

Homeless Women Veteran White Paper

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Background

Final Salute Incorporated (FSI) is an organization whose mission is to provide homeless women Veterans and their children with safe and suitable housing. On July 10, 2019, they presented evidence to the House Committee on Veteran Affairs at a hearing called the “Economic Wellbeing of Women Veterans” concerning the ineffectiveness of the Veteran Affairs’ (VA) definition of homelessness and how it adversely affects women Veterans with children. However, no change has been made to the VA’s definition of homelessness since 2009 nor an update to services provided to transitioning women to prevent them from becoming homeless. Through their advocacy and quest for raising awareness to the issues concerning homeless women Veterans, I became aware of the challenges transitioning women Veterans face in relation to homelessness. Therefore, I am submitting this paper in hopes for an expansion of the services provided to transitioning women Veterans and to the definition of homelessness as defined by the VA.

Statistics

Transitioning women Veterans are four times more likely to be homeless than any other women in the United States. According to the VA, there are 1.9 million women Veterans, making women a significant minority amongst Veterans because they make up only 9.4% of the Veteran population. However, it is estimated that 1–2% of all women Veterans and 13–15% of women Veterans living in poverty experience homelessness over the course of a year. Additionally, transitioning Veteran women are

more than three times as likely as non-Veteran women living in poverty to experience homelessness. However, there is little to no research concerning the number of women Reservists and Guardsmen that are currently homeless.

Although women transitioning from the military are the fastest growing population in the United States and have a higher unemployment rate, they face challenges in getting services they need from the VA because the VA does not have suitable housing for them and their children. According to the VA, the VA's Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program is offered annually by the Department of Veterans Affairs to fund community agencies providing services to Veterans experiencing homelessness and in FY 2020, 17,7000 entered the VA's GPD transitional housing. However, according to the Government Accountability Office, "more than 60 percent of surveyed GPD programs that serve homeless women veterans did not house children, and most programs that did house children had restrictions on the ages or numbers of children." "In addition, several noted there were financial disincentives for providers, as VA does not have the statutory authority to reimburse them for costs of housing veterans' children. Limited housing for women and their children puts these families at risk of remaining homeless."

Women transitioning from the military encounter additional challenges such as civilian pay gaps, bias against mothers, stereotypes about female servicemembers, and additional stress caused by military sexual trauma. They are also more than likely to live below the poverty line than transitioning male Veterans.

Prevention

According to the Public Health Prevention Model, prevention of homelessness occurs at three levels, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Primary prevention are initiatives that create structural change. This paper proposes that Transition Assistance Program should evolve from an educational tool to a support service that targets the unique challenges transitioning women Veterans face. Additionally, the VA should make a structural change to their definition of homelessness to accurately depict the number of homeless women Veterans. Secondary prevention techniques aim to address homelessness when it begins. Organizations such as FSI, have identified the systemic issue of homelessness amongst women Veterans and have implemented programs that provide housing and resources for homeless women Veterans and their children. Finally, tertiary prevention aims to prevent a person that have experienced homelessness from experiencing it again.

Recommendations

The Secretary of Defense should augment the content of current transition assistance programs to better meet the unique needs of transitioning servicewomen. Additionally, the committee should conduct focus groups to determine specific issues transitioning women face in relation to future employment and homelessness. Furthermore, Secretary of Defense should work with the VA to update and broaden its definition of homelessness to get an accurate representation of the actual number of homeless women Veterans. Their definition should be updated to include the following:

- Individuals without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring it.

- Individuals that do not have a permanent house or place to live, including houses of friends, family members, and emergency accommodations.
- Individuals living in boarding houses without a private bathroom or security of tenure.

Lastly, the committee should conduct focus groups to determine how many women Reservists and National Guardsmen experience homelessness on any given day to provide them with adequate resources. Key stakeholders must understand the unique issues transitioning women Veterans face to ensure they have the support they need to prevent homelessness.

References

Department of Veteran Affairs: [VA Homeless FAQs - VA Homeless Programs](#)

[Final Salute, Inc. - Providing homeless women Veterans with safe and suitable housing \(finalsaluteinc.org\)](#)

[Here's what women separating from the military need to know \(militarytimes.com\)](#)

Homeless Women Veterans: [Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing | U.S. GAO](#)

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act: [The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act As Amended by S.896 The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing \(HEARTH\) Act of 2009 \(hud.gov\)](#)

The 2020 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress:

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

VA Fact Sheet December 2020: [Fact Sheet \(va.gov\)](#)

What is Homelessness? [What is Homelessness | The Homeless Hub](#)

[Women Facing Disproportionate Challenges When Leaving Military Service, Experts Tell Congress | Military.com](#)