



Welcome to the
Elks National
Veterans Service
Commission
Convention
Seminar!

Agenda



Introductions

ENVSC Staff in Attendance:

Mary Morgan, Director

Emily Cruz, Programs Associate

Rene Villalobos, Programs

Associate

Information

Today's Topic: Ending Veteran Homelessness

- Overview
- Prevention
- Community Connection
- Stability

Homelessness in America

In the United States in 2023, there were more than 653,104 Americans experiencing homelessness, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Discounting the Pandemic, this rise in homelessness is on trend with numbers from 2016-2020. The end of pandemic-era housing programs is tied to this increase, after a few years of decrease.

This rise in homelessness is largely due to a sharp rise in people who became homeless for the first time.

- Sheltered homelessness rose by 13.7%
- Unsheltered homelessness rose by 9.7%.
- Homelessness among individuals rose by 10.8%.
- Homelessness among people in families with children rose by 15.5%.
- Homelessness among unaccompanied youth rose by 15.3%.
- Homelessness among veterans rose by 7.4%.
- Chronic homelessness among individuals rose by 12%.





Numbers Don't Tell the Whole Story

This is called a Point-in-Time count but it's more of an estimate. It's nearly impossible to count every person without secure housing.

- Some “unsheltered homeless” individuals do not want to be found for fear of legal repercussions.
- It does not include individuals or families who are “doubled up”, aka homelessness but staying temporarily with friends or family.
- It does not include the number of individuals in jails, who were homeless at the time of incarceration. This is a considerable population.

Veteran Homelessness

In 2023, 35,574 veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S., or 22 of every 10,000 veterans in the United States.

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness increased by seven percent (2,445 more veterans) between 2022 and 2023.

The increase included a 14 percent rise in the number of unsheltered veterans (1,943 more veterans) and a three percent increase in veterans experiencing sheltered homelessness (502 more veterans).

Despite increases in veteran homelessness between 2022 and 2023, veteran homelessness is 52 percent lower than it was in 2009, the baseline year for veteran homelessness.





Veteran Homelessness

- Unsheltered Veterans represented nearly 80% of the overall increase.
- Veterans who experience sheltered homelessness often live in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or other supportive settings.
- In contrast, Veterans who experience unsheltered homelessness live in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings and literally on the street.
- The experience of homelessness alone is already harmful. However, research demonstrates that unsheltered individuals often report more significant negative health conditions than those who are sheltered.
- There is hope for better results when the January 2024 results come in, based on outreach by the VA this year and increased funding for affordable housing for veterans.

The Elks' Role

Veteran homelessness has declined 25% since 2015, the year the Elks launched the Welcome Home program. I think Elks can be proud to have played a part in that.

Beyond the Numbers:

- We reached out to Social Workers, volunteers and project partners to learn about the role that Elks volunteers and Elks programs play in the day-to-day fight against veteran homelessness.
- We couldn't fly them out all out to be here today, but we are excited to share their feedback with you.



We identified three main ways Elks are helping, and gathered some advice for those who want to join in.

- Prevention
 - The Elks Emergency Assistance Fund helps veterans exit or prevent homelessness
- Community Connection
 - Freedom and Focus Grant Projects, local partnerships
- Stability
 - Welcome Home Kits to help veterans stay housed



Prevention: Elks Emergency Assistance Fund

Within the research surrounding homelessness, two classifications are used: **chronic and crisis**.

Chronic homelessness is used to describe individuals who have experienced homelessness:

- For a minimum of twelve months over three years, consecutively or cumulatively
- Who have a disabling condition such as mental illness/disability, physical disability, or substance use disorder.

However, the majority of homelessness experienced by adults in the US today is classified as short-term **“crisis” homelessness**:

- Experienced for 180 days or less
- Usually following a triggering event, such as a family conflict or emergency, transition out of an institutional setting, or an eviction.

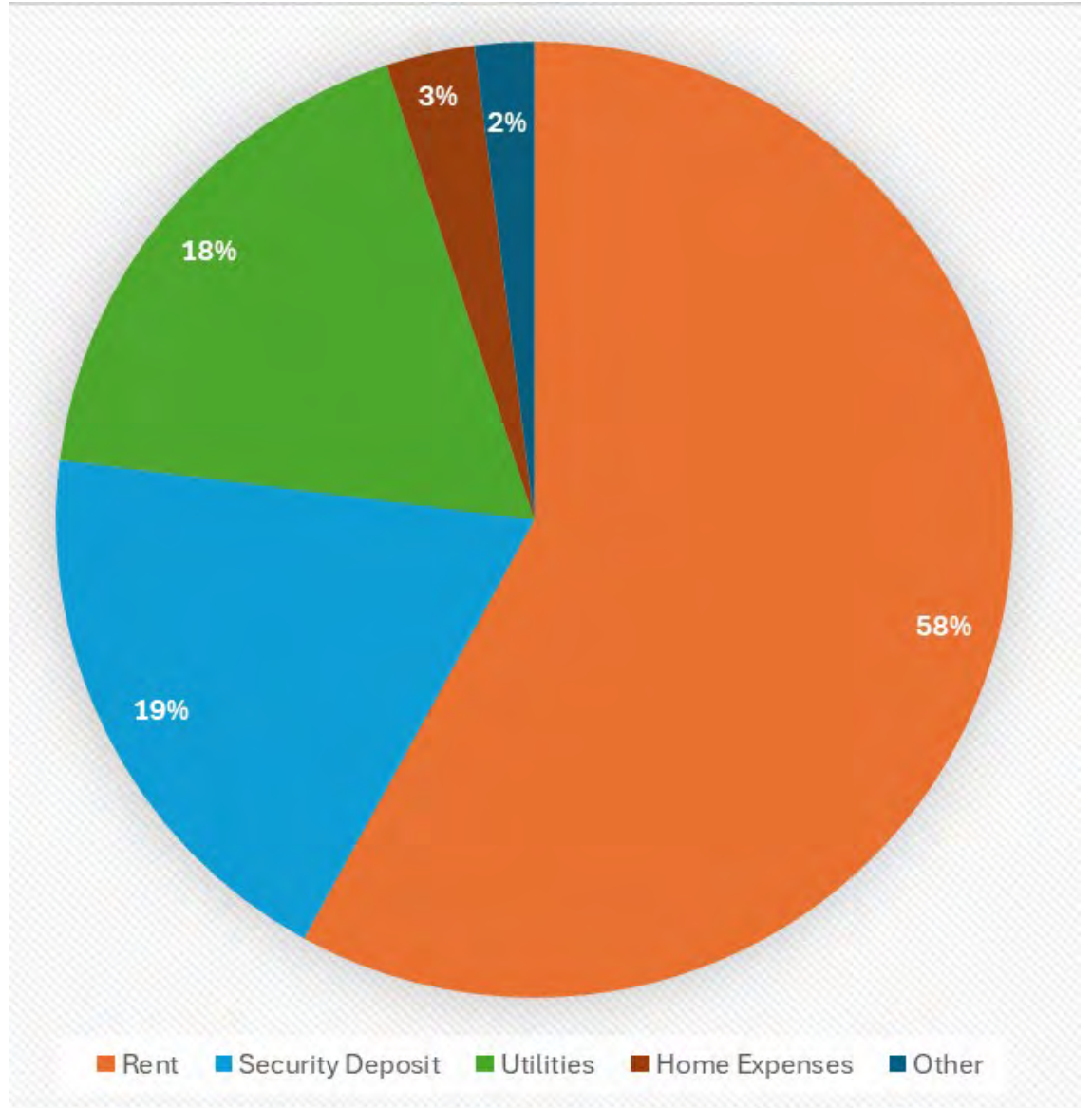
Historically, programs have addressed crisis homelessness less often than chronic homelessness. This is part of what makes the EAF program so unique.



Prevention: Emergency Assistance Fund

2023-24 EAF Numbers

- 539 veterans helped in 2023-24
- 108 veterans had dependents living with them at the time of assistance
- 78% of this assistance went to prevention
- Average amount of assistance is \$1,719.38



Prevention: Emergency Assistance Fund

**Leah Lyons, Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)
Senior Social Worker at the Community Resource and
Referral Center (CRRC) in Washington, DC:**

“Programs such as EAF have been invaluable to the VA Homeless program. I have often referred to Elks Emergency Financial Assistance as the “safety net of the homeless program” as they are able to fill a much needed gap the VA is unable to.

Veterans/veteran families are able to receive financial support during truly critical times of uncertainty. Veterans have been able to receive urgent financial assistance for homeless prevention, utility assistance, and even occasional car payment to ensure veteran’s remain stable during a time of crisis. The Elks has always been ready and willing to step in and assist however needed.”

Community Connection: Listen

Lillie Prince is a Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Coordinator at the Lovell Federal Health Care Center in Illinois. She was in planning meetings with the Elks when we were just launching the Welcome Home program.

“Without your support, our services would lack, and our Veterans would suffer. What EAF did for me specifically was gave me permission to have more conversations! Conversations about what it is that we really need to end homelessness in Lake County. I recall having a conversation with the Elks and being asking “what do you need?” I had never been asked before! In the past we just got a lot of donated socks, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hygiene kits etc. and the truth was that we needed access to money with little to no barriers. EAF did just that. It literally changed people’s lives.

Most of the time, listening can be the best form of helping. Sometimes we get so eager to help, when really all you need to do is listen.”



Community Connection: Start Small



JoEllen Knapp was the Freedom Grant Project Manager for the Fountain Hills, Ariz., Lodge No. 2846. She is also the ENF Chair and Grant Coordinator. The Lodge received a \$1,000 Freedom Grant as a starting point for their support of a local veterans nonprofit and housing unit.

“We partnered with Community Bridges Inc., a well-known outreach organization in Phoenix. They have housing units where veterans deal with behavioral and physical health problems as well as a support unit until they can get into permanent housing.

We donated \$200 to the housing unit for client support and supplies. We provided bus passes are used for job interviews and travel to the local VA. We also supported the Phoenix Stand Down by supplying 56 back packs. To supplement the grant, the Lodge ran quarterly donation drives for coats, blankets and water. We estimate a value of at least \$700 which is not listed as an expenses, but should be considered as a part of this grant.

Cloud Break work with Veterans to develop life skills and learn how to socially interact with others. Peer to peer interactions are strongly stressed to enable veterans to deal with behavioral and mental health problems. Helping to give a stable home life to individuals and families through food and household products meets many needs. We are actively helping to house and keep housed our Veterans and their families.”

Community Connection: Learn and Evolve

Fiona Engler has been the Focus Grant Project Manager for Westchester, Calif., Lodge No. 2050 since 2019, when they first launched the program.

“Our Lodge Veteran’s chair heard about the US Vets- Inglewood facility that is housed in our community. We began simply. We met with the coordinator at the time to see what the immediate needs were. We decided to dedicate the grant to buying much needed household items for veterans leaving transitional apartments for housing. We also used the Anniversary grant to host dinners at the facility so that the veterans would get to know the Elks.

The following year we decided to host quarterly dinners at the facility. We provided entertainment, food that is not usually on the menu due to cost, and friendship. We had many Elks who assisted in the dinners and would sit with the veterans and talk with them. This provided the veterans with an outside connection in the area. We continued with the dinners until 2022 when we decided to see if the veterans would enjoy something different: boat trips!

Catalina Island tour and lunch, whale watching, and fishing. The veterans loved the trips! During these trips, Elks were able to really make some good connections with the individual veterans. Visiting one on one and sharing meals while out really helped make those connections. After that we decided to stay with the social outings as well as some dinners at our lodge which got the veterans out of the facility. We have moved from boat trips to sports as that was an interest the veterans had.”





Stability: Welcome Home Kits

“As difficult as it can be at times, there is nothing more energizing than helping a formerly unsheltered veteran move into their new apartment.”

- Lillie Prince, MSW, LCPC, Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Coordinator

Words of Wisdom: Don't Underestimate your Own Experience

“I would say to someone who wants to help but doesn't know how are to understanding homelessness from a Veteran's perspective rather than a civilian perspective.”

- Kowsillia Jattan, Program Director for Supportive Services for Veteran Families in New York



Parting Advice: Patience is a Virtue

“I would recommend starting small. Get to know that organization, what their needs are, how they work with outside agencies like the Elks. And, the problem with any of these large organization is that there is always turnover. Each year the person in charge changes. Fortunately, Thomas, as the Outreach Specialist, remained. While we still have to contact the official person for the final approval, but we do most of our planning through Thomas. He is easy to work with and truly has the veterans at the heart of all he does. Building a relationship with Thomas was easy. His only goal is to see success for the veterans he serves. The key is to find that person in an organization and connect with them.”

- Fiona Engler, Westchester, Calif., Lodge No. 2050 Project Manager





Thank you!

Stay for our Volunteer of the Year
Award Presentation and Welcome
Home Kit Panel in this room at 1 PM!

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