

Veterans

Veterans are men and women 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. Increasingly more attention has been paid to veterans due to the high visibility of recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq although veterans from the Gulf War, Vietnam, and Korea also have a strong presence in the Puget Sound Region. As in past conflicts, many veterans who are returning to their homes and communities are bringing with them physical, emotional and psychological scars. Many of these issues extend beyond the capacity of the services that formally designated veterans’ agencies, such as the federal Veterans Administration (VA), Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) or the King County Veterans Program (KCVP), are able to provide. Increasingly, these veterans’ organizations are forging effective partnerships with community-based human services agencies to provide outreach and other needed resources.

What’s Working?

- In 2005, voters in King County passed a Veterans and Human Services Levy, which makes \$13 million annually available (\$6.5 million for each). These funds provide a variety of services addressing the needs of veterans and their families, including support services for housing through Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council and expanding satellite sites for the King County Veterans Program at WorkSource Redmond and Lake Washington Technical College in Kirkland. The Levy also provided some funding for Imagine Housing (formerly known as St. Andrew’s Housing Group) and St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church to build Andrew’s Glen, a housing complex in Bellevue that provides 20 new units for vets transitioning out of home-

lessness: 10 for supportive housing and 10 for individuals and families needing reduced rent. The WDVA and the KCVP have partnered to co-fund some programs with State and Levy monies, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Counseling.¹ In August 2011, the Levy was renewed by the voters for another six years, which will generate about \$16 million annually.

- Bellevue College supports veterans and their families through a number of programs. Staff from the Veteran’s Office, Financial Aid, assists veterans in activating their benefits under the GI Bills to attend school, and Project Succeed, funded through a grant from Microsoft, helps vets and their families find employment, explore career options and network with employers. The college also provides referrals to resources, such as counseling and housing.
- To address the gap in knowledge about vets issues, such as PTSD, vet’s “culture” and services available from the VA and WDVA, over the past two years, staff from KCVP have initiated a number of forums for non-profit human services providers countywide, including several in East King County.

Prevalence

- According to the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS), there are 21,854,374 veterans in the United States; 20,374,557 are men, and 1,479,817 are women. The 2009 ACS estimated that 585,202 veterans are living in Washington State; 92% are men and 8% women.²
- According to available data, the total number of veterans in King County is declining. The 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that there are approximately 131,000 veterans in King County, out of a total population of about

1.9 million persons (7 percent of the population), and is made up of approximately 123,000 men and 8,000 women veterans. This is down from 2000, when the census estimated the veteran population at 163,815 or 9.43 percent of King County's overall population. The overall decline in male veterans is based on the large number of veterans age 65 and over, and less recruitment as the US shifted from the draft to an all volunteer military.³

- The proportion of veterans who are persons of color has increased in the county; nearly 27% of male veterans under age 35 are people of color. Among women, while only 11% over age 55 are people of color, 22% of those under age 54 are people of color.⁴
- In 2009, about two thirds of all veterans live outside of Seattle. Those who were disabled due to war live primarily in South King County and those who are poor and disabled live either in Seattle or South King County. Almost 30,000 vets (23%) reside

in East King County, compared to 20% as estimated by the 2007 ACS.⁵

- According to the 2009 ACS, in Bellevue, 7,133 people are veterans. Of those, almost one third (31.3%) served in Vietnam, and 21% served in World War II. The largest age group represented are those 55-75+ years (54%), with those 18-34 years old the smallest (3%).⁶

Service Trends

Increase in Number of Older Vets

- Over the next twenty years, the number of veterans over age 65 in Washington State will remain stable, but there will be a sharp rise (35%) in veterans ages 85 and over. The U.S. Department of Defense estimates the number of vets in this age group in Washington State to be 33,000. There will likely be increased demands for long-term care, including hospice and Alzheimer's care, supportive housing, mental health and substance abuse treatment. The effects of this rapidly growing population are

reflected in the fill levels of Washington Veterans' Homes, which have experienced occupancy rates between 95-100% for the last 8 years. These Homes report that 95% of their residents are medically indigent.⁷

- In King County, about one-third (36%) of veterans living here are from the Vietnam War era, and one-fifth are from the Second World War and Korea war eras. As a result, there are more men in the 65-74 year age group who are veterans (48.8%) and those 75 years and older (69%) than there are in the 35-64 year age group (11.6%).⁸

Location of Veterans in King County						
Summary of Vets Receiving VA Disability Compensation			Summary of Vets Receiving Disability Pension (non-war related)		Total Veterans King County	
REGION						
East Total	2,519	16.63%	99	9.04%	29,947	22.82%
North Total	976	7.36%	73	6.69%	13,449	10.25%
Seattle Total	3,537	26.68%	573	52.17%	38,584	29.40%
South Total	6,227	46.97%	352	32.10%	49,248	37.53%
Grand Total	13,259		1098		131,228	
Source: Veterans Administration Benefits Distributions			Source: Veterans Administration Benefits Distributions		Source: 2005-2009 American Communities Survey 5-Year Estimate	
Source: "Status of Veterans and King County Veterans Services in 2009"						

Increase in Financial Needs

- The WDVA projects there will be more veteran households in Washington State with annual incomes below \$20,000. They estimate that the number of veterans aged 65 and over with annual incomes of under \$20,000 will rise from 39,000 in 2000 to more than 45,000 in 2015. Many aging vets will be dependent upon care in the Veterans' Homes, or else potentially face homelessness. King, Pierce, Snohomish and Skagit County have the smallest percentage of low-income vets compared to those living in rural areas in Eastern Washington.⁹
- There was a dramatic increase countywide in veterans calling the Crisis Clinic 2-1-1 Community Information Line for assistance. Although the number of actual requests is higher from veterans living in South King County, the percentage of requests increased by 378% for those living in East King County, as shown below. The percentage of requests by region also grew; the share from East King County was 6.5% in 2008 and 9.3% in 2010.¹⁰

Housing and Homelessness

- National estimates project that 30-35% of homeless adult men are veterans. Locally, data suggests that 18-20% of homeless single men are veterans. Veteran families account for approximately three percent of all homeless families in shelters.¹² Estimates are that about 1,000 to 1,150 homeless veterans live in King County at any point in time; 92% are estimated to be male veterans and 8% are women. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor's Women Bureau interviewed women vets in seven states including Washington and found some of the main causes of homelessness mentioned were unemployment, legal problems, disabilities, domestic violence and substance abuse.¹³
- The *2011 One Night Count in King County* survey found that 508 individuals in shelters (311) and transitional housing (197) programs in the county had served in the military.¹⁴
- In November 2009, the VA introduced its Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans. WDVA initiated a work-

Regions of King County 2010 Veteran King County 2-1-1 Requests							
REGION	Total Veterans Served	% of Requests by Region	2010 Growth from 2008 (2 years)	Spouse/Partner of Vet/Act Military	% of Requests by Region	Active Military	% of Requests by Region
East Total	349	9.3%	378.1%	25	9.7%	6	11.1%
North Total	194	5.2%	280.4%	13	5.1%	3	5.6%
Seattle Total	1,375	36.7%	261.8%	68	26.5%	18	33.3%
South Total	1,833	48.9%	192.8%	151	58.8%	27	50.0%
Total 2-1-1 Requests	3,751		231.9%	257		54	

- The King County Veterans Program provides low-income vets with general health and human services, such as emergency financial assistance (rent, food, and utilities), referrals to services for mental illness and substance abuse, as well as referrals to federal benefits for which they are eligible. Additional funds provided by the Vets and Human Services Levy have made available services especially needed by low-income vets, such as housing and counseling.¹¹
- group in 2010 including staff from King County, local housing service providers and others to coordinate with the VA Plan. The King County Committee to End Homelessness and United Way's Campaign to End Chronic Homelessness are coordinating their strategies with the federal and state initiatives focusing on ending veteran homelessness in five years. In 2011 the plan was completed and work has begun to implement strategies.¹⁵

- Permanent housing with services for homeless veterans is a major need. Though funding from the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy has greatly increased the number of permanent housing units for homeless and at-risk vets and their families, there is still an estimated gap of 610-770 units. This gap is expected to increase as more vets return from the current conflicts. The type of housing is also expected to change, with more units needed for vets with families and senior units as more vets age.¹⁶

Employment

- High unemployment rates continue to affect the population as a whole, but the unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans is higher than the overall national unemployment rate, reaching 11.3% in 2009, 18% for those recently separated from the military and up to 21% for Vets 18-24 years old.¹⁷ Returning veterans may be even more at risk of not finding work at a living wage: 18% of the vets who looked for jobs within one year of being discharged were unemployed, while one out of four (25%) who did find jobs earned less than \$21,840 a year.¹⁸ Complaints remained high from reservists who were denied jobs or benefits after they tried to return to their old jobs after extended tours in Iraq. Another issue in particular for those in the National Guard or Reserves is that when they return home, their jobs may no longer exist due to downsizing or other issues related to the poor economy.¹⁹
- A number of resources focused on employment training and education for veterans are located throughout King County: WorkSource offices in North King County and Seattle offer specialized services, and Bellevue College and Shoreline Community College have Veterans Conservation Corps (Vet Corps) members on-site to help them navigate systems needed to adjust from military to college life. Vet Corps members also assist with training and job placement opportunities, including getting connected to green jobs.²⁰

Issues Related to the Increase of Women Serving in the Military

- Women make up about 15% of the military force. Historically women have served to some extent in all wars beginning with the Revolutionary War but the Gulf War was the beginning of more large scale participation. Currently there are an estimated 50,000 women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.²¹
- About 8,000 women veterans live in King County; an estimated 59% are post Vietnam era and under 55 years of age. Of these women, 900 are under 34 years of age and there are an estimated 800 women over 75 years of age.²²
- With the increasing numbers of women serving in the military, reports of sexual assault, ranging from unwanted sexual contact to rape, are increasing. These are referred to by the VA as “military sexual trauma” or MST. The VA reports that during its universal screening program at intake at VA hospitals, all veterans are asked if they have experienced MST. About 1 in 5 women and 1 in 100 men respond “yes” when screened for MST.²³ In the 2012-2017 Service Improvement Plan for the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy, MST is included as a new area to explore with services added as appropriate.²⁴
- Data from the National Survey of Women Veterans conducted in 2010 found that 31% of respondents did not think they were eligible for VA health care, 21% did not know how to apply, and 20% said that the closest VA clinic was too far from their homes.²⁵
- Health care services for women veterans have been historically co-delivered in the same facilities with veterans who are men, without consideration of the unique needs of women; more than 30% of the 3,012 women veterans participating in a study were dissatisfied with the responsiveness of the VA healthcare system, and approximately one-fourth said they were dissatisfied with the competence of VA healthcare providers.²⁶ A new model of “one stop”

health care for women vets with multi-disciplinary teams, both male and female, has been mandated by the VA. Mental health counseling, primary care and pharmacy access are included in the clinics. Maternity services are contracted out to other providers. In Bellevue, at the Valor Clinic, as of June 2011, 113 women vets were patients.²⁷

Increasing Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues

- It is estimated that up to 19% of veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts reported a mental health issue.²⁸
- While vets from all periods of service have experienced a range of mental health issues from the trauma experienced in combat, 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 war that includes hyper-alertness, nightmares and depression. It may be triggered by reminders of combat, such as fireworks or television scenes of violence. TBI's are head injuries from combusive explosions.²⁹
- As many as 320,000 troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from TBI and 300,000 (20%) suffer from PTSD or depression. These two conditions will cost the nation an estimated \$6.2 billion in the two years following deployment, including direct medical care and costs for lost productivity and suicide. However, as much as \$2 billion could be saved if high quality treatment was available.³⁰
- With the delay in onset of symptoms, studies suggest that 35% of vets from the current conflict will suffer from PTSD in their lifetimes. In King County, estimates are that between 1,000 to 2,300 individuals will have PTSD as a result of the Gulf

"Veterans can use help in navigating the VA system and learning about benefits they are eligible for. Among veterans, there is a higher incidence of substance abuse and PTSD which can impact their ability to access and receive services."
Provider Survey - Catholic Community Services

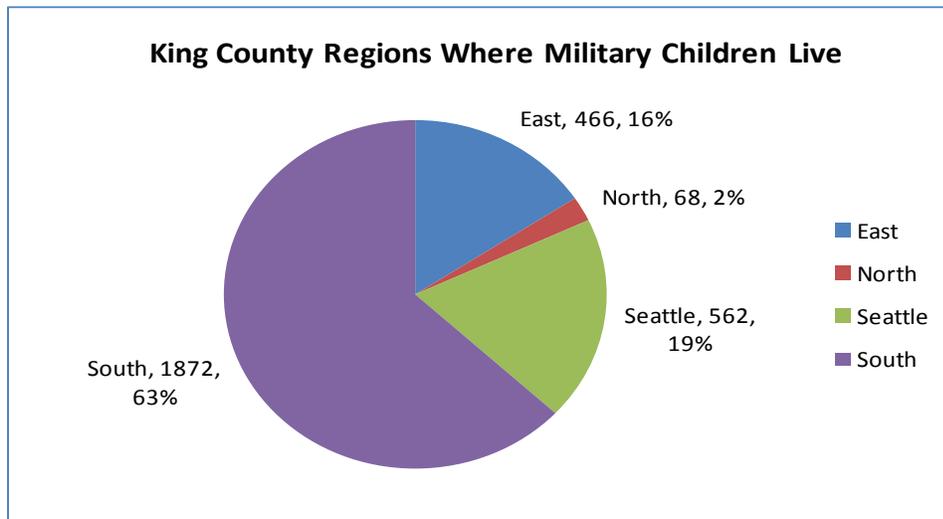
War or the current conflicts. Many soldiers who experience TBI events are not properly diagnosed; estimates are that 57% of vets with a probable TBI have not been evaluated. The long term effects of TBI from explosives are unknown.³¹

- Veterans constitute about 20% of the 30,000 to 32,000 annual U.S. deaths from suicide. The VA reports that over 6,000 veterans commit suicide each year. After a large increase of suicides between 2003 and 2004, the VA developed a plan to increase veterans' access to mental health services by hiring additional mental health professionals and establishing a toll-free hotline.³² Despite these efforts, suicides in the Army remain high. During the first seven months of 2011, the Army investigated 109 deaths throughout the service that may have been suicide, compared with 91 during the same period in 2010. At Joint Base Lewis-McChord, nine soldiers took their lives in 2010. In the first seven months of 2011, nine deaths are under investigation as suicides, including five in July. As a result, Army commanders at the base began tracking even more closely monthly suicide-risk assessments and offer services including counseling with civilian counselors for the soldiers and their families.³³
- Several studies have found only about half of vets will seek help for PTSD or depression. The main reasons cited are they do not know they have PTSD, they fear the stigma or damage to their careers if they have an identified mental illness and they have difficulty accessing help. Veterans who report PTSD or mental health issues are more at risk for substance abuse. The impact is seen in particular on homeless vets. Seventy percent of homeless vets are estimated to have substance abuse issues.³⁴
- Improved body armor for soldiers has resulted in higher survivor rates in the

current conflicts compared to other wars. Now for every one death, seven service members are wounded compared to Vietnam and Korea when fewer than three people were wounded for each fatality. The result is that the ongoing service needs of these permanently disabled vets, for example, to control chronic pain or to find appropriate employment or housing, could be extensive, but are currently fully understood.³⁵

Needs of Families of Active Military or Veterans

- There are more than 3,000 children of active duty service members in King County, the majority living in South King County. A large percentage (16%) lives in East King County compared to the overall percentage of veterans living here (6%).³⁶



Source: King County Evaluation Report: Status of Veterans and King County Veterans Services in 2009

- Strategies funded through the Veterans and Human Services Levy have increased awareness of the needs of families and dependents of soldiers and veterans. Some of the needs identified include meeting the needs of the caregivers of aging veterans, providing support to families who are caring for traumatized vets, and supporting families through longer deployments of their service members.³⁷ In the 2012-2017 King County Veterans and Human Services

Levy Service Improvement Plan, additional funds will be allocated for veteran's families.

- While many military children are healthy and resilient, some groups are more vulnerable: young children, some boys, and children with pre-existing health and mental health problems. Others include those who do not have the support of living in military communities and those who come from single parent or dual military families.³⁸ Another study found mental and behavioral health visits increased by 11% in children when a military parent is deployed.³⁹

"Employment is a big issue. It's hard to work and also go to school."

Veteran Student at Bellevue College

- Other needs of military families identified in the Bellevue providers surveys include vocational retraining for employment, housing, PTSD treatment and medical and mental health services for caregivers of disabled vets.
- Domestic violence is showing increased incidence among veterans, particularly among those who experience PTSD. The victims are most often women. For those dependents with

fewer resources, the abuse can often lead to homelessness. Treatment of domestic violence when PTSD is a factor requires particular expertise, so collaboration between professionals who treat each issue is critical.⁴⁰

Community Perceptions

- One of the common themes expressed at the 2011 Women Veterans Summit was the lack of knowledge by women who served in the military that they were eli-

gible for veteran benefits. Another theme was that women vets' needs for healthcare were often not adequately addressed by the VA resulting in gaps in care.

"I didn't feel the part of being a vet since I was a woman. I didn't think I deserved services."
Woman Navy Veteran, Panelist at the 2011 Women Veterans Summit

- In a 2011 survey completed by human services providers serving Bellevue residents, over half (60%) of the respondents stated that they ask clients at intake about their veteran status, similar to responses in 2009. This is in stark contrast to the same survey in 2007, at which time over half stated that they did not ask for that information.
- Almost 90% of the respondents to the 2011 Bellevue phone/online survey answered that they had never served in the U.S. Military. Of those who have, 5% were on active duty, 2% were in the reserves, and 3% had been both on active duty and the reserves. However, one out of five (19%) reported that they or someone else in their households has military experience; 77% reported that it was their spouse, and 20%, their children.
- Staff from the YWCA, one of several agencies who receive Vets and Human Services Levy funds to provide outreach to veterans, report that in East King County, the most frequently requested needs are housing, financial assistance and food.⁴¹
- Staff from the new VA Caregivers Support Program for those caring for aging and/or disabled vets report that the most frequently requested services are low-cost respite care, in-home care, emergency financial assistance, and transportation to get to services, such as doctor's appointments.⁴²
- Staff from the King County Veterans Program are seeing an increase in family caregivers caring for younger vets who have returned from the current wars severely disabled.

Implications for Action

- Through a focused countywide effort over the past six years, human service agencies have begun to better track veterans' usage of their services with improved intake processes. This needs to continue and further be refined so data is available to show the real needs of this group, especially among the population of homeless vets who are very challenging to track.
- Ongoing partnerships between federal, state, and county programs for veterans and human service agencies are 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. Recent efforts to provide public funding for outreach in the veteran community have shown successful outcomes.
- Coordination and alignment of funding for veterans programs with emerging strategic plans such as the King County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness and to the King County Five Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans is important to ensure that services are based on sound research and best practices, and are therefore effective in addressing the needs of vets.

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