

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. This became even more important as US troops were withdrawn from Iraq at the end of 2011, and will continue to be critical with plans to withdraw the majority of US troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

What’s Working?

- In 2005, voters in King County passed a Veterans and Human Services Levy which is collected through a sales tax. These funds are split equally between services for veterans and human services for the general population. The Vets Levy programs 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 expansion of satellite sites for the King County Veterans Program at the Work-Source office in Redmond and in Carnation in East King County. 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 homelessness: 10 for supportive housing and 10 for individuals and families needing reduced rent. The WDVA and the KCVP continue to partner to co-fund some programs with State and Levy monies, such as the expansion of counseling and consultation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).¹ In August 2011, the Levy was renewed by 69% of voters for another six years, which will generate about \$15.5 million annually.
- Bellevue College (BC) 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. Vets-Corps Navigators work with vets on campus to assist them with job readiness, job placement and transition services for vets separating from the military. BC staff also makes referrals to resources, such as counseling and housing.
- On June 14, 2012, King County Regional Veterans Court was launched. Veterans Court connects eligible veterans to treatment and counseling services available through local providers and the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.
- In early 2013, King County launched a Regional Veterans Initiative (RVI) to create stronger regional partnerships and coordination of services for veterans. Lack of coordination across systems results in many veterans and their families not connecting with services they earned. A report on the RVI was released in July 2013 and concluded that the system of veterans’

services is fragmented. Five objectives were developed including using systems maps to create tools for vets and others to find services, creating an interactive website, and improving customer services for vets and their families. The 2013-2015 Action Plan lays out steps to achieve these objectives.

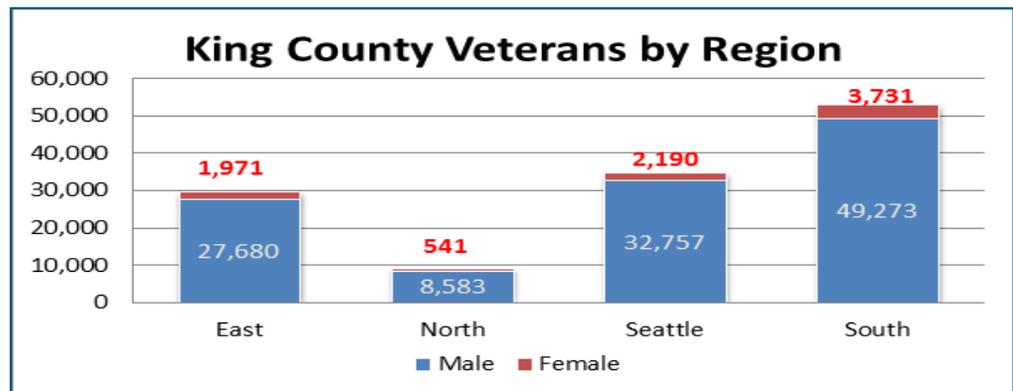
- Together Center, a one-stop human services campus, provides information, referral and advocacy services at its front door. Advocates include those of the Cultural Navigator Program, Public Health Seattle & King County and Family Housing Connection. In 2013, the Center added a Veterans Service Officer to meet unmet needs in East King County. Together Center is working with State and King County veterans programs and the VFW to expand services to veterans at the Center and to increase their access to 18 on-campus agencies and other service providers.

Prevalence

- According to the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS), there are 21,458,427 veterans in the United States; 19,891,961 are men, and 1,566,466 are women. The 2011 ACS estimated that 597,778 veterans are living in Washington State; 91.2% are men and 8.8% are women.²
- According to available data, the total number of veterans in King County has been declining for over a decade. The 2010 American Community Survey indicates that there are approximately 127,000 veterans in King County, (6.6 percent of the population), and is made up of approximately 117,205 men and 9,984 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. The number of women in the military has increased, with women veterans in King County 3% of veterans age 65-74 and now 14.1% of all King County veterans under 35 years of age.³

- The proportion of veterans who are persons of color has increased reflecting a gradual shift to a more diverse military; 25% King County veterans under age 35 are people of color. Overall the proportion of veterans who are veterans of color is somewhere



Source: Status of Veterans and Veterans Services in King County, 2013

between 16% and 19%.⁴

- According to the 2010 ACS survey, about three quarters of all veterans live outside of Seattle. Almost 30,000 vets (22.1%) reside in East King County, compared to 20% as estimated by the 2007 ACS.⁵
- According to the 2011 ACS, in Bellevue, 7,723 people are veterans (7,212 male, 511 female). This represents an 8.2% increase compared to 2009 ACS data. In 2011, almost one third (32%) served in Vietnam and 17% served in World War II. The largest age group represented in 2011 are those 55-75+ years (70% compared to 54% in 2009), with those 18-34 years old the smallest (10% compared to 3% in 2009).⁶
- Data from the Veterans Health Administration-Puget Sound Health Care Services System shown in the chart on the next page indicate that four out of ten of their enrollees in King County live in South King County and almost three out of ten live in Seattle. These enrollees are predominantly low-income and disabled.⁷

Location of Veterans in King County						
Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation			2011 Enrollees VA Health System		Total Veterans King County	
REGION						
East Total	3239	23.2%	5,568	19.6%	28,101	22.1%
North Total	936	6.7%	1,709	6.0%	10,704	8.4%
Seattle Total	3,907	28.0%	8,390	29.5%	33,700	26.6%
South Total	5,886	42.1%	12,744	44.9%	54,503	42.9%
Grand Total	13,968		28,411		127,008	
Source: Veterans Administration Benefits Distributions (2011)			Source: Veterans Administration Puget Sound Health Care System (2011)		Source: 2010 ACS Estimate	

years. These Homes report that 95% of their residents are medically indigent.⁸

- In 2007 in King County, about one-third (36%) of veterans living here were from the Vietnam War era, and one-fifth were from the Second World War and Korea war eras. From 2007-2010 King County veterans from pre-Vietnam era decreased by over 10,000 and Vietnam era veterans decreased by approximately 9,000. By 2010, Gulf War era

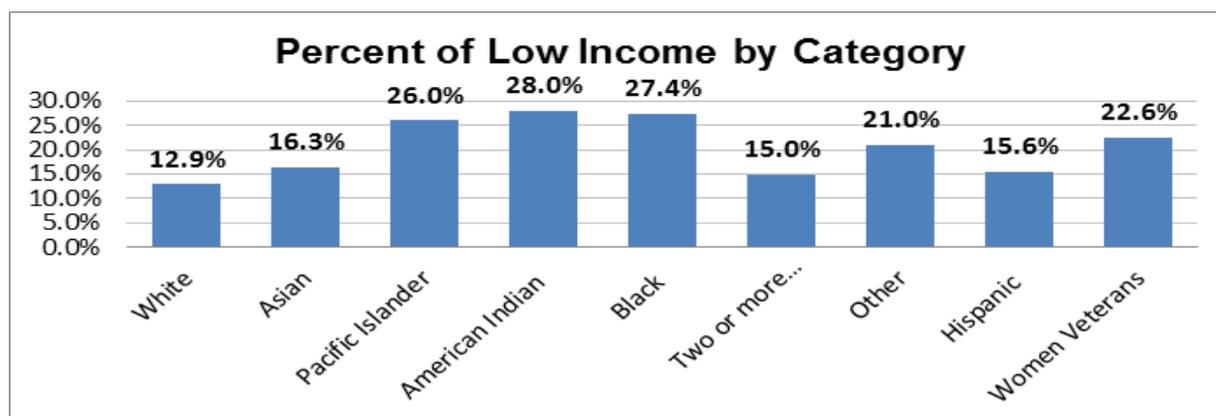
veterans had grown from 19.1 % of King County veterans to 22.3%. Close to two-thirds, 80,000, veterans in King County are over the age of 55, with 30,700 between 55 and 64, not quite retirement age.⁹

Service Trends Aging Veterans

- 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

Income Status and 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



Source: Status of Veterans and Veterans Services in King County, 2013

County have the smallest percentage of low-income vets compared to those living in rural areas in Eastern Washington.¹⁰

- In 2010, about 4.6% (5,800+) of King County veterans lived below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and another 9.2% (11,500) lived between 100% and 200% of the FPL. Combined this is 13.8%, which compares to 22.9% of the non-veteran population. Over 60% of this group of veterans are not disabled and close to 3,800 are under age 65 so they are not likely to be eligible for VA compensation or Social Security.¹¹
- Veterans of color and women veterans are more likely to be lower income than White veterans. The chart on the previous page shows that according to 2005-2010 ACS data, these groups are more likely than White veterans to be earning 200% of the FPL or less.¹²
- While there was a dramatic increase countywide in veterans calling the Crisis Clinic 2-1-1 Community Information Line for assistance between 2008 and 2010, there was a less marked increase between 2010 and 2012. Some of this could be that due to funding cuts; the Crisis Clinic took fewer calls in 2012 (105,131) than in 2010 (110,431)

for those living in East King County, as shown below. The percentage of requests by region also continued to grow slightly; the share from East King County was 6.5% in 2008, 9.3% in 2010, and 10.04% in 2012. For the first six months of 2013, calls are slightly less compared to the same period in 2012.¹³ Also, another one-stop call center for Veterans was funded by the King County Veterans Levy and operated by the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs. This hotline (1-877-904-VETS) provides a follow-up phone call within two weeks.

- The King County Veterans Program, funded since the 1950s by State tax revenues for veterans, 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 more services available especially needed by low-income vets, including employment and job skills training. Between 2006-2011, over 24,000 duplicated veterans

Region of King County 2012 Veteran King County 2-1-1 Requests (TOTAL OF ALL KING COUNTY 2-1-1 CALLS = 105,131)							
REGION	Total Veterans	% of Requests by Region	2012 Growth from 2010 (2 years)	Spouse/Partner of Vet/Act Military	% of Requests by Region	Active Military	% of Requests by Region
East Total	344	10.04%	0.74%	25	6.81%	14	15.56%
North Total	176	5.14%	-	20	5.45%	1	1.11%
Seattle Total	1,291	37.68%	0.98%	126	34.33%	28	31.11%
South Total	1,615	47.14%	-	196	53.41%	47	52.22%
Total 2-1-1 Requests	3,426			367		90	

because they had fewer staff. Although the number of actual requests is higher from veterans living in South King County, the percentage of requests increased by almost a percentage point between 2010 and 2012

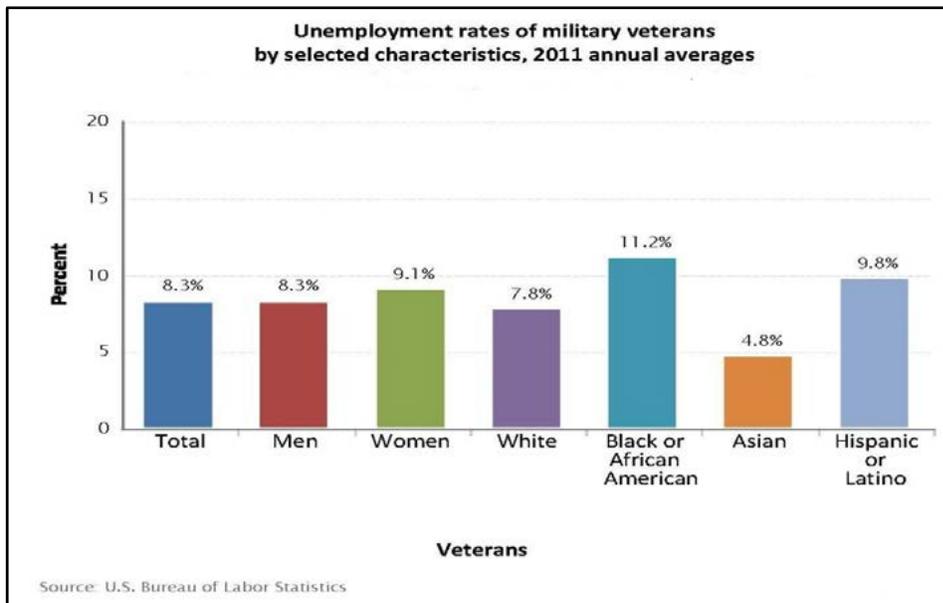
were served by the expanded services including more outreach made possible with Veterans and Human Services Levy funds. These services are offered at 10 satellite sites throughout King County.¹⁴

Housing and Homelessness

- National estimates project that 40% of homeless adult men are veterans.¹⁵ Locally, data from the Safe Harbors Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) suggests that 18-20% of homeless single men are veterans. Veteran families account for approximately three percent of all homeless families in shelters. In 2011, HMIS identified 1,734 veterans served by King County shelters and transitional housing; there were 120 women and 1,603 men. The average age of homeless male veterans is 52 and the average age of the women is 43. About half the men and half the women report that they are disabled, and close to half of the veterans in the data base were people of color.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷
- Of the 6,236 people in shelters and transitional housing during the 2012 One Night Count in King County, slightly more than 10% identified as veterans – or 633 people. In addition, the Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness conducted a special Veterans Interview Project to identify veterans who had no overnight shelter. Through this work, they demonstrated that at least 163 veterans lacked basic shelter in the county - though there is good reason to believe that the total number is higher.¹⁸
- In November 2009, the VA introduced its Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans. WDVA initiated a workgroup 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 many of its recommendations were included in the Veterans and Human Services Levy Strategy on ending homelessness. These recommendations included developing two outreach programs for high utilizers in downtown Seattle and another one in South King County, a mobile medical program, and supports the Landlord Risk Reduction Program which was funded under the first Levy.¹⁹
- Permanent housing with services for homeless veterans is a major need. Funding from the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy has greatly increased the number of permanent housing units with supportive services. During 2011, 8 levy-funded housing projects opened county-wide additional 349 units of housing; 6 additional projects received funding to begin development. In addition, bed nights for homeless veterans in shelters and transitional housing programs increased 44% between 2006-2011.²⁰ However, the need is expected to increase as more vets return from the current conflicts; estimates are that from 610-770 more units are needed to help currently homeless vets. The type of housing is also expected to change, with more units needed for vets with families and senior units as more vets age.

Employment

- Higher unemployment rates continue to affect the population as a whole, but the unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans was until recently much higher than the overall national unemployment rate: for veterans it reached 11.3% in 2009, dropped to 9.7% in 2012, and in July 2013, it fell to 7.2%.²¹ 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. Women veterans have higher unemployment rates in general with the rate in June 2013 at 8.9%. As the chart on the next page shows, veterans of color also have higher rates of unemployment.
- In King County, the local unemployment rate is 8.4% for veterans based on the 2010



Source: Status of Veterans and Veterans Services in King County, 2013

ACS, which is less than the 9.2% of the non-veteran population.²²

- A number of resources focused on employment training and education for veterans are located throughout King County: WorkSource offices in North King County, Redmond and Seattle offer specialized services. 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.²³ A new Veterans Program office opened in Renton is collocated with the WorkSource office there and is quickly growing.

Issues Related to the Increase of Women Serving in the Military

- According to the Department of Defense, nationally women make up about 20% of the military force; about 8% of US veterans are women, which is consistent with King County. The mean age of woman veterans nationally is 48 years of age, compared to 63 years of age for men. 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. As of 2010, there

were an estimated 50,000 women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. In January 2013 it was announced that women would be able to serve in combat units; prior to that time, women could not serve in certain areas of the military such as Special Operations and Infantry.²⁴

- The 2010 ACS estimated 9,984 women veterans live in King County, up from 8,000 in 2008. Of these women, 2,957 (30%) are under 34 years of

age, 3,910 (39%) are age 35-54, 1,302 are age 55-64 (13%), and 818 (8%) are 65-74 years old. There are an estimated 997 women over 75 years of age.²⁵

- With the increasing numbers of women serving in the military, there is a trend toward more reports of sexual assault, ranging from unwanted sexual contact to rape. These are referred to as “military sexual trauma” or MST. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is often a result of MST. A smaller percentage of men in the military also experience MST. Rates of MST reported among all veterans screened at VA hospitals in FY 2011 were 23.0% for women and 1.2% for men.²⁶ A report released by the Department of Defense in 2013 stated that the number of service members anonymously reporting a sexual assault grew by more than 30% in the past two years, from 19,300 in 2010 to more than 26,000 in 2012. To show the level of under-reporting of these offenses, in fiscal year 2012, the official number of reports was 3,374, a 6% increase over the previous year.²⁷ In King County if national prevalence rates are applied over 5,000 veterans is potentially affected by MST. The 2012-2017 Service Improvement Plan for the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy is targeting women veterans who have experienced MST as a high priority population for outreach and

engagement services. In 2013 King County created a Task Force of staff, stakeholders and local providers of services for survivors of MST that are reviewing ways to provide support and detail these in recommendations to be released at the end of 2013.²⁸

- Many women who served in the military report that they do not consider themselves veterans because they did not serve in combat. 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.²⁹
- 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. As a result there have been until recently fewer women veterans using VA healthcare services. In the same survey cited above, more than 30% of the 3,012 women veterans 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.³⁰ 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 in 2009. Mental health counseling, primary care and pharmacy access are included in the clinics. Maternity services are contracted out. There is a VA Valor Clinic using this model located in Bellevue. The VA in Seattle has separate entrances for male and female veterans.
- According to a report by King County on access to services for veterans of color and women, women veterans (all ethnicities combined) experience a 22.6% low-income rate compared to White veterans who have

a 12.9% low-income rate.³¹

- Another area of need cited in a report by the VA Veterans Women’s Task Force is for access to childcare so women veterans can take care of their healthcare needs.

Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues

- The emotional effects of serving in combat have been evident for veterans throughout history, but beginning with the Vietnam War, there has been more national awareness of the extent of the trauma on the veteran and his/her family. For example, data shows that nearly 20% of veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts reported a mental health issue such as PTSD or major depression. The impact of multiple deployments such as those military serving in Iraq is anticipated to significantly increase the rate of PTSD rates in future studies. 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. TBIs are head injuries from combustive explosions which may result in concussions that may at first seem mild, but can lead to symptoms up to three months after the event. TBIs can also be a contributing cause of PTSD.³²
- In King County, estimates are that there could be as many as 25,000 individuals who will have PTSD from all war eras, and as many as half of them will not seek treatment from the VA or community organizations without assistance to overcoming reluctance or institutional barriers. Untreated PTSD contributes to other issues such high rates of chemical dependency, other behavioral and mental issues, divorce, homelessness and criminal justice system involvement.³³
- Nationally, veteran suicides increased by 26% from 2005-2007. In 2007, the VA developed a plan to increase veterans’ access to mental health services by hiring additional mental health professionals and establish-

“Many of the veterans with who we work have dishonorable discharge status, which makes them ineligible for any VA benefits. This makes it difficult in helping them find the community resources they need.”

Provider Survey, HealthPoint

ing a toll-free hotline. Despite these efforts, suicides continued to increase; in 2012 the number of suicides (349) was greater than the number of combat deaths. The VA projects that in 2013, each day 22 veterans will commit suicide, up from 18 in previous estimates. Most of the veterans who commit suicide are over age 50.³⁴

- Therapeutic Health Services reports seeing an increase in substance abuse among vets who are trying to cope with the stress of reentry into civilian life or self-medicate to deal with the trauma they experienced.³⁵
- 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. Approximately 48,000 individuals have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. The result is that the ongoing service needs of these permanently disabled vets, many of whom are amputees, for example, to control chronic pain, afford prosthetic limbs or to find appropriate employment or housing, could be extensive, but is currently not fully understood.³⁶

Needs of Families of Active Military or Veterans

- 2010 ACS data indicates that over half (61%) of King County veterans and active duty military are married. These spouses and dependents potentially need support as they cope with the issues that their family member in the military faces, such as PTSD or physical disabilities, as well as, during deployment, loss of income and changing family dynamics.³⁷
- Strategies funded through the Veterans and Human Services Levy has increased aware-

“They (veterans) do not know all that they are eligible for or how to access it.”

Provider Survey, YWCA, Angeline Center East-side

ness of the needs of families and dependents of soldiers and veterans. Some of the needs being focused on include helping

the caregivers of aging or disabled veterans with respite, providing mental health counseling to all family members, providing phone resources through an information and referral service, and providing training and employment services through the Career Connections Program at Work-Source offices and community colleges.³⁸ In the 2012-2017 King County Veterans and Human Services Levy Service Improvement Plan, additional funds are allocated for veterans families.

- While many military children are healthy and resilient, studies show that 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. In 2011, the VHS Levy provided funding for the Military Kids Curriculum train-the-trainer groups for the Kent, Auburn and Federal Way school districts to help children cope with the stress of having a parent deployed.³⁹
- Other needs of military families identified in the Bellevue providers surveys include vocational retraining for employment, housing, substance abuse treatment, adult day health, long term care, transportation, PTSD treatment and medical and mental

“I go to a Vets Clinic on Beacon Hill in Seattle. They have transportation for vets that I use with my wheelchair, or Hopelink used to take me on Medicaid transportation.”

Community Conversation, Imagine Housing

health services for caregivers of veterans with disabilities.

- Veterans with PTSD are two-to-three times more likely to commit intimate partner violence than veterans without the disorder, according to the Veterans Administration. Other sources say that spouses and girlfriends of male veterans with PTSD are two-to-three times more likely to be victims of domestic violence than women involved with male veterans who do not have the disorder. For those dependents with fewer

resources, the abuse can often lead to homelessness.⁴⁰

Transition from Military to Civilian Life

- A comprehensive study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) mandated by Congress and published in 2013, found that about 44% of returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan reported difficulty when they were back in civilian life. In addition to overlapping mental health and physical conditions, other areas of readjustment issues included not finding employment, military sexual trauma, and fitting back into society in general. The study recommends that the VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) use evidence-based treatment to address the current needs and recognize that veterans' needs will likely peak several decades after their war service, so prevention measures are also needed. Also, the study emphasizes the huge role that supportive families have on the successful readjustment of service members, and recommends that the DoD expand its definition of family and ramp up its efforts to assist family members, especially in the area of prevention of domestic violence.⁴¹
- In another study by the Pew Research Center in 2011 which surveyed more than 1,800 veterans, researchers used logistic progression analysis to look at how the ease of re-entry could be predicted examining certain variables. Factors that predicted a more difficult re-entry included: experienced a traumatic event, seriously injured, post 9/11 veteran, and post 9/11 veteran who was married while serving. Factors that predicted an easier time in re-entry into civilian life included: college graduate, understood his/her mission, was an officer and higher levels of religious beliefs. Poor predictors included: race/ethnicity, age at time of discharge and how many times the veteran had been deployed.⁴² Therapeutic Health Services (THS) has an Enhanced Outreach to Women Veterans and Veterans of Color Program to help underserved veterans to access the benefits to which they are entitled, including VA, federal, state and

local benefits. The Women Veterans Mental Health and Recovery Services Program provides individual and group counseling to women veterans to address PTSD, MST, violence, abuse, alcohol and drug counseling and many other services.⁴³

Community Perceptions

- In a 2013 survey completed by human services providers serving Bellevue residents, 76% of the respondents stated that they ask clients at intake about their veteran status, up from 60% in 2011. 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.
- Ninety-one percent of the respondents to the 2013 Bellevue phone/online survey answered that they had never served in the U.S. Military. Of those who have, 4% were on active duty, 1% was in the reserves, and 3% had been both on active duty and the reserves. About 8% stated that there was a military member in the household; 5% of those were a spouse and 1%, a child.
- The most critical needs for veterans mentioned by providers in the 2013 survey include mental health and chemical dependency counseling, help finding employment and job training, and housing.
- Staff from the 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. Caregivers of post 9/11 vets who tend to be younger are also requesting mental health services, and for some, childcare is an important need.⁴⁴
- Local veterans have shared that travel to and from downtown Seattle for services is cumbersome and expensive so local options like having a Veterans Services Officer at the Together Center and a Renton King County Veterans Program service office have increased their utilization of available resources. Many vets and their families are unaware of the benefits that they are entitled to, to making it convenient to find out about the resources is a positive step.

- Staff from the King County Veterans Program noted that an emerging issue is the growing needs of the “baby boomer” veterans population, who are in their late 50s and early 60s. Many are starting to experience problems from injuries or wounds from their time in service, and are seeking medical services from the VA or King County. Some of these veterans are also trying to find services for their elderly parents, some of whom are veterans, in terms of assisted living housing or adult day care. Some of the staff at local assisted living facilities are not aware that even a widow of a veteran may be eligible for some services from the VA. Another issue continues to be younger veterans who have come back from Iraq or Afghanistan with significant injuries or TBI, and are being cared for by their older adults parents. All these caregivers need additional support and information about current resources.⁴⁵
 - Among the top ten unmet needs perceived by veterans in national surveys are welfare payments, legal assistance for child support, dental care and childcare.
- informant interviews with stakeholders conducted by King County suggest several ideas which have the potential to improve access to services. These include exploring the creation of a Veterans One-Stop Hub in collaboration with the VA for veterans and their families, and a Veterans Coordinating Council.
- 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 very important. The King County Veterans Service System Mapping Project, begun in 2013, is creating a local inventory of all the services and resources available to King County veterans. This will improve the understanding of the scope of these resources in the county and also create tools that will visually display the current system.
 - The King County Regional Veterans Initiative (RVI) also has great potential to increase coordination of existing regional services with resulting improved quality of life for Vets and their families.

Implications for Action

- Through a focused countywide effort over the past eight 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 veterans, especially among the population of homeless veterans who are very challenging to track. In addition, ongoing training for community providers on Veterans Culture so services meet veterans needs is also critical.
- 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. Recommendations included in a report in 2013 from focus groups and key

Endnotes

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