

## **Suicide Attempts and Homelessness**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have found an alarmingly high rate of recent and lifetime suicide attempts in a study of over 7,000 homeless people with mental illness. Over half (51.3%) reported an attempt sometime in their lives and 8% reported an attempt in the past month. Lifetime suicide attempt rates in this homeless group are 12-15 times that seen in the general population (3-4%) and over 7 times that seen in general samples of people with mental illness (7%). Rates were higher among those who were homeless for the first time. This suggests that the shock of becoming homeless can serve as a trigger for a suicide attempt. Notably, recent suicide attempters were highly likely to have been recently discharged from a hospital and to have received outpatient mental health services. However, their current homeless status and recent suicide attempts suggest that service levels were insufficient. This study highlights the vulnerability of homeless people with mental illness as a group at risk for the most tragic of psychiatric clinical outcomes. Efforts to house and properly treat these particularly vulnerable people may reduce the risk of unnecessary deaths due to suicide. This study also shows that homeless people at highest risk for suicide attempts are highly likely to come in contact with the mental health system, giving clinicians an opportunity to identify and aggressively manage their suicidal symptoms. MIRECC researchers Rani Desai, Wen Liu Mares, David Dausey and Robert Rosenheck conducted this research.