A December 2010 data match conducted by HHS and the VA\(^2\) revealed that veterans comprise a small but significant proportion (just over 5 percent) of the noncustodial parent child support caseload. This means that there are more than half a million\(^3\) veterans among the 10.7 million noncustodial parents in the match.\(^4\) This proportion did not vary much by state. About half of the states had more than 10,000 veterans in their child support caseload.

The data match also provided information about the arrearage owed by veterans. Veterans account for more than $7 billion of the child support arrearages owed by noncustodial parents. This represents about 7 percent of the total child support debt, slightly more than the veterans’ share of the population. The per capita child support debt owed by those veterans with debt is on average 27 percent higher than the per capita child support debt owed by all noncustodial parents. The average debt owed by veterans with debt is about $24,500 and the comparable per capita debt for all noncustodial parents with debt is $19,200. OCSE did not obtain information from the data match on how much of the arrearages veterans owe is debt owed to the state for reimbursement of public assistance versus how much is support owed to the custodial parent.

The veteran population in the IV-D caseload is substantially older than the noncustodial parent population in the child support caseload as a whole, which may be a reason for the higher per capita debt by veterans. Almost 50 percent of veterans in the child support caseload are over age 50, while for the caseload as a whole only 14 percent of noncustodial parents are over age 50. This means that veteran noncustodial parents are three times as likely to be older than an average noncustodial parent. Based on feedback from the pilot sites, many of the homeless and at-risk veterans are Vietnam-era veterans with adult children, rather than more recently returning veterans. These cases are often arrears-only
cases; that is, there is no current support obligation remaining. Nonetheless, this debt keeps increasing in states that charge interest.

**The Importance of Child Support Outreach to Homeless Veterans**

Based on a national survey of homeless veterans and their service providers, legal assistance with child support issues is consistently among the top ten unmet needs of homeless veterans. Many homeless veterans face obstacles in moving into permanent housing because of legal judgments related to the nonpayment of child support. Unresolved child support debts can result in liens against bank accounts, an inability to obtain credit, suspension of driver’s licenses, and a disincentive to obtain gainful employment. Often, the veteran incurred the arrearage while homeless, in a phase of active addiction, or otherwise untreated for a serious mental illness.

**HHS-VA-ABA Collaboration**

In response to the need for legal assistance on child support issues, HHS (through OCSE), the VA, and the ABA collaborated in 2010 to establish nine pilot sites where partners would address the child support issues of homeless veterans. Such issues include review of driver’s licenses suspensions, review and modification of orders, arrears management, and interstate/intergovernmental case processing. The sites were Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, San Diego, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. There was no federal funding for this special initiative.

Initially, the pilot sites targeted homeless veterans who had been living in VA transitional housing for a minimum of three months. The veterans had little or no income. Drawing from a population of homeless veterans who were connected to ongoing rehabilitation and support services offered continuity and an increased likelihood of being able to reach the veteran for any needed follow-up. As the project developed, the sites made local determinations regarding whether to expand the target population to include homeless and at-risk veterans from other referral sources. The service model varied among the sites. However, each site had as its goal to help veterans achieve economic stability and thereby increase their likelihood of obtaining housing. At each site, the staff were passionately
dedicated to finding creative ways to establish partnerships and practical solutions to positively impact the lives of veterans and their families.

Data collected during the 2016 Point-in-Time Count — a “snapshot” of homelessness on a given night in America — revealed a 47 percent decline in homeless veterans since 2010,\textsuperscript{6} the year the HHS-VA-ABA initiative began. Many factors have contributed to that decline, and the child support community continues its efforts to help end veterans’ homelessness. Most of the HHS-VA-ABA pilot sites have been operational for more than five years, yielding promising practices and lessons learned for other locales interested in developing similar initiatives to help veterans. This toolkit is based on information they have shared, in addition to promising practices identified by other jurisdictions.

**Additional Information**

**Child Support and Veterans**

**Story Behind the Numbers Fact Sheet Series, No. 1: Veterans in the Child Support Caseload (2011)**

This fact sheet focuses on veterans who are noncustodial parents in the child support caseload and how the program can help them.

**Source:** Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement


This fact sheet describes early implementation of a collaboration among the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the American Bar Association. The collaboration helped homeless veterans address their child support issues to reduce barriers to permanent housing.

**Source:** Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement

**Homeless Veterans**

**Ending Veteran Homelessness**

This website describes the VA’s efforts to end homelessness among veterans.

**Source:** The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Homeless Veterans

This website describes Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups), which brings together homelessness service providers, advocates, veterans and other concerned citizens to identify the needs of homeless veterans and work to meet those needs through planning and cooperative action.

Source: The U.S Department of Veterans Affairs

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

NCHV is the resource and technical assistance center for a national network of community-based service providers and local, state and federal agencies that provide emergency and supportive housing, food, health services, job training and placement assistance, legal aid and case management support for homeless veterans.

Source: The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

The USICH coordinates and catalyzes the federal response to homelessness, working in close partnership with Cabinet Secretaries and other senior leaders across its 19 federal member agencies. One of its goals is to end veteran homelessness.

Source: U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Tools and Training Resources