



Report Finds Veterans Make Up High Number of Homeless

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It is being called the most authoritative analysis of homelessness among military veterans, and the numbers are disturbing.

The joint report, conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs along with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, says that while veterans make up only 10 percent of the population, they account for 16 percent of all homeless adults.

Veterans advocates say the reasons vary from person to person and what kinds of trauma they experienced during their time in the military.

"There's as many reasons as there are vets you know. You can categorize this guy as he has PTSD so he can't deal with people ... this guy became an alcoholic when he became a vet and he's still an alcoholic," says Richard Rudnick spokesman with the National Veterans Foundation.

"The percentage of homeless vets relative to their population has always been higher."

President Obama has set a goal to eliminate the problem of homeless veterans by 2015. Experts say 90 to 95 percent of homeless veterans could be moved off the streets in that time.

One of the most successful attempts is a housing program for homeless vets called the Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing voucher program or HUD-VASH. It combines rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services by Veterans Affairs.

Rudnick says this program is especially essential in targeting chronic homeless vets who do not like dealing with government bodies.

"This HUD-VASH is essential," he says. "There's a solid core of chronic homeless veterans. The only way you're going to get them off the streets is, very bluntly, you get them an apartment and move them into it and help them pay for it, and HUD-VASH does that."

For the past three years Congress has appropriated \$75 million a year for these vouchers, but now there is a debate in Congress over whether more money is actually needed this year and whether enough veterans are taking advantage of the program.

"The president's request had adequate funding for this fiscal year in total. About 30,000 vouchers, 19,000 of those vouchers have been used. There's still about 11,000 available," Iowa Rep. Tom Latham said.

However, that number is being debated by several agencies. The Department of Veterans Affairs, which runs the program, says the current vouchers are all spoken for – many of which are in use. The others it says has been assigned to veterans who are currently waiting to be placed in housing.

"What outrages me personally is that there's even consideration of reducing the VA budget at all," Rudnick said. "But the idea that in the middle of a war, in the aftermath of a war, that we're going to say, 'OK, we're going to cut back on the services for the people that did these things for us,' that's something to be outraged about."

Obama initially did not include new funds for HUD-VASH in his original budget, however, he has since changed his mind, which added to the battle over it in Congress.

"We are funding it at a level the president requested in his budget," Latham said. "There are adequate funds there for this program. We will evaluate going forward how many vouchers will be needed next fiscal year."

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