



Homelessness and Housing Instability Among Veterans in Washington

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THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS HEALTH AFFAIRS (VHA) is the largest integrated health care system in the United States (US). The VHA provides care to an especially vulnerable population of individuals. Prior research (Henzel et al. 2016, Bittinger et al. 2018, Bittinger et al. 2020) examined state health and social service use by Veterans. This report focuses on homelessness and housing instability among Washington Veterans in CY 2018. By drawing on data from both state- and VHA-administered programs, this report provides an in-depth picture of housing instability and homelessness among Veterans. Differences in rates of homelessness and housing instability by age, sex, race/ethnicity, geography, and engagement in the VHA Primary Care Management Module (PCMM) (a nationwide program supporting care coordination for Veterans) are examined.

Key Findings

1. **Four percent of Veterans—one in 25—were homeless or unstably housed in CY 2018.** Of the 221,686 Veterans in Washington, four percent (n=8,947) were identified as homeless or unstably housed by either the Veterans HOMES database or through state-administered housing and homelessness services.



2. **Veterans aged 45 to 64 accounted for more than half of those who were homeless or unstably housed.** Veterans ages 45 to 64 made up 33 percent of the total Veteran population, but represent 58 percent of those who were homeless, 52 percent of those unstably housed, and 58 percent of those enrolled in permanent housing programs.
3. **A higher proportion of racial/ethnic minority Veterans were homeless or unstably housed compared to the overall Veteran population.** A higher proportion of Veterans who identify as any racial/ethnic minority were homeless (34 percent), unstably housed (30 percent), or in permanent housing (31 percent) compared to the proportion of all Veterans who identify as a racial/ethnic minority (17 percent).
4. **Of the Veterans who were homeless or unstably housed, a majority were enrolled in the VHA Primary Care Management Module.** Among all Veterans, slightly over half (56 percent) were enrolled in the PCMM. However, of those who were homeless, 79 percent were PCMM-affiliated. Seventy-one percent of those who were unstably housed were PCMM-affiliated and 82 percent of those in permanent housing were PCMM affiliated.

Data and Methods

This study included all Veterans living in Washington State who were enrolled with the VHA in calendar year (CY) 2016. These data were then linked to state administrative records and restricted to Veterans who were alive as of December 31, 2018 (n=221,686). Veterans enrolled with VHA may also choose to enroll in the PCMM. About 56 percent (n=123,748) of the Veteran cohort participated in the PCMM.

Demographic information on Veterans, as well as PCMM engagement, was obtained from the Veterans Health Administration Corporate Data Warehouse. These analyses also draw on three administrative data systems within the state and the VHA that track housing status and homelessness/housing programs. The three data systems are:

- An extract from the VHA's Homeless Operations and Management Evaluation System (HOMES) database containing information on receipt of VHA homelessness services in CY 2018. The HOMES database is part of the larger VHA Homeless Services Registry.
- Information about state-administrated housing and homelessness services is from the Department of Commerce Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
- Living arrangement data is from the DSHS Economic Services Administration Automated Client Eligibility Systems (ACES).

Using data from HOMES, HMIS, and ACES, Veterans were assigned to one of four mutually exclusive categories using a hierarchy to place them in the most precarious housing status they experienced during CY 2018: homeless, unstably housed, in permanent housing, or not homeless during the year (see Ford Shah et al. 2015). Veteran housing status is shown by PCMM engagement status in Table 1.

Two percent (n=5,024) of the Veteran cohort were homeless (e.g. unsheltered) at some point during CY 2018. However, over 3 percent of the PCMM Veterans were identified as unstably housed compared to 1 percent of the non-PCMM Veterans. Unstably housed (e.g. couch surfing, living in a vehicle) and permanent housing (e.g. HUD VA Supportive Housing Program) categories have similar patterns, with PCMM Veterans having higher proportions of housing instability than non-PCMM Veterans. Of the total Veteran population, 1 percent (n=2,177) were unstably housed and an additional one percent (n=1,746) were in permanent housing in CY 2018.

TABLE 1.

Housing Status of Veterans by PCMM Engagement (CY 2018)

Housing Status	PCMM Veterans		Non-PCMM Veterans		All Veterans	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Homeless	3,953	3.2%	1,071	1.1%	5,024	2.3%
Unstably Housed	1,547	1.3%	630	0.6%	2,177	1.0%
Permanent Housing	1,436	1.2%	310	0.3%	1,746	0.8%
Subtotal	6,936	5.6%	2,011	2.1%	8,947	4.0%
Not Homeless	116,812	94.4%	95,927	98.0%	212,740	96.0%
TOTAL	123,748	100%	97,938	100%	221,687	100%

The Appendix contains a detailed breakout of the housing and homelessness services used across systems (Table A1). Additional details about the housing statuses, data sources, and methods are in the Technical Notes section.

Table 2 highlights the variability in which data systems identify Veterans as homelessness or housing instability. The results are stratified by PCMM engagement to identify any subpopulation differences. Four percent (n=8,947) of the Veteran cohort were identified by at least one system as receiving homelessness or housing instability related services in CY 2018 (see Table 2).

- Three-quarters (77 percent) of these Veterans were identified as homeless or unstably housed in a single system, and only 3 percent were identified as homeless or unstably housed in all three systems.
- Over a quarter of these Veterans (28 percent) were not identified as homeless or unstably housed in the VHA HOMES database.
- Additionally, almost half of the non-PCMM Veterans who were identified as homeless or unstably housed were only identified as such in a non-HOMES system (HMIS or ACES) versus those identified by HOMES (39 percent).

TABLE 2.

Identification of Homelessness or Housing Instability (CY 2018)

Source System	PCMM Veterans		Non-PCMM Veterans		All Veterans	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
HOMES Only	4,042	58%	727	36%	4,769	53%
HMIS Only	749	11%	358	18%	1,107	12%
ACES Only	558	8%	497	25%	1,055	12%
HOMES and HMIS	798	12%	137	7%	935	10%
HOMES and ACES	320	5%	98	5%	418	5%
ACES and HMIS	213	3%	140	7%	353	4%
HOMES, HMIS, and ACES	256	4%	54	3%	310	3%
TOTAL	6,936	100%	2,011	100%	8,947	100%
Total not in HOMES	1,520	22%	995	49%	2,515	28%

Veteran Housing Status by Demographics

Veterans who were not identified as homeless during CY 2018 had a similar demographic make-up to the broader Veteran population. However, the demographic composition of Veterans who were homeless, unstably housed, or in permanent housing often differed from the broader Veteran population. Differences across four demographic characteristics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, geography) and PCMM affiliation are highlighted below.

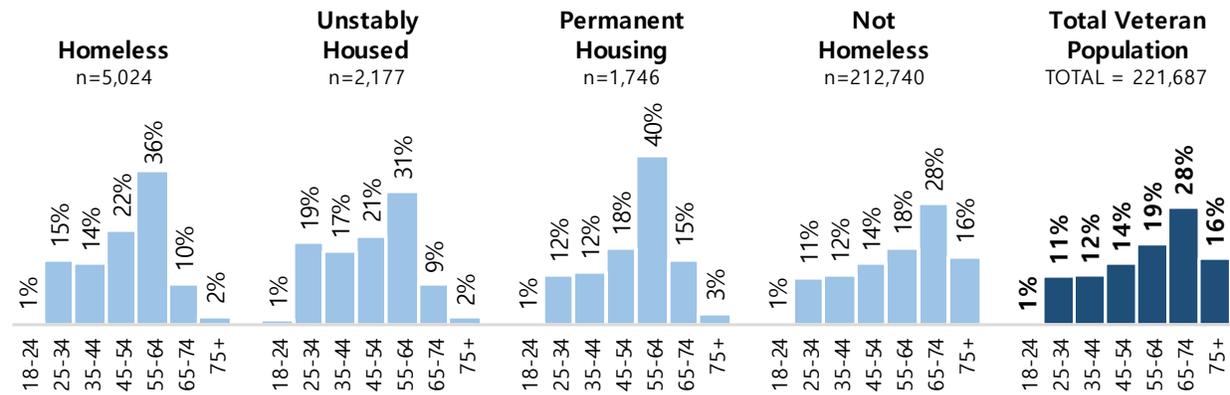
Age

The proportion of Veterans experiencing homelessness or housing instability begins to increase with Veterans ages 25 to 34, peaks among Veterans ages 55 to 64, and drops significantly for Veterans aged 65 and older (see Figure 1).

Veterans ages 55 to 64 make up 19 percent of the total Veteran population, but represent 36 percent of those who were homeless, 31 percent of those unstably housed, and 40 percent of those who were in permanent housing.

FIGURE 1.

Age and Veteran Housing Status

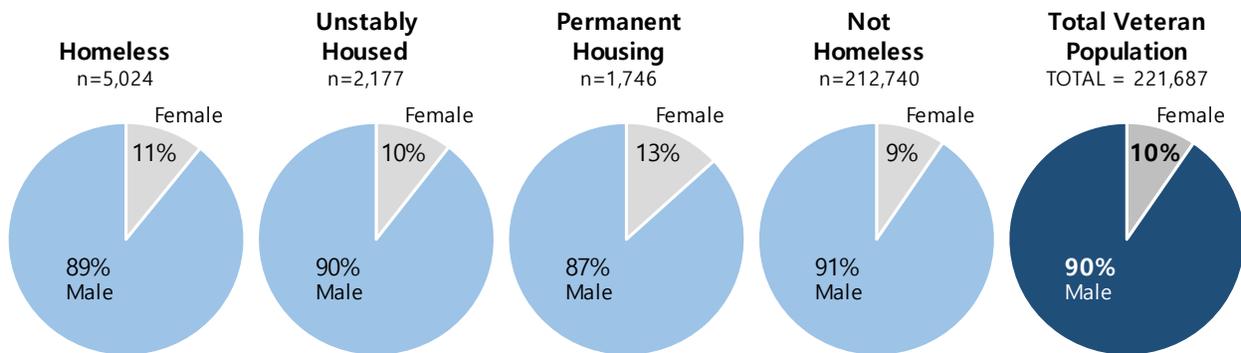


Gender

The proportion of male and female Veterans is consistent across housing status with approximately 90 percent male and 10 percent female (see Figure 2). There is a slightly higher proportion of female Veterans in permanent housing (13 percent). Overall, housing status does not vary by gender.

FIGURE 2.

Gender and Veteran Housing Status

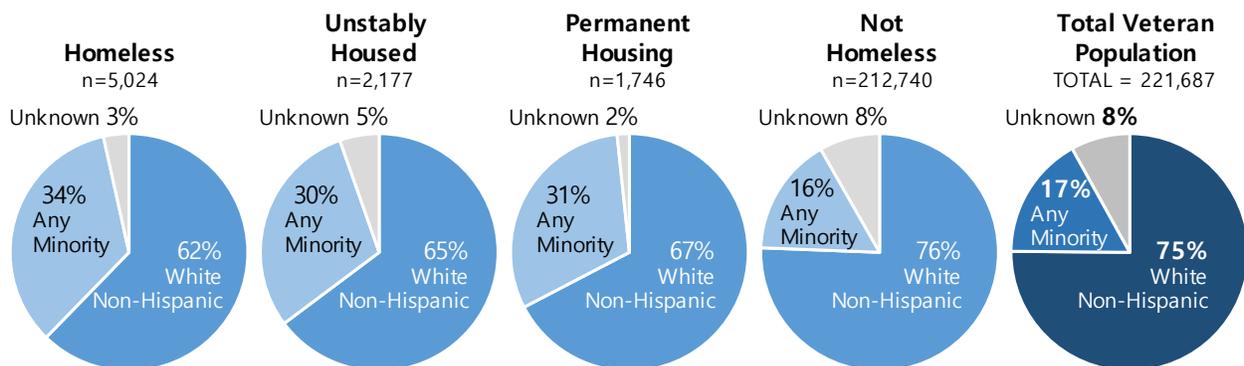


Race/Ethnicity

As shown in Figure 3, a higher proportion of Veterans who identify as any racial/ethnic minority were homeless (34 percent), unstably housed (30 percent), or in permanent housing (31 percent) compared to the proportion of this Veteran group in the total Veteran population (17 percent).

FIGURE 3.

Race/Ethnicity and Veteran Housing Status

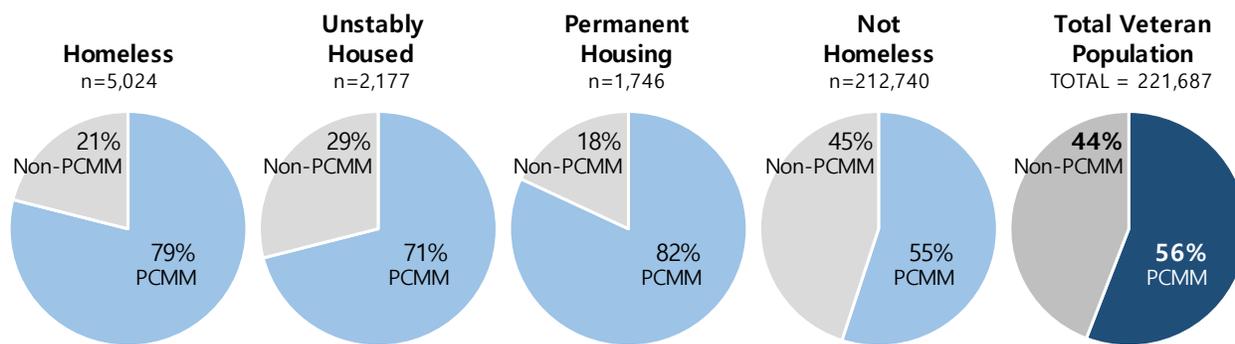


Primary Care Management Module Affiliation

Among Veterans who were experiencing homelessness or housing instability, the majority were enrolled in the PCMM (see Figure 6). Among those who were homeless, 79 percent were PCMM affiliated. 71 percent of those who were unstably housed are PCMM affiliated and 82 percent of those in permanent housing were PCMM affiliated; 56 percent of all Veterans were enrolled in the PCMM.

FIGURE 6.

PCMM Affiliation and Veteran Housing Status

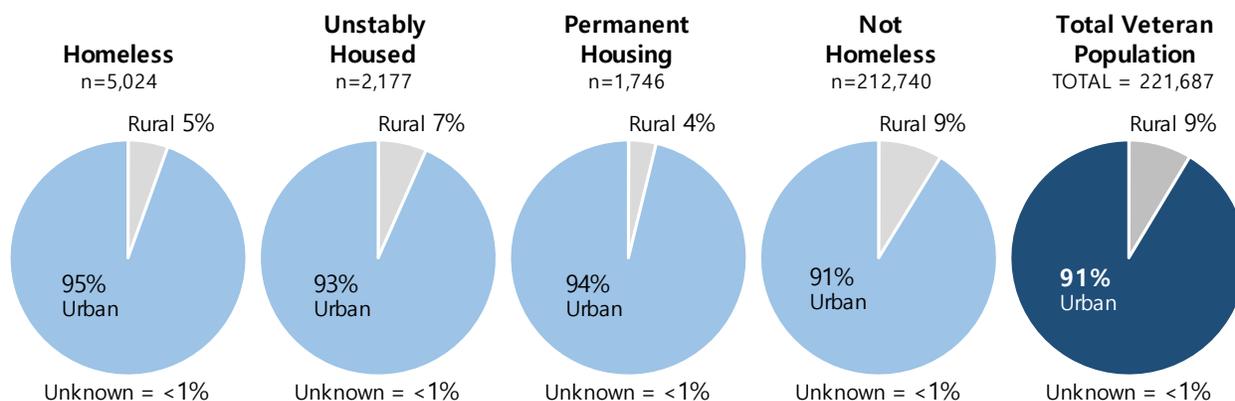


Geography – Urban/Rural

91 percent of all Veterans live in urban ZIP codes (see Figure 4). The proportion is higher for Veterans who were homeless (95 percent urban), unstably housed (93 percent urban), and in permanent housing (96 percent urban).

FIGURE 4.

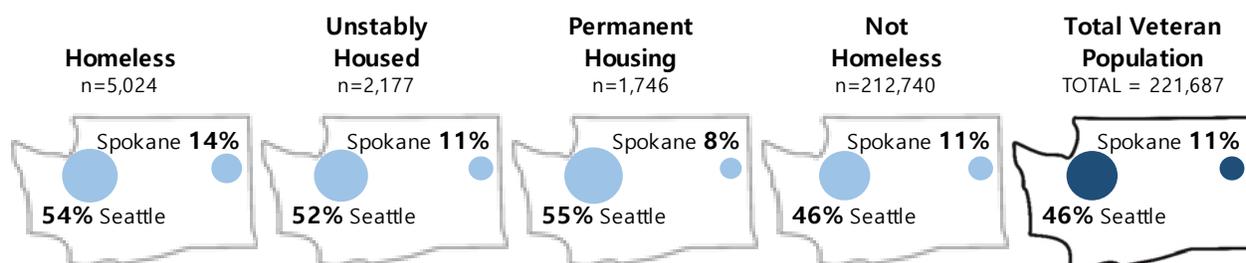
Urban/Rural and Veteran Housing Status



Urbanicity – Seattle Metro Area and Spokane Metro Area.

Given the high percentage of Veterans who lived in urban areas, the two largest urban areas (the Seattle metro area and Spokane metro area) were examined separately. Over half (57 percent) of Veterans in Washington lived in either the Seattle metro area (46 percent) or the Spokane metro area (11 percent) (see Figure 5). However, about two thirds of Veterans who were homeless (68 percent), unstably housed (63 percent), or in permanent housing (63 percent) lived in these areas.

FIGURE 5.
Metro Areas and Veteran Housing Status



Discussion

Overall, results from these analyses show that Veterans were receiving housing and homelessness services from both VHA- and state-administered programs. In addition, the characteristics of those receiving homeless and housing services differ from those of the broader Veteran population. These data highlight a particularly vulnerable subsets of veterans including those aged 45-64 and those who identify as any racial/ethnic minority. PCMM enrollment also varies considerably between the total Veteran population and those who were homeless/unstably housed.

This report also highlights the importance of using multiple data systems to create a more comprehensive picture of homelessness in the Veteran population in Washington State. By looking for indicators of homelessness and housing instability across DSHS, Commerce, and VHA systems, our analyses identified subsets of veterans with housing services needs that were not identified in the VHA HOMES system but were identified in state-systems. When comparing identification of housing instability by PMCC enrollment status, our analyses indicate that participation in PCMM could result in increased connections to needed housing services. Even with PMCC enrollment, a substantial percentage of persons using housing services were identified only in state systems.

Future research on this topic could further examine client characteristics by service source systems (VHA vs. state) to better understand the source of differences noted here. For example, given that non-PCMM Veterans were more likely to be identified by a state system rather than HOMES, are they also more likely to only receive state housing and homelessness services rather than VHA based services? Additional longitudinal analyses could examine where services are initially received, how long services are received, and how frequently there is overlap in services between the state and VHA programs. These types of analyses could help continue to identify differences in how Veterans are accessing needed homelessness and housing instability services.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1.

Detailed Housing Status by PCMM Engagement Status (CY 2018)

NOTE: Veterans can be counted in multiple categories if they received multiple services in CY 2018.

	Source System	Veterans		
		PCMM (n=123,748)	Non-PCMM (n=97,938)	All (n=221,687)
HOMELESS				
Health Care for Homeless Veterans: Case Management. Receipt of case management services for homeless Veterans through the HCHV program.	HOMES	230	34	264
Health Care for Homeless Veterans: Emergency Housing. Placement in emergency housing through the HCHV program.	HOMES	113	13	126
Health Care for Homeless Veterans: Outreach. Outreach services to homeless Veterans through the HCHV program.	HOMES	2,149	287	2,436
Health Care for Homeless Veterans: Contract Residential Treatment. HCHV program which places homeless Veterans with serious mental illness diagnoses into housing.	HOMES	113	13	126
Emergency Housing Shelter. Staying in an emergency shelter.	ACES	**	**	16
Battered Spouse Shelter. Staying in a domestic violence shelter.	ACES	**	**	**
Homeless. Unsheltered.	ACES	564	368	932
Emergency Shelter. Temporary shelter.	HMIS	432	185	617
Safe Haven. Offers supportive housing that serves hard-to-reach homeless persons.	HMIS	**	**	32
Day Shelter. Offers daytime facilities and services for persons who are homeless.	HMIS	98	42	140
Street Outreach. Services necessary to reach out to unsheltered persons.	HMIS	**	**	29
UNSTABLY HOUSED				
Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residence. Engagement in program which provides employment opportunities and therapeutic housing for homeless Veterans who might have behavioral health treatment needs.	HOMES	**	**	50
Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans. Residential rehabilitation and treatment services for Veterans with behavioral health treatment needs who are homeless.	HOMES	**	**	59
Grant and Per Diem. Transitional housing for Veterans.	HOMES	860	136	996
Mental Health Residential and Rehab Treatment: General Program. Residential treatment program (general) for Veterans with co-occurring health conditions and psychosocial needs (homelessness).	HOMES	**	**	13

NOTE: Veterans can be counted in multiple categories if they received multiple services in CY 2018.

	Source System	Veterans		
		PCMM (n=123,748)	Non-PCMM (n=97,938)	All (n=221,687)
Mental Health Residential and Rehab Treatment: PTSD Program. Residential treatment program (general) for Veterans with co-occurring PTSD, health conditions, and psychosocial needs (homelessness).	HOMES	**	**	35
Mental Health Residential and Rehab Treatment: Substance Abuse Program. Residential treatment program (general) for Veterans with co-occurring SUD, health conditions, and psychosocial needs (homelessness).	HOMES	172	15	187
Veterans Justice Outreach. Outreach for homeless, criminal justice system-involved Veterans.	HOMES	494	109	603
Supportive Services for Veteran Families. Provision of services to very low-income Veteran families living in transitional housing.	HOMES	1,260	109	1,557
Unstably housed. Sheltered, but not in own residence (e.g. couch surfing)	ACES	678	419	1,097
Transitional Housing. Temporary lodging designed to facilitate movement of homeless individuals and families into permanent housing.	HMIS	210	64	274
Homelessness Prevention. Services and/or financial assistance to prevent a person from moving into an emergency shelter.	HMIS	238	114	352
PERMANENT HOUSING				
HUD VA Supportive Housing. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development program that combines HUD housing vouchers with supportive services for Veterans experiencing homelessness.	HOMES	2,964	465	3,429
Permanent Housing/Permanent Support Housing. Offers permanent housing and supportive services to assist homeless persons to live independently.	HMIS	907	204	1,111
Rapid Re-Housing. Housing relocation and stabilization services and short- and/or medium-term rental assistance to help a homeless individual or family move as quickly as possible into permanent housing.	HMIS	503	212	715

** = Suppressed due to small numbers.

TECHNICAL NOTES

STUDY DESIGN AND OVERVIEW

This study examines the homelessness service use of Veterans in the state of Washington. In particular, this study focuses on Veterans who may receive services from both the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and other state agencies (such as the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Commerce).

The cohort of Veterans used in these analyses are those who were enrolled with the VHA in CY 2016 (the most recent year of data available for the VHA cohort). The Veterans HOMES data extract contained information on CY 2018 homelessness-related services. Linking procedures were used to identify Veterans who also used state-based housing stability or homelessness services in CY 2018. Analyses were then restricted to Veterans who were not deceased as of December 31, 2018 (n=221,686).

DATA SOURCES AND MEASURES

RDA leveraged data from multiple sources: DSHS Economic Services Administration Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES) data and the Department of Commerce Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data in the DSHS Integrated Client Database (ICDB), the Veterans Health Administration Corporate Data Warehouse, and Homeless Operations and Management Evaluation System (HOMES) data from the VHA Homeless Services Registry.

- **Veteran-specific measures:** Veteran characteristics were derived from the Veterans Health Administration Corporate Data Warehouse.
 - **Demographic characteristics:** Gender, age, race/ethnicity, and zip code of residence were reported for the 2016 cohort of Veterans.
 - **Primary Care Management Module engagement:** Engagement is defined as being enrolled in the VHA Primary Care Management Module (PCMM) in CY 2016. The PCMM is a nation-wide program intended to support both primary care and non-primary care teams to effectively provide health care services to Veterans.
- **Homelessness and housing instability measures:**
 - **HOMES:** Homelessness and housing services provided to Veterans by the VHA are tracked in the HOMES data system. Programs include the Health Care for Homeless Veterans programs, HUD VA Supported Housing, Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residence program, Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans, Grant and Per Diem program, Mental Health Residential and Rehab Treatment programs, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, and Veterans Justice Outreach. While not all of these programs require an individual to be homeless or unstably housed to enroll, participation tracked in the HOMES database does indicate that the program recipient is homeless. Additional information about Veteran housing and homelessness services can be found at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/>.
 - **ACES:** ACES housing status indicators include the following types of housing: batter spouse shelter, emergency housing/shelter, unstably housed, and homeless.
 - **HMIS:** Housing and homelessness services provided by the Department of Commerce are identified in HMIS and include: homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing, emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing, permanent supportive housing, street outreach, Safe Haven, and day shelters.



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