

A photograph of a man in a blue hoodie and black cap hugging a golden retriever. They are sitting on a green blanket on a concrete floor. There are two clear plastic containers of food and a red bag nearby. The background is a plain grey wall.

# Dog Tags: Homeless Veterans and Their Pets/Animal Companions

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This presentation is free from commercial bias or interests.

# Learning Objectives



- The learner will be able to:
  1. Describe the construction of self-worth among homeless veterans.
  2. Assess the value of pet/animal companionship, coping strategies, views, and concerns through which homeless veterans survive.
  3. Understand the role companion animals play in effecting change or providing stability to homeless veterans.
  4. Recognize the decision-making impact that homeless veterans with high levels of pet attachment may experience when seeking permanent shelter.

# Background

- Military veterans are at increased risk for homelessness
- Comprise 10% of the US population
- Account for 16% of the homeless adult population



# Background

- Challenges affect physical, mental, and emotional health status and quality of life
- Companion animals play a significant role in effecting change or providing stability to the homeless



# Purpose



- To examine the construction of self-worth among homeless veterans by assessing the value of pet/animal companionship.
- Through the use of qualitative interviews conducted with homeless veteran pet guardians, coping strategies, views, and concerns through which marginalized people survive was experienced.

# Methodology

- Institutional Review Boards (IRB)
- Participation was voluntary
- Participants were approached and surveyed where the homeless congregate
- Mixed methods study



# Pet Attachment Survey

A person wearing a dark cap and a blue jacket is sitting on a patterned blanket on the ground. They are holding a large, light-colored dog. In front of them is a picnic basket with a white container and a bowl. The background is a bright, outdoor setting.

- Standardized pet attachment survey
  - Comfort from Companion Animals Scale
  - 11 item 4 point Likert scale
    - 1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strong agree
    - Scoring 11-44; with 44 highest score
- Results
  - Mean = 43.4
  - Highest comfort from companion animal

# Data Analysis



- Each interview was analyzed and compared to previous interviews to reveal repeated themes and categories.
- Data saturation was achieved.
- Central concept:
  - Homeless veterans have a strong, unyielding bond with their pet/animal companions that over-rides personal needs.



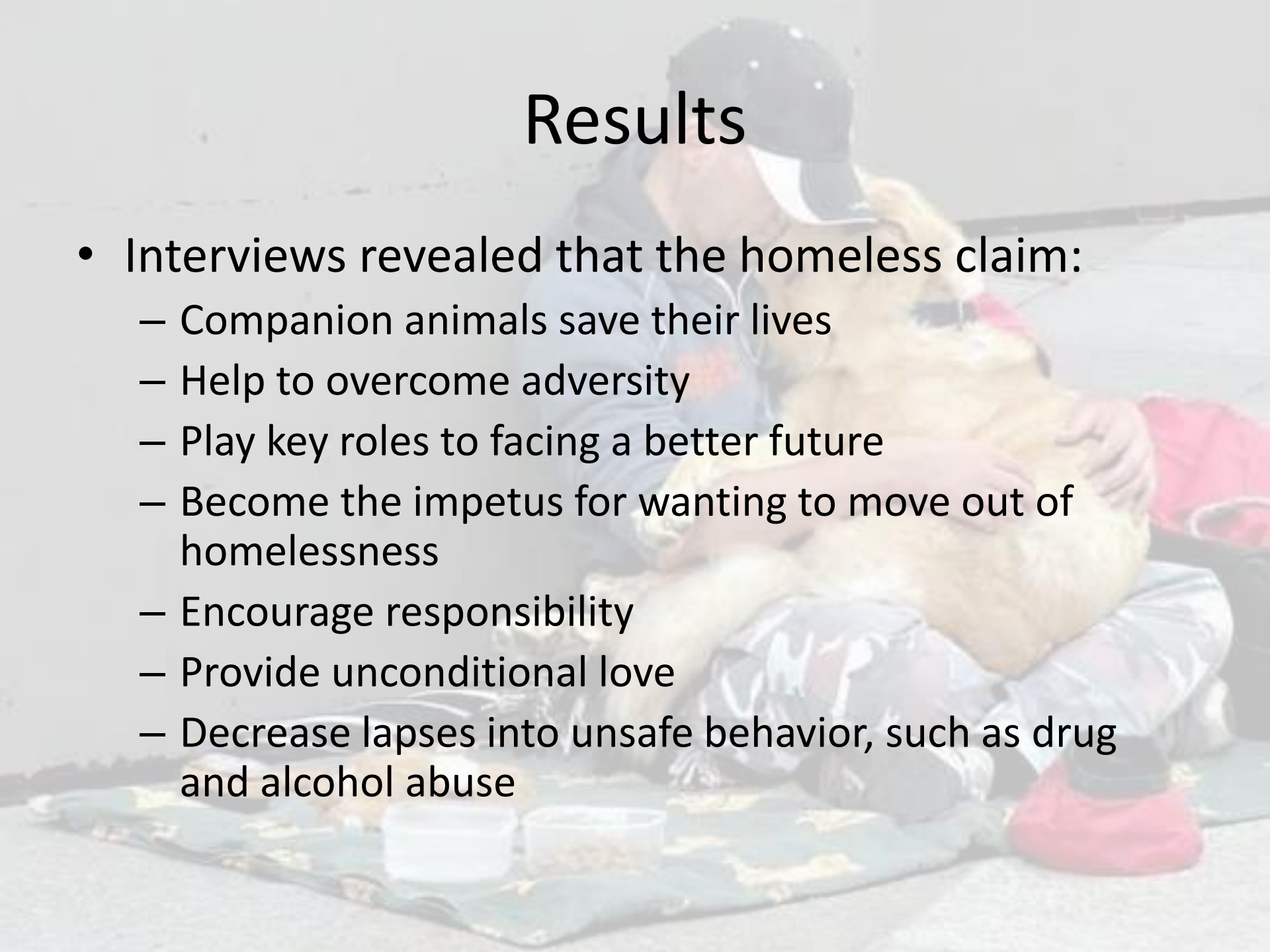
# Demographics

- Settings
  - Urban food pantry
  - Urban parks, bridges
  - Rural health ministry
- Number & Gender
  - 3 Females; 5 males
- Number of Pets
  - Ranged from 1-5



# Results

- Interviews revealed that the homeless claim:
  - Companion animals save their lives
  - Help to overcome adversity
  - Play key roles to facing a better future
  - Become the impetus for wanting to move out of homelessness
  - Encourage responsibility
  - Provide unconditional love
  - Decrease lapses into unsafe behavior, such as drug and alcohol abuse



# Results

- Homeless veterans with pets/animal companions have difficulty finding housing or employment and refuse opportunities for placement if pets/animal companions are not allowed.



# Implications

A person wearing a dark cap and a blue jacket is sitting on a green tarp on the ground. They are holding a large, light-colored dog. The person is looking down at the dog. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

- Homeless veterans are denied housing because of their unwillingness to separate from their pets/animal companions.
- Strict regulations existed against having pets/animal companions in shelters and rental units.
- Strategy:
  - Co-habitation shelters for the homeless and their pet/animal companions
  - Provide food, shelter, and healthcare

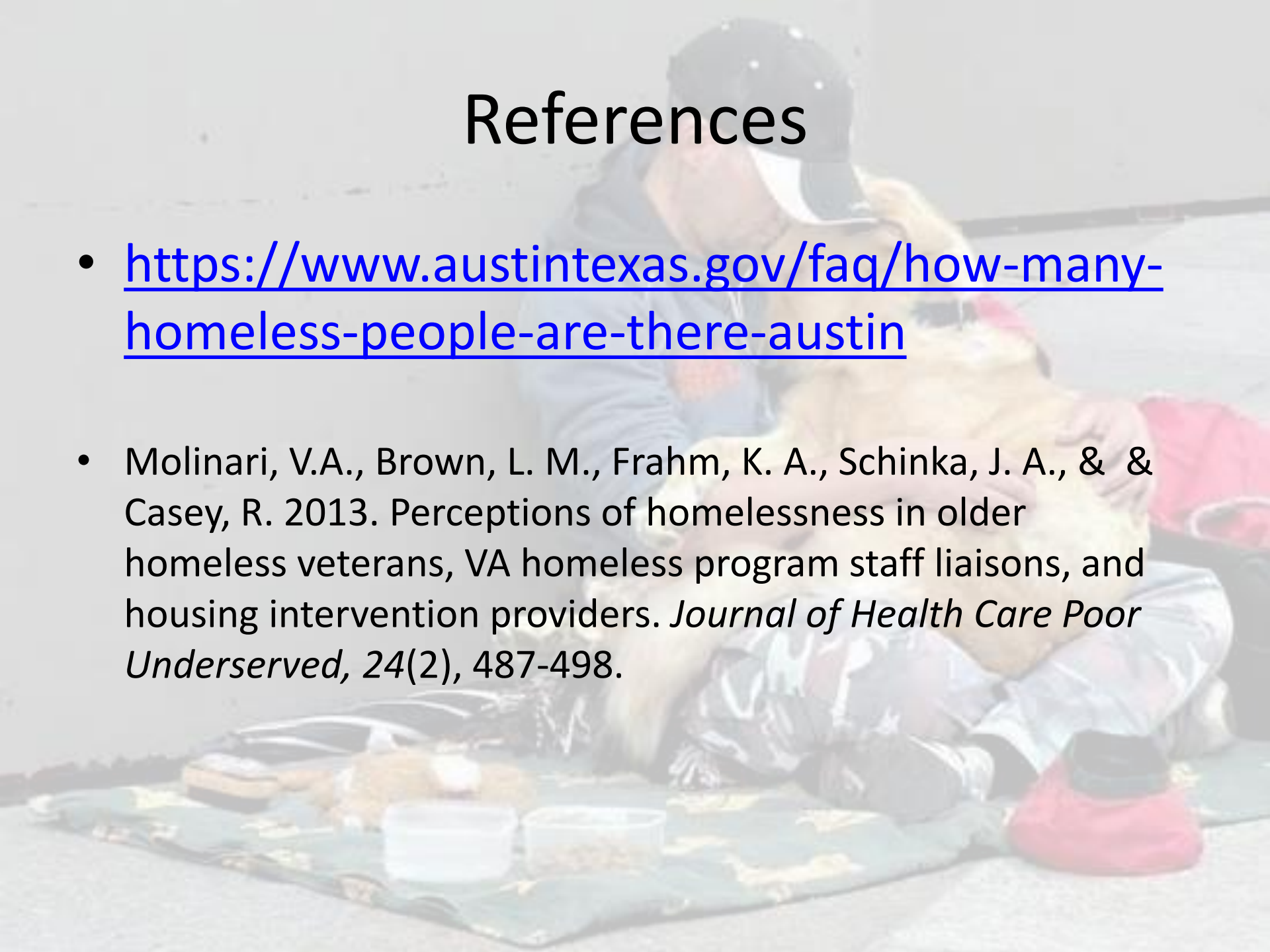
# Relevance

A person in a military uniform, wearing a black beret and a blue jacket, is sitting on a blue mat outdoors. They are holding a small, light-colored dog. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

- There is a shared responsibility to ensure that men and women who have served in the military are not forgotten and that they have access to the quality, timely healthcare they deserve.
- When homeless veterans with pet/animal companions attempt to find housing, barriers may prevent this. Identifying, recognizing, correcting, and limiting barriers that fragment services may improve the health and well-being of homeless veterans and their pets/animal companions.

# References

- <https://www.austintexas.gov/faq/how-many-homeless-people-are-there-austin>
- Molinari, V.A., Brown, L. M., Frahm, K. A., Schinka, J. A., & Casey, R. 2013. Perceptions of homelessness in older homeless veterans, VA homeless program staff liaisons, and housing intervention providers. *Journal of Health Care Poor Underserved, 24(2), 487-498.*



# Thank You

- Our most sincere gratitude to the Veterans!
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