Veteran Homelessness in Ottawa



ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS OTTAWA

SOLDIERS HELPING SOLDIERS

MULTIFAITH HOUSING INITIATIVE

© 2019 Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa

Report prepared by Danielle Rolfe, PhD

Special thanks to: Soldiers Helping Soldiers volunteers and staff members at Shepherds of Good Hope, The Ottawa Mission, Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre, and Cornerstone Shelter for Women.

Report available in English at: endhomelessnessottawa.ca

Table of Contents

Project Summary 1

Background 2
Point in Time (PiT) Count Explained 2
Table 1. Estimates of the proportion of veterans among the homeless population based on community-wide Point in Time (PiT) Counts and HIFIS data 3

Project Overview 4
Project Partners 4
Stakeholder Engagement 5
Objectives 6

Veteran's Housing Project 7

Approach 8
Homeless Shelter Recruitment 8
Survey Development 8
Engaging Shelter Staff in Planned Counts 8
Training of Volunteers 9
Survey Administration 9
Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) Data 9

Findings 10
Veteran Counts at Shelters 10
Table 2. Counts conducted to identify veterans at homeless shelters in Ottawa 10
Objective 1: Number of veterans in Ottawa who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness 11
Table 3. Number and percentage of veterans identified during shelter counts 11
Demographics 11
Indigenous Veterans 11
Health Conditions 11
HIFIS Data 11
Service History 12
Figure 1. Veterans' self-reported year of enlistment 12
Figure 2. Veterans' self-reported service component 12
Figure 3. Veterans' self-reported service branch 12
Objective 2: Increased awareness of available supports & services among veterans in Ottawa who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness 13
Objective 3: Increased awareness of available supports & services among shelter staff, and ability to identify veterans 14
Figure 4. Shelter staff awareness of how to support veterans 14
Objective 4: Increased referrals of veterans to available supports & services from shelters/organizations 14
Objective 5: Increased awareness among key stakeholders of scope of issue 15
Figure 5. Word Cloud representing the types of support requested by veterans 15

Discussion & Conclusion 16

References 17

Appendices 18

Pre-Post Survey for Shelter Staff 19

Shelter Client Survey 20

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Poster for Shelters 23

Resources for Veterans 24



Project Summary

Objective evidence of the extent of veteran homelessness in Ottawa, Ontario has not previously been explored through academic research or via municipal Point in Time counts during which citizens who are homeless or precariously housed are systematically counted. The purpose of this project was to gather objective evidence on the extent of veteran homelessness in Ottawa, and to better understand how veterans experiencing homelessness might be better supported or prevented altogether.

The Ottawa Chapter of Soldiers Helping Soldiers, in collaboration with the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, Multifaith Housing Initiative, and with funding from Support Our Troops (Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services), enabled several Point in Time counts to be conducted involving the four major emergency shelters in Ottawa (Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre, The Ottawa Mission, Shepherds of Good Hope and Cornerstone Shelter for Women) to identify veterans experiencing homelessness. Staff members' awareness of the importance of identifying veterans, as well as available supports and services was assessed before and after an informational seminar on these topics.

A count at each shelter was conducted during Fall 2018 and Winter 2019. Forty percent of shelter clients participated in a survey administered by trained Canadian Armed Forces volunteers. Twenty-six (25 male and one female) shelter clients self-identified as veterans, representing about 11% of all survey respondents. About one-third (8) of these self-identified veterans could recall their service number or 'last three,' representing about 3% of all shelter clients surveyed. Based on data available in each shelter's database, 1.6% of shelter clients reported past military history. Thirty-five (35%) of veterans self-identified as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit or Métis). Nearly half of all identified veterans reported experiencing a medical condition, physical disability, addiction and/or mental health issue concurrently.

The average age of veterans at enlistment was 18 years, and most (91%) reported enlisting in the Forces ten or more years ago. Sixty-nine percent of veterans reported service in the Regular Forces, predominantly in the Army (60%) and with more than one-third citing their occupation as artillery, infantry, field engineer, or weapons technician.

Less than half of veterans were aware of the potential to receive benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada, and fewer had tried to receive benefits. Seminars with shelter staff increased staff members' intentions to ask about service history during client intake, and their likelihood of referring veterans to relevant supports and services. Veterans most frequently identified affordable housing as a desired form of support.

The findings from this report are comparable to previous studies of veteran homelessness in other Canadian cities, and the 2019 City of Ottawa Point in Time Count. Data from this project and others suggest that veterans are likely overrepresented among Canadians experiencing homelessness and targeted efforts are needed to provide appropriate supports and importantly, affordable housing.

Background

Objective evidence on the extent (number) of veteran homelessness in Canada has only recently been gathered but remains unknown for several communities such as Ottawa. Potentially comparable estimates of homelessness among veterans in the UK and Australia suggest that approximately 3-6% of the homeless population are veterans. (Ray, 2011)

The first national study of veteran homelessness was conducted by the Government of Canada and used data gathered from January 1st to December 31st, 2014 by emergency shelters across Canada using the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). At that time, it was estimated that 2,250 veterans use homeless shelters each year in Canada, representing about 2.7% of shelter users. (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015) In addition to collected HIFIS data, this report also cites estimates of the proportion of veterans among the homeless population based on community-wide Point in Time Counts (see Table 1).

Findings from the 2016 Coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) Count conducted across 32 participating Canadian communities (not including Ottawa or other major urban centres, such as Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal) found that nearly 5% of respondents indicated that they had served in the Canadian Armed Forces, while less than 1% indicated that they had served in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017) It is suggested in this report that, compared to the proportion of veterans in the Canadian adult population (2.4%), veterans are approximately twice as likely to experience homelessness as non- veterans.

Estimates of the homeless veteran population vary by region and by method (see Table 1). That is, HIFIS data relies on shelter staff asking clients about military service in order to connect veterans with available benefits and supports. A PiT Count survey often includes the question "Have you ever had any service in the Canadian military or the RCMP?"

Point in Time (PiT) Count Explained

PiT Counts provide a snapshot of homelessness in a community over a set period of time, generally 24 hours.

Traditionally, PiT Counts measure absolute homelessness, including individuals staying outside (e.g., parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings), emergency shelters, and fixed-term transitional housing. A PiT Count is typically a community-wide exercise with many volunteers spending several hours surveying people in these various locations.

PiT Counts yield (1) the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in a community on a given night (often referred to as "the count"), and (2) information on the population such as demographics, history of homelessness, and service needs.

(Gaetz, 2016)



Table 1. Estimates of the proportion of veterans among the homeless population based on community-wide Point in Time (PiT) Counts and HIFIS data

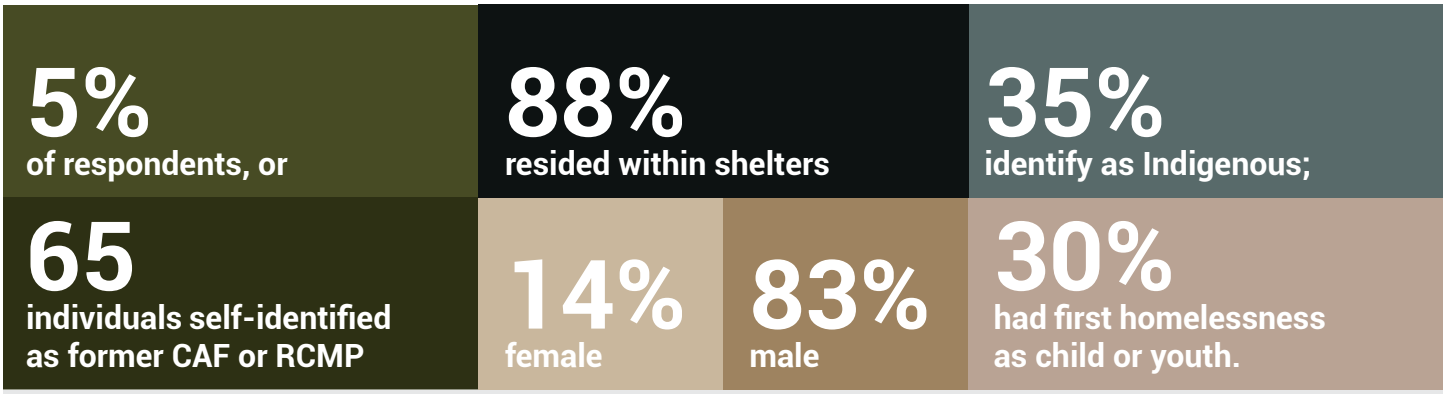
PiT Count	HIFIS Data	Community, Year	Source
NA	2.7%	60 shelters across Canada (15% of the emergency shelters in Canada), 2014	The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015)
7%	2.4%	Vancouver, 2014	
5%	0.5%	Waterloo, 2014	
5%	NA	Toronto, 2018	City of Toronto Street Needs Assessment (City of Toronto, 2018)
4%	NA	Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal, Moncton	At Home/Chez Soi, Mental Health Commission of Canada (Goering, 2014)
9%	NA	Overnight shelter in Toronto, 2010	Good Shepherd (unpublished) Ministries, 2010

NA – *data not available*

Until 2018, no detailed information existed about veterans experiencing homelessness in Ottawa. Despite previous municipal PiT Counts to assess homelessness in Ottawa, the question about Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) or RCMP service had never been asked.

The first attempt to gather an estimate of the number of veterans in Ottawa experiencing homelessness was coordinated by the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa in collaboration with the Ottawa Chapter of Soldiers Helping Soldiers. Conducted in April 2015, the result of this PiT Count was the estimate that about 8.5% of the homeless persons surveyed reported Canadian military service. (20,000 Homes, 2015)

Beginning in 2018, under the Housing Services Act, 2011, the City of Ottawa was required to count the number of homeless people in their communities every two years, including the question about service in the Canadian Armed Forces or RCMP. A city-wide PiT Count was conducted in April 2018. At the time of planning this project, it was unknown whether the City would include the question of military service, and the final report was not made available until June 2019 (following the completion of this project). Nonetheless, the findings of the City of Ottawa's PiT Count (City of Ottawa, 2019) are informative (see infographic, below).



City of Ottawa 2018 Point in Time Count Findings about Veterans Experiencing Homelessness.



Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to increase knowledge about veteran homelessness in Ottawa, and to share this knowledge among key stakeholders in order to better support and prevent homelessness among veterans. To achieve this, several partners led the development and coordination of the project, stakeholders were engaged to determine the best approach, and a coordinated effort was implemented to survey and identify veterans experiencing homelessness and staying in Ottawa shelters. Though more limited in scope and reach than city-wide PiT Counts, our pragmatic and feasible approach (necessitated by limited funding) offers the first comprehensive survey of veterans experiencing homelessness in Ottawa to date.

Project Partners

Project leads included individuals from the Ottawa Chapter of Soldiers Helping Soldiers (Captain; RCN, ret. Mark Eldridge), the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (Executive Director, Kristen Holinsky) and Multifaith Housing Initiative (Executive Director, Suzanne Le). A project consultant (Danielle Rolfe, PhD) was contracted to coordinate the counts and volunteers, complete data analysis, and prepare the final report. In-kind and financial support was received from Support Our Troops (Boomer's Legacy Fund), the Ottawa Chapter of Soldiers Helping Soldiers and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

Stakeholder Engagement

To inform the approach for this project, a focus group with service providers who may interact with veterans experiencing homelessness was conducted in January 2017. In attendance were individuals from several organizations with an interest in supporting veterans experiencing homelessness, including:

- **Ottawa Police**
- **Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre - Street Outreach Services**
- **Canadian Mental Health Association Ottawa**
- **The Ottawa Mission**
- **Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services**

Focus group participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and interactions with veterans experiencing homelessness in Ottawa, and to share how they usually encounter and identify veterans as part of their work, what issues contributed to veterans' experience of homelessness, and their suggestions on the best approach to finding and identifying veterans experiencing homelessness.

Specifically, the focus group provided input on survey questions, the length of the survey, and highlighted potential challenges of identifying veterans who are homeless, including:

- **Mental illness that may lead to individuals identifying as a veteran when in fact they are not;**
- **Veterans experiencing homelessness may not be staying in shelters (and are living instead outside, on the streets, or in rooming houses) since they prefer to avoid crowded spaces as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental or behavioral issues;**
- **Street outreach may be better positioned to identify veterans living outside or in places unfit for human habitation;**
- **A lack of consistency in asking about veteran status by shelter intake staff (intake processes are sometimes expedited or non-confidential), or it takes time for veterans to admit that they are to shelter staff;**
- **Veterans not considering themselves veterans because they only served a short period of time many years ago, were not deployed overseas, or were a Ranger in the north;**
- **Veterans not wanting to be connected with Veterans Affairs Canada, partly because of bad experiences, including denial of service injuries, long wait times for benefits, not wanting to comply with rules or complete lengthy paperwork;**
- **A growing number of younger veterans (25 years old or younger) that are medically released after deployment (i.e., require intensive support for mental illness) – these veterans differ from stereotypes of veterans and so may not be asked about their veteran status;**
- **A preference to identify themselves to peers versus civilians; and**
- **Difficulty finding women veterans experiencing homelessness.**

Focus group discussions also informed planned data analyses, for example, capturing age at enlistment, occupation in the Forces, and reasons for discharge to begin to understand explanatory reasons for homelessness among veterans.

Objectives

The five key project objectives identified by project partners and stakeholder engagement included the following:

1	**Gather objective evidence on number of veterans in Ottawa who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness;**
2	**Increase awareness of available supports & services among veterans in Ottawa who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness;**
3	**Increase awareness of available supports & services among shelter staff, and ability to identify veterans;**
4	**Increase referrals of veterans to available supports & services from shelters/organizations;**
5	**Increase awareness among key stakeholders of scope of issue (i.e., number of homeless veterans, unmet needs of homeless veterans)**.



Veteran's House Project







Veteran's House Project will be a supportive housing community for homeless veterans and will be operational in November 2020



Approach

Homeless Shelter Recruitment

Conducting a survey of shelter clients to identify homeless veterans was determined by all project partners and stakeholders to be the most feasible approach. The project experienced some delay as it was decided that it was best to not have this project overlap with the City of Ottawa Point in Time (PiT) Count which occurred in April 2018. (City of Ottawa, 2019) In June 2018, executive directors of each of the four major emergency shelters in Ottawa (Shepherds of Good Hope, The Ottawa Mission, Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre, and Cornerstone Shelter for Women) were invited to participate in the project. Information about available resources for veterans was gathered (for shelter staff and identified veterans), and a survey was developed for use during the scheduled counts.



From left: Sergeant Céline Filion, The Ottawa Mission Executive Director Peter Tilley, Corporal Corey Avery

Survey Development

The survey used for the counts (see Shelter Client Survey) includes questions about basic demographics, health conditions and service history. Demographic-related questions 1-6, were based on the Canadian Point in Time (PiT) Count survey conducted in all Canadian provinces. (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013) Further input on the content and wording of survey questions was provided by project partners, including those with past Canadian Armed Forces experience. Peer input was also sought at the 2018 VAC Roundtable on Veterans Homelessness (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2019) and Question 10 (service number recall) was added to increase the validity of respondents identifying as a veteran. Peer (Soldiers Helping Soldiers) volunteers provided an additional suggestion for Question 10, the option to provide 'last 3' as a proxy for service number, particularly for veterans who may have experienced injury that would impede their ability to recall their complete service number. Following the first count at a shelter, the wording of Question 4 (Indigenous identity) was changed from 'Aboriginal' to 'Indigenous,' based on survey respondent feedback.

Engaging Shelter Staff in Planned Counts

Lunch-and-learn seminars were held at each of the four shelters where the count was to be conducted. Seminars were coordinated by the project consultant and shelter manager, and were intended to provide staff members with information about the planned counts, assess how veterans are currently identified and supported within each shelter, determine the best approach for each shelter (i.e., date, time and location for the count, level of volunteer vs. staff involvement, whether volunteers wore uniforms), and to share available resources for veterans (see Resources for Veterans). A pre- and post-seminar survey (see Pre-Post Survey for Shelter Staff) was used to assess shelter staff members' current practices of assessing veteran status, and their knowledge of available resources and supports for veterans.



From left: Sergeant Céline Filion, Corporal Corey Avery, Lieutenant-Colonel Vanessa Hanrahan

Training of Volunteers

The project consultant solicited volunteer participation from Soldiers Helping Soldiers. Five Canadian Armed Forces volunteers were trained to greet shelter clients, invite them to participate in the project, and administer the survey to willing shelter clients.



From left: Soldiers Helping Soldiers Ottawa Chapter Lead Darcy Webb, Lt.Col Hanrahan, Sgt. Céline Filion, WO/Adj Kimberly-Ann St-Denis

Survey Administration

Survey administration was planned in collaboration with shelter managers. Based on their knowledge of their clientele, shelter managers advised about the best day and time for the counts, and whether volunteers should be in uniform or dressed in civilian clothing with some identifier of military affiliation. Posters with information about the counts were posted in communal areas of the shelters the day prior and day of planned counts. Shelter staff members working on site during the counts encouraged all clients to consider participating in the survey. All shelter clients were invited and eligible to participate in the survey, and those that did received a $5 Tim Horton's coffee gift card for their participation.



Cpl. Avery conducting a count at The Ottawa Mission.

Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) Data

Prior to scheduled counts at shelters, shelter managers were asked to provide (if available) their shelter's HIFIS data on Canadian Armed Forces and RCMP veterans currently identified as part of their intake processes. This data was intended to supplement the point-in-time count data which serves as the major data collection methods of this project.



Lt.Col Hanrahan, WO/Adj St-Denis



Sgt. Céline Filion, Marc Gallant (Manager of Client Services, The Ottawa Mission), Cpl. Avery



Findings

Veteran Counts at Shelters

Following an invitation sent in June 2018 to participate in counts to identify veterans experiencing homelessness, two shelters expressed immediate willingness to participate. The other two shelters required a follow-up invitation upon completion of counts at the first two shelters before agreeing to participate. The counts were conducted in the four identified emergency shelters in Ottawa in fall 2018 (the initial two shelters) and winter 2019 (the other two shelters). Counts lasted approximately 4-6 hours and were scheduled for afternoons and evenings. One shelter conducted the count with only its staff members, one shelter had staff support and Soldiers Helping Soldiers volunteers, and the other two counts were led by one to four Soldiers Helping Soldiers volunteers. On average, 40% of shelter clients participated in the count (see

Table 2. Counts conducted to identify veterans at homeless shelters in Ottawa

Shelter	Date (dd-mm-yyyy)	Surveys completed	Coverage (% of shelter clients surveyed)
Salvation Army	07-11-2018	98	58%
Ottawa Mission	28-11-2018	62	31%
Cornerstone Shelter for Women	07-03-2019	25	40%
Shepherds of Good Hope	25-03-2019	49	31%
TOTAL		234	40%

Objective 1: Number of veterans in Ottawa who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness

Counts at the four emergency shelters identified 26 Canadian veterans, or 11% of survey respondents. About one-third (8) of these 26 self-identified veterans could recall their service number or 'last three,' representing about 3% of all shelter clients surveyed.

Table 3. Number and percentage of veterans identified during shelter counts

Shelter	Cornerstone Shelter for Women	Shepherds of Good Hope	Salvation Army	Ottawa Mission	Total
Date	07-03-2019	25-03-2019	07-11-2018	28-11-2018	
# Shelter clients surveyed	25	49	98	62	234
Self-Identified Veterans	0	7	12	13	32
# of Canadian veterans (% of shelter clients)	0 (0%)	6 (12%)	10 (10%)	10 (16%)	26 (11%)
# Canadian veterans that recall service number (% shelter clients)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)	2 (2%)	3 (5%)	8 (3%)

HIFIS Data
HIFIS data provided by shelter managers at three of the four shelters reported an average of **1.6%** of shelter clients reporting veteran status. The veteran status of 20-25% of clients in the HIFIS database at each shelter, however, was "unknown/not asked."

Demographics

Twenty-six **(26)** shelter clients self-identified as a Canadian veteran. Of these, **25** identified as male, and one as female. The median age of these veterans was **48.5 years**.

Eight percent of veterans preferred to speak French, **15%** had no preference between English and French language, and **77%** preferred to speak English

Health Conditions

Many veterans reported having a chronic or acute medical condition **(50%)**, physical disability **(54%)**, addiction **(42%)**, and/or mental health issue **(58%)**. Nearly half **(46%)** of veterans reported experiencing at least three of these issues concurrently.



Indigenous Veterans

Thirty-five **(35%)** of veterans self-identified as Indigenous: **five** as First Nations, **two** as Inuit, and **two** as non-status.

Service History

The average age of veterans at enlistment was **17.6 years**. Twenty-two veterans reported completing basic training. Most veterans (**91%**) reported enlisting in the Forces ten or more years ago (see Figure 1. Veterans' self-reported year of enlistment), and on average reported five years of service. Figure 2. Veterans' self-reported service component and Figure 3. Veterans' self-reported service branch show the percentage of veterans reporting service history by service component and branch.

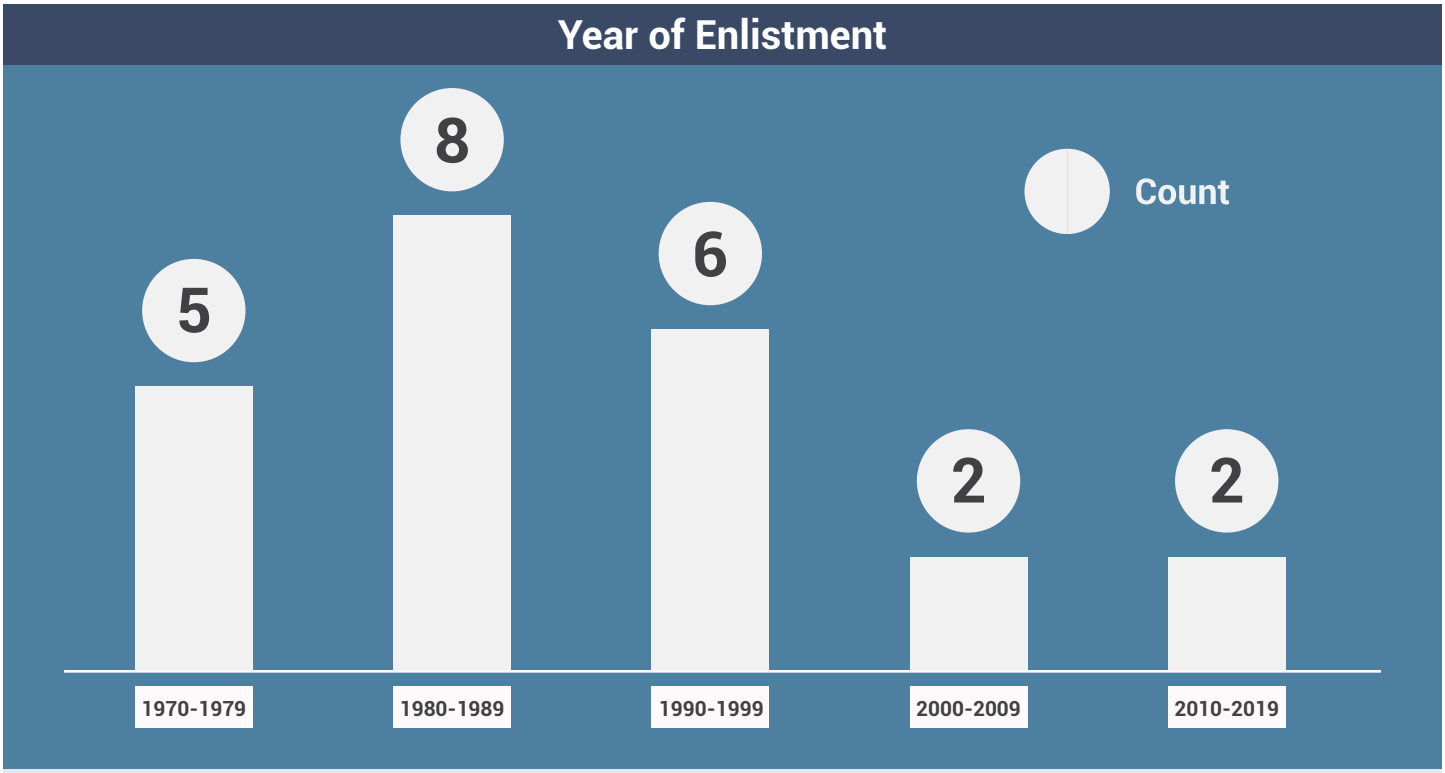


Figure 1. Veterans' self-reported year of enlistment

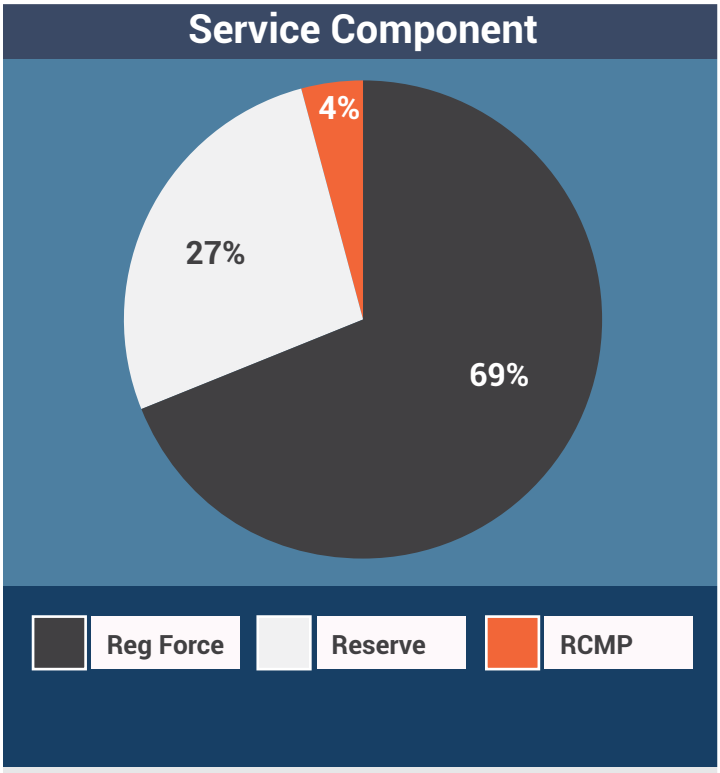


Figure 2. Veterans' self-reported service component

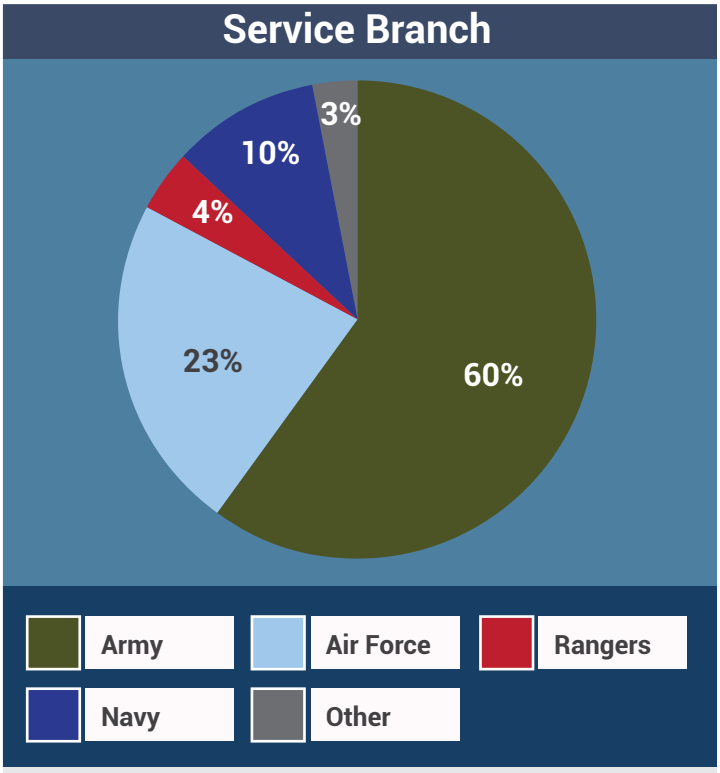


Figure 3. Veterans' self-reported service branch

Six veterans reported having been deployed overseas one or more times each, including to missions in Germany (**2**), Afghanistan (**3**), Kuwait (**1**) and Iraq (**1**). Rank at enlistment was most often reported as Private (**77%**). At discharge, **35%** remained at the rank of Private, with some reporting higher ranks of Corporal (**39%**), Sergeant (**4%**), or Lieutenant (**8%**).

Veterans reported varied occupations, with **35%** citing their occupation as artillery, infantry, field engineer, or weapons technician, **15%** as signalman, telecommunications, or radar technician, and **8%** as a ranger. Reasons for leaving the military were similarly varied: voluntarily, for personal reasons, or to pursue a civilian occupation (**35%**), medical release (**12%**), declining a remuster, or as part of the Forces Reduction Program (**12%**). Only **19%** were living in the Ottawa/Gatineau area when they were discharged.

Objective 2: Increased awareness of available supports & services among veterans in Ottawa who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness

During planning and preparation meetings with shelter staff, posters for Veterans Affairs Canada were provided (see Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Poster for Shelters). Shelter staff were encouraged to post and refer identified veterans to the emergency information line, and/or support veterans to seek benefits from VAC.

Less than half of veterans were aware of the potential to receive benefits from VAC (42%). Even fewer had tried to receive benefits (15%) or had successfully received VAC benefits (8%). Following the count, 42% reported that they may contact VAC to learn more about potential benefits, and 46% requested help in order to do so. With permission, peer volunteers provided information about available supports for veterans (see Resources for Veterans), and offered peer- based follow-up support from the local legion and/or volunteers at Top Cover Drop-In Centre for Veterans within one week of completing the survey.



Objective 3: Increased awareness of available supports & services among shelter staff, and ability to identify veterans

Three lunch-and-learn seminars were held with 32 shelter staff members. The seminars were generally well attended, and staff members were enthusiastic to learn about available resources. The seminar increased staff members' intention to more consistently ask about service history during client intake, greater awareness of potential benefits for veterans and how to connect them to relevant supports and services (see Figure 4. Shelter staff awareness of how to support veterans).

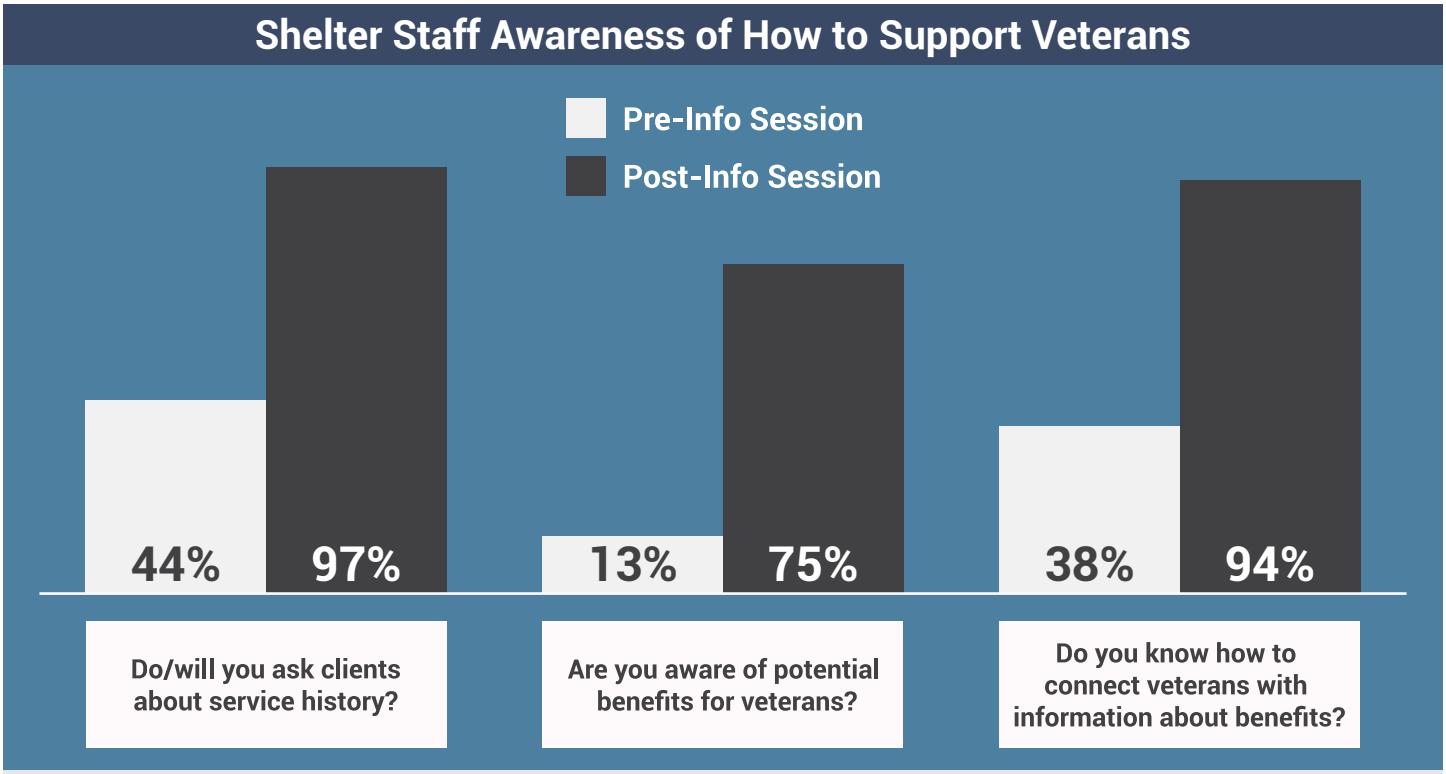


Figure 4. Shelter staff awareness of how to support veterans

Staff members stated that pamphlets with relevant information would be helpful for them to better support veterans, as well as improved communication and coordination with supports such as Veterans Affairs Canada to help clients access resources and benefits.

Objective 4: Increased referrals of veterans to available supports & services from shelters/organizations

The practice of identifying veterans upon intake to the shelter was known among many staff members involved in the intake process of shelter clients. Following the seminar nearly all staff members planned to ask about veteran status during future intake processes (see Figure 4. Shelter staff awareness of how to support veterans).



Objective 5: Increased awareness among key stakeholders of scope of issue

Three lunch-and-learn seminars were held with 32 shelter staff members. The seminars were generally well attended, and staff members were enthusiastic to learn about available resources. The seminar increased staff members' intention to more consistently ask about service history during client intake, greater awareness of potential benefits for veterans and how to connect them to relevant supports and services (see Figure 4. Shelter staff awareness of how to support veterans).



Figure 5: Word Cloud representing the types of support requested by veterans. Text size is proportional to the frequency of requests for specific type of support.

Results of this project were shared with participants at the RESPECT Forum in Ottawa (April 2019), Soldiers Helping Soldiers Ottawa Chapter (December 2019), Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (January 2020), with plans underway for broader dissemination among other key stakeholders. This report is available for download via the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa.

Discussion & Conclusion

From fall 2018 to winter 2019, Point in Time (PiT) counts were conducted at each of Ottawa's major emergency shelters to identify veterans experiencing homelessness. Although PiT counts are not a perfect science (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019), they offer a minimum number of people experiencing homelessness within a given context, and allow for future counts to assess changes over time. In this project, 26 shelter clients reported Canadian Armed Forces service history, representing 11% of all shelter clients surveyed. Of these, eight (or 3% of all shelter clients surveyed) could recall their service number or 'last three.'

Recruitment for this project only within shelters is a potential limitation, as many veterans may be living outside of shelters, either in rooming houses, 'couch-surfing,' and/or living in an unsheltered location. However, given that 88% of the veterans were encountered within shelters during a more comprehensive municipal assessment of homelessness in Ottawa (City of Ottawa, 2019), this approach was the best balance of available resources and likelihood of identifying veterans. While the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in Ottawa is potentially underestimated by our approach (particularly in comparison to the 65 veterans identified in the City count), our findings may offer a more accurate estimate by having asked respondents to recall their service number or 'last three.' This approach may have reduced the chance of a false positive (i.e., that an individual self-identifies as a veteran but in fact has no service history). Despite the potential for individuals to be double-counted (particularly with the incentive of the gift card), this was not encountered, and the length of time that the few volunteers spent with identified veterans to complete the survey meant that any individuals attempting this would have been recognized.

This project confirmed the City of Ottawa finding that 35% of veterans experiencing homelessness identify as Indigenous. (City of Ottawa, 2019) Effort is required to support these individuals, including engaging relevant organizations with a mandate to serve Indigenous veterans specifically, and/or Indigenous people experiencing homelessness generally. There is also a need for better methods of finding female veterans. In the City's count, 14% of veterans identified as female, which cooresponds to the proportion of women in the CAF (Government of Canada, 2019). Our count, however, only identified one female veteran (4% of identified veterans), suggesting that counts limited to homeless shelters may substantially underestimate the number of female veterans experiencing homelessness.

Beyond the primary objective of identifying veterans experiencing homelessness in Ottawa, this project achieved its other objectives of increasing veterans' and shelter staff members' awareness and intentions to connect with available supports and services. Feedback from shelter staff members and identified veterans, however, indicates an important opportunity for ongoing efforts to encourage all to ask about/report service history and receive timely support and information about available resources and services. Informal discussions with shelter staff members indicated that regular walkabouts with volunteers in uniform or in CAF identifiable civilian clothing are helpful and should be ongoing.

Most important to the veterans encountered in this project, is the need for affordable housing, and while this is a complex social issue not limited to veterans, focused efforts for this specific and limited population are needed and actionable.

References

20,000 Homes. (2015, April). ***Community Debrief and Call to Action Ottawa's participation in 20,000 Homes.*** Retrieved from http://www.20khomes.ca: http://www.20khomes.ca/wp- content/uploads/3-Ottawa-Community-Debrief.pdf

City of Ottawa. (2019). ***Everyone Counts: Ottawa's 2018 Point-in-Time Count. Ottawa: City of Ottawa.***

City of Toronto. (2018). ***Street Needs Assessment 2018.***
Retrieved from City of Toronto Housing & Homelessness Research & Reports: https://www.toronto.ca/wp- content/uploads/2018/11/99be-2018-SNA-Results-Report.pdf

Employment and Social Development Canada. (2013). ***Guide to point-in-time counts in Canada of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.***
Retrieved from http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/edsc-esdc/Em12-9-2015-eng.pdf

Employment and Social Development Canada. (2015). ***The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada.***
Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada.

Employment and Social Development Canada. (2017). ***Highlights - 2016 Coordinated Point in Time Count of Homelessness in Canadian Communities.***
Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada.

Employment and Social Development Canada. (2019, March 27). ***Everyone Counts – A guide to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada – 2nd Edition.***
Retrieved from Government of Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social- development/programs/homelessness/reports/guide-point-in-time-counts.html#TOC8-3

Gaetz, S. D. (2016). ***The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016.***
Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Goering, P. V. (2014). ***National At Home/Chez Soi Final Report***.
Calgary: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Ray, S. F. (2011). ***The Experience of Homelessness Among Canadian Forces and Allied Forces Veterans.***
London: Homelessness Partnering Strategy Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Veterans Affairs Canada. (2019, 02 16). ***Veterans Affairs Canada Roundtable on Homelessness - Record of Discussion.***
Retrieved from https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/what- we-do/stakeholder-engagement/homelessness

Appendices

Pre-Post Survey for Shelter Staff

Before the session, please respond to the following questions:

	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you currently ask all clients about veteran status (that is, past military service)?		
2	Are you aware of what benefits Canadian veterans are potentially entitled to?		
3	Do you know how to connect veterans with more information about benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada?		

Following the session, please respond to the following questions:

	Question	Yes	No
4	Do you plan to assess veteran status among all clients?		
5	Are you aware of what benefits veterans are potentially entitled to?		
6	Do you know how to connect veterans with more information about benefits?		
7	What support do you need to be able to assess veteran status among clients and provide information about benefits?		

Shelter Client Survey

Before the session, please respond to the following questions:

Screening Questions

A Have you ever served in the Armed Forces?

- ☐ Yes → Complete next question (B)
- ☐ No → Complete questions 1-6
- ☐ Don't know → Complete questions 1-6
- ☐ Decline to answer → Complete questions 1-6

B Have you ever had any service in the Canadian military or RCMP? (Military includes Canadian Navy, Army, Air Force and Rangers)

- ☐ Yes, Military → Complete next question 1-25
- ☐ Yes, RCMP → Complete next question 1-25
- ☐ Cadets → Complete questions 1-6
- ☐ No → Complete questions 1-6
- ☐ Don't know → Complete questions 1-6
- ☐ Decline to answer → Complete questions 1-6

Demographics

1 Where are you staying tonight? / Where did you stay last night? (please circle)

a. Decline to answer

b. Own apartment/house

c. Someone else's place → ASK A1 AND A2

d. Motel/hotel → ASK A2

e. Hospital, jail, prison, remand centre → ASK A2

f. Emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter

g. Transitional shelter/housing

h. Public space (e.g., sidewalk, park, forest, bus shelter)

i. Vehicle (car, van, RV, truck)

j. Makeshift shelter, tent or shack

k. Abandoned/vacant building

l. Other unsheltered location

m. Respondent doesn't know [likely homeless]

A1: Can you stay there as long as you want or is this a temporary situation?

- a. ☐ As long as they want
- b. ☐ Temporary → ASK A2
- c. ☐ Don't know → ASK A2
- d. ☐ Decline

A2: Do you have your own house or apartment you can safely return to? this a temporary situation?

- a. ☐ Yes
- b. ☐ No
- c. ☐ Don't know
- d. ☐ Decline

2	How old are you OR what year were you born?	☐ Age (in years) _____ ☐ Year born: _____ ☐ Don't know	☐ Decline to answer
3	What gender do you identify with?	☐ Male/Man ☐ Female/Woman	☐ Other ☐ Decline to answer
4	Do you identify as Indigenous or do you have Indigenous ancestry? This includes First Nations, Métis, Inuit, with or without Status. [If yes, please follow-up to specify.]	☐ Yes → ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐ Decline	☐ First nations ☐ Inuit ☐ Metis ☐ Non-status or have indigenous ancestry
5	In what language do you feel best able to express yourself?	☐ English ☐ French ☐ No preference	☐ Neither (specify) _____ ☐ Don't know ☐ Decline to answer

6 Do you identify as having any of the following conditions?

Chronic/Acute Medical Condition	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know	☐ Decline
Physical Disability	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know	☐ Decline
Addiction	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know	☐ Decline
Mental Health Concern(s)	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know	☐ Decline

If participant is **NOT a Canadian Veteran, STOP here** and provide gift card.

If participant is a Canadian Veteran, please **complete the rest of the survey**.

Veteran Status		Yes	No
7	Did you complete basic training?		

8 Were you in: ☐ Regular forces ☐ Reserves ☐ RCMP

9 In which branch of the forces did you serve?

☐ Army ☐ Navy ☐ Air Force ☐ Rangers ☐ Declined
☐ Cadet Instructor Cadre ☐ Other: _____

Service History		Response	Declined
10	What was your service number or "last 3"?		
11	When did you enlist in the Armed Forces?	_____/_____ (month/year)	
12	What was your rank at enlistment?		
13	When did you leave the Armed Forces?	_____/_____ (month/year)	
14	What was your occupation?		
15	What was your rank at discharge?		
16	What was the reason for your discharge?		
17	Where were you living immediately before discharge?		
18	Were you deployed overseas?		
	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐ Decline	Location _____ Duration _____	

Veterans Affairs Canada		Yes	No	Declined
19	Did you know that you may be able to get benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)?			
20	Have you ever tried to get benefits from Veterans Affairs?			
21	Have you ever received benefits from Veterans Affairs?			
22	Do you plan to contact Veterans Affairs?			
23	Would you like to get help to contact Veterans Affairs? **If yes, add participant details to your list.			
24	What services would have been useful to you when you were discharged?			
25	What services would be useful to you now?			

Please provide gift card.

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Poster for Shelters



AVAILABLE RESOURCES ARE:

- Veterans Emergency Fund
- Health Care
- Financial Support
- Employment
- Vocational Training and Support
- Peer Support
- Veteran & Family Well-Being Fund
- Case Management
- Local Service Providers

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO SERVED IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES OR THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE WHO IS HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF BECOMING HOMELESS?

CALL US.

1-866-522-2122

veterans.gc.ca/services

1-800-268-7708

VAC Assistance Service, to speak to a mental health professional

Veterans Affairs Canada | Anciens Combattants Canada

Canada

Resources for Veterans

Ottawa Innercity Ministries

OIM Office, 391 Gladstone Ave.
Wednesdays, 10 to 11:30 am
All veterans welcome
Contact Rick at rick_oim@rogers.com or call our office at (613)237-6031

Ottawa Innercity Ministries, in partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada, offers a weekly support and drop-in for homeless and at-risk Veterans. We offer a safe community and one-on-one support in a welcoming environment. Available services:

- Access to resources & literature
- Access to phone & computer
- Individualized support
- Recreational activities
- Refreshments & more

VETS Canada Drop-In & Support Centre

517 Besserer Street
613-562-9772
Mon-Fri 9am-4pm (closed 12-1pm)

Full-time social services worker, veterans' lounge, computer centre, library, common area, access to food/gas cards, bus tickets, coffee & sandwiches.

ABORIGINAL/INDIGENOUS VETERANS

Shawenjeagamik Drop-In Centre
510 Rideau Street Ottawa, ON K1N 5Z6
Tel: 613 -789 -3077
shawenjig@odawa.on.ca

Traditional Teachings/Circles -Access to Elders -Peer Support Group -Housing Placement -Connecting clients to income supports -Pre-Employment Support -Life skills: -Computer training/assistance -Laundry -Showers -Clothing donations - Referrals for: Mental Health, Crisis, Addictions, and Residential School Counselling