

VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS & THEIR ACCESS TO RESOURCES

BY HAILEY BILES, SARA COLE, KETSARAPORN DEE, VANESSA HERNANDEZ, ILIMA KAAUWAI-WALKER, LAURA MEDEIROS, MICHAEL ROCHE



INTRODUCTION

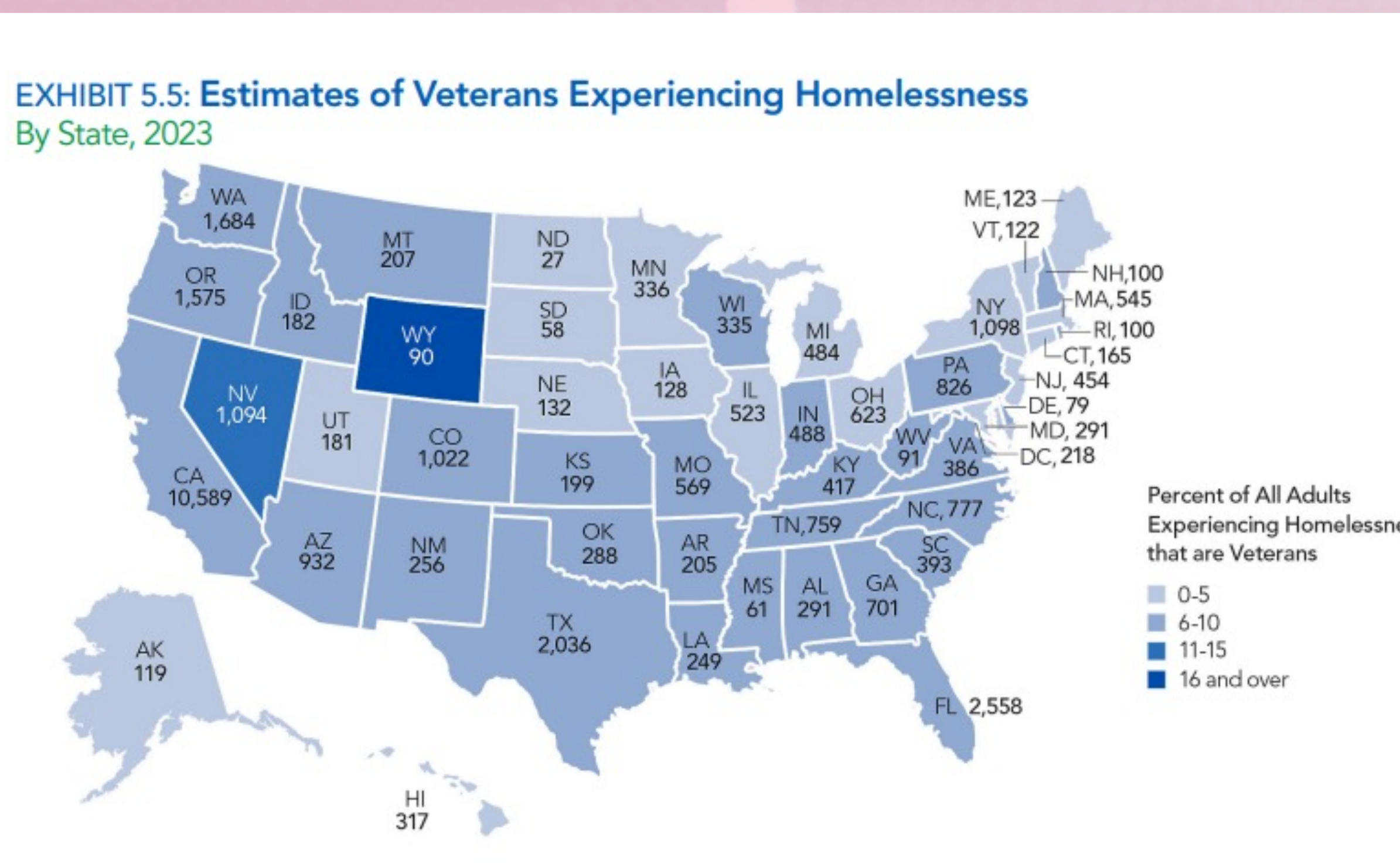
Healthcare disparities are differences in the quality of care individuals are getting in specific populations. There are many influencing factors, such as gender, race, disabilities, and income (Eun-Ok, I. & Sangmi, 2021). They negatively impact groups of people and can be preventable. Social determinants of health influence the health of people and populations. There are five categories: neighborhood and built environment, healthcare access/quality, economic stability, education access/quality, and community (Scanlon & Reinisch, 2023). It is extremely important that social determinants of health be addressed, or healthcare disparities will result and negatively affect people's health and well-being, leaving inequalities in healthcare.

COLLABORATION & PLANNING

Our goals with this presentation include identifying current resources in place for veterans experiencing homelessness, discovering potential roadblocks that hinder those veterans from receiving benefits they qualify for, and looking at ways to combat these hindrances through community outreach. Through these goals, our group can hopefully bridge the gap between available resources and those in need.

Who can we work with?

- Vets Helping Vets H.Q. to help other veterans receive the assistance they are seeking, whether it be financial, educational, or material
- Linn County Veterans Services Office for benefits and claims
- Easter Seals Oregon for reintegrating houseless veterans
- Cahoots Eugene to establish a crisis mental health services response team in Albany/Linn County



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BACKGROUND

- **Assigned community:** Albany, Oregon
- **Vulnerable population:** Veterans
 - A veteran is a person who has served in the military. Veterans are at much higher risk of mental health illnesses, alcohol and substance abuse, PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, and rates of suicide than most ordinary citizens (Ernstmeier & Christman, 2022).
- **Priority population:** Veterans experiencing homelessness
 - Veterans who are facing financial burdens and cannot afford to find a safe place to stay. Without a safe place to live, veterans are even more vulnerable to a host of health issues.

ASSESSMENT & SPECIFIC DISPARITY

- 7.8% (1,575) of Oregon's homeless population are veterans (de Sousa et al., 2023).
- Changes over time
 - According to the 2023 HUD report, between 2020 and 2023, 22 US states saw an increase in veteran homelessness, with Oregon experiencing the largest increase by 246 more veterans (de Sousa et al., 2023).



Findings:

- As of 2/6/24, Albany helping hands houses approximately 4 veterans. For anyone to access their services, the individual must be clean and sober (T. Hopper, personal communication, January 31, 2024).
- Despite various interviews and thorough research, the population of homeless veterans in Albany, Oregon, is undetermined. However, it was determined that veteran homelessness is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Interpretation:

- This population is overlooked; if not clean and sober, veterans are unable to receive the assistance they need.
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of veteran specific shelters
- Lack of outreach and volunteers

Health/healthcare related disparities:

- SDOH: healthcare access and quality
 - “The goal is to increase access to comprehensive, high-quality care services” (healthy people 2030, n.d.).
- Substance abuse (w. Scott, personal communication, February 6, 2024).
- Mental health (w. Scott, personal communication, February 6, 2024).
- Transportation (w. Scott, personal communication, February 6, 2024).

INTERVENTIONS

Vets helping vets H.Q.

- Vets helping vets is an all-encompassing volunteer organization that seeks to connect veterans, their dependents, and other family members that are seeking assistance with state, federal, and community services.
- VHVHQ trains volunteer veteran advocates by teaching them to assist veterans in gathering the evidence to acquire the benefits that may be available to them from the VA.
- VHVHQ helps veterans in person or via phone or internet from all around the state who have served in the U.S. Military under honorable conditions by preparing them to meet their VSO (veteran service officer) to file their fully developed claim(s).
- VHVHQ assists veterans who are disabled or handicapped who need special medical equipment such as wheelchairs and wheelchair ramps.
- VHVHQ assists veterans in many more areas. Call 541-791-4357 to speak with an advocate to inquire on these other areas.

Location/contact information: 237 SW Third Ave. Albany, OR 97321 | 541-791-4357 | vvhvqthebunker@gmail.com

Evidence of services in action: VHVHQ is open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays from 9 am-2pm. I was able to speak with a veteran advocate both over the phone and in person to confirm accuracy of information and to verify that services are currently being provided.

Lack of resources: VHVHQ is entirely volunteer based and as such the number of veterans that they can help is limited to the number of volunteers. They are also a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization relying entirely on donations from outside organizations/businesses and community members.

Easter Seals Oregon - Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program and Housing Assistance for Homeless Veterans

- Provides services for job skills, interviewing tips, technology training, financial help
- Assists veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless reintegrate into society and find, maintain, and succeed in employment

Easter Seals and the HVRP help with:

- Individualized support based on specific needs
- Job-related equipment or reasonable expenses (clothing, transportation, toiletries or food, etc.)
- Training and remedial education, job preparation services, trade certification and licensing assistance
- Assistance finding shelter and housing
- Referrals for other services

Location/contact information: 208 Broadalbin, Albany, OR 97322 | 541-248-3732

Potential Interventions/Dead Ends/Broken Links:

Easter seals SSVF does not currently serve Linn county as they only serve Multnomah, Marion, and Polk counties. Some of the services provided overlap with what vets helping vets provides, but you can never have too many resources/places for veterans to go to receive help. The SSVF program provides limited financial assistance services to veterans to help temporarily stabilize their living situation. This is limited by sponsorships and outside donations from local businesses and community members/organizations. More money = more veterans helped.

Outreach: Easter Seals has a couple of great brochures and members feel as though they are doing a good job with outreach to veterans in the greater Albany area. The area in which is lacking (common amongst these programs) is interagency/interdisciplinary outreach. Those people seeking these services can readily find and access them with internet searches or if they happen to be in the downtown area as many veterans' services offices are located downtown. A current struggle is passing this information to those that have potential to encounter homeless veterans needing assistance. Homeless individuals very often do not readily have access to the internet and/or telephones to connect with VHVHQ, Linn County Veterans Services Offices, or Easter Seals Oregon.