

The United States Conference of Mayors

# SURVEY OF MUNICIPAL VETERAN SERVICES

February 2019



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

COMCAST  
NBCUNIVERSAL



**THE UNITED STATES  
CONFERENCE OF MAYORS**

**Steve Benjamin**

Mayor of Columbia  
President

**Bryan K. Barnett**

Mayor of Rochester Hills  
Vice President

**Greg Fischer**

Mayor of Louisville  
Second Vice President

**Joseph McElveen**

Mayor of Sumter  
Chair, Veterans Affairs Task Force

**Tom Cochran**

CEO and Executive Director



Printed on Recycled Paper.

**DO YOUR PART! PLEASE RECYCLE!**

# Foreword



**Tom Cochran**  
CEO and Executive Director  
The United States  
Conference of Mayors

I am pleased to join with our partners: Comcast NBCUniversal and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) in releasing the findings from a recent survey of 126 cities in 32 states on municipal veteran services. We conducted this survey to assess the needs of veterans, as well as identify the successes and challenges municipalities are experiencing as they strive to establish, expand and improve services available to veterans. The findings provide cities that have municipal veteran programs a means for comparing what they are doing with other cities. Further, it is our hope to help frame the issue to support those cities that have yet to start thinking about a municipal veteran program.

Let me start by thanking all of the Mayors who took the time to make sure your city responded to our survey. Without your help this would not have been possible.

When asked about the top challenges facing veterans in their cities, respondents identified affordable housing, employment options and homelessness as the top three challenges facing veterans. A total of 79 percent of the cities responding said they were committed to reducing homelessness. And while cities cited more affordable housing as the number one solution to veteran homelessness, they underscored the importance two critical federal programs: The Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers program provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) support program provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Most will agree that no honorably discharged veteran should have to face stagnant unemployment after returning home from active duty. Cities, states, the federal government and the private sector are all working to increase job opportunities for veterans. In our survey, cities identified workforce training as the top solution for veteran unemployment and many said they are committed to helping veterans find gainful employment. A third of the cities in the survey have municipal transition or employment assistance for veterans, while a quarter have established partnerships with post-secondary institutions for student veterans/and or employers.

While many cities are striving to address the needs of veterans, we acknowledge that much more remains to be done. In closing I want to encourage all Mayors to review this report, share it with other elected officials and community leaders in your cities, and seriously consider what more can be done to improve the services available to veterans residing in your communities.



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Overview .....	2
Key Findings .....	3
<b>Summary of Key Findings .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Supporting Veterans .....	4
Best Practices .....	5
Quotes From Cities .....	6
Informing Mayors About Veterans .....	8
List of Participating Cities .....	9

# Executive Summary

## OVERVIEW

In partnership with Comcast NBCUniversal and the Center for a New American Security, The United States Conference of Mayors sent out a survey to assess the needs of veterans, as well as successes and challenges in providing services to veterans at the municipal level.

Mayors throughout the United States were surveyed from October 16 through December 6, 2018. During this period, 126 cities in 32 states, including the District of Columbia, responded to this survey. Of the 126 cities, 77 provided a complete response to the survey, while 49 cities provided enough data for topline analysis. Cities with populations up to 150,000 comprised the largest group (or 48%); cities with populations 150,000 to 1 million comprised the second largest group (or 43%); and cities over 1 million in population (or 9%) were the smallest group represented.

There are roughly 20 million veterans in the United States today, and while that number is steadily shrinking as the large cohorts who served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam pass, each year, around 250,000 service members leave military service and become veterans within our communities across the country. The goal of this work is to provide further information to cities with existing programs that have identified gaps in services, as well as to better understand key issues facing cities with emerging veterans support programs.

Specifically, the survey sought information from mayors on: (1) the size of the veteran population in each city and the presence of an office or individual dedicated to veteran services; (2) organizational alignment on the city, county, state, and federal level and with non-profit and private partners; (3) the top three challenges facing veterans at the municipal level; (4) what obstacles cities face in addressing those identified challenges; (5) challenges to homelessness, employment, and for minority veterans; and (6) cities' successes and best practices.

This survey was developed and fielded by The United States Conference of Mayors with support from Comcast NBCUniversal and the Center for a New American Security.

### 126 CITIES IN 32 STATES PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY

59% of cities have an established collective impact group or structure to coordinate delivery of services by multiple entities.

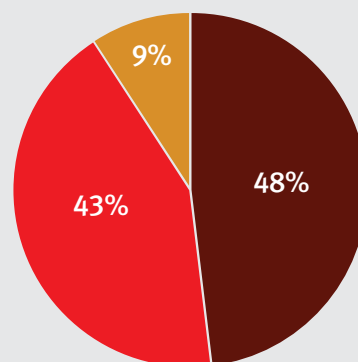
Roughly one third of respondents did not know how many veterans live in their cities.

There is significant variation in organizational alignment with the individual or office dedicated to veterans falling under a variety of agencies.

The majority of individuals and offices fall under Health and Human Services and the mayor's office.

#### SMALL, MEDIUM AND LARGE CITIES WERE ALL REPRESENTED

- Small (Pop. < 150K)
- Medium (Pop. 150K - 1M)
- Large (Pop. 1M+)





## KEY FINDINGS

The results show that mayors around the country share similar concerns about affordable housing, homelessness, and employment opportunities for veterans, are keenly interested in learning how communities can best support those who have served our nation and have identified burgeoning best practices in doing so.

- The survey asked cities to identify the top three challenges facing veterans in their communities; responses seem interrelated and not unique to veterans: affordable housing, employment options, and homelessness. Additional challenges respondents highlighted are: navigating the VA system, transition to civilian life, and mental health (i.e. suicide prevention, behavior health issues, and mental health services).
- Two-thirds of responding cities reported they do not have an office nor an individual dedicated to veteran services, with 80% of small sized cities having neither, compared to only 18% of large sized cities.
- Of the cities that responded, **one-third** did not know how many veterans reside in their jurisdiction. Smaller cities were more likely not to know the veteran population in their municipality than medium or large cities. **Two-thirds** of cities did not know the number of female veterans residing in their jurisdiction.
- Of those cities that reported the number of veterans that reside in their jurisdiction, on average small size cities reported 9,000; medium size cities reported 23,000; and large size cities reported 142,000.
- Over half (59%) of cities have a plan in place to address their top identified challenge over the next 24 months, and report expecting nearly 20% of the funding to come from cities themselves.

### TOP THREE CHALLENGES FACING VETERANS

#### 1. Affordable Housing

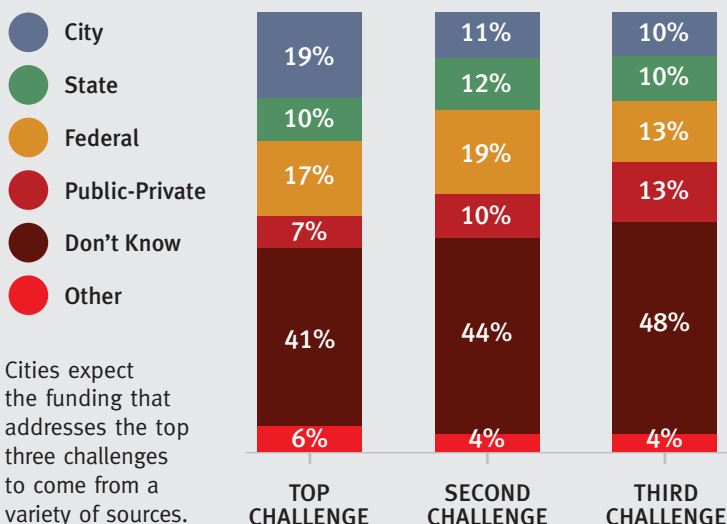
#### 2. Employment Options

#### 3. Homelessness

59% of cities have a plan in place to address the top identified challenge over the next 24 months.

Most cities do not have public awareness campaigns promoting veterans issues (53%) or campaigns to address misconceptions about veterans (58%).

#### EXPECTATION OF FUNDING FOR TOP CHALLENGES



# Summary of Key Findings

## Supporting Veterans

### *Veteran Homelessness and the Lack of Affordable Housing*

Ending veteran homelessness has been a top priority at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for several years now; the January 2018 point-in-time count identified 37,800 homeless veterans nationwide. Seventy-nine percent of cities that responded to this survey have committed to reducing or ending veteran homelessness. The majority of cities (42 of 77 cities, or 55%) track homeless veteran demographics. Cities indicated *affordable housing* is the number one identified challenge while *homelessness* is the third: a total of 59 cities rank affordable housing as one of the top three challenges while 37 cities rank homelessness as one of the top three challenges. When asked what the obstacles were to addressing veteran homelessness, one-third of cities indicated funding was a hurdle, with one-fifth of cities reporting lack of available housing was an obstacle.

Increasing the amount of available affordable housing (identified as a stand-alone challenge by cities), understandably, has been identified as the top solution to homelessness; cities also mentioned HUD/VASH vouchers, SSVF, and wrap-around services to address complicating factors. Cities were asked whether they currently provide, are planning to provide, or would like to provide an array of services to support veterans. Respondents were most likely to report that they are currently providing housing assistance and community awareness programs.

### *Ensuring Successful Transition to the Civilian Workforce*

Cities specified *employment options* for veterans as the second most important challenge facing veterans in their jurisdictions: 40 cities rank employment as one of the top three challenges. In terms of veteran unemployment, cities identified workforce training as the top solution followed by public-private partnerships. Mayors were asked what transition or employment assistance cities dedicated to veterans; a third offer transition or employment assistance for veterans and another quarter of cities have partnerships with post-secondary institutions for student vets and/or employers. However, another third have no established program in place to address this challenge. When asked about obstacles to successfully addressing veteran unemployment, cities indicate lack of coordination and access to education as the primary hurdles. On a number of occasions, cities indicated that lack of coordination with county, state, or federal entities inhibited the city's ability to adequately provide services to veterans. Highlighting this, less than one-third of cities (27%) indicated they have support to access signup portals for federal or state veteran-specific benefits.

While housing assistance and community awareness programs were the services cities most commonly provide, plan to provide, or would like to provide, cities also indicated transition programs, veteran job retraining, and entrepreneurship support. Yet only 19% indicated that they had web-based or distributed learning technology accessible for veterans to use.

And relatively few cities were planning to provide additional services, even though there was strong interest in being able to provide additional support for veteran entrepreneurship, digital literacy, transition programs and job retraining, employment partnerships with companies and organizations, as well as to support women veterans and military families.

### *Promising Initiatives and Partnerships*

Mayors reported significant variation in organizational alignment when asked under which department the office or individual dedicated to veteran services fell. The majority of veteran service offices/individuals fell under the mayor's office or health and human services. Only 5 cities had standalone departments for veterans.



Despite this diversity in organization, cities overall report regular engagement with a variety of state, federal, and county organizations – including the local VA medical center, various national-level VA offices, local Veterans Benefits Administration regional offices and VA cemeteries, county veterans service officers, and state women veteran coordinators. However, few consider their cities well integrated with these other entities: just over half feel that way about integration with their county, but under a third consider themselves well integrated with state, federal, private, or philanthropic entities.

The survey asked cities about what initiatives they see as most promising, and they identified *support to non-profits, increased integration and coordination with state and federal agencies, and municipal support for affordable housing* as the top three.

Additionally, identified as promising initiatives were public-private partnerships, awareness campaigns, collective impact engagement, and support to military caregivers. Of note, need for greater coordination amongst agencies and organizations was an obstacle for cities in deploying solutions to support veterans. Cities noted how technology could increase veteran engagement, highlighting public-private partnerships being established or re-established with veteran’s advisory commissions; hubs or clearinghouses of veteran-specific resources; more information and better communication about offerings, training, and available technology; and assistance with local needs to build veteran-serving apps and portals.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING VETERANS AT A MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Survey responses suggest most cities lack the resources and coordination to effectively overcome the top needs of veterans in their communities, although cities also collaborate widely with government, private, and non-profit actors to fill gaps in service.

Cities’ self-identified municipal best practices suggest a few recommended courses of action:

- Designate an individual or office to coordinate veteran services at the municipal or county level and ensure synchronization across city and county agencies, along with state, federal, and private-sector organizations.
- Connect lawyers conducting pro-bono legal assistance to veterans within the community.
- Institute subsidized ride-sharing or volunteer-based transportation program to transport veterans to medical appointments and job interviews.
- Use city platforms (i.e. websites), communications channels (i.e. mailers and brochures), and social media to raise awareness regarding the challenges veterans face, available services, location of services, and announcements of public outreach events for veterans, as well as to connect non-profit organization with veterans.
- Provide a facility for a veteran resource center such as community college space.

In addition to these self-identified best practices, The United States Conference of Mayors and the Center for a New American Security reviewed the survey results and would recommend several other proven best practices, including:

- Seeking public-private partnerships through involvement from locally-led businesses with a history or interest in engaging the military community from a workforce and/or community outreach perspective.
- Cities serving as conveners with existing influencers in their local veterans’ space to develop a “collective impact” group of structure to coordinate delivery of services by multiple entities. Examples of these influencers could be local VFW posts, VA Community Veteran Engagement Boards, American Legion posts, military caregiver organizations (i.e. the Elizabeth Dole Foundation), or post-9/11 veteran-focused non-profits that encourage social collaboration from veterans, including Team Red, White, and Blue, and The Mission Continues.

## QUOTES FROM CITIES

### *Recommendations for improving services:*

**Augusta, GA:** Increase in availability of low-income housing units, preferably with a Veteran preference and lowered barriers to access around credit and criminal history.

**Plano, TX:** Meeting with residential developers and state legislatures to raise awareness of the need for affordable housing and allowing cities the opportunity to create programs to address the issue.

**Independence, MO:** Funding for mental health crises centers to alleviate demand on hospitals and police. Mental health isn't a police issue but the police and paramedics are forced to respond. We need places that are judgement free zones where the mentally ill and addicted can walk in or be transported by police, fire, and paramedics.

**Augusta, GA:** Collaborative engagement between VA programs and community partner (non-profit) programs in Resource Fair settings, collaborative case conferencing for homeless veteran issues.

**Portland, OR:** Adequate facilities and funding to address mental health and substance abuse. Currently a majority of the efforts are addressed through local law enforcement.

### *Best practices:*

**Austin, TX:** The City of Austin's Veterans Services Office provides support for City employees who are in the National Guard and Reserve or are veterans, as well as their families. Support is provided before deployment, during deployment and during reintegration into the workplace. City of Austin Veterans Services Office is a resource for individual employees, City departments and City management. It stays up-to-date on available veteran services both within the City and with other agencies. The office offers training to City departments on federal legislation that addresses hiring, leave and benefits; monitors the health, welfare and morale of veterans in the City workforce; and works to ensure fair treatment for all service members and their families by all government agencies.

**Glassboro, NJ:** The Veterans Advisory Commission has a strong, engaging social media campaign. Creating awareness via social media comes at low to no-cost. It highlights the successes of other Veteran organizations and supports their initiatives in the absence of official City plans. Concurrently, the Veterans Advisory Commission is building relationships with veteran service organizations, corporations, non-profits at the local and national levels in order to reach and understand Veteran needs outside of just our city resources.

**Irvine, CA:** The City of Irvine's "For Families" Program is an accessible resource to support veterans in endless ways. The program is overseen by a therapist and supported by Police and Community Services Departments.

**Pinellas Park, FL:** Currently, Pinellas Park serves on and supports Pinellas County's Homeless Leadership Board and supports the Pinellas Hope shelter and other countywide and nonprofit programs serving Veterans living in the City. Pinellas Park is developing a 10-acre property, the Wounded Warriors Abilities Ranch, that is the first outdoor recreation facility designed completely for wounded veterans and their families.

**Washington, DC:** We have implemented an on-demand, no-cost transportation program for low-income and homeless veterans. The program allows for transport to health care appointments, employment interviews, and educational opportunities. We have also implemented robust community outreach programs to better connect with multiple segments of the veteran community. We have also extended these to include minority groups of veterans (e.g. aging, caregivers, women, LGBTQ etc.).

**Medford, MA:** To ensure that all of the Veterans of Boston are healthy and thriving, the Office of Veterans Services has implemented an engagement program known as Operation Thank A Vet, under the direction of the Mayor's Office of Health and Human Services. The mission of this program is to engage our veterans and their families with a focus on our most vulnerable and hard to reach residents; provide a means to identify the needs of each veteran and their family to better advocate on their behalf and to ensure that the way in which we serve the Veterans of Boston remains effective and efficient.

## Informing Mayors About Veterans: Challenges and Solutions

This survey is an ambitious initiative by The United States Conference of Mayors to inform municipal leaders around the country about the challenges of serving a unique group of constituents – America’s military veterans and their families, who share the challenge of balancing the conclusion of military service with transitioning to a thriving post-service life.

The information and insights shared here come from the front-line reality of local government. Mayors and their staffs in 126 cities generously shared their experience in trying to provide appropriate support for the veterans embedded in the fabric of our communities, and those who continue to come out of the military and reintegrate back into our communities at the rate of 250,000 a year.

Mayors were asked to identify the major challenges facing veterans in their cities. Not surprisingly, the related issues of affordable housing, employment and homelessness were the most widely cited. These concerns are not unique to veterans, but their impact is magnified for service members and their families who have to tackle them against the already-difficult task of military-to-civilian transition.

Veterans issues are national in scope, but local government has a well-earned reputation as the place where bi-partisan solutions to national problems are created, often with the help of public/private partnerships. This survey shares a few of the promising efforts underway in some cities on behalf of veterans, as well as summarizing the greatest challenges and needs cited by participating mayors.

The information presented here should make this survey a useful tool for cities across America as they work to expand opportunities for the men and women who volunteered to serve our country.

Comcast NBCUniversal has benefitted immensely from the veterans and military family members we’ve integrated into our workforce. As a proud member of the The United States Conference of Mayors Business Council, we are delighted to sponsor this survey and bring these critical learnings to you in partnership with The United States Conference of Mayors and Center for New American Security.

Sincerely,

David L. Cohen  
Senior Executive Vice President, Comcast Corporation

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Carol Eggert  
Senior Vice President, Military & Veteran Affairs, Comcast

## Cities and States Represented in the Survey

CITY	STATE/ REGION	CITY POPULATION
Alabaster	AL	30,352
Anchorage	AK	292,826
Arnold	MO	21,113
Auburn	WA	77,472
Augusta	GA	200,549
Austin	TX	790,390
Beverly Hills	CA	34,622
Bismarck	ND	61,272
Bloomington	IN	80,405
Boston	MA	617,594
Boulder	CO	97,385
Bridgeport	CT	144,229
Cape Coral	FL	154,305
Cape Girardeau	MO	37,941
Champlin	MN	25,022
Chapel Hill	NC	57,233
Charlotte	NC	731,424
Chattanooga	TN	177,571
Clarksville	TN	150,289
College Station	TX	98,587
Columbia	SC	129,272
Columbia	MO	108,500
Columbus	OH	789,033
Cooper City	FL	32,345
Corpus Christi	TX	305,215
Dallas	TX	1,197,816
Dayton	OH	141,359
Dearborn Heights	MI	57,774
Denver	CO	600,158
Des Moines	IA	203,433
Dubuque	IA	57,637

CITY	STATE/ REGION	CITY POPULATION
East Hartford	CT	51,252
El Paso	TX	649,121
Erie	PA	101,786
Everett	MA	41,667
Everett	WA	103,019
Fairfield	CT	57,578
Fall River	MA	88,857
Fayetteville	AR	73,580
Fort Lauderdale	FL	165,521
Fort Wayne	IN	253,691
Framingham	MA	68,318
Franklin	TN	62,487
Garland	TX	234,943
Gary	IN	80,294
Glassboro	NJ	20,011
Goodyear	AZ	62,275
Gresham	OR	105,594
Henderson	NV	279,226
Hollywood	FL	140,768
Honolulu	HI	991,788
Houston	TX	2,099,451
Independence	MO	116,830
Indianapolis	IN	829,178
Irvine	CA	212,375
Joliet	IL	147,433
Juneau	AK	31,275
Knoxville	TN	178,874
Lakewood	CO	142,980
Las Cruces	NM	97,618
Lauderdale Lakes	FL	35,593
Lansing	MI	114,297

CITY	STATE/ REGION	CITY POPULATION
Las Vegas	NV	583,756
Little Rock	AR	193,524
Livermore	CA	80,968
Livonia	MI	96,942
Long Beach	CA	462,257
Los Angeles	CA	3,797,621
Louisville	KY	741,096
Medford	MA	56,173
Mesa	AZ	457,587
Miami	FL	399,457
Mobile	AL	195,111
Mooresville	NC	37,820
Napa	CA	76,915
New Bedford	MA	95,972
New Haven	CT	129,779
New Orleans	LA	343,829
New York	NY	8,175,133
Newport News	VA	189,719
Norfolk	VA	242,803
North Little Rock	AR	62,304
North Ridgeville	OH	30,571
Ocala	FL	56,315
Oregon City	OR	34,622
Orlando	FL	238,300
Palo Alto	CA	64,403
Pembroke Pines	FL	154,750
Philadelphia	PA	1,526,006
Phoenix	AZ	1,445,632
Pinellas Park	FL	49,579
Pittsburgh	PA	305,704
Plano	TX	259,841
Portland	OR	583,776

CITY	STATE/ REGION	CITY POPULATION
Princeton	NJ	31,249
Puerto Vallarta	14	203,342
Richmond	VA	204,214
Richmond	CA	103,701
Riverside	CA	303,871
Rochester Hills	MI	70,995
Sacramento	CA	466,488
Saint Petersburg	FL	244,769
Salisbury	MD	30,343
Salt Lake City	UT	186,440
San Antonio	TX	1,439,845
Santa Ana	CA	324,528
Santa Fe	NM	67,947
Santa Monica	CA	89,736
Seattle	WA	608,660
South Bend	IN	108,168
South Pasadena	CA	25,888
Sumter	SC	40,424
Tacoma	WA	198,397
Tallahassee	FL	186,411
Tempe	AZ	175,826
Tucson	AZ	520,116
Tulsa	OK	391,900
Tuscaloosa	AL	99,943
Vancouver	WA	161,791
Warrenton	VA	9,875
Washington	DC	646,449
Waukesha	WI	70,718
West Haven	CT	55,564
Westland	MI	80,094
Wichita	KS	382,368
Yakima	WA	91,067







THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

*Tom Cochran*

Tom Cochran, CEO and Executive Director

1620 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
Tel: 202.293.7330  
[usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org)