Closing the Gap and Improving Outcomes: Identifying and Addressing Veteran Food Insecurity

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Food insecurity within Veterans

• Affects approximately 11% of Veterans\(^1\)
• Veterans of more recent service eras are at greater risk compared to more distant service eras.\(^2\)
• Compared to non-veterans who share similar socio-demographics, Veterans are almost 3 times more likely to experience very low food security.\(^3\)
• Among Veterans, as severity of food insecurity worse, risk for depression and suicidal ideation increase.\(^4\)
Screening for food insecurity

• In October of 2018, Veteran Health Administration added screening for food insecurity into electronic medical record in primary care clinics.

• VHA Primary care clinics use Hunger Vital Sign as screening tool

• Veterans who screen positive for food insecurity are offered social work consultation
Federal Programs

- **Non-Veteran** Federal programs and benefits can be utilized and leveraged to address the growing recognition of high rates of food insecurity within the veteran population. (SNAP, WIC, Meals on Wheels)

- Opportunities to address and make changes:
  - Administratively: Use existing authority to effectively connect food insecure veterans with Federal programs (VA screening and DOD TAPS)
  - Regulatory: Develop/update regulations that includes complete process of public comment, etc....
  - Legislatively: Farm Bill, appropriations and other.
Community-based Initiatives

• Partnerships with local food pantries and food banks allow for Veteran-specific food distributions
• These distributions can also be opportunities to provide additional outreach services like SNAP application assistance
• Examples include: Veteran Pantry Days with Houston Food Bank
Continued Gaps
Integrated components

Resources
- Household Income
- Time
- Transportation
- Kitchen Tools/Equipment
- Social Support
  - Family/Friends
  - SNAP Participation
  - Food Pantry

Personal Capacity
- Health
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Motivation/Determination
  - Cooking Skills

Cultural Influence
- Military Training/Experience
- Pre-military experiences
- Ethnic Backgrounds

Home Food Access
Type
Quality*
Quantity

*Quality refers to nutritional value & consumer expectation

Greater accountability for Veteran culture

“I can speak for myself and it could be the same for other veterans. But for the big part . . . we adopted a military structure. We kind of feel independent, and we don’t need outside help and support ... I wouldn’t go for resources that are free or immediately available.”⁴
Greater integration with health care and mental health care

Veterans’ ability to address food insecurity at personal level intersects with their physical and mental well-being
Resources

• Veteran Food Insecurity: Bringing Solutions to the Table video training course to help service providers understand what food security means, recognize how Veterans and their families can become food insecure, and determine ways to help Veterans become food secure.

• MAZON’s resources on Veteran Food Insecurity

• Information on SNAP and other USDA nutrition assistance programs: https://www.fns.usda.gov/

• VA’s Nutrition and Food Services: https://www.nutrition.va.gov/food_insecurity.asp
References


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