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**Most veterans return to Chicago unprepared for civilian life, study finds**

*New USC study identifies critical lack of housing and employment planning and opportunities, heightened suicide risk for veterans in Chicago*

**CHICAGO** Tuesday, April 19, 2016— Many service members leaving the military and returning to the Chicagoland area are not prepared for the transition home and have a range of needs that cannot be easily addressed by a single organization, according to a new University of Southern California report released Tuesday. Among the research statistics were high rates of unemployment/underemployment, homelessness and suicide risk.

“The State of the American Veteran: The Chicagoland Veterans Study” by the USC School of Social Work Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families (<http://cir.usc.edu>), conducted in partnership with the Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work (<http://www.luc.edu>), outlines the findings of a survey conducted in summer 2015 of almost 1,300 veterans living in Cook, DuPage, Will and Lake counties.

The study found many veterans leave the military without having lined up some key elements that could complicate their transition home.

- About 61 percent of pre-9/11 and 65 percent of post-9/11 veterans left the military without a job, expecting to quickly find meaningful employment.
- About half of pre-9/11 and 42 percent of post-9/11 veterans left the military unsure of where they would be living.
- Many left active duty with untreated physical and mental health issues, which were higher among post-9/11 veterans. Among the most recent veteran population, nearly one in four veterans was at risk for suicide but did not seek help, compared to 11 percent of pre-9/11 veterans.

“The main thing we learned from this study is that many Chicagoland veterans were unprepared for their transition out of the military and subsequently are still facing significant challenges that impact their post-service well-being,” said Sara Kintzle, lead author and research assistant professor at the USC School of Social Work.

This first comprehensive study of the area’s military population, which also included follow-up focus groups with 20 veterans, explored numerous areas, such as transition challenges, life satisfaction, employment and finances, housing, health and access to veteran services. USC has conducted similar studies of veteran populations in Southern California in Los Angeles and Orange counties. While unique to the Chicago area, similarities among the findings point to a need for a larger, nationwide transition effort.

“Although veterans in each community have their own unique needs and experiences, we are seeing an overarching theme across the nation,” Kintzle said. “Veterans need support that includes preparing for military transition, managing expectations of post-service life, addressing challenges early, and creating communities that are ready to welcome veterans with a strong, connected network of support.”

The study found that recent veterans who served after 9/11 reported more difficulties adjusting to civilian life and feeling disconnected from their community compared to older veterans. Nearly seven in 10 post-9/11 veterans indicated they needed time to figure out what they would do after the military. More than two-thirds of all veterans felt civilians didn’t understand their problems.

A majority of Chicagoland veterans held positive views of their health, with almost 80 percent of pre-9/11 and 76 percent of post-9/11 veterans indicating good to excellent health. Yet despite these high self-assessments, over a third of post-9/11 veterans had probable PTSD (39.8 percent), depression (36.3 percent) and were at risk for suicide (32.6 percent).

The study suggested that the high risk for suicide, especially among post-9/11 veterans, was likely due to the similarly high lack of social connection. Research has shown that lack of connectedness and social isolation are major contributors to death by suicide among military personnel.

The study also found that veterans feel there are significant barriers preventing them from seeking help. More than half of veterans surveyed said they knew how to help themselves and that they would prefer to manage problems on their own. About three in 10 veterans indicated that strong people could resolve their own psychological issues. Post-9/11 veterans were also more likely to report not trusting mental health professionals (19.8 percent) or difficulties scheduling appointments (26.5 percent).

Key among the report’s recommendations was a robust community public awareness campaign that would include family and friends of returning service members to address some of the main barriers to accessing care and lack of social connectedness. Also recommended was an expanded and coordinated effort among Chicagoland’s veteran-serving organizations, which tend to focus on severe and chronic needs (e.g., homelessness, chronic unemployment, immediate health care needs). In order to meet the varied needs of the area’s veteran population, organizations could pool efforts to take a holistic approach and focus on prevention.

The timing of this study and its recommendations are critical. Chicagoland is home to almost 310,000 veterans, or roughly 43 percent of the state’s population, with many more returning to the area each year who will need coordinated services upon their return.

“The information gained from this study provides localized data that will allow us to target our future research efforts to better understand some of the differences unique to the Chicago area,” said Janice Matthews Rasheed, study investigator and professor at Loyola University Chicago. “This is a starting point that will help us develop relevant social policy for the state and begin to address service barriers and gaps for veterans and military families.”

The Chicagoland Veterans Study was funded by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and Deloitte.

“The study must now be the basis for strong policy and programs that address the unmet needs of veterans and military family members,” said David Hiller, McCormick Foundation president and CEO. “The findings and recommendations will guide us on the road to making Illinois the best place for returning veterans to live and continue to serve their country and community.”

“Projections show that by 2020, the American veteran population will be nearly 20 million, with 40 percent of these veterans from the Gulf Wars,” said Byron O. Spruell, vice chairman and Chicago managing principal, Deloitte LLP.

“Recognizing this, Deloitte has not only increased our emphasis on the employment of veterans, but also, through our long-standing commitment to our communities, we are focused on more effectively addressing the core needs of veterans and their families,” Spruell said.

For more information and to read the full Chicagoland Veterans Study, visit <http://cir.usc.edu/research/research-projects/chicagoland-veterans-study>.

#### **About the Robert R. McCormick Foundation**

The Robert R. McCormick Foundation is committed to fostering communities of educated, informed, and engaged citizens. Through philanthropic grant-making, Cantigny Park, Museums, and Cantigny Golf, the Foundation works to make life better in our communities. The Foundation was established in 1955 upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune. The McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest foundations, with more than \$1.5 billion in assets. Find out more at [www.mccormickfoundation.org](http://www.mccormickfoundation.org), follow us on Twitter (@McCormick\_Fdn) and like us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/mccormickfoundation](http://www.facebook.com/mccormickfoundation)).

#### **About the Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families**

Housed within the University of Southern California School of Social Work, the Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families aims to strengthen the transition of veterans and their families into the community through research, education and training, and global partnerships. The center is focused on rapidly increasing the number of clinical social workers and behavioral health providers trained to treat the challenges service members, veterans and their families face, as well as mental health research that can be directly and quickly translated into clinical practice. In 2009, the USC School of Social Work created the nation's first large-scale military social work program at a research university to increase the number of social workers specifically trained to meet the needs of veterans and their families. The program has graduated more than 1,000 who are trained to care for service members, veterans and their families and to help them cope with the stresses of military life and transitions into civilian life. To learn more, visit [cir.usc.edu](http://cir.usc.edu).

#### **About Loyola University Chicago**

Founded in 1870, Loyola University Chicago is one of the nation's largest Jesuit, Catholic universities, with nearly 16,500 students. More than 11,000 undergraduates call Loyola home. The University has four campuses: three in the greater Chicago area and one in Rome, Italy, as well as course locations in Beijing, China; Saigon-Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Vernon Hills, Illinois (Cuneo Mansion and Gardens); and a Retreat and Ecology Campus in Woodstock, Illinois. The University features 11 schools and colleges, including the Quinlan School of Business, Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing, Stritch School of Medicine, College of Arts and Sciences, School of Communication, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, School of Education, School of Law, School of Social Work, Graduate School, and Arrupe College

of Loyola University Chicago. Ranked a top 100 national university by *U.S. News & World Report*, Loyola is also among a select group of universities recognized for community service and engagement by prestigious national organizations like the Carnegie Foundation and the Corporation for National and Community Service. To learn more about Loyola, visit [LUC.edu](http://LUC.edu), “like” us at [Facebook.com/LoyolaChicago](https://Facebook.com/LoyolaChicago), or follow us on Twitter via [@LoyolaChicago](https://twitter.com/LoyolaChicago) or [@LoyolaNewsroom](https://twitter.com/LoyolaNewsroom).

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