

A lack of prompt medical care, slim tuition reimbursements and ineffective job placement programs plague Arizona veterans, according to a council advising U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell.

Mitchell's Veterans' Advisory Council members said that the problems could lead to a future wave of homeless servicemen unless federal veterans programs are improved.

A cross section of Arizona veterans sits on the council. It met for the first time Sunday to discuss the biggest problems ailing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Medical complaints from the committee included mounds of paperwork, staffing shortages and up to year-long wait times for appointments at Phoenix's Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center.

Apart from health issues, council member Tomas Chavez of Mesa argued that former combat veterans should be given free tuition to Arizona's state universities. He also said that job placement programs must do a better job of reintroducing veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder back into society.

Arizona joins the ranks of several states now with veterans advisory committees assisting its congressional representatives.

Mitchell, a Democrat, is a member of the House of Representatives' Veterans Affairs Committee. He said that he will seek input from the council when pushing for future legislation and funding.

To contact the council, call Mitchell's district office at (480) 946-2411.

A list of council members is available at azcentral.com.