

# REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HOMELESS VETERANS



**16th ANNUAL REPORT**

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ACHV)  
16th Annual Report**

**HISTORY**

On December 21, 2001, Public Law 107-95, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001, became effective. The Act revised, improved, and consolidated provisions of law providing benefits and services for homeless Veterans and authorized an Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ACHV). In response to its provisions, the ACHV was established on March 1, 2002, pursuant to section 2066 of title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.). The mission of ACHV is to advise and make recommendations to the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Congress on issues affecting homeless Veterans. Additionally, the Committee assesses the needs of homeless Veterans to determine whether VA and other programs and services are meeting those needs.

**MEMBERS**

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs selects ACHV members from experts knowledgeable in the treatment of mental illness and substance abuse disorders, as well as those adept at developing permanent housing alternatives for lower income populations. Additional experts selected by the Secretary include State Veterans' Affairs officials, community-based service providers, advocates of homeless Veterans, and homeless individuals in both the civilian and Veteran population. The members serve without pay, in accordance with the Committee's charter.

A brief biographical summary of each Committee member follows:

**Mark Johnston (Chairman)** has been an independent consultant on the issue of ending homelessness since June 2014. He assists communities nationwide in helping to reduce and end homelessness, including Veteran homelessness. In addition, during this time he serves as the Vice Chair of the Salt Lake County Housing Authority. Prior to these roles, he was a career Federal employee for 31 years, primarily focused on homelessness. He served as the Deputy Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and worked at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for 25 years. While at HUD, he helped design and implement the agency's homelessness programs and policies. He served simultaneously as the HUD Acting Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development (2 years) as well as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs (10 years), overseeing HUD's Homelessness Programs.

**Dottie L. Guy** is a Program Manager and Vets @ Employee Resource Group Founder at Dropbox. She currently serves as the Secretary of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission. She was in the Army National Guard and served in Iraq in 2003. Ms. Guy is very active in the Veterans community volunteering her time with nonprofits and helping Veterans find reliable services and gainful employment.

**Eric Grumdahl** is the Director of Special Projects for the Minnesota Office to Prevent and End Homelessness and the Minnesota Department of Education. He leads the Homework Starts with Home initiative to create housing stability for homeless students and their families. He serves on an interagency team that supports the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness in implementing *Heading Home Together: Minnesota's 2018 – 2020 Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. Previously he was Special Advisor on Ending Veteran Homelessness with the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, helping Minnesota communities end Veteran homelessness. During the Obama Administration, he served as Policy Director for the U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. He was responsible for convening the Council's 19 agencies and leading policy efforts to end homelessness among youth and Veterans. Previously he was Housing Manager for Dakota County, Minnesota, and Director of Information, Evaluation, and Regional Community Relations for Hearth Connection.

**Elisha Harig-Blaine** is a Manager of Veterans and Special Needs with the National League of Cities. He engages local leaders and stakeholders working to end Veteran homelessness daily. He is a Veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve and has 20 years of experience in the fields of homelessness and affordable housing in positions that include outreach worker, operating a soup kitchen, and later leading a coalition to prevent homelessness.

**Charlie Hall** is the President of Upstate Warrior Solution in Greenville, SC. Upstate Warrior Solution is a community-based non-profit that connects warriors and their families with quality of life solutions. He was responsible for building the organization from the ground up as the principal founder and developer to create this full-fledged non-profit organization that has been in operation since 2012. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and has served on active duty in the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, including a combat deployment to Iraq. He continues to serve as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

**Peter Kelleher** is the President and CEO of the Partnership for Successful Living, a network of six nonprofit organizations within New Hampshire providing access to housing, health care, education, employment, and supportive services to help individuals and families achieve sustainable independence. Harbor Homes, a member agency within the Partnership, was founded by him in 1982 and was designed, in part, to provide Veteran-specific affordable housing, employment, and supportive services. In Spring 2017, the Partnership for Successful Living was the lead agency in achieving Federal recognition of effectively ending Veteran homelessness in the Greater Nashua area.

**Susan Lee, PhD, RN, CNE** lives in Austin, Texas. For more than 20 years, she has focused on community and public health and conducted research in improving healthcare access for homeless Veterans. She has published in peer-reviewed professional journals and presented her research findings at state, national, and international professional conferences. She is currently affiliated with the University of Texas - MD Anderson Cancer Center School of Health Professions in Houston, Texas, where she is

strengthening and revising the Health Care Disparities, Diversity, and Advocacy bachelor's degree program.

**Steve Como** is the Vice President and Director of Government Relations for Soldier On, based in Massachusetts. He works on behalf of formerly homeless Veterans, operating 235 transitional living beds and 115 Limited Equity Apartments for homeless Veterans in three locations. He works with Government agencies at the local, state, and Federal levels. He has developed relationships with VA, HUD, the Department of Labor, and the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Leon Winston** works at Swords to Plowshares, a Veterans rights organization, and community-based direct service provider. He has been active in his local community, representing the interests of homeless and at-risk Veterans through involvement with and appointments to advisory committees to local Government in the areas of alcoholism and drug abuse. He has served as Co-Chair of the San Francisco Homeless Continuum of Care Board, and the San Francisco 10-Year Planning Council to End Chronic Homelessness. He is a Veteran of the U.S. Navy.

**Roger Woodworth** began his military career by enlisting in the United States Army in June 1996, and medically retiring in January 2016 after nearly 20 years of combined National Guard and active duty service. He continues his service to Veterans beyond the military and remains actively engaged in Veterans' advocacy and service through various Veteran-oriented committees and councils. He most recently served as the President and CEO of the Veterans One-Stop Center of WNY, Inc. and was instrumental in its founding. He is currently the President of GEM Manufacturing, his family's firm, which produces customized machined parts.

**Yvette Kelley** is the President and CEO of New Directions for Veterans, 501(c)3 Non-Profit organizations, founded in 1992, whose mission is to empower men and women who served in the military, and their families, to lead productive and fulfilling lives. She is an Army Veteran with over 30 years of active duty service as an aviator serving in myriad of command and staff assignments. Her service includes combat and contingency deployments to Panama, Somalia, and the Middle East. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, and holds three graduate degrees, including a Master of Business Administration. She is currently in the process of working on a Law Degree from the University of California.

**Robert Sargent "Bobby" Shriver, III** is an activist, attorney, and journalist living in Santa Monica, California. He is also president of RSS Inc., a Beverly Hills, California music, film and philanthropic company. The letters RSS are his initials. In 1987, he produced a prime-time television feature about the Special Olympics, an organization for disabled young people and founded by his mother in 1968. This and subsequent productions have raised more than \$55 million for the Special Olympics program. He has also produced several films, including True Lies (1994). In 2002, he was a co-founder of DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade in Africa), a multinational, non-government organization whose purpose is to obtain social equality and justice for Africa through debt relief; adjust trade rules which

burden Africa; eliminate the African AIDS epidemic; and strengthen democracy with more accountability by the wealthiest nations and African leaders with transparency towards the people. In 2006, he co-founded, and is Chief Executive Officer of (RED), a brand-licensing company, to raise money for The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. In 2004, he was appointed to serve as chairman of the California State Park and Recreation Commission overseeing the state's parks and gardens. In November 2004 he was elected to a seat on the Santa Monica City Council. His second term ended November 2012. He has been awarded The Advertising Club's *Silver Medal Award*—also known as the *Advertising Person of the Year Award*—for his work with (RED). The annual award recognizes those who have made outstanding contributions to the advertising industry, furthering industry standards, demonstrating creative excellence and responsibility in areas of social concern. He has been honored with amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS's *Award of Courage* for his contribution to HIV/AIDS research and awareness.

### **Ex-Officio Members**

**Anthony Love, Veterans Health Administration (VHA)**, is the Designated Federal Official for the Committee and serves as the Senior Advisor and Director, Community Engagement, Veterans Health Administration, Homeless Programs Office.

**Leisa Davis, VHA**, is the Alternate Designated Federal Official for the Committee and serves as a Strategic Advisor, Communication and Engagement Coordinator in the Office of Community Engagement, Veterans Health Administration, Homeless Program Office.

**Department of Defense (DoD)** Ex-Officio position is currently vacant.

**John McLaughlin, Ed.D., Department of Education** is a Federal Contractor, Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program.

**Matthew Doherty, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)**, is the Executive Director, USICH.

**Mike Frueh, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)**, is the Executive Director, Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Benefits Assistance Service.

**Emily Rosenoff, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**, is the Acting Director, Division of Long-Term Care Policy, HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

**Gary Vessels, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)**, is the Alternate Ex-Officio.

**Norm Suchar, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is the Director, Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs.**

### **COMMITTEE REPORT IN BRIEF**

This is the 16th report filed by ACHV. The Committee is pleased that the Administration and Congress have set a platform that is resulting in an end to Veteran homelessness in a growing number of communities, both large and small, and encourages the Administration to retain ending homelessness among Veterans as a priority effort, with the special emphasis and focus our Veterans deserve. To that end the Committee recommends that the Administration continue to support all aspects of *Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, which can be found at <https://www.usich.gov/home-together>.

As the Committee that advises you on ways to reduce and end Veteran homelessness, we want to recognize the continued historic progress made by VA and its partners. The latest measure of this success is, of course, the five percent reduction in Veteran homelessness during 2017. Since 2010, Veteran homelessness has been reduced by nearly half. As of December 19, 2018, 66 communities and 3 states have effectively ended Veteran homelessness, confirmed through a rigorous review by VA, HUD, and USICH. This progress is significant. To put it in proper perspective, we are not aware of any other social problems in this Nation that have seen such a dramatic reduction. VA has been the leader in this effort, in close cooperation with its partner agencies and local communities. The most recent list of communities can be found at [www.va.gov/HOMELESS/endingVetshomelessness.asp](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/endingVetshomelessness.asp).

Since the authorization and implementation of the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans, we have been pleased that most of our recommendations have been brought to the attention of the Secretary and Congress for implementation or remain under active consideration. The ACHV and VA share a common mission to ensure all Veterans, regardless of gender, age, race, or disability, are provided with programs and services to aid rehabilitation and reintegration into society as fully-functioning citizens. Annually, we affirm that ACHV and VA hold a sacred duty to assist homeless Veterans in their immediate and long-term efforts to rejoin society.

Our annual report recommendations are based on data, personal knowledge, experience, and information provided in person and in writing from a variety of sources, including direct input from homeless Veterans and community partners/advocates. We make recommendations to VA regarding matters we believe should be addressed and offer suggestions regarding VA's Federal partners to help enhance the highly effective collaborations and to promote the goal of ending Veteran homelessness.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE**

ACHV held our most recent committee meeting in San Francisco, California to assess local progress and housing strategies that have been employed to address Veteran homelessness.

Consistent with your efforts to continuously improve VA, you have established strategic priorities focused on modernizing VA and establishing a systems-change approach to addressing your five priorities to better serve Veterans. VA's systematic efforts to end Veteran homelessness are working. Without continued focus and support, however, we fear the momentum will be lost and the trajectory reversed. This could have the following consequences:

- Increase in Veteran homelessness;
- Diminished energy and momentum nationwide;
- Public perception that the historic progress made has been lost with this Administration; and
- Homeless Veterans will lose hope and trust in VA, which promised benefits in exchange for their service to their country.

To sustain and continue the long-term progress in reducing and ending Veteran homelessness, we have two sets of recommendations: 1) your explicit and public support of this effort to VA employees, other Federal agencies, and communities; and 2) further enhancement of VA programs and policies.

**Recommendation 1: Your Explicit and Public Support.** Communities nationwide have worked to reduce Veteran homelessness since VA announced the goal to end Veteran homelessness in late 2009. VA has been front and center at communicating to employees, other Federal agencies, and communities its commitment to ending Veteran homelessness. VA continues to collaborate with other Federal agencies and implement programs to achieve the goal of ending Veteran homelessness; however, there is a desire in communities across the country to see and clearly hear from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs that this goal is still a priority. Without a clear communication to those in communities across the Nation who are working to find, house, and provide services to homeless Veterans, VA employees and stakeholders nationwide are beginning to question if VA is committed to the goal of ending Veteran homelessness.

We recognize that you have five overarching priorities for the Department. We firmly believe that VA's efforts to reduce and end Veteran homelessness can be recognized and improved through your *existing* priorities. For instance, a core principle that has contributed to reducing Veteran homelessness has been Housing First, which allows Veterans to choose the services they want to engage in. This approach is consistent with your Choice for Veterans priority. Another example is the VA priority to ensure efficiency in the use of its services; in ending Veteran homelessness, VA, in coordination with HUD, ensures that housing resources are allocated efficiently, prioritizing permanent housing to those Veterans most likely to die on our streets.

We recommend that you leverage your platform as VA's chief executive and spokesperson for VA's priorities, to emphasize both the importance of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness and this effort's connection to VA's priorities. This would also give VA an opportunity to tout the unprecedented progress made to date on Veteran homelessness and galvanize these efforts to make continued progress. These messages can be worked into existing communication vehicles (e.g., speeches, memos to staff, press releases, budget documents) to both internal and external audiences. These talking points would be strong messages to include in your communications:

- VA has been leading the effort nationally to prevent and end Veteran homelessness;
- Veteran homelessness was reduced by five percent in 2017;
- As a result of VA's strategic collaboration with Federal, state and local agencies, Veteran homelessness has been reduced by nearly half since 2010; and
- To date, 66 communities and 3 states have ended Veteran homelessness and many others will be doing so in 2019.

**VA Response: Concur.** Local elected officials, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, business leaders, and Federal partners will remain vital to continuing the progress in reducing homelessness among Veterans. To sustain the interest and support of all of our existing stakeholders and encourage new partners to help, VA must continue to regularly communicate progress, challenges, and areas requiring additional support to those who have the will and capacity to aid in preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans. Thus, the VA Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA) supports ACHV's recommendation that the agency emphasize both the importance of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness and this effort's connection to VA's other key priorities.

OPIA will advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of your specific recommendations and will undertake the following six activities:

- Reiterate to VA leaders the importance of including remarks about Veteran homelessness, and its connection to VA's other initiatives, in speeches to internal and external audiences;
- Share updated data, key messages, and talking points about Veteran homelessness with VA leaders and their speechwriters regularly;
- Encourage VA Medical Center (VAMC) Directors, Public Affairs Officers, and other local VA leaders to regularly engage with civic, business, and non-profit organizations about ways they can help accelerate progress in reducing Veteran homelessness;
- Use news releases and media engagements to emphasize key messages about Veteran homelessness;
- Leverage staff at all levels of VA as potential messengers about the importance of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness by making easily understood information about the effort available on internal websites and social platforms; and



- Provide a mechanism for staff at all levels to ask questions about VA's work to prevent and end Veteran homelessness.

**Recommendation 2: Further Enhancement of VA's Programs and Policies.**

In addition to regularly and clearly communicating your personal support for preventing and ending Veteran homelessness, we recommend you ask the Homeless Program Office to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, External Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. The Committee also recommends the following enhancements be considered as part of this SWOT Analysis, which we believe would not only further reduce Veteran homelessness but would also help you achieve your five Departmental priorities.

**VA Response: Concur.** The VA Homeless Program Office is working on a strategic planning that will review strengths and weaknesses within the homeless program and will coordinate with other areas recommended by the Committee.

**Recommendation 2A: Develop a User-Friendly Guide for Using the Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) Program.** The EUL is a method for funding construction or renovations on VA and other Federal property by allowing a private developer to lease underused property, with the rent paid by the developer. EUL has been used to provide housing and services on VA property. To make more use of underused property, we recommend VA contract with an *organization that has real-world experience* in using EUL to write an easy-to-understand step-by-step guide on developer and VA responsibilities, to successfully execute and implement an EUL. The guide should provide a contact number in the EUL office that a developer can call to get the name and contact information for a VA-designated EUL-experienced liaison who can help the developer and the VAMC director through the process. Based on our experience, without such a liaison, the process will be daunting and, perhaps, unsuccessful. Finally, the EUL guide and the EUL review and decision-making processes should be aligned with the approach VA is using in ending Veteran homelessness, including embracing Housing First, which has not consistently been the case.

**VA Response: Concur in Principle.** VA agrees, in principle, that a user-friendly document that could be made available to the development community would be useful to explain additional guidance on developer and VA responsibilities to successfully execute and implement an EUL under the current authority. This also would include a brief explanation of the current EUL authority, such as the current EUL authority limits consideration to cash only. However, it is important to note that VA already has two detailed EUL Program Handbooks (7415 and 7454), which describe, at length, the roles and responsibilities associated with formulation, execution, and steady state operations of the EUL Program. VA believes a new, 1-to 2-page program summary containing relevant contact information would be more appropriate and useful to the general public than a fully developed 'guide' or additional handbook. VA's Office of Asset Enterprise Management (OAEM) has prepared extensive briefing materials and factsheets on the EUL Program over the years and can draw on this content to prepare such a consolidated

program summary. Any new materials created will be aligned with VA's EUL implementation process and Housing First philosophy.

VA supports the concept of encouraging private and non-profit sector developers' interest in the EUL Program and increasing transparency associated with EUL Program operations. An EUL program summary that is easy to understand and contains current information on the EUL Program will assist the agency in raising awareness about this important initiative in support of VA's goal of ending Veteran homelessness. OAEM will begin work on such a program summary immediately and anticipates publication and distribution in Summer 2019.

**Recommendation 2B: Support the VA Effort to Allow for Enhancements in the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF).** SSVF is one of the key programs responsible for the dramatic reductions in Veteran homelessness. We applaud the creative and effective approaches the program office has taken with this program. We recommend that SSVF's efforts to allow for 1-year subsidies be implemented to further reduce homelessness.

**VA Response: Concur.** On December 19, 2018, VA published an SSVF Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) that includes a Priority 3 funding opportunity that may permit extended rental assistance for Veterans' families located in targeted high-cost Continuum of Care (CoC). The ability of SSVF to offer these new rental subsidies is contingent on publication of final rule, Rental and Utility Assistance for Certain Low-Income Veteran Families (projected to be published in Summer 2019). The proposed rule (designated 2900-AQ40) was published to the Federal Register May 17, 2019, and is currently pending a public comment period that ends June 17, 2019. Shallow subsidies are meant to provide intermediate-term support to impoverished Veterans' households who do not require the depth of clinical and financial support provided by HUD-VASH but cannot be adequately transitioned to sustainable housing during a typical rapid re-housing intervention. Shallow subsidies are intended to expand the rental pool in communities with tight rental markets by bringing more units into affordability, providing a longer pathway to support housing sustainability, while providing certainty about rental assistance.

**Recommendation 2C: Make Resource Allocations Across Program Silos.** Provide local VAMCs a forum to offer input and participate in national or regional dialogue, prior to public announcements regarding homelessness funds. One recent example of when this would have been helpful was the reduction in SSVF funding for a community, which at the same time, was informed by VA that they would receive an increase in funding for the Grant and Per Diem Program that is very much reliant on SSVF funding. This lack of communication prior to funding decisions is confusing, and negatively impacting efforts regarding Veteran homelessness.

**VA Response: Concur.** VAMCs currently have some input into the funding decisions for some of our homeless programs. In HUD-VASH (HUD-VA Supportive Housing), VAMCs determine the staffing plans in Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV),

and decide which contracts they want. The Homeless Program Office provides the funds. However, the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) and SSVF programs are nationally competitive grant programs (as opposed to contracts); therefore, their applications are required to be reviewed by subject matter experts and scored based on criteria established in the programs' regulations. VAMCs and Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISN) have an opportunity to demonstrate support for grant applications through support/coordination letters that can be provided to the grant applicant for inclusion in their grant proposal.

VA's Homeless Program Office efforts at inclusivity currently include greater use of the Gap Analysis to inform funding decisions to the field. National guidance on the requirements of each VAMC to fully participate in their CoC's coordinated entry system has resulted in greater coordination of service delivery with local CoCs and a greater understanding of the larger communities' needs, in terms of specific VA-funded resources.

Joint planning is needed by Federal partners to coordinate homeless programs not simply through VA, but throughout the Federal Government as we pursue initiative to end homelessness among Veterans. Examples of this include:

- The Strategic Decision and Coordination Team (SDCT) that operates as the decision-making body for the VA, HUD, and USICH joint initiative to end Veteran homelessness by aligning activities, setting goals, communicating key activities, determining scope, and making decisions for the solving Veteran homelessness effort, via their monthly meetings; and
- Targeting of Priority 3 Communities in SSVF NOFAs based in part on HUD/USICH identification of high-need communities. GPD has used prioritization approaches in its grant process as well, with the goal of ensuring high-need communities are prioritized.

**Recommendation 2D: Lead on Achieving Equity in Outcomes Across Demographic Groups.** There is a growing understanding throughout efforts to end homelessness and in the Federal *Home, Together* Strategic Plan of the centrality of racial, and ethnic disparities that contribute to and perpetuate homelessness. VA is in a unique position to lead efforts to understand how communities and programs can respond to these disparities to achieve equitable outcomes across Veterans experiencing homelessness, by analyzing the performance of VA homeless programs in terms of who is engaged, who is successfully housed, and who remains stably housed in terms of demographic groups (especially race, ethnicity, and age). A preliminary analysis – looking at all Veterans served by VA homeless programs across the country, as a group – was largely encouraging, but this analysis should go deeper, looking at how success achieving equitable outcomes varies by program and locality to identify promising practices, and areas needing greater focus and support. Our committee extensively discussed this topic, including providing staff with detailed recommendations for how it could be implemented. We believe this is a growing area of focus and provides VA with an important opportunity to provide leadership for the field.

**VA Response: Concur.** VA's Homeless Program Office has provided national-level data from Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 to the Committee addressing the question of whether there are racial disparities in VA homeless programs related to participation in services and outcomes. The Committee is now asking for similar data at the community level. VA data is organized by VAMC, not by CoC; therefore, the VA Homeless Program Office plan is to produce updated data for FY 2018 at the VAMC level and provide that to the Committee for site-by-site analysis and review. VA's Homeless Program Office also plans to send that data to the Committee prior to its next meeting in Quarter 3 of FY 2019.

**Recommendation 2E: National Health Service Corps (NHSC) for Attracting and Retaining VA Employees.** This Federal initiative pays off student loans through providing service, which could bolster VA staffing to further progress in reducing Veteran homelessness. Currently, primary care providers outside VA who work in eligible disciplines are able to get scholarships and loan repayments. If this program were expanded to include VA employees who provide necessary supportive services to Veterans, more Veterans in need, including Veterans who are homeless, could be helped.

**VA Response: Non-Concur.** By statute (42 U.S.C. § 254e, Health professional shortage areas), VA facilities are not included in NHSC's Health Provider Shortage Areas (HPSA); therefore, VA employees are not eligible to receive NHSC loan repayment for their work at VA nor can NHSC send providers to VA. Furthermore, VHA does not support modifying legislation to include VA employees as eligible for NHSC loan repayment programs, as existing authorities allow us to meet this need through VA loan repayment programs.

The Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP) authorizes up to \$200,000 over 5 years (not to exceed \$40,000 per year) for direct-care positions that are difficult for recruitment and retention. Physicians, nurses, and psychologists receive the most EDRP awards; however, any direct-care position is eligible, making EDRP a flexible tool for VHA recruitment and retention purposes. The VA MISSION Act of 2018 also established the Specialty Education Loan Repayment Program which will focus on securing recent medical school graduates for future service at VA health care systems in exchange for loan repayment of up to \$160,000 over 4 years (not to exceed \$40,000 per year). VHA also uses the Federal-wide Student Loan Repayment Program and VA employees also qualify for the Department of Education's Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. In addition to loan repayment, VHA also offers clinical scholarships and training opportunities to establish a pipeline of providers to meet Veteran care needs.

**Recommendation 2F: Resumption of Veterans Benefits Upon Release of Incarceration.** VA reinitiates benefits upon a Veteran's release from incarceration. It is our understanding that VA takes, on average, over 350 days (almost a year) to restore these benefits. This significant delay of providing vital benefits impedes Veterans' ability to re-enter society and re-build their lives, contributing to ex-offenders falling into homelessness and crime.

**VA Response: Concur.** There are currently workload processes in place to expeditiously identify all incoming homeless cases. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) works with external agencies such as the Department of Justice and Bureau of Prisons to identify incarcerated Veterans as early as possible.

As of the end of February 2019, VBA's pending inventory of incarceration claims had been pending an average of 162.7 days. This was down from over 400 days near the end of last year. In addition, VBA had reduced the number pending from over 850 to 208 at the end of February 2019. This is a result of VBA's workload for incarceration adjustments being prioritized through centralized processing at specialized regional offices, and hard work on the part of VBA claims processors.

All VA disability claims for homeless Veterans are designated as VA Priority claims and are prioritized above non-VA Priority claims at the national and local levels. From October 2018 through the end of December 2018, disability claims for all homeless Veterans were being completed, on average, in 122 days. Additionally, the average days pending of this inventory was just over 93 days at the end of December 2018.

Finally, VA provides recommended training plans to the staff that processes compensation claims to identify such cases, and has policies in place that govern VA's responsibilities pertaining to incarcerated Veterans claims under 38 CFR 3.665(i)(1).

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Secretary, VA has made truly historic progress in reducing and ending Veteran homelessness. With the implementation of the above recommendations, further and significant progress will continue to be made in ending Veteran homelessness during your tenure. I and a number of other Committee members are concluding our involvement on the Committee. It has been a pleasure to serve you and to work with your excellent homeless programs team.