

Veterans



20 veterans
commit suicide
each day
according to the VA
estimates in 2014

The number of
veterans in KC
is steady
declining
(10.6%) overall
since 2010

Over
60% of KC
vets are
55 or older,
serving in
Vietnam Era
or earlier

From 2017 Count Us In count
1,329 identified as
Veterans, from those
52% unsheltered
48% sheltered

Number of KC veterans
below 200% FPL
grew from
5786/2010
to
8200/2015
43% increase

VETERANS

Veterans are men and women who have served in one of the five branches of the military—Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Air Force, and also includes “citizen soldiers”, those serving in the State National Guard or as part of the Services Reserve Components. Increasingly more attention has been paid to veterans due to the high visibility of recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq although veterans from the Gulf War, Vietnam, and Korea also have a strong presence in the Puget Sound Region. As in past conflicts, many veterans who are returning to their homes and communities are bringing with them physical, emotional and psychological scars. Many of these issues extend beyond the capacity of the services that formally designated veterans’ agencies, such as the federal Veterans Administration (VA), Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) or the King County Veterans Program (KCVF), are able to provide. Another key issue is employment, with more help needed for the many veterans who are leaving the military. Increasingly, these veterans’ organizations are forging effective partnerships with community-based human services agencies to provide outreach and other needed resources.

What’s Working?

- In 2005 voters in King County passed a Veterans and Human Services Levy which is collected through a property tax of .05% per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. These funds are split equally between services for veterans, military members and their families and human services for vulnerable populations. In 2011, the Levy was renewed by 69% of voters for another six years, 2012-2017, which generated about \$18 million annually. In November 2017 the

Levy was again extended due to a popular vote, and added services for seniors as an additional focus, raising the rate to .10 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. In 2016 1,146 people in Bellevue zip codes received services. The Vets Levy programs provide a variety of services addressing the needs of veterans and their families, including support services for housing through Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council, veteran employment and training at Bellevue College, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Counseling and the addition of Military Family Counseling in two Bellevue locations. The Levy also provided funding to the Low Income Housing Institute’s August Wilson Place that opened May 26, 2015, providing 57 new units of housing in downtown Bellevue. In addition, the Levy provided funds to Imagine Housing Andrew’s Glen, a housing complex in Bellevue contributing 40 units of housing—20 new units for vets transitioning out of homelessness, 10 for supportive housing and 10 for individuals and families needing reduced rent. The WDVA and the KCVF continue to partner to co-fund some programs with State and Levy monies, such as the expansion of counseling and consultation for PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Family Counseling and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).¹

- Bellevue College (BC) supports veterans and their families through a number of programs. Staff from the Veteran’s Office, Financial Aid, assists veterans in activating their benefits under the GI Bills to attend school. There are services at the Veteran’s Program and Project

“The best vet service providers are vets themselves.”

— Community Conversation, King County Veterans Consortium participant

Succeed that help vets and their families find employment, explore career options and network with vets on campus to assist them with job readiness, job placement and transition services for vets separating from the military. BC staff also makes referrals to resources, such as counseling and housing.

- The King County Veterans Consortium convenes over 20 Veterans service agencies as well as legislative aides, county representatives and veterans themselves monthly to discuss veteran services and network. Members of the group advocate for improved services and funding for services to veterans and their families.
- Hopelink's service Vets-Go (www.vets-go.com) is an online tool built to make finding transportation to healthcare, employment, education and community services easier for Veterans, former service members, and active duty military personnel. Vets-Go has been integrated into Hopelink's tool FindARide (www.findaride.org) to expand this service to all King, Pierce, and Snohomish County residents. Now, Veterans and non-Veterans alike can find their best trip.

Prevalence

- According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) there are currently over 567,799 veterans in the U.S. military in Washington State. This includes 511,736 men and 56,063 women.²
- **The total number of veterans in King County has been declining for over a decade; since 2010 there has been a 10.6% decrease. In 2016 there are approximately 112,556 veterans in King County, 100,834 males, 11,722 female. More than 74,000**

vets are over the age of 55 (60%) and over 9,200 are 34 years of age and younger.

The overall decline in male veterans is based on the large number of veterans age 65 and over and less recruitment as the US shifted from the draft to an all-volunteer military. However, the size of the veterans population can change rapidly based on federal policies and world events.³

- According to the 2011-2015 American Community Survey (ACS) five year estimates, in Bellevue, 6,649 people are veterans (6,014 male, 635 female). This is slightly less than the 2013 ACS data. In **2015, almost one-third (32%) served in Vietnam and 13% served in World War II.** The largest age group represented is those 55-75+ years (74% compared to 72% in 2013), with those 18-34 years old the smallest (7.6% compared to 7.8% in 2013).⁴
- The 2010-2014 ACS found that over 70% of all veterans live outside of Seattle. The highest percentage live in South King County (42.4%) About 26,000 veterans live in East King County, 22% of the total in the County. This is about the same as was estimated by the ACS in 2007. Data from the Veterans Health Administration-Puget Sound Health Care Services System shown in in Figure 1 indicate that almost half of their enrollees in King County live in South King County. These enrollees are predominantly low-income and disabled.⁵
- The proportion of veterans who are persons of color has increased reflecting a gradual shift to a more diverse military; as shown in Figure 2, 49% of King County veterans under age 35 are people of color compared to only 10% of veterans who are 75 years and older.⁶

LOCATION OF VETERANS IN KING COUNTY

| Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation | | 2015 Enrollees VA Health System | | Total Veterans King County | | |
|---|---------------|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| Region | | | | | | |
| East Total | 2,614 | 19.8% | 4,827 | 16.9% | 25,900 | 21.8% |
| North Total | 928 | 7% | 1,930 | 6.8% | 9,731 | 8.2% |
| Seattle Total | 3,346 | 25.3% | 8,315 | 29.1% | 32,748 | 27.6% |
| South Total | 6,332 | 47.9% | 13,771 | 47.2% | 50,330 | 42.4% |
| Grand Total | 13,210 | | 28,411 | | 118,710 | |
| Source: Veterans Administration Benefits Distributions (2015) | | | Source: Veterans Administration Puget Sound Health Care System (2015) | | Source: 2010-2014 ACS Estimate | |

Figure 1 | Source: King County Department of Community and Human Services, 2017

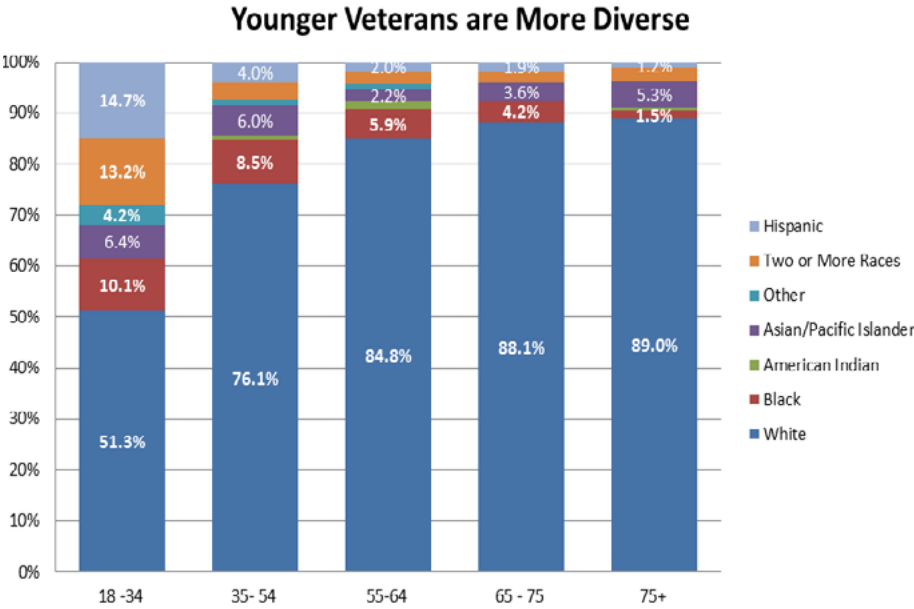


Figure 2 | Source: King County Department of Community and Human Services, 2017

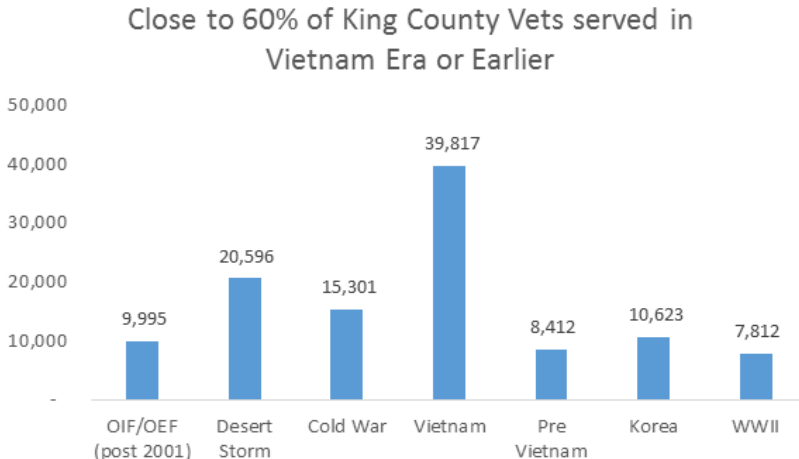


Figure 3 | Source: King County Veterans and Human Services Community Engagement Report

In addition to being more diverse, younger vets may be more isolated. Only 8% of men in King County between the ages of 35-54 is a veteran, and only 2.7% of men between 18 and 34 is a veteran; yet one in 3 men in King County between the age of 65 and 74 is a veteran (36.4%) or is likely to know a veteran.⁷

Service Trends

Aging Veterans

- Over the next twenty years, the number of veterans over age 65 in Washington State will remain stable, but there will be a sharp rise (35%) in veterans ages 85 and over. The U.S. Department of Defense estimates the number of vets in this age group in Washington State to be 33,000. There will likely be increased demands for long-term care, including hospice and Alzheimer's care, supportive housing, mental health and substance abuse treatment. The effects of this rapidly growing population are reflected in the fill levels of Washington Veterans' Homes, which have experienced occupancy rates between 95-100% for the last 10 years. These Homes report that 95% of their residents are medically indigent. In July 2014 federal funding for another State Veterans Home in Walla Walla was secured, with the opening for residents in 2017.⁸
- In 2014 in King County, the majority, about one-third (35%) of veterans living here were from the Vietnam War era, and 16% were from the Second World War and Korea war eras.⁹ As these veterans age, a significant number are presenting service-related illness and disabilities that combine in complex ways with health considerations that accompany the aging process generally.¹⁰

Income Status and Financial Needs

- According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, veterans

overall have lower rates of poverty than non-veterans but veteran poverty is on the rise. Poverty rate for veterans between the ages of 18 and 34 are higher than all other age groups. Veteran poverty is clustered in states located in the Southeast and Northwest United States.¹¹

- The WDVA projects there will be more veteran households in Washington State with annual incomes below \$20,000. They estimate that the number of veterans aged 65 and over with annual incomes of under \$20,000 will rise from 39,000 in 2000 to more than 45,000 in 2015. Many aging vets will be dependent upon care in the Veterans' Homes, or else potentially face homelessness. King, Pierce, Snohomish and Skagit County have the smallest percentage of low-income vets compared to those living in rural areas in Eastern Washington.¹²
- Another significant issue for many veterans is financial insecurity. **Between 2010-2015 the number of King County veterans below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) stayed about the same even though total veterans' population dropped by 10% as shown in Figure 4. The number of veterans below the poverty level grew from 5,786 to 8,299, a 43% increase.**¹³
- While there was a dramatic increase countywide in veterans calling the Crisis Clinic 2-1-1 Community Information Line for assistance between 2008 and 2014, there was a decrease between 2014 and 2016. Staff believes that the need is still great but due to a shortage of staff there were fewer calls answered. In June 2017 more staff were hired to address the need. The number of actual requests is higher from veterans living in South King County and Seattle, as shown

| REGION OF KING COUNTY 2016 VETERAN KING COUNTY 2-1-1 REQUESTS (TOTAL OF ALL KING COUNTY KC CALLS= ?) | | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Region | Total Veterans | % of Requests by Region | Growth from 2014 (2 years) | Spouse/Partner of Vet/Act Military | % of Requests by Region |
| East Total | 289 | 9.58% | | 52 | 9.58% |
| North Total | 197 | 6.53% | | 18 | 9.58% |
| Seattle Total | 1131 | 37.50% | | 100 | 9.58% |
| South Total | 1399 | 446.39% | | 230 | 57.50% |
| Total 2-1-1 Requests | 3016 | | | 400 | |

Figure 5 | Source: Crisis Clinic 7/13/17

in Figure 4. The share from East King County was 6.5% in 2008, 9.3% in 2010, 10.4% in 2012, and stayed about the same, 9.23%, in 2014 and in 2016 at 9.58%.¹⁴ Another one-stop call center for veterans was funded by the King County Veterans Levy and operated by the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs. This hotline (1-877-904-VETS) provides a follow-up phone call within two weeks. In 2015 881 vets were served connecting 874 to veteran-specific services. The hotline can also be accessed by providers needing services for veterans.

- The King County Veterans Program (KCVP), funded since the 1950s by State tax revenues for veterans, provides low-income vets with general health and human services, such as emergency financial assistance (rent, food, and utilities), referrals to services for mental illness and substance abuse, as well as referrals to federal benefits for which they are eligible. Additional funds provided by the Vets and Human Services Levy enabled KCVP to expand to serve National Guard and Reserves members who were not eligible for other military services. KCVP has also made more services available especially needed by low-income vets, including case management, short term financial assistance and life skills. In 2015, 2,532 veterans and family members were served by the expanded services including more outreach made possible with Veterans

and Human Services Levy funds. More than 900 of these individuals were homeless when they contacted KCVP. Veterans had increased employment and job skills training opportunities because staff was placed at partnering shelters, transitional housing facilities and Seattle-King County WorkSource sites.¹⁵

Housing and Homelessness

- In January 2016 communities across America identified 39,471 homeless veterans during point in time counts. This represents a substantial decrease (56%) in the number of homeless vets counted in 2010. Homeless vets tend to be male (91%) single (98%)

Number of Veterans by Income Status 2010-2015

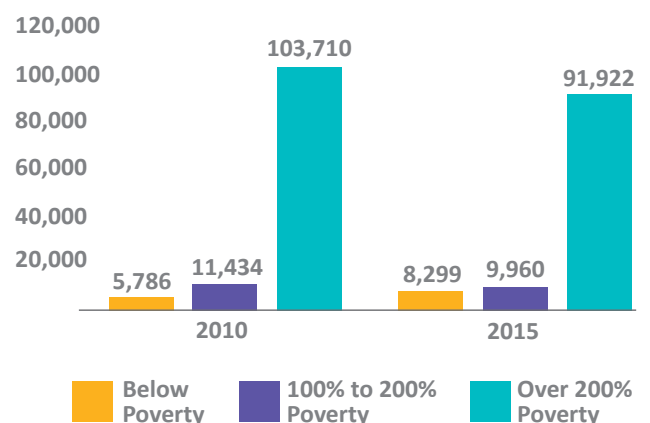


Figure 4 | Source: King County Veterans and Human Services Community Engagement Report

live in a city (76%) and have a mental or physical disability (54%). As troops return from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq the face of veteran homelessness has changed, increasingly younger, female and heads of households. In June 2014 the White House announced the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, with pledges from hundreds of mayors, 9 governors and 172 county and city officials.¹⁶ King County government participated in this initiative.

- Of those counted during the **2017 Count Us In point in time count in Seattle/King County (formerly the One Night Count) an estimated 1,329 individuals (11% of the total count population) identified as veterans. Over half of these veterans were unsheltered (693) while 48% (636) were sheltered**

on the night of the count. The methodology for the count this year was changed from previous years so the numbers from past years are not comparable. In addition, an in-person representative survey of unsheltered and sheltered individuals was conducted by peer surveyors in the weeks following the general street count. Compared to other Count Us In survey respondents, veterans reported notably higher rates of living with post-traumatic stress disorder and physical disabilities, low rates of substance abuse and slightly lower rates of involvement with the criminal justice system.¹⁷

- In November 2009, the VA introduced its Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans. WDVA initiated a workgroup in 2010 including staff from King County, local housing service providers and others to coordinate with the VA Plan. All Home, formerly the King County Committee to End Homelessness, and United Way's

Campaign to End Chronic Homelessness are coordinating their strategies with the federal and state initiatives focusing on ending veteran homelessness in five years. In 2011 the plan was completed and many of its recommendations were included in the Veterans and Human Services Levy Strategy on ending homelessness. In the All Home 2016 Strategic Plan, veteran homelessness issues are addressed under the single adult focus area, including supporting opportunities to increase income and identifying individuals at imminent risk of homelessness and preventing that occurrence. In 2015 Levy funds provided for homeless street outreach program and two other programs served homeless veterans and family members. One of the programs, Enhanced Outreach to Women Veterans of Color, served 462 veterans.¹⁸

- Permanent housing with services for homeless veterans is a major need. Funding from the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy has greatly increased the number of permanent housing units with supportive services. Since 2006 levy-funded housing projects opened county-wide an additional 2,056 units of affordable housing; 660 were created during the current levy period. Many of these sites had units dedicated specifically for veterans and their families.¹⁹
- Another challenge for finding housing for all residents is high rents, especially in East King County. Even though King County receives specialized Housing Choice Vouchers to help subsidize rent for low-income veterans, many cannot find a place they can afford.²⁰

Employment

- Nationally the unemployment rate for all veterans was 4.3% in 2016 similar to the overall national unemployment rate of 4.7%. Women veterans have higher unemployment rates in general with the rate of 5.0%. This

represents a declining trend. In Washington State, 3.8% of veterans were unemployed in 2016.²¹ As Figure 6 shows, veterans of color also have higher rates of unemployment.

- In King County, the local unemployment rate is 5.9% (about 3,000 veterans) for veterans based on the 2011-2015 ACS, similar to the non-veteran population which is 6.2%.²²
- A number of resources focused on employment training and education for veterans are located throughout King County. WorkSource offices in North King County, Redmond, Renton and Seattle offer specialized services. Bellevue College has a Veterans Conservation Corps (Vet Corps) member on-site to help them navigate systems needed to adjust from military to college life. Vet Corps members also assist with training and job placement opportunities. Community Employment Services enrolled and served 382 homeless individuals in 2015, many of whom were veterans.²³ In 2015 the Washington State Legislature created a YesVets Hiring Campaign to encourage employers to hire vets. The goal is to create partnerships with public and private organizations to help vets transition into civilian employment in Washington.²⁴

Women Serving in the Military

- According to the VA, nationally women make up about 9.4% of the military force or about two million; by 2043 women are expected to make up 16.3% of all living veterans. The mean age of woman veterans nationally is 50 years of age, compared to 63 years of age for men. A higher percentage of women veterans are in the 35-64 years old. Historically women have served to some extent in all wars beginning with the Revolutionary War but the Gulf War was the beginning of more large-scale participation. As of 2015, there were an estimated 700,000 women serving in the military post 9/11 only.²⁵ In January 2013 it was announced that women would be able to serve in combat units; prior to that time, women could not serve in certain areas of the military such as Special Operations and Infantry. Beginning in January 2017 combat roles are available to women in all the military branches.²⁶
- There are over 11,700 women veterans living in King County, up from 8,000 in 2008. Younger women have increased their proportion of veterans in their age group-now representing close to one fourth of veterans younger than 35 as shown in Figure 7.²⁷

- With the increasing numbers of women serving in the military, there is a trend toward more reports of sexual assault, ranging from unwanted sexual contact and harassment to rape. These are referred to as “military sexual trauma” or MST. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is often a result of MST. About 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men seen for VA healthcare report a history of MST when screened by a VA provider. There are significant numbers

Unemployment rates of military veterans by selected characteristics, 2016 annual averages

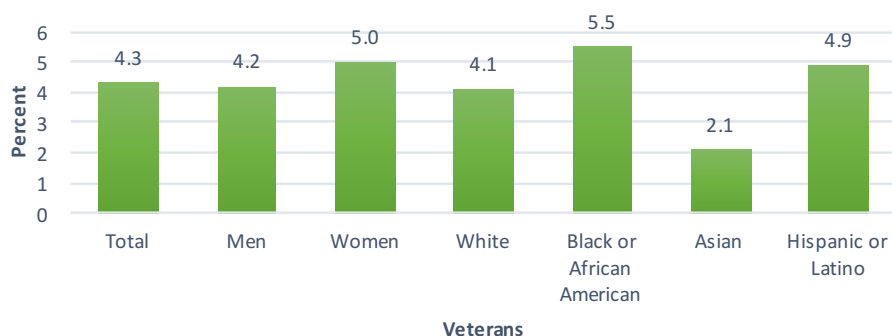


Figure 6 | Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

of men and women who have experienced MST; over 40% of the veterans seen at the VA who disclose MST are men.²⁸ A report released by the Department of Defense in 2016 stated that the number of service members estimated to have experienced MST went from 26,000 in 2012 to 20,300 in 2014, to 14,900 in 2016. During each time frame the percentage of those who reported increased considerably. The report concluded that the Department's efforts to eliminate sexual assault, such as providing a hotline, policies that prevent retaliation, and more training for providers to identify MST are helping to increase reporting and decrease prevalence but that these efforts must be maintained.²⁹ In King County when national prevalence rates are applied as many as 7,900 men and women veterans are potentially affected by MST. The 2012-2017 Service Improvement Plan for the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy is focusing on women veterans who have experienced MST as a high priority population for outreach and engagement services. In 2015, the PTSD program funded by the Vets and Human Services Levy provided 13 trainings to providers to increase their understanding of MST; after the training almost half said they had referred a MST provider to benefits.³⁰

- In 2013 King County created a Task Force of staff, stakeholders and local providers of

services for survivors of MST. One outcome of the Task Force is the development of two curricula for treating veterans with MST. One is for providers who provide MST services in a setting specifically for veterans and staffed by former veterans, and the other is designed for service providers in a non-veteran specific setting. Both curricula are not just targeting women veterans but male veterans because, as stated earlier, men also experience MST.³¹

- Many women who served in the military report that they do not consider themselves veterans because they did not serve in combat. Data from the National Survey of Women Veterans conducted in 2010 found that 31% of respondents did not think they were eligible for VA health care, 21% did not know how to apply, and 20% said that the closest VA clinic was too far from their homes.³² Interviews and surveys of women veterans reveal their perception that there is a significant gap in delivery of services for them.³³
- Health care services for women veterans have been historically co-delivered in the same facilities with veterans who are men, without consideration of the unique needs of women. As a result there have been until recently fewer women veterans using VA healthcare services. In the same survey cited above, more than 30% of the 3,012 women veterans were dissatisfied with the responsiveness of the VA healthcare system,

and approximately one-fourth said they were dissatisfied with the competence of VA healthcare providers.³⁴ A new model of "one stop" health care for women vets with multi-disciplinary teams, both male and female, was mandated by the VA in 2009.

Younger women veterans are a large proportion of their age groups

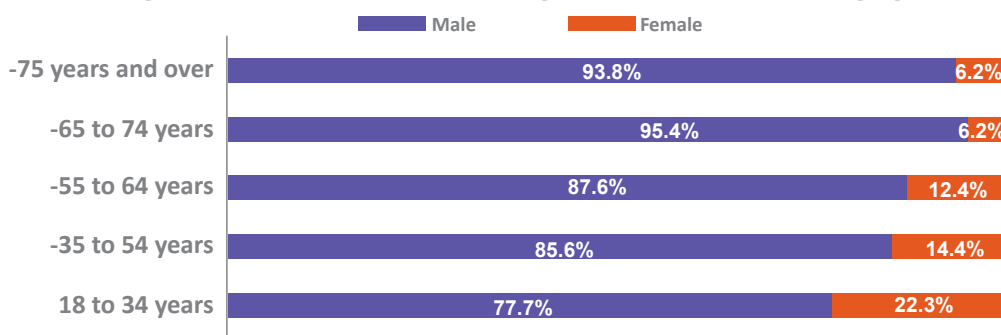


Figure 7 | Source: King County Department of Community and Human Services, 2017

Mental health counseling, primary care and pharmacy access are included in the clinics. Maternity services are contracted out. There is a VA Valor Clinic using this model located in Bellevue. The VA in Seattle has separate entrances for male and female veterans.

- Another area of need cited in a report by the VA Veterans Women's Task Force is for access to childcare so women veterans can take care of their healthcare needs or attend school and job training.

Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues

- The emotional effects of serving in combat have been evident for veterans throughout history, but beginning with the Vietnam War, there has been more national awareness of the extent of the trauma on the veteran and his/her family. For example, data shows that nearly 20% of veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts reported a mental health issue such as PTSD or major depression. The impact of multiple deployments such as those military serving in Iraq and Afghanistan is anticipated to significantly increase the rate of PTSD rates in future studies. PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) have emerged as two signature injuries of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. PTSD is a severe reaction to war that includes hyper-alertness, nightmares and depression. It may be triggered by reminders of combat, such as fireworks or television scenes of violence. TBIs are head injuries from combustive explosions which may result in concussions that may at first seem mild, but can lead to symptoms up to three months after the event. TBIs can also be a contributing cause of PTSD.³⁵
- The VA estimates up to 30% of Vietnam veterans, 2% of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom veterans and 10% of Gulf War veterans experience PTSD.³⁶ In King County, estimates that there are between

19,500 and 28,000 veterans who have PTSD from all war eras, and as many as half of them will not seek treatment from the VA or community organizations without assistance to overcoming reluctance or institutional barriers. Untreated PTSD contributes to other issues such high rates of chemical dependency, other behavioral and mental issues, divorce, homelessness and criminal justice system involvement.³⁷ In 2015 the PTSD program in King County provided confidential counseling services free of charge to 250 vets and their family members.³⁸

- Nationally, **20 veteran commit suicides each day, according to VA estimates in 2014**; 6 of the 20 were users of VA services. This is down somewhat from 2013 estimates of 22 veterans each day. Sixty five percent of all vets in 2014 who committed suicide were men over age 50. In 2007, the VA developed a plan to increase veterans' access to mental health services by hiring additional mental health professionals and establishing a toll-free hotline. Risk for suicide is 2.4 times higher for female veterans than for females within the civilian population.³⁹
- Improved body armor for soldiers has resulted in higher survivor rates in the current conflicts compared to other wars. Now for every one death, seven service members are wounded compared to Vietnam and Korea when fewer than three people were wounded for each fatality. Approximately 48,000 individuals have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. The result is that the ongoing service needs of these permanently disabled vets, many of whom are amputees, for example, to control chronic pain, afford prosthetic limbs or to find appropriate employment or housing, could be extensive, but is currently not fully understood.⁴⁰

- Studies show that there is a strong relationship between PTSD and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) in both men and women and those in military and civilian populations. In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, about 1 in 10 returning soldiers seen in VA clinics have a problem with alcohol or other drugs. If someone has both PTSD and SUD, it is likely that he or she also has other health problems (such as physical pain), relationship problems (with family and/or friends), or problems in functioning (like keeping a job or staying in school). Using drugs and/or alcohol can make PTSD symptoms worse. Treatment options include individual and group therapy, medications and psychological treatments.⁴¹
- While many military children are healthy and resilient, studies show that some groups are more vulnerable: young children, some boys, and children with pre-existing health and mental health problems. Others include those who do not have the support of living in military communities and those who come from single parent or dual military families.
- Other needs of military families identified in the Bellevue providers surveys include housing, substance abuse treatment, adult day health, long term care, transportation, PTSD treatment and medical and mental health services for caregivers of veterans with disabilities.
- Military service has unique psychological, social, and environmental factors that may contribute to elevated risk of IPV among active duty service members and veterans. Multiple deployments, family separation and reintegration, demanding workloads at home and while on duty, histories of head trauma, mental illness, and substance abuse can contribute to partner conflict and elevated risk of IPV among active duty service members, veterans, and their intimate partners.⁴⁴

Needs of Families of Active Military or Veterans

- 2010 ACS data indicates that over half (61%) of King County veterans and active duty military are married. These spouses and dependents potentially need support as they cope with the issues that their family member in the military faces, such as PTSD or physical disabilities, as well as, during deployment, loss of income and changing family dynamics.⁴²
- Strategies funded through the Veterans and Human Services Levy has increased awareness of the needs of families and dependents of soldiers and veterans. Some of the needs being focused on include helping the caregivers of aging or disabled veterans with respite, providing mental health counseling to all family members of vets experiencing PTSD, family counseling, phone resources through an information and referral service, case management to help families find emergency and other types of housing, and training and employment services through the Career Connections Program at WorkSource offices and community colleges. In the 2012-2017 King County Veterans and Human Services Levy Service Improvement Plan, additional funds are allocated for veterans' families.⁴³

Transition from Military to Civilian Life

- A survey conducted by the Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2014 found that 60% of the veterans participating thought that the military was doing a poor or fair job in addressing the problems faced by veterans and 50% said that the military is lagging behind in helping them transition to civilian life which has been difficult for 50% who have left the service.⁴⁵
- Some of the challenges that vets may face in this transition include joining or creating a community after having other vets to relate to 24/7, looking for a job, including writing a resume as some vets entered the service out of high school and do not have that

“What has not been explored is that the various generations of Veterans who don’t think, work or operate the same. We have veterans from the Greatest Generation (served in WW II , Korea and Vietnam), the Baby Boomers (served in Vietnam) and subsequently Generation X and the Millennials who have served in the Gulf and Middle East areas.”

— Past Chair, King County Veteran’s Program Advisory Board, Past Chair, King County Veterans Levy Oversight Board

experience, finding services such as a doctor, adjusting to a different pace of life and providing the basics of food and housing for themselves and their families.⁴⁶

Veterans and the Legal System

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 10% of inmates in the nation’s jail and prisons report having served in the military. King County statistics suggest that veterans make up about 2-3 % of the inmate population at any given time. In May 2014 in response to a motion by the King County Council, a report was prepared on incarcerated veterans in the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention jail facilities. Some of the recommendations included that a dedicated veteran housing unit be piloted to provide veteran specific services and programs to incarcerated veterans in King County jail facilities and that all criminal justice partners receive training on the impact of incarceration on benefits and potential alternatives to incarceration that allow veterans to maintain their VA benefits. Training for Jail Health Services release planning staff

and partners on military culture and trauma informed care was also recommended.⁴⁷

- King County has implemented several programs that acknowledge the fact that some veterans return from combat to civilian life and face civil legal barriers to a stable life, or may become involved with the criminal justice system. Seattle Veterans Court (established in 2011) and King County Regional Veterans Courts (established in 2012) provide an opportunity for veterans to choose treatment for substance abuse or receive other resources as an alternative to incarceration. The Vets and Human Services Levy provides a Court Liaison who screens veterans for these courts, and helps follow them through the process. The Veterans Legal Assistance Program provides homeless and low-income veterans with legal assistance for civil legal issues, such as reinstatement of driver’s licenses and eviction prevention. The Veterans Incarcerated Program (VIP) screens vets who were incarcerated and provides short-term case management. Seventy percent of the 242 vets who were served in 2015 followed through with referrals to treatment or educational programs.⁴⁸

Community Perceptions

- In a 2017 survey completed by human services providers serving Bellevue residents, 46% of the respondents stated that they ask clients at intake about their veteran status, lower than the number in 2015.
- The most critical needs for veterans mentioned by providers in the 2017 provider survey include mental health services and housing.
- In 2016, King County staff from the Veterans and Human Services Levy hosted 16 community conversations, 15 focus groups and three rural convenings, and circulated two online surveys. One theme that veterans expressed was that though there are currently over 180 programs serving vets in King County, there are barriers cause

by fragmented service systems and lack of trained Veteran Services officers.

- At a Community Conversation with veterans at the King County Veterans Consortium

“Get all service providers informed about all vets services in Bellevue so that no vet is told “I don’t know when they ask a provider about vets services.”

— King County Veterans Consortium

Muster it was noted that that in East King County there are several barriers identified by veterans including fewer entry level positions for employment, fewer bus lines that make it hard to navigate, and a higher cost of living which makes it more difficult to find affordable housing, including landlords who are unwilling to accept housing vouchers.⁴⁹

- An issue identified by Bellevue College staff related to veterans who are students there is the gap between what the GI bill pays for and the real needs of veterans. For example, a vet’s benefits may pay for books but not for a bus pass or food. Staff also stated that there are unique challenges in getting vets to use services due to pride.

Implications for Action

- As a result of a focused countywide effort over the past ten years, human service agencies have begun to better track veterans’ usage of their services with improved intake processes. This needs to continue and further be refined so data is available to show the real needs of veterans, especially among the population of homeless veterans who are very challenging to track. In addition, ongoing training for community providers on Veterans Culture and Veterans services are needed to create a more seamless system with “no wrong

door” to meet veterans’ needs, especially for those veterans who are not eligible for VA services due to their less than honorable discharge status. The Veterans and Human Services Levy funding provides many of these trainings through the Veterans Training Support Center which can be accessed at <http://veteranstrainingsupportcenter.org/>

- Ongoing partnerships between federal, state, and county programs for veterans and human service agencies are needed to ensure that veterans are aware of the benefits to which they are entitled, get help in accessing these benefits when they are eligible, and are assisted in a coordinated, seamless manner.
- In addition to awareness of benefits, city governments could create internships for veterans and help link them to professional networks and businesses to encourage them to hire veterans, and have veterans more access to living wage jobs. Cities could also assist veterans’ transition to civilian life by helping them learn about services and resources in East King County.

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