



## » NEWS

### **Chicago Tribune: Discharged, Now Destitute**

#### **Approximately 196,000 Veterans of All Ages Were Homeless on Any Given Night in 2006**

More than 400 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have turned up homeless, and the Department of Veterans Affairs and aid groups say they are bracing for a new surge in homeless veterans in the years ahead.

Experts say it often takes several years after leaving military service for accumulating problems to push veterans into the streets. But some aid workers say the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans appear to be turning up sooner than the Vietnam veterans did.

“We’re beginning to see, across the country, the first trickle of this generation of warriors in homeless shelters,” said Phil Landis, chairman of Veterans Village of San Diego, a residence and counseling center. “But we anticipate that it’s going to be a tsunami.”

With more women serving in combat zones, the current wars are resulting in a higher share of homeless women as well. They have an added risk factor: Roughly 40 percent of the hundreds of homeless female veterans of recent wars have said they were sexually assaulted by U.S. soldiers while in the military, officials said.

“Sexual abuse is a risk factor for homelessness,” said Pete Dougherty, the VA’s director of homeless programs.

Unique traits of the current wars may contribute to homelessness, including high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, and traumatic brain injury, which can cause unstable behavior and substance abuse, and the long and repeated tours of duty, which can make the re-integration into families and work all the harder.

Frederick Johnson, 37, an Army reservist, slept in abandoned houses shortly after returning to Chester, Pa., from a year in Iraq, where he experienced daily mortar attacks and saw mangled bodies of soldiers and children. He started using crack cocaine and drinking, burning through \$6,000 in savings.

“I cut myself off from my family and went from being a pleasant guy to wanting to rip your head off if you looked at me wrong,” Johnson said.

On the street for a year, he finally checked in to a VA clinic in Maryland and has struggled with PTSD, depression, and drug and alcohol abuse. The VA has provided temporary housing as he starts a new job.



## » NEWS

More than 11 percent of the newly homeless veterans are women, Dougherty said, compared with 4 percent enrolled in such programs overall.

Veterans have long accounted for a high share of the nation's homeless. The National Alliance to End Homelessness in Washington will release a report on Thursday saying that although they veterans make up 11 percent of the adult population, they make up 26 percent of the homeless on any given day.

According to the VA, some 196,000 veterans of all ages were homeless on any given night in 2006 -- a decline from about 250,000 a decade back.

### Homeless ranks

The estimated percentage of veterans who were homeless in 2005 varied widely by state; in Illinois, the figure was 0.26 percent. Here are the places with the highest percentages:

1. Washington, D.C. ... 7.51%
2. Louisiana ... 3.28%
3. California ... 2.26%
4. Missouri ... 2.12%
5. Oregon ... 1.98%

*Nearly 39,000 veterans participated last year in the Department of Veterans Affairs' homeless-specific programs. A review of those participants found:*

*\*4.9 percent served before the Vietnam War.*

*\*42.5 percent served during the Vietnam War.*

*\*41.9 percent served after Vietnam and before the Persian Gulf war.*

*\*10.6 percent served after the Persian Gulf war began, including veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.*

*Sources: Associated Press, National Alliance to End Homelessness, Veterans Affairs Department This article appeared in The Courier News on November 22, 2007.*

*This article appeared in The Chicago Tribune on November 8, 2007, and was written by Erik Eckholm.*