

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 (KCVP), 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. Although official military operations have ended in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. is still involved in those countries’ military affairs, and in 2015 some additional troops were deployed to Afghanistan due to increased militant insurgency there.¹

What’s Working?

- In 2005, voters in King County passed a Veterans and Human Services Levy which is collected through a property tax. These funds are split equally between services for veterans and human services for the general population. In 2014 about 17% of people served by the levy lived in East King County. 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, 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 KCVP 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).² In August 2011, the Levy was renewed by 69% of voters for another six years, 2012-2017, which will generate about \$18 million annually.

- 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 Career Advancement Center, and Project Succeed, funded through a grant from Microsoft, helps 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.
- In 2012, Veterans and Human Services Levy funds were awarded to the KCVP-Aerospace and Veterans Employment and Training Pilot Project for veterans’ employment and training services for 2012-2014. The Aerospace Manufacturing Project (AMP) was created to help veterans get jobs in the aerospace and manufacturing industries

in King County. Outcomes showed that overall, 143 clients (75%) obtained a job at an average hourly wage of \$17.79. Veterans in AMP had a substantially higher employment rate than non-AMP veterans.

- In early 2013, King County launched a Regional Veterans Initiative (RVI) to create stronger regional partnerships and coordination of services for veterans. Lack of coordination across systems results in many veterans and their families not connecting with services they earned. A report on the RVI was released in July 2013 and concluded that the system of veterans' services is fragmented. Five objectives were developed including using systems maps to create tools for vets and others to find services, creating an interactive website, and improving customer services for vets and their families. In 2015 the RVI Work Plan includes continuing the King County Veterans Consortium as the Regional Veteran Services Network for services such as education/employment and behavioral health/health care systems, and continuing facilitating and aligning national and local initiatives to end Veteran homelessness by December 2015.
- A new Hopelink service called VetsGo (www.vets-go.com) is helping veterans and their families living in Central Puget Sound navigate the sometimes confusing combination of travel alternatives. VetsGo helps veterans connect to healthcare, employment, education and community services using a key feature of the free website, the Find-a-Ride tool. VetsGo is made possible by a grant from the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative and partnerships with Sound Transit, King County Metro, the Washington

State Department of Veterans Affairs, and other partners.

Prevalence

- According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) there are currently over 21.6 million veterans in the U.S. military. This equates to approximately 13% of all adults in the U.S., including 24% of males and 2% of females.³
- According to available data, the total number of veterans in King County has been declining for over a decade. The 2010 American Community Survey indicates that there are approximately 127,000 veterans in King County, (6.6 percent of the population), and is made up of approximately 117,205 men and 9,984 women veterans. According to the 2009-2013 ACS, estimates for King County range between 114,000 and 119,000 veterans. This is down from 2000, when the census estimated the veteran population at 163,815 or 9.43 percent of King County's overall population. 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. The number of women in the military has increased, with women veterans in King County 3% of veterans age 65-74 and now 14.1% of all King County veterans under 35 years of age.⁴
- The proportion of veterans who are persons of color has increased reflecting a gradual shift to a more diverse military; 25% King County veterans under age 35 are people of color. Overall the proportion of veterans

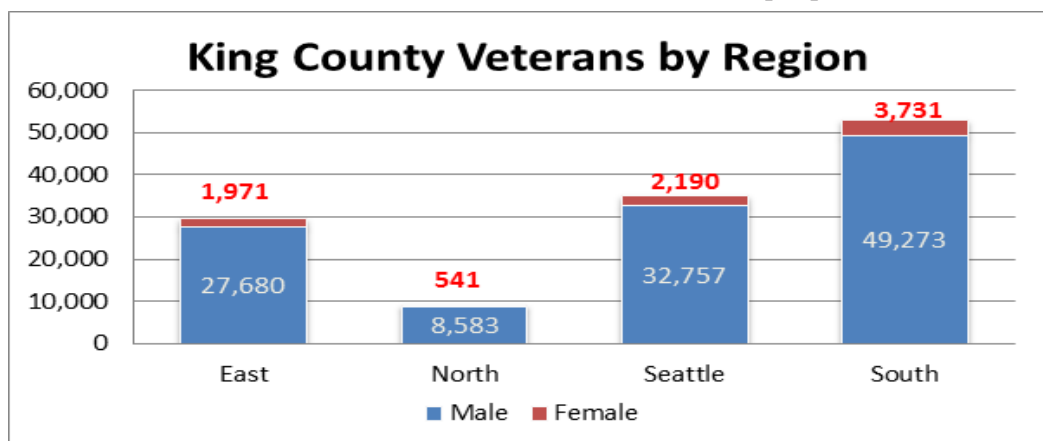


Figure 1

Source: Status of Veterans and Veterans Services in King County, 2013

who are veterans of color is somewhere between 16% and 19%.⁵

- According to the 2009-2013 ACS estimates, about three quarters of all veterans live outside of Seattle. The highest percentage of veterans live in South King County. Almost 30,000 vets (22.1%) reside in East King County, compared to 20% as estimated by the 2007 ACS.⁶
- According to the 2009-2013 ACS five year estimates, in Bellevue, 7,530 people are veterans (7,002 male, 528 female). This is roughly the same as 2011 ACS data. In 2013, almost one third (32%) served in Vietnam and 15% served in World War II. The largest age group represented are those 55-75+ years (72% compared to 70% in 2011), with those 18-34 years old the smallest (7.8% compared to 10% in 2011).⁷
- Data from the Veterans Health Administration-Puget Sound Health Care Services System shown in Figure 2 indicate that four out of ten of their enrollees in King County live in South King County and almost three out of ten live in Seattle. These enrollees are predominantly low-income and disabled.⁸

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 projected to be Summer, 2016.⁹

- In 2007 in King County, about one-third (36%) of veterans living here were from the Vietnam War era, and one-fifth were from the Second World War and Korea war eras. From 2007-2010 King County veterans from pre-Vietnam era decreased by over 10,000 and Vietnam era veterans decreased by approximately 9,000. By 2010, Gulf War era veterans had grown from 19.1 % of King County veterans to 22.3%. Close to two-thirds, 80,000, veterans in King County are over the age of 55, with 30,700 between 55 and 64, not quite retirement age.¹⁰

Location of Veterans in King County						
Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation			2011 Enrollees VA Health System		Total Veterans King County	
REGION						
East Total	3,239	23.2%	5,568	19.6%	28,101	22.1%
North Total	936	6.7%	1,709	6.0%	10,704	8.4%
Seattle Total	3,907	28.0%	8,390	29.5%	33,700	26.6%
South Total	5,886	42.1%	12,744	44.9%	54,503	42.9%
Grand Total	13,968		28,411		127,008	
Source: Veterans Administration Benefits Distributions (2011)			Source: Veterans Administration Puget Sound Health Care System (2011)		Source: 2010 ACS Estimate	

Figure 2
Source: Status of Veterans and Veterans Services in King County, 2013

Service Trends

Aging Veterans

- Over the next twenty years, the number of veterans over age 65 in Washington State

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

"Veterans get GI benefits only when they are in school so they do not get paid for school breaks. Then they are suddenly thrust into poverty, can't pay rent or buy food. More businesses need to create jobs for school breaks for vets so they can buy the basics."
Community Conversation, Bellevue College

requests is higher from veterans living in South King County and Seattle, the percentage of requests increased by a percentage point between 2012 and 2014 for those living in East King County, as shown in

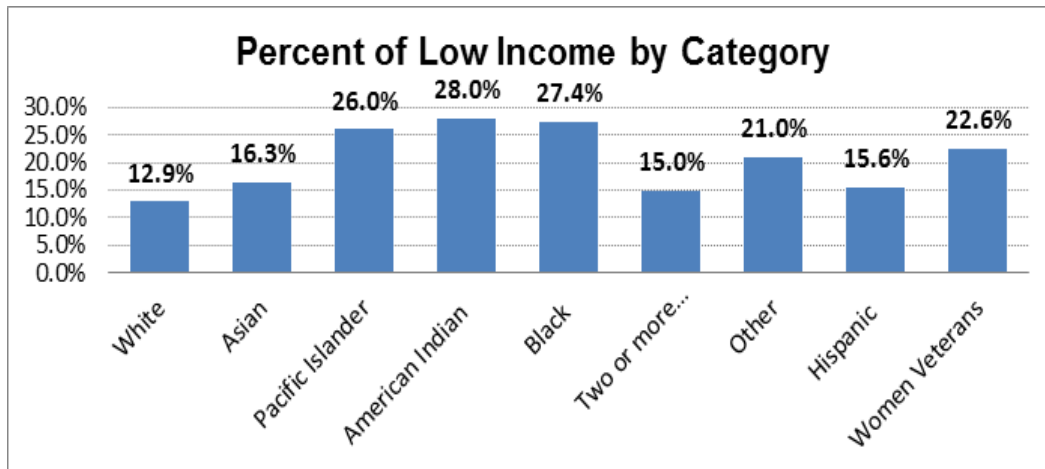


Figure 3
Source: Status of Veterans and Veterans Services in King County, 2013

- In 2010, about 4.6% (5,800+) of King County veterans lived below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and another 9.2% (11,500) lived between 100% and 200% of the FPL. Combined this is 13.8%, which compares to 22.9% of the non-veteran population. Over 60% of this group of veterans are not disabled and close to 3,800 are under age 65 so they are not likely to be eligible for VA compensation or Social Security.¹³
- Veterans of color and women veterans are more likely to be lower income than White veterans. Figure 3 shows that according to 2005-2010 ACS data, these groups are more likely than White veterans to be earning 200% of the FPL or less.¹⁴
- While there was a dramatic increase countywide in veterans calling the Crisis Clinic 2-1-1 Community Information Line for assistance between 2008 and 2010, there was a less marked increase between 2012 and 2014. Although the number of actual

Figure 4. The percentage of requests by region also continued to grow slightly; the share from East King County was 6.5% in 2008, 9.3% in 2010, 10.04% in 2012, and stayed about the same, 9.23%, in 2014.¹⁵

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. The hotline can also be accessed by providers needing services for veterans.

- The King County Veterans Program, 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 have made more services available especially needed by low-income vets, including case management, short term financial assistance and life skills. In 2013, 2,653 veterans and family members were served by the expanded services including more

Region of King County 2014 Veteran King County 2-1-1 Requests (TOTAL OF ALL KING COUNTY 2-1-1 CALLS = 108,707)					
REGION	Total Veterans	% of Requests by Region	Growth from 2012 (2 years)	Spouse/ Partner of Vet/Act Military	% of Requests by Region
East Total	348	9.23%	1.16%	43	9.35%
North Total	155	4.11%	-11.93%	28	6.09%
Seattle Total	1,470	39.00%	13.87%	141	30.65%
South Total	1,796	47.65%	11.21%	248	53.91%
Total 2-1-1 Requests	3,769			460	

Figure 4

Source: Crisis Clinic

outreach made possible with Veterans and Human Services Levy funds. Veterans had increased employment and job skills training opportunities because staff were placed at partnering shelters, transitional housing facilities and Seattle-King County Work-Source sites.¹⁶

Housing and Homelessness

- National estimates project that 40% of homeless adult men are veterans.¹⁷ Locally, data based on a point in time count and a formula supplied by the VA estimated that 1,344 veterans will be homeless between January 2015 and December 2015. It was estimated that about 224 of those veterans will be able to find housing without help, leaving about 1,120 veterans needing interventions to achieve permanent housing. The King County Executive and the Mayors of Seattle, Auburn, Kenmore, Renton, and Algona have signed on to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in King County by December 31, 2015. The Regional Veterans Initiative has also launched the “WelcomeOneHome Campaign designed to increase community awareness, urgency and opportunities for engagement about the King County goal, which includes efforts to enlist more landlords to provide housing for veterans.¹⁸
- Of the 6,275 people in shelters and transitional housing during the 2015 One Night Count in King County, 9% (288) in overnight shelters identified as veterans, 9% (268) were in transitional housing, and 109 were unsheltered for a total of 665. This is a 15% decrease compared to 2014 data. In addition, the Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness conducted a special Veterans Interview Project to identify veterans who had no overnight shelter. Through this work, they demonstrated that at least 163 veterans lacked basic shelter in the county - though there is good reason to believe that the total number is higher.¹⁹
- In March 2014 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched the 25 Cities Initiative to assist communities with high concentrations of homeless Veterans in intensifying and integrating their local efforts to end Veteran homelessness. Seattle was one of those cities. As of August 31, 2014, the efforts of the 25 Cities Initiative has helped to house 10,096 homeless Veterans and non-Veterans. However, there are still approximately 40,000 homeless individuals in these cities who are in need of assistance.²⁰
- In November 2009, the VA introduced its Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans. WDVA initiated a work-group 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 2013 Levy funds provided the REACH homeless street outreach program and three other programs for people who are homeless, serving 1,307 homeless veterans and family members.²¹

- 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. During 2013, 5 levy-funded housing projects opened county-wide an additional 252 units of housing; an additional project received funding to begin development, including a 44 unit apartment complex for veterans.²²
- Another challenge for finding housing for all residents is high rents, especially in East King County. Even though King County received 128 additional specialized Housing Choice Vouchers in 2015 for a total of 246 to help subsidize rent for low-income veterans, there are still over 100 veterans who cannot find housing they can afford even with the vouchers.²³

Employment

- Nationally, the unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans (also called Gulf War-era 2) was until recently much higher than the overall national unemployment rate: for veterans it reached 11.3% in 2009, dropped to 9.7% in 2012, and in 2013, it fell to 8.8%. In 2014 it dropped again, to 6.9%. Women veterans have higher unemployment rates

in general with the rate in 2013 at 9.6 % and 8.5% in 2014 with a similar declining trend. In Washington State, 6.4% of veterans were unemployed in 2014.²⁴ As Figure 4 shows, veterans of color also have higher rates of unemployment.

- In King County, the local unemployment rate is 7.5% (about 6,000 veterans) for veterans based on the 2009-2013 ACS, similar to the non-veteran population which is 7.6%.²⁵
- 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

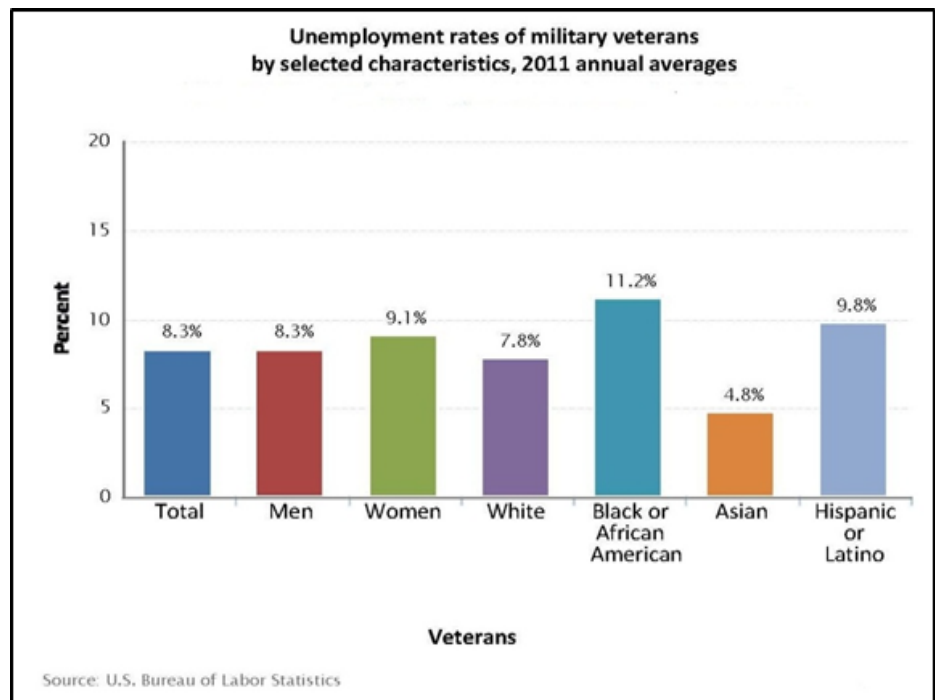


Figure 4

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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.²⁶

Women Serving in the Military

- According to the VA, nationally women make up about 15% of the military force; about 10% of US veterans are women, which is consistent with King County. The

mean age of woman veterans nationally is 48 years of age, compared to 63 years of age for men. 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 2010, there were an estimated 50,000 women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the population of male veterans is projected to decline, the population of women veterans is projected to increase. 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. By 2016, combat roles will be available to women in all the military branches.²⁷

- The 2010 ACS estimated 9,984 women veterans live in King County, up from 8,000 in 2008. Of these women, 2,957 (30%) are under 34 years of age, 3,910 (39%) are age 35-54, 1,302 are age 55-64 (13%), and 818 (8%) are 65-74 years old. There are an estimated 997 women over 75 years of age (10%).²⁸
- 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. Of VA healthcare users, those that experienced MST had 3 times the risk for receiving a mental health diagnosis, such as anxiety or depression. A smaller percentage of men in the military also experience MST. Rates of MST reported among all veterans screened at VA hospitals in FY 2011 were 24.3% for women and 1.3% for men.²⁹ A report released by the Department of Defense in 2013 stated that the number of service members anonymously reporting a sexual assault grew by more than 30% in the past two years, from 19,300 in 2010 to more than 26,000 in 2012. To show the level of under-reporting of these offenses, in fiscal year 2012, the official number of reports was 3,374, a 6% increase over the previous year.³⁰ In King County when national prevalence rates are applied over 5,000 veterans is 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.³¹
- 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.³²
- 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.³³ Interviews and surveys of women veterans reveal their perception that there is a significant gap in delivery of services for them.³⁴
- 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.³⁵ A new model of “one stop” health care for women vets with multi-disciplinary teams, both male and female, has been mandated by the VA in 2009. 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.

- According to a report by King County on access to services for veterans of color and women, women veterans (all ethnicities combined) experience a 22.6% low-income rate compared to White veterans who have a 12.9% low-income rate.³⁶
- 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.³⁷
- 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.³⁸ In King County, estimates are that there could be as many as 25,000 individuals who will 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.³⁹

"Coordinating care is the big issue; it's not that services don't exist."

Key Informant Interview, King County Regional Veterans Initiative

- Nationally, veteran suicides increased by 26% from 2005-2007. 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. Despite these efforts, suicides continued to increase; in 2012 the number of suicides (349) was greater than the number of combat deaths. The VA projects that in 2013, each day 22 veterans will commit suicide, up from 18 in previous estimates.⁴⁰ A new VA study concluded that while suicide rates have remained fairly constant over the past few years, there were decreased rates of non-fatal suicide events. It also noted increased rates of suicide by male veterans under age 30, especially in 18-25 year olds.⁴¹ Another study conducted by the VA found that females who are veterans commit suicide at nearly six times the rate of women who are not veterans.⁴²
- 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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴
- 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, providing family counseling, providing phone resources through an information and referral service, and providing 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, for example, the Military Family Counseling, in which WDVA counselors provide services to the whole family, regardless of who is the veteran.⁴⁵ The VA also provides Supportive Housing for Veterans Families (SSVF) for supportive services designed to promote housing stability.
- 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 vocational retraining for employment, 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.

- Combat veterans commit 21% of intimate partner violence (IPV) nationally which is linked to the development of PTSD. TBIs also increase the incidence of IPV. VA research has shown there is a direct link to the severity of PTSD and the severity of the intimate partner violence; survivors of IPV have identified barriers to getting help that include cultural competence and specialized services to support military spouses and partners.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷

"Some (vets) only want to work with a Veteran specific organization and some don't want to have anything to do with government agencies. They have the same needs as all callers, but may not realize the services available specifically to Veterans and may not have registered to receive benefits. Easy for them to fall through the cracks when they are trying to access services and do not have a case manager or navigator assisting them."

Provider Survey

- In another study by the Pew Research Center in 2011 which surveyed more than 1,800 veterans, researchers used logistic progression analysis to look at how the ease of re-entry could be predicted examining certain variables. Factors that predicted a more difficult re-entry included: experienced a traumatic event, seriously injured, post 9/11 veteran, and post 9/11 veteran who was married while serving. Factors that predicted an easier time in re-entry into civilian life included: college graduate, understood his/her mission, was an officer and higher levels of religious beliefs. Poor predictors included: race/ethnicity, age at

“Needs of veterans: Helping veterans translate description of their military experience into civilian workplace skills; facilitating connections among veterans and employers; helping veterans represent themselves well in application materials; helping veterans build a supportive community as they transition into civilian life; helping veterans get internships so that they can gain civilian workplace skills.”

Provider Survey

time of discharge and how many times the veteran had been deployed.⁴⁸

- Therapeutic Health Services (THS) has enhanced outreach in their Women Veterans of Color and Recovery Services Program to help underserved veterans to access the benefits to which they are entitled, including VA, federal, state and local benefits. The program provides individual and group counseling to women veterans to address PTSD, MST, violence, abuse, alcohol and drug counseling and many other services. . Although this program places emphasis on working with Women Veterans of Color, services are open to any female veteran seeking treatment regardless of ethnicity, discharge status or financial circumstance. This is a unique program that can provide another therapeutic option for those female veterans who are reluctant to seek out services offered within the VA medical care system. Services are available to all women veterans regardless of their ability to pay.⁴⁹

Veterans and the Legal System

- 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.
- 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.⁵⁰

- 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 which 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.

“Four of the top 10 unmet needs of homeless veterans involve legal assistance for eviction/foreclosure prevention, child support issues, outstanding warrants/ fines and restoring a driver’s license.”

Findings from the VA’s 2012 Project CHALENG for Veterans survey

Community Perceptions

- In a 2015 survey completed by human services providers serving Bellevue residents, 72% of the respondents stated that they ask clients at intake about their veteran status, about the same as 2013. This is in stark contrast to the same survey in 2007, at which time over half stated that they did not ask for that information.
- Thirteen percent of the respondents to the 2015 Bellevue phone/online survey answered that they had served in the U.S. Military, compared to nine percent in 2013.
- The most critical needs for veterans mentioned by providers in the 2015 survey

include mental health and chemical dependency counseling, help finding employment and job training, and housing. Providers also mentioned that there is a lack of services for veterans who have been dishonorably discharged.

- Staff from the King County Veterans Program noted 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.⁵¹
- While there are a number of highly successful veterans' employment initiatives available in King County Regional Veterans Initiative staff observe that some veterans have challenges in navigating the job seeking process, such as applying on line, and translating their skills from the military into current jobs in the civilian world.
- Two issues identified by Bellevue College staff related to veterans who are students there are the prevalence of learning disabilities and PTSD. Staff observe that these issues and also the veteran's readjustment to civilian life can be barriers to veterans who are trying to study and getting jobs.
- Based on the findings of a recent report by the King County Mobility Coalition - Hopelink, more flexible vans/shuttles and volunteer driver options are needed for Vets, as well as more programs to help Vets afford public transit.⁵²

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/> Another resource is the Seattle Vets Centers' office at the Together Center in Redmond which provides an outreach worker to guide Vets and their families with information about benefits and supports.

- 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, and get help in accessing these benefits when they are eligible.
- Coordination and alignment of funding for veterans programs with new strategic plans such as the All Home, 21 Cities Initiative, and the King County Five Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans is very important. The King County Veterans Service System Mapping Project, begun in 2013, created a local inventory of all the services and resources available to King County veterans. This will improve the understanding of the scope of these resources in the county and also create tools that will visually display the current system. Three areas frequently mentioned that need such coordination are housing, employment and behavioral health.
- The King County Regional Veterans Initiative (RVI) has provided a great planning focus and continues to have great potential to increase coordination of existing regional services with resulting improved quality of life for Vets and their families, particularly the goal to end veteran homelessness by December 2015.

Endnotes

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