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Veteran Homelessness Continues To Drop In Ohio

The number of homeless veterans in Ohio decreased 23.38% compared to 2015, according to the federal government's latest data.

Other states too appear to be making progress - with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development this week announcing that homelessness among veterans nationally has seen a 47% decrease since 2010 and a 17% decrease since 2015.

That's according to data from the national Point-in-Time homeless census, conducted each January at the local level, which this year identified fewer than 40,000 veterans across the country experiencing homelessness.

"It shows if you get smart with how you deliver services and you coordinate with others in the work and you increase resources, the homeless problem is solvable," Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio Executive Director Bill Faith said of the numbers in an interview.

Homeless advocates have urged caution in the past when interpreting PIT data, saying the one day snapshot doesn't necessarily accurately account for the continually revolving door of those entering and leaving homelessness. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, November 27, 2015](#))

But it's the most accurate measure there is and the annual numbers, useful for gauging trends in the homeless population, do show progress being made in housing Ohio's veterans.

"While we've made remarkable progress toward ending veteran homelessness, we still have work to do to make certain we answer the call of our veterans just as they answered the call of our nation," HUD Secretary Julian Castro said in a statement.

In Ohio, 930 homeless veterans were found in January 2016 - 845 of whom were sheltered and 85 of whom were unsheltered. That's down from 2015, when 1,183 were identified - 1,073 of whom were sheltered compared to 110 unsheltered.

Among Ohio's most populous regions this year:

- In the Franklin County area, there were 133 homeless veterans in 2016 - a 3% increase from the 129 identified homeless vets identified in 2015
- In the Hamilton County area, there were 185 homeless veterans- an 8.9% drop from the 203 identified homeless in 2015
- In the Cuyahoga County area, there were 202 homeless - a 38% drop from the 326 identified homeless vets in 2015

- In the Ohio Balance of State, which contains 80 of Ohio's most rural counties, there were 179 homeless veterans - a 20% drop from the 224 identified homeless vets in 2015

Mr. Faith credited that improvement to additional funding and coordination from Congress and the administration and stronger efforts among local support agencies to identify the chronically homeless and direct them toward housing.

He said the Dayton area in particular has seen marked improvement - with 114 homeless veterans identified in 2015 and 60 identified in 2016 leading to a 47% decrease.

The Obama Administration has prioritized ending veteran homelessness, including an initial goal of ending it by 2015. Congress has worked to provide new funding and resources to support programs such as the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program.

"Initially we didn't see the needle move much," Mr. Faith said, "but I think as communities embraced the approach, coordinated efforts with each other and had increased funding they really are moving the needle. I'm old and cynical, but the fact you can actually see solutions happening every day for these folks is heartened and makes you feel like this is something that we can really solve."

He said he hopes that bipartisan support continues at all levels, including renewed state support for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, regardless what happens in the coming election. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, November 20, 2015](#))

"We've seen, really, support across the board," he said. "I don't know of an elected official of any party that doesn't embrace this because how can we let our veterans continue to flounder on our streets? It's just unconscionable."

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