



# Homeless Veterans in Minnesota 2015

*Statewide Survey of People Experiencing Homelessness*

NOVEMBER 2016

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# Summary

Beginning in 1991, Wilder Research has conducted a statewide study every three years to gather data that will help better understand the prevalence, causes, circumstances, and effects of homelessness in Minnesota. The most recent study was conducted on October 22, 2015 by 1,100 volunteers and program staff in more than 370 locations across Minnesota. As part of this study, Wilder Research analyzed a subset of the overall population: U.S. military Veterans experiencing homelessness.

## Key findings

**Homelessness among Veterans has decreased since 2012.** Targeted efforts to reduce homelessness among military Veterans appear to be paying off. The estimated number of Veterans surveyed in the study decreased by approximately 27 percent from 2012 to 2015; this decrease outpaces the overall decrease in the statewide homeless population (9% decrease from 2012 to 2015).

**Most homeless Veterans are older.** The average age of homeless Veterans in Minnesota is 51. This is a decade older than the average age of the overall homeless adult population.

**Veterans experience high levels of chronic homelessness.** Six out of 10 homeless Veterans have been without stable housing for a year or longer. One out of 3 has been homeless at least three years.

**Most homeless Veterans have serious health issues.** This includes serious mental illness (62%), chronic health conditions (61%), substance abuse disorder (31%), or other conditions that limit work or activities of daily living. Over one-third of all homeless Veterans (36%) likely have a brain injury.

**Nearly one-third (32%) of homeless Veterans are employed and employment rates have risen since 2012.** Of those employed, 15 percent were employed full time. Compared to 2012, homeless Veterans in 2015 were more likely to be employed (32% in 2015 versus 22% in 2012), and those employed were more likely to make \$10 per hour or more (67% in 2015 versus 52% in 2012).

The study shows hopeful news in the decrease in the number of homeless Veterans and an increase in both employment and income. However, it appears that those who remain in the homeless population have additional barriers to overcome in order to achieve stable housing.

Solutions must not only include opportunities for entry into supportive housing communities, but must also include ready access to service providers who are trained and prepared to respond to the full range of issues faced by the Veterans who are homeless today.

# About the study

Beginning in 1991, Wilder Research has conducted a statewide study every three years to gather data that will help better understand the prevalence, causes, circumstances, and effects of homelessness in Minnesota.

The study includes counting the number of people who were homeless on a single night and face-to-face interviews with people throughout the state who are considered homeless according to federal definition.

This report provides information about Veterans who experience homelessness from our most recent study conducted on October 22, 2015 by 1,100 volunteers and program staff in more than 370 locations across Minnesota. Other fact sheets and reports related to the 2015 study of Minnesota's homeless population can be found at <http://mnhomeless.org/>.

## Why this study is important

The Minnesota Homeless Study is considered the most comprehensive source of descriptive information about homeless adults, youth, and children in the state. Wilder Research produces the study with a unique partnership made up of hundreds of nonprofit organizations, service providers, state agencies, homeless advocates, and volunteers in order to gather critical data on homelessness.

This report explores the experiences of Veterans who are homeless and provides detailed information on the background and characteristics of Veterans experiencing homelessness, conditions that contribute to homelessness, and barriers to obtaining and retaining safe and stable housing. Organizations and government agencies use the data to: identify and address systemic issues; guide services, programs, and policies to support Minnesota Veterans experiencing homelessness; and track progress in efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate homelessness in Minnesota.

Comparisons are made between men and women in this report in order to increase comparability with the statewide homeless study results in light of the fact that homeless veterans are predominantly men.

The study collects a great deal of detailed information about Veteran homelessness, and the reader may be seeking a fact not reported here. The reference to all survey questions and the responses to those questions can be found on our website: <http://mnhomeless.org/> with information for each question partitioned by geography, shelter type, and gender of respondent.

## Gathering the data

The October 22, 2015 study included 3,672 face-to-face interviews with adults and unaccompanied youth in shelter settings and non-shelter locations such as meal sites, service centers, encampments, and other places not intended for housing.

In addition to the interviews, shelter staff provided counts of adults, youth, and children staying in all emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing, a few Rapid Rehousing programs, and emergency service voucher sites. This complete enumeration within shelters allows us to weight the interview results for those in shelters and generalize the findings to nearly the entire population of those experiencing homelessness in our state.

Sample weightings are applied to all interviews conducted in shelter locations in order to describe the entire shelter population, including those who could not be interviewed, on the day of the survey. Interviews with those **not** staying in shelters receive a weighting of 1.0 since there are no census counts to which these interviews can be weighted.

There is no comparable information about the total number of persons in non-shelter locations, other than the counts of those who participated in interviews and persons staying with them in non-shelter locations. All adults and unaccompanied youth found in non-shelter locations were asked to be interviewed (or one member of each couple).

As described above, interviews with Veterans are weighted using this same procedure as the weighting of the overall study population; therefore the numbers (Ns) that appear in this report are the **weighted** interview totals.

## Definition of homelessness

The definition of homelessness used for the study is the same one specified by the U.S. Congress in its most recent reauthorization of the Hearth Act in May 2009. For the 2015 study, a homeless person is anyone who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, **and**:

1. Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;  
**or**

2. Has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised, publicly- or privately-operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including hotels and motels paid for by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations; congregate shelters; and transitional housing);  
**or**
3. An individual who resided in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation and is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided (this includes those persons leaving detox on the date of the study who were homeless upon entry).

For this study, this definition is expanded to include persons who will imminently lose their housing, as evidenced by an eviction action that notifies them that they must leave within 14 days; or persons staying in hotels or motels (not paid for by public or charitable funds) who lack the resources necessary to reside there for more than 14 days; or persons in doubled-up situations where there is evidence that the owner or primary renter will not allow the individual or family to stay for more than 14 days.

A parent not meeting any of these criteria may be included if they have a child with them, have a significant history of residential instability, and have a barrier (or have a child with a barrier) that interferes with housing or employment.

## Definition of Veterans

There are different definitions of Veteran and these definitions often affect eligibility for services and support. Individuals are included in the body of this report if they reported they served on active duty for at least one day. This definition was chosen to align with the Federal definition and maintain consistency with past Veterans reports from the Minnesota Homeless Study.

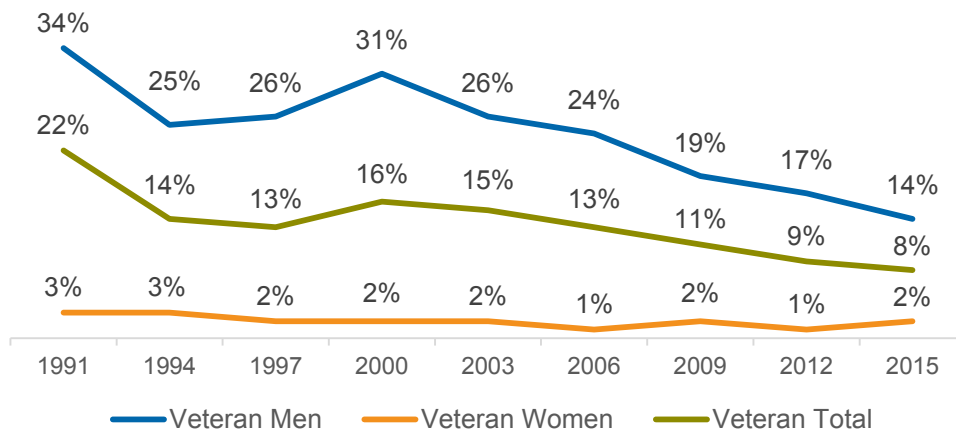
The state of Minnesota's definition of Veteran is more specific and is defined as "a citizen of the United States or a resident alien who has been separated under honorable conditions from any branch of the armed forces of the United States after having served on active duty for 181 consecutive days or by reason of disability incurred while serving on active duty, or who has met the minimum active duty requirement as defined by Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 3.12a, or who has active military service certified under section 401, Public Law 95-202. The active military service must be certified by the United States secretary of defense as active military service and a discharge under honorable conditions must be issued by the secretary." (MN Statute 197.447). This report includes an Appendix with comparisons between those meeting Minnesota's statutory definition and others.

# Homelessness among Veterans in Minnesota has decreased

Recent targeted efforts to reduce homelessness among military Veterans appear to be paying off. The estimated number of homeless Veterans decreased by 27 percent from 2012 to 2015. Based on weighted totals, it is estimated that in 2015 there were approximately 422 homeless Veterans in Minnesota.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, there were approximately 580 homeless Veterans. There was a 30 percent decrease in the estimated number of Veteran men from 2012 (approximately 542) to 2015 (approximately 379). However, the rate of homelessness for Veteran women remained consistent, though this is based on a small number of Veteran women, so it should be interpreted with caution.

In addition, the proportion of homeless Minnesotans who identify as Veterans has decreased over time. When compared to the first statewide homeless study, the percentage of homeless adults who are Veterans decreased from 22 percent in 1991 to 8 percent in 2015 (Figure 1).

## 1. Percentage of homeless persons who are U.S. military Veterans by year



Note: This table shows the weighted percentages of homeless Veterans over the nine study periods.

Sixty-eight percent of homeless Veterans were in the Twin Cities metro area, and 32 percent were in greater Minnesota.

<sup>1</sup> Interview responses with Veterans are weighted using the same procedure as the weighting of the overall homeless adult population study results; therefore any numbers (Ns) that appear in this report are the **weighted** interview totals.

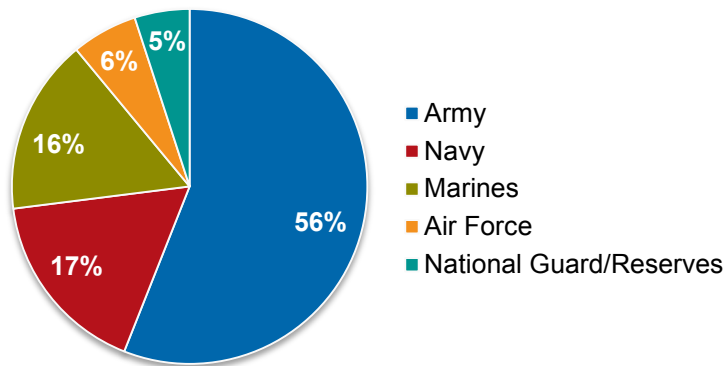


# Characteristics of homeless Veterans

## Military service

- Two-thirds (67%) of homeless Veterans had served more than two years, 22 percent between six months and two years, and 12 percent under six months.
- Over half (56%) of Veterans interviewed had served in the U.S. Army, followed by the U.S. Navy (17%) and U.S. Marines (16%) (Figure 2).

### 2. Branch of U.S. military in which homeless Veterans served



- The most common era in which Veterans served was from October 1980 through March 2003 (43%). None of the Veteran women served before June 1975 (Figure 3).

### 3. Date homeless Veterans entered U.S. military service

	Men (N=378)	Women (N=41)	Total (N=419)
Prior to August 1964	1%	-	1%
August 1964 to May 1975	20%	-	18%
June 1975 to September 1980	27%	38%	28%
October 1980 to March 2003	43%	40%	43%
April 2003 or later	9%	22%	11%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

- Nearly one-third (30%) of homeless Veterans reported having served in a combat zone.
- Forty-five percent of homeless Veterans reported a service-related health problem, and of those over 40 percent have a service-related mental health problem (45%) or hearing problem (41%).

## Demographics

- Ninety percent of homeless Veterans in this study were men. This reflects the overall Veteran population in Minnesota, in which 93 percent are men.<sup>2</sup>
- The average age of homeless Veteran men was 52 (median age 54), and the average age of homeless Veteran women was 44 (median age 47). This is up slightly for men (50 in 2012 versus 52 in 2015) and more markedly for women (33 in 2012 versus 44 in 2015).
- Racial disparities are prevalent in the homeless population, including homeless Veterans (Figure 4). Forty-two percent of homeless Veterans in Minnesota were people of color, though people of color make up only 15 percent of the Minnesota adult population. However, a greater percentage of homeless Veterans are white (58%) compared to the general homeless adult population (38%).

#### 4. Race and ethnicity of homeless Veterans compared to Minnesota adult homeless population and overall Minnesota adult population

	Percent of homeless Veterans	Percent of all homeless adults in MN	Percent of Minnesota adults: age 18 or older <sup>a</sup>	Percent of Minnesota Veterans <sup>b</sup>
American Indian	6%	8%	1%	1%
Asian American	<1%	2%	4%	1%
Black/African American	27%	39%	5%	3%
White/Caucasian	58%	38%	85%	92%
Other/Mixed race	4%	5%	1%	2%
Hispanic (any race)	5%	7%	4%	2%

Note. Respondents were asked to select one racial category, and were asked separately about Hispanic ethnicity. Those who report Hispanic ethnicity are not included in the racial categories for most data in this table. However, for the Minnesota Veteran population data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, those who report Hispanic ethnicity are included in other racial categories.

<sup>a</sup> Source: 2014 U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey.

<sup>b</sup> Source: 2014 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> 2014 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics.

- Ninety-five percent of surveyed homeless Veterans were not currently married. Eight in 10 had never been married (41%) or were divorced (42%), 7 percent were separated, and 5 percent were widowed.
- Nearly all (97%) homeless Veterans had graduated from high school or completed a GED, and one half (51%) had some type of postsecondary education.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of homeless Veterans had lived in Minnesota for more than five years. Over half (52%) have lived in Minnesota for 20 years or more.
- Although almost half (47%) of homeless Veteran women and nearly one-quarter (24%) of homeless Veteran men reported that they *had* children under the age of 18, the proportion currently caring for their children was substantially lower. Just under one-quarter (23%) of homeless Veteran women and 3 percent of Veteran men were accompanied by their children on the night of the survey.

## Current homeless situations

For over one-quarter of homeless Veterans (29%), the current episode of homelessness is their first (Figure 5). Fifty-eight percent of homeless Veterans had been homeless more than one year. However, there were differences by gender: Veteran women (65%) were more likely to be homeless for less than one year, while Veterans men (59%) were more likely to be homeless for one year or longer.

### 5. Number of homeless episodes in lifetime and length of current episode for homeless Veterans

<b>Number of homelessness episodes in lifetime</b>	<b>Men (N=369)</b>	<b>Women (N=43)</b>	<b>Total (N=412)</b>
One	29%	32%	29%
Two or three	29%	27%	29%
Four or more	42%	41%	42%
<b>Length of current homelessness episode</b>	<b>Men (N=379)</b>	<b>Women (N=43)</b>	<b>Total (N=422)</b>
Less than 1 month	7%	11%	8%
More than 1 month but less than a year	33%	54%	35%
1 year to less than 3 years	22%	14%	22%
3 or more years	37%	21%	36%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

Overall, 92 percent of all homeless Veterans surveyed had at some point lived in a short- or long-term program for homeless people (emergency shelter, battered women's shelter, transitional housing, or permanent housing with supportive services); of those, 90 percent had done so in the previous two years.

However, shelter is not always available to all who need it. Twenty-two percent of homeless Veterans reported they had been turned away from shelter in the previous three months due to a lack of available bed spaces. Of these, two-thirds (66%) stayed outside or somewhere not meant for habitation, 20 percent were able to secure an alternative shelter bed for that night, and 11 percent stayed doubled-up with family or friends.

- Forty-one percent of homeless Veterans reported having stayed outdoors at least one night during the month of October. The average number of nights spent outdoors was six.
- Nearly one-quarter (24%) of homeless Veterans reported that they had doubled-up in the month of the survey (October). The average number of nights spent doubled-up in October was two.

### ***Long-term homelessness***

In Minnesota, people are considered to be long-term homeless if they have been homeless for a year or longer or if they have been homeless at least four times in the past three years. In the 2015 study, 61 percent of homeless Veterans fit this definition (in the overall homeless population, this rate was nearly the same at 60%).

- Nearly half (46%) of homeless Veterans met the federal definition of chronic homelessness, which, in addition to the long-term criteria in the Minnesota definition, also requires the presence of at least one serious or chronic disability.

### ***Immediate causes of homelessness***

- The main reasons homeless Veterans cited for leaving their last regular housing included: inability to afford the rent (34%); eviction (32%); loss of a job or reduction in work hours (30%); their own drinking or drug problems (28%); a breakup with their spouse or partner (22%); or problems getting along with the people they lived with (21%) (Figure 6).
- Veteran women were more likely than men to cite domestic violence, eviction, another household member's drinking or drug problem, problems getting along with other people they lived with, or violence in the neighborhood.

- Veteran men were more likely than women to cite the loss of a job or entering treatment, jail, or a residential program.

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## 6. Common reasons why homeless Veterans left their last regular housing

Did you leave your last regular housing because...	Percentage responding "yes"		
	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
You could not afford the rent or house payments	35%	32%	34%
You were evicted or your lease was not renewed	30%	51%	32%
You lost your job or had your hours cut	32%	16%	30%
A drinking or drug problem you had	29%	24%	28%
Breakup with your spouse or partner	22%	23%	22%
Problems getting along with other people you lived with	20%	27%	21%
You entered treatment, jail, or a residential program	27%	2%	19%
A drinking or drug problem of another member of your household	18%	27%	19%
You were living in substandard or unsafe housing	11%	15%	12%
Behavior problem of guest or visitor	12%	11%	12%
Abuse by someone you lived with	9%	29%	11%
Violence in the neighborhood	10%	17%	11%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men. Respondents could identify multiple reasons.

- Homeless Veterans most often reported that the first place they stayed when they lost their housing was with family or friends (34%); in an emergency shelter (32%); outdoors (9%); or in a van, bus station, or another public place (11%).
- Homeless Veteran women were more likely than homeless Veteran men to stay with family or friends when they first left their last housing (46% versus 33%).

# Barriers to regaining stable housing

Once someone has lost their regular housing, there are multiple barriers they face in their efforts to regain stable housing.

- The main reasons given by homeless Veterans for currently being unable to obtain housing included lack of job or income (50%), no housing they could afford (45%), credit problems (42%), no local rental history (31%), or a criminal background (30%) (Figure 7).
- Veteran women were more likely than men to cite abuse by someone they lived with as a reason they cannot get or keep housing.
- Veteran men were more likely than women to identify a criminal background, no local rental history, the cost of application, or chemical use by themselves or someone they live with as reasons they are unable to obtain or maintain housing.

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## 7. Common reasons why homeless Veterans cannot obtain housing

Have you ever had difficulty getting or keeping housing because...	Percentage responding "yes"		
	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
Lack of job or income	52%	36%	50%
No affordable housing	44%	51%	45%
Credit problems	43%	42%	42%
No local rental history	33%	14%	31%
Criminal background	33%	6%	30%
Cost of application	26%	17%	25%
Alcohol or chemical use	27%	8%	25%
Don't know how to find rental housing	20%	17%	19%
Court eviction or bad rental history	16%	17%	16%
Mental health problems	15%	17%	15%
Race	11%	8%	11%
Health	10%	0%	9%
Abuse by someone lived with	6%	29%	8%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

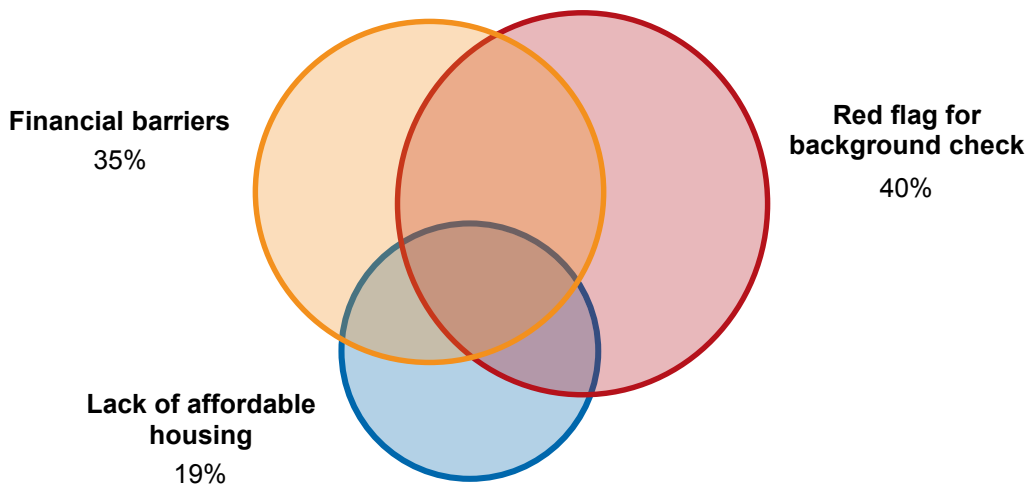
These barriers represent both sides of the affordability equation – the cost of housing and the ability to pay. Secondary barriers include considerations that landlords use to screen for the desirability of a new tenant, including poor credit and rental histories and/or criminal history.

- Figure 8 shows the relative frequency with which homeless Veterans report each of these as issues that are currently preventing their getting housing. Over half (52%) reported at least one of these barriers, and over one-quarter (28%) reported experiencing multiple barriers.
- The most common type of barrier reported is a red flag for background checks (40%), followed by a lack of job or income (35%). In addition, 13 percent of homeless Veterans reported experiencing both of these barriers.

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## 8. Overlapping barriers to housing for homeless Veterans

Proportion with any barriers: 52%  
Proportion with multiple barriers: 28%



To supplement what survey respondents reported as their housing barriers, we looked at information elsewhere in the survey for other possible barriers to housing. These were selected based on a list of common barriers identified by homeless service providers. Virtually all homeless Veterans (98%) report at least one of the housing barriers described below and they are likely to require assistance in order to help regain housing.

- 71% have been homeless before
- 68% are currently unemployed

- 57% have a serious mental illness
- 63% have spent time in a correctional facility
- 57% have been homeless for at least a year
- 33% could only afford to pay less than \$200 monthly for rent

## Housing needs

- Eighty-six percent of homeless Veterans needed only an efficiency or one-bedroom apartment.
- One-fifth (19%) of homeless Veterans were not able to pay any amount for rent. Ten percent indicated they could pay \$1 to \$100 per month for rent; 15 percent could pay \$101 to \$300; 24 percent could pay \$301 to \$500; and 33 percent could pay more than \$500 per month.
- Over one-third (36%) of homeless Veterans were on a waiting list for housing vouchers (Section 8) or housing that offers some type of financial assistance, and 24 percent of those Veterans had been waiting for over a year. Of those who were not on a waiting list, 14 percent reported that they were unable to get on a waiting list because the list was closed. Seven percent of homeless Veterans said they had received a housing voucher that they lost or could not use.



# Homeless Veterans' health

## Trauma histories

One significant predictor of Veteran health is exposure to trauma in childhood and adulthood. Trauma exposure can be predictive of mental health, physical health, and chemical health issues.

- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of homeless Veterans had experienced some type of adverse childhood experience, such as abuse, neglect, or out-of-home placement (Figure 9).

### 9. Selected adverse childhood experiences experienced by homeless Veterans

Selected adverse childhood experiences	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
Physically abused as a child	40%	47%	40%
Sexually abused as a child	15%	27%	17%
Neglected as a child	12%	30%	14%
Out-of-home placements as a child <sup>a</sup>	24%	34%	25%
During childhood, had a parent serve time in prison	9%	14%	9%
Witnessed abuse as a child	42%	53%	43%
Lived with substance abuser as a child	52%	46%	51%
Lived with parent/guardian with mental illness	28%	37%	29%
At least one of the above	73%	68%	73%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

<sup>a</sup> Out-of-home placements include foster care, group home, and treatment facilities.

- Forty-four percent of Veteran women and 23 percent of Veteran men have stayed in an abusive situation due to no other housing options.
- One-quarter (24%) of Veteran women and 14 percent of Veteran men said they had been sexual with someone only for the purpose of getting shelter, clothing, or food.
- Nine percent of homeless Veteran men and nearly one-third (32%) of homeless Veteran women reported being in a personal relationship in the previous year with someone who hit them, slapped them, pushed them around, or threatened to do so.

- About one in five homeless Veterans (17% of men and 20% of women) reported being physically or sexually attacked while homeless.
- Eight percent of homeless Veteran men and 10 percent of homeless Veteran women had been approached to work in the sex industry.
- Nine percent of homeless Veterans (9% of men and 12% of women) reported having sought health care because of an injury or illness caused by violence in the previous year.

## Physical health

- Sixty-one percent of homeless Veterans reported they had at least one chronic health condition (high blood pressure, asthma, other chronic lung or respiratory problems, chronic heart or circulatory problems, diabetes, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, and/or tuberculosis). Of those, over two-thirds (68%) reported receiving care for each reported condition in the previous 12 months.
- Over half (55%) of homeless Veterans said they needed to see a dentist about tooth or gum problems; 39 percent said they needed to see a doctor for a physical health problem.
- Twenty-one percent of homeless Veterans reported they were not taking medication that was prescribed to them.
- Homeless Veterans tended to have greater unmet chronic health needs in 2015 compared to 2012. Homeless Veterans were slightly more likely to report at least one chronic health condition in 2015 (61%) compared to 2012 (54%), but they were less likely to report receiving care for their chronic health conditions in 2015 (68% in 2015 versus 75% in 2012).

## Mental health

Sixty-two percent of homeless Veterans report a serious mental illness.<sup>3</sup> This includes being told by a doctor or nurse (within the previous two years) that they had schizophrenia, manic depression, some other type of delusional disorder, major depression, antisocial personality disorder, anxiety or panic disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder, or had received mental health treatment within the previous two years (Figure 10).

- Thirty-eight percent of homeless Veterans surveyed had received outpatient mental health services, and 16 percent had lived in a facility for persons with mental health problems within the previous two years.
- Over one-third (35%) of homeless Veterans said they currently needed to see a doctor about a mental or emotional health problem.

### 10. Mental health characteristics of homeless Veterans

	Percentage with characteristics		
	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
Anxiety or panic disorder <sup>a</sup>	33%	52%	35%
Post-traumatic stress disorder	31%	38%	32%
Major depression	30%	45%	31%
Manic episodes or manic depression, bipolar disorder	17%	20%	18%
Antisocial personality, obsessive-compulsive personality, or another severe emotional disorder	13%	13%	13%
Schizophrenia	6%	3%	6%
Paranoid or delusional disorder, other than schizophrenia	6%	2%	5%
<b>Any mental health diagnosis above</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>Mental health diagnosis and/or recent mental illness treatment</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>62%</b>

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

<sup>a</sup> Anxiety or panic disorder was added to the 2015 survey and was not included as a diagnosis in previous studies.

<sup>3</sup> This number should not be compared to the 2012 percentage for serious mental illness because anxiety or panic disorder was added to the 2015 survey.

## Chemical dependency

- Nearly one-third of homeless Veteran men (32%) and about one-quarter of homeless Veteran women (22%) had been told by a doctor or nurse within the previous two years that they had chemical dependency problems (Figure 11).
- One-quarter of homeless Veterans had a dual diagnosis with chemical dependency and mental illness (25%).

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### 11. Chemical dependency among homeless Veterans

	Percentage with characteristics		
	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
Alcohol abuse disorder	27%	22%	27%
Drug abuse disorder	17%	9%	16%
<b>Any chemical dependency diagnosis above</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Dual diagnosis (chemical dependency and mental illness)</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

- In addition, over one-third (38%) of homeless Veterans (39% of Veteran men and 29% of Veteran women) reported that they consider themselves to be alcoholic or chemically dependent.
- Forty-four percent of Veteran men and 10 percent of Veteran women had been admitted to a detox center at least once.
- Over half of Veteran men (54%) and one-quarter of Veteran women (25%) reported that they had lived in an alcohol or drug treatment facility at some time in their lives. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of Veteran men and 14 percent of Veteran women had been in residential drug treatment programs in the previous two years.
- Nearly half (49%) of Veteran men and over one-quarter (29%) of Veteran women had received outpatient drug or alcohol treatment at some time in their lives. Twenty percent of Veteran men and 9 percent of Veteran women received outpatient drug or alcohol treatment in the previous two years.
- Twelve percent of homeless Veterans reported the need to see a health professional about alcohol or drug problems.

## Co-occurring health issues

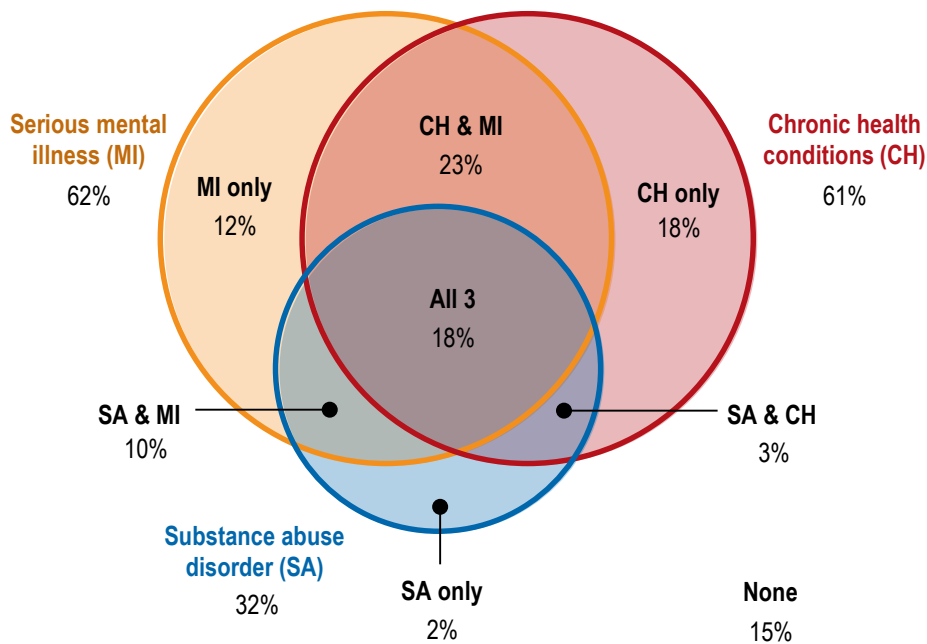
Health issues in the homeless adult population are characterized by high levels of co-occurrence (Figure 12). Over half (53%) of homeless Veterans have more than one of the three most common conditions (serious mental illness, chronic health condition, or substance abuse disorder). This fact has significant implications for service needs since treatment that addresses only one condition, but not others that are also present, has a lower likelihood of success.

- Eighteen percent of homeless Veterans reported all three conditions. Substance abuse disorder is particularly likely to co-occur with other conditions; only 2 percent of homeless Veterans report substance abuse disorder without one of the other two conditions.

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### 12. Incidence and co-occurrence of health conditions among homeless Veterans

Proportion with no barriers: 15%  
Proportion with multiple barriers: 53%



## Disabilities

- According to many homeless Veterans interviewed, physical, mental, or other health conditions limited the amount or kind of work they could do (46%), limited their daily activities (14%), or interfered with memory or daily decision-making (30%).
- Nearly nine in ten (87%) homeless Veterans reported having at least one serious or chronic disability (mental illness, substance abuse disorder, chronic medical condition, cognitive impairment, or other condition that limits work or activities of daily living).

## Traumatic brain injury

Another concern is the fact that traumatic brain injury, which is reported by about one in three homeless Veterans, is sometimes difficult to detect, and the symptoms may mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder. While not all survivors display symptoms, they often have diminished memory, act in irrational ways, display episodes of rage, have difficulty concentrating, and generally have diminished capacity to maintain family relationships. Any of these elements, left untreated, can increase the likelihood of homelessness for Veterans.

- Over one-third (36%) of homeless Veterans in the study had a history that suggests likely traumatic brain injury. That is, they received a serious head injury, followed by the development of problems with headaches, concentration or memory, understanding, excessive worry, sleeping, or getting along with people.
- Nineteen percent of homeless Veterans report being told by a doctor or nurse in the previous two years that they have a traumatic brain injury. Seven percent of homeless Veterans report being diagnosed with a service-related head injury or traumatic brain injury.

# Resources homeless Veterans are accessing

## Veteran-specific services

- While not all Veterans are eligible for Veteran benefits, 41 percent of homeless Veterans were currently using Veteran benefits. The benefits most frequently used were Veterans Administration medical services (30%), service-related compensation (24%), and Veterans Administration disability pay (11%). An additional 3 percent of Veterans who were not currently using Veteran benefits, had used Veteran benefits in the previous 12 months.
- About one-third (30%) of homeless Veterans reported that during the past 12 months they had contact with a County Veterans Service Officer and over one-quarter (29%) had attended a Veterans Stand Down event.
- Twenty-seven percent of homeless Veterans had joined the Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry (designed by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs) to quickly identify and secure housing for Veterans). These rates were slightly higher among Veterans in the Twin Cities metro area (29%) than in greater Minnesota (22%). For more information about the registry, visit:  
<https://mn.gov/mdva/resources/homelessnessandprevention/>

## Medical care

- Eighty-four percent of homeless Veterans reported that they had a regular place to go for medical care. Of these, the most frequent places mentioned were a clinic that requires insurance or fees (43%), Veterans Administration (VA) (39%), a free clinic (12%) and an emergency room (3%).
- Eighty-six percent of homeless Veterans had medical coverage of some kind in October. This is very similar to the 2012 rate of coverage (83%).
- One-quarter (26%) of homeless Veterans had received care in an emergency room in October, and 44% reported receiving care in an emergency room in the previous six months.

## Community programs

The services most commonly used by homeless Veterans during the month of the survey (October) were:

- Food stamps (45%)
- State or federal Veteran benefits (40%)

- Hot meal programs (37%)
- Free clothing shelves (35%)
- Transportation assistance (35%)

In addition to being the most commonly received kind of service, recipients also rated food stamps as one of the services that helped them the most. State and federal Veteran benefits were also rated highly as helping Veterans the most. Other kinds of food assistance, especially hot meals and food shelves, were also rated among the “most helpful” (Figure 13). Veterans were less likely than the general homeless population to use these types of assistance, with the exception of drop-in centers, hot meal programs, and free voice mail or cell phone.

### 13. Types of assistance received by homeless Veterans in October 2015

	Percent who received the service during October	Of those who received the service, percent who say it is one of 3 services that have helped the most
<b>Food assistance</b>		
Food stamps/SNAP	45%	34%
Hot meal program	37%	18%
Food shelf	27%	13%
<b>Health-related services</b>		
Emergency room	26%	8%
Free medical clinic	22%	10%
Free mental health clinic	10%	5%
Free dental clinic	8%	3%
<b>Transportation assistance (including bus cards)</b>	35%	22%
<b>Free/almost free clothing</b>	35%	11%
<b>Outreach-related</b>		
Drop-in center services	27%	13%
Outreach services	15%	5%
Help getting an ID	10%	4%
Free voice mail or cell phone	25%	10%
<b>Benefits related</b>		
State or Federal Veteran benefits	40%	25%
Help getting financial or other benefits	11%	3%



## Employment

- Nearly one-third (32%) of homeless Veterans were employed; 15 percent were employed full time. These are rates similar to the general homeless population.
- Over two-thirds (68%) of employed homeless Veterans reported that their job had lasted at least three months.
- One-third (33%) of employed homeless Veterans reported that their jobs paid less than \$10 per hour.
- Homeless Veterans reported greater employment and income in 2015 compared to 2012. Compared to 2012, homeless Veterans in 2015 were more likely to be employed (32% in 2015 versus 22% in 2012), and those employed were more likely to make \$10 per hour or more (67% in 2015 versus 52% in 2012).
- In addition, both homeless Veteran men and women had higher median monthly incomes (\$700 for men and \$900 for women) than reported by Veterans in the 2012 study (\$400 for men and \$437 for women).
- About one-fifth (21%) of unemployed Veterans last held a steady job in the past six months (Figure 14). However, almost half (46%) reported that their last job had been more than four years prior.

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### 14. Unemployed homeless Veterans: length of time without a job

How long has it been since you last held a job?	Men (N=244)	Women (N=23)	Total (N=267)
Less than six months	20%	32%	21%
Six months to one year	12%	4%	11%
One to two years	10%	-	9%
Two to three years	7%	18%	8%
Three to four years	5%	5%	5%
More than four years	47%	40%	46%

Notes: This table reflects only those responses given by individuals not currently employed. The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

- Forty-two percent of unemployed homeless Veterans were looking for work.
- The most frequently mentioned barriers to employment for unemployed Veterans were physical health problems (34%), lack of transportation (19%), mental health problems (17%), lack of housing (15%), criminal background (13%), and age (11%).

## Other sources of income

- When asked about their main sources of income during October, homeless Veterans must often reported General Assistance (27%), steady employment (24%), Veteran benefits (18%), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) (14%), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (14%), Social Security (10%), and day labor (10%) (Figure 15).
- Veteran women were more likely than men to report their main source of income was steady employment, SSDI, or MFIP or another family welfare program.
- Veteran men were more likely than women to report their main source of income was General Assistance, temporary or day labor, or Social Security.
- In 2015, homeless Veterans were less likely to receive government support compared to 2012. In 2015, homeless Veterans were less likely to have received MFIP or other welfare assistance in the previous 12 months. For Veteran men, the percent receiving government assistance dropped from 7 percent in 2012 to 3 percent in 2015. For women, the drop was more dramatic, from 45 percent in 2012 to 19 percent in 2015.

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### 15. Main sources of income for homeless Veterans in October

Main sources of income	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
General Assistance	28%	18%	27%
Steady employment	22%	39%	24%
VA: Veterans disability/benefits/pension	19%	13%	18%
SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance)	13%	26%	14%
SSI (Supplemental Security Income)	13%	16%	14%
Temp work or day labor	11%	0%	10%
Social Security	11%	0%	10%
Asking for money on the streets	8%	2%	8%
Sale or pawning of personal belongings	7%	2%	7%
Emergency assistance	6%	13%	6%
Blood or plasma center	5%	7%	5%
Other relatives or friends, including boyfriends/ girlfriends	5%	7%	5%
MFIP or a family welfare program in another state	1%	19%	3%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

- Most homeless Veterans (93%) had at least some income during the month of the study. While 30 percent received less than \$300, over half (56%) received more than \$500 (Figure 16).
- Homeless Veteran women were more likely to have an income over \$800 (56%) than homeless Veteran men (36%). Overall, homeless Veteran men had lower median monthly incomes than homeless Veteran women (\$700 versus \$900). The 2015 median incomes for homeless Veteran men and homeless Veteran women were the same in the Twin Cities area and in greater Minnesota.

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#### 16. Total income for homeless Veterans in October

Total income in October	Men (N=379)	Women (N=43)	Total (N=422)
No income	8%	2%	7%
\$1 to \$100	10%	5%	9%
\$101 to \$300	22%	11%	21%
\$301 to \$500	7%	12%	7%
\$501 to \$800	18%	14%	18%
Over \$800	36%	56%	38%

Note: The Ns listed in this table are the **weighted** interview totals. It should be noted that the number of homeless Veteran women is much smaller than the number of homeless Veteran men.

# Conclusions

Results of the 2015 study show an encouraging drop in the total number and percentage of Veterans among Minnesota's homeless population. The estimated number of Veterans surveyed in the study decreased by approximately 27 percent from 2012 to 2015; this decrease outpaces the overall decrease in the statewide homeless population (9% decrease from 2012 to 2015).

These changes are likely the outcome of targeted efforts, both nationally and locally, to end homelessness for Veterans. Significant efforts are underway to identify Veterans experiencing homelessness and encourage them to join the Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry. Through this registry, Veterans receive extensive services designed to help them access and secure permanent housing. The Minnesota Homeless Study was conducted in October 2015, just before a new system was put in place that promoted coordinated systems for identifying Veterans for the Registry.

The study shows that both employment and income among homeless Veterans are up and that the receipt of welfare benefits is down. However, the fact that 6 in 10 Veterans surveyed in 2015 can be defined as chronically homeless and that the incidence of chronic health issues is up from the 2012 study suggest that those who remain in the homeless population have additional barriers to overcome in order to achieve stable housing.

It is clear from Veterans' responses related to barriers to getting and keeping housing that the lack of affordable housing is a stubborn and pervasive problem. Nonetheless, most Veterans report at least one or more additional barriers to getting and keeping housing that are unrelated to affordability. This means that improved incomes or employment outcomes alone will not be sufficient to address housing issues.

The case for improving Veterans' access to housing with supportive services is strong. Over half of the homeless Veteran population reports a serious mental health problem and nearly one-third have a chemical dependency diagnosis. In addition, nearly half of all Veterans report a health condition that limits the amount or kind of work that they can do. Finally, more than one-third of homeless Veterans report a history suggesting the likelihood of a traumatic brain injury.

It is encouraging that more than 8 out of 10 Veterans had a regular place to go for medical care. It is also encouraging that 2015 median incomes were higher for both men and women than reported in the 2012 study, and that more than 4 in 10 Veterans are currently taking advantage of some form of state or federal Veteran benefit program. But, the work remaining will require a level of commitment and resources that address more of the

underlying barriers that make housing opportunities alone insufficient to solve the problem of homeless Veterans.

It is becoming clear that solutions must not only include opportunities for entry into supportive housing communities, but must also include ready access to service providers who are trained and prepared to respond to the full range of issues faced by the Veterans who are homeless today.

# Appendix: Findings for Minnesota

## Definition of Veterans

Of the homeless adults surveyed in the 2015 Minnesota Homeless Study, most (83%) of those who served in the U.S. military met the Minnesota definition of Veteran status (see page 4 for detailed definitions). The Veterans who meet the Minnesota definition are a subset of the larger group of Veterans who meet the federal definition. The descriptions given below show the comparison between those who met the Minnesota definition of Veteran and those who served in active duty and therefore meet the federal definition of Veteran, but did not meet the Minnesota definition. Because the number of all other active duty Veterans is so small, interpret differences with caution.

Homeless Veterans who met the Minnesota Veteran definition were very similar demographically to those who did not meet the definition (Figure A1). However, those who met Minnesota’s definition of Veteran were older, on average, and less likely to have been incarcerated or previously homeless. They were also more likely to be on the Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry.

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### A1. Demographics of homeless Veterans

	Minnesota definition of Veterans	All other active duty Veterans
Men	90%	90%
Average (mean) age	52	46
Located in Twin Cities metro area	67%	73%
At least a high school diploma or GED	97%	93%
Some college	51%	51%
Racial or ethnic minority	43%	48%
Ever incarcerated	61%	72%
Ever homeless before	70%	77%
Currently homeless a year or longer	57%	60%
On the Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry	30%	11%
Employed	32%	29%

Note: Because the number of all other active duty Veterans is so small, differences should be interpreted with caution.

On average, homeless Veterans who met the Minnesota Veteran definition reported fewer traumatic childhood experiences than homeless Veterans who had any other active military duty (Figure A2). In particular, Veterans meeting Minnesota’s definition were notably less likely to have experienced physical abuse, out-of-home placements, parental incarceration, witnessing abuse, and parental substance abuse.

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## A2. Adverse childhood experiences experienced by homeless Veterans

<b>Adverse childhood experiences</b>	<b>Minnesota definition of Veterans</b>	<b>All other active duty Veterans</b>
Lived with substance abuser as a child	49%	60%
Witnessed abuse as a child	41%	51%
Physically abused as a child	38%	50%
Lived with parent/guardian with mental illness	28%	33%
Out-of-home placements as a child <sup>a</sup>	23%	36%
Sexually abused as a child	16%	21%
Neglected as a child	13%	17%
During childhood, had a parent serve time in prison	8%	18%
At least one of the above	71%	81%

Note: Because the number of all other active duty Veterans is so small, differences should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>a</sup> Out-of-home placements include foster care, group home, and treatment facilities.

## Physical and mental health

Homeless Veterans who met the Minnesota Veteran definition were more likely to have service-related health problems, serious mental illness, and PTSD (Figure A3).

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## A3. Health-related issues of homeless Veterans

<b>Health-related issues</b>	<b>Minnesota definition of Veterans</b>	<b>All other active duty Veterans</b>
Service-related health problem	50%	23%
Chronic health condition	61%	61%
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	33%	27%
Major depression	31%	34%
Serious mental illness	64%	54%
Alcohol abuse disorder	27%	27%
Drug abuse disorder	16%	19%
Dual diagnosis (mental health and substance abuse disorder)	26%	21%

Note: Because the number of all other active duty Veterans is so small, differences should be interpreted with caution.

## Barriers to housing

Homeless Veterans who met the Minnesota Veteran definition were more likely to report the lack of affordable housing as a barrier to getting housing, but less likely to report the lack of a job/income, lack of a local rental history, or their criminal history as a barrier (Figure A4).

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### A4. Barriers to housing

<b>Current housing barriers cited by Veterans</b>	<b>Minnesota definition of Veterans</b>	<b>All other active duty Veterans</b>
Lack of job/income	29%	47%
Credit problems	21%	17%
Lack of affordable housing	21%	15%
Criminal history	18%	30%
No local rental history	5%	15%

Note: Because the number of all other active duty Veterans is so small, differences should be interpreted with caution.