



Five Year Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans in King County

May 2011

Acknowledgements

In an effort to capitalize on the excellent work being done nationally and locally to support the reintegration needs of veterans, this report relies on information provided by veterans, veteran's agencies, and housing and supportive service providers throughout King County. This report has been influenced by several important resources including:

- The many veteran and homeless housing providers in King County
- The previous and ongoing work of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County
- The work done by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, VA-Puget Sound Healthcare Systems, and Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs
- Veterans who participated in a series of focus groups hosted by King County Department of Community and Human Services.

A list of individuals who participated in the Five Year Plan to End Homelessness among Veterans in King County advisory group and key informants who provided background research is available in Appendix E.

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Executive Summary

Nearly 131,000 veterans call King County home. Approximately 1,000 to 1,150 of these veterans are homeless¹, per the 2010 point in time census of homeless individuals, the majority of whom are from the Vietnam War era. Among this cohort, we anticipate a growing need for housing and services related to aging and disabilities. Our community is now preparing for a new generation of veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. Concerns run high that these veterans are going to face many challenges when they come home to our region, and will need community support to reintegrate to civilian life. Local planners anticipate that King County will see the addition of at least 100 newly homeless OIF/OEF veterans and their families each year for the foreseeable future if preventative steps are not taken.

Challenges remain, however, in meeting the needs of veterans and their families. The main challenge facing the region is obtaining adequate resources and aligning federal, state and local policy and resources in support of ending veteran homelessness. Other challenges that need to be addressed include understanding and preparing for the changing demographics of homeless and at-risk veterans, and responding to the existing level of need for housing and services among currently homeless veterans.

To respond to these challenges, an advisory group was convened by King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) on behalf of Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEHKC), and made up of representatives from local community housing and service providers, public agencies, funders, and state and local veteran agencies, as well as veterans themselves. The result of their work, The Five Year Plan to End Homelessness among Veterans in King County outlines a set of overarching goals for ending homelessness among veterans, with the understanding that implementation of these strategies will depend on collaboration among all levels of government and across all sectors.

The advisory group of the Five Year Plan to End Homelessness among Veterans in King County recommends the following priorities and system enhancements:

1. **Close the housing gap for homeless/at-risk veterans:** About 610 to 770 units of housing are needed among currently homeless veterans. This housing gap is expected to increase by approximately 100 per year among newly returning veterans facing considerable challenges reintegrating to civilian life. The housing gap should be addressed by a combination of the following:
 - A. Increased development of housing and services dedicated to veterans and their families, using a mix of capital funds and housing vouchers.
 - B. Align regulations and priorities among Veterans Administration Supportive Housing, Grant Per Diem and local capital housing dollars.
 - C. Match the level of need with the level of service and type of housing to assure that scarce resources are targeted towards the appropriate households.
 - D. Develop and use interim housing strategies to engage and rapidly re-house homeless veterans and put them on the path towards housing stability.
2. **Secure adequate funding and work with partners towards system alignment, with an emphasis on exploring efficiencies and reducing duplication of service:** The system of housing and supportive services available to veterans is complex. Many veterans, as well as

¹ The range of homeless veterans is higher than the range of additional units needed to house them. King County has recently received additional vouchers and opened new veterans housing projects, so some of these estimated homeless veterans have either recently been or will shortly be housed.

housing and service providers, note that not only are there not enough services and housing, it is difficult to access those services that do exist. Opportunities to streamline and improve services to veterans include:

- A. Advocate for additional resources, support changes in federal, state and local policy, and remove barriers to effective services among veterans.
 - Advocate for additional funding at the federal state and local level even during this time of budget reductions to government funding, and apply for grant funding as resources become available.
 - Align regulations and policies across existing and newly acquired fund sources.
 - Advocate for reinstatement of federally funded monthly stipends during school breaks under the GI Bill for veterans who are enrolled in community colleges and universities.
- B. Use a coordinated approach for housing and services. Move towards a 'coordinated referral' approach to assure that veterans are quickly and effectively matched with the appropriate housing and services, whether within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) or local provider system. Develop and use common assessment elements across the system to match the level of need with the level of service and assure that scarce resources are targeted towards the appropriate population. Explore opportunities to create efficiencies and reduce duplication of service.
- C. Build capacity among all agencies serving veterans so case managers and program staff have the skills they need to best support veterans, as well as understanding of the unique challenges faced by the newly returning veterans.
- D. Enhance data collection so more is known about the challenges faced by veterans and the outcomes of the services being provided for veterans.

3. Address complex needs among veterans, starting with outreach and prevention: The current generation of newly returning veterans face unique challenges that require tailored approaches if we are to prevent an increase in homelessness among veterans and their families. It is recommended that:

- A. Local partners respond with intensive community outreach and services specifically targeted to the needs of these veterans, with a strong element of peer support.
- B. Prevention strategies, such as emergency rental assistance or routine assessment among recently discharged personnel for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and other risk factors, be enhanced to better identify veterans at risk of becoming homeless and direct them to appropriate services.

4. Identify and replicate best practice models for serving veterans: Best practice models need to be developed and funded which take into account the differing needs of the aging veteran population, as well as newly returning veterans. Strengthen data collection and analysis across the system to drive system change towards ending veteran homelessness. Evaluate local demonstration projects to identify their impact and replicable practices. Create and implement a funding plan to bring effective strategies to scale.

King County is fortunate to have a nationally recognized network of veteran-focused outreach, health care, treatment, case management, employment, legal and housing related services, as well as other specialty services for veterans. The majority of services are funded, or directly provided, by the VA, the WDVA and the King County Veterans Program (KCVP). In addition, many experienced community based organizations provide vital services to veterans, and are critical partners in reaching veterans who do not typically access government-affiliated programs. Working together, these partners can end veteran homelessness in King County.

Introduction

The Five Year Plan to End Homelessness among Veterans in King County was developed at the direction of the Funders Group of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEHKC), in alignment with each of the federal, state and local five year plans to end veteran homelessness recently developed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), VA-Puget Sound Healthcare System (VA-Puget Sound), and Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs (WDVA).

This five year plan is purposefully brief, with the background research and data that informed the discussions and recommendations of the advisory group available in a series of appendices found at the end of this report. It is centered around four goals:

- **Close the housing gap for currently homeless/at-risk veterans:** Build or acquire 610 - 770 additional units of housing needed by currently homeless veterans, using a mix of capital development and housing vouchers, and engage mainstream systems in providing this housing and services.
- **Secure adequate funding and work with partners towards system alignment, with an emphasis on exploring efficiencies and reducing duplication of service:** Review and advocate for funding opportunities at the federal, state and local level in support of ending veteran homelessness. Align strategies and funding priorities wherever possible in support of homeless housing and services for veterans and their families.
- **Address complex needs among veterans, especially newly returning veterans, starting with outreach and prevention:** Approximately 1,000 newly discharged veterans will return to the Puget Sound area for the foreseeable future, and approximately 300 of these will be in need of transition education, counseling (financial/education/employment, income, benefits), treatment (physical/mental health/chemical dependency/trauma/Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD]) and diversion (jail/treatment). Approximately 100 of these will be at high risk of becoming homeless each year unless focused prevention strategies are implemented.
- **Identify and replicate best practice models for serving veterans:** Create a clear vision for veteran housing and homeless services, and align partner efforts towards ending veteran homelessness. Use data to drive this systems change, including enhanced data collection and analysis to understand veteran needs and services.

The plan is intended to offer guidance to local policy makers on emerging needs of veterans and their families, challenges our systems face in responding to those needs, and changes needed to align efforts and strengthen veteran supports.

King County Veterans and the Challenges They Face

Nearly 131,000 veterans call King County home. The largest cohort of veterans (just over 50,000) is from the Vietnam War era. The second largest cohort is those who served during the Gulf War in the 1990's. A third cohort is older veterans, aged 75 and older, who served during World War II or the Korean War. Our community is now preparing for the return of its newest group of veterans, those from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan.

Today's military, with its reliance on an all-volunteer military, has seen a steady decline in the number of men serving in the armed forces, while women are making up a larger percentage than ever before. At the same time, the demands placed on both men and women in the armed forces have increased, given the need to stretch resources under the Global War on Terror. Due to the strain of long and

multiple tours of combat duty for those in the military in recent years, concerns run high that OIF/OEF veterans are going to face many challenges when they come home to our region and will need community support.

Returning to civilian life offers considerable challenges for many veterans, including finding or retaining employment and securing affordable housing. The national unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans is 11.3 percent overall, 18 percent for those recently separated from the military, and up to 21 percent for younger veterans ages 18 to 24.

Many veterans are also affected by mental health and service-related trauma. It is estimated that up to 19 percent of Iraq and/or Afghanistan war veterans experience a mental health problem, and among veterans who are homeless, up to 45 percent suffer from a mental illness. Substance abuse is also a very serious concern among veterans who are homeless. Studies show that up to 70 percent of homeless veterans suffer from substance abuse problems, with considerable overlap between mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

When looking at the overall veteran population in King County, the following characteristics are worth noting:

- The veteran population, as a whole, is aging.
- The percentage of King County residents who are also veterans is declining, due in large part to the aging of this population.
- Even as the overall percentage of veterans is declining, the percentage of female veterans is growing.
- The military experience among veterans varies significantly depending upon the era in which they served.
- An individual's experience in the military appears to directly affect reintegration to civilian life. Newly returning veterans from OIF/OEF face significant challenges, which the current system is only now gearing up to address. Specific challenges faced by veterans include:
 - Mental health concerns, including PTSD and military sexual trauma (MST)
 - Disabilities acquired as a result of military service, including traumatic brain injuries (TBI), and chronic pain issues
 - Substance abuse and chemical dependency
 - Eligibility for benefits, depending on military discharge status
 - An increased incidence of domestic violence
 - Increased rates of unemployment, particularly among recently returning vets
 - Increased need for legal assistance, for issues such as outstanding warrants and child support orders
 - An increased incidence of homelessness, especially among single adult males.

Background research and documentation of the incidence and prevalence of these concerns is available in Appendix A: Veterans Needs, Housing and Services in King County, provided in an appendix accompanying this report.

Homeless Veterans in King County

Homelessness is an especially important consideration when looking at the challenges and barriers faced by veterans, hence the call by all levels of government serving homeless veterans to develop

and align five year plans to end veteran homelessness. According to local sources, up to 21 percent of all homeless single adults in King County are veterans, with an estimate of 1,000 to 1,150 homeless veterans in our region, and about 27 percent (270 to 310) being chronically homeless. Most of these homeless veterans are single and male, with an average age of 50 (e.g., individuals who served during the Vietnam War era). Single homeless female veterans make up nearly four percent of those living in shelters and transitional housing.

Safe Harbors, the local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in King County, reports that veteran families account for approximately three percent of all homeless families in shelters and transitional housing in King County each year (representing approximately 30 households with 105 individuals). This is likely an under representation, as many homeless veteran families are known to be doubled up with friends or family, or living in vehicles, and hence are not enrolled in Safe Harbors partner programs. The Homeless Care Line through the VA-Puget Sound reports they are hearing from approximately 10 homeless families per month.

Based on a 2010 landscape study of permanent housing units set aside for veterans, coupled with housing subsidy programs available, the gap in permanent housing for currently homeless veterans in King County is estimated to be in the range of 610 to 770 units, of which 165 to 207 units is the estimated gap for chronically homeless veterans. The housing gap is derived from adding the annual allocation of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)/VA housing vouchers (approximately 150) and the 261 aside units for homeless veterans that have come online since the inception of the Ten Year Plan and subtracting from the estimated number of currently homeless veterans in King County. The housing gap does not account for those who may become newly homeless as veterans return to King County from Iraq or Afghanistan.

It is estimated that the number of homeless veterans and veteran families is anticipated to grow by about 100 households per year as veterans from OIF and OEF struggle to reintegrate to civilian life. The demographics of this cohort will be vastly different from the older single adult males who are currently homeless. This figure is based on the understanding that approximately 1,000 OIF/OEF veterans return to King County each year and will continue to do so for the near future. These veterans face a range of physical traumas, mental health concerns, and chemical dependency issues because of the unprecedented length of their multiple deployments. The WDVA notes that nearly 50 percent of OIF/OEF veterans are reservists, or citizen-soldiers, two-thirds of whom (64 percent) are married and come home to families, bringing additional reintegration challenges for the entire family. Just under half (49 percent) of career military are married.

Despite the critical need for services among this group, there appears to be a lag time in their seeking services. Most veterans first try to solve their problems on their own with the assistance of family and friends. Only when those resources are exhausted do they seek community resources. Recent reports from the WDVA are that 33 percent (or 333 of the 1,000) of OIF/OEF veterans in the Puget Sound region receive VA medical benefits for PTSD, TBI, depression or anxiety, which are typically indicators of being at risk for homelessness. Of the group that eventually seeks VA-specialty services, it is estimated that most do not seek services until nearly four years after initial discharge. The WDVA and VA have recently initiated prevention services to reach this cohort. Pending these programs ability to acquire full funding and going to scale, however, planners anticipate that approximately one-third of the group that eventually seeks services will become homeless, thus increasing the housing gap by 100 units per year unless strong prevention steps are taken.

This estimated housing gap is not meant to imply that the entire gap needs to be developed as set-aside units for veterans, as homeless veterans and their families are eligible for a number of different programs and housing opportunities. The estimated gap does show, however, that there continues to be a need for a range of new housing options for veterans – including units for both men and women

as single individuals and family units - with a continuum of services available to help them stabilize in housing.

Programs and Resources for Veterans in King County

Three agencies provide or fund the majority of veteran-focused services in King County. They are: 1) the VA; 2) the WDVA; and 3) the King County Veterans Program (KCVP). These agencies provide an array of financial, education and employment assistance, health care, case management, and housing related services, as well as other specialty services for veterans. In addition, many experienced community-based organizations and non-profits throughout King County are helping people in need, including veterans, to secure housing and emergency services. These community-based and grass roots organizations are especially integral to engaging what is termed VA-resistant veterans who avoid programs offered by the VA or other government-affiliated programs.

Together these agencies provide, either directly or through contract, a range of services targeted exclusively to veterans, including:

- Veteran's outreach and eligibility determination
- Primary and mental health services/dental care/rehabilitation/convalescent and respite care
- Substance abuse/chemical dependency
- Education and employment supports
- Legal/criminal justice services
- Emergency services
- Housing and homeless supports.

To fund this range of housing and services, partners rely on a variety of federal, state and local dollars including resources from the HUD, VA, and at the local level, King County's Veterans Relief Fund and Veterans and Human Services Levy. As is the case for nearly all community resources targeted to our region's neediest residents, the need outstrips availability.

Unique in the nation, the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy is a tax payer supported property tax raising about \$13 million per year, half of which is dedicated to assisting veterans, reservists, members of the national guard, and their families. The infusion of funding from the King County Veterans and Human Services Levy has greatly increased the number of permanent housing units set aside for homeless and at-risk veterans and their families in King County. As of July 2010, there were 261 units of permanent housing with supportive services set aside for veterans. For the three year period from 2008 through 2010, King County has also benefitted from the receipt of federal resources, including 330 VA Supportive Housing (VASH) Program housing subsidy vouchers and other special allocations of non-elderly disabled Section 8 Vouchers awarded to local housing authorities, a portion of which are dedicated to disabled (or eligible veterans) and their families through King County Housing Authority's Housing Access Services Program (HASP).

Still, there exists a housing gap relative to need among currently homeless veterans and homeless veteran families, and it is important to bear in mind that this gap is anticipated to grow as more veterans return from the current conflicts and need housing assistance. The veteran populations who need this assistance may also be changing. For example, we may need more housing for women and families, as well as more senior housing as our veterans age.

Challenges to Providing Housing and Supportive Services to Veterans in Need

While there has been successful collaboration among funders and providers in creating housing and supportive services for veterans to date, systemic challenges remain. Issues that need to be addressed as local partners work together to support the reintegration of veterans and their families and end homelessness includes:

- *Resources, programs and funds are insufficient. Those that exist are not consistently aligned and are coming under increasing pressure due to government budget reductions.* King County is fortunate to currently have federal, state and local dedicated funding sources for veteran housing and services. While these entities have affirmed a commitment to ending homelessness among veterans, they are all coming under increasing pressure due to the budget reductions faced by every level of government during this current economic cycle. In addition, historic fund restrictions, eligibility guidelines, and strategies for some of these sources continue to drive current programming and policies. These policies and restrictions are not always well aligned with emerging strategic plans and best practices, and it can be challenging to coordinate resources. This coordination and alignment is critical not only to address the housing gap for homeless veterans, but also to ensure that our existing and perhaps reduced future resources for housing and services for veterans are effective.
- **Housing gap for homeless veterans.** There continues to be a need for a range of new homeless housing options for veterans – for both men and women as single individuals and options for families – with a continuum of services needed to help veterans stabilize in housing. This gap is anticipated to increase by approximately 100 units per year as newly returning veterans from OIF and OEF face considerable challenges in reintegrating to civilian life if considerable prevention efforts are not in place.
- **Access to appropriate housing and services is challenging.** The system of housing and supportive services available to veterans is complex. Many veterans as well as housing and service providers noted that not only are there not enough services and housing, it is difficult to access those services that do exist.
- **Service levels are not clearly connected to level of need.** Service levels vary widely across providers and are not consistently directed towards those with the highest level of need. In an era of scarce resources, it is important to assure that staff and funding are prioritized towards the most vulnerable and those strategies that achieve the best results.
- **Lack of data on homeless veterans.** Very little is known about homeless/at-risk veterans' trajectory into homelessness. Providers and planners often rely on anecdotal information when developing housing and services to meet the needs of current veterans as well as the anticipated needs of newly returning veterans.

Appendix A provides a comprehensive report with documented research on veterans and their needs, a description of programs and agencies taking the lead to provide housing and services to these veterans and their families, and challenges these partners face in coordinating their efforts.

Six Pillars to End Homelessness among Veterans in King County

The advisory group was first convened in the fall 2010. Through a series of meetings, the advisory group adopted a set of six key pillars to serve as the framework for the Five Year Plan. The pillars, with additional background research, can be found in Appendix B. These pillars were selected to align with the VA, VA-Puget Sound, and WDVA five year plans, each of whom organized their respective plan around the same set of pillars, in recognition that it will depend on collaboration among all levels of government and across all sectors to end veteran homelessness. See Appendix C for highlights from each of these partners' five year plans.

Subject matter experts from within the advisory group and the King County Department of Community and Human Services staff spent the winter 2010 researching veteran needs and services within the context of these six pillars. Each pillar includes a needs statement, descriptions of some of the programs in King County serving veterans within that pillar and the policies and plans that guide their work, followed by recommended action steps specific to that pillar. The following provides a brief explanation of each pillar and why each is an important consideration in efforts to end veteran homelessness and recommended action steps to address the need.

1. **Outreach to veterans/veterans' education:** Returning to civilian life for many veterans brings considerable challenges, requiring outreach and intervention strategies that identify and connect veterans with tailored services to aid in the transition. Veterans may also need additional training and education to obtain living wage jobs in an economy and marketplace that is very different from the military experience they leave behind.

Action steps: Strengthen re-entry efforts to help veterans and their families better prepare for reintegration to civilian and family life. Identify opportunities to provide critical time intervention among newly exiting veterans to inform them of services and benefits available through the VA, WDVA, KCVP and other community-based agencies. Enhance data collection to better understand veteran's use of partner systems and trajectory after discharge.

2. **Treatment:** A disproportionate number of veterans who are homeless (most who served during the Vietnam era) have significant mental health and substance abuse treatment needs. Veterans returning from OIF/OEF likewise face a number of mental health problems, chemical dependency issues, and physical traumas, particularly those who have experienced combat. The timely availability of proper diagnosis and treatment is vital for these veterans' successful reintegration to civilian and family life.

Action steps: Assure that veterans have access to proper and timely diagnosis and treatment options, and actively engage them and their families in treatment where necessary. Strengthen linkages between community-based mental health and treatment providers and the VA-Puget Sound.

3. **Prevention:** According to a number of national studies conducted by the VA and other research organizations (Rand, 2008) increasing numbers of veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars experience PTSD, TBI and chronic pain. Many veterans, especially those who entered the military directly from high school, are now entering a job market in which they find they lack marketable skills. The impact of multiple deployments, especially among National Guard members with families, is a particularly difficult issue for active duty military, resulting in a dramatic increase in the need for prevention services. Many veterans do not apply for veterans' benefits that could assist with reintegration due to the complexities of the veteran system and lack of knowledge about available benefits. These issues will require non-traditional prevention strategies to help veterans and their families successfully reintegrate to civilian life and avoid homelessness.

Action steps: Increase understanding of the impact of deployments and military service upon veterans and their families. Use this data to develop tailored approaches to prevent veterans and their families from becoming homeless, with an emphasis on increasing linkages between community-based agencies and veteran programs, matching the strengths of the various organizations providing prevention and veteran services.

4. **Housing and supportive services:** Veterans are disproportionately represented among people who are homeless. These veterans and their families will require a comprehensive array of housing and supportive services to achieve housing stability. Currently, however, not only are there not enough services and housing, it can be difficult to access the housing and services that do exist due to eligibility criteria, program compliance requirements, and transportation needs, with some veterans resistant to accessing VA-affiliated housing and services. Housing planners with King County estimate up to 770 new units are needed to house our veterans who are currently

homeless in King County. Planners anticipate this figure will grow, perhaps by as much as 100 per year, as veterans from OIF/OEF struggle to return to civilian life.

Action steps: Increase the number of housing units available to veterans and their families. Support the use of quality assessment tools to identify veterans' service needs and use this data to develop and make available necessary supportive services connected to housing, matching strengths across the housing and community-based systems and veteran supports. Support flexibility in fund use and program policy to create the types of housing and services needed to end veteran homelessness.

5. Employment/income/benefits: Multiple factors affect a veterans' ability to obtain employment or other sources of income and benefits. Veterans' jobs may disappear during their deployment, and the unemployment rate for veterans exceeds the national average. Additionally, veterans may return with special needs that affect employment. The application process and eligibility criteria for veterans' benefits to help them through this period of transition is complex and can be hard to navigate.

Action steps: Encourage employment strategies to be a component of re-entry planning. Identify the reasons why veterans' unemployment rates are higher than the general population and strengthen linkages between employment and housing programs and veteran agencies to engage veterans in workforce development activities. Promote policy changes to allow more flexible use of funds to fill gaps in employment services, including the development of supported-employment options for homeless veterans and veterans with special needs (such as TBI and PTSD).

6. Community partnerships: Ending veterans' homelessness will require extensive collaboration among community partners, with resources from federal, state, and local governments and community-based organizations. The King County region has multiple large-scale partnerships with whom the Five Year Plan to End Homelessness among Veterans in King County will need to align to increase the effectiveness of the plan.

Action steps: Strengthen/create partnerships across systems. Seek to match the strengths of the various mainstream housing systems with the appropriate veterans' system counterpart to better collaborate on housing and services to veterans. Support increased flexibility in the use of funds and policy directives across the various systems; support policy and funding directives driven by veterans' needs, not by historic fund and policy restrictions.

Overarching Recommendations of the Five Year Plan Based on the Six Pillars

Based upon the recommended action steps contained within the six pillars, the advisory group developed a set of four overarching recommendations to guide implementation of the Five Year Plan action steps. The four overarching recommendations are a synthesis of the themes common to the recommended action steps across one or more of the six pillars. They are:

1. Secure adequate funding and work with partners towards system reform: The system of housing and supportive services available to veterans is complex. Many veterans, as well as housing and service providers, note that not only are there not enough services and housing, it is difficult to access those services that do exist. Opportunities to streamline and improve services to veterans include:
 - A. Advocate for additional resources and support changes in federal, state and local policy to remove barriers to effective services among veterans. Examples include:
 - Advocate for additional funding at the federal, state and local level, even during this time of budget reductions to government funding, and apply for grant funding as resources become available.

- Advocate to better align funding priorities among VASH, Grant Per Diem and local capital housing dollars.
 - Advocate for reinstatement of federally funded monthly stipends during school breaks under the GI Bill for veterans who are enrolled in community colleges and universities.
- B. Use of a coordinated approach to housing and services so any veteran calling a community based agency, or any level of the veteran service system, will be appropriately referred into a coordinated benefit and service delivery system. Special attention should be given to the use of common assessment elements to match the level of need with the level of service and assure that scarce resources are targeted towards the appropriate population.
 - C. Build capacity among all agencies serving veterans so case managers and program managers are trained in the unique skills needed to best support veterans, as well as the unique challenges faced by the newly returning veterans. Housing agencies must demonstrate competence in providing services to veterans, sensitive to veterans' needs and unique culture, and veteran agencies must demonstrate competence in navigating housing and social services.
 - D. Enhance data collection so more is known about the challenges faced by veterans and the outcomes of the services being provided for veterans. Agencies providing housing and supportive services in King County should participate in Safe Harbors and collect agreed upon data elements to support this need for better understanding and reporting on the challenges and successes of King County veterans.
2. Close the housing gap for homeless/at-risk veterans: There is a housing gap to support the 1,000 to 1,150 veterans who are homeless in King County. This housing gap is expected to increase by approximately 100 per year as veterans from OIF and OEF return/relocate to King County and face considerable challenges reintegrating to civilian life. The projected housing gap for current and projected returning veterans in King County over the next five years should be addressed by a combination of the following:
 - A. Increased development of dedicated permanent housing with supportive services for veterans and their families.
 - B. Increased use of rental subsidies and other vouchers to secure existing private market housing for veterans and their families, as well as to help with operating support of newly developed housing.
 - C. Matching the level of need with the level of service and type of housing to assure that scarce resources are targeted towards the appropriate households.
 - D. Development and use of interim housing strategies to engage homeless veterans and put them on the path towards housing stability.
 3. Address complex needs among veterans, starting with outreach and prevention: The current generation of newly returning veterans faces unique challenges that require tailored approaches. Today's veterans face issues such as PTSD, TBI, MST and chronic pain. They return to civilian life at a time of slow job growth. The WDVA staff report that nearly 50 percent of those returning from OIF/OEF are reservists (as opposed to career military) which brings with it even more significant reintegration challenges for them and their families. It is therefore recommended that:
 - A. Local partners respond with intensive community outreach and services specifically targeted to the needs of these veterans, with a strong element of peer support.
 - B. Prevention strategies, such as emergency rental assistance or routine assessment among recently discharged personnel for PTSD, MST, TBI and other risk factors, be enhanced to better identify veterans at risk of becoming homeless and direct them to appropriate services.
 4. Identify and replicate best practice models for serving veterans: Best practice models need to be developed and funded that take into account the differing needs of the aging veteran population

as well as the newly returning veterans. There are veteran demonstration projects in the beginning stages of development, such as the HUD demonstration project currently being implemented by Catholic Community Services and the VA. This demonstration project should be thoroughly evaluated to identify the impact and replicable practices, particularly as it relates to an integrated approach of blending the strengths of community based agencies working closely with the veteran serving systems.

Specific action steps that might be undertaken by local and national partners to further these overarching recommendations can be found within each of the six pillars, available as a whole in Appendix B.

A matrix of the various programs and services available throughout King County, and organized by the six pillars, is available in Appendix D: Matrix of Veteran Services in King County.