ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS: A SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPERATIVE

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AGENDA

- Introductions
- Veteran Homelessness Trends
- Brief Military Competencies
- Homeless Prevention Resources for Veterans
- Social Justice Initiatives
ADDRESSING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS
Veteran Homelessness Trends

- Veteran homeless is trending downward, with a 5% decrease from 2017 to 2018 and 48% decrease since 2009 (HUD, 2018); yet still a prominent issue

- On a singular night in NJ (HUD, 2018):
  - 150 veterans were placed in emergency shelter
  - 85 veterans were unsheltered (i.e., living on the street, park bench, vehicle, or other place not meant for human habitation)
  - 320 veterans stayed in transitional housing for formerly homeless persons
  - Nationwide: 37,878 veterans experience homelessness on a singular night in the U.S.; accounts for almost 9% of all homeless adults
The VA previously declared that it would end veteran homelessness by 2015. (Montgomery, Hill, Kane, & Culhane, 2013) …So what makes homelessness so difficult to end?
WHAT LEADS TO HOUSING INSTABILITY?

- Rising housing costs and lack of affordable and subsidized housing
- Issues of foreclosure and inability to maintain home ownership
- Stagnated living wage
- Domestic violence
- Substance and alcohol use
- Mental health
- Adverse childhood experiences/Trauma
- Veterans are more at risk of becoming homeless than civilian adults

(National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2015; Tsai & Rosenheck, 2015)
IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS

HOW DOES HOUSING INSTABILITY AFFECT THE INDIVIDUAL?

- Poor physical and mental health
- Poor economic and social outcomes
- Financial burdens and debts
- Eviction history and poor credit
- Affects employability
- Losing documents/lack of identification—perpetuates the cycle of homelessness

(Tsai & Rosenheck, 2015)
LET'S LEARN THE LANGUAGE

• **Literally Homeless**: Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence:
  - Emergency shelter, motel stay paid for by charitable organization, outside/in vehicle/etc.

• **HUD/VASH**: Intensive case management services for chronically homeless veterans to promote housing stability and readiness; a subsidized housing voucher

• **Point in Time (PIT) Count**: Annual national count of homeless individuals and families on the same singular night

• **Housing First Model**: Connect homeless individuals and families with permanent housing without requirements or preconditions (e.g., sobriety, employment, etc.)

• **Continuum of Care (CoC)**: Each county’s programming to facilitate homeless service providers to network, promote client access to services, and end homelessness

(HUD, 2018)
MILITARY COMPETENCIES

What Defines veteran status?

• Depends on who is asking!

• 5 Branches of Service: Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard
  • Active duty, Reserves, and National Guard (Army & Air Force)

• Discharge types: Honorable, General, Other than Honorable, Dishonorable, Uncharacterized

• Veteran Healthcare, service-connected Disability, and Services

• “Have you ever served in the military?”
RISK FACTORS FOR VETERANS

• STUDY SAMPLE INCLUDED 1,582,125 VETERANS: 107,504 (6.8%) WERE WOMEN AND 1,474,621 (93.2%) WERE MEN

• MOST AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS ARE:
  • YOUNGER (35-54), UNMARRIED, BLACK FEMALES
  • OLDER (55+), UNMARRIED BLACK MALES
  • VETERANS WHO DO NOT RECEIVE VA DISABILITY (MONETARY) COMPENSATION—A SOURCE OF INCOME, LIKELY RECEIVING TREATMENT/CONNECTED WITH SERVICES

• WE CONTINUE TO SEE RACIAL DISPARITIES WITH INCREASED RISK AMONG RACIAL MINORITY POPULATIONS

(Montgomery, Ditcher, Thomasson, Fu, & Roberts, 2015)
WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS?
SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR VETERAN FAMILIES (SSVF)

• **Began in 2011 as part of the initiative to end veteran homelessness**

• **Nonprofit organizations that receive federal funding to serve veterans and their families**

• **Must be homeless or at risk of homelessness, low income, and have active duty service (excluding dishonorable service)**

• **Short-term case management services for permanent housing**

• **Temporary financial assistance**

• **In NJ: Soldier On, Community Hope, Catholic Charities, Veteran Multiservice Center**
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT – VETERAN AFFAIRS SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (HUD-VASH)

• Since 2008, about 87,000 vouchers have been funded and 144,000 homeless veterans have been served (Lane, 2018)

• Focus on chronically homeless veterans with low income

• 30% of household income goes toward rent
TRANSLATIONAL HOUSING FOR VETERANS

- **For veterans who are not ready to maintain their own permanent housing**

- **Veterans Haven North** in Glen Gardner and **Veterans Haven South** in Hammonton
  - On-site social workers, veteran service officers, and shuttles to VA medical facilities

- **Domiciliary** *(Lyons VA Medical Center)*: Intensive program that focuses further on developing daily living skills needed to maintain housing.

- It is possible for a veteran to first be admitted into a substance rehabilitation center *(East Orange VA Medical Center or Coatsville, PA Medical Center)* or through an intensive in-patient PTSD program *(Lyons VA)*
Veteran’s Haven North
New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
“The Rally Point”
FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

• Be aware of the risk factors and statistics relevant to veterans and homelessness

• Work from a trauma-informed approach; Highlight resiliency

• Ask clients about their housing histories
  • Was there ever a time when you were unsure of where you would sleep on a nightly basis?
  • Have you ever lived in transitional housing for veterans, such as the Domiciliary at the Lyons VA or at Veterans Haven North or South?

• Read about and integrate veteran cultural competencies into your work
SOCIAL JUSTICE: WHAT CAN WE DO?

- For nonprofit organizations, obtaining support from county CoC’s for continued federal funding is vital.
  - Additional case managers/staff are needed in order to keep caseloads low

- Volunteer to be trained in the PIT survey administration and volunteer during the annual one-day event at a community site or on a street outreach team.

- Increased funding for vocational resources for veterans is imperative.
  - Each county has a One Stop Career Center with a veteran representative

- Support affordable housing in your town by going to planning board meetings; Request veteran preference or Homeless unit set-aside.
WHO ARE MY REPRESENTATIVES?

• **Federal Level:**
  • **Senator Cory Booker** (973) 639-8700
  • **Dom Scalise (Domenico_Scalise@booker.senate.gov)**
  • **Senator Bob Menendez** (973) 645-3030

• **State Level:**
  • **Congressman Donald Payne, Jr., parts of Essex, Hudson, Union counties,**
    (973) 645-3213
  • **Samantha Washington (Samantha.Washington@mail.house.gov)**

• **Look up your federal legislators—**
  www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm

• **Look up your state legislators—**
  www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative
REFERENCES


