453 of the 6,527 individuals experiencing homelessness (7%) were veterans.¹

The 2020 *Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC)*^a, which represents rural counties of Missouri, reported 89 veterans (83 male and 6 females; 78% White, 13% Black) experiencing homelessness.² Therefore, approximately 80% of veterans experiencing homelessness reside in more urban CoCs. Given that racial demographics in urban areas typically differ from rural demographics in Missouri, the above data cannot necessarily be extrapolated to draw statewide conclusions.³ However, national data indicate that racially minoritized veterans are disproportionately experiencing homelessness compared to White veterans.^{1,4}

In the 2019 Statewide Homelessness Study, 52% percent of homeless veterans resided in large metropolitan areas such as Kansas City and St. Louis City.⁵ In 2017, Kansas City had met the criteria benchmarks for achieving an end to veteran homelessness developed in collaboration by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs.⁶ This does not mean every veteran is housed or has permanent housing, but that they are prepared to house all who may become homeless.

Health Outcomes of Homeless Veterans

Homelessness at any age is a consistent, strong predictor for adverse physical and mental health outcomes throughout the lifespan.⁷ However, when compared to non-veteran homeless populations, homeless veterans are more likely to report at least one chronic medical condition and multiple mental health conditions, including substance abuse.⁸⁻¹⁰ Homeless veterans may be eligible for basic medical benefits package through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and have access to specific health care resources through Veteran Affairs hospitals, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans program, and other community-based outreach clinics. However, homeless veterans are most likely to utilize emergency departments for care due to repeated visits and hospitalizations.⁸ In fact, national administrative data from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs reported that 35.1% of homeless veterans service received emergency department care in 2019.⁴ Using health services in this manner also creates challenges in obtaining necessary medications and arranging outpatient follow-up care, which can lead to poor patient outcomes.

Research has investigated types and patterns of medical and mental illnesses found in homeless veterans and have created four categories: 1) relatively few problems, 2) dual diagnosis, 3) poverty, substance abuse, and incarceration, and 4) disabling medical problems. In a nationwide study of 120,852 veterans, those identified as having relatively few problems were more likely to be younger, female, and have more years of education.⁹ Those in the dual diagnosis group had

^aContinuum of Care (CoC): The Governor's Committee to End Homelessness implemented 8 CoCs across the state to have a developed strategy to prevent homelessness whenever possible; if it cannot be prevented, then the experience should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

the highest rates of substance abuse disorders, mental illness, and psychiatric hospitalization. The disabling medical problems group were most likely to have a chronic disease, to be older, and to have been unemployed in recent years.

Gender Differences

Missouri is home to approximately 443,000 veterans, with 8.1% of the veteran population being female.¹¹ In a study comparing veteran outcomes by gender, homeless female veterans were more likely to be younger, had shorter incarceration histories, and were less likely to have substance abuse disorders.¹² However, homeless female veterans experienced more military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and were more likely to have dependent children. Homeless female veterans were also more likely than homeless male veterans to be referred to Veteran Affairs support programs.

Veterans in Prison

Homelessness and incarceration are strongly linked and often cyclical. The U.S. Department of Justice estimated that 107,400 veterans (98% male and 25% Black) were serving time in state or federal prisons in 2016.¹³ In a study of 30,348 incarcerated veterans, 30% had a history with homelessness, which is 5 times greater than the rate for non-veteran populations.¹⁴ Moreover, approximately 26% of male veterans serving time in state or federal prisons in 2016 were incarcerated for violent sexual offenses;¹³ this type of criminal offense creates additional barriers in finding adequate and safe housing.

Veteran Homelessness Legislation

In 2021, 22 states including Missouri and Illinois have filed 73 pieces of legislation related to veteran homelessness.^{15,16} In general, the proposed legislation predominantly focuses on home loans, rental protections, adapted housing developments, and grant programs for developing housing for homeless veterans. Other [approaches](#) outlined by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness may be possible at the state and local levels to end or reduce veteran homelessness. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has various homeless veterans programs and resources pertaining to [health care](#), [mental health services](#), [housing assistance](#), and [employment/job training](#).

Filed during the 2021 Missouri Legislative session, [HB 921](#) would change the laws regarding the Missouri Housing Development Commission to give preferential occupancy to veterans and senior citizens for housing occupancy. This bill would permit former school buildings to be transformed into housing development sites.

Five other bills were filed related to Missouri homelessness, but they were not specifically geared toward veterans. If passed, [HB 1154](#) would require hospitals to adopt policies on discharge planning of homeless patients which would also, by proxy, affect homeless veteran health outcomes. The plan would include that the patient is discharged to a safe and appropriate location, arranged for care, referrals to the appropriate agencies, and coordination of services.

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