

# research snapshot

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## Factors linked to chronic homelessness among U.S. military veterans with gambling disorder

### What this research is about

The link between gambling and homelessness is complex. Homelessness and gambling disorder (GD) share similar risk factors, such as mental health concerns, substance use problems, trauma histories, and suicidal behaviours. Military veterans may be at greater risk for housing instability and gambling problems. In this study, the researchers examined how common chronic homelessness is among U.S. veterans with GD. They also identified factors associated with chronic homelessness among veterans with GD.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Corporate Data Warehouse, which stores all VA electronic medical records.

Veterans were considered to experience chronic homelessness if they had: (1) been homeless for at least 1 year; (2) had at least 4 episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years; or (3) been homeless for more than 11 months with disability status.

The following information was used in the analysis:

- Sociodemographic and military characteristics (e.g., military branch, rank, and years in service).
- Mental health and medical diagnoses within the year prior to the initial HOMES assessment.
- Self-rating of physical health over the past 30 days.
- Alcohol and drug use and cravings in the month prior to their intake assessment.
- History of treatment from alcohol/drugs.
- Need of psychiatric, substance use, or medical treatment or help with family problems.

### What you need to know

This study analyzed how common chronic homelessness is among U.S. veterans with gambling disorder (GD). This study also identified factors associated with chronic homelessness. Data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) were used. The dataset included 6,053 veterans with GD who were assessed between 2015 and 2020. Almost one-third (28.6%) of veterans with GD experienced chronic homelessness. Compared to veterans without chronic homelessness, those with chronic homelessness were more likely to be male and unemployed, and have lower educational levels and fewer years in the military. Veterans with GD and chronic homelessness had more clinical and behavioural concerns requiring treatment. For example, they had more mental health, physical health, and alcohol and drug use problems. They were also more likely to have traumatic experiences and suicidal thoughts. But they expressed less interest in psychiatric treatment.

- Interest in receiving such treatment.
- Traumatic events and suicidal thoughts.

The current study used data from veterans with GD who had their first intake assessment between 2015 and 2020. The total number of veterans who had a intake assessment was 529,322. Among them, there were 6,053 veterans with a GD diagnosis.

### What the researchers found

Of the 6,053 veterans with GD, 28.6% experienced chronic homelessness. The average age was 53 years.

Most veterans were male (94.2%). Compared to veterans with GD but without chronic homelessness, those with both GD and chronic homelessness were more likely to have the following characteristics:

- Be older, unemployed, male, and identify with a race other than White.
- Have fewer years of military service.
- Be diagnosed with schizophrenia, psychosis, alcohol use disorder, drug use disorder, and nicotine dependence.
- Have tuberculosis and liver diseases, and a greater number of medical conditions.
- Report more days of inebriation, illegal/street drugs use, and cravings for alcohol/drugs.
- Have inpatient and outpatient admission and emergency room/department visits.
- Be assessed as needing treatment for substance use and other psychiatric and medical concerns.
- Be in need of assistance with family problems.
- Have experienced violence and traumatic events, including being attacked when they were homeless; being forced to do things they did not want to do; engaging in risky behaviour (e.g., shared needles); harmed oneself; and experienced danger from others (e.g., gang violence).
- Have been incarcerated.

Veterans with both GD and chronic homelessness were less likely to show the following characteristics:

- Have a college or professional degree.
- Have a child.
- Consider their health as excellent/very good.
- Be interested in psychiatric treatment.

### How you can use this research

This research can help develop targeted approaches to meet the needs of veterans with chronic homelessness and GD.

### About the researchers

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