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Opinion: Too Many Veterans with Children are Still Homeless


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Opinion: Too Many Veterans with Children are Still Homeless

Abstract

Don't ignore homeless veterans.

As we pause this Veterans Day to reflect on those who have sacrificed in the service of our country, let us not neglect to address the plight of those who have returned to a civilian life with far less promise than they have every right to expect. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Veterans, Veterans Day, Homeless, Poverty, Homelessness, Homeless Shelter, Soup Kitchen

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Opinion: Too many veterans with children are still homeless

By [Christopher Fee and Joshua L. Stewart](#)

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VA makes some progress in getting vets off streets but not enough



Getty Images

Don't ignore homeless veterans.

As we pause this Veterans Day to reflect on those who have sacrificed in the service of our country, let us not neglect to address the plight of those who have returned to a civilian life with far less promise than they have every right to expect.

It is true that since 2010, the number of homeless veterans in the country has decreased by 33%, and Alaska and Rhode Island have recently reported that there are no homeless veterans living on the street. This is unprecedented.

We still can't seem to help all those vets with kids who are living on the street, in their cars, or doubled up at a relative's house.

But there remains much to do. All states, including these two, still have many veterans housed in the shelter system. Getting veterans in off the street is a huge step forward for the movement to end homelessness among veterans, but it is not the finish line.

This year, 1,708 veterans with families were homeless. That's 4% of all homeless veterans. Although we have seen a decline over the last four years, that number is still way too high.

Years ago, President Barack Obama announced a national goal to end veteran homelessness by 2015; programs have been created to serve homeless veterans, and a concerted cross-department investment has been made at the federal level. But we still can't seem to help all those vets with kids who are living on the street, in their cars, or doubled up at a relative's house.

A homeless veteran with a family is often a young woman from a minority group. Female vets are now 10% of the total vet homeless population, up from 8% last year, and we have every expectation that this number will continue to increase. This is not at all surprising. There are simply more women serving than ever before, and upon separation from the service, they have, on average, suffered more as a result of harsh economic realities than have male vets.

Women veterans are unemployed at higher rates than their male counterparts, and are more likely to be the sole bread-winners of single-parent households. Homelessness in women vets often may be correlated to additional factors such as sexual assault, post-traumatic stress disorder, and unemployment, which —although not always the root causes of homelessness — obviously can be severely debilitating and are more prevalent in the population of female homeless vets than in that of their male comrades.

In short, women veterans face a range of challenges that extend beyond those already faced by all veterans, and systems calibrated towards single homeless male vets may well need to be retooled to take these needs into account.

Programs created in the early stages of the federal government's plan to end veteran homelessness seem to be working, but only one third of all of the VA's grant and per diem programs can accommodate children. And it is a struggle to pay for such housing because the VA, by law, can't cover it.

This program has been the backbone of the federal government's fight against veteran homelessness for 20 years and has been responsible for serving this nation's most vulnerable heroes. It is time that we update this program to allow it to serve the dependents of these veterans.

Unfortunately, while the overall number of homeless veterans has decreased during the Obama administration, the number of homeless women veterans has increased and the number of veterans homeless with their families is not declining fast enough.

U.S. Airstrikes Targeting ISIS Leadership

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Another program that helps homeless veterans called Stand Downs has to take this shifting demographic into account. These events offer large groups of homeless veterans the chance to safely gather and access services for a few days.

Characterized by communal living arrangements, Stand Downs have not traditionally been geared towards families. The number of children attending these events have doubled while there has been a steady decline in the number of single men attending.

The Stand Down in San Diego was recently profiled in large part because of this shift, and although it is heartening that the VA goes to lengths to attempt to accommodate and even entertain the dependents of homeless vets, it is a sad commentary on America's care of our veterans that so many of their children might look forward to a Stand Down the way their more privileged peers might anticipate a week at camp, at a beach house or at Disney World.

The push to end homelessness among veterans has yielded encouraging results, but there is still much more hard work to do. The existing structure of veteran homelessness programs is more robust than ever, but not every part of it is working as seamlessly as it should. In many places, women veterans and those with kids in tow are falling through the cracks.

We must all redouble our efforts to ensure that every veteran — and every child of a veteran — can find a real home on the home front.

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/too-many-veterans-with-children-are-still-homeless-2014-11-10?dist=afterbell>

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