



Veteran Homelessness

In Tulsa's 2023 Point-in-Time Count, 1 in 10 individuals experiencing homelessness were Veterans.

In 1954, following the return of service members from World War II and the Korean War, President Dwight D. Eisenhower endorsed a bill that affirmed November 11 as Veterans Day. This move aimed to inspire Americans to actively support the pursuit of peace and to show appreciation for the bravery, integrity, patriotism, and selflessness shown by America's veterans. Since the declaration of Veterans Day, there has been an increase in attention towards the unique support needs veterans often exhibit after returning from service. Returning to civilian life for a Veteran can come with unpredictable difficulties. The inherent structure and rigidity of military service may present formidable challenges for veterans as they transition into civilian life. Furthermore, veterans often return to civilian life with service-related disabling conditions, encompassing both those that are visible and those that are not. Veterans Day serves as an opportunity to recognize the challenges that are unique to those that have served in the military, and what communities can do to come together to support their local veterans.

Challenges Facing Veterans

More than a quarter of all veterans have a disabling condition related to their military service. This can encompass both those with physically disabling conditions, as well as those with mental health conditions. "RAND research shows that veterans who have been deployed are more likely than civilians to experience mental health conditions or cognitive injuries. In fact, one in five U.S. veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) or major depression." There is significant research and support for veterans who develop PTSD, after their time serving in the military. An estimated 10% of men and 19% of women who have served in the military meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. PTSD is a mental health challenge that individuals may develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening or traumatic event. Linked with veterans' heightened risk of mental health conditions is a corresponding likelihood of experiencing substance use disorder (SUD), which is classified as a mental health condition. Reports from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association (SAMHSA) indicate that 12% of veterans have struggled or currently do struggle with SUD. More than 1 in 4 veterans struggle with a mental health condition and / or substance use disorder.

"I have lots of experience being homeless alongside friends and family who had served in the military. The biggest challenge I see is their struggles with their mental health. We send these folks out of the country off to fight a war, we sacrifice them almost, and expect them to come back home to nothing? And shame them for asking for help when they need it? And their PTSD... If they come back home struggling with it from war, and then let it get worse by experiencing homelessness? We are failing the people who are fighting for our country." - Laura C.

While mental health challenges and substance use disorders do not cause an individual to fall into homelessness, they are often factors that contribute to a person's situation. Lack of affordable housing is recognized as the leading cause for homelessness among veterans. Once a veteran finds themselves struggling to find a place to live, a common challenge these days, they are significantly more likely to meet challenges with their mental health and substance use, which adds to the barriers to access housing.

History of Veteran Homelessness & Its Decline

While veteran homelessness is not a phenomenon that is exclusive to the 21st century, it has only been in recent decades that it has received significant attention. This attention has yielded considerable progress in the fight to end veteran homelessness. Since 2010, the United States has seen a [55.3% reduction](#) in veterans experiencing homelessness. The first community to effectively end veteran homelessness was [Rockford, Illinois](#), and achieved this feat 8 years ago in 2015.

[83 communities and 3 states](#) have ended veteran homelessness. The strategy for ending homelessness among veterans applies to all sub-populations experiencing homelessness; a community-wide [plan](#) that organizes all resources and programs to achieve a functional end to homelessness.

The cities and communities that have successfully ended veteran homelessness have all done so in similar ways, with similar tactics. The strategy for successfully ending veteran homelessness involves a community-wide commitment to addressing the issue. Every community that has housed its entire population of veterans experiencing homelessness has achieved this feat using a [Housing First](#) approach. These communities have successfully conducted coordinated outreach and engagement efforts to find and work with all local veterans experiencing homelessness.

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What Communities Can Do to Help Local Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has released a [list of strategies](#) that are useful in the fight for ending veteran homelessness, and each of these strategies are reflected in the communities that have already successfully ended veteran homelessness. These strategies include:

- **Find and be accountable to all veterans experiencing homelessness.** Veteran homelessness can only be solved if communities can locate and identify every veteran or veteran family in need of assistance and track their progress from initial engagement to housing placement in real time. Also, to use resources efficiently and adequately connect veterans with all resources available, communities must work together as a part of a coordinated entry system.
- **Implementing a housing first approach.** Individual programs and projects within the system should remove as many barriers to their housing and services as possible, accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety or use of substances, poor credit or financial history, or past involvement with the criminal justice system.
- **Engaging and supporting private landlords and property managers.** Creating partnerships with private market landlords is critical for moving people out of homelessness quickly and fully using local, state, and federal subsidies. In high-cost, low-vacancy markets, the challenge of finding available rental units is daunting, and calls for collaboration.

Each strategy, along with expanding access to affordable housing, are proven effective methods to address veteran homelessness. It requires a widespread community collaboration agreement to address the needs of veterans experiencing homelessness. It falls on the responsibility of everyone within a community, from local landlords, business and organization leaders, and elected officials to adequately address the challenge that is veteran homelessness.

Federal Programs Dedicated to Veteran Homelessness

Every federal program intended to aid veterans is administered through the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, also known as the VA. Its primary mission is to support and care for veterans by offering healthcare, disability compensation, education and job training, home loans, and other essential services to enhance their well-being and transition to civilian life. The VA facilitates all federal programs dedicated to ending veteran homelessness.

Any Veteran experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, along with their family members, friends and supporters, can receive free and confidential information about services and resources available to veterans experiencing homelessness by calling the national call center for vets experiencing homelessness, 1-877-424-3838. There is also an online chat line available to provide resources as well, accessible on the VA's website. Both the hotline and the chat line are available 24/7.

Additionally, veterans experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness can call or visit their local VA Medical Center (VAMC) and ask for a Homeless Coordinator. Locating a VAMC can be done by using the VA's [online locator tool](#), or by calling the 24-hour hotline.

HUD-VASH is another resource available to veterans in need of housing aid. The HUD-VASH (HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) program combines HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance with case management and clinical services provided by the VA. The HUD-VASH program has been [integral in the success](#) of ending veteran homelessness for so many communities. However, this program relies heavily on landlords and property managers in the community to participate in the program. As of July 2023, data from HUD's website reveals that only [63% of veterans](#) who were issued a HUD-VASH voucher were successful in finding a unit and a landlord willing to work with them in Tulsa. This is 10% lower than the national average, revealing a need for more landlords in Tulsa willing to work with federal subsidy programs.

Resources for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness in Tulsa

For veterans in Tulsa, there are many resources available to help those in need of supportive services. The [Tulsa Vet Center](#) is a resource hub that offers counseling and mental health services while also connecting individuals with other VA support they might need, such as housing or more intense healthcare. The VA is also an active member of A Way Home for Tulsa (AWH4T), the continuum of care that serves as the local planning body that coordinates the community's policies, strategies, and activities toward ending homelessness.

The VA often has case managers available at local drop-in centers, at outreach events, and is in contact with other service providers to ensure that eligible veterans experiencing homelessness are connected to the VA for resources and support. All outreach workers and case managers within AWH4T are trained to efficiently identify a person's veteran status and connect them with the VA if necessary. Tulsa's [2023 PIT Count data](#) reveals that 10.5% of our population experiencing homelessness are veterans, which is 3.6% lower than the national average.

[Community Service Council's Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\)](#) is a rapid rehousing program funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Service for Veteran Families (SSVF) grant. Formerly known as BRRX4VETS, SSVF uses the Housing First model to provide temporary intervention and short-term assistance to very low-income veteran families who are homeless or facing eviction.

[Volunteers of America Oklahoma Veterans Employment Services](#) is tailored to meet the unique needs of veterans who are unemployed or under employed. The program assists veterans to apply skills and traits attained in military service to new civilian employment opportunities.

Stanley, a former soldier, was living with PTSD after returning from his time serving in the Army. He struggled to keep employment for several months with mental health struggles, until eventually he was evicted for nonpayment.



These challenges led to Stanley becoming homeless. Stanley lived in various encampments and in-and-out of shelters for almost two years before feeling comfortable sharing with a case worker about his mental health struggles, and how they were caused by his time serving in the military.



The case worker connected Stanley with the Veterans Affairs (VA) after discovering his Veteran status. Due to the length of time Stanley spent experiencing homelessness combined with his PTSD, he was considered to be experiencing chronic homelessness, which affects nearly half of the Veterans experiencing homelessness in Tulsa.



Stanley's story

Stanley had difficulties gathering the required documents for VA assistance, but his case worker assisted him through the process. Case management services are the third highest reported need for Veterans experiencing homelessness in Tulsa.



After a waiting period, Stanley received a housing voucher through the VA. Stanley had to file an extension for his voucher, as it was difficult to find a landlord to accept his rental assistance. During his time waiting for housing a VA case manager connected him with a service officer who assisted with a VA disability application which resulted in Stanley securing monthly income.



Stanley was able to find a unit within budget that accepted his rental aid just weeks before his voucher was set to expire. With stable housing and stable income, Stanley accessed regular mental health treatment and experienced significant improvement in his well-being.



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