National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Virtual Learning Courses (VLC)
Session 1 of 4: Underserved Populations Overview
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Key Points

- **Introduction**
    - o To create an environment conducive to open discussion, NVTAC introduced a Liberated Space Agreement, created by [ThirdSpace Action Lab](#) in Cleveland, Ohio. The attendees were encouraged to share their thoughts in the discussion, give other attendees space to share, be attentive with words and tone, assume positive unconditional intent among fellow attendees, and sit in their discomfort if they were to experience it during the discussion. NVTAC asked attendees if additional guidelines would make them more comfortable during the discussion.
    - o NVTAC reminded attendees that there would be HVRP best practices shared during this session. NVTAC encouraged all grantees to utilize best practices that may improve their service delivery. Before implementing a practice discussed during this session, grantees must review their award statement of work and contact their Grant Officer Technical Representative (GOTR) to discuss if it is an allowable cost or activity or if it requires an amendment to their approved plan.
    - o **NVTAC Overview:** NVTAC provides individualized technical assistance (TA), training, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and additional support to HVRP grantees. To contact NVTAC or request TA, reach out to contact@nvtac.org.
- **Introduction to Underserved Populations and Associated Stigma**
    - o Over the course of the four-part series, underserved populations such as youth (ages 18-24), seniors (ages 55+), individuals experiencing mental health challenges, individuals experiencing physical health challenges, women, and black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) will be discussed. Individuals within these populations who have compounding challenges are at an even higher risk of being underserved.
- **Youth (ages 18-24)**
    - o Youth are over-represented in homelessness, particularly youth who are also LGBTQ+, non-white, or unmarried and parenting. Youth receiving less than a high-school diploma and youth with an annual household income of less than $24,000 are also over-represented.

- o Youth experiencing homelessness often lack access to necessary resources, employment opportunities, housing opportunities, and rental assistance specifically for youth.
  - o **Historical Impact**: Youth are exploited through unpaid or low-paying internships, although they contribute valuable work to the employer. Youth are less likely to report misconduct in the workplace out of fear of repercussions. Historically, youth are paid less than their older counterparts in the same or similar positions.
- **Seniors (ages 55+)**
  - o Homelessness among the senior population is increasing nationwide and is the fastest-growing age group of individuals experiencing homelessness. As of 2020, roughly 50 percent of individual adults experiencing homelessness were over the age of 65. Approximately 50 percent of seniors experiencing homelessness had their first instance of homelessness after age 50. Lifelong struggles, recent setbacks, social isolation, lack of access to transportation, financial insecurity, and medical challenges or health-related barriers may cause homelessness among the senior population. Seniors experiencing homelessness are often a hidden population.
  - o Ageism in the workplace, a lack of technological skills training, social isolation, and lack of access to needed benefits are common barriers for seniors working towards re-entering the workplace.
  - o **Historical Impact:** There is a societal misconception that seniors are not valuable in the workplace due to a focus on youth-centric culture. Seniors who do not have current or extensive knowledge of technology are often not provided the proper training to address this barrier.
- **Individuals with Mental Health Challenges**
  - o Many individuals experiencing homelessness also experience a mental health challenge, with alcohol and drug use, schizophrenia spectrum disorders, and major depression among the most common challenges.
  - o Some barriers individuals with mental health challenges experiencing homelessness face are stigma, lack of accommodations, misconceptions regarding mental health, and lack of access to needed resources.
  - o **Historical Impact:** Mental health is not seen as a real disability or challenge, so employers are not always willing to make necessary accommodations. The long history of stigma associated with mental health may result in a reluctance to disclose mental health challenges and ask for accommodations.
- **Individuals with Physical Health Challenges**
  - o Experiencing homelessness may exacerbate existing physical health challenges that began as minor. Individuals who must exhaust their sick leave or can no longer maintain a standard work schedule due to their physical health may experience unemployment. It is often difficult for individuals with physical health challenges to find employment that does not require physically demanding tasks.

- There is a lack of employment opportunities for individuals with physical health challenges, and accommodations an employer is willing to make are often not ideal or practical. Individuals with physical health challenges sometimes settle for the employment available to them regardless of whether it is within their skillset or goals.
  - **Historical Impact:** Although employers are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations, the accommodations provided do not always fully meet the needs of the employee with physical health challenges. Individuals with physical health challenges are often replaced in the workplace, which makes it difficult to maintain employment.
- **Women**
  - Women experience high levels of trauma throughout their bout with homelessness and are more likely to die prematurely than men. Since 2016, the total number of women experiencing homelessness and the number of women experiencing unsheltered homelessness has increased.
  - Women who experience domestic violence or other trauma may find it more challenging to re-enter the workplace. Compared to men in the workplace, women experience misogyny and lower salaries on average. Dated societal norms create challenges for women in the workplace.
  - Transgender women often face challenges because many shelters lack appropriate accommodations for them. Safety concerns may lead to transgender women avoiding mainstream homeless services.
  - **Historical Impact:** For much of history, women lacked fundamental human rights and access to employment. Based on societal norms, raising a family was often prioritized over careers for women, and they were not encouraged to participate in higher education.
- **BIPOC**
  - Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) conducted a study that revealed racial inequities in the homeless system. BIPOC are over-represented in the homeless system due to institutional and systemic racism.
  - Microaggressions in the workplace are common and often go unaddressed, leading to a toxic and unsafe work environment for BIPOC. Racist and discriminatory experiences in the workplace often go unreported due to the stigma BIPOC individuals face. Inequitable systems and a lack of necessary cultural competence perpetuate workforce oppression.
  - **Historical Impact:** Racial segregation, as a result of slavery, oppressed BIPOC and denied them rights and access to socioeconomic opportunities. BIPOC have historically been overrepresented in the homeless system in part due to discouragement of investment in non-white communities. Racial inequities in other systems, including the justice system, may lead an individual to an instance of homelessness.
- **Poll Questions and Discussion**

- o **Poll Question:** Are you serving underserved populations?
  - ▪ **Response:** 88 percent responded yes; 8 percent responded unsure; 4 percent responded no.
- o **Poll Question:** Do you currently have a plan in place to reach underserved populations?
  - ▪ **Response:** 75 percent responded yes; 25 percent responded unsure; 0 percent responded no.
- o **Discussion Question:** What are your strategies to reach underserved populations?
  - ▪ **Response:** Facilitating opportunities for previous HVRP participants to meet with current HVRP participant peers regularly. Previous participants who have since maintained employment have experienced challenges that current participants may be experiencing.
  - ▪ **Response:** Inviting partner organizations to their HVRP location monthly to discuss available resources for underserved populations.
- o **Discussion Question:** What are some lessons learned around dismantling assumptions and stigmas?
  - ▪ **Response:** Addressing microaggressions the moment they arise and avoiding making assumptions about other individuals.
  - ▪ **Response:** Understanding that everyone is different and has their own unique lived experiences.
  - ▪ **Response:** Being able to notice, identify, and address inequities both in HVRP and outside of HVRP is important.
- **Resources**
  - o [True Colors United](#)
  - o [Homelessness Among Older Adults: An Emerging Crisis](#)
  - o [National Alliance to End Homelessness: Older Adults](#)
  - o [The Prevalence of Mental Disorders Among Homeless People in High-Income Countries: An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-Regression Analysis](#)
  - o [Homelessness and Health: What's the Connection?](#)
  - o [Women in the Workplace](#)
  - o [Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC)](#)
  - o [Homelessness and Racial Disparities](#)

Conclusion

Historical inequities, societal stigma, and lack of access to resources are common themes leading to experiences of homelessness and unemployment among each of the underserved populations discussed in this series. Individuals who have compounding challenges are even more at risk of being underserved. Reaching and serving individuals within these underserved populations may require a different approach.

Throughout the remaining three VLC sessions, NVTAC will discuss strategies and techniques for servings each of the identified populations. HVRP grantees can request individualized TA for their program at any time by emailing contact@nvtac.org.

For more information, please visit www.nvtac.org.

You can review the presentation through the following link: NVTAC VLC May 2023: Underserved Populations Overview.