



Housing Placement and Suicide Attempts among Homeless Veterans

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VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans



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Objectives

- Overview of VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans
 - Highlight 3 key initiatives:
 - Homeless Registry
 - At Risk Screener
 - VET-AHAR
- Discuss relationship between suicide and homelessness
- Current study methods and results
- Conclusions and next steps



VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans

- Funded in 2010 as a multi-site initiative (VISN 4 & VISN 8) with the leadership office located at the Philadelphia VAMC.
 - Faculty from VISN 1 added in 2011
- Primary academic partners:
 - University of Pennsylvania
 - University of South Florida
 - University of Massachusetts
- Primary Objective: Link research and evaluation findings to policy decisions, and the delivery and implementation of high quality, research-informed homeless services.



VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans

- Strong partnerships with:
 - VISN 4 Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC)
 - Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP)
 - VISN 2 Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention at Canandaigua
- Center and VHA Program Office was the prototype for HSR&D CREATE initiative.



VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans

Key Initiatives

- Housing First pilot
- Exiters Study from HUD-VASH
- Homeless Registry
- At Risk for Homeless Screen
- Substance Use Enhancement to Case Management
- Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams (H-PACT)
- Safe Havens

Key Initiatives

- Community Resource and Referral Centers (CRRCs)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to Promote Treatment Engagement and Safety
- Veteran Supplement to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (VET-AHAR)
- Suicide risk



Homeless Registry

- A comprehensive national data management tool that incorporates information from both the VA and the community related to homeless and at risk for homeless Veterans.
- Includes:
 - VA Specialized Homeless Programs Data
 - VA Medical Record Encounters/Contacts
 - Diagnostic History
 - VBA
- Provides Veteran-centric longitudinal data regarding Veterans who are homeless.
 - Ability to target and track the impact of homeless programs on clients



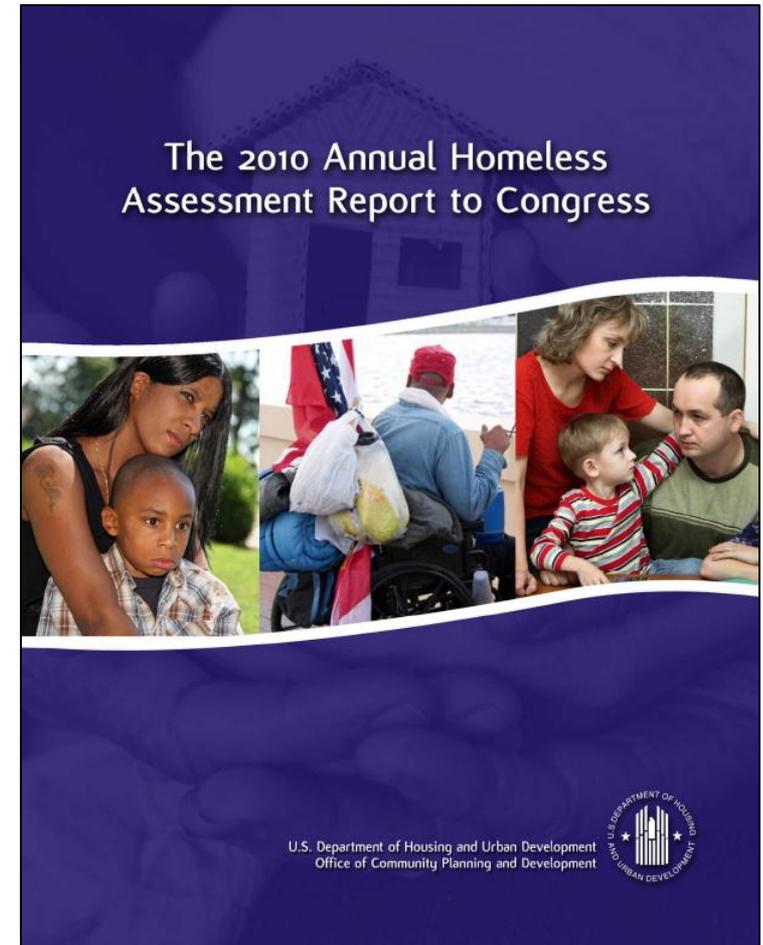
Homelessness Risk Assessment

- Purpose: to identify Veterans at imminent risk of homelessness who may be appropriate for VA's prevention initiatives
 - Do you have a home of your own that is safe and where you have lived for the past 90 days?
 - Are you worried that you may not have a home of your own that is safe and where you can live for the next 90 days?
- Pilot data indicate strong and significant relationship between common risk factors and Veterans' endorsement of imminent risk



Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR)

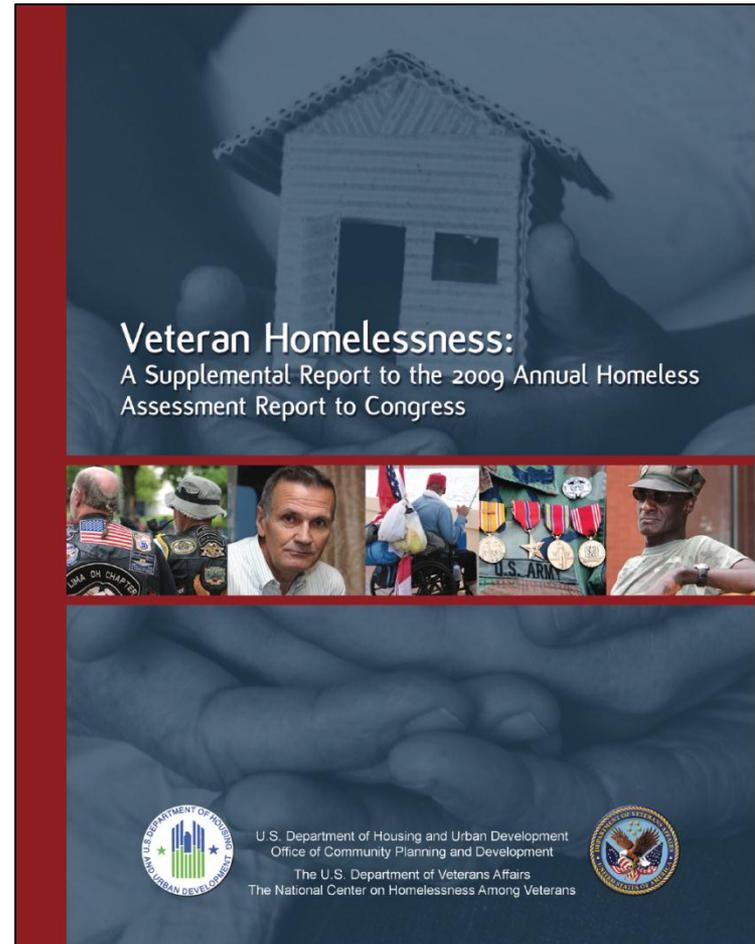
- Required annual report to Congress since 2005
- Estimate levels, describe homeless population, location, patterns of shelter use
- Standard methods for data collection across the country





AHAR Veteran Supplement

- New in 2009
- Uses similar methods as the AHAR
- Adds:
 - Differences between Veteran and non-Veterans
 - Risk of homelessness for groups of Veterans





Annual and Point in Time Estimates

Annual

- Full picture of homelessness through entire year
- Unduplicated records
- 300 + communities report

Point in Time (PIT)

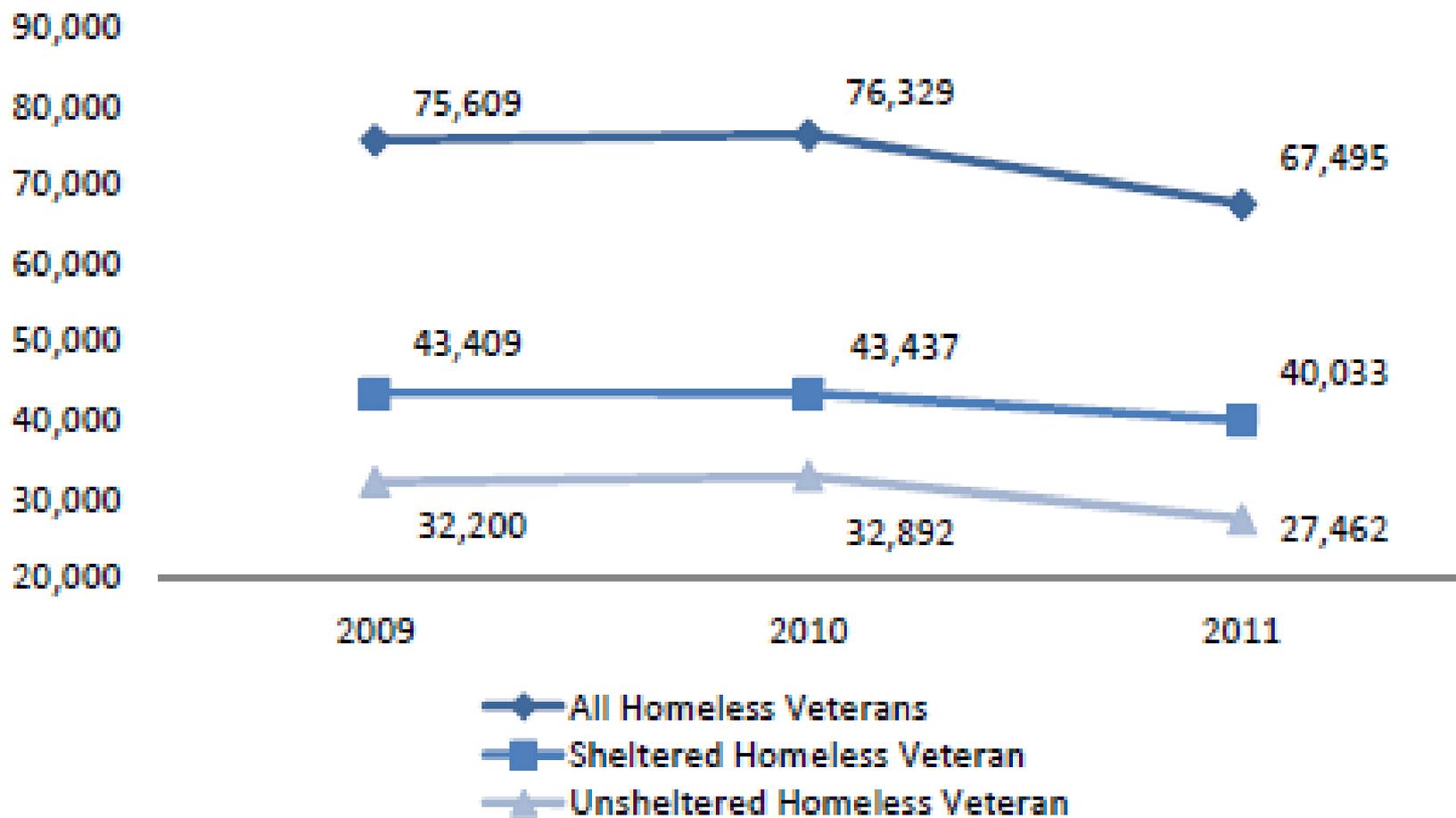
- Answers the question: “How many Veterans are homeless on a given day?”
- Includes sheltered and unsheltered counts



Groups of Veterans at High Risk of Homelessness

- AHAR Veteran Supplement compares risk of homelessness among groups of Veterans to risk for groups of non-Veterans.
- Certain groups are at high risk:
 - Veterans under 30 years (OEF/OIF era)
 - Female Veterans
 - African American and Hispanic Veterans
 - Risk is higher for poor members of these groups

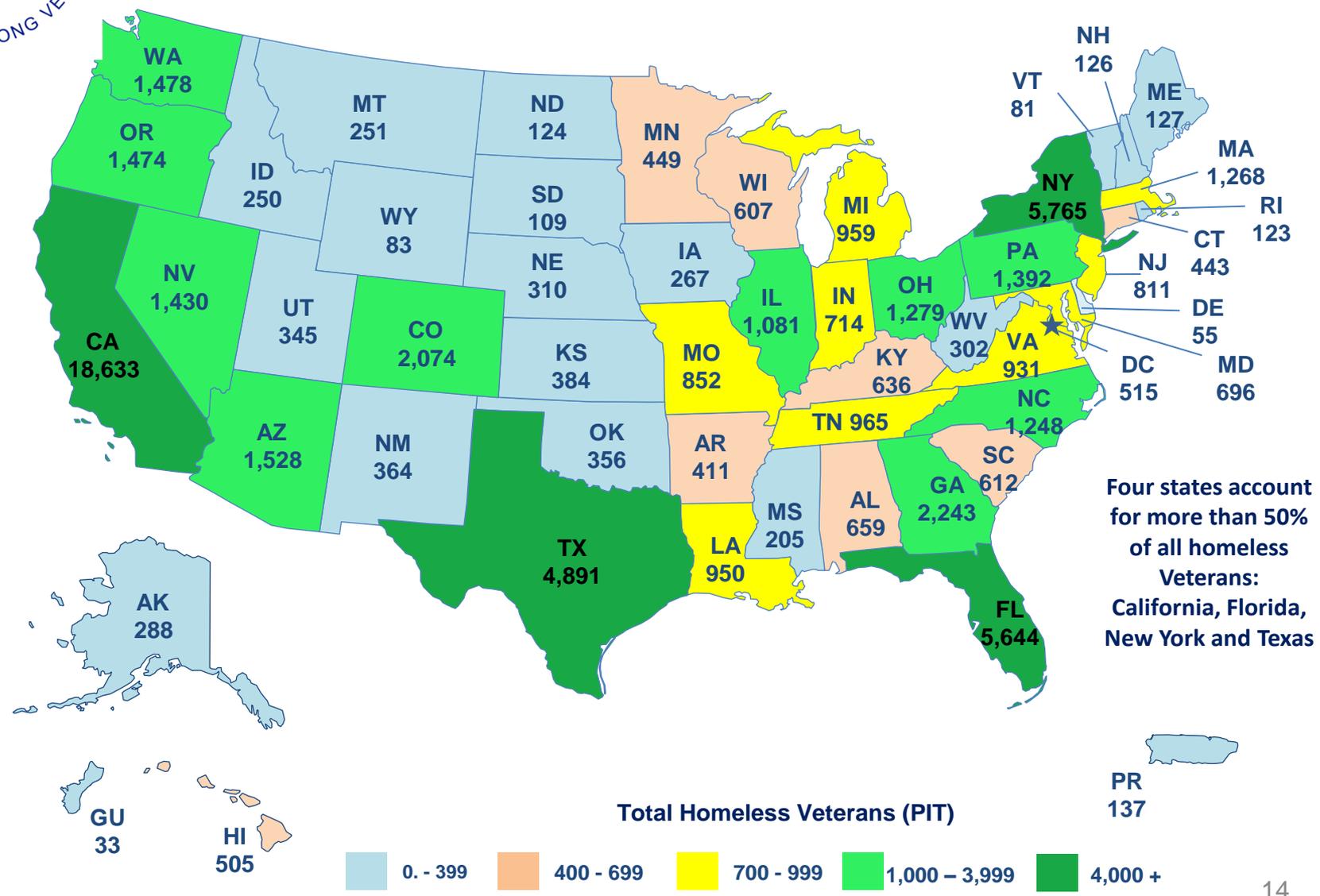
Table 8: PIT Estimates of Homelessness Among Veterans by Sheltered Status





Geographic Distribution of Homeless Veterans by State (Point-In-Time)

Total: 67,495 Veterans





Health Disparities and Homelessness

- High morbidity
 - Diabetes
 - CHF
 - COPD
- Mortality
 - Average life expectancy of 65 years
- Barriers to healthcare
 - Trouble keeping appointments
 - Medication compliance
 - Limited resources
- Poor psychosocial supports



Homelessness among Veterans

- On any given night, it has been estimated that there are more than 76,000 homeless Veterans in the U.S. (AHAR, 2010)
 - More than 67,000 homeless were Veterans (PIT, 2011)
 - ~14% of all homeless adults were Veterans (PIT, 2011)
- High prevalence of psychiatric and substance abuse disorders among Veterans who are homeless or with a history of homelessness.
- Mental health and substance abuse services were among the most frequently MET needs of homeless Veterans. (CHALENG, 2011)
- Homeless Veterans appear to be more socially isolated, with weaker family and social support systems
 - Characteristics associated with an increased risk for suicide.



Homelessness and Suicide

- Risk for suicide associated with homelessness is not well-understood.
- Prigerson et al (2003): Estimated the 30 day prevalence to suicide ideation to be 37.5% and suicide attempts to be 7.9%.
- Schinka et al (2012): Reported a high prevalence of self-reported suicide ideation and attempts among older homeless/at-risk Veterans.
- Bickley et al (2006): Reported 3% of all suicides among psychiatric patients had a record of homelessness.
- Hwang et al (2009): Estimated risk for suicide among the homeless to be as much as five times higher than that of the general population.
- Little is currently known about the prevalence of suicide attempts or longer term outcomes among homeless Veterans.



Risk Profile of Homeless Individuals

- High prevalence of psychiatric dx
- Social isolation / relationship instability
- Poor quality of life

- Large, comprehensive national-level datasets available to explore relationship between homelessness and suicide



Current Study

- The aims of the current study were to:
 1. Document the prevalence of suicide attempts/re-attempts among Veterans with a history of homelessness.
 2. Document characteristics of suicide attempts (method of attempt, frequency, etc.)
 3. Explore the relationship between housing stability and self-reported SI/SA 30 days prior to homeless assessment.



Data Sources

- Suicide Prevention Applications Network (SPAN)
 - Standardized set of measures collected for all suicide events known to VA providers and Suicide Prevention Coordinators.
 - Data are entered electronically and can be used to identify individuals over time.
 - Currently available for the time period FY09-12Q1
 - Includes information on nearly 40,000 suicide attempts and more than 32,000 Veterans
- Homeless Service Intake Assessments (Form X)
 - Intake assessment tool for Veterans enrolling for homeless services.
 - Self-report information on housing characteristics, service needs, psychiatric and medical history, and suicide behaviors.



Method

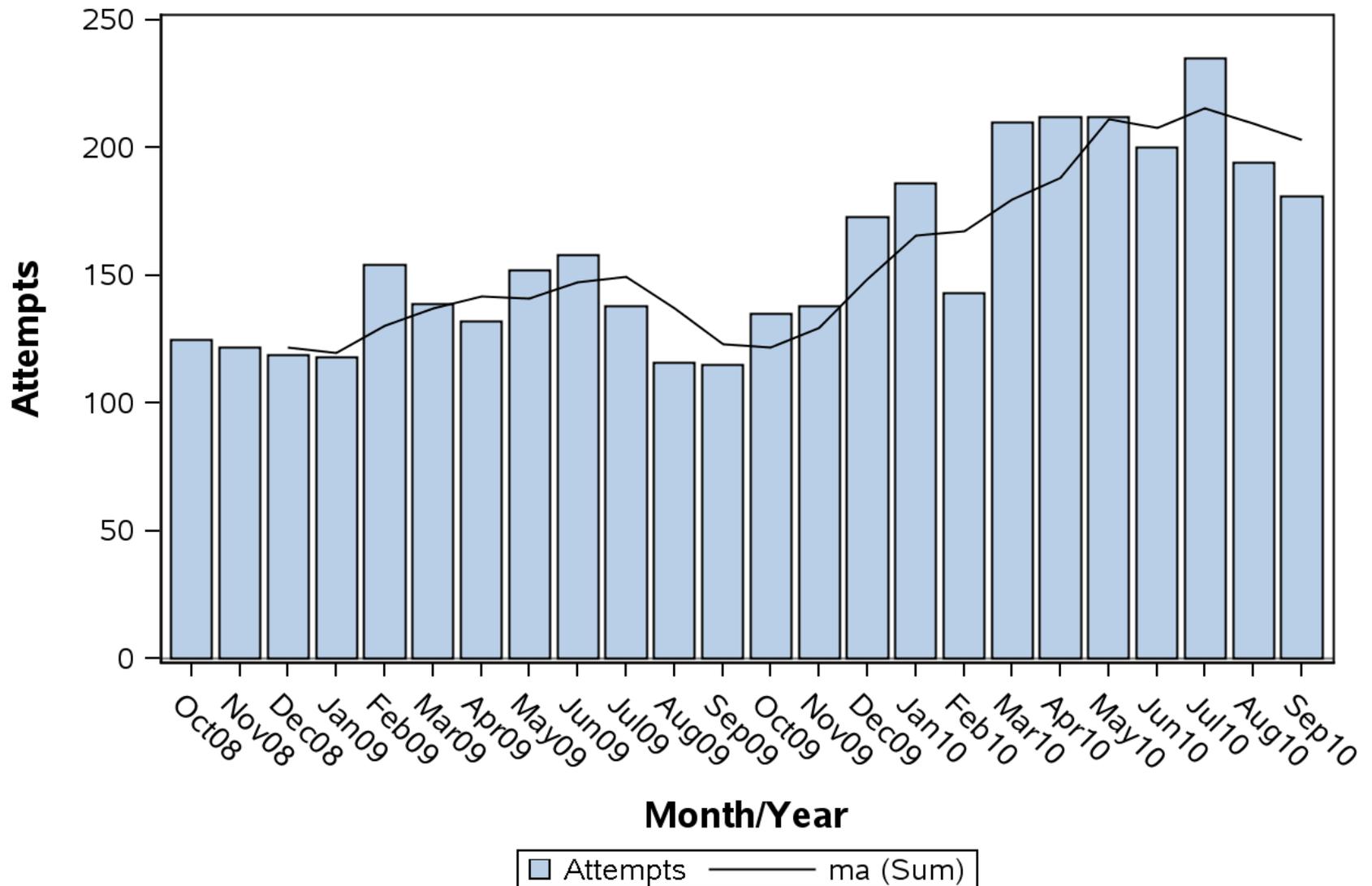
- Data from SPAN and Form X were merged for a two year period (October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2010) using social security numbers.
- Analyses were limited to Veterans who had received VHA services in the year prior to or year of their first reported suicide attempt and year of intake assessment.
- Rates of suicide attempts were calculated using the number of unique Form X assessments completed in each fiscal year.
- Reattempt prevalence was calculated as the proportion of Veterans with report of a repeat suicide attempt within 12 or 24 months of their index attempt (in SPAN).
- VHA clinical records used to identify last known service prior to the first reported suicide attempt on record.



Study Population

- Between FY09-10 there were 79,755 unique Veterans who received a homeless service assessment.
- Among this group, 3,037 homeless Veterans were identified as having one or more suicide attempts during the same time period.
 - A total of 3,807 suicide attempts were reported.
- The age-adjusted rate of suicide attempts among homeless Veterans during the study period was 3,808 per 100,000 unique Veterans.
 - Attempts among Veterans who received VHA services during roughly the same time period was 191 per 100,000 unique Veterans.
- Rate of suicide attempts among homeless Veterans was **~20 times higher** than the rate of suicide attempts among all Veterans.
- The rate of suicide attempts among homeless female Veterans (4,677/100,000) was roughly 25% higher than the rate among homeless male Veterans (3,734/100,000).

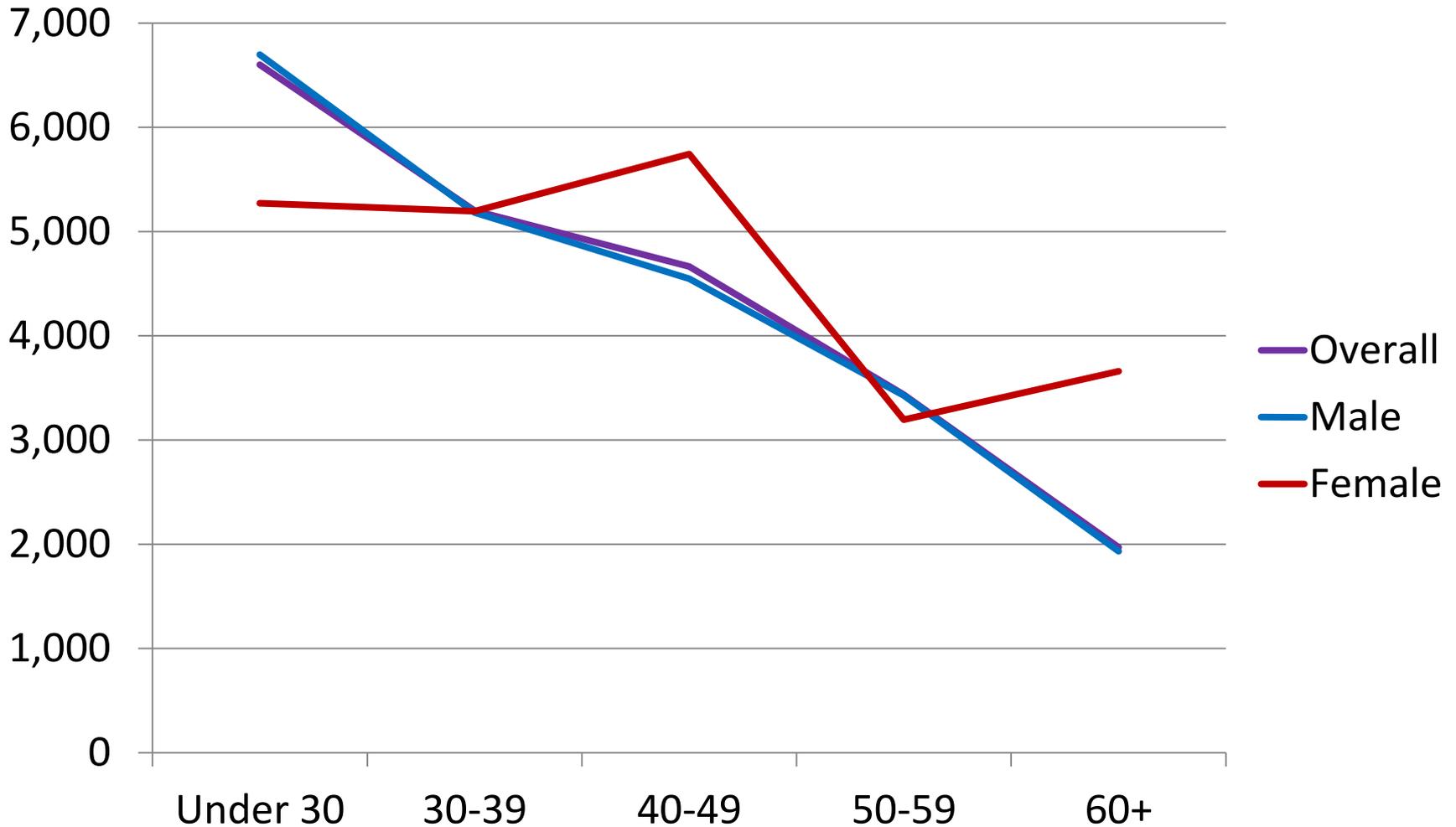
NonFatal Attempts by Homeless Users Reported by Month FY09 - FY10





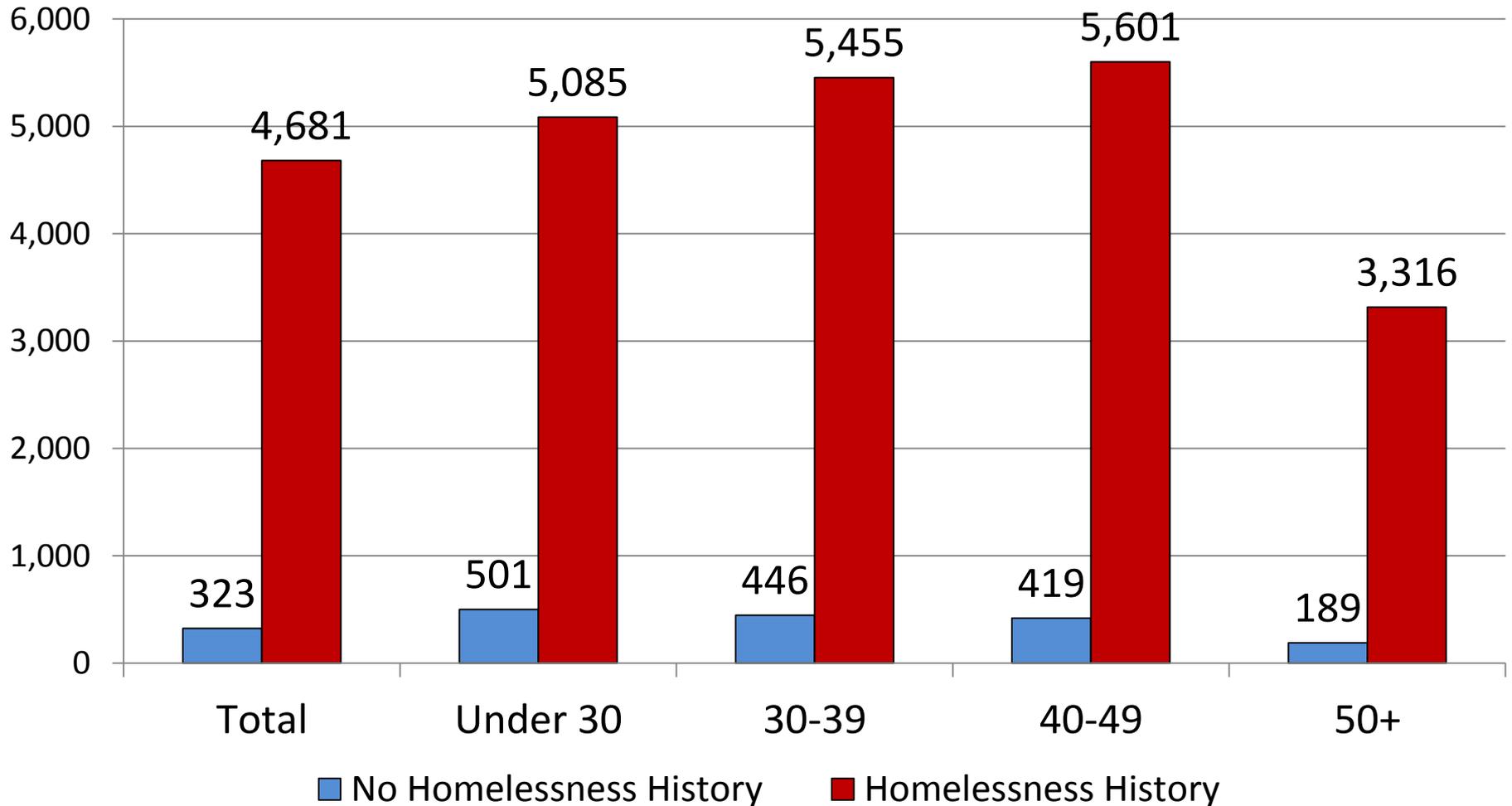
Rates of Suicide Attempts by Age and Gender

(per 100,000 unique Veterans assessed for homeless services)



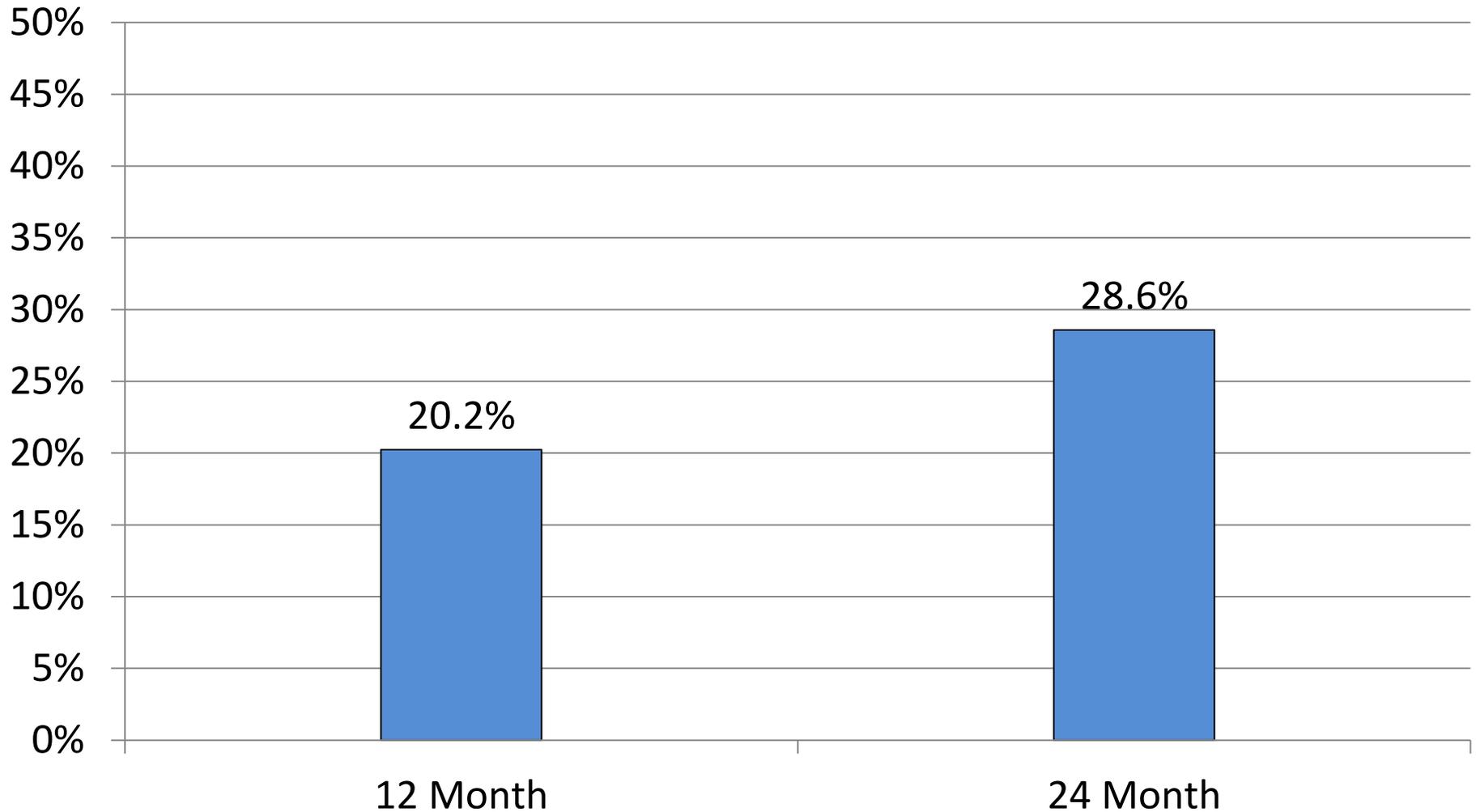


Rates of Suicide Attempts for Female Veterans by Age and Homelessness History (per 100,000 unique Veterans)





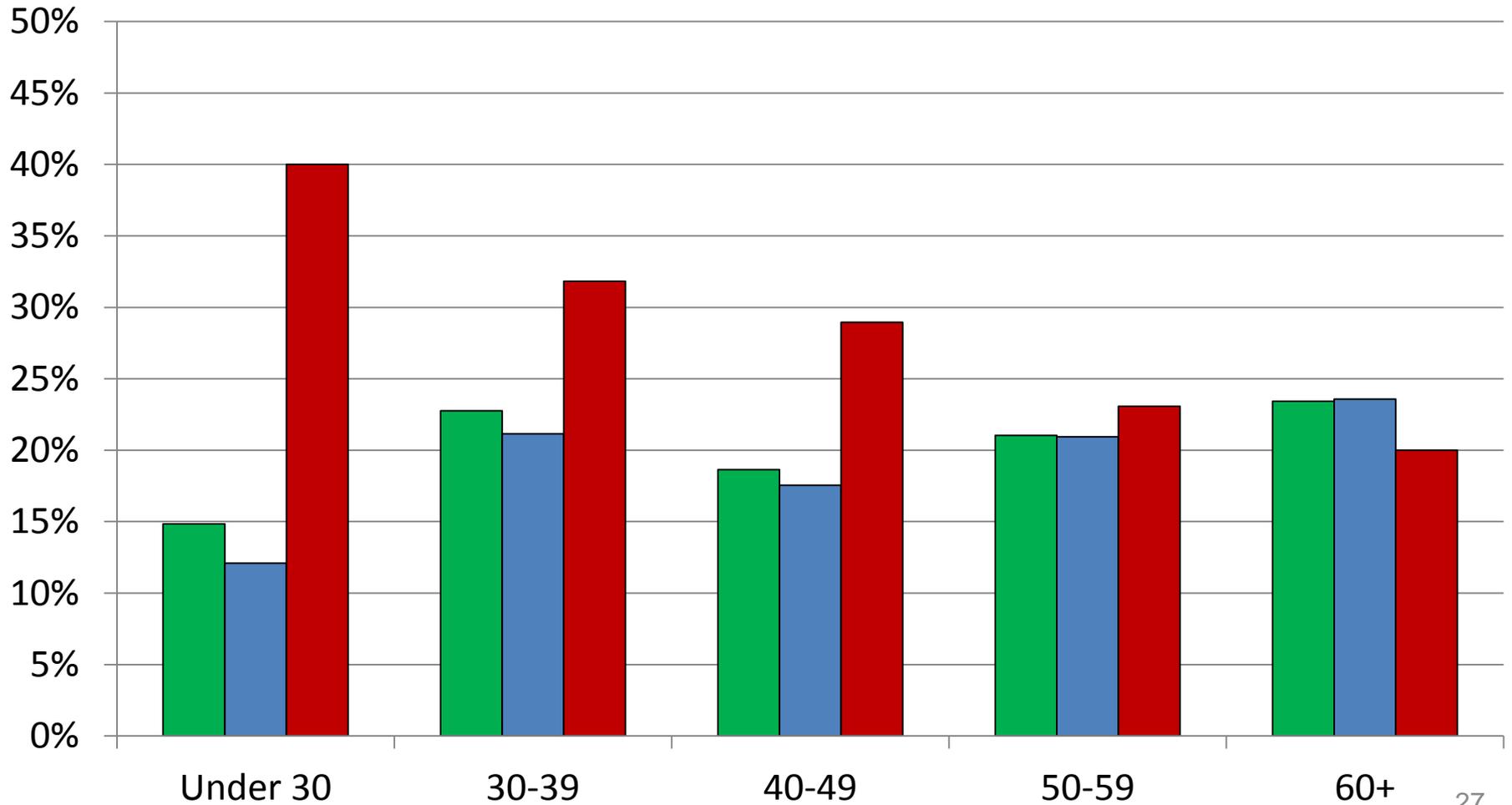
Overall 12 and 24 Month Re-attempt Prevalence





12 Month Re-attempt Prevalence by Age and Gender

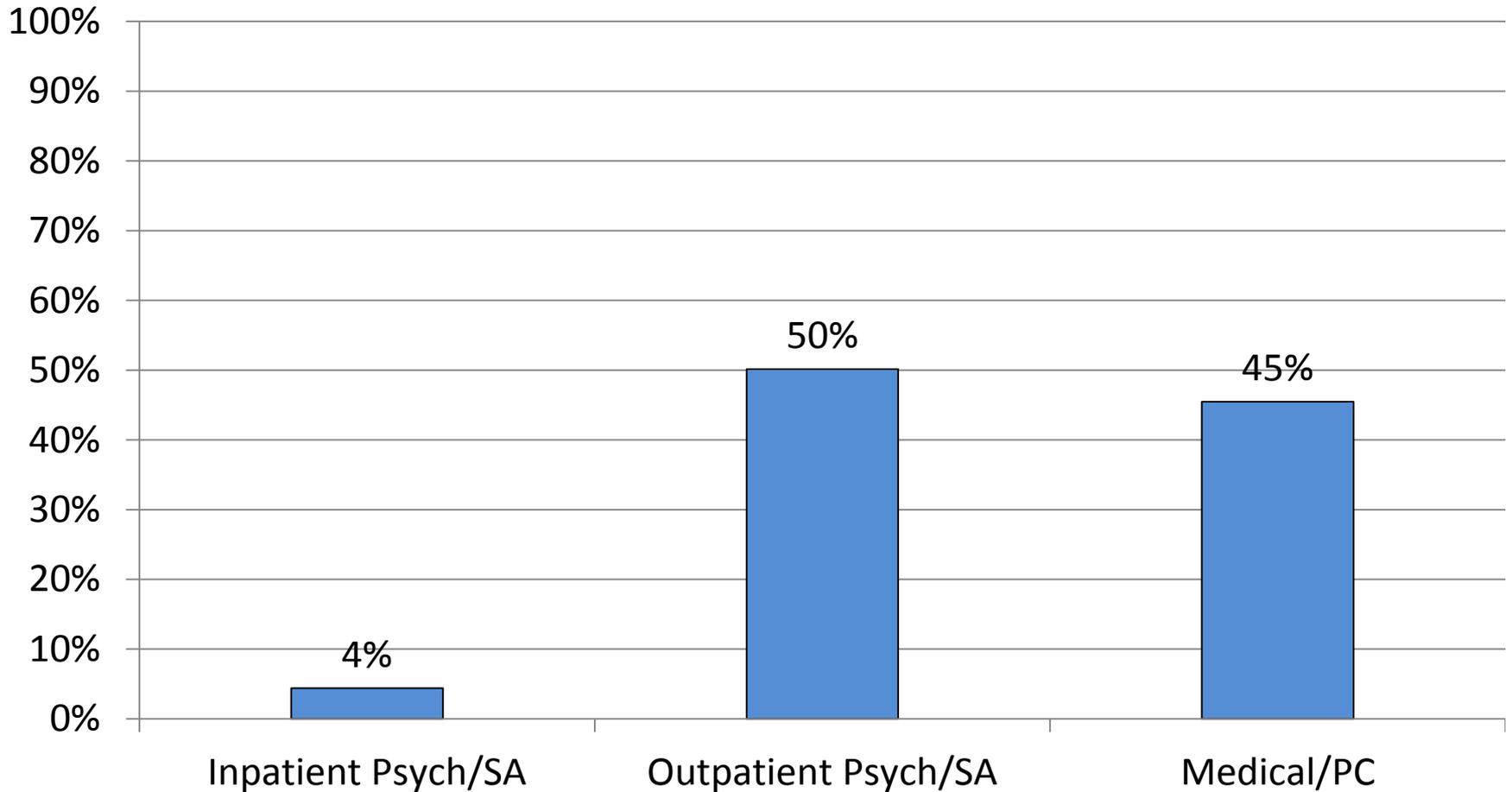
Overall Male Female



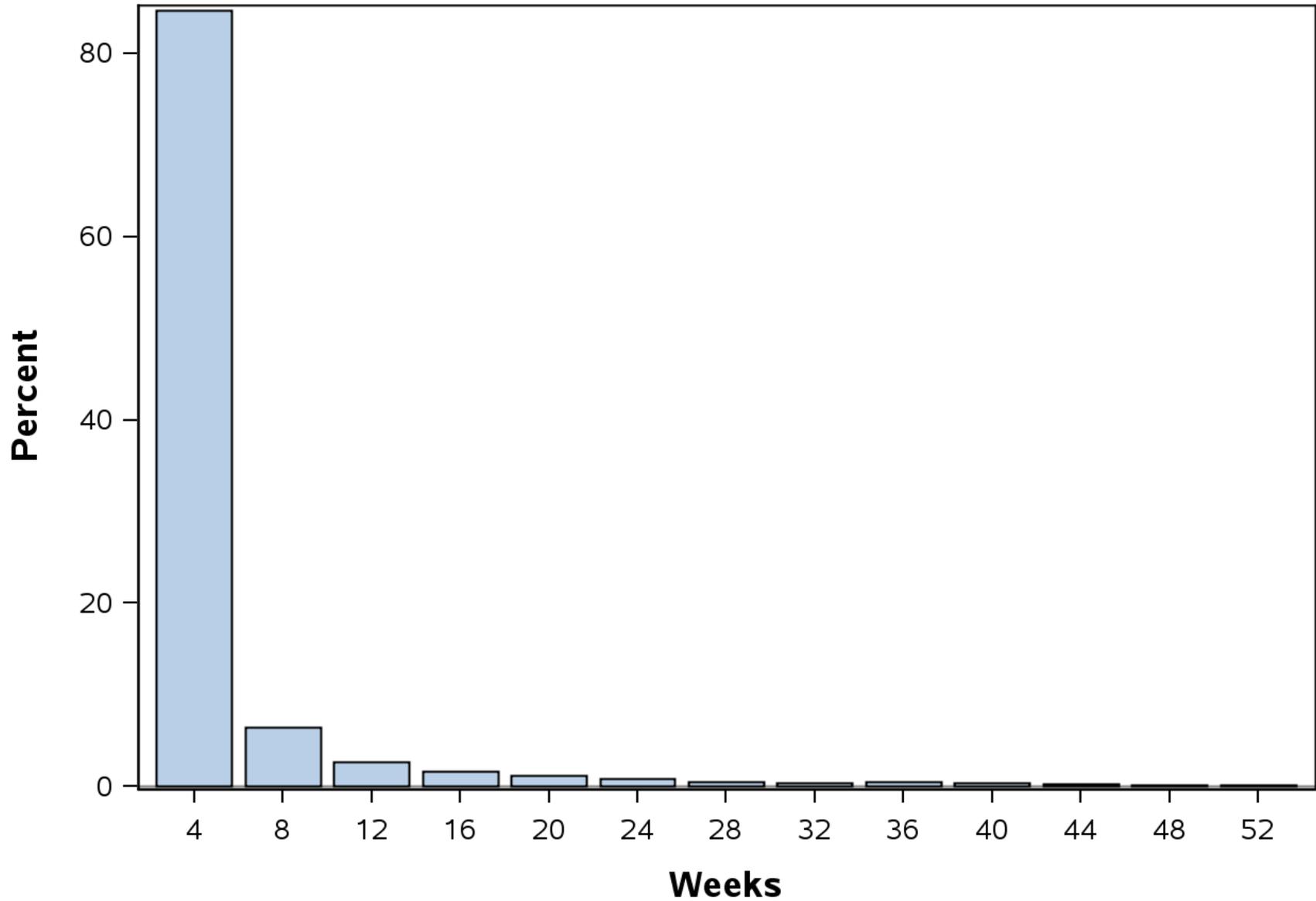


Point of Last Service Delivery Prior to Index Attempt

(N=3,807)



Weeks from Last VHA Utilization to Attempt

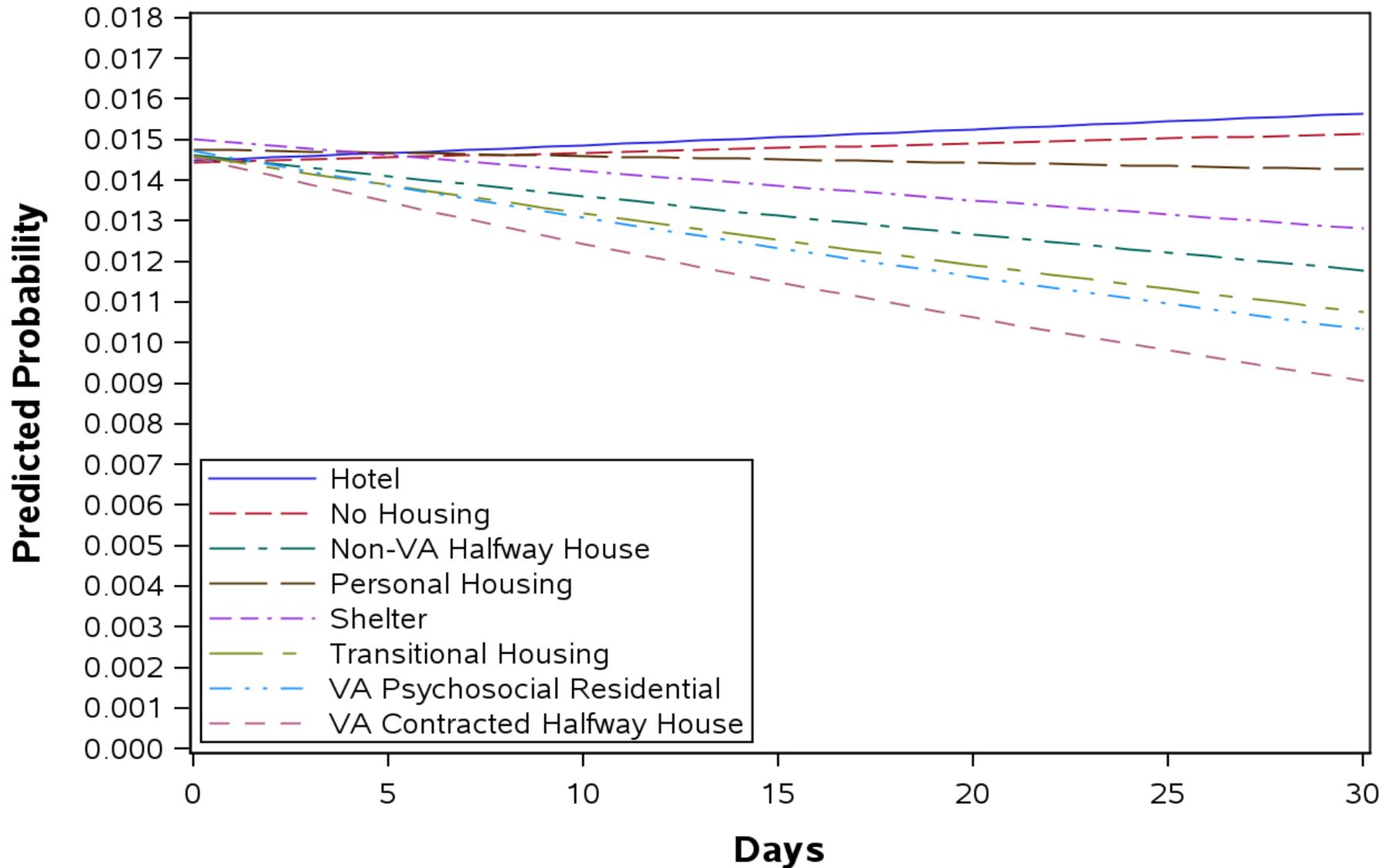




Method of Attempt

	FY	
	2009	2010
Poisoning	61.60%	55.66%
Hanging, strangulation, suffocation	4.94%	6.09%
Drowning, submersion	0.51%	0.82%
Firearms	4.82%	6.81%
Fire	0.19%	0.31%
Sharp object	7.92%	11.16%
Jumping - high place	3.11%	3.43%
Jumping - moving object	6.08%	4.66%
Automobile	0.51%	1.28%
Intentional self-harm by other specified means	3.36%	1.02%
Intentional self-harm by unspecified means	5.96%	11.98%
Sequelae of intentional self-harm	1.84%	2.87%

Predicted Probability of Suicide Behavior on Housing Categories





Summary

- High rates of suicide attempts among Veterans experiencing homelessness or with a history of homelessness.
- The 12 and 24 month prevalence of repeat suicide attempts is also high.
- Important gender differences in the rate of attempts/re-attempts.
- Overall, a majority of homeless Veterans who attempted suicide had received service within 30 days of their index attempt.
- Primary method of suicide attempt was by poisoning – providing opportunities for risk reduction and innovative prevention strategies.
- Support existing efforts to integrate suicide prevention and homeless service initiatives.



Future Research

- Exploring the temporal relationship between homeless episodes and SI/SA
- Link between Homelessness, MST, and Suicide
- Differences between frequency/duration of homelessness as it relates to suicide
- Length of time in permanent supported housing and SI/SA
- Prevention/targeting interventions for both homelessness and suicidality



The Center as a Resource for Suicide Prevention Research

- Extensive registry of homeless Veterans including: dx hx, txt hx, and last known housing status.
- Risk assessment
- Linking homeless data and suicide data to drive prevention/targeting.
- Further understand the nuances of suicide in the Veteran population.



Conclusions

- Veterans experiencing homelessness are a particularly vulnerable population.
 - Focus on female homeless Veterans
- Suicidality and homelessness are linked however the intricacies require further exploration.
- Type of housing placement may confer some protective factor against suicidal behaviors among homeless Veterans.



Questions

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