

COLUMBIA — Hope is on the horizon for homeless female veterans who, like men, are now being offered public housing.

Providing housing to veterans has been a priority for Welcome Home, Columbia Housing Authorities and Truman VA. The increase in female veterans has also caused these organizations to consider how they can meet the needs of all veterans.

According to [endhomelessness.org](http://endhomelessness.org), homeless veterans make up 8.6 percent of the total U.S. homeless population. As of April 2015, there were 49,933 homeless veterans in the United States. [Como.gov](http://Como.gov) says in a Boone County issue analysis that as of 2012, 48 percent of sheltered homeless individuals in Boone County were veterans.

In addition, there has been an increase in young and female veterans after troops returned from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Welcome Home is a homeless shelter in Columbia that serves veterans at risk of homelessness. The shelter currently has only nine temporary beds, which all serve male veterans. After expansion Welcome Home will have 32 shelter beds and will be allowed to serve female veterans. The shelter is located at 1206 Rangeline St. Expansion is expected to be finished in summer of 2017.

Welcome Home is able to expand because of an affordable housing initiative between Columbia Housing Authorities and Truman VA Hospital. The initiative aims to provide energy efficient and fully accessible housing to people with disabilities.

Scott Buis, Welcome Home clinical director, said female veterans aren't currently being served at the shelter because of security issues. There's only one stand-up shower on each level of the shelter and both showers serve males. The shelter expansion will provide a separate wing for female veterans, which will allow them to be served.

Day services at the shelter currently include showers, laundry and meals from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. These day services will be extended after the shelter's expansion because of more showers.

"We're turning away about 15 veterans per month due to lack of space," Buis said.

In addition to expanding the shelter, the housing initiative made Patriot's Place available to veterans. Patriot's Place is an affordable apartment complex specifically for veterans. The complex is located on property adjacent to Welcome Home, off of Business Loop 70.

Phil Steinhaus, Columbia Housing Authorities CEO, said that each Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines and the Missouri Foundation for Health donated \$500,000 to Patriot's Place. The Missouri Housing Development Commission provided \$1.7 million in low-income housing tax credits.

"Each veteran pays 30 percent of their adjusted household income to live at Patriot's Place," Steinhaus said.

Patriot's Place consists of 25 one-bedroom apartments. Seven of these rooms are specifically for female veterans.

Stephen Long, Patriot's Place supportive case manager, said that female veterans are now given higher priority because of the historical lack of service for them. Since there are fewer resources for them, Patriot's Place is trying to get female veterans into housing faster.

"Veterans are one of the most complex sub-populations within the total homeless population," Long said.

Veterans experience homelessness for many different reasons, including mental health and substance abuse. In addition to a variety of factors that lead to veteran homelessness, the population itself is composed of a diverse group of people.

As of 2012, va.gov says that 37.5 percent of veterans are female. Additionally, there is a higher rate of racial diversity among female veterans than male veterans.

Stephen Gaither, Truman VA Hospital public affairs officer, said preventing homelessness has been a major priority for VA health care for the past 8 years.

“As a result, the population of homeless veterans in the United States has been reduced by 47 percent since 2009,” Gaither said.

Truman VA adopted the housing first philosophy as a means to reduce veteran homelessness. The philosophy believes that providing housing is the first step in helping struggling veterans succeed after service. Not having an address to put on a job application prevents many veterans from getting a job.

Gaither said that the veteran population is 22 million, and 11 million of them are receiving some type of VA benefit service. VA benefits include financial benefits, compensation and insurance. These services are tools that VA provides to help homeless veterans.

VA says that a veteran who has behavioral inconsistencies or behavioral issues that keep him/her from performing successfully in society are eligible for mental health services. Many veterans are homeless because they suffer from

mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Their struggle with mental health makes it hard to transition back into post-service life, which leads to homelessness.

“You can’t address the other issues until you have a roof over your head,”  
Gaither said.