

NVTAC Monthly Newsletter: January 2024

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JANUARY SPOTLIGHT



2023: A Year of Federal Action to Address the Nation's Homelessness Crisis

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) Executive Director Jeff Olivet published a statement addressing the 2023 Point-in-Time Count. He underscored the belief in housing as a fundamental human need and deems homelessness preventable and solvable. Highlighting the impact of COVID-19 policies, he emphasized the importance of policy choices in addressing homelessness. However, recent data reveals a 12 percent increase in homelessness from 2022 to 2023, with root causes attributed to the scarcity of affordable homes and high housing costs. The administration's successes include surpassing housing goals, building record apartments, and investing in initiatives to alleviate unsheltered and rural homelessness. Acknowledging the systemic nature of the issue, Olivet emphasizes a multi-pronged approach, incorporating evidence-based solutions, preventive measures, and collaboration across federal, state, and local levels.

[USICH Executive Director Jeff Olivet's Full Statement](#)

RESOURCES



Poverty in America Awareness Month

Join the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) this month as we observe Poverty in America Awareness Month. Listen to NVTI's podcasts, [Episode 18 - Serving Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#) and [Episode 7 - Effective Collaboration Between Jobs for Veterans State Grants \(JVSG\) Staff and Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program \(HVRP\) Grantees](#); watch NVTI's microlearning, [The Difference: Special Populations versus Significant Barriers to Employment](#); read an NVTI article - [Working Together to Assist Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#), [Discovering Resources Available for Veterans in Need of Housing](#); and explore NVTI's [additional resources](#) to learn about how you can support veterans experiencing homelessness.



Hundreds of Millions in Grant Funding to Help Homeless Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced [two grant opportunities, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars](#), to address homelessness among veterans. Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Grants will provide funding to

organizations helping rapidly rehouse veterans and their families, prevent imminent loss of housing, and identify more suitable housing situations. The Legal Services for Homeless Veterans and Veterans At-Risk for Homelessness Grants will award over \$26 million to organizations providing legal representation and assistance to homeless veterans. This initiative follows the release of data from the 2023 Point-in-Time Count, indicating a 7.4 percent increase in homelessness among veterans compared to 2022. The VA emphasizes its commitment to ending veteran homelessness and will explore and address barriers contributing to the increase.



New Series in the War Horse Addressing Noncombat Deaths of Women in the U.S. Military

The War Horse's five-part series, "Short Changed," examines the non-combat deaths of women in the military since 9/11, shedding light on persistent issues, such as unaddressed reports of abuse or harassment, unmet mental health needs, and unchecked reprisals, resulting in the tragic deaths of servicewomen. Congress has mandated investigations to be taken out of the military's hands to ensure a safer environment for all. Despite previous efforts to address issues like the Tailhook scandal in 1993 and the Aberdeen Proving Ground scandal in 1996, challenges persist. Following the 2020 murder of Vanessa Guillen, changes have been implemented, allowing individuals to report sexual harassment or assault outside the military and removing commanders from investigations by the end of 2023, with further changes expected by January 1, 2025. The War Horse aims to create a database of noncombat deaths of women and monitor how cases of abuse or sexual assault are handled, emphasizing solutions for meaningful cultural change.

[Learn more about the series](#)

NEWS UPDATES



Veteran Jobless Rate Lowest In Over 20 Years

The average veteran unemployment rate for 2023 was just under 2.8 percent, [the lowest in at least two decades](#), according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The data also indicates that veteran unemployment remains significantly below the national rate of 3.7 percent. Although lawmakers have focused on veteran unemployment, research shows that veterans often outperform their civilian counterparts in securing full-time employment. Among veterans in the labor force, those who served in the Gulf War II era constitute almost half of the employed individuals, and one in seven veterans with full-time jobs are women.



Almost Half of Veterans Screened Found to Have Potential Toxic Substance Exposure

The VA has screened nearly 5 million veterans under the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, a 2022 law expanding benefits for those exposed to toxic substances during military service. Of the screened veterans, [43 percent, or 2.1 million, reported potential exposure to toxic substances](#), with burn pits and Agent Orange being the most common exposures. These screenings are crucial for identifying health risks, including various cancers related to airborne hazards encountered during military service. VA Secretary Denis McDonough emphasized the screenings' role in improving healthcare and early detection of potential health challenges for veterans.



Lawmakers Push for Additional Outside Help to Prevent Veteran Suicides

Lawmakers expressed frustration with the lack of progress in preventing veterans' suicides, suggesting that [more of the \\$16 billion allocated for outreach efforts be given to outside community groups](#) during a House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing. After a slight increase in the suicide rate among veterans in 2021, reaching nearly 6,400 preventable deaths, the second lowest since 2007, lawmakers emphasized the need for more urgent and effective approaches. While the VA defended its efforts and highlighted the distribution of \$174 million in suicide prevention grants to community groups, some lawmakers suggested redirecting funds to established community programs, emphasizing the importance of producing measurable results. A report on the suicide prevention grant program is expected early this year.



Sorenson Supporting Veterans with Hearing Loss

Sorenson, a leading language services provider, has introduced the [Sound Off Project \(SOP\)](#), an initiative aimed at supporting U.S. military veterans and service members facing hearing loss. SOP seeks to empower veterans by providing resources and support for those dealing with hearing impairments. Sorenson, known for its inclusive communication services, aims to advocate for veterans through SOP, emphasizing the importance of addressing hearing-related challenges among those who have served in the military. The initiative includes a digital campaign for community building, education, and awareness, with plans to participate in key conventions throughout 2024.



Advocates Wish to Overhaul Program to Help Veterans Transition to Civilian Jobs

Many veterans and their advocates [expressed frustration with the Transition Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#), viewing it as insufficient in aiding transitioning troops. TAP, designed to help service members plan for civilian life, is criticized for providing too much information too quickly, making the information unclear and forcing troops to pursue outside resources. A 2023 report by the Government Accountability Office found that over 70 percent of those leaving the military did not start TAP on time, and more than one-third began TAP less than six months before leaving. The TAP Promotion Act, a legislative effort to address these issues, aims to involve accredited representatives from veterans service organizations in TAP classes and help with Benefits Delivery at Discharge claims.



Push for San Diego VA to Give More Housing Vouchers to Homeless Veterans

Four members of San Diego's Congressional delegation have [urged the local VA office to issue more housing vouchers](#) in response to a surge in homelessness among military veterans. This request follows data from The San Diego Union-Tribune revealing that numerous vouchers failed to reach those in need in recent years. The Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, designed to cover rent and reduce veteran homelessness, has faced underutilization, with around 40 percent of San Diego County's HUD-VASH vouchers unused last year. The letter from the Congressional members aims to address barriers and increase support for veterans, emphasizing the importance of utilizing all available vouchers to combat homelessness effectively.



Three New Vet Centers and Six Satellite Locations Added

The VA has announced the addition of [three new Vet Centers and six Vet Center Outstations](#) to enhance access to counseling services for veterans and service members. Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that offer various social and psychological services, including professional counseling at no cost to eligible veterans, service members, and their families. The new centers and outstations will be located in Arizona, California, Minnesota, New Jersey, Tennessee, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. VA Secretary Denis McDonough emphasizes the commitment to ensuring that veterans receive the mental health care and support they deserve, regardless of their location.

SUCCESS STORY



Do you have a success story you would like to share? If you are a grantee who helped a veteran who is struggling with housing or employment, we would love to hear from you.

[Submit Your Success Stories](#)

