

Homeless veterans in Minnesota 2006

*Statewide survey of veterans without permanent
shelter summary*

November 2007

Wilder Research Center
1295 Bandana Boulevard North, Suite 210
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108
651-647-4600
www.wilder.org/research

Summary

This study gives a snapshot of U.S. military veterans experiencing homelessness in Minnesota on a single day in 2006. The findings reported here are based on interviews with 459 male veterans and 26 female veterans conducted on Thursday, October 26, 2006. As part of the overall statewide survey of homeless adults and youth conducted across the state of Minnesota on that date, results were weighted to represent the known population of homeless adults who were residing in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing programs on October 26, 2006. Interviews with people in non-sheltered locations were not weighted, because there is no way to determine the total population in such settings.

Key findings

Numbers of homeless

- Based on weighted results, 624 veterans were represented in the study. Veterans make up 13 percent of all homeless adults and 24 percent of all homeless men. These proportions are very similar to the proportion of veterans found in the general adult population. In 2006, military veterans made up slightly less than 11 percent of all adults in Minnesota, and 21 percent of adult men in Minnesota.¹

Number and percent of homeless persons who are US military veterans

	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
October 1991	417	33.7%	21	2.7%	438	21.8%
October 1994	322	25.4%	32	2.6%	354	14.3%
October 1997	350	26.3%	24	1.6%	374	13.2%
October 2000	686	30.7%	50	2.4%	686	16.4%
October 2003	652	26.1%	50	2.2%	702	14.7%
October 2006	595	23.9%	29	1.3%	624	13.2%

¹ 2006 American Community Survey. Minnesota S2101.Veteran Status. [Statistics from Data file]
Retrieved October 10, 2007 from <http://www.factfinder.census.gov/servlet>

Who is homeless?

- The vast majority of homeless veterans were males (95%). The average age of homeless male veterans was 47.5, and the average age of homeless female veterans was 39.3. The percent of homeless veterans who had never married was lower than that of the general homeless population surveyed in 2006 (37% vs. 57%). Over half of homeless veterans reported that they were divorced or separated (42% and 11%, respectively).
- Less than one-quarter of veterans (23%) who were homeless on the night of the survey had lived in Minnesota for two years or less. Close to three-quarters (70%) of the veterans surveyed had lived in Minnesota for more than five years, including 46 percent who had lived in Minnesota for more than 20 years.
- Homeless veterans were disproportionately people of color. Particularly over-represented were African Americans in the Twin Cities metro area (37%) and both African Americans (10%) and American Indians (10%) in greater Minnesota.² While less than 11 percent of the state's overall population is made up of persons of color, over two-fifths (42%) of Minnesota's homeless veterans were persons of color.
- Veterans interviewed in informal and unsheltered locations were predominantly male (95%), and over half (55%) had been homeless for a year or longer. American Indians made up 18 percent of veterans interviewed in informal and unsheltered locations.
- Nearly half (48%) of veterans interviewed had served in the U.S. Army, 18 percent served in the U.S. Navy, 17 percent served in the U.S. Marines, 7 percent served in the U.S. Air Force, 7 percent served in the National Guard, 3 percent served in the Reserves, and less than 1 percent served in the Coast Guard.
- Sixty-four percent of homeless veterans had served for more than two years, 21 percent for 181 days to two years, 7 percent for 90 days to 180 days, and 8 percent for less than 90 days.
- Five percent of the homeless veterans began their military service prior to August 1964, 32 percent between August 1964 and May 1975, 30 percent between June 1975 and September 1980, and 33 percent after September 1980.
- Nearly one-third (31%) of homeless veterans reported having served in a combat zone. Nineteen percent of homeless veterans reported they had served in a combat zone in Vietnam, 6 percent in the first Gulf War, 3 percent in Iraq or Afghanistan, and less than 1 percent each in Korea, El Salvador, Granada, Panama, Libya, Serbia/Bosnia, Lebanon, and Iran.

² Throughout this report, the "Twin Cities metro area" refers to the seven counties of Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Carver, Scott, Dakota, and Washington.

Children of homeless veterans

- Although 34 percent of homeless veterans reported having children under the age of 18, only 13 percent (26) of those parents had any children with them on the night of the survey. Those 26 parents represented 6 percent of all homeless veterans surveyed.
- Of the 26 homeless veterans who had children with them, 24 percent reported they had been unable to obtain needed child care in the previous 12 months, 13 percent had been unable to obtain needed dental care, and 6 percent had been unable to obtain needed health care for at least one of their children. Seven percent of the homeless parents reported that their children had to skip meals in the last month.
- Six homeless veterans (23%) who had children with them, reported having at least one child who had an emotional or behavioral problem that interfered with their daily activities. One homeless parent (3%) reported having at least one child who had a physical health problem that interfered with their daily activities.
- All 26 homeless parents had at least one school-age child. Just over one-quarter (27%) reported that at least one of their school-age children had some type of learning or school-related problem, and nearly one-fifth (19%) reported having a child who had repeated a grade in school. All 26 parents reported that their children attended school on the day of the survey, and only one parent reported there were problems going to school because of their housing situation.

Education, employment, and income

- The percentage of homeless veterans who had completed high school was much higher than that of the general homeless population surveyed in 2006 (92% for homeless veterans and 72% for the general homeless population). The percentage who had attended at least some college was also higher than for the general homeless population (42% vs. 27%).
- Twenty-eight percent of homeless veterans were employed, with 15 percent employed full-time. Two-thirds (67%) of homeless veterans earned less than \$10 per hour. Over half (57%) of homeless veterans who were employed had been at their current job for three months or more.
- Those who were not working reported that their main barriers to employment were physical health (35%), transportation (33%), mental health problems (32%), lack of housing (25%), age (15%), criminal background (14%), and lack of job history (13%).
- Homeless veterans surveyed reported their main sources of income in the month of October had been from the following sources: steady employment (25%), General Assistance (19%), day labor (15%), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) (13%), and asking for money on the streets (6%).

- When asked about their total income for the month of October, 10 percent reported some income, but less than \$100, 21 percent reported incomes of \$101-\$300; 8 percent reported incomes of \$301-\$500, 21 percent reported incomes of \$501-\$800, and 25 percent reported incomes over \$800. Ninety-two (16%) homeless veterans reported having had no income in October.

History of homelessness

- Almost three-quarters (70%) of homeless veterans had been homeless more than once. Just over one-quarter (26%) reported they had been homeless two to three times in their lives, 23 percent had been homeless four to seven times, and 22 percent had been homeless eight or more times. The average age at which they became homeless was at age 33.8, and the median age was 35.
- The proportion of homeless veterans that fit HUD's definition of chronic homeless was 47 percent. Likewise, the proportion of homeless veterans that fit Minnesota's definition of long-term homeless was 58 percent.
- One-sixth (16%) of homeless veterans reported having been unable to obtain shelter in the previous three months because of a lack of available beds. Of those, most ended up sleeping outdoors (43%), with friends or family (14%), in cars or other enclosed places not meant for habitation (12%), or in another shelter (11%). Others ended up in a church (5%), with a voucher for a motel (3%), in a safe home (1%), in a hospital (1%), in a motel (no voucher) (1%), or in detox (1%).
- More than one-third (37%) of homeless veterans spent at least one night outdoors during the month of October. The average number of nights spent outdoors was 4.8. Over one-quarter (29%) of homeless veterans spent at least one night during October "doubled-up" with friends or family. The average number of nights spent "doubled-up" was 2.6.

Residential placements

- Close to three-quarters (71%) of homeless veterans had lived in at least one kind of institution or residential program in their lives, most commonly a drug or alcohol treatment facility (55%), halfway house (33%), mental health treatment facility (26%), group home (15%), or foster home (14%).
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of homeless veterans had been held in a correctional facility in their lives, including in a county jail or workhouse (60%), a state or federal prison (26%), or a juvenile detention center (14%).

Housing

- The four most common reasons homeless veterans cited for having left their last regular housing were: inability to afford the rent (41%), loss of a job (40%), eviction (31%), a drinking or drug problem (30%), or a break-up with a spouse or partner (24%). The most commonly cited current barriers to regaining housing were: lack of a job or income (39%), no housing they could afford (25%), credit problems (18%), or a criminal background (13%).
- The average amount that homeless veterans reported they could pay for rent, including utilities, was \$275 a month. The median amount was \$240. More than one-third (35%) of homeless veterans could pay something but \$300 or less for rent. Just over one-quarter (26%) reported they could not pay anything for rent. More than two-thirds (68%) only needed an efficiency or studio apartment.

Public assistance and service use

- Seven percent of homeless veterans (5% of men and 31% of women) had received MFIP (welfare assistance) in the previous 12 months. Of those who had received MFIP benefits, one-third (34%) had been sanctioned, and 21 percent had exited MFIP in the previous 12 months.
- One-fifth (20%) of homeless veterans reported the loss of one or more services or public assistance benefits during the previous 12 months. Those who had lost benefits most frequently reported losing Food Stamps (60%), medical benefits (49%), General Assistance (10%), and unemployment benefits (8%). More than one-quarter (29%) of all homeless veterans said they needed help to apply or re-apply for services.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of homeless veterans reported having had some type of medical coverage in October, and more than one-third (35%) reported having used Food Stamps in October. Other services homeless veterans reported using included hot meal programs (47%), free clothing shelves (40%), drop-in centers (32%), transportation assistance (27%), free medical clinic (23%), food shelves (22%), and outreach services (18%).
- Nearly half of homeless veterans (48%) reported having had contact with their County Veterans Service Officer during the previous 12 months.

Health and well-being

- Two-fifths (40%) of homeless veterans reported having had a service-related health problem. Of those veterans, 44 percent reported having had a mental health problem.
- Nearly half (48%) of homeless veterans had at least one chronic medical condition (asthma, other chronic lung or respiratory problems, high blood pressure, diabetes,

tuberculosis, hepatitis, or HIV/AIDS). Of those, 65 percent reported they had received care for each such condition in the previous year.

- Nearly three-fifths (59%) of homeless veterans said they currently needed to see a dentist, 49 percent needed to see a doctor for a physical health problem, 38 percent needed to see a professional for a mental health problem, and 20 percent needed to see a professional for a chemical dependency problem. Nearly one-third (32%) reported problems getting needed medical care.

Mental and chemical health

- Mental illness was a significant problem among those who were homeless veterans in Minnesota. Over half of homeless veterans (55%) had been told by a doctor or nurse within the previous two years that they had at least one of the following serious mental health disorders: schizophrenia, manic-depression, some type of delusional disorder, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Adding those who had received inpatient or outpatient mental health treatment in the previous two years, 60 percent of homeless veterans had a serious mental health problem.
- The specific mental health disorders reported by homeless veterans included major depression (42%), post-traumatic stress disorder (28%), manic-depression (19%), anti-social personality disorder or another serious emotional disorder (17%), schizophrenia (8%), and some other type of delusional disorder (8%).
- More than half of homeless veterans (54%) considered themselves to be alcoholic or chemically dependent. More than two-fifths of homeless veterans (42%) reported they had been told by a doctor or nurse within the previous two years that they have a drug disorder or an alcohol disorder. More than one-quarter (29%) of homeless veterans reported having received inpatient alcohol or drug treatment within the previous two years. Just over one-fourth of homeless veterans (26%) reported having received outpatient alcohol or drug treatment in the previous two years.
- Nearly one-third (31%) of homeless veterans reported having both a mental illness and a chemical dependency problem. This is based on the percent of persons who reported being told by a doctor or nurse within the previous two years that they have a major mental illness (schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depression, major depression, anti-social personality or post-traumatic stress disorder) and alcohol or drug abuse disorder. By comparison, nearly one-fifth (19%) of the statewide homeless population surveyed in 2006 reported both mental health and chemical dependency problems.

Serious or chronic disability

- Over half (52%) of homeless veterans reported that a physical, mental, or other health condition limited the amount or type of work they could do. Nearly one-fifth (19%) reported that a health condition limited their daily activities, and one-third (33%) reported problems with memory, concentration, or decision-making.
- Pooling these disabilities with chronic medical conditions, mental illness, and substance abuse, 85 percent of homeless veterans had at least one serious or chronic disability.
- One-third (33%) of homeless veterans had a history that suggests likely traumatic brain injury.

Abuse and victimization

- More than one-third (35%) percent of homeless veterans reported physical mistreatment as a child (35% of men and 44% of women), and 14 percent reported they were sexually mistreated as children (13% of men and 41% of women).
- Just over one-quarter (26%) of homeless veterans reported they had stayed in an abusive situation for lack of other housing options (26% of men and 38% of women), and 34 percent of homeless female veterans either had left their previous housing or had come to Minnesota in order to flee domestic violence.
- Fourteen percent had been physically or sexually attacked at some time while they were homeless (14% of men, 19% of women), and 8 percent had sought health care for injuries due to violence in the previous year (7% of men and 20% of women).