Veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19. VA is working to ensure that homeless Veterans have access to the resources they need to stay safe, including aggressive infection prevention and control measures at every VA medical center.

On March 19, 2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a national alert for increased infection prevention and control precautions as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The alert directed all VA medical centers to enhance safety for Veterans, staff, and visitors by implementing specific infection prevention and control measures.

The alert directed VA medical centers to:

- Post signage at all entrances and throughout facilities: "Do Not Enter If Feeling Ill"
- Limit entry points to one per floor
- Increase cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas
- Limit visitors to a non-invasive screening process
- Implement virtual care options
- Enhance the use of personal protective equipment for staff
- Require face coverings for staff and visitors
- Implement updated visitation policies
- Limit non-essential travel between centers

VA’s evidence-based and aggressive response to COVID-19 continues to protect Veterans from contracting and spreading the virus.

For additional COVID-19 informational resources for Veterans who are homeless, visit the VHA Homeless Programs website.

Protecting Veterans and VA Facilities

VA facilities will ensure adequate supplies and adequate testing for Veterans with positive or suspected COVID-19. The alert directed VA medical centers to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to test, isolate, and care for Veterans who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19.

VA also outlined appropriate accommodations where Veterans who are homeless can receive care in PPE (masks). Homelessness, health care, and social services interact to create challenges for Veterans, and VA continues to work in partnership with communities to improve the care of Veterans who are homeless.

VA research reveals circumstances that can lead to homelessness among Veterans. VA research found that women Veterans are more than twice as likely to become homeless as women who did not serve in the military.

Women Veterans tend to access VA homeless programs such as transitional housing—programs often geared specifically for males. Women, however, are more frequently on their own when homeless, women are more often accompanied by dependents. Men also are more likely to access emergency shelters or shorter-term transitional housing programs.

Homelessness for women Veterans may look different than it does for men. While men are more frequently the primary income earner for their families, women are more frequently the primary income earner for their families. Women face challenges like domestic violence, commercial sexual exploitation, and over-surplus child care costs.

The common theme was trauma before, during, and after their military services concluded. The veterans described their “downward spiral” into homelessness, and the common theme was trauma before, during, and after their military services concluded.

Risk Factors

Risk factors for Veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness include:

- History of substance misuse
- History of mental health issues
- Lack of education and job training
- Trauma and chronic health issues
- Homelessness
- Lack of stable housing

Veteran homelessness research, VA and non-VA evidence, and Partnerships Office research show that homeless Veterans have poorer health outcomes than housed Veterans. This includes higher rates of homelessness among Veterans who are diagnosed with COVID-19.

In 2018, approximately 11% of U.S. households experienced food insecurity—consistent with previous reports that food insecurity is more common among individuals who lack stable housing, including homeless Veterans, than among the general population.

Food insecurity resources are available on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Information Center website.

VA has worked with the 21st Century Center for Social and Preventive Medicine (21C) at Duke University to better understand the impact of food insecurity on Veterans who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness.

VAannouncements

VA is working with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the VA Mission and Business Operations to create a national guide to help Veterans and VA facilities prepare for this unprecedented event to protect Veterans and non-Veterans as part of its “Fourth Mission” to serve as a backstop to America’s health care system.

Since COVID-19 appeared in the U.S., VA has effectively managed its resources and has cared for more than 4,500 Veterans diagnosed with the virus, and dozens of non-Veteran patients admitted to VA medical centers.

VA partner agencies

VA is working with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), UnitedHealthcare, and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to create a national guide to help Veterans and VA facilities prepare for this unprecedented event to protect Veterans and non-Veterans as part of its “Fourth Mission” to serve as a backstop to America’s health care system.

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Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) VA Partner agencies

Additional information on how to prepare your family in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak is available on the CDC website. The CDC offers guidance on how to prepare for a COVID-19 outbreak.