

A comparison of services for homeless veterans in Colorado and Arizona

Prepared for the Client

Summary:

While offering housing for veteran care is a priority in both states, Colorado is advanced in veteran services in the areas of:

- Communicating services in a comprehensive and easy-to-access manner,
- Programs offering education and livelihood training with a strong mental-health component,
- Creating a sense of community building in partnership with housing development programs.

Background

Colorado and Arizona have similar numbers of vets who are or have experienced homelessness. Both the Phoenix and Denver Metro areas have experienced similar trends over the past couple of years.

Arizona:

According to the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, **16% of veterans report having experienced homelessness at least once in their lives, or approximately 1,195 individuals** (2019). A micro-level Point-In-Time survey revealed a **slight increase in homeless veterans in Maricopa County over a three-year span** (2019). Arizona's direct homeless services primarily focus on temporary and permanent housing. If a homeless individual wants information about education or job training, they are typically referred to an external organization such as their local library or university. The connections between the various organizations providing services to Arizona veterans have tended to be decentralized and disorganized.

Colorado:

Meanwhile, in Colorado, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness reported that 1,068 veterans have experienced homelessness (2019). **76% of this population live in cities such as Denver. However, the [Denver Voice](#) reported a decrease in veteran homelessness from 2017 to 2018 (2018).** "Look around the nation, communities effective in creating a functional zero population have a common denomination: systematized entry," says Brenton Hutson, Division Director at Volunteers of America (VoA) Colorado, another one of the VA's community partners. This approach has already delivered results for Colorado's homeless veterans. In 2016, the Point-In-Time survey identified 551 homeless veterans. By 2018, that number dropped to 427, just over 12 percent of the total homeless population.

Variances:

As for services offered to homeless veterans in Colorado and Arizona there is a significant gap between the states. In contrast to Arizona's services, Colorado's services are easier to access and



understand. For example, the [Colorado Veterans Project](#) serves as a comprehensive clearinghouse of information for homeless veterans requiring assistance.

Both Arizona and Colorado embrace the “housing first” model of confronting homelessness. This is logical, as ensuring that basic needs such as shelter are met is a key component of remedying this social problem. However, the ways in which the states go beyond the provision of housing, and how effectively they do so, is key to understanding the differences. To better understand this, we need to examine the services Colorado’s veteran-focused nonprofits offer directly as opposed to Arizona, which may create opportunities for intervention.

Theories

One reason for the difference between efficacy of service in Colorado versus Arizona may be the systemized nature of programs offered to veterans in Colorado versus the scattershot nature of nonprofit and government resources in Arizona. Perhaps this reflects the deep military roots in Colorado, creating a heightened level of support for veteran care. Or, perhaps Colorado’s support for veteran services began earlier. According to the Denver Voice article previously referenced, other states have taken notice of Colorado’s progress as well. Between 2011 and 2017, Denver cut its homeless veteran population by 59 percent, according to a 2018 report comparing homeless veteran population in major metropolitan areas published by Washington State’s Department of Commerce. All of this supposition to say, Colorado serves as a strong case study of more advanced services to veterans within the nonprofit sector.


According to a 2018 article by Claire Caulfield for Phoenix-area news station, many formerly homeless veterans find themselves isolated in the apartments they are provided. One formerly homeless veteran, Ferrall Fritzbahe, said outright “if I had to make a choice between having a roof over my head or having my sense of community, I would choose being part of a community.” This feedback is similar to what was shared by Catholic Charities. Having a social network is as important as providing housing.

The services offered in Colorado, particularly the Denver area, mitigate potential isolation. For example, the Stout Street Health Center in Denver provides both physical and mental health services in one location. It also contains 60 units of permanent, supportive housing which prevents feelings of isolation. Investing in partnership with organizations that are seasoned in providing comprehensive veterans services that facilitate wellness and self-sufficiency is key.

Mental health:

Under the category of “Mental and Physical Health” the above-mentioned [Colorado Veteran’s Project](#) provides links to services such as [RehabCenter.net](#), which provides specialized PTSD and addiction treatment to veterans. This is not unique and often offered in Arizona programming through U.S. Vets and Catholic Charities. However, new trends in veteran services include [ComebackYoga.org](#), which offers trauma-informed yoga classes to veterans and [Project Sanctuary](#) which is one of the only organizations serving veterans, spouses, caregivers, and children as a family unit.

Livelihoods:



To create self-sustainability, educational and employment services are abundant in Colorado. It appears that the Colorado nonprofit community has invested in vocational training for burgeoning industries. Examples of these programs include [University of Colorado's Veteran and Military Student Services](#), [Veterans Green Jobs](#), and [Mi Casa Resource Center](#). Moreover, investing in business development among veterans extends beyond job skills training into venture investments. The [Support Warrior Project](#) offers business loans and investment capital for veterans interested in launching their own businesses or starting one of the recommended franchises. Not only do many of these resources provide education and job training but they also nurture mental and emotional wellness and, perhaps most importantly, foster a sense of camaraderie among veterans. While this programming might exist in Arizona, it appears difficult to find and less abundant.

Recommendations

In addition to creating opportunities for housing, the goal is increase levels of self-sufficiency among veterans so they feel empowered to sustain their housing and re-integrate into society as well as they can. This strategy is paramount to sustaining long-term positive change for the veteran community.

Arizona's services appear difficult to navigate for the civilian, let alone a homeless veteran without reliable access to the internet. It is worth mentioning that the dedicated professionals who serve Arizona's homeless veterans have begun taking steps to remedy this, at least as of the time of the Caulfield article cited above. This means that there could be an opportunity to invest in creating a comprehensive portal of veteran care services as a starting point for veterans to seek the support they are needing.

Additionally, investment in employment and educational services for veterans could be bolstered in Arizona. There are a number of opportunities to either partner with an existing Arizona-based nonprofit or to inspire an existing Colorado program to expand into Arizona to bring more of these opportunities to the Arizona-based community. For example, with [78 solar manufacturers](#) already established in Arizona, the state ranks number one nationwide in terms of having the most solar electricity installed. Colorado has a program that invests in a green jobs initiative for homeless veterans that trains them on careers within this field. Universities such as Maricopa Community College, Arizona State, and the University of Arizona have already shown an interest in working with the homeless veteran population so it may be worth exploring opportunities with these institutions. Moreover, Catholic Charities has shared a commitment to "wrap-around" services and could be an excellent partner in filling the gaps that exist for veteran care.

Providing access to strategic employment, entrepreneurship and educational services seems to be needed in Arizona. Moreover, facilitating a sense of mental and emotional wellness among homeless veterans and, by extension, less isolation and more camaraderie is essential.