Welcome to the Inaugural Edition of IVMF’s Veteran Homelessness Report!

The number of veterans who are homeless is declining as a result of the push by the Obama Administration to end veteran homelessness by 2015. However, on any given day over 60,000 men and women who have worn their country’s uniform are still homeless. Initiatives like the Veterans Administration Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF), the Department of Labor-VETS Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), the VA/HUD supportive housing collaboration (HUD-VASH) and other public and private investments are important efforts supporting veterans and their families who are currently or at-risk of becoming homeless.

Addressing the causes and solutions to homelessness among veterans and their families is central to IVMF’s mission. Through a strategic partnership and grant from the New York State Health Foundation, the IVMF developed the nation’s first state-based SSVF Direct Training and Technical Assistance Center (DTA). The DTA worked with organizations across New York State over the past year to triple the amount of VA SSVF funding earmarked to serve New York State veterans and their families — from $8.2 million last year to more than $24 million in the coming federal fiscal year. IVMF, under contract to the US Department of Labor-VETS, is the National Veterans Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC) providing on and off-site training and TA to over 150 HVRPs across the country. We regularly publish Research Briefs on the topic of veteran homelessness and will produce original research in the future. IVMF Senior Leadership recently helped facilitate a National Listening Session on Women Veterans Issues sponsored by the US Department of Labor-VETS. These are only some of the ways that IVMF will contribute to the goal of ending veteran homelessness.

This report is another example of IVMF’s commitment to addressing the causes of and solutions to veteran homelessness. Future issues will present demographic information to help gauge our national progress in achieving the veteran homeless elimination goal and we will highlight themes and issues that could derail this important national priority. We will also publish articles, news releases and guest editorials that help us think differently and creatively about what works and what may not work in ending veteran homelessness. We will also invite editorials from veterans with lived homelessness experience. For this inaugural edition, we feature an editorial by Ms. Barbara Poppe, Executive Director of the US Interagency Council on the Homeless (USICH).

We dedicate our first Report to women veterans with the lived experience of homelessness. We present national demographics of women veteran homelessness by Mr. Vince Kane, Director of the VA National Center for Homelessness among Veterans. We also include a brief overview of IVMF’s National Summit on Women Veteran Homelessness, held recently in Chicago. You can download the full Summit Summary Report from http://vets.syr.edu/ivmf-releases-summary-of-the-2013-national-summit-on-women-veteran-homelessness.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and look forward to your comments!

Mike Haynie, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Founder
Institute for Veterans and Military Families
The causes of veteran homelessness can include lack of safe and affordable housing, employment at living wages, military to civilian transition challenges, disability-related impacts and a number of economic and social factors. Although the risk of homelessness among veterans can affect all genders, racial and socio-economic categories, women veterans can face a number of unique challenges, including those below:

- There were an estimated 2.3 million female veterans in 2011.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression were among the top three most diagnosed conditions for women veterans using Veteran’s Administration (VA) health care.
- Women veterans are four times more likely to become homeless compared to non-veteran women and women veterans who are homeless are younger, less likely to be employed and more likely to have a mental illness (Gamache, 2003).
- More than 11% of female service members are single parents, so if they become homeless, then the tragedy of homelessness can extend to their children (Foster & Vince, 2009).
- Estimates indicate that 53% of homeless women veterans have experienced military sexual trauma, which can be a factor in becoming homeless (Washington, 2010).

For these reasons and others, IVMF convened noted researchers, policy and practice experts and women veterans with the lived experience of homelessness in facilitated dialogue sessions in an effort to understand the complex conditions that can result in women veteran homelessness. The Summit was held in Chicago on May 2 & 3, 2013 and over 80 Summit participants isolated the key challenges faced by women veterans who are homeless and offered comprehensive and sustainable solutions from the research, policy and program development perspectives.

**Day #1** of the Summit began with presentations on women veteran demographics, factors that can precipitate homelessness among women veterans, and women veterans’ experience in accessing health benefits. The remainder of the first day featured facilitated round table sessions that explored the following questions:

- What factors contribute to homelessness among women veterans? What increases the risk of homelessness for women veterans?
- Once women do become homeless, what services do they seek, and what are their experiences of those services? What helps them to get back on their feet?
- What in your experience helps keep women veterans from becoming homeless?

**Day #2** included panel discussions building upon the reflections and suggestions from the first day but focused upon actionable research, policy and program steps that could and should be taken to end homelessness among women veterans, including:

- What research needs to be undertaken to better understand the homelessness risk factors for women veterans?
- What research needs to occur to better understand the prevalence and most effective responses to military sexual trauma (MST) that can precipitate homelessness?
- How can programs hire, train and deploy more women veterans as program staff and give greater attention to training staff in providing women-specific services and support?
- How can helping women veterans with families obtain, retain and advance in jobs while accommodating child care issues help prevent or end homelessness?

The National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans
Delivers Coordinated, Collaborative, Evidence-Based Solutions to End Veteran Homelessness

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS VETERANS BY STATE
(Point-in-Time)
Total: 62,619 Veterans

Four states account for 50% of all homeless Veterans (California, Florida, New York and Texas)

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE HOMELESS AND AT RISK VETERANS BY STATE
(October 2011–September 2012)
Total: 20,944 Female Veterans

Five states account for 40% of all female homeless Veterans (California, Florida, Georgia, New York and Texas)

Source: VeteranAHAR2012
Source: VSSC Homeless Services Cube
**Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness**

**By Barbara Poppe, USICH Executive Director**

Women veterans are experiencing homelessness at an alarming rate. More than 20,000 women veterans were experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness between October 2011 and September 2012. Despite the growing numbers, we still don’t know enough about the best ways to prevent homelessness for these women. Too many communities have a shortage of emergency shelters for women and female-headed families, which may mask the extent of homelessness among female veterans as women may be forced to seek out other forms of shelter that are not as safe.

Another significant social and public health concern is that female veterans who experience homelessness have high levels of exposure to trauma from before, during, or after their military service. Women who served in recent wars are more likely to have participated in combat, so they may have a unique set of needs. Trauma such as military sexual trauma, PTSD, and domestic violence can be debilitating in isolation, but is heightened when compounded with the stress associated with experiencing homelessness.

Access to safe, stable housing is critical to preventing and solving homelessness among female veterans. Programs like HUD, Veteran’s Affairs Supportive Housing and Supportive Services for Veteran Families, are working and should be expanded to ensure that every woman who has put on a uniform for her country never finds herself without a safe, stable place to call home. Female veterans are talented, strong, resilient and looking for a chance to continue their service to their country, community and family as civilians. Federal organizations, homeless providers, and communities must work in collaboration to prevent violence against female veterans, and ensure that this group has access to supportive services and benefits they need and to which they are entitled as veterans.

**WHAT HOMELESS PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITIES CAN DO TO HELP**

- Refer female veterans appropriately and connect them with the closest VA facility.
- Ensure that programs provide trauma-informed care.
- Recruit women with military backgrounds to volunteer and serve in leadership positions at nonprofit organizations that serve women who experience homelessness.
- Connect with VA and the Women Veterans Program Manager at the closet VA Medical Center.
- Adopt evidence-informed practices like Housing First, permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, motivational interviewing, etc. (see USICH’s Solutions Database).
- Partner with local housing organizations and owners to identify affordable housing options for female veterans.
- Connect with employment and entrepreneurship opportunities that target women and/or female veterans.

**FAST FACTS**

- Female veterans are up to four times more likely to experience homelessness than non-veteran women.
- Nearly 40 percent of female veterans who receive services from the Veterans Health Administration experienced military sexual trauma and have increased odds of a mental health diagnoses.
- Female veterans who experience homelessness are more likely than their male counterparts to be part of households that include minor children.