

**Ending Homelessness among Veterans by addressing the lack of  
affordable housing and loss of human rights**

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## Abstract

Veteran homelessness has increased in the past decades for several reasons. Let's decide to create policies that will help veterans post-war. When they come home, they face a new war, the war on homelessness. I challenge Congress to fight against homelessness in the veteran community the same way the veterans made the unselfish decision to fight for our country. Let's end the war on veteran homelessness by providing affordable housing to vets, creating complexes that house vets in between tours, and providing the mental health support needed for veterans to integrate into society. Former president Barak Obama said it best when he said, "It is simply unacceptable for individuals, children, families, and our nation's Veterans to be faced with homelessness in this country. As influential leaders, you have the power that it takes to make the necessary changes and give Veterans the respect and recognition that they deserve,

We live in an affluent society, yet the homeless rate is so high, particularly in the Veteran community. As former president Obama has said, too many of those who once wore our nation's uniform now sleep on the streets of our country. It is time to address these concerns and provide a solution, not just a band-aid solution, to patch the problem for the time being. Instead, a permanent solution is needed to provide permanent affordable housing for veterans returning home. Veteran homelessness is often looked upon. Looking at homeless Veterans a little closer, you will notice that 2/3 of veterans are disabled and need us more than ever to find a home and regain their human rights. They made a difference for us; now it's time for us to make a difference for them. We may not know them all, but we owe them all.

### **Scope of the problem**

Homelessness is not an acceptable way of living for anyone; it attacks a person's dignity and right to life and violates the right to housing. Homelessness violates several other human rights besides the right to live in a sanitary manner, including discrimination against, access to hygienic conditions such as clean water, and the security and safety of the person from cruel, degrading, and inhumane treatment. It counts as a global human rights violation. The only way to combat this violation is to provide a solution and system of support. Homelessness can be the leading factor of numerous disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). (Veteran Homelessness: Risks, Statistics & Assistance Programs - [veteranaddiction.org](http://veteranaddiction.org), 2023)The co-occurrence of these conditions limits access to health care and causes substance abuse that a lack of family support can exacerbate. For example, exposure to homelessness impairs those affected by physical and mental health, lessening their right to attainable health standards. This issue has increased since the civil war and continues to do so, especially post the COVID pandemic.

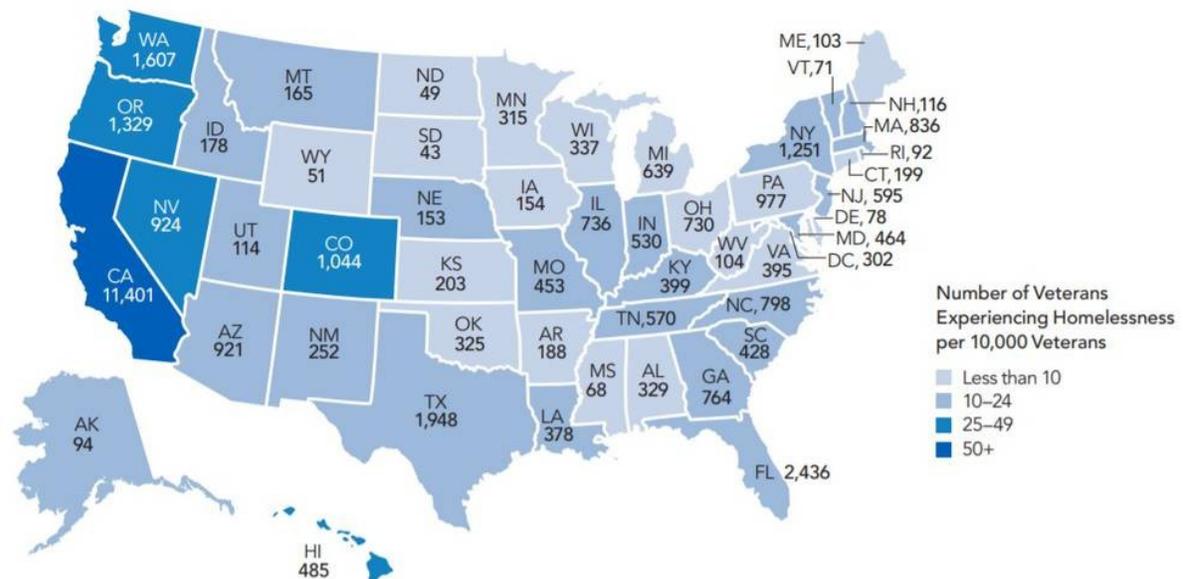
Homelessness is criticized, and often those that are homeless are discriminated against based on their living conditions or lack of an official permanent home, affecting their social and economic status and taking away their right to be employed and to access social benefits. We must eliminate these stigmas and expand programs to assist those without a permanent address or outlet to receive mail. Providing ways for them to apply for jobs, receive public benefits, and gain a source of income; In addition, other assurances may play a part in the

problem, including lack of education, social isolation, incarceration, and incarceration domestic violence. (Home - National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2023)

According to the Department of veteran affairs, the data show that on a single night in January 2022, 76,136 veterans were experiencing homelessness in the United States sheltered and unsheltered 57% were sleeping in shelters or transitional housing, 43 % were in encampments, vehicles, abandoned properties and locations that are unsafe for human habitations. (VA.gov Home | Veterans Affairs, n.d.)

(New Data Shows Biggest Drop in Veteran Homelessness in 5+ Years, n.d.)

**EXHIBIT 5.5: Estimates of Homeless Veterans**  
By State, 2020



Men are two times more likely to be chronically homeless than women. However, the number of women Veterans that are homeless has increased. The number of veterans experiencing

homelessness increased in 2020 even before the effects of the coronavirus pandemic damaged employment prospects and financial resources for the community, according to a new report released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. (Military Times, n.d.)

Many Veterans need to be made aware of programs that assist them. This is where community leaders can take a role in helping. Veterans could take advantage of these programs if they knew what programs were available and could assist them in various ways. Particularly those programs that assist with affordable housing as well as physical and mental health. Community leaders such as yourself can help build a platform to help veterans obtain the information they need to apply for such programs. Most veterans return to their communities with many issues and do not know where to seek help. Let's be a part of the solution and not neglect those that have fought for us and lost themselves in the process. Let's give back their human dignity and rights that we are all entitled to.

### **Past Policies**

Since 2014, When Michelle Obama made her speech, more than 800 mayors, governors, and other state and local officials have responded to the pleas of First Lady Michelle Obama's Mayors' Challenge to end Veteran homelessness, pledging to make it possible to ensure their communities succeed. (The White House, 2017). The Helping the Homeless Act of 2013 (Sec 3) Requires public or private non-profit entities that receive grants under the VA comprehensive service program for homeless veterans to agree to meet the physical privacy, safety, and security needs of such veterans. (Sec 10) Extends through FY2017 the Secretary and the Secretary of Labor's authority to carry out a program of referral and counseling for veterans at risk of

homelessness and transitioning from certain institutions, including penal institutions. Repeals that such programs be carried out in at least 12 locations. (Helping Homeless Veterans Act 2013, 2016). Although these past policies have improved the current homelessness situation, it is not enough; other policies must be implemented to provide a better support system for Veterans. This is why I am here advocating for a policy change. I ask you to please consider those that are in a vulnerable position and that are not able to help themselves currently. They have fought so many battles and deserve someone to fight this battle for them. (Veteran Homelessness: Risks, Statistics & Assistance Programs - veteranaddiction.org, 2023b)

### **Current Policy**

Under the Biden- Harris Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides more services faster. This is exceptional. In 2022, VA processed 1.7 veterans claims. These claims included housing, mental health services, and assistance with health insurance. This advancement has been made possible by the direction of President Biden and the funds provided by Congress during the 2020 pandemic. With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, VA's homeless programs

1. Received \$481 million in funding to support veterans—including funding to expand the Shallow Subsidy Initiative,
2. Expanded the [Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program](#) to address legal barriers to housing and to transform congregate transitional housing spaces into individual rooms with bathrooms.

3. The American Rescue Plan provided more than \$5 billion to help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and more than \$40 billion for housing provisions nationwide. (2022) VA, USICH, and HUD are making progress using the evidence-based “Housing First” approach, which prioritizes getting a veteran into housing, then providing them with the wraparound support they need to stay housed—including health care, job training, legal and education assistance. (2022) This policy strode to progress on the Veteran homeless problem and succeeded by making remarkable progress and decreasing homelessness by 17 percent. Recently Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin has shifted from his previous plan to move money from the homelessness program at the VA to other areas. This was only done because advocates protested for change. This service has helped drastically in reducing the homeless problem. This new law will cause the homelessness problem to increase if funds are reallocated to areas other than housing. “We need to keep pushing forward until we no longer ask how we achieve this goal, but instead, we’re asking how we do not. That’s the very least we can do for our men and women in uniform.” – First Lady Michelle Obama, January 21, 2016-

The housing first initiative is excellent. Still, other programs and policies must be implemented to improve the problem. This policy has been an asset to the community, but alone, it has not been able to provide for the thousands of Veterans in need of a stable living environment, a source of income to provide for themselves and their families, as well as obtain the medical and physical help that they may need to improve their quality of life. Let’s give them a fighting chance by providing funds to programs that can assist with building new homes for Veterans, establishing contracts with the existing landlord, and providing guidance in obtaining those services. In addition, funds must remain within these Policy agreements with no chance of reallocation to other programs. Reallocation will cause an interruption in the helping hand and a

disruption in the progress being made. Once more, I ask you to examine my proposed policy and consider the battles these veterans have fought in and out on the battlefield.

### **Proposed Solution**

As the ending result for veterans, it is not simply to be housed but to successfully shift into a community where they can feel at home and supported. The recent concentration on housing must keep the community focused on the longstanding goals of a successful change. A policy that addresses the symptoms of the lack of local and national policy for transitioning veterans must adapt to take a long-term approach to fully reintegrate veterans after their service (Hassan, Flynn, & Astor, 2013). The proposed policy would include a policy where all resources were listed on one platform making all the information accessible to veterans and their family members. (cir.usc.edu) Making a one-stop system alleviates the stress and anxiety of searching multiple platforms to access information. Proposed policy efforts must strengthen the housing and community systems that address people experiencing homelessness and include better support for veterans in housing distress. The problems that lead to homelessness must be addressed to find a solution. Veterans face many barriers when they return to civilian life; this is why we need to identify all homeless Veterans by their location and names. This information can be shared across a national system so that no one falls through the cracks. This shared data can be utilized to access and account for every homeless veteran—allowing various organizations to utilize it and provide services to those in need.

- Employment/ Job Interview- Provide job readiness training – Many Veterans only know the battlefields as a place of employment. This is the only job they may have held, and they do not know any other way of life. Job readiness is essential in assisting them in obtaining employment to support themselves and their families.
- Mental Health/ PTSD- Veterans trying to integrate into society often suffer from depression, insomnia, PTSD, and many other mental health conditions. Several Veterans have complained that when they reach out for assistance, all the VA does is Medicate them and not provide them the necessary help they need to learn to cope with their new sense of reality. Veterans could better function in society if money were allocated to programs that can assist with mental health treatment.
- Physical Disabilities- In 2021, in the United States, about 1.9 million veterans had a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher. These disabilities impede them from gaining employment, putting them at a disadvantage. (Statista, 2022)
- Substance and Alcohol Abuse- Substance and alcohol abuse in veterans is widespread. Veterans have been found to experience several difficulties due to alcohol and drug dependencies.
- Affordable medical Insurance- The study by researchers at Harvard Medical School, the City University of New York's Hunter College, and Public Citizen's Health Research Group found that 1.53 million veterans nationwide were uninsured last year. Additionally, about 1 in 12 veterans – 2 million individuals – also go without needed physician care annually because of cost. (1.53 Million

Veterans Are Uninsured and 2 Million Can't Afford Care, New Harvard-Public Citizen Study Finds - Public Citizen, 2020) Affordable health care insurance is essential as it is the building block for Veterans to receive the assistance they need. ("Public Citizen - Protecting Health, Safety, and Democracy," 2022)

In advocating and "showing up" where you are needed by putting in place a policy that will allow all the above-listed programs to be housed under one roof under one platform and will be funded by the government to elevate homelessness in the Veteran community. The goal of the new policy and database system would be to cause a reduction in homelessness among Veterans by connecting homeless Veterans with all the needed services. This program would provide free case management and mental health care assistance. In addition, it will ensure that outreach and meeting efforts are synchronized across different sources of services such as the police department, fire department, prisons, juvenile detention centers, hospitals, mental health facilities, and employment centers to look for Veterans in need of assistance with housing and any other programs. In addition, they are facilitating different ways to reduce the number of Veterans newly experiencing homelessness.

### **Involvement of local communities**

It is not possible for one agency or group to end Veteran homelessness alone. The effort to prevent and end Veteran homelessness is a partnership among several organizations, levels of government, and, most importantly, the local communities. It will take a village to try and combat this problem. Advancement comes when the government and community leaders realize that proven practices that reduce homelessness among Veterans nationwide can be utilized to end the community locally.

This is not done in a day, as it takes time, dedication, and community involvement to progress in the right direction. Allocating specific tasks to various organizations can be one way to combat homelessness. It is providing these services within the communities as this is where the veterans feel the most comfortable. Through time they have built relationships with community leaders and members and entrust those employed in the community. These organizations are essential because they provide resources and support for people who are struggling with homelessness. Homelessness is a complicated issue, and it can be difficult for veterans to get back on their feet without some assistance. Community organizations offer various services, including temporary shelter, food, clothing, hygiene products, and counseling.

These community organizations remind people that there is a way out of homelessness; they can show their clients the light at the end of the dark tunnel and that they are not alone. For many people, community outreach organizations are a lifeline; without them, they could not survive. Their involvement in the community is essential and has proven to help alleviate some of the everyday burdens on homeless communities. They do fantastic work, and organizations like these make a difference in people's daily lives.

These organizations are always in need of donations. They rely on the generosity of donors and volunteers who donate their time to help them provide food, shelter, and other necessities to those experiencing homelessness.

### **Involvement of Faith Communities**

Religious organizations have made their faith visible for decades by helping some of America's most vulnerable people. This is just the start of what they can do to reduce and

eventually end homelessness. Faith-based organizations have served a great purpose in facing homelessness in this country. Some Faith-based organizations provide temporary housing to homeless vets on a first come basis by providing a warm place to rest during the night.

Unfortunately, the need is so high that they cannot house everyone who enters their doors. Many are turned away due to a lack of resources and funds to keep the programs running. Many Faith-based organizations also assist by providing three hot meals, warm showers, hygiene products, and spiritual guidance. Spiritual guidance is integral to what the faith community offers, which is why they exist. Their main goal is to provide humanitarian services to those in vulnerable circumstances. Many veterans feel they are forgotten, no one cares about them, and they are not loved or missed by anyone. These organizations give them the encouragement and confidence they need to keep a positive mind frame.

Regarding America's homeless Veterans, Christian organizations set out to do more than offer a hot meal and a safe place to stay. (Shellnutt, 2017b) They provide a listening ear, empathy, and the ability to gain trust and understanding. This can only be done by getting to know your clients and their situations to help them understand that they are not alone. The role of the faith organization is to show empathy, compassion, and love to those they encounter, and through their actions, they can provide the moral support their clients need. They play an essential role in providing services to people facing any crisis. Homelessness will not end without the help of faith-based organizations providing staples to those in need. Let's continue to provide these organizations with the support they need and work alongside them to strive and help those in need. Through the collaboration of the faith community, we can recruit volunteers and donors to support the program as we advance.

I ask you to help solve the homelessness problem in America among those who have fought tirelessly for our country. They have fought for your and my freedom; it took their bravery to allow us to sit here today and discuss this problem. Please stand by me as I commit to doing everything within my power to find stable, economical homes for the veteran homeless population. In addition, I ask you to implement a policy where affordable housing is made possible and is tracked through a universal informational database. This database will allow several community organizations, such as Faith-based organizations, to utilize it; through the system, they can keep track of available housing accommodations. This system will allow them to service those needing services and stable living accommodations accurately. I can only realize this policy with your support, commitment, and funds to implement the new system and to keep up with the high demands of accommodation needed.

As mentioned before, Many Veterans need to be aware of programs that assist them. This is where community leaders can take a role in helping. Veterans could take advantage of these programs if they knew what programs were available and could assist them in various ways. Particularly those programs that assist with affordable housing as well as physical and mental health.

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