



## COMMUNITIES SERVE HIGHLIGHTS FOR STATE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

### A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF NEED ASSESSMENTS ON U.S. VETERAN AND MILITARY-CONNECTED POPULATIONS

*Written by Ryan D. Van Slyke & Nicholas J. Armstrong*



#### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

“ Military veterans and their families face a multiplicity of challenges once they transition from service. Even though more American private and public-sector organizations are engaged in studying the needs of veterans and their families through need assessments, few assessments are comprehensive analyses of the challenges they face. This systematic review of 61 need assessments from 2007-2018 in the United States summarizes findings on 18 veterans issues. While most studies addressed issues relating to accessing U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health and benefit services, mental health, employment, and homelessness, gaps in the literature emerged, particularly regarding ethnic and sexual minority, rural and elderly veterans, and National Guard/ Reserve servicemembers. Large cities and states with varying degrees of military presence were frequent regions of study, with national think tanks, nonprofit organizations, and public universities conducting most need assessments. Future assessments should address persistent inequities in coverage among communities and topics of study using mixed-method research and survey design. ”

#### MOST COMMON TOPICS OF STUDY:

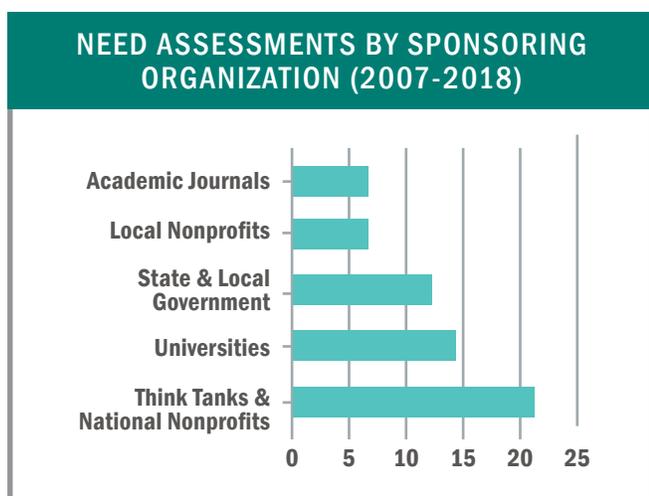
- ▶ Access to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) (i.e. Transportation, Navigation of the VA, Cultural Competency, Military Sexual Trauma)
- ▶ Mental and Behavioral Health (i.e. Stigmas in VA & Military Culture, care for Women and ethnic minority veterans)
- ▶ Employment (i.e. Perceived employer stigmas, difficulties translating military skills)
- ▶ Transition (i.e. feelings of isolation and disconnect from local communities and VA system)
- ▶ Homelessness and housing (i.e. high costs of living, limitations of HUD-VASH voucher program)

#### LEAST COMMON TOPICS OF STUDY:

- ▶ Poverty among Veteran & Military-Connected Families (i.e. food insecurity, fractured community support)
- ▶ Rural and ethnic-minority veterans (i.e. access to VA and VHA services, quality of health)
- ▶ National Guard/Reserve veterans (i.e. employment and retention challenges, poor inclusion into VA and veteran community organizations)
- ▶ Financial Support (i.e. financial planning assistance)
- ▶ Legal Support (i.e. risk of handling legal issues without representation, common legal issues of criminal offenses, bankruptcy, housing, and substance abuse).

#### RESEARCH METHOD BEST-PRACTICES:

- ▶ Partner with multiple community organizations & stakeholders across a set of issue areas to use marshalled resources to expand the scope of a need assessment, drawing upon each organization’s expertise or interest areas to study an area’s veteran population in a holistic manner.
- ▶ Employ rigorous mixed-method procedures in the assessment of a wide scope of issue areas and needs, such as quantitative data collection, interviews and focus groups, and comparing samples to Census Bureau and VA data.



## STATE MODELS



**VIRGINIA (VA TECH):** Excellence for using mixed-methods approaches with quantitative surveys of Virginia's veteran population as well as small focus groups and qualitative interviews.

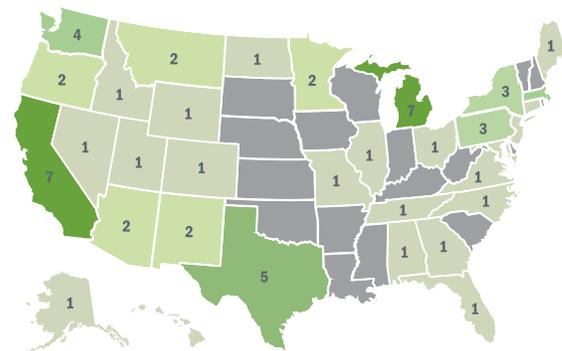


**PENNSYLVANIA (PSU- HARRISBURG):** Excellence for using mixed-methods approaches across a variety of topic/ need areas. Impact-oriented with recommendations for the Pennsylvania Department of Military & Veterans Affairs at the end of each section.



**ALASKA (UA- ANCHORAGE):** Excellence for using mixed-methods approaches with quantitative surveys (collaborating with the Alaska Department of Motor Vehicles) and qualitative interviews with discussion sessions, with clearly-documented survey and interview methodologies and protocols.

## GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF NEED ASSESSMENTS



NUMBER OF STUDIES:



## IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

- ▶ Most need assessments address a core set of issues for U.S. veterans: accessing U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health and benefit services, mental health, employment, and homelessness. These were common in cities, counties, states, and regions studied in the U.S.
- ▶ Veterans often have a co-occurrence of needs, requiring a multifaceted response by state agencies and community partners for more than one type of service.
- ▶ The least well-documented and understood veterans groups at a state level are minority veterans, veterans living in rural areas, and National Guard/Reserve veterans.
- ▶ Need assessments can help state government agencies distinguish experiences, needs, and gaps in service by geography when conducted on a state and regional level. This enables state agencies to target improvements to service delivery to their state's veteran population.
- ▶ Connecting with, and educating, veterans on available and future services through the state's DVA and the U.S. VA is paramount to effectively meeting their set of needs, particularly in rural states with few VA Medical Centers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (DVAS)

1. Partner with state universities to conduct statewide need assessments to inform understanding about your state's veteran population, leveraging existing expertise in policy, health, and social-work programs and evaluation. Use other states' needs assessments as best practices for a potential study in your state.
2. Focus on studying and building greater awareness of the veteran experience and sets of needs for particular groups of under-studied veterans, including ethnic minority, women, and National Guard/Reserve veterans, and more.
3. As state agencies, think about community needs, and the co-occurrence of need, inclusively and develop relationships to deliver services and aid across multiple areas of need for veteran communities in your state.

