



A literature review on this topic revealed the following practices to be evidence based and effective. The intention of this review is to substantiate best practices in HVRPs with research findings in the professional workforce development literature, such as they exist and are relevant to the HVRP population. Where research is limited or not directly about veterans or homeless populations, inferences were made to inform HVRP practices.



WHAT WORKS?

Research at Your Fingertips

WORKING WITH YOUNGER VETERANS: THE EVIDENCE

Research into homelessness and employment among veterans is increasingly focusing on the unique needs of younger veterans (defined varyingly as younger than 35, younger than 30, or younger than 25). To conduct outreach and provide services effectively, it is important to understand the health concerns, educational and occupational issues, and social dynamic of this age group. Recent research is described below.

Younger veterans make up a small percentage of the veteran population.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs tracks veterans by state and age (Office of the Actuary, 2014). Younger veterans represent a relatively small percentage of the overall veteran population, as older men were subject to a draft and served in times in which military forces were much larger. Further, many people in younger age groups continue to serve in the military and are not considered veterans. Table 1 indicates the number of veterans by age group, expressed as an absolute number and as a percentage of the veteran population. For the sake of comparison, the table also shows the percentage of the U.S. population falling into the 20-14, 25-29, and 30-34 age ranges (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a).

TABLE 1. VETERANS BY AGE

Age Range	Living Veterans	Percentage of Living Veterans	U.S. Population	Percentage of U.S. Population
<20	5,898	0.03		
20-24	283,586	1.2	22,847,945	7.2
25-29	753,686	3.4	21,604,166	6.8
30-34	1,057,946	4.8	21,298,044	6.7
35+	19,897,992	90.4		
Grand Total	21,999,108	100		

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Younger veterans include more women, compared to older veterans. Women have never been subject to mandatory military service, and women now have expanded roles in all branches of military service. Accordingly, younger women veterans represent a much larger percentage of the women veteran population, in comparison to veterans overall (Office of the Actuary, 2014), as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. WOMEN VETERANS BY AGE

Age Range	Living Women Veterans	Percentage of Living Veterans
<20	1,711	0.08
20-24	56,110	2.8
25-29	134,792	6.7
30-34	199,998	9.9
35+	1,627,466	80.6
Grand Total	2,020,077	100

Younger veterans are spread throughout the country, but are more likely to live in states with military installations. As shown in Table 3, younger veterans are concentrated in the most populous states, but a few states such as Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina are home to a disproportionately large percentage of younger veterans, compared to the state's relative population (Office of the Actuary, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Other states, such as

New York, are home to fewer veterans than would be expected based on their overall population. Another state with a notably low population of younger veterans is New Jersey, home to 2.8 percent of the U.S. population but only 1.5 percent of veterans aged 25-29.

It should be noted that Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina all have much larger populations of active-duty military personnel than states such as New York and New Jersey (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2014), which may represent a key factor in where veterans reside after their separation from military service.

Younger veterans are more likely to be unemployed or out of the work force than non-veterans of their age and gender. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015a) reports on veterans by age group, noting the numbers of veterans who are working; unemployed (i.e., seeking work); or not participating in the labor force (i.e., neither working nor seeking work). The youngest cohort of veterans is far less likely to be employed than other working-age adults. Among 211,000 veterans aged 18-24, 69,000 (32.7 percent) were not in the labor force; however, it should be noted that many young adults, veterans and non-veterans, are pursuing education. Another 23,000 veterans (10.9 percent of total) were unemployed. (Of those in the labor force, 16.2 percent were unemployed.) Overall, 43.6 percent of veterans aged 18-24 were either unemployed or not in the labor force.

TABLE 3. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF VETERANS, COMPARED TO U.S. POPULATION

State	< 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	% of vets 25-29	% of US total pop
California	622	25,549	70,613	95,893	9.4	12.2
Texas	505	23,188	70,234	106,122	9.3	8.5
Florida	304	13,616	41,050	62,891	5.4	6.2
Virginia	352	12,116	33,227	48,023	4.4	2.6
North Carolina	214	10,820	32,855	41,005	4.4	3.1
Georgia	184	10,858	28,415	38,579	3.8	3.2
New York	263	9,798	26,710	37,914	3.5	6.2
Ohio	257	9,868	25,817	35,376	3.4	3.6
Pennsylvania	242	10,891	25,154	36,194	3.3	4.0
Illinois	261	9,821	23,807	34,531	3.2	4.0

For the next cohort, rates of employment and labor force participation are higher, but unemployment and non-participation in the labor force are nevertheless troubling. Among 1,708,000 veterans aged 25-34, 321,000 (18.8 percent) were not in the labor force, and another 107,000 (6.3 percent of total) were unemployed. (Of those in the labor force, 7.7 percent were unemployed.) Overall, 25.1 percent of veterans aged 25-34 were either unemployed or not in the labor force. It should be noted that, across the U.S. population, labor force participation in this age range is much lower among women than among men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b).

Younger veterans face numerous obstacles to employment, even if they have attended college.

Traumatic brain injury (Pogoda et al., 2014) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Davis et al., 2012) present significant barriers to employment among veterans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Plach and Sells (2013) examined how these conditions affected veterans aged 20-29 who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan. The researchers identified a number of challenges, including relationships, education, physical health, sleep habits, and driving, each of which affected 23 to 77 percent of the younger veterans studied.

Many younger veterans who take advantage of G.I. Bill educational benefits have difficulty obtaining suitable employment. One reason for this difficulty may be that a significant percentage chooses to attend for-profit universities (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Many of these institutions have low on-time graduation rates, and veterans complete degrees at much lower rates than non-veterans; further, graduates earn less than those of more selective institutions (Rothwell, 2014).

Younger veterans are at special risk of homelessness. Younger veterans are overrepresented in the population of veterans experiencing homelessness. In 2013, veterans aged 18-30 made up 9.6 percent of all veterans experiencing sheltered homelessness, compared to 5.6 percent of all veterans who were in that age range (Solari et al., 2014). Post-traumatic stress disorder is linked to homelessness among veterans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan (Metraux et al., 2013; Tsai et al., 2013), many of whom are younger.

Substance use disorders also increase the risk of homelessness among veterans (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2015).

Race, gender, and poverty are key factors in homelessness among younger veterans. Among younger veterans, African Americans living in poverty and women living in poverty have a significantly greater risk of homelessness, compared to non-veterans living in poverty (Solari et al., 2014). A study of seven HUD Continua of Care revealed that among women veterans, the highest prevalence of homelessness occurred in the 18-29 age group (Fargo et al., 2011). Looking only at people in that age group and living in poverty, being a veteran dramatically increased the risk of homelessness. The risk was increased by a factor of 4.5 and 2.2 for African American and non-African American men, respectively, and by a factor of 2.3 and 3.1 for African American and non-African American women, respectively. One study found that veterans aged 25-34 had an increased risk of homelessness compared to other veterans, regardless of gender or whether they had served in a combat zone (Metraux et al., 2013). Among veterans experiencing homelessness, those who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan are less likely to receive VA disability benefits than older veterans (Tsai et al., 2013).

Younger are less likely to engage with traditional veteran service organizations (VSOs). According to news reports (Montgomery, 2014), the average age of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) members is almost 70, and only about 130,000 of 3 million veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have joined VFW. The American Legion is also experiencing declining membership due to difficulties attracting younger members, and membership has declined from 3.3 million to 2.3 million since the 1990s (Huang, 2014). Instead, younger veterans are opting for new groups such as Team Rubicon; Team Red, White, and Blue; and The Mission Continues, which focus on service and fitness. Members of traditional VSOs worry that younger veterans associate their organizations with their bars and meeting halls rather than the services that they provide to veterans, such as assistance with obtaining benefits.

Younger veterans are engaging in VA services at higher than expected rates. According to a VA report using FY 2012 data (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2014), the youngest male veterans (aged 24 and younger) were less likely (28.8 percent) to use VA services than average (40.1 percent of all male veterans). However, the 25-34 age group was more likely (42.5 percent) to use VA services than any other 10-year age bracket other than the 75-84 and 85-and-older age brackets. By comparison, 31.4 percent of male veterans aged 35-44 and 30.3 percent of male veterans aged 45-54 used VA services.

Women veterans using VA services tend to be younger. In fact, 27.9 percent of women veterans who use VA services are under the age of 34. Younger women veterans were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to use VA services—31.2 percent of those aged 24 and younger and 42.3 percent of those aged 25-34. Overall, however, only 34.5 percent of women veterans used VA services, due to lower enrollment among older age brackets.

Younger veterans receive behavioral health, housing, and employment support from the VA, but many have unmet needs. Although younger veterans engage in VA services in higher numbers relative to older veterans, many younger veterans have untreated mental and substance use disorders. An analysis of data taken from the adult U.S. population (Golub et al., 2013) revealed that 16 percent of veterans aged 21-34 had an untreated substance use disorder and

8 percent had untreated serious psychological distress. However, these numbers were similar to those for non-veterans in the same age range. The likelihood that younger veterans will seek psychiatric treatment is linked to their perception of public attitudes toward seeking treatment (Kulesza, 2015). The effects can be devastating. Mental and substance use disorders, along with financial and relationship problems, are more common among younger veterans who die by suicide, compared to older veterans (Kaplan et al., 2012).

Among veterans who have psychiatric diagnoses, those under the age of 45 are more likely (5.8 percent) than those over the age of 45 (4.8 percent) to receive employment services (Abraham et al., 2014). Younger veterans receiving employment services are also more likely to work (Leddy et al., 2014), including working in competitive employment (Twamley et al., 2013). Veterans who have children in their custody, who tend to be younger than most veterans receiving VA services, are more likely to be admitted to the VA's permanent supportive housing program (Tsai et al., 2015).

The use of technology improves outreach to younger veterans. Pedersen and colleagues (2015) successfully used Facebook to recruit a research sample of veterans aged 18-34, many of whom had mental or substance use disorders but had never received treatment or a disability evaluation. Text messages are also effective at increasing the rate at which veterans experiencing homelessness keep their VA appointments (McInnes et al., 2014).

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