

Veterans



20 veterans
commit suicide
each day in U.S.
according to the VA
estimates in 2018

Between 10% and
18% of Veterans
from Iraq and
Afganistan
conflicts have
Post Traumatic
Stress Disorder.

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

From 2019 Count Us In Report
830 identified as **Veterans**,
from those
56% unsheltered
44% sheltered

Number of KC veterans in
Washington **below**
100% FPL decreased
from **8,299/2015**
to
7,131/2017
14% decrease

Veterans

Key Findings

- As a result of a focused countywide effort over the past several years, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in King County has decreased considerably.
- There needs to be a more seamless system to meet veterans' needs, especially for those veterans who are not eligible for VA services. Mental health services, substance use disorder treatment and services for Military Sexual Trauma are particularly critical to have available in the community as sometimes veterans seek non-VA help with these issues. High rates of veteran suicides continue to be an issue.
- Ongoing partnerships between federal, state, and county programs for veterans and human service agencies are still 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.

Population Overview

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 of September 2019, there are 544,310 veterans in Washington State, about a 6% decrease compared to 2016.¹ The total number of veterans in King County has also been declining for almost a decade; since 2010 there has been over a 10% decrease. There are approximately 106,384 veterans in King County; more than 70,000 vets are over the age of 55 (66%) and 9,147 (9%) are 34 years of age and younger.² About 26,000 veterans live in East King County, roughly one-quarter of all veterans in King County.³ There are 5,346 veterans in Bellevue, a decline of nearly 20% from 2015.⁴ The overall decline is based on the large number of veterans over age 65 and less recruitment.⁵

Beyond reductions in number of veterans, there are also demographic differences and changes. By 2043, women are expected to make up 16.3% of all living veterans nationally. Currently, there are more than 9,500 women veterans living in King County and 575 in Bellevue.⁶ Younger women have increased their proportion of veterans in their age group now representing close to one fourth of veterans younger than 35.⁷ Nationally, male veterans are more likely to be White than their non-veteran counterparts. In contrast, female veterans are more likely to be women of color compared to their non-veteran counterparts. Both male and female veterans are less likely to be Hispanic than their non-veteran counterparts.⁸ Figure 1 provides race and ethnicity data for both Bellevue and King County veterans.⁹

Figure 1. Estimated Number of Veterans by Race and Ethnicity

	King County	Bellevue
American Indian/Alaska Native	878 (1%)	5 (0%)
Asian	5,778 (5%)	346 (6%)
Black	7,897 (7%)	55 (1%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	734 (1%)	75 (1%)
White	86,103 (81%)	4,733 (89%)
Multiple races	3,780 (4%)	83 (2%)
Other	1,214 (1%)	49 (1%)
Hispanic	4,474 (4%)	66 (1%)
Total	106,384	5,346

Source: U.S. Census Bureau¹⁰

In 2005, King County voters passed a Veterans and Human Services Levy (VHSL), 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 percent of voters for another six years, which generated about \$18 million annually. In November 2017, 68 percent of voters approved the Veterans, Seniors, and Human Services Levy (VSHSL), adding seniors to one of the groups to be served. The Levy will raise an estimated \$350 million between 2018 and 2023 for seniors, veterans, and vulnerable populations. In 2018, about 9% of clients served were from East King County.¹¹

This chapter only provides information about goals 1 through 5 as they relate specifically to veterans. For a broader discussion of these areas, please see their respective chapters.

- Goal 1: Food to Eat and Roof Overhead
- Goal 2: Supportive Relationships within Families, Neighborhoods, and Communities
- Goal 3: A Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence
- Goal 4: Health Care to be as Physically and Mentally Fit as Possible
- Goal 5: Education and Job Skills to Help Individuals Reach their Full Potential

In addition to these goals, the following topics have been identified as important to this population: Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Lesbian, Questioning, Intersex or Asexual Members of the Military

Goal 1: Food to Eat and a Roof Overhead

- An estimated 830 individuals experiencing homelessness (7% of the total count population) in the 2019 Count Us In (formerly One Night Count) report identified as veterans. This represents a downward trend that began in 2018; the number of veterans has fallen by 38% since 2017. Over half of 2019's veterans were unsheltered (56%), while 44% were sheltered. Compared to other Count Us In survey respondents, veterans reported notably higher rates of living with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and similar rates of physical disabilities. Job loss was the most frequently cited cause of homelessness by veterans (27%) followed by eviction (19%) and alcohol or drug use (13%).¹²
- Over half of provider survey respondents ask clients at intake about their veteran status, similar to previous years. The most critical needs for veterans mentioned are mental health services, rental assistance, legal assistance, and housing. Solid Ground, a program providing housing subsidies and counseling, has funding specifically from VSHSL to assist veterans.¹³
- Veterans and service providers attending a meeting of the King County Veterans Consortium in May 2019 commented that one of the top needs for veterans included housing and rental support.¹⁴

"Affordable housing is a big issue for veterans. There are stipends for vets but they may lose them depending on how they perform at school and they don't get a stipend over the summer if they are not in class so they could lose their housing."

~Participants, Bellevue College
Community Conversation

Goal 2: Supportive Relationships

- Strategies funded through the VSHSL have increased awareness of the needs of families and dependents of soldiers and veterans. The Military Family Counseling Program provided no-cost behavioral health counseling to 36 family members of veterans in 2018. Of the 20 people enrolled for at least 6 months, 95% reported reduced negative symptoms.¹⁵
- Affordable legal services are important for veterans. King County Bar Association hired a social worker specifically to work with veterans, and Eastside Legal Assistance Program reports that veterans have increased needs for medical and housing legal issues.¹⁶
- In a national survey, 60% of veteran respondents thought the military was doing a poor or fair job in addressing the problems faced by veterans and 50% said that the military lags behind in helping them transition to civilian life.¹⁷
- The number of veterans calling the Crisis Connections 2-1-1 Community Information Line for assistance continued to decrease in 2018 after a large increase in 2014-2016. The number of requests is higher from veterans living in South King County and Seattle, as shown in Figure 2. The share from East King County decreased to 6% compared to 9% in 2016.¹⁸
- Another one-stop call center for veterans was funded by the VSHSL and is operated by the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2018, 987 vets were connected to veteran-specific services. The hotline can also be accessed by providers needing services for veterans and family members of veterans.¹⁹

Figure 2. Crisis Connection Calls

REGION	Total Veterans	% Of Requests by Region 2018
East Total	104	6%
North Total	23	2%
Seattle Total	957	56%
South Total	612	36%
Total 2-1-1 Requests	1696	100%

Source: Crisis Connections²⁰

- Beginning in 2016, King County staff hosted 72 engagements over 2 years with community members across the county to learn what current programs worked well and where gaps existed. In 2018, the team held community planning meetings to get feedback to refine strategies and programs before 2019 procurements. Veteran participants report that although there are currently more than 180 programs serving vets in King County, there are barriers caused by fragmented service systems and lack of trained Veteran Services officers.²¹

Goal 3: Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence

- There has been 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. About 6.2% of active duty women indicated experiencing a sexual assault in the year prior to being surveyed, a statistically significant increase over 2016. The estimated prevalence rate for active duty men remained statistically unchanged at 0.7 percent.²²
- Using these rates, the Department of Defense estimates 20,500 Service members, representing about 13,000 women and 7,500 men, experienced some kind of unwanted sexual contact or rape in 2018, up from approximately 14,900 in 2016.
- When national prevalence rates are applied to King County, as many as 7,900 men and women veterans are potentially affected by MST. The 2019-2023 Implementation Plan for the King County VSHSL includes funds for a program operated by a non-profit to seek out and specialize in serving women and transgender veterans in King County. In 2018, 229 individuals received MST/PTSD counseling.²³
- Nationwide, 10% of jail and prison inmates report having served in the military. King County statistics suggest that veterans make up about 2% to 3% of the inmate population at any given time. The Incarcerated Vet Reentry Service Program (funded by VSHSL and administered by the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, WDVA) helps eligible vets and other military personnel within the King County misdemeanor jail system. In 2018, the program supported 155 vets to navigate ongoing court and probation requirements.²⁴
- Seattle Veterans Treatment Court (established in 2011) and King County Regional Veterans Court (established in 2012) provide an opportunity for veterans to choose treatment for

substance use disorder or receive other resources as an alternative to incarceration. The VSHSL provides a Court Clinician who screens veterans for these courts and helps follow them through the process. Public Health Seattle & King County provides Jail Health Services, including a cognitive behavioral class. In 2018, 87 veterans were screened for participation in both courts; 31 veterans opted into the therapeutic court program.²⁵

Goal 4: Health Care to be as Physically and Mentally Fit as Possible

- Over the next twenty years, the number of veterans over age 65 in Washington State will remain stable, but there will likely be a sharp rise (35%) in veterans ages 85 and over. 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% and 100% for the last 10 years. These homes report that 95% of their residents do not have medical insurance and are not eligible for other health care, such as Medicaid, Medicare, and private health insurance. Currently, over 300 veterans live in these homes in Orting, Spokane, Port Orchard and Walla Walla, WA.²⁶
- 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 VA, WDVA, or the King County Veterans Program (KCVP), can provide.
- 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. PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) have emerged as two signature injuries of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. PTSD is a severe reaction to trauma that includes hyper-alertness, nightmares and depression. TBIs are head injuries which can result from combustive explosions that may result in concussions that may at first seem mild but can lead to symptoms beginning to appear up to three months after the event. TBIs can also be a contributing cause of PTSD. The VA estimates up to 15% of Vietnam veterans, 11% to 20% of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom veterans and 12% of Gulf War veterans experience PTSD.²⁷ There are an estimated 19,500 to 28,000 King County 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 as high rates of chemical dependency, other behavioral and mental issues, divorce, homelessness, and criminal justice system involvement.²⁸
- Between 2015 and 2016, the veteran suicide rate decreased from 30.5 per 100,000 to 30.1 per 100,000. The 2016 veteran suicide rate was 1.5 times greater than the non-Veteran rate, after controlling for age and gender. Of Veterans who had received VHA care, the suicide

"Mental health services are available for veterans but there is still lots of stigma around mental health and a thought that people need to push through."

~Key Informant Interview

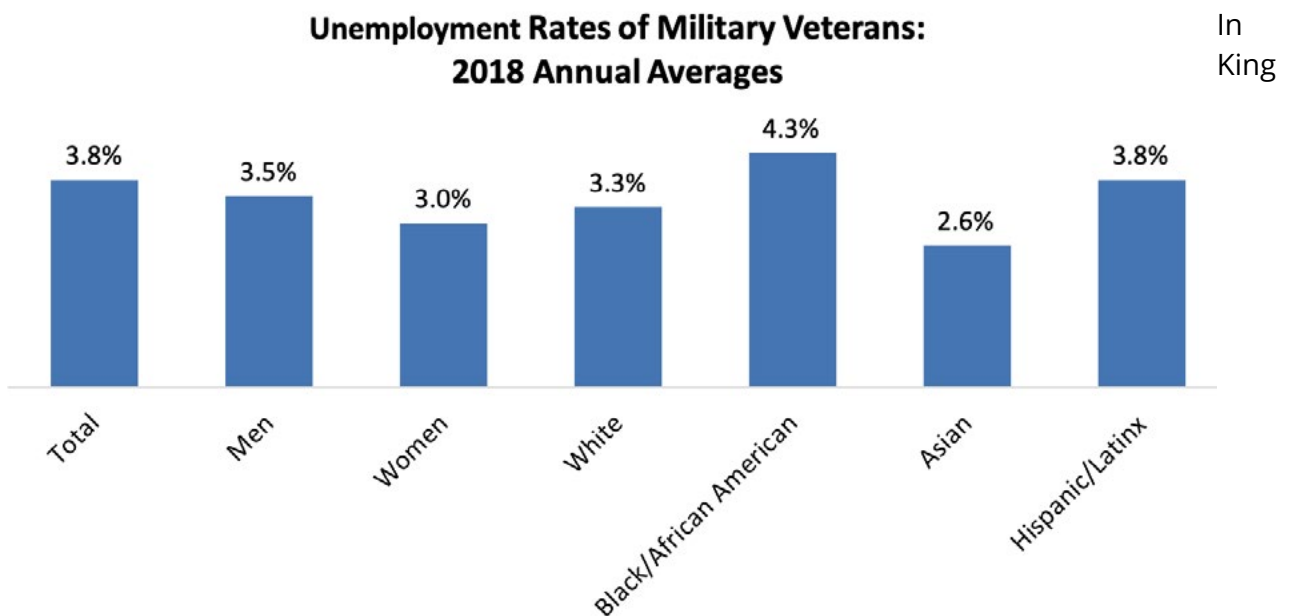
rate was higher, but the rate of increase was lower. The rate of suicide for women veterans was higher than for women who were not veterans. In Washington State in 2016 there were 174 veteran suicides (30.6 per 100,000) which was similar to the national rate.²⁹ The average number of veterans who die by suicide each day in the U.S. remains at 20.³⁰

- Between 11% and 20% of veterans of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom may have PTSD. Between 3% and 25% may develop depression. According to the VA, through 2009 there were one million veterans who returned from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of those, about 220,000 sought VA services and were diagnosed with mental illness.³¹
- Veterans and service providers attending a meeting of the King County Veterans Consortium in May 2019 commented that one of the top needs for veterans include mental health and substance use disorder services.³²

Goal 5: Education and Job Skills to Help Individuals Reach Their Full Potential

- Another key issue is employment, with more help needed for the many veterans who are leaving the military to find living wage jobs.
- In July 2019, the national unemployment rate for all veterans was 3.4%, lower than 2016 and similar to the overall national unemployment rate of 3.6%. Women veterans have higher unemployment rates in general with the rate of 5.0%. In Washington State, 4.3% of veterans were unemployed in July 2019.³³ As Figure 3 shows, national figures reveal that veterans of color sometimes have higher rates of unemployment.³⁴

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics³⁵



County, the local unemployment rate for veterans is 5% (about 2,300 veterans), the same as the non-veteran population of 5%. In Bellevue, the veteran unemployment rate is 5.5% (about 100 veterans), similar to the non-veteran population which is 4.5%.³⁶

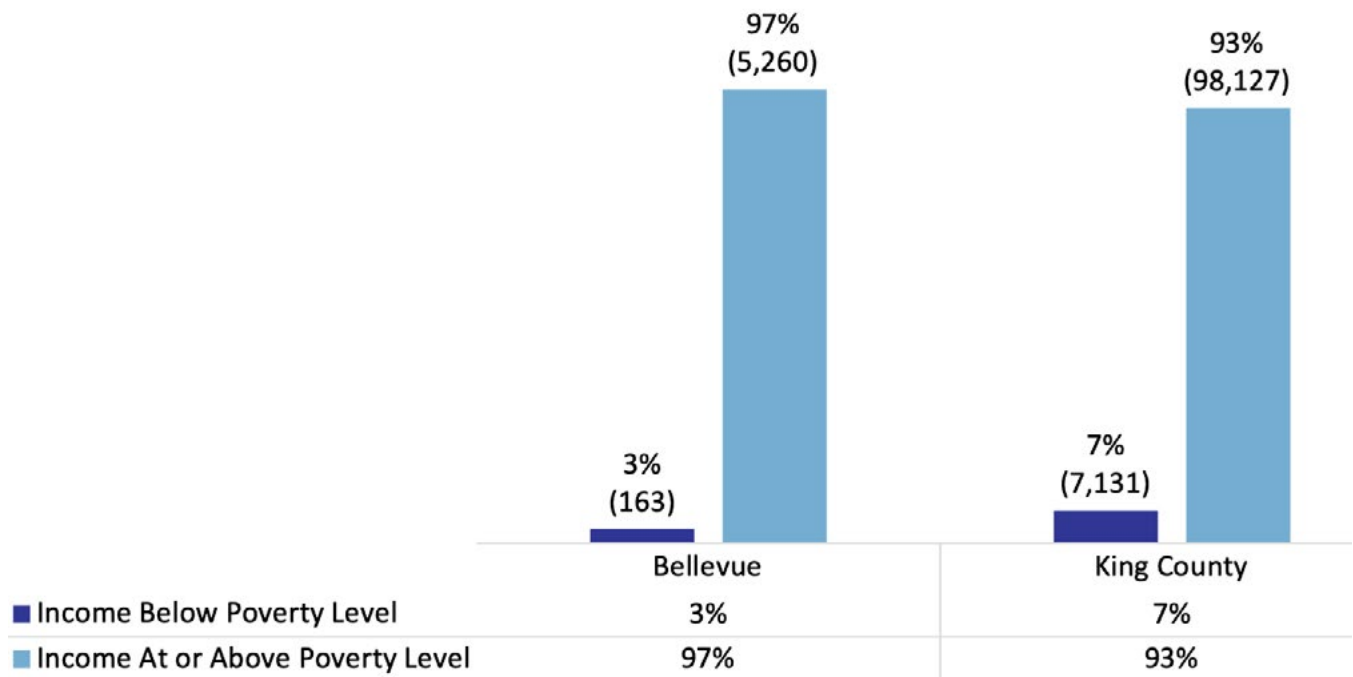
- Several resources focused on employment training and education for veterans are located throughout King County. WorkSource offices in North King County, Redmond, Renton and

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 512 homeless individuals in 2018, many of whom were veterans.³⁷

- Overall, veterans have lower rates of poverty than non-veterans but there are differences related to age and race among veteran groups. For example, White male veterans in 2017 had a poverty rate of 5.5% compared to 10.9% for Black/African American male veterans. Poverty rates for veterans between the ages of 17 and 34 are higher than all other age groups of veterans except for men 55 to 64 years old. Veteran poverty in 2017 was highest in Puerto Rico, District of Columbia and West Virginia.³⁸
- The Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs 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. King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Skagit Counties have the smallest percentage of low-income vets compared to those living in rural areas in Eastern Washington.³⁹

Source: U.S. Census Bureau⁴⁰

Figure 4. Number and Percent of Veterans by Income Status



- As shown in Figure 4, there are 7,131 (7%) veterans in King County living below the poverty level, compare to 163 (3%) veterans in Bellevue living below the poverty level.⁴¹

Additional Issues for Consideration

Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Lesbian, Questioning, Intersex or Asexual Members of the Military

- In a national survey, 5.8% of service members identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Among men, 1.9% identified as gay and 2.0% identified as bisexual. Among women, 7.0% identified as lesbian and 9.1% identified as bisexual. In this survey, 0.6% identified as transgender, which is identical to that of the US adult population. The survey found that although military members that identify as LGBTQ are a small portion of the population, there are disparities in their experiences and behaviors that indicate they have special health care needs that should be monitored and addressed.⁴²
- It is estimated that more than 134,000 veterans are transgender and about 15,000 trans people currently serve in the military. Support for transgender people in the military has improved, but many still face barriers related to confidentiality of their military records and receiving coverage for medical procedures.⁴³
- A key informant interviewee and participants in the King County Veterans Consortium mentioned that there is a growing need for specific services for the veteran LGTBQAI+ population now and in the future.⁴⁴

Endnotes

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