

HOW TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE EVER-INCREASING NUMBER OF HOMELESS VETERANS

Committee:

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Contact Information for Questions:

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Raise awareness in your communities about the ever-increasing number of homeless veterans, especially women veterans and those with children.

Background information:

- The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans states that homeless veterans are mostly males, but about 8% are females. Most are single and many may suffer from mental illness, alcohol and/or substance abuse. About 12,700 veterans of the recent conflicts were homeless in 2014 and the number of younger homeless veterans is increasing. 77% of homeless female veterans are unemployed. Your unit can get involved in several ways. We hope to supply you with ideas that will help you participate in the fight against homelessness and its impact on veterans.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- First, learn about the homeless veterans in your area. Identify the needs of the homeless veteran population in your area by contacting community organizations like shelters, food banks, and if available, a Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC).
- If you have a VAMC in your area, work with the VAMC homeless coordinator to see what kinds of programs they already have in place and identify how your unit can help.
- Use funds collected through the Poppy program to support the needs of homeless veterans.
- Advertise the Department of Veterans Affairs help line for homeless veterans in homeless shelters, community centers, VAMC's, CBOCs, local hospitals, mental health service facilities and other community centers in your area. The hotline, 1-800-4AID-VET or 1-877-424-3838 is a free, confidential hotline that pairs homeless veterans and their families with trained counselors who are able to refer veterans to services in their area. Posters are available at no cost on www.ALAforVeterans.org. Also visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/Default.aspx.
- Get the word out! As a unit or member, contact your local and state representatives in person, by mail, phone or email. Ask them to keep veteran legislation on their agendas.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs also has founded a national suicide prevention hotline to ensure veterans in emotional crisis have free 24/7 access to trained counselors. Ask the local homeless shelter, hospital, schools, community centers, mental health services facilities and other public places to post the free flyer or hand out free brochures. Visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/Default.aspx.

Three projects your unit might consider:

- Host a stand down or Homeless Veterans' health fair. Contact your local VAMC homeless outreach coordinator or visit the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans website www.nchv.com. They have a simple guide to follow called, *Stand Down Guide*.
- Assemble Buddy Baskets for homeless veterans transitioning into housing. Visit www.ALAforVeterans.org for a How To Sheet that further details the Buddy Basket process.
- Work with your Legion Family to develop a fundraising plan. These funds can be used for emergency housing, supporting local shelters, and supplying veterans with basic needs. Contact local businesses, churches, and civic groups, for item and monetary donations. Ask to receive a portion of the proceeds raised at a community event. For example ask an organization to sponsor a 5k run/walk on behalf of homeless veterans. Involve media to ensure donors are recognized for their support of America's veterans.