

# Veteran homelessness is a solvable problem

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By Jason Levesque

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As Veterans Day approaches, I'm reminded of the struggles facing many of my fellow veterans, including those of our homeless veteran population.

When we hear the term "homeless veteran," many of us conjure up stereotypical images of older men living under railroad bridges or sleeping on our city benches, and while these images are sometimes accurate, the issue can be much more obscure. It can range from a young veteran sleeping on a friend's couch, to an older veteran suffering quietly from mental illness living in a shelter. While we have made great strides, homelessness among military veterans remains an issue in Maine. Thankfully, it is a solvable one.



Jason Levesque

With groups like the Maine Homeless veteran Action Committee (MHVAC) and their member groups, including Preble Street, VA Maine, Easter Seals Maine, Veteran's Inc., Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services, MaineHousing, Bread of Life Ministries, Maine VFW, Volunteers of America Northern New England, Betsy Ann Ross House of Hope, Maine Elks and most critically, individual veterans who have personal experience with homelessness, progress is being made across the state to achieve the goal of making veteran homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Since fall 2018, this statewide alliance has helped reduce our homeless veteran population by over 60%, decreasing the average nights spent in a shelter by 76. They achieved this by rapidly identifying veterans in need, and providing them with appropriate housing, counseling, and job placement.

Despite these advances, we still see that statewide as of Sept. 30, there are about 107 veterans still in need of our help. That's why I'm joining Mayor Kristen Cloutier of Lewiston and other mayors across the State in signing the Mayor's Challenge to End veteran Homelessness in Maine. It is truly up to all of us to solve this problem right here, in our hometowns and cities.

While signing a piece of paper is not going to magically solve this issue, it commits us as a community to work together. Here are a few ways you can help:

We need landlords to partner with MHVAC to house and support our veterans. In doing so, you gain access to resources you wouldn't otherwise have, including a financial safety net, a coordinated group of providers, additional information on applicants, professional help mediating and resolving issues with tenancy, professional support for tenants, and more.

We need employers to enthusiastically provide jobs to our veterans so that they can get back on their feet and once again be productive members of our communities. There are programs and tax incentives in place to assist you.

We need community members to be diligent in helping our veterans get the help they need and deserve. If you see or hear of a veteran experiencing homelessness, please contact MHVAC or one of their partners.

The Maine Homeless veteran Action Committee can be reached through Preble Street veterans Housing Services' Housing Liaison Supervisor, Robert Marcroft, MHVAC's current chair, at 207-239-2795 or [\[email protected\]](#)

We owe it to our veterans to fight for their future just as they fought for ours — with dignity and honor. Together, we can end veteran homelessness in Maine.

***Jason Levesque served in the U.S. Army and is mayor of Auburn.***

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