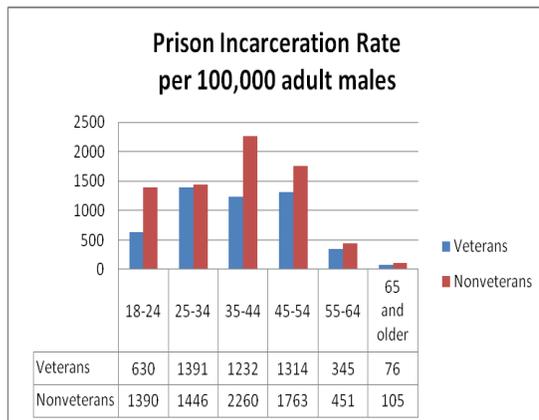


# Situation Analysis: Special Needs: Incarcerated Veterans

## Overview

Veterans make up about 9% of the total jail and prison population, according to the National Veterans Technical Assistance Center.



The following information is based on findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics:

An estimated 127,500 veterans were held in state and 12,500 in federal prisons. Veteran prisoners are almost exclusively male.

Imprisoned veterans are better educated than their non-veteran counterparts with 91% reporting that they hold at least a high school diploma or GED. In comparison, 60% of non-veteran prisoners hold a high school diploma or GED.

Six in 10 incarcerated veterans reported an honorable discharge from their military service.

Drug use among imprisoned veterans seems to be less predominant than among the non-veteran prison population. 42% of veterans reported the use of drugs prior to incarceration compared to 58% of non-veterans.

When examining information from state prisons, veterans had shorter criminal histories than non-veterans. However, they reported longer average sentences than non-veterans. About 57% of veterans served time for violent criminal offenses, which compares to 47% among non-veterans.

Nearly one in four veterans in state prisons were sexual offenders compared to one in 10 non-veterans. Veterans were also more likely to have victimized women or minors.

More than one third of veterans in state prison carried maximum sentences of 20 years, life or death.

## Support for Imprisoned Veterans

In 2008, the CMHS National GAINS Center released a set of recommendations on how to respond to the needs of justice-involved combat veterans with service-related trauma and mental health issues.

The following recommendations are meant to be utilized in a community-based approach to meet the mental health needs of veterans who have come in touch with the criminal justice system.

1. Screening individuals for military service and traumatic experiences.
2. Training for law enforcement, probation and parole, and correction officers on identifying signs of combat-related trauma and the role of adaptive behaviors in justice system involvement.
3. Helping connect veterans to VA health care services for which they are eligible, either through a community-based specialist or transition planner, the VA's OEF/OIF coordinators, or through a local Vet Center.
4. Expanding community-based, veteran-specific peer support services.
5. Preparing service providers to address substance abuse, physical health, employment, and housing needs in addition to mental health needs.

*The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission has created a special committee to address and facilitate the needs of chronically homeless individuals and the justice system. The report is available at [www.nashville.gov/sservices](http://www.nashville.gov/sservices)*

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Prepared by the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission.

## Notes from the author:

*This brief is primarily based on a special report titled "Veterans in State and Federal Prison", that the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics released in 2007.*

*The report found that the percentage of veterans in state and federal prisons has steadily declined over the past three decades.*

*Nonetheless, veteran prisoners have unique issues that need to be considered upon release to prevent homelessness.*

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