Arizona Action Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans

Sustaining the Future
2017

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Solving the veteran homeless problem requires a vision and even then, it can be a complex issue to resolve. The Department began trying to solve the problem through a collaborative effort in 2010.

The Arizona Action plan was formed by a number of Arizona government and community organizations, including the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness. The plan was a guide for all stakeholders in the critical activities related to ending and preventing homelessness among veterans. The plan, which was meant to run for five years, focused on three areas of need: ending chronic homelessness, increasing the capacity of the temporary help system and preventing further homelessness among veterans.

Although a great deal of effort was expended to reduce homelessness, as of January 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated there were 39,471 veterans without permanent housing across the country, including 1,036 who were unsheltered or living in temporary housing in Arizona. This indicates there is still work to be done.

The national and statewide numbers are considerably lower than they were five years ago. Arizona advocates say eliminating veteran homelessness is within reach, and Phoenix has already reached "functional zero" veteran homelessness. To continue the Department vision of solving homelessness, a new plan has been developed to reach three goals: End Street/Shelter Homelessness, Transform the Temporary Help System and Build Infrastructure for long term sustainability.

Working together we will certainly achieve the outcomes we are looking for: ensuring we have capacity within our systems to rapidly rehouse veterans and their families experiencing homelessness in stable affordable permanent housing and the development and sustainment of resources necessary to prevent homelessness from occurring. As we proceed we encourage all of our current partners to continue with participation in this plan and we invite other interested stakeholders to join us as we work together to eliminate homelessness amongst veterans.

Thank you for all your efforts in the past and for what we are about to do in the next five years to make Arizona a safer place for our veterans.

Sincerely,

Wanda A. Wright

Wanda A. Wright
Director

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Executive Summary

In 2011, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) implemented the Arizona Action Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans. This statewide plan outlined Goals, Strategies, and Objectives to guide the community in its mission of ending chronic homelessness among veterans over a five-year span. Through massive organizational efforts, 222 chronically homeless veterans were identified in an assessment of the community. Following the establishment of that baseline, the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness (AZCEH) led an effort known as Project H3 Vets and housed 325 veterans, successfully reducing the size of that population to just 18 over a two year period. Additional systemic changes included the establishment of new Grant Per Diem beds, as well as creating 772 housing units with veteran preference through the Arizona Department of Housing's (ADOH) Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program (LIHTCP). Many housing units are providing supportive services and creating a dedicated market for homeless veterans to find quality affordable housing. Community collaboration has been bolstered through the evolution and expansion of the Arizona Veteran Stand Down Alliance, which successfully supports the local coordination of 10 annual Stand Downs serving 12 counties statewide. The Arizona Coalition for Military Families has further enhanced Arizona's capacity for statewide resource coordination with the development of the Arizona Military/Veteran Resource Network.

Despite monumental achievements over the last five years, the collaborative spirit among community providers has been difficult to sustain. Coordination and data management are key drivers of the community's success. The Directors of ADVS and ADOH recognized these challenges and launched a needs assessment of statewide communities with respect to our homeless service system. In the fall of 2016, Regional Summits were conducted in Northern, Central and Southern Arizona. These Summits provided forums for community partners to express concerns about the landscape of veteran homelessness and shortcomings in services. As a result of these Summits, ADVS has updated the Arizona Action Plan to End Homelessness Among Veterans with changes reflective of the current needs of communities in each region. These updates are a continuation of the original plan and aim to build off of its success. It is critical that this plan be continuously evaluated and will be revisited annually in the form of regional Summits. The Action Plan Update outlines 3 key Goals, 3 Strategies and 26 regionalized Objectives to sustain efforts to end homelessness among veterans in Arizona.

Goal 1: End Street/Shelter Homelessness Among Veterans

Strategy: The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services has adopted the housing first model. When at all possible, housing veterans experiencing homelessness on the streets or in shelters into their new home immediately without the need for bridge housing is optimal. However, this may not always be possible, therefore there is a need to increase the coordination of resources for veterans living on the streets or in emergency shelters through the development of Critical Response Units (CRU) consisting of Veterans Administration, State of Arizona, city and local non-profit housing specialists. The CRU's target navigation and bridge housing to those veterans experiencing homelessness in excess of 90 days. These veterans often require a more robust housing stability plan utilizing a diverse application of federal, state, city and local resources. The data collected from these interventions will be analyzed to inform and support Coordinated Entry Systems being developed by local Continuums of Care (CoC). Ultimately, these efforts will support CoC's statewide to achieve and sustain housing for homeless veterans within 90-days of the first encounter with the homeless veteran.

Northern Objectives:

- Support all opportunities for the development of bridge housing, including re-establishing the Northern Arizona Veterans Administration Healthcare System (VAHCS) contract in the tri-city area (Kingman, Bullhead City and Lake Havasu City) to leverage development of housing facilities.
- Develop regional navigation to include transportation, connection to appropriate services and coordination with existing coordinated entry systems.
- Work with Prescott VA and partners to preserve Grant and Per Diem (GPD) beds by altering models to right size community needs through the upcoming GPD Reboot Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA).

Central Objectives:

- Enhance coordination of new and existing navigation services to increase permanent housing placements from streets or shelter.
- Develop bridge housing to facilitate rapid placement in permanent housing.
- Strategize with GPD partners to alter models and right size community needs to preserve all GPD beds through the upcoming Reboot NOFA.

Southern Objectives:

- Develop a coordinated outreach protocol to ensure veterans are connected to appropriate resources to include transportation.
- Strategize with local GPD providers to retain all GPD beds and alter models to right size community needs and maintain occupancy levels.
- Develop a more robust bridge housing program that aligns with local housing providers and community resources to expedite permanent housing placement.

Goal 2: Transform the Temporary Help System

Strategy: Coordinate a plan for GPD programs to adopt new models of care with the capacity of ending street and shelter homelessness through the upcoming GPD Reboot and future repurposing of GPD beds throughout the State. Communities should be in a position to demonstrate gaps in models of care, and how they can be filled by using new GPD models of care in communities. Close attention should be paid to contributing factors to homelessness to include substance abuse, and the abuse of prescription medication.

In February 2016, Governor Ducey appointed the Substance Abuse Task Force to find solutions to the increasingly urgent issue of substance abuse statewide (Office of the Governor). With a disproportionate representation of substance abusers amongst those experiencing homeless, particular emphasis should be focused in this area. There has been a steady increase in the prevalence of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) nationally. According to a recent study released by VA in February 2017, for every prescription

painkiller death, there were 10 treatment admissions for abuse; 32 emergency department visits for misuse or abuse; 130 people who abused or were dependent; and 825 non-medical users (VA National Center on Homelessness, 2017). It is recommended that outreach workers, case managers, peer support specialists and substance use disorder specialists become knowledgeable about Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in settings more accessible to veterans experiencing homelessness (HERS, 2017) to enhance housing placement and stability. In addition, each region of the State has a Military Veteran Community Network (MVCN). The MVCN's incorporate Federal VA leadership, State leadership, and local leadership to tackle problems veterans are experiencing across Arizona. The MVCN plays a critical role in receiving information from the temporary help systems to create systemic change.

Northern Objective:

- Increase Bridge Housing capacity by aligning current state, city and local resources. Enhance communication and referrals within regional access points for available housing vouchers.
- Work with GPD providers to identify the capacity needed for each model of intervention including Bridge Housing and Low-Demand Shelter.
- Prepare the communities of Flagstaff and the Tri-City Region for future GPD opportunities.

Central Objective:

- Coordinate the delivery of GPD service models among existing providers to streamline and right size existing intervention models to retain all current GPD beds.
- Prepare gaps analyses and engage new, high capacity providers to expand GPD with future opportunities.
- Work with SSVF leadership to ensure existing contracts have the capacity to support longer interventions and engage new providers to expand SSVF to help close the gap.

Southern Objective:

- Coordinate with local GPD providers to streamline intervention models and right size the need to retain all beds.
- Engage new, high capacity providers to fill remaining gaps by expanding GPD through upcoming opportunities.
- Develop an immediate strategy to use existing GPD vacancies as Bridge Housing.

Goal 3: Ensure Ongoing System Functionality for All Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

Strategy: Ensure statewide systems for veterans experiencing housing instability include prevention with the appropriate balance of affordable and supported housing for all veterans; including connection to City, State, VA benefits, supported work environments and physical and mental health services. Emphasis should be placed on using Federal and State benefits prior to using local resources, and developing or enhancing the referral processes with partnering agencies. To further the goal of ending veteran homelessness throughout Arizona, the Action Plan will now incorporate participation in Arizona's Military/Veteran Resource Network (www.ArizonaCoalition.org/network). This Governor's Office supported effort is facilitated by the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) and the Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF). Opportunities for housing and homeless provider participation include:

- Training for staff who serve the military, veteran and family population, including online and in-person options. Training is provided at no cost to organizations.
- Technical assistance to complete the process to become a Resource Network partner organization under the Housing & Homeless Provider Guidelines for CARE.
- Resource Profiles on the Network for each program or benefit available. These profiles will be matchable to users on the Resource Network.
- Training for staff to become Military/Veteran Resource Navigators and utilization of Resource Network to connect clients to additional resources.

Northern Objective:

- Increase support for development of permanent supportive housing. Consider changes to the veteran preference in LIHTCP for rural area development.
- Support the development of co-located services in all regions wherever possible, including Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (VASH), Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF), Veterans Benefits Counselors, Disabled Veteran Outreach Program and Local Veteran Employment Representative (DVOP/LVER) and other critical services.

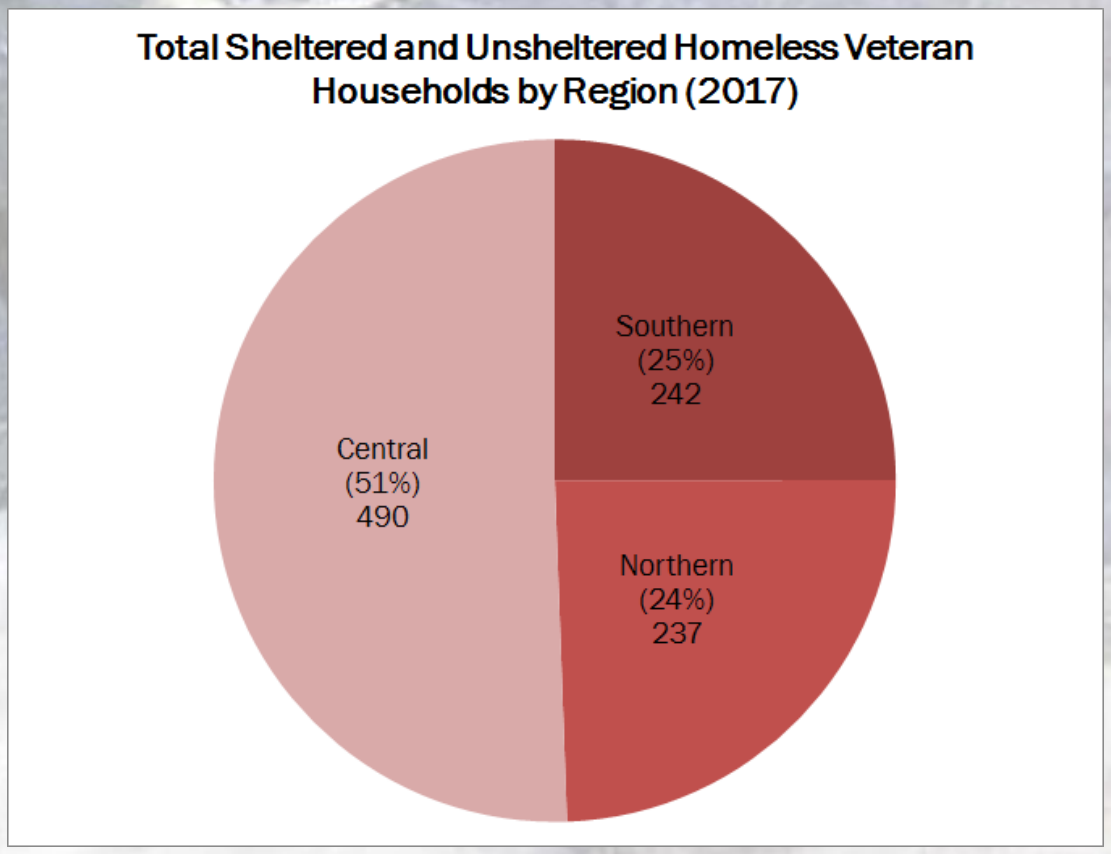
Central Objective:

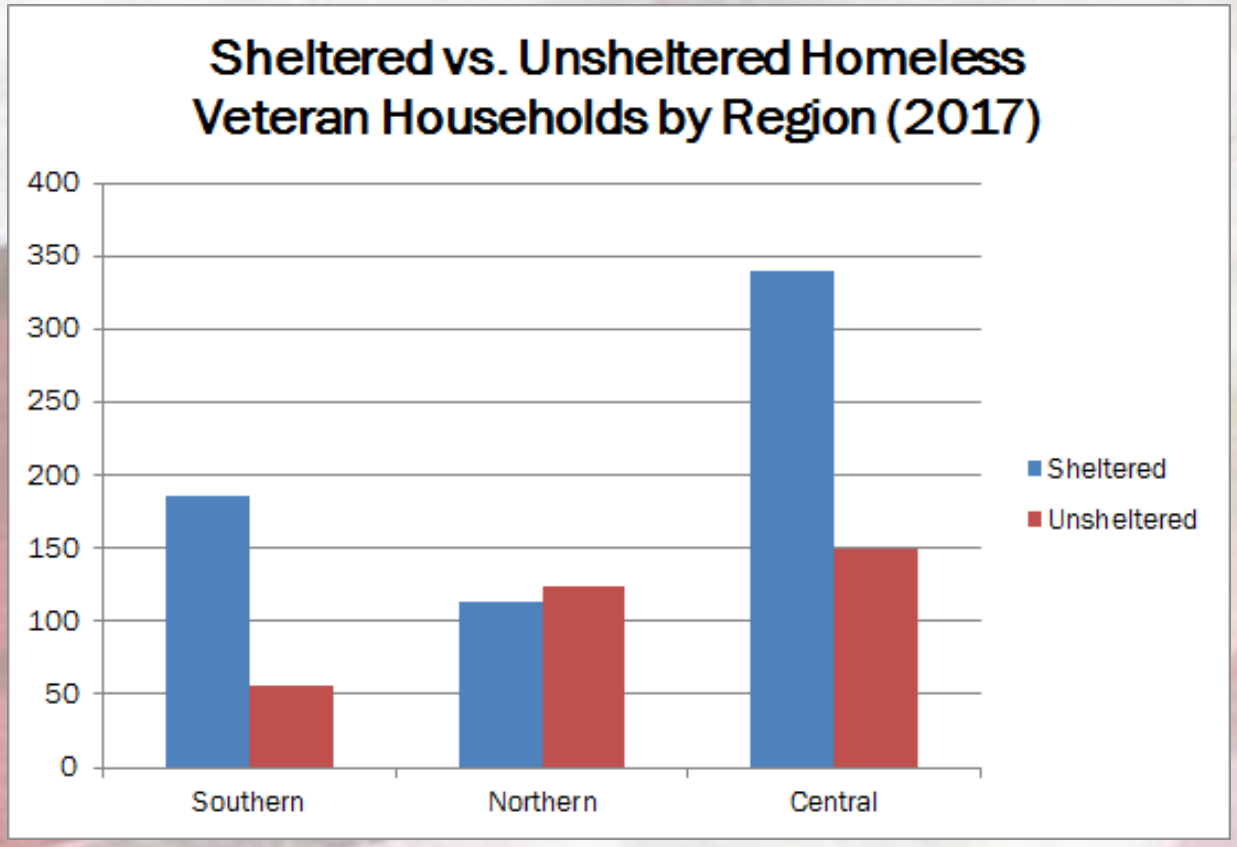
- Continue veteran preferences within the LIHTC program and encourage Public Housing Authorities (PHA) to project base vouchers within these developments commensurate with the number of set aside units.
- Advocate for continued Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) preference for all homeless to ensure veterans ineligible for HUD VASH have access to Permanent Supportive Housing.
- Continue to enhance co-location of services at the Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) and each major veteran housing campus.

Southern Objective:

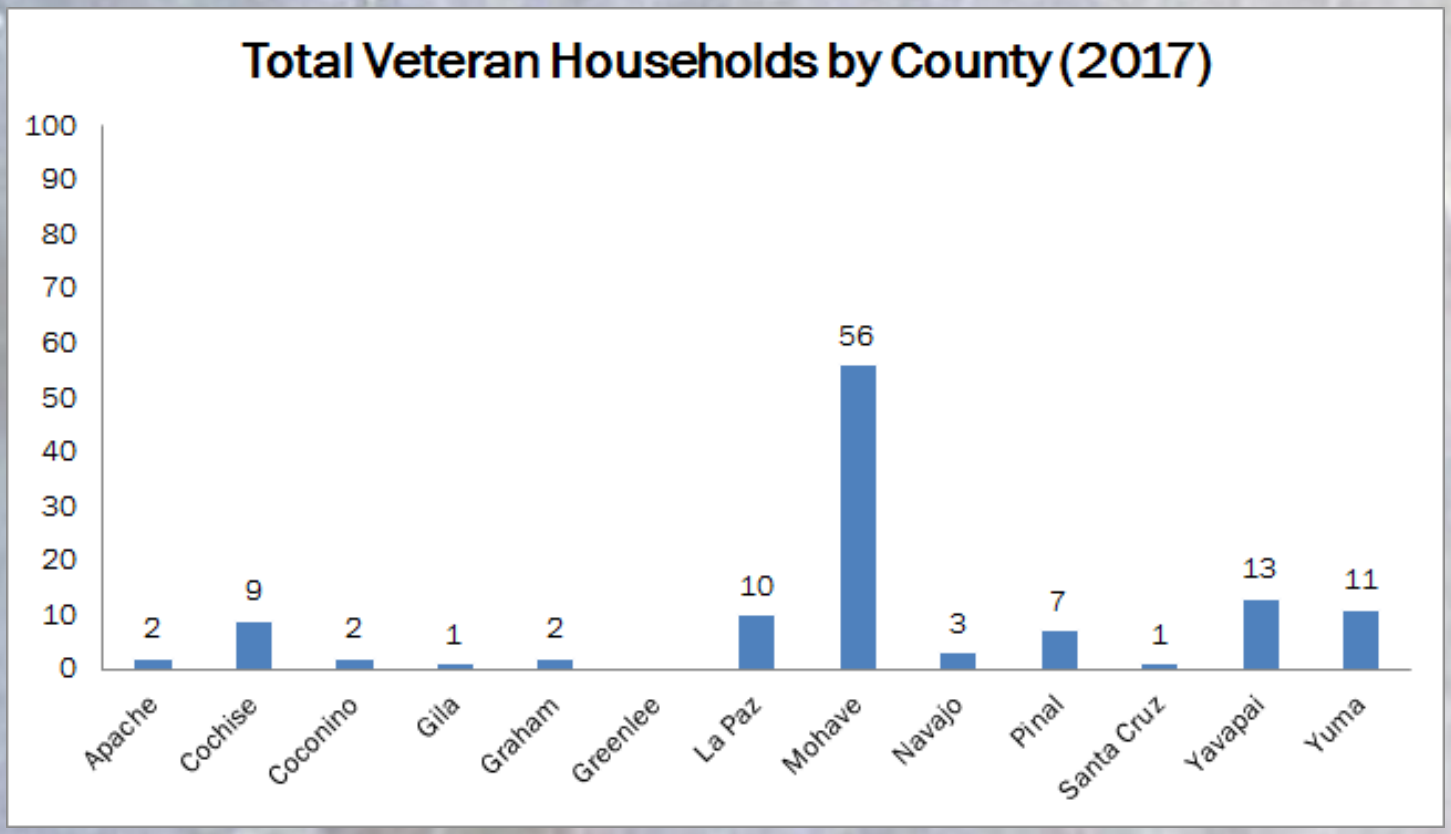
- Continue veteran preferences under the LIHTC program and encourage PHAs to project base vouchers within these developments commensurate with the number of set aside units.
- Advocate for HCV set-asides for the homeless to ensure veterans ineligible for HUD VASH have access to Permanent Supportive Housing.
- Continue to enhance co-location of services within VA homeless programs and in each major veteran housing campus.

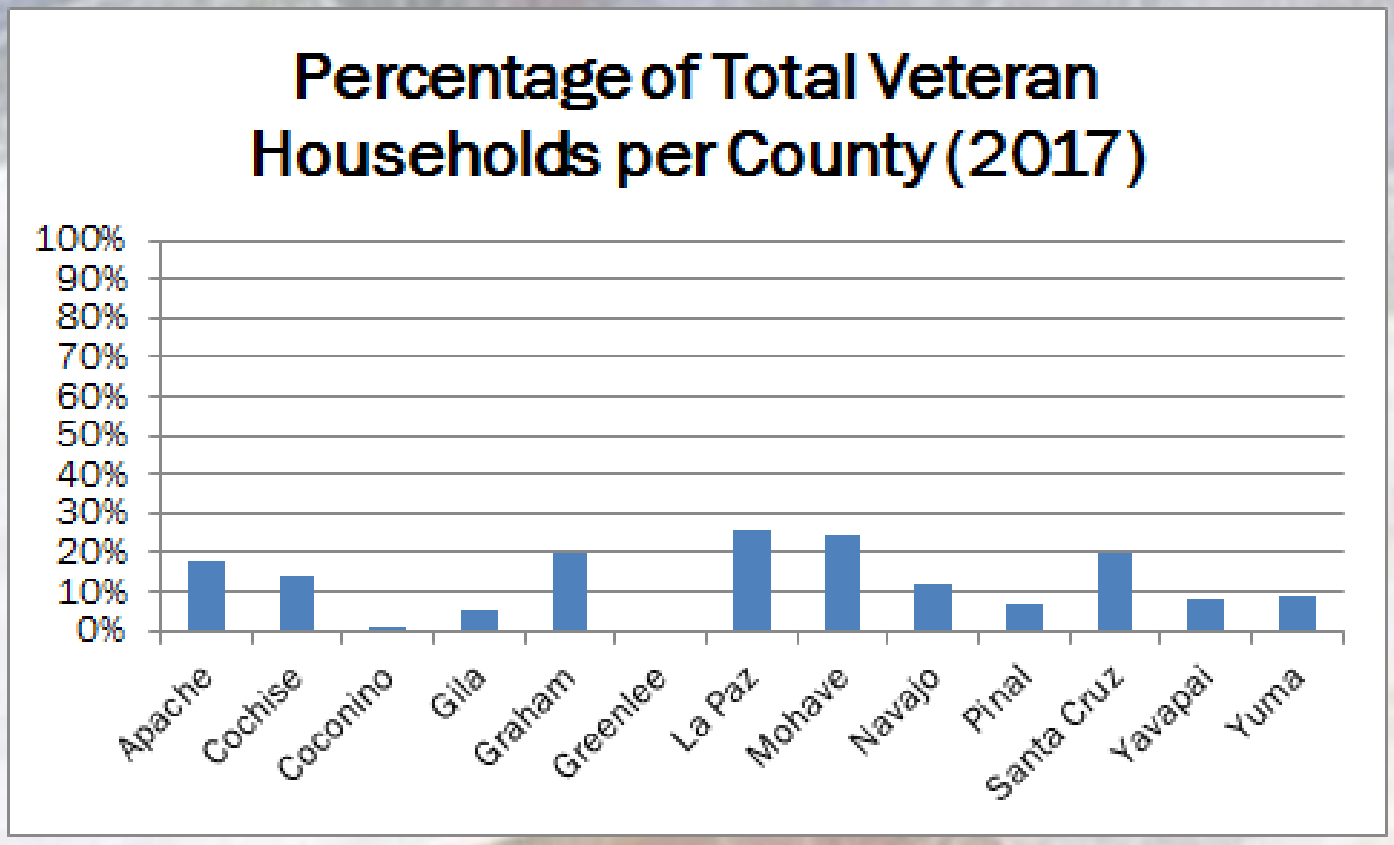
Appendix A
2017 Point in Time (PIT) Count Data
Statewide Homeless Veteran Households





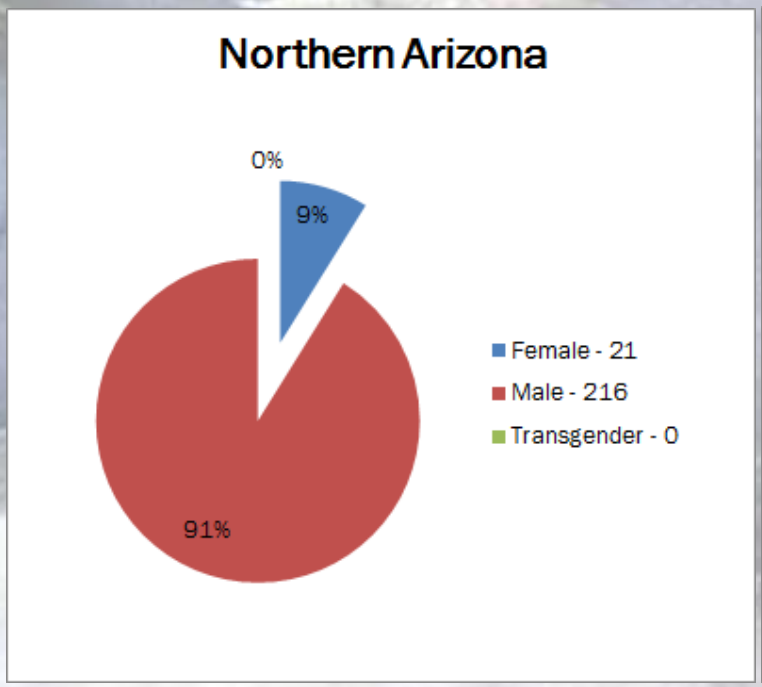
2017 PIT Count: Percentage of Homeless Households where a Veteran is Domiciled

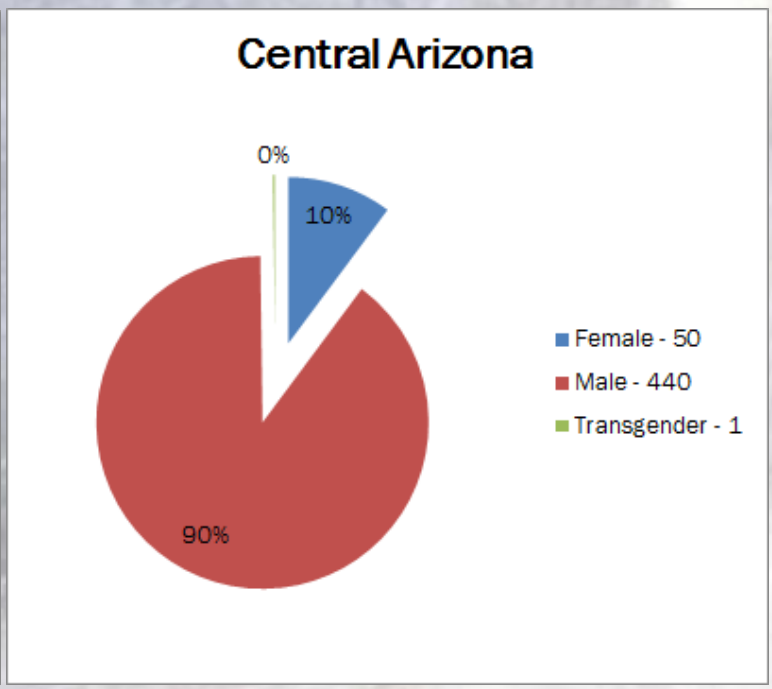


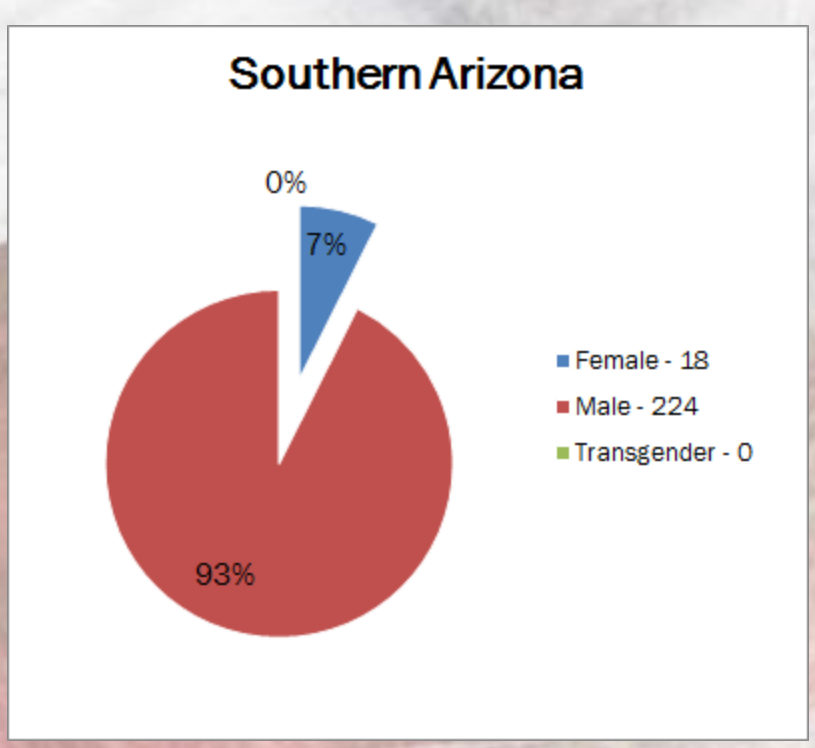


2017 PIT Count Data

Breakdown of Homeless Veterans By Gender

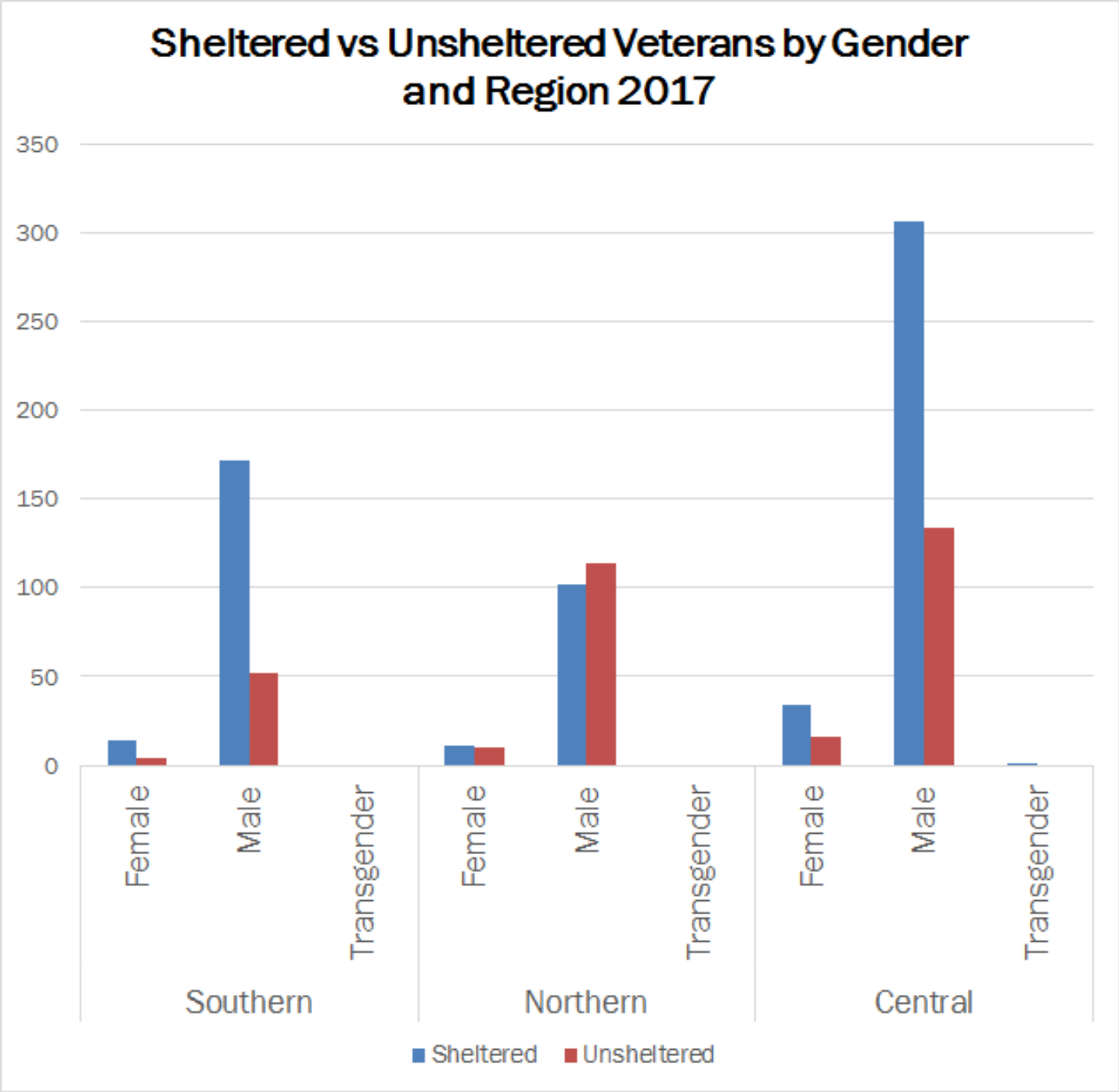






2017 PIT Count Data

Sheltered vs.Unsheltered Veterans by Gender



Regional Breakdown of Arizona Counties

Northern Arizona*: Coconino County, Yavapai County, Navajo County, Apache County, Mohave County*

Central Arizona*: Maricopa County, Graham County, Greenlee County*

Southern Arizona: *Cochise County, Pima County, Santa Cruz County, Gila County, La Paz County, Yuma County,*

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