

# *Homelessness among Veterans in Texas*

*A report submitted to the 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature*  
*December 1, 2016*

**Introduction.....6**  
    Reading this Report..... 6  
**Section I: Determine the Definition of Homeless Veteran.....7**  
**Section II: Status of Homeless Veterans in Texas .....8**  
    IIa. Veterans Demographics in Texas ..... 8  
    IIb. Numbers of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness ..... 9  
    IIc. Analysis of 2-1-1 Data for Veterans ..... 11  
    IId. Needs of Veterans ..... 12  
    IIe. Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness..... 14  
**Sections III-IV: Entities Serving and Funding Sources to Serve Veterans Experiencing Homelessness..... 19**  
    III/IV.a. Programs for Veterans Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness ..... 19  
    III/IV.b. Nonprofit Providers..... 20  
**Sections V-VI: Recommendations to Change State Programs/State Law..... 21**  
    1. Increase Partnerships with the Rental Market..... 22  
    2. Identify Veterans, Share Information, and Increase Coordination ..... 22  
    3. Increase Housing and Service Resources ..... 23  
    4. Improve Access to Employment Resources ..... 23  
    5. Improve Access to Mental and Physical Health Resources ..... 23

*Appendix A. Senate Bill 1580*

*Appendix B. Discussion of Veteran and Homeless Definitions*

*Appendix C. Veteran Demographics in Texas*

*Appendix D. Data Sources for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness*

*Appendix E. Texas Point-in-Time Count Analysis*

*Appendix F. 2-1-1 Calls for State Fiscal Years 2012-2015 in Eleven Cities*

*Appendix G. Housing and Service Needs of Veterans*

*Appendix H. Overview of the Mayors Challenge to End Veterans Homelessness*

*Appendix I. Effectively Ending Veteran Homelessness in Houston*

*Appendix J. Mayors Challenge Survey Template*

*Appendix K. Mayors Challenge Survey Responses*

*Appendix L. Programs Used by Persons Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness*

*Appendix M. Programs Specific to Veterans Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness*

*Appendix N. Federal Programs that Address Veteran Homelessness*

*Appendix O. Nonprofit and Government Homeless and Veteran Service Providers in Texas*

*Appendix P. Responses to Online Forum for Recommendations to End Veteran Homelessness*

*Appendix Q. Recommendations from the Public*

*Appendix R. Public input that is not Recommended*

*Appendix S. Bibliography*

## Executive Summary

The 84 (R) Texas Legislative Session's Senate Bill 1580 requires the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs ("TDHCA"), in conjunction with the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless ("TICH") and the Texas Veterans Commission ("TVC") to conduct a study of Veterans experiencing homelessness and submit a report to the Texas Legislature no later than December 1, 2016.

As a result of several initiatives focusing on Veteran homelessness starting in 2010, the overall number of homeless Veterans in Texas has reduced dramatically. Three cities, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin, have achieved the federal benchmarks that would consider them as having effectively ended Veteran homelessness.

However, while much progress has been made, there are still Veterans experiencing homelessness in Texas. The practices used in many Texas cities, as described in this study, demonstrate several successful strategies to reduce Veteran homelessness. In addition, the State reached out to the public to obtain other recommendations on ways to address Veteran homelessness.

### 1. Definition of Homelessness

The definitions used for this study are from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") point-in-time ("PIT") count notice for 2016. The definition of "Veteran" is "adults who have served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty."<sup>1</sup> The homelessness definitions used includes sheltered and unsheltered individuals or families: (1) sheltered individuals or families are "living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals;" and (2) unsheltered individuals or families "with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned buildings, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Status and trends of homeless veterans in Texas

As of 2014, Texas is currently home to 1.68 million Veterans, second in population only to California. Approximately 70% of Texas Veterans live within one of the 25 most populous counties. More Texas Veterans served during earlier periods of service, which increases the average age of the Veteran population.<sup>3</sup> The greater number of Texas Veterans from these earlier periods of service inflates the average age of the Veteran population.

The total number of Veterans experiencing homelessness during the Point-In-Time ("PIT") count in 2016 was 1,768, which has decreased 66% compared to the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in 2010. From an analysis of the 2014, 2015, and 2016 PIT counts of persons

---

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 18, 2015, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs, April 15, 2015.

experiencing homelessness, Veterans experiencing homelessness were more likely than the civilian homeless population to:

- Be male;
- Be older when first becoming homeless, with the median age of 54;
- Experience repeated episodes of homelessness;
- Be single without household members with them;
- Have higher education levels;
- Report sleeping outdoors, as opposed to an Emergency Shelter or Transitional Housing;
- Have from one or more of the following: substance abuse, mental illness, and physical disability;
- Have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (“PTSD”)

For this study, HHSC provided TDHCA with 2-1-1 call data for fiscal years 2013-2015 for callers who identified themselves or a family member as a Veteran with homelessness related needs in eleven Texas cities. Veteran callers of 2-1-1 were mainly male, between the ages of 23-59 years old, and served in the Army (49%).

Identified housing needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness include, but are not limited to: affordable housing; housing with low barrier to entry; emergency shelters that accept children; housing units compatible with family size; greater access to U.S. Veterans Affairs benefits; and approaches to address chronic homelessness. Reasons contributing to Veteran homelessness as found by Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services counselors are lack of income due to limited education and lack of ability to demonstrate transferable skills from military to civilian life; combat-related mental and physical health issues and disabilities; substance abuse; and weak social networks. When Veterans separate from the military, the Texas Veterans Commission found that Veterans need help with a variety of tasks, such as filing a claim with the VA and accessing Veteran education benefits.

As of the winter of 2015, eight Texas cities took the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. A survey of these cities showed trends and successes, such as reaching out to Veterans through Veterans County Service Officers; advertising at food banks/pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters; and reviewing Homeless Management Information System (“HMIS”) data. Houston was the first city in Texas to effectively end Veteran homelessness, as further described in Appendix K. Their strategies included (1) providing immediate access to Permanent Supportive Housing for the most vulnerable chronically homeless Veterans; (2) standardizing assessment at the VA Drop-In Center and allowing daily access to permanent housing; (3) targeting 100% of HUD-VA Supportive Housing (“HUD-VASH”) to chronically homeless Veterans; and (4) preparing for and achieving a steady state through Coordinated Access.

### **3. Description of and funding sources for statewide and major local entities serving homeless veterans**

The primary state agencies providing services to Texas Veterans experiencing homelessness are TVC, Health and Human Services agencies, the Texas Workforce Commission and TDHCA. It should be noted that not all services provided by these agencies are exclusively for Veterans. The primary funders of the services are federal funders, such as U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S.

Department of Education; HUD; U.S. Department of Labor; U.S. Health and Human Services; and U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Additional funders are Texas State General Revenue, Department of Public Safety, Department of Motor Vehicles; and Texas Lottery proceeds from Veteran Scratch-off Tickets.

There are over 800 “parent organizations” providing services to Veterans or persons experiencing homelessness in Texas.

#### **4. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of Texas’ approach to addressing homelessness among veterans.**

To gather input on recommendations, TDHCA reached out to stakeholders in the Veterans communities and the homeless services communities across Texas. TDHCA and the TVC co-hosted two roundtables and TDHCA held an online forum.

During discussions, TICH members noted that several recommendations from the public were already being implemented by the State or other entities in Texas; these recommendations from the public appeared to show the lack of familiarity with existing resources or processes. A comprehensive list of recommendations is compiled in Appendix Q. The public input was categorized into five broad recommendations listed below:

- A. Increase Partnerships with Rental Market
- B. Identify Veterans, Share Information, and Increase Coordination
- C. Increase Housing and Service Resources
- D. Improve Access to Employment Resources
- E. Improve Access to Mental and Physical Health Resources

### **Conclusion**

The number of Veterans who are homeless in Texas has decreased since 2010. Cities across Texas have implemented initiatives to reduce their Veteran Homelessness population and several have succeeded in effectively ending Veteran homelessness. While Texas has a robust network of Veteran’s services, there needs to be more outreach to let Veteran’s know about the services for which they may be eligible and how to access them. Finally, additional resources for Veteran’s services would enable existing network providers to serve more homeless Veterans across Texas.

## **Introduction**

The 84 (R) Texas Legislative Session's Senate Bill 1580, authored by Senator Sylvia Garcia, passed both chambers and was signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott on June 18, 2015. Senate Bill 1580 adds §2306.1101 to the Texas Government Code, which requires the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs ("TDHCA"), in conjunction with the [Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless](#) ("TICH") and the Texas Veterans Commission ("TVC") to conduct a study of Veterans experiencing homelessness. The report generated from the study is due to the Texas Legislature no later than December 1, 2016.

The TICH is a council created by the 74th Texas Legislature to coordinate the state's homeless resources. Per legislation, Tex. Gov't Code, Subchapter KK, the TICH serves as an advisory committee to TDHCA, and TDHCA also provides clerical support to the TICH. The TICH is composed of eleven state agencies and representatives appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House of Representatives. TDHCA has two representatives on the TICH.

### **Reading this Report**

This report is organized as outlined below:

- I. A definition of Veterans experiencing homelessness used for the study
- II. The status of Veterans experiencing homelessness in Texas
- III. Statewide and local entities providing services for Veterans experiencing homelessness
- IV. Funding sources of services for Veterans experiencing homelessness
- V. Recommendations to the State's approach to address Veteran homelessness
- VI. Recommendations to State law to assist Veterans experiencing homelessness

*In accordance with Senate Bill 1580, “The report prepared under this section must...note any significant assumptions made in preparing the report, including, the definition of ‘homelessness’ that was used to prepare the report and the reason the definition was used.”*

## **Section I: Determine the Definition of Homeless Veteran**

For Veterans experiencing homelessness, this study uses the definitions specified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) provided as guidance for the point-in-time (“PIT”) count. These definitions are used because the primary data source for counting homelessness is the PIT, as further provided for in Section II (Status of Homeless Veterans) which includes counts of Veterans experiencing homelessness from three years of PIT counts.

“Veteran” is defined in the 2016 PIT count guidance as “adults who have served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.”<sup>4</sup>

Sheltered homeless populations include “individuals or families ‘living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)’ on the night designated for the count.”<sup>5</sup>

Unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness include “individuals or families ‘with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned buildings, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground’ on the night designated for the count.”<sup>6</sup>

To see a discussion of the different definitions of Veterans or persons experiencing homelessness, see Appendix B.

---

<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 18, 2015, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 17-18.

*In accordance with Senate Bill 1580, “the report prepared under this section must...summarize the status of the homeless Veteran population in this state and note any trends observed in the previous three calendar years.”*

## **Section II: Status of Homeless Veterans in Texas**

For the status of Veterans experiencing homelessness in Texas, this report supplies a short description of Texas Veteran demographics for context, followed by characteristics and the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness from the point-in-time (“PIT”) count for the last three years. To assist in determining the needs of Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, the Health and Human Services Commission (“HHSC”) provided three years worth of data for calls to 2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral Network for persons who identified as Veterans. In addition, various TICH member agency staff provided the status of homeless Veterans by identifying housing needs, assistive and rehabilitative needs, needs when separating from the military, and employment needs. The status of Veterans experiencing homelessness has been impacted by various initiatives taken up in Texas, including the Mayors Challenge to effectively end Veteran homelessness. This report includes a summary of the Mayors Challenge, a survey of the Texas cities that took the Mayors Challenge, as well as results from the City of Houston’s Challenge provided for in Appendices H, J, and K, respectively.

### ***IIa. Veterans Demographics in Texas***

According to VetPop2014, as analyzed by the Texas Veterans Commission (“TVC”), Texas is currently home to 1.68 million Veterans, second in population only to California. While males continue to dominate all branches of service, the number of female Veterans continues to increase steadily. In fiscal year 2015, the population of female Veterans nationwide climbed to 2,035,000. By percentage, female Veterans now represent just over 10% of the total Veteran population of 21,260,534. Texas has seen its population of female Veterans climb sharply as well, up to 180,286 female Veterans in fiscal year 2015, and overtaking California to now boast the largest female Veteran population in the country.<sup>7</sup>

While approximately 70% of Texas Veterans live within one of the 25 most populous counties, the remaining 30%, which represents approximately 503,000 Veterans, live across 229 counties, many of those rural, to very rural, with less than seven persons per square mile.<sup>8</sup>

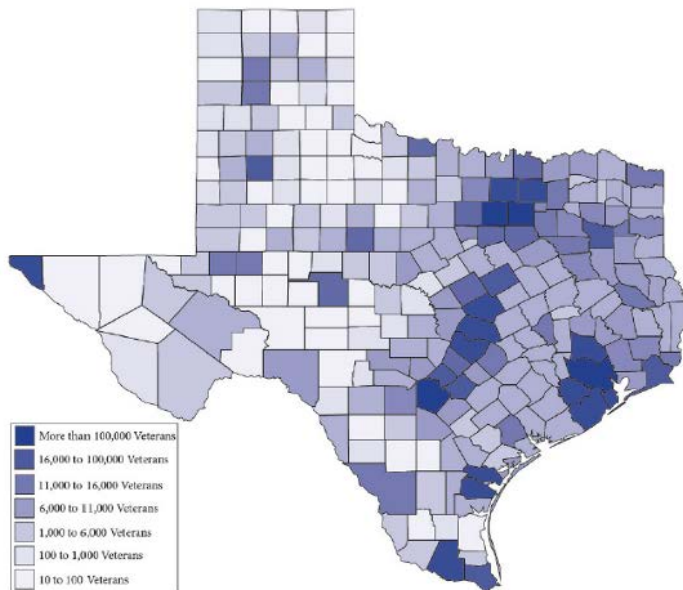
---

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs, April 15, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Texas Workforce Investment Council, December, 2012.



Map 1: VetPop 2014 Number of Veterans in Texas by County



In 2011, Texas Veterans indicated that they served in the following eras of war:

- approximately 47% of the served during Vietnam, Korean, or WWII eras;
- approximately 16% of Texas Veterans served during the Gulf War Era I (August 1990 through August 2001); and
- approximately 15% of Texas Veterans served during the Gulf War Era II (September 2001 and later)
- 22% served in other eras<sup>9</sup>

The significant number of Texas Veterans coming from these earlier periods of service results in a higher average age (60 years old) of the Veteran population. More demographic information on Veterans is provided in Appendix C.

### ***IIb. Numbers of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness***

For a discussion of the different data sources available on homelessness among Veterans, see Appendix D.

On August 1, 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (“VA”), and the United States Interagency Council for the Homeless (“USICH”), announced a nationwide decrease of homelessness among Veterans of 47% since 2010. The three agencies cite the progress as a result of a partnership among stakeholders, the 2010 launch of *Opening Doors*, and the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (“HUD-VASH”) Program. The August 1, 2016, news release focused on the nationwide PIT counts every January, which are required by

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Continuum of Care (“CoC”) member agencies and submitted to HUD.<sup>10</sup> The CoC Program is HUD-funded and “is designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness.”<sup>11</sup>

Texas is composed of 11 CoC regions which jointly cover all Texas counties. All of Texas’ 11 CoC regions conduct PIT counts. In Texas, the 2010 PIT count for Veterans experiencing homelessness was 5,133<sup>12</sup>; the 2016 PIT count for Veterans experiencing homelessness was 1,768. In Texas, the change between the 2010 and 2016 PIT counts represented a decrease of 66%.<sup>13</sup>

For this study, the PIT count data for 2014, 2015, and 2016 in Texas was analyzed by the Texas Homeless Network, a private nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide solutions to end homelessness in Texas communities. A summary of the process for analyzing the PIT data, along with more detailed results, is provided in Appendix E.

While Veterans from all demographics can experience homelessness, a list of common demographics found in three years’ worth of PIT data found that Veterans experiencing homelessness:

- Were white males in their mid-50s;
- Were more likely to have served in one of the Gulf area conflicts than in Vietnam;
- Became homeless in their mid-40s;
- Had been homeless for a year;
- Had been unemployed for a year;
- Were more likely to be sleeping outdoors than in a shelter; and
- Were slightly more likely to be located in a major metropolitan city than in Texas’ rural and mid-sized cities.

From three years worth of PIT data, it was found that Veterans experiencing homelessness and civilians experiencing homelessness had some similar characteristics:

- The overwhelming reason given for becoming homeless is a lack of affordable housing;
- For racial categories, two-thirds were white and one-quarter were African-American;\*
- For ethnicity, one-quarter were Hispanic;\*
- Slightly less than two-thirds of the respondents indicated they were unemployed;
- One-third of respondents indicated they were working full-time, part-time, or in temporary jobs;
- Less than half reported a separate instance of homelessness in the past 12 months; and
- One in five respondents reported experiencing physical or sexual violence.

\*Note: Races and ethnicities are not exclusive; For example, a respondent could be African-American and Hispanic.

---

<sup>10</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, August 1, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, October, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.1.

Also from the three years worth of PIT data, it was found that Veterans experiencing homelessness and civilians experiencing homelessness had some different characteristics. Veterans experiencing homelessness were more likely to:

- Be male;
- Be older when first becoming homeless, with the median age of 54;
- Experience repeated episodes of homelessness;
- Be single without household members with them;
- Have higher education levels;
- Report sleeping outdoors, as opposed to an Emergency Shelter or Transitional Housing;
- Has one or more of the following: substance abuse, mental illness, and physical disability; and
- Have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (“PTSD”).

### *IIc. Analysis of 2-1-1 Data for Veterans*

The Texas Information and Referral Network (“TIRN”) exists as a formal, comprehensive, and statewide service that provides Texans with information about a variety of health and human services and provides specific referrals to local service providers. In Texas, calling 2-1-1 provides a menu of options and the TIRN is responsible for handling calls related to community resource information and referrals, the Emergency Assistance Registry (which callers use to register their participation in evacuations and other emergency responses), and disaster response (only available during specific disaster situations).

For this study, HHSC provided TDHCA with 2-1-1 call data for fiscal years 2013-2015 (specifically September 2012 to August 2015) for callers who identified themselves or a family member as a Veteran with homelessness related needs. Only cities that were listed in of the winter of 2015 as having taken the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness were included in the data retrieved from 2-1-1. Call specialists ask and record all 2-1-1 callers’ age, ZIP code, gender, and military status. Military Status determination sometimes refers to a family member of the caller so caution should be considered in using this demographic data.

A total of 6,564 calls were received in 2013; 6,870 calls were received in 2014; and 5,604 calls were received in 2015 for a total of 19,038 calls for a caller or family member reporting having served in the military. The total number of calls increased slightly in 2014, with 306 more calls, but then decreased in 2015 by 18.4%. The majority of callers who identified themselves as Veterans were male (10,423) compared to female (8,596).

HHSC separated out the three years of 2-1-1 call data by city. Listed in the table below is the total number of calls for each of 11 cities identified by HUD as taking part in the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. Of the city data gathered, the vast majority of calls were in the urban regions of the state with Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio, accounting for 90% of the calls.

**Table: 2-1-1 Calls by City**

City	Veteran Calls	Total Veteran Population 18 years and older*	Percent of Veterans Calling 2-1-1
Austin	1,899	38,358	5%
Corpus Christi	299	25,059	1%
Crystal City	4	205	2%
Dallas	2,834	47,544	6%
El Paso	795	44,734	2%
Fort Worth	2,175	43,115	5%
Garland	306	10,798	3%
Houston	5,500	80,369	7%
Plano	152	13,275	1%
San Antonio	4,852	107,466	5%
Waco	222	7,123	3%

\*American Community Survey, 2010-2014

While data should be interpreted with caution as some of the ages may be the ages of a Veteran’s family member, most callers (74.5%) were between the ages of 23 and 59 years. The next largest group (22%) of callers was between the ages of 60-84. Callers ages 19-22 were 1.8%, and callers over age 85 years accounted for 1.2% of the calls.

The majority of callers who identified themselves as Veterans also provided the branch of military in which they served. Almost one-half (49%) of the callers reported they served in the Army, versus those who reported they served in the Navy (13.8%). The number of callers who said they served in the Marine Corps was 7.6%, and those who identified as serving in the National Guard and Cost Guard accounted for 2.3% and .4% of the callers respectively. For more charts from 2-1-1 between 2013 and 2015, see Appendix F.

***II.d. Needs of Veterans***

There is not one specific reason for Veteran homelessness. Veterans come from all walks of life, with a variety of demographic characteristics as described in Appendix C and E. Just as there is not one “typical” Veteran, there is not one “typical” Veteran experiencing homelessness. A discussion of the housing needs of Veterans is included in Appendix G.

There are several identified housing needs for Veterans experiencing homelessness. It should be recognized that the list below is not exhaustive. Individual Veterans exhibit unique needs that should be taken into account when providing housing or services. Identified housing needs for Veterans include the following:

- Affordable housing, which may address Veterans that earned lower pay grades pre-discharge;
- Housing with low barrier to entry, such as landlords or property managers that will accept persons with criminal backgrounds or with poor credit history, on a case-by-case basis;
- Emergency shelters that accept children;
- Housing units compatible with family size;

- Greater access to VA benefits such as housing, including recognition of mental health needs which may have led to an other-than-honorable or dishonorable discharge, and possible reversal of the discharge status
  - note: an “other-than honorable discharge” is a discharge that is not honorable for reasons such as “security violations, use of violence, conviction by a civilian court with a sentence including prison time, or being found guilty of adultery in a divorce hearing”<sup>14</sup>
- Approaches to address chronic homelessness including:
  - Housing First, which does not require sobriety, income, medication requirements, or bio-psychosocial assessments prior to placement in the unit.<sup>15</sup>
  - Housing with access to services. These services could include mental health care associated with deployment, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse, and sexual trauma. An example would be HUD-VA Supportive Housing (“HUD-VASH”), which provides rental assistance for Veterans experiencing homelessness with case management and clinical services provided by the VA.<sup>16</sup>

Through ongoing efforts working with Texas veterans, Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (“DARS”) counselors have identified several reasons contributing to Veteran homelessness, including:

1. A direct correlation between lack of income due to limited education and lack of ability to demonstrate transferable skills from military to civilian life (especially true of younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan);
2. Combat-related physical health issues and disabilities;
3. Combat-related mental health issues and disabilities;
4. Substance abuse problems that negatively impact job retention; and
5. Weak social networks due to problems adjusting to civilian life.

According to the Texas Veterans Commission, upon leaving the military, a Veteran may need services such as:

- Assistance with filing a claim with the VA;
- Using Veteran education benefits;
- Finding on-the-job training opportunities;
- Finding employment;
- Starting or growing a business;
- Getting housing assistance;
- Accessing healthcare;
- Getting counseling for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury;
- Finding family and child services;
- Finding referrals to other services;
- Getting into a Veterans’ Retirement Home; and
- Accessing burial, health, and life insurance benefits.

It should be noted that VetConnect of North Texas recently completed a comprehensive needs

---

<sup>14</sup> G.I. Jobs, November 15, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> United States Interagency Council for the Homeless, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, May 16, 2016.

assessment for Veterans in north Texas. The report, released in March 2016, is called “Needs Assessment: Veterans in the Dallas – Fort Worth Region” and can be found online at <http://vetconnectntx.org/>. Research was conducted between August 2015 and February 2016, and resulted in analysis on the Veteran demographics, federal Veteran expenditures, health care, and a variety of other topics.<sup>17</sup>

### ***IIe. Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness***

In June 2014, USICH launched its initiative of a Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, which encouraged mayors and other state and local leaders to commit to end Veteran homelessness in their cities in 2015.<sup>18</sup> The Mayors Challenge is highlighted in this study because it was the largest and most nationally recognized initiative regarding homelessness among Veterans during the timeline of this study, though there were several other co-reinforcing initiatives to end Veteran homelessness between 2010 and 2016. Houston was the first city in Texas to effectively end Veteran homelessness in June 2015. During the course of this study, San Antonio met the benchmarks to effectively end Veteran homelessness in May 2016. For an overview of the Mayors Challenge, see Appendix H.

As of the winter of 2015, eight Texas cities participated in the Mayor’s Challenge. (As of summer 2016, the number of Texas cities taking part in the Mayors’ Challenge rose to eleven.<sup>19</sup>) As part of the study on Veteran Homelessness, HHSC Strategic Decision Support Division conducted a survey designed by the TICH Veteran Workgroup to assess local efforts to end Veteran homelessness in Texas. The survey was sent to one contact person, generally a city government employee, in each of the eight Texas cities participating in the Challenge. Participating cities as of the winter of 2015 included Austin, Crystal City, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, Plano, San Antonio, and Waco. City government employees in each city were notified about the upcoming survey by phone and mail in early 2016. In late February 2016, each city was sent a link to complete the survey online.

All but Crystal City responded to the survey. Listed below are the major findings. See Appendix I to view all of the results and Appendix J to view the survey tool.

1. Five of the cities responded that they keep a list of Veterans experiencing homelessness (a.k.a. a “by name list”) who live in their city.
2. The most common methods used by cities to identify Veterans to educate them about Veteran services are:
  - a. Working with Veterans Services Officers in their county
  - b. Advertising at food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens
  - c. Advertising to Veterans within homeless shelter
  - d. Reviewing their Homeless Management Information System (“HMIS”) monthly
3. Cities reported that on average it was about 90 days between identification of the homeless Veteran and housing them permanently.

---

<sup>17</sup> Kidder, March, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.4.

<sup>19</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, May, 2016.

4. Six of seven cities reported that they had implemented a coordinated assessment, *i.e.*, no-wrong door approach to services.
5. Costs: San Antonio reported they spent \$12.7 million on the challenge which included federal, city, and grant funding. Fort Worth spends \$2 million annually on homeless issues (the respondent did not clarify if that is specific to Veterans or the general homeless population). Austin raised \$393,000 of private funds to address barriers and provide new support for the effort.
6. Five of the cities responded that they are participating in other programs/initiatives/activities to address Veteran homelessness in addition to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.
7. The most common service the cities reported providing or referring Veterans to were:
  - a. Mental health services
  - b. Legal services
  - c. Job training
  - d. Food or other subsistence need
  - e. Case management
8. Three of the seven cities provided a housing continuum, which could include:
  - a. Emergency Shelter
  - b. Housing First model (described under II.d. “Housing Needs” above)
  - c. Permanent Supportive Housing  
(According to the USICH, “Supportive housing is implemented in a range of models that respond to the needs and preferences of people experiencing homelessness and the communities in which housing opportunities are created... Services in supportive housing are flexible and participation is voluntary. They focus on ensuring housing stability as a foundation for addressing needs related to mental health, substance use, health, and employment.”<sup>20</sup> Permanent Supportive Housing is supportive housing that does not have a time limit.)
  - d. Rapid Re-housing  
(According to the USICH, “Rapid re-housing provides supportive services and/or time-limited financial assistance to help a household quickly secure housing, including move-in assistance, short- or medium-term rental assistance, and supports to address barriers to long-term housing stability including connections to employment.”<sup>21</sup>)
  - e. Safe Haven  
(According to HUD, “Safe Haven, as defined in the Supportive Housing Program, is a form of supportive housing that serves hard-to-reach homeless persons with severe mental illness who come primarily from the streets and have been unable or unwilling to participate in housing or supportive services.”<sup>22</sup>)
  - f. Transitional Housing

---

<sup>20</sup> 2015, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> 2015, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, October, 2012.

(According to the USICH, “Transitional Housing programs have traditionally been used to provide services to people experiencing homelessness to prepare them to move into permanent housing... Transitional housing may also benefit certain households who need more time in a program while they work to overcome severe challenges that they face identifying and securing permanent housing.”<sup>23</sup>)

9. All cities used the PIT counts to measure progress toward their goals.
10. Six of the seven cities reported using street outreach to also measure progress.
11. Cities reported that the top five barriers to Veterans receiving services were:
  - a. Incarceration
  - b. Criminal record
  - c. Screening criteria for rental housing
  - d. Denial of service
  - e. Experiencing mental health disorders other than PTSD

### *Effectively Ending Veteran Homelessness in Houston*

Houston was the first city in Texas to announce that it had effectively ended Veteran homelessness, which was announced by former Houston Mayor Annise Parker in June 2015. TDHCA and TVC visited Houston in August 2015 to report on the path Houston took in various federal initiatives, including the 25 Cities Effort and the Mayors Challenge, which culminated in success. A short history of TDHCA's and TVC's findings in Houston is included in Appendix K. The strategies used in Houston's plan called *The Way Home* are included below:

1. “Immediate access to Permanent Supportive Housing for the Most Vulnerable Chronically Homeless Veterans”<sup>24</sup>

Permanent Supportive Housing is described under the survey responses from the cities that took part in the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. Houston also offered permanent supportive housing with the Housing First Model, which does not require sobriety, income, medication requirements, or bio-psychosocial assessments. The Way Home had to demonstrate to private landlords what case management meant in this instance in order to build a relationship with landlords. Since Housing First housed higher risk tenants, The Way Home held landlord events and leasing events in which The Way Home explained that the liability for the Veteran was on the service or housing provider, mitigating the risk to the landlord. The service or housing providers made themselves available to the landlord at all times for any issues that arose from the Veteran using Housing First.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the VA Drop-In Center developed a system of peer supports so that Veterans could support other Veterans, providing supplemental support.<sup>26</sup>

Houston used many housing options, including HUD-VASH vouchers, Public Housing Authority (“PHA”) vouchers, PHA housing, CoC-funded housing, Grant per Diem (“GPD”), and affordable housing through federal and state funding.<sup>27</sup> Many of these programs are described in Part III/IV

---

<sup>23</sup> 2015, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, June, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Grier, August 28, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, August 27, 2015

<sup>27</sup> Grier, November, 2014.



(Local Entities and Funding Sources) of this study. Affordable housing offers reduced-rent apartments and is funded through many programs administered through HUD, VA, TDHCA, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Affordable housing is paired with services in order to make the housing supportive.

2. “Standardize Assessment at the VA Drop-In Center and Allow Daily Access to Permanent Housing”<sup>28</sup>

Houston’s coordinated access used the Homeless Management Information System (“HMIS”) as an alert and connection tool to flag Veterans experiencing homelessness and connect them with the needed resources from the response system. HMIS is used by HUD-funded homeless service providers. The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (“SSVF”) providers and PHAs participated in data sharing with the HMIS in order to participate with coordinated access.<sup>29</sup> The VA Drop-In Center was integrated into coordinated access, and staff members from the PHAs, SSVF, and CoCs were located at the VA-Drop-In Center.<sup>30</sup> In addition, coordinated access was made available through Stand Down events.<sup>31</sup> Stand Down events, hosted by the VA and various government groups, occur for one to three days, and provide supplies and services to Veterans experiencing homelessness.<sup>32</sup> In order to fully implement coordinated access, The Way Home created teams with four to five social workers, one housing specialist, and one Veteran peer support specialist. Each team was responsible for approximately 130 clients.<sup>33</sup>

3. Identify the Remaining Unsheltered Veterans and Target 100% of HUD-VASH to Chronically Homeless Veterans.<sup>34</sup>

The Way Home held monthly HUD-VASH briefings, pulling together all service providers in one location, including SSVF, employment, fair market property owners, PHAs, and the VA.<sup>35</sup> Through streamlining The Way Home’s processes and combining resources from its member agencies, HUD-VASH vouchers were often able to be issued the same day as the Veteran’s assessment.<sup>36</sup> By the end of 2012, more than 680 formerly homeless Veterans were permanently housed.<sup>37</sup>

Eva Thibaudeau, Director of Programs for the Coalition for the Homeless at Houston/Harris County (“CFTH”), related that The Way Home worked to use the community’s resources wisely. For example, a private source of funds was used for “barrier busting,” which paid landlords up to double deposits in order to house Veterans with criminal records or evictions. The barrier-busting fund was used for deposits and application fees instead of the HUD-VASH vouchers, preserving the HUD-VASH funding to subsidize monthly rent.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, June, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Grier, November, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, June, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Grier, November, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> United States Department of Labor, n.d.

<sup>33</sup> Morris, August 27, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, June, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Grier, November, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, n.d.

<sup>38</sup> Thibaudeau, August 27, 2015.

In addition, Houston has a Veterans' Court Program that works to: "increase access to mental health and addictions treatment for those Veterans with felony and misdemeanor offenses by diverting Veterans directly into VA treatment, reducing jail time, costs, and criminal recidivism, while improving mental health recovery and successful re-entry into the community."<sup>39</sup> Many Veterans are diverted from the court system into the Veterans' Court Program; these Veterans do not establish a criminal record, which helps them better pass background checks to be able enter into a lease if they receive HUD-VASH.<sup>40</sup>

To use HUD-VASH, relationships with landlords of market-rate units and property managers of affordable housing played a vital role. While many different federal funders supported efforts of The Way Home, one affordable housing development opportunity in particular opened when The Way Home was focused on the third strategy of using 100% of its HUD-VASH vouchers. Through its competitive Housing Tax Credit ("HTC") competition, TDHCA awarded Cloudbreak Communities \$1,374,101 in HTCs, which may be syndicated once a year for 10 years to fund affordable housing. Cloudbreak Communities is a for-profit company with a mission is to develop supportive housing for homeless, formerly homeless, and at-risk Veterans. The HTC award was issued in July 2010, and after the construction phase, the development started leasing in 2013 offering 192 units of affordable housing with supportive services. Since TDHCA affordable housing accepts PHA or HUD-VASH vouchers, Travis Street Plaza, a Cloudbreak Communities Property, was able to help The Way Home use the HUD-VASH vouchers. In April 2013, Travis Street Plaza was approximately 21% occupied, and by December 2013, it was 95% occupied.

#### 4. "Prepare for and Achieve Steady State through Coordinated Access"<sup>41</sup>

In Houston's annual PIT count in January 2015, volunteers identified 563 Veterans experiencing homelessness.<sup>42</sup> The team matched HMIS and VA data, strengthened coordinated access for Veterans, and noted that the volume of Vets seeking assistance had dramatically declined at shelters, drop-ins, and outreach. With the increased collaboration between housing and service agencies, additional funding through HUD-VASH and SSVF, and use of affordable housing developments, Houston announced it effectively ended Veteran homelessness in June 2015. Effectively ending Veteran homelessness does not mean that there is not a Veteran experiencing homelessness in Houston; it means that Houston has a coordinated, systematic response, with identified resources to provide housing options to those Veterans within a certain time period, such as 30 days. Houston now works to hold "steady state," a system that maintains equilibrium even through changes. The Way Home works to make sure that number of Veterans who face homelessness each year equal the number of available housing units based on historical turnover of HUD-VASH, SSVF, and CoC.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Harris County District Courts, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Morris, August 27, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, n.d.

<sup>42</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014b.

<sup>43</sup> The Housing News Network, June, 2013.

*In accordance with Senate Bill 1580, “based on input from the Texas Veterans Commission and the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless, describe the statewide and major local entities serving homeless Veteran populations, and the funding sources of those entities.”*

### **Sections III-IV: Entities Serving and Funding Sources to Serve Veterans Experiencing Homelessness**

For the statewide and local entities that provide funding sources and services for Veterans, this study includes a list of state programs that assist persons experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, as well as programs that have specific set-asides for Veterans. In addition, federal programs that were specific to Veterans experiencing homelessness are also detailed. To determine nonprofit organizations serving Veterans or homeless populations, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (“TDHCA”) received data from TexVet.org and purchased data from OneStar Foundation. The Health and Human Services (“HHSC”) Strategic Decision Support analyzed the nonprofit data to determine which counties did not have any Veteran services or any homeless services.

State agencies that were members of the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (“TICH”) were asked to determine (1) which of its services or programs were appropriate to be used by Veterans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, though not exclusive to Veterans, and (2) which of its services or programs were appropriate to Veterans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness that had set-asides or preferences for Veterans.

#### ***III/IV.a. Programs for Veterans Experiencing or At-Risk of Homelessness***

The tables in Appendix L and Appendix M were completed by state agencies that are members of the TICH. The table in Appendix L lists programs that are appropriate for, and are available to, Veterans experiencing or a-risk of homelessness, but are not specifically limited to Veterans. State agencies that run those programs are Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (“TDHCA”), Texas Health and Human Service agencies, Texas Workforce Commission (“TWC”). Funding sources of these programs are:

1. Texas State General Revenue
2. U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”)
3. U.S. Department of Education (“DOE”)
4. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”)
5. U.S. Department of Labor (“DOL”)
6. U.S. Health and Human Services (“HHS”)
7. U.S. Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”)

The table in Appendix M shows programs that have set asides or preferences for Veterans experiencing or a-risk of homelessness. State agencies that run those programs are TDHCA, HHSC, TWC, TVC, and DSHS (which is now HHSC). The funding sources for programs with set-asides or preferences are included in the list of funding above, as well as Texas donations through Department of Public Safety, Department of Motor Vehicles; and Texas Lottery proceeds from Veteran Scratch-off Tickets.

In addition to federal sources that funnel funds through state agencies, there are also many programs specific to addressing Veterans experiencing homelessness offered directly to local agencies (such as

Public Housing Authorities) from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”), HUD or Department of Labor (“DOL”). These include HUD-VA Supportive Housing (“HUD-VASH”); Stand-Down Events; Domiciliary Care; Health Care for Homeless Veterans; Homeless Mobile Medical/Mental Veterans Outreach; Project Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education, and Networking Groups (“CHALENG”); Community Resource and Referral Centers; Health Care for Homeless Veterans Emergency Housing and Contract Residential; Grant Per Diem; Compensated Work Therapy Transitional Residences; Peer Housing Location Assistance Groups; Homeless Women Veterans Program; Vocational Rehabilitation (Formerly Compensated Work Therapy); Supportive Services for Veteran Families (“SSVF”), and Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (“HVRP”). Descriptions of these programs are provided in Appendix N.

### ***III/IV.b. Nonprofit Providers***

In 2015, TDHCA gathered information on nonprofit service providers from major Texas and national nonprofit databases, including TexVet.org, 2-1-1, and GuideStar. For a description of the databases, and tables showing the service providers, see Appendix O. While some governmental providers were included in the databases, primarily the data consisted of nonprofits. The HHSC Strategic Decision Support Division worked with the raw data to de-duplicate and identify locations for each provider. They found that in 2015 there were 83 counties with no homeless services and 106 counties with no Veteran services listed in the dataset.

There were over 800 “parent organizations” listed as providing services to Veterans or persons experiencing homelessness. “Parent organizations” are larger organizations that have satellites or branch offices. Examples of larger nonprofit providers that have parent organizations and provide Veteran or homelessness assistance were as follows:

- American Legion;
- American Red Cross;
- Catholic Charities;
- Community Development Corporations;
- Independent School Districts;
- The Salvation Army;
- VA Health Care Systems;
- Veteran County Service Officers;
- Veterans of Foreign Wars;
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc;
- Workforce Solutions;
- Wounded Warrior Programs; and
- Young Men Christian Organizations (“YMCA”) or Young Women Christian Organizations (“YWCA”).

*In accordance with Senate Bill 1580, “the report prepared under this section must...provide recommendations, including recommendations made by the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless, to improve the effectiveness of this state’s approach to addressing homelessness among Veterans, including any recommended changes to state law.”*

## **Sections V-VI: Recommendations to Change State Programs/State Law**

Recommendations to changes in State Programs and State Law were gathered from the public through two roundtables and an online forum. The recommendations received were vetted through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (“TDHCA”) senior staff, Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (“TICH”) Veteran Workgroup, and the TICH members. During the vetting process, it was noted that several recommendations from the public were already being accomplished in Texas, possibly suggesting a need for outreach and education regarding existing resources or processes. Through the vetting process, five overarching recommendations emerged.

Stakeholders in the Veterans communities and the homeless services communities were asked for input to provide recommendations to end Veteran homelessness. TDHCA and the TVC co-hosted two roundtables: one at the Texas Conference on Ending Homelessness on October 15, 2015, and one at the Texas Veterans Commission Summit on February 4, 2016. The Texas Conference on Ending Homelessness is an annual conference which in 2015 was held in Corpus Christi and presented by the Texas Homeless Network (“THN”), Region 10 Education Service Center, and the Texas Homeless Education Office (“THEO”). TDHCA and TVC facilitated a discussion with approximately 75 attendees, though only 37 attendees signed into the event. The Texas Veterans Commission Summit was held in Bryan/College Station and hosted by Texas A&M University. Approximately 55 people attended and signed into the event. Attendees included Veterans, service providers, housing providers, and apartment associations.

Attendees were seated together based on the geographic areas that most closely matched their home in Texas. When the attendees were divided into small groups, staff facilitated discussion requesting the following:

- Describe the Veterans who were experiencing homelessness in their communities;
- Think of success stories for effectively ending Veteran homelessness in their communities, and determine if their identified successes could be used Statewide;
- Identify existing gaps or needs in programs or services that are preventing the end of Veteran homelessness, and determine how those gaps or needs could be filled.

The roundtables discussed issues relevant to state and federal programs and policies. Recommendations focused on federal programs, such as expanding the Veterans Affairs’ Compensated Work Therapy Program, are not included in this study. Because this is a study to the Texas State Legislature, the recommendations to change federal programs and policies are not addressed, except where the State could affect the implementation of the federal programs.

Along with the two roundtables, TDHCA hosted an online forum starting from March 9, 2016. The forum introduction presented its purpose as follows:

“Through this Online Forum, TDHCA is seeking expertise and experience from Homeless Services Providers, Veterans Service Providers, and other interested stakeholders on how to end Veteran

homelessness in Texas. Accordingly, TDHCA aims to answer the following questions:

1. What changes can be made to improve the effectiveness of Texas' approach to addressing homelessness among Veterans?
2. What recommendations to state law would better address homelessness among Veterans?"

Due to a significant amount of participation, TDHCA extended the online forum an additional week so that the forum ended on April 13, 2016, instead of April 6, 2016. TDHCA received over 60 recommendations; information on local initiatives; barriers, gaps and needs; or success stories of Veterans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. The online forum is included in Appendix P of this report.

The recommendations received from the public were grouped by topic and summarized and then vetted through TDHCA staff, the TICH Veteran Workgroup, and the TICH members. Recommendations were discussed at the April, July, and September TICH quarterly meetings, along with a specially-called TICH meeting in November 2016. The TICH Veteran Workgroup met between each TICH quarterly meeting.

During discussions, TICH members noted that several recommendations from the public were already being accomplished by the State or other entities in Texas; these recommendations from the public appeared to show a lack of familiarity with existing resources or processes. Outreach or expansion of services or programs already in place may satisfy these recommendations. For a complete list of recommendations from the public including considerations from the TICH, see Appendix Q. Public input received, but not recommended, is listed in Appendix R.

Based on input from the TDHCA staff, the TICH Veteran Workgroup, and the TICH members, recommendations are grouped into the categories below. A few examples are listed for each category.

**1. *Increase Partnerships with the Rental Market***

Examples of recommendations from the public:

- Educate landlords and property managers on resources available to assist them in housing Veterans with housing barriers.
- Provide a source of funds to be made available to landlords for any damages to the property caused by a tenant who is a Veteran who formerly experienced homelessness.
- Past debts and problematic rental history should not automatically disqualify prospective tenants.

**2. *Identify Veterans, Share Information, and Increase Coordination***

Examples of recommendations from the public:

- Agencies should uniformly assess military service by asking “Did you serve in the military?” instead of the more commonly-asked question, “Are you a Veteran?”

- Outreach to increase the use of 2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral Network (“TIRN”) by both service and housing providers and Veterans and their families.
- Build on the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness to bring stakeholders together, including the social service and housing community, to better Coordinate Veteran Services.

**3. *Increase Housing and Service Resources***

Examples of recommendations from the public:

- Increase funding for housing assistance, such as developing more affordable housing units, rent for rapid re-housing of persons experiencing homelessness, housing counseling, rental application fees, and rental deposits.
- Consider using a “Housing First” model.
- Continue to incentivize existing affordable housing developers to set aside units for Veterans wherever possible.

**4. *Improve Access to Employment Resources***

Examples of recommendations from the public:

- Better match the experience of Veterans with job qualifications.
- Assist Veterans with improving their interview skills.
- Stricter enforcement of the American with Disabilities Act and Reasonable Accommodations in regards to hiring practices

**5. *Improve Access to Mental and Physical Health Resources***

Examples of recommendations from the public:

- Address the violence and victimization that the Veteran experienced while homeless, as well as post service-related trauma.
- Create incentives or motivations for Veterans to enter rehabilitation programs, despite the perceived stigma of the treatments.
- Ensure Veterans have access to both short- and long-term treatment options.

As noted earlier the comprehensive list of all recommendations, including considerations to be made when contemplating those recommendations, are found in Appendix Q.