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Served, Sacrificed, Yet Struggling: 1 in 4 U.S. Veterans Living in Financial Hardship

New ALICE report reveals that 4.6 million of our nation's veterans can't afford the basics

MORRISTOWN, N.J. – They've served and sacrificed for our country yet more than one quarter — 27% — of our nation's 17 million veterans struggle to afford the basics, according to a new report from United For ALICE, a driver of national research, innovation and action on financial hardship.

In 2019, while 6% of the country's veterans were deemed in poverty, 21% — more than three times as many — were ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). ALICE households earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but less than what it costs to live and work in the modern economy. Combined, 4.6 million veterans were living on an income that falls below the ALICE Threshold of Financial Survival, unable to meet the basic costs of housing, child care, health care, transportation and a smartphone plan.

"Our freedom comes with the responsibility to ensure that those who have served and sacrificed don't struggle to make ends meet once they return home," said United For ALICE CEO Kiran Handa Gaudio. "Although veterans do have additional supports not afforded nonveterans, clearly there's still room for improvement."

The *ALICE in Focus: Veterans* report and interactive tools reveal that while veterans show lower rates of financial hardship than individuals who never served, the degree of economic insecurity for veterans remains significant, ranging from 21% in Wisconsin to as much as 36% in Louisiana.

The findings also show how the racial and ethnic inequities that are prevalent in the general population are mirrored among veterans with 40% of American Indian, 35% of Black and 33% of Hispanic veterans experiencing financial instability in contrast with 27% of Asian and 25% of white veterans. In addition, veterans with disabilities are more likely to struggle financially as 37% had income below the ALICE Threshold compared to 23% of veterans without disabilities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 19% of veterans grappling with financial insecurity reported food insufficiency, needing to tap the help of food pantries, a higher rate than the 4% of financially stable veterans who reported receiving free groceries.

Nonetheless, there are some lessons from the data that might be applied to help nonveterans, said United For ALICE National Director Stephanie Hoopes, Ph.D. The country's veterans are

better off than nonveterans with 27% struggling to make ends meet compared to 35% of adults who never served.

“Veterans have higher rates of full-time employment, are more likely to be homeowners and have more comprehensive health insurance coverage and disability benefits,” Hoopes said. “This suggests that the supports afforded veterans are making a difference and could provide invaluable insights for developing strategies that help nonveterans facing financial hardship.”

Other findings from *ALICE in Focus: Veterans* include:

- The youngest and oldest veterans face the highest rates of hardship; 37% of those aged 24 and younger and 34% of those aged 75 and older had income below the ALICE Threshold.
- While working, veterans still experience financial hardship with 14% of veterans with full-time employment and 36% of those working part time living below the ALICE Threshold.
- Across the country, all states had fewer than one-quarter of financially strapped veterans participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), with Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Utah and Wyoming having the lowest rate at less than 10% participation.
- Three states — New Jersey, Connecticut and Alaska — had 50% or more of veterans below the ALICE Threshold spending more than one-third of their income on their mortgage and utilities. Likewise, Nevada, Hawaii and New Jersey had the highest rates of veterans below the ALICE Threshold cost burdened by their rent.

More data is available through the *ALICE in Focus: Veterans* interactive data dashboard, which provides filters for regional and local geographies, age, race, disability status, living arrangements, work status and proximity to military bases. Visit UnitedForALICE.org/Focus-Veterans.

ALICE in Focus: Veterans marks the third installment in the *ALICE in Focus* Research Series, which draws from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS). Each installment in the series highlights a specific segment within the ALICE demographic. The other installments focused on children and people with disabilities.

About United For ALICE

United For ALICE is a driver of innovation, research and action to improve life across the country for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) and for all. Through the development of the ALICE measurements, a comprehensive, unbiased picture of financial hardship has emerged. Harnessing this data and research on the mismatch between low-paying jobs and the cost of survival, ALICE partners convene, advocate and collaborate on solutions that promote financial stability at local, state and national levels. This grassroots ALICE movement, led by United Way of Northern New Jersey, has spread to 24 states and includes United Ways, corporations, nonprofits and foundations in Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawai‘i, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Washington, D.C., West Virginia and Wisconsin; we are United For ALICE. For more information, visit: UnitedForALICE.org.