

# Veterans



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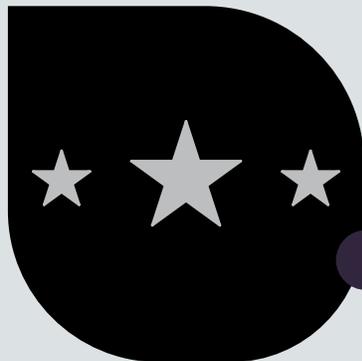
**125,000** active military members and their families may be facing food insecurity in the United States.

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2020 Count Us In, **813** identified as Veterans, from those **51%** unsheltered and **49%** sheltered.

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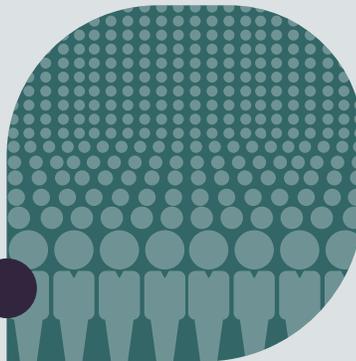
In Washington State in 2019, there were **192** veteran suicides.

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An estimated **19,500** to 28,000 King County Veterans with PTSD.

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**5.8%** of military members identify as LGBTQ.

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# Veterans

## Key Findings

- Due to the pandemic, many services for veterans, similar to other populations, had to be provided virtually, with social distance or with hybrid models. It became clear that a significant number of this population had no digital access or social supports to provide help in lieu of formal, in-person services.
- As a result of a focused countywide effort over the past years, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in King County has decreased considerably.
- Behavioral 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.
- Though rates of veteran suicides have decreased slightly, this continues to be an issue.
- Affordable housing is one of the most frequently identified top needs among veterans by both veterans and providers.
- Ongoing partnerships between human service agencies and federal, state, and county veterans' programs 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. Navigators that assist with finding health care and other resources could be a model to provide a more comprehensive approach.

## Population Overview

Veterans are individuals of all genders 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. Since the events of 9/11, more attention has been paid to the human service needs of veterans due to the high visibility of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq although veterans from the Gulf War, Vietnam, and Korea also have a strong presence in the Puget Sound Region.

In 2020, 18.5 million individuals were veterans, accounting for about 7% of the civilian noninstitutional population age 18 and over. Of all veterans, 10% are women. Veterans are defined as individuals who have previously served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and who were civilians at the time these data were collected. A higher percentage of the veteran population are male than that of the general population. The veteran population is also of an average age that is older than that of the general population. In part, this reflects the characteristics of veterans who served during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam era, all of whom are now over 70 years old. Veterans who served during these wartime periods accounted for 37% (6.8 million) of the total veteran population in 2020. Forty-one percent of veterans (7.6 million) served during Gulf War era I (August 1990 to August 2001) or Gulf War era II (September 2001 to present). Twenty-two percent (4.1 million) served outside the designated wartime periods.<sup>1</sup>

As of August 2021, there are 544,533 veterans in Washington State, about a 6% decrease compared to 2016.<sup>2</sup> The total number of veterans in King County has also been declining for more

than a decade, since 2010 there has been over a 20% decrease. There are 106,581 veterans in King County; more than 65,000 vets are over the age of 55 (66%) and (9%) are 34 years of age and younger. About 5,100 veterans live in Bellevue, roughly 5% of all veterans in King County.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond reductions in number of veterans, there are also demographic differences and changes. Women are the faster growing group; by 2043, women are expected to make up 16.3% of all living veterans nationally. Currently, there are more than 6,965 women veterans living in King County and 526 (10%) in Bellevue.<sup>4</sup> Nationally, male veterans are more likely to be White than their non-veteran counterparts. In contrast, female veterans are more likely to be people of color compared to their non-veteran counterparts. Veterans of all gender identities are less likely to be Hispanic than their non-veteran counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Figure 1 provides race and ethnicity data for both Bellevue and King County veterans.<sup>6</sup>

### Estimated Number of Veterans by Race and Ethnicity

	King County	Bellevue
American Indian/Alaska Native	774 (1%)	7 (0%)
Asian	5,412 (5%)	387 (6%)
Black	7,358 (7%)	68 (1%)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	946 (1%)	94 (1%)
White	78,573 (78%)	4,461(86%)
Multiple races	3,533 (4%)	111 (2%)
Some other race alone	1,382(1%)	431(1%)
Hispanic/Latino (any race)	4,577 (5%)	66(1%)
Total	106,581	5,170

Figure 1 | 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (Table S2101)

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% of voters for another six years, which generated about \$18 million annually. In November 2017, 68% 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.<sup>7</sup>

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, Queer, Intersex or Asexual Members of the Military

We recognize that disparate outcomes based on race exist regarding prevalence of and responses to the issues covered in this chapter. As part of the City’s ongoing efforts to continue growing as a culturally competent and racially equitable organization and city, we have, when possible, highlighted racial disparities throughout this report, denoted by the phrase **Racial (In) Equity Data Point**.

While gender is a spectrum that includes transgender people and those who identify as neither male nor female, the sources referenced in this chapter reported data by male and female and did not report data encompassing the entire gender spectrum.

## Goal 1: Food to Eat and a Roof Overhead

- An estimated 813 individuals experiencing homelessness (7% of the total count population) in the 2020 Count Us In (formerly One Night Count) report identified as veterans. The Count was not conducted in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This represents a downward trend that began in 2018; the number of veterans has fallen by 38% since 2017. Half of 2020’s veterans were unsheltered (51%), while 49% were sheltered. Since 2017, 2021 has marked the highest sheltered rate for veterans of 51%. Of the veteran homeless population, about 80% are men, 57% white, 97% were non-Hispanic, and 92% were 25 and up. About 27% of the veterans experiencing homelessness reported that this was the first time that they were experiencing homelessness. Additionally, 11% of the veterans (compared to 17% of the non-veteran population) identified as LBTQIA+.
- **Racial (In) Equity Data Point:** Of the veterans included in the 2020 Count Us In data, Black, Indigenous, People of Color or multiple races represent 43% of the total, while in King County, 38% of the population is Black, Indigenous, People of Color or multiple races. <sup>8</sup>
- 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 to the non-veteran population. Veterans had an overall rate of psychiatric or emotional conditions of 70%, and 55% report experiencing PTSD.
- Mental health and alcohol or drug use issues were the most frequently cited cause of homelessness by veterans (13% for each) followed by illness and medical problems (10%).<sup>9</sup>
- The most critical needs for veterans mentioned in the providers survey include rental assistance and housing.<sup>10</sup>
- King County Veterans Program launched the COVID-19 Veteran Rental and Mortgage Assistance Pilot program, investing over \$288,000 in housing payments to support veterans and their families staying safely housed. <sup>11</sup>
- As many as 125,000 active military members and their families may be facing food insecurity in the United States. Some of the reasons cited are cost of living, other financial commitments, and limited income. Only 2% of active-duty service members qualify for

“Affordable housing is the number one need for veterans.”

~Key informant interview

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, according to the USDA. But approximately 7% of military personnel and their families face food insecurity.<sup>12</sup>

## Goal 2: Supportive Relationships

- The number of veterans calling the Crisis Connections 2-1-1 Community Information Line for assistance increased in 2020 by 17% compared to 2018. 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 increased to 10% compared to 6% in 2018. Of cities on the Eastside, Bellevue veterans had the highest number of calls (88).<sup>13</sup>

### Crisis Connection Calls

REGION	Total Veterans	% of Requests by Region 2020
East Total	193	10%
North Total	108	5%
Seattle Total	748	38%
South Total	930	47%
Total 2-1-1 Requests	1,985	100%

Figure 2 | Source: Crisis Connections<sup>14</sup>

- There are a total of 5.5 million caregivers caring for former or current military personnel in the U.S. (1.1 million post 9/11). Nine in ten (96%) caregivers of veterans are women and 70% provide care to their spouse or partner. 30% of veterans' caregivers provide care for a duration of 10 years or more as compared to 15% of caregivers nationally. 88% report increased stress or anxiety as a result of caregiving, and 77% state sleep deprivation as an issue.<sup>15</sup>
- Strategies funded through the VSHSL have increased awareness of the needs of families and dependents of soldiers and veterans. The Military Family Counseling Program provides no-cost behavioral health counseling to families.<sup>16</sup>
- Affordable legal services are important for veterans. King County Bar Association provides eviction legal assistance and Eastside Legal Assistance Program provides eviction prevention and legal counsel for civil legal issues.<sup>17</sup>
- Another one-stop call center for veterans was funded by the VSHSL and is operated by the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>18</sup>

## Goal 3: Safe Haven from All Forms of Violence

- There has been a trend toward more reports of sexual assault of military members, often reported when they leave the services and become veterans, ranging from unwanted sexual contact and harassment to rape. These are referred to as military sexual trauma or MST. In 2018, the most recent data available, 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 men in active duty remained statistically unchanged at 0.7 percent. 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 penetrative sexual assault in 2018, up from approximately 14,900 in 2016.<sup>19</sup>

- When national prevalence rates are applied to King County, as many as 7,900 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.<sup>20</sup>
- One of the top three challenges with transition from the military that women veterans identified was coping with mental health issues related to MST (25%). Through the Annual Warrior Survey, 44% of women warriors reported experiencing MST as a result of their service. This survey found that more warriors have had experiences often related to MST, with nearly 73% of women warriors reporting experiencing sexual assault or harassment while in the military.<sup>21</sup>
- Nationally, 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 by providing legal counsel and services such as behavioral health and substance abuse treatment services.<sup>22</sup>
- 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 guide? them through the process. Public Health Seattle & King County provides Jail Health Services, including a cognitive behavioral class. Between June 2018 and June 2019, 192 veterans were enrolled; 126 were referred to Behavioral Health services, and 130 were referred to education or employment services. Over half of all referrals result in actual participation in services.<sup>23</sup>
- **Racial (In) Equity Data Point:** Black, Indigenous and People of Color or multiple races represent 50% the jail population in King County<sup>24</sup> while in King County, 38% of the population is Black, Indigenous, People of Color or multiple races. A segment of this population are veterans.<sup>25</sup>

## **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, behavioral health, and substance use 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.<sup>26</sup>

- 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 their family. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (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 combusive explosions that may result in concussions that may at first seem mild but can lead to symptoms that begin 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.<sup>27</sup> 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 overcome 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.<sup>28</sup>

“Services such as health care, substance use disorder treatment and mental health services are in silos; they need to be more connected to be accessible to veterans and the general population as well.”

~Key informant interview

“Many veterans are reporting more severe PTSD syndromes triggered by the recent events in Afghanistan, even Vietnam era veterans.”

~Key informant interview

- Of the 46,510 Americans who died from suicide in 2018, the most recent data available, 6,435 were veterans. This was not a significant difference compared to 2017. The annual total number of veteran suicide deaths increased by 36 from 2017 to 2018, an increase of 0.6% (from 6,399 in 2017 to 6,435 in 2018), while the veteran population fell by 1.5% (from 20.4 million to 20.1 million). From 2017 to 2018, the average number of veteran suicides per day rose from 17.5 to 17.6. This compares to 30.1 in 2016. While the average rate did rise slightly, there were positive trends related to VA healthcare and suicide prevention efforts overall. <sup>29</sup> In Washington State in 2019 there were 192 veteran suicides.<sup>30</sup>
- 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, and affordable housing.<sup>31</sup>

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

- Overall, veterans have lower rates of poverty than non-veterans but there are differences related to age and race among veteran groups.

**Racial (In)Equity Data Point:** White male veterans in 2017 had poverty rates 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.<sup>32</sup>

- Employment providing a living wage is a key need for many veterans as they are leaving the military.
- The unemployment rate for veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time since September 2001, a group referred to as Gulf War-era II veterans, rose to 7.3 percent in 2020, as of March 2021. The jobless rate for all veterans increased to 6.5% in 2020. These increases reflect the effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the labor market.<sup>33</sup>

**Racial (In)Equity Data Point:** As Figure 3 shows, national figures reveal that veterans of color sometimes have higher rates of unemployment.<sup>34</sup>

### Unemployment Rates of U.S. Military Veterans: 2018 Annual Average

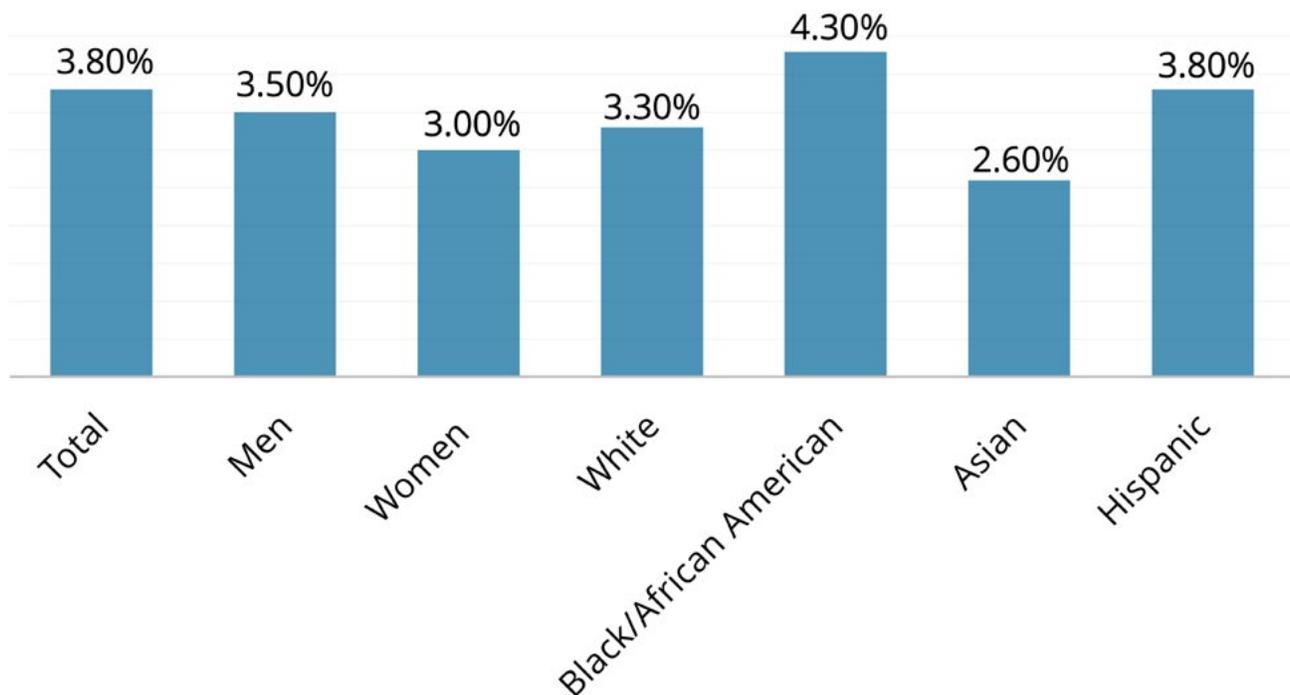


Figure 3 | U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

- In King County, the local unemployment rate for veterans is 4.4% (about 1,900 veterans), slightly higher than rate for the non-veteran population (4.2%). In Bellevue, the veteran unemployment rate is 2.5% (about 50 veterans), slightly lower than non-veteran population (3.5%).<sup>35</sup>
- Several resources focused on employment training and education for veterans are located throughout King County. WorkSource offices in Shoreline, Redmond, Renton, and Seattle offer specialized services. Bellevue College has a Veterans Conservation Corps (Vet Corps) member on-site to help veterans navigate systems needed to adjust from military to college life. Vet Corps members also assist with training and job placement opportunities.<sup>36</sup>
- The King County Department of Human Resources' Vets 4 HIRE Program supports veterans in making a successful transition from military to civilian employment and provides a pipeline of skilled veteran talent for positions within King County. Due to the pandemic, hiring was slower in 2020 than in previous years.<sup>37</sup>

## Additional Issues for Consideration

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+) Members of the Military**

- In a national survey, 5.8% of service members identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Among the male services members, 1.9% identified as gay and 2.0% identified as bisexual. Among female services members, 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 of bias that indicate they have special health care needs that should be monitored and addressed.<sup>38</sup>
- 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.<sup>39</sup>
- The US Department of Veterans Affairs announced in 2021 that it will begin the process to expand health care services available to transgender veterans to include gender confirmation surgery.<sup>40</sup>

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## Endnotes

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