

Michigan's Veteran Homelessness Report 2023

Introduction

In accordance with Section 415 of the legislative appropriations for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) administration, this report presents a study on veterans experiencing homelessness within Michigan. This report encapsulates a data report (attached), summary of data, and analysis of the scope of homelessness among veterans. It also identifies the challenges they face in securing stable housing and proposes actionable recommendations for fostering long-term collaborations among the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the MVAA, local municipalities, and nonprofit organizations. Aimed at eradicating homelessness among veterans in Michigan, these recommendations are designed to optimize effectiveness while minimizing fiscal impacts on local government entities.

Veteran Core Demographic Report Summary 2023 – Supplied by the homeless management information system (HMIS)

Population

- Total Clients: 1657

Gender Breakdown

- Male: 91%
- Female: 9%
 - Non-binary veterans: 4%
 - Transgender veterans: 3%
 - Veterans questioning identity: 1%

Age Breakdown

Veterans aged 55+ make up over half of the veteran population with 18-24 year olds making up the smallest age bracket at under 2% of the total veteran population.

- 65+ years: 24%
- 55-64 years: 35%
- 25-54 years: 38%
- 18-24 years: 1.75%

Race Breakdown

- White: 49%
- Black: 42%
- Multi-racial: 6%
- American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous: <1%

Indefinite and Impairing Disability Breakdown

Over half of veterans (52%) have at least one disability.

- Physical disabilities: 31%
- Mental health disorders: 31%
- Chronic health conditions: 19%
- Substance use disorders: 14%
- Developmental disabilities: 2.5%
- HIV/AIDs: <1%

DV (Domestic Violence) Victim/Survivor Breakdown

- 9% of veterans are DV Victims/Survivors

Times on the Streets, Emergency Shelters (ES), or Safe Haven (SH) in the Past 3 Years

84% of veterans have spent time on the streets, ES, or SH in the past 3 years

- Once: 44%
- Twice: 17%
- Three times: 9%
- Four or more times: 14%

Months on the Streets, Emergency Shelters (ES), or Safe Havens (SH) in the Past 3 Years

83% of veterans have spent at least one month on the streets, ES, or SH.

- One month: 37%
- 2-12 months: 32%
- 12+ months: 15%

Prior Living Situation

The majority of veterans came from places not meant for habitation or emergency shelters.

- Not meant for habitation: 34%
- Emergency shelters: 21%

Household Types

- At 96%, the vast majority of veterans are adult-only households.

Challenges

Based on an in-depth review of major stakeholders in the state, many challenges exist in housing veterans experiencing homelessness. Many programs have barriers to entry (most using United States Department of Veterans Affairs eligibility standards) and veterans who are justice-involved, have legal issues, or may have had an other than honorable discharge from the military and are difficult to house. Other challenges are the lack of housing supply, landlords unable to maintain their properties and do not pass inspections, and application fees. With the two million dollars in funding from the Legislature for FY24, MVAA created the Michigan Veteran Homelessness Prevention Grant. A major challenge to partner organizations applying for the grant was the state's policy on disbursement of funds requiring reimbursement versus advancement. For many boots on the ground organizations, this would mean fundraising in order to use grant funding.

Michigan Veteran Homeless Prevention Grant Program

The MiVHPG grant funding is made available to provide financial assistance to Michigan-based nonprofit organizations that assist service members, veterans, and their families who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

“Veteran” means an individual who served in the United States Armed Forces, including the reserve components and National Guard, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. Veteran includes an individual who died while on active duty in the United States Armed Forces.

“Homeless” means that term as defined in section 103 of the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance act of 2009, 42 USC 11302.

Grant funding must be used to support a wide range of initiatives that offer immediate relief, sustainable housing solutions and comprehensive support services for veterans in need. Eligible projects may include, but are not limited to the following:

- **Immediate Relief and Emergency Shelter:** funding for temporary housing options including overnight stays in hotels to provide immediate relief to veterans experiencing homelessness.
- **Housing Development and Rehabilitation:** support for the construction or renovation of affordable housing units specifically designed to cater to the needs of veterans and their families.

- **Family Support Services:** funding for programs that provide comprehensive support to veterans and their families, including financial assistance, counseling services, childcare support, etc.
- **Landlord Incentive Programs:** programs in the community to encourage landlords to house veterans.
- **Training and Technical Assistance Programs:** a community-based approach to learning, developing, and understanding development of veteran housing.

ELIGIBILITY

Organizational Requirements:

- Grantee must be a nonprofit organization (e.g., 501(c)3, 501(c)19, etc.), or have a selected fiduciary, whose mission/purpose statement is to serve veterans in any capacity.
- Grantee must demonstrate a clear commitment to addressing veteran homelessness through various programs and initiatives and have a flexible and innovative approach to addressing the diverse needs of veterans in crises, with support from organizations that provide case management and support services.
- Grantee, or the selected fiduciary, must be able to provide a copy of its federal designation letter, governing by-laws and have a fully functioning board.
- Grantees must supply a minimum of two letters of support from partnering community organizations.

The MVAA received 34 grant applications. Through an objective screening process, the agency selected 13 organizations with the most competitive and effective plans for reducing veteran homelessness. A detailed summary of the 13 recipients is attached to this report.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the issue of veteran homelessness in Michigan, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges and improve support systems for homeless veterans:

- a. Landlord incentive programs
 - i. In speaking with partners, particularly those that work in rural spaces, landlord incentives are essential to housing veterans. Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) providers are able to be successful in housing veterans due to their ability and flexibility to work with landlords who may have had bad experiences prior, to help with any damages that may have occurred while the veteran was living there, and to help those that are the most difficult to house.
 - ii. A state that is comparable to Michigan's veteran population is Minnesota and they are excelling at ending veteran

homelessness. Minnesota's Department of Veterans Affairs have stated that nine of their ten Continuums of Care have declared an end to veteran homelessness. Their success is based on:

1. Create and implement a statewide homeless veteran registry to better identify and serve homeless veterans by being able to recognize immediate needs and trends sooner.
 2. Creation of a voucher program to fill in the gaps of those that have many challenges/barriers to housing.
 3. Landlord Incentives; a vacancy relief fund, incentive fund, risk mitigation fund, and high-barrier landlord incentive program.
- b. Educating Independent and Assisted Living facilities of the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program.
- i. 70% of Michigan's veteran population is over the age of 55 and 59% of veterans experiencing homelessness are 55 and older. By connecting and educating medical foster homes, assisted living facilities, and community residential care programs about HUD-VASH vouchers, this increases housing supply and appropriate services for our older adult veteran population.
- c. Increase in Michigan Veteran Homelessness Prevention Grant (MiVHPG) Funding to \$5 million.
- i. The MiVHPG for FY24 was a \$2 million grant. Grants were provided to 13 partners at a rate of \$150,000 each.
 - ii. MVAA had over 54 organizations submit a letter of intent, of which 34 organizations applied, and 13 were awarded.
 1. Grantees are providing landlord incentives, family supports, emergency shelters, building housing, completing renovations and repairs, providing rental and mortgage assistance, home closing cost assistance, assisting with transitional housing, and many other needed services in their communities.
 - iii. MVAA requests the increase in funding due to the number of applicants, which shows significant interest and need in our communities and legislation offering up to 100% advancement of those funds to approved grant recipients.
 1. With increased funding and 100% advancement to grant recipients, MVAA can work with partner organizations to serve our most vulnerable and underserved veteran populations (women, LGBTQ+, families, etc...) that have many barriers to access gender-specific and culturally competent safe-housing options.

- d. Michigan needs at least two SSI/SSDI, Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) practitioners that are veteran specific.
 - i. SOAR is a program designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI for those who are experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or co-occurring substance use disorders.
 - ii. A Veteran SOAR practitioner can assist with collecting the necessary paperwork, forms, and file the application packet to the Social Security Administration.
 - iii. Only about 34% of SSI/SSDI claims are approved and only 10-15% of SSI/SSDI claims that are submitted by those experiencing homelessness are approved. In 2021-2022 75% of SOAR-assisted applications were approved with a shorter time to decision of 138 days instead of up to 18 months.
 - iv. Over 52% of veterans in Michigan experiencing homelessness have a disability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2023 Michigan Veteran Homelessness Report sheds light on the critical issue of veteran homelessness within the state. The data presented in the report underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the challenges faced by our veteran population. From the demographic breakdown to the analysis of challenges and proposed recommendations, it is evident that collaborative efforts among various stakeholders are crucial in tackling this issue effectively.

The report highlights the disproportionate representation of certain demographics among homeless veterans, such as older adults and those with disabilities. It also identifies systemic barriers, including eligibility criteria for housing programs and funding disbursement policies that hinder efforts to provide adequate support to this vulnerable population.

To address these challenges, the report proposes several actionable recommendations aimed at improving housing accessibility and support services for homeless veterans. Key recommendations include implementing landlord incentive programs, creating a statewide homeless veteran registry, increasing funding for homelessness prevention grants, and establishing veteran-specific SOAR practitioners.

By implementing these recommendations, Michigan can take significant strides towards ending veteran homelessness and ensuring that our veterans have access to safe and stable housing. It is imperative that we prioritize the well-being of those who have served our country and work collaboratively to honor their service by providing the support and resources they need to thrive.