



Veterans Integration Centers (VIC)

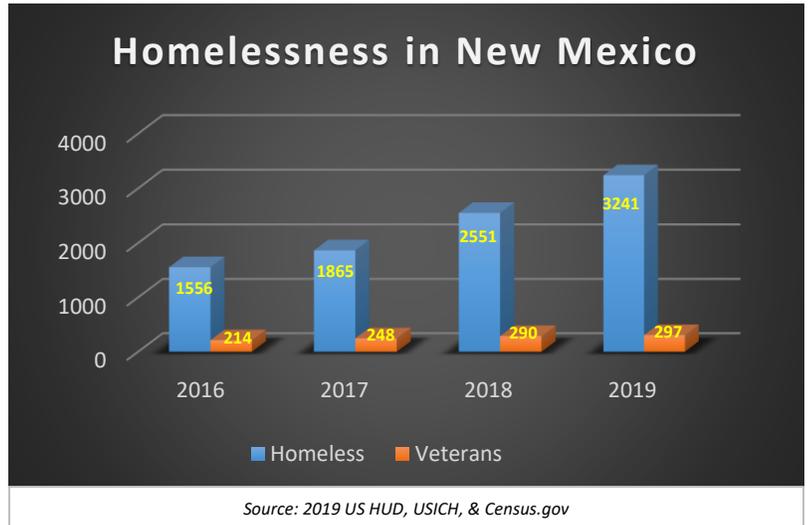
Helping End Veteran Homelessness throughout New Mexico

As we celebrate our 15th year of serving Veteran families, the VIC continues to be the only organization in New Mexico whose primary mission is to end Veteran homelessness.

In 2019, it was reported that homelessness increased 27% overall, the largest in the nation (US HUD). In 2018 the same department recorded a jump of 16.9% percent for homeless Veterans; one of the highest in the nation. This number continues to rise as Veterans are faced with homelessness in a COVID environment throughout the near future.

The VIC has created multiple programs that have become the model for how nonprofits and the community can work cohesively to combat Veteran homelessness. The VIC applies a “No Wrong Door” approach to service delivery. That is, we break barriers down that may otherwise keep a Veteran from seeking help or accessing services. No problem is too big and no concern too small; we strive to solve around these problems and work hard to help a Veteran family achieve success.

Through an aggressive application of the Housing First model of fighting homelessness, the VIC operates multiple housing options that address the full spectrum of needs, including Emergency, Transitional and Rapid Re-housing options. These choices ensure that a homeless veteran willing to accept help can effectively be removed from the streets and be placed in a safe and supportive environment immediately anywhere in New Mexico as their first step to long-term self-sufficiency and independence. For those at-risk of homelessness, our programs provide an avenue to avoid becoming homeless and work on the barriers that keep them from being sustainable.



Emergency Housing, a grossly underfunded resource in preventing homelessness, enables a literally homeless Veteran, and family of up to 4, to be immediately removed from the homeless event, thereby increasing their chance of success by 21%. Provided for up to 14 days, our teams are able to effectively assess and determine appropriate next steps with the best opportunity for Veterans to address their struggles. Our program also goes one step further, and can be used by any agency in the state providing services to a Veteran without having to re-enroll them into VIC programs. Our goal is not to remove Veterans from their supportive system, but enable others to help our Veteran families with a unified front of support.

Our **Transitional Housing** program, available for up to 1 year, allows the Veteran, and a family of up to 4, to continue their journey in a “transition” phase that will focus on the issues and problems that led to their homeless event. This includes multiple complex issues like trauma, PTSD, domestic violence or substance use. It includes financial readiness counseling and education, substance use disorder treatment, a re-education on life skills that many of us take for granted including cooking, laundry, life planning, and an adjustment to relying on others as their new family rather than struggling alone and having no one to turn to for advice, help or support.



Our **Rapid Re-Housing** program is the final step toward new independence. We help them move into their new apartment where they continue to receive a variety of supports for up to 9 months. As the VIC says, we turn a “house into a home.” By providing the Veteran family with essential living needs including furniture, a bed to sleep in, and the basic household essentials, the VIC believes in providing everything possible a Veteran family needs so that they do not struggle and can continue their road to recovery. We do this through our **Donations and Move-In** program that redistributes tax-deductible donations each year from the community. With over 85% of what we receive returned to the Veteran community, this program is critical in the reintegration process, and helps to fill an unmet need that most programs do not support. The program also gives back through employing two Veterans with part-time employment. Our way of paying it forward in our effort to improve employment opportunities.



Operation Warrior Recovery: We have dedicated Peer Support Specialists on staff, with lived experience, that can relate to the Veteran and their plight. Acting as a “battle buddy”, the Peer Specialists provides a listening ear to prevent the 22 Veterans a day committing suicide as their only option in life. They allow the Veteran to ask questions they may not normally ask their case manager and create a new family member they can rely upon. This model has been proven to work effectively in suicide reduction, and enables our programs to boast a 75% success rate (continued housing stability) 12-months after exit from our programs, while the national average is 64 to 67%.

During COVID, mental health crises have increased 54% in our clients. In large part because current systems have been shut down, leaving our Veterans to face their struggles alone. We have also added clinical counseling to the VIC array of services in 2020. By providing in-house clinical counseling, Veterans can receive essential services proven to increase long-term stability and emotional wellness. Veterans can adjust how much, or little, service is provided, but even more essential is our ability to remove any and all barriers to obtaining effective mental health services outside of normal resources.

As good stewards of the community, the VIC operates a **Food Pantry** in the second-most impoverished area of Albuquerque where we distribute over 113,000 pounds of USDA-approved food products each year to over 1300 needy families. This includes home delivery to housebound clients during COVID that are food insecure. Many without family support, we want to help reduce the growing 26% of Albuquerque that are food insecure, or deciding between paying rent or feeding their family. Supported by agency’s like the Roadrunner Food Bank, local grocers, great community gardens, and other donors, the Pantry ensures that no family will be hungry again.



As the VIC moves into the future, we will continue to increase our services so that no Veteran is left behind. We are working toward finding new options to expand housing services and enable all Veteran families affordable housing options. In 2020, **this also includes National Guard and Reserve Veterans, and unremarried surviving spouses**, who generally are ineligible for any federal programs, although they have supported our Veterans, our great state, and this nation with honor and distinction.

Working to provide services to over 152,000 Veteran families in New Mexico poses many challenges. Aside from finding and providing new grant-funded programs and services, the highly rural environment of the state is challenging and poses other barriers to accessing services for our Veteran families. In turn, the limited affordable housing stock that continues to dwindle is an obstacle that creates a struggle for the organization and all Veteran families living at or below the poverty line. But, as we say at the VIC, we will continue to provide services to our nation’s Heroes and their families “*Beyond the Battlefield*” for as long as it takes!