



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT HOMELESSNESS VETERAN REPORTING**

**A WHITE PAPER**

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**WHITE PAPER**  
**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND**  
**HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT HOMELESSNESS VETERAN REPORTING**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

On Monday August 1, 2016, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veteran's Affairs (VA) reported a drop in veteran homelessness of over 50% (since 2010). HUD's 2015 Point in Time (PIT) Count stated there were only 40,000 homeless veterans.

We know that both the HUD and the VA continue to strive to make necessary improvements to address the nation's growing veteran homeless population. Some initiatives have proven to be beneficial in supporting homeless veterans and prevention of homelessness; however, there is still much more work to be done—especially regarding their reporting methodology.

We understand that the PIT Count is only a "snapshot" of veteran homelessness on any given day; however, the data used and disseminated from the PIT Count is inaccurate and does not display the complete picture of veteran homelessness within the United States. The PIC Count does not encompass some critical elements within its counting mechanism. Specifically missing from the process are some of the following critical factors and/or sub-categories.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Women veterans who couch surf do not qualify as homeless, due to the current federal definition of homelessness.**

Over 70% of the women that come to Final Salute Inc. for housing and/or emergency financial assistance are single mothers. Frequent moves from friends to families' homes (or couch surfing) are how they typically find temporary and emergency shelter. Mothers do this for a number of reasons, with the top two priorities being: 1) to avoid the dangers of living on the street, and 2) out of fear of losing custody of their children.

HUD's definition of the term "homeless" used for the PIT Count is defined in the following statement, "The PIT count only captures those persons sleeping in sheltered and unsheltered

locations on the night of the count, but is not reflective of who is eligible for HUD's homeless assistance grants programs."

You will not find vast numbers of homeless women veterans housed in shelters, as the majority of homeless shelters predominately focus on male veterans. Additionally, some programs place restrictions on the ages and/or number of children they can shelter at any given time, which eliminates many shelters as a potential option for homeless women veterans.

The Final Salute Inc. organization was specifically founded due to a significant lack of supportive housing programs for women veterans and their children. In 2011, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) first noticed the discrepancies in reporting on women veterans as a segment of the homeless population and a system that had insufficiently been structured to support their unique needs. This has led to women veteran being the fastest growing homeless population in the U.S.

### **The numbers as a whole (all homeless veterans) are not adding up.**

In 2015, The National Coalition on Homeless Veterans reported 47,000 homeless veterans by HUD's PIT Count, but later stated in the same narrative that the VA reported they had supported 150,000 homeless veterans through their health care system in the same year. These numbers come nowhere close to matching the projections.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a drop in veteran unemployment in 2015, but even with that drop it still leaves 495,000 unemployed veterans. (Of note, unemployment is a major contributing factor to homelessness among our nation's veterans.) Are we to assume that the other 455,000 of those unemployed veterans are able to maintain housing for themselves (and their families) with no income source?

Of the total reported unemployed veterans, 23,000 of them were women. The VA states only 4,338 women veterans were homeless in 2015. That leaves over 18,600 women veterans (with and without children) uncounted and with no income. Many of these women are in fact homeless; however, they don't meet the current HUD definition for the PIT Count.

### **How the VA counts unsheltered veterans:**

The VA counts its sheltered veterans primarily using the Homelessness Screening Clinical Reminder (HSCR).

This reporting mechanism found that veterans screened in substance abuse and mental health clinics were higher risks for housing instability.

They also found that white males aged 51-60 were a majority of positive screens.

The biggest issue with using this process as a reporting/screening mechanism for homeless veterans is that 82% of women veterans do not use the VA for health care services (as reported by Disabled American Veterans).

The HSCR screening reached over 3 million veterans. There are currently over 21 million veterans in the United States, with 2.2 million of those being women veterans.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

- How are the homeless veterans counted that couldn't be sheltered/housed due to space restrictions and/or lack of resources?
- Do you inquire into the housing status of the unemployed veterans, as one of the identified major contributing factors to veteran homelessness?
- What other mechanisms are being used to account for the 87% of women veterans that don't use the VA, thus rendering them virtually invisible via the unsheltered screening process?
- When will veterans who “couch surf” or who live with family and friends on a continuous basis be counted?

We plan on submitting/sharing this information with the GAO, HUD and VA. Hopefully they will consider the information shared when prepping for the next counting iteration, specifically in order to fine tune how they assess/report on the number of homeless women veterans and veterans in general currently in the United States.

Historically, women veterans and their children have faced difficulty getting access to the support and resources they desperately need. This vulnerable veteran population is neglected even further by inaccurate counting mechanisms and definitions. Under-reporting hurts resource allocations and non-profit organizations trying to assist the homeless veteran population, especially those that the HUD and VA are currently unable to reach or support. The non-counting of homeless women veterans (and their children) contributes to their under-reporting and prevents them from being represented within the larger homeless population.

We want readers to understand that we will continue to work with the HUD and the VA to support our nation's veterans and their children. However, the true scale of the veteran homelessness problem within the United States must be made known in order for all of us to continue to effectively combat this issue.

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