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### Communities Serve: Highlights for Local and Government Officials

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# COMMUNITIES SERVE

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR LOCAL AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

### A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF NEED ASSESSMENTS ON U.S. VETERAN AND MILITARY-CONNECTED POPULATIONS

*Written by Ryan D. Van Slyke & Nicholas J. Armstrong*



### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

“ Military veterans and their families face a multiplicity of challenges once they transition from service. Even though more American private and public-sector organizations are engaged in studying the needs of veterans and their families through need assessments, few assessments are comprehensive analyses of the challenges they face. This systematic review of 61 need assessments from 2007-2018 in the United States summarizes findings on 18 veterans issues. While most studies addressed issues relating to accessing U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health and benefit services, mental health, employment, and homelessness, gaps in the literature emerged, particularly regarding ethnic and sexual minority, rural and elderly veterans, and National Guard/ Reserve servicemembers. Large cities and states with varying degrees of military presence were frequent regions of study, with national think tanks, nonprofit organizations, and public universities conducting most need assessments. Future assessments should address persistent inequities in coverage among communities and topics of study using mixed-method research and survey design. ”

#### MOST COMMON TOPICS OF STUDY:

- ▶ Access to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) (i.e. Transportation, Navigation of the VA, Cultural Competency, Military Sexual Trauma)
- ▶ Mental and Behavioral Health (i.e. Stigmas in VA & Military Culture, care for Women and ethnic minority veterans)
- ▶ Employment (i.e. Perceived employer stigmas, difficulties translating military skills)
- ▶ Transition (i.e. feelings of isolation and disconnect from local communities and VA system)
- ▶ Homelessness and housing (i.e. high costs of living, limitations of HUD-VASH voucher program)

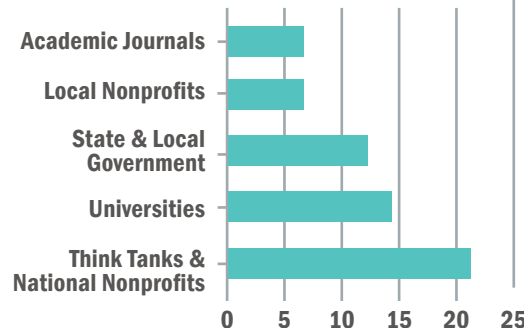
#### LEAST COMMON TOPICS OF STUDY:

- ▶ Poverty among Veteran & Military-Connected Families (i.e. food insecurity, fractured community support)
- ▶ Rural and ethnic-minority veterans (i.e. access to VA and VHA services, quality of health)
- ▶ National Guard/Reserve veterans (i.e. employment and retention challenges, poor inclusion into VA and veteran community organizations)
- ▶ Financial Support (i.e. financial planning assistance)
- ▶ Legal Support (i.e. risk of handling legal issues without representation, common legal issues of criminal offenses, bankruptcy, housing, and substance abuse).

#### RESEARCH METHOD BEST-PRACTICES:

- ▶ Partner with multiple community organizations & stakeholders across a set of issue areas to use marshalled resources to expand the scope of a need assessment, drawing upon each organization’s expertise or interest areas to study an area’s veteran population in a holistic manner.
- ▶ Employ rigorous mixed-method procedures in the assessment of a wide scope of issue areas and needs, such as quantitative data collection, interviews and focus groups, and comparing samples to Census Bureau and VA data.

**NEED ASSESSMENTS BY SPONSORING ORGANIZATION (2007-2018)**



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODELS



**KING COUNTY (WA):** Excellence for using quantitative methods to studying the needs of multiple veteran sub-groups (i.e. period of service, ethnicity) across almost a dozen issue areas. Provides actionable recommendations for King County agencies on community collaboration, financial assistance, behavioral health, and young veterans.

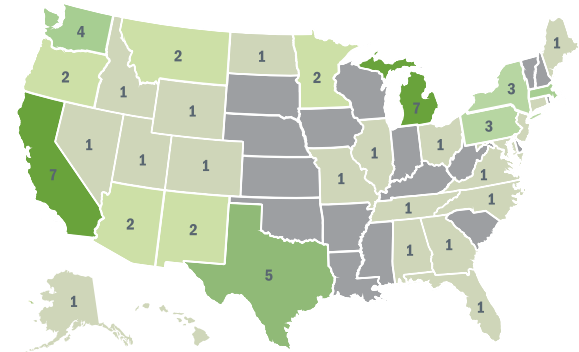


**SAN MATEO COUNTY (CA):** Excellence for using qualitative data gathered from focus groups, interviews, and public meetings with quantitative data from national sources like the VA and Census Bureau. Includes in-depth analysis on 7 different issue areas and comparisons to national trends.



**METRO ATLANTA (GA):** Excellence for using mixed-methods approaches to study both the veteran population and for the veteran-serving nonprofit community. Provided set of recommendations across issue areas for local government, community organizations and nonprofits, and businesses.

## GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF NEED ASSESSMENTS



### NUMBER OF STUDIES:



## IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

- ▶ Most need assessments address a core set of issues for U.S. veterans: accessing U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health and benefit services, mental health, employment, and homelessness. These were common in cities, counties, states, and regions studied in the U.S.
- ▶ Veterans in cities and counties across the U.S. faced particular shared concerns and needs on housing (and affordability), the coordination of service delivery among partners, and access to VA services.
- ▶ Veterans often have a co-occurrence of needs, requiring a multifaceted response by state agencies and community partners for more than one type of service.
- ▶ Need assessments can help local government agencies distinguish experiences, needs, and gaps in service within their localities and can reinforce the opportunity of public-private partnerships and relationships with community organizations to serve veterans.
- ▶ Connecting with, and educating, veterans on available and future services through the state's DVA and the U.S. VA is paramount to effectively meeting their set of needs, particularly in rural states with few VA Medical Centers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

1. Partner with philanthropies, community nonprofits, and universities to conduct a city or county-wide need assessments to inform understanding about your locality's veteran population, leveraging existing expertise in policy, health, and social-work programs and evaluation. Use other local governments' needs assessments as best practices for a potential study in your area.
2. Focus on studying and building greater awareness of the veteran experience and sets of needs for particular groups of under-studied veterans, including ethnic minority, women, National Guard/Reserve veterans, and more.
3. As local government agencies, think about community needs, and the co-occurrence of need, inclusively and develop relationships to deliver services and aid across multiple areas of need for veteran communities in your locality. Use needs assessments as starting points to engage city, county, state, and national actors and stakeholders in providing and delivering wrap-around service and care for veterans within your locality.

