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### Communities Serve: Highlights for University and Academic Communities

Ryan Van Slyke

Nicholas Armstrong

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## COMMUNITIES SERVE HIGHLIGHTS FOR UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

### 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)

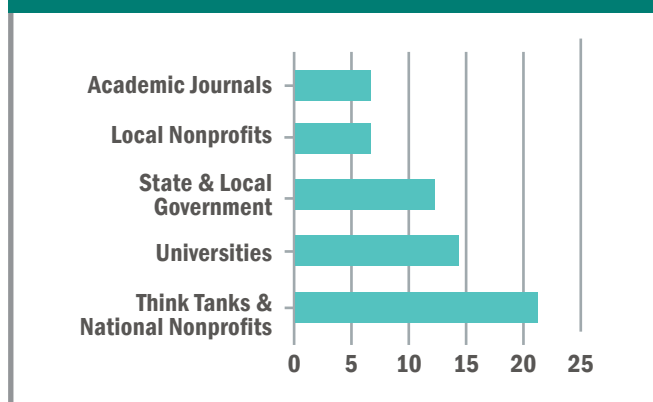
#### LEAST COMMON TOPICS OF STUDY:

- ▶ 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)**



## STATE MODELS



### NEVADA (UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA- RENO):

Excellence in quantitative research using statewide on-line surveys. In-depth research focus on 5 topics, particularly on veterans' education needs. Researchers collaborated with public universities across the state of Nevada.

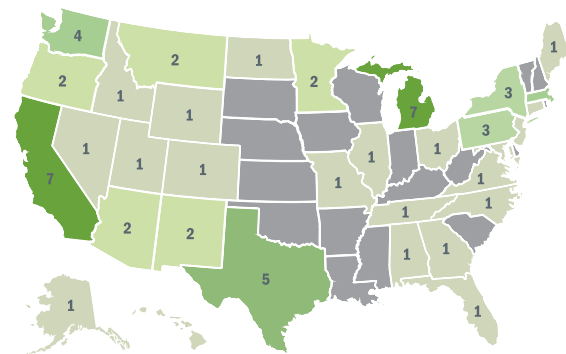


### MASSACHUSETTS (RAND CORPORATION):

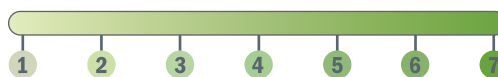
Excellence in mixed-method research using web-based surveys of Massachusetts veterans, focus groups, and interviews. Compared the needs and experiences of Massachusetts veterans to those nationally using data from American Community Survey. Compiled a list of community resources for Massachusetts veterans in appendix.

**NATIONAL (INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE):** Excellence in mixed-method research including literature reviews, quantitative data analysis, and ethnographic studies. Studied needs of servicemembers' families and the impact of deployment on need. Authors provided actionable recommendations on how to study and serve servicemembers' unmet needs.

## GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF NEED ASSESSMENTS



### NUMBER OF STUDIES:



## IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITIES & ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

- ▶ 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 often have a co-occurrence of needs, requiring a multifaceted response by state agencies and community partners for more than one type of service.
- ▶ The least well-documented and understood veterans groups at both the local, state, and national levels, including in academic-authored assessments, are minority veterans, veterans living in rural areas, and National Guard/Reserve veterans.
- ▶ Universities and academic think tanks are integral partners for communities and nonprofits to partner with in studying the unique needs of veterans within a particular geographic area. State universities are particularly critical to shining light on the co-occurrence of needs for their state's veteran population, since they published 10 out of 14 reports authored by universities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITIES & ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

1. Partner with local, state, and federal governments, and other philanthropic stakeholders and funders to conduct local, state, or national need assessments to inform understanding about a locality's veteran population, leveraging existing expertise in policy, health, and social-work programs and evaluation. Use other need assessments published by universities or think tanks as guiding best practices for your potential study.
2. Place particular attention and emphasis 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, and National Guard/Reserve veterans.
3. As universities and academic think tank scholars and practitioners, think about community needs, and the co-occurrence of need, inclusively and develop relationships to tell a data-driven and on-the-ground-informed story of veterans in your community. 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.

