

Permanent Housing Placement National Challenge to House 38,000 Veterans

VHA Homeless Programs Office – March 31, 2022

Housing Placement Goal

Background

- VA remains committed to ending Veteran homelessness and increasing permanent housing placements (PHPs) is critical to achieving this goal.
- Between 2010-2020, the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in the United States was cut roughly in half, but despite this progress, data show that since 2016, progress towards ending Veteran homelessness has stalled.
 - Veteran homelessness declined by 47% between 2010 and 2016, and by only six percent between 2016 and 2020.
- The Secretaries of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the VA affirmed their commitment to accelerate the process of ending homelessness by developing targets, assessing progress, and holding agencies accountable to prioritize the effort to end Veteran homelessness at the highest levels.
- The VHA Homeless Programs Office (HPO) acknowledges the heroic efforts of homeless program staff during the pandemic and recognizes the unprecedented challenges to find housing within local rental housing markets.

Our Goal: 38k Permanent Housing Placements

- During calendar year (CY) 2022, VA homeless programs will place at least 38,000 literally homeless Veterans into permanent housing.
- This goal represents a nearly 5% increase from fiscal year (FY) 2021's PHPs.
- These PHPs require a collective effort by Grant and Per Diem (GPD), Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Contract Residential Services (CRS), HCHV Low-demand Safe Haven (LDSH), Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), and Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH).
 - Note: The target represents the de-duplicated PHPs made by these programs.
- HPO has developed a dashboard for Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) and VA medical center (VAMC) staff to monitor progress towards the goal.

Guiding Principles

- **House literally homeless Veterans** identified through coordinated entry processes, local by-name lists (BNL), and VA and community-partner outreach services.
- **Honor Veteran choice**, including needs and preferences for care when determining appropriate services and housing placements. Center Veterans' lived experience in the effort.
- **Lead with equity** while continuing to prioritize housing resources for all Veterans.

- **Provide supportive services** to Veterans with complex needs and/or histories of chronic homelessness through a trauma-informed, Veteran centered approach based in cultural humility.
- **Enhance coordination** among VA homeless programs and community partners, including GPD, HCHV CRS/LDSH, and SSVF service providers; Continuum of Care (CoC) partners; public housing authorities (PHA); advocacy groups for and made up of Veterans with lived experience; landlords; city and county officials; and other service providers.

Homeless Programs Contributing to the Goal

We All in This Together

- All VA homeless programs must prioritize PHPs of literally homeless Veterans.
- This will require effective coordination and collaboration among all VA homeless programs, especially:
 - HUD-VASH permanent supportive housing (PSH).
 - SSVF rapid rehousing (RRH).
 - GPD transitional housing (TH) and case management (CM).
 - HCHV outreach and CRS/LDSH.
- Lead a balanced approach to offer the necessary tenancy supports to sustain long-term tenancies and limit returns to homelessness.
- Coordinate with your Veterans Justice Programs (VJP), Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams, Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services, CoCs, PHAs, advocacy groups for and made up of Veterans with lived experience, landlords, city and county officials, and other service providers.

HUD-VASH

- Ensure housing search and placement resources are available to all Veterans engaged in HUD-VASH.
- Enhance and improve housing navigation and landlord engagement services.
- Assess training needs and opportunities for housing search and placement.
- Enhance collaboration with VA programs and community partners. Strategies may include:
 - Progressive engagement.
 - Collaborative case management partnerships.
 - Targeted case conferencing.
- Implement system improvement strategies and make data-informed decisions to increase utilization and reduce barriers throughout the housing process.

SSVF-RRH

- Prioritize RRH services to meet all demand for referrals from literally homeless Veterans on each community's BNL.
- Evaluate SSVF staffing levels for housing navigation services support Veterans enrolled other VA programs (i.e., HUD-VASH and GPD).
- Innovate and explore a range of options to further build and cultivate SSVF's pool of landlords.
- Actively engage in efforts to co-enroll with other VA homeless programs.

- Pursue co-enrollment when in the best interest of the Veteran and it offers complementary services, with particular attention to supporting housing navigation efforts.
- Pursue targeted Homelessness Prevention (HP) strategies to prevent Veterans returning to homelessness: Strategies include:
 - Reinstitute rapid resolution services at initial engagement,
 - Leverage and use Emergency Rental Assistance Programs (ERAP), and
 - Connect Shallow Subsidy services for SSVF HP and RRH Veterans.

GPD – TH and CM

- Enhance and improve housing navigation and landlord engagement services for each GPD TH provider.
- Offer training and specialized support to GPD TH and CM staff on housing navigation, and landlord engagement.
- Increasing the opportunities for GPD providers to collaborate with other VA resources to accelerate transitions to permanent housing. Strategies include:
 - SSVF Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) and Shallow Subsidy.
 - HUD-VASH Case Management Collaborative and transitions from Bridge housing.
- Collaborate with coordinated entry systems to transitionally house literally homeless Veterans on the BNL.
- Work with grantees to remove programmatic barriers to accessing services and emphasize high engagement with Veterans to support their transition back to stable housing.
- Leverage GPD Liaisons to troubleshoot systems-issues that impede Veteran progress toward attaining permanent housing, as well as supporting connections to needed medical and mental health services.

HCHV Outreach and CRS/LDSH

- Enhance and improve housing navigation and landlord engagement services within your HCHV CRS and LDSH providers.
- Offer training and specialized support to HCHV Outreach and CRS/LDSH staff on housing navigation, and landlord engagement.
- Improve and further develop coordination with SSVF focusing on co-enrollment to connect with housing navigation services.
- Utilize coordinated entry specialists to:
 - Actively troubleshoot and address system-level bottlenecks / gaps / barriers in your system to quickly engage and initiate a housing plan with each Veteran.
 - Connect and broker specialized services with other VA programs for homeless Veterans with complex needs.
- Leverage your specialized programs in this effort (i.e., Community Resource and Referral Centers).

Reinvigorate Your System Processes and Tools

- Identify innovative measures, concrete strategies, and effective utilization of resources to ensure increased placements for Veterans.

- Improve and sustain accurate, dynamic BNLs of literally homeless Veterans in your community where available.
- Develop and sustain a process to regularly disaggregate and review your BNL data by demographics to identify and actively address disparities.
- Incorporate Veterans with lived experience into decision making processes around resources and planning.
- Reinvigorate your local case conferencing processes focused on quickly housing homeless Veterans.
- Ensure your system processes are focused on prioritizing housing resources for homeless Veterans with complex needs.
- Improve and enhance your local housing navigation and landlord engagement services. Focus areas should include:
 - Make proactive and sustained efforts to engage individual landlords with the goal of building an active, dynamic list of landlords
 - Identify units across your geography by tapping into municipal, faith-based, grassroots, and neighborhood organizations.
- Leverage federal resources from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to support your housing placements efforts including:
 - Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) / Emergency Solutions Grants – CARES Act (ESG-CV) (e.g., landlord incentives).
 - PHA's Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs).
 - VA resources such as:
 - 4201 / Financial Alert funds to support housing efforts.
 - Recruitment and retention incentives to support hiring and retention of direct service staff.

Outlining Your Role in This Effort – Memorandum Overview: Department of Veterans Affairs Permanent Housing Placement National Challenge to House 38,000 Veterans in CY 2022

VAMC Strategies

- VAMCs are expected to actively and immediately engage in strategic planning, in consultation with Network Homeless Coordinators (NHC) and HPO, to ensure full implementation of the following strategies:
 - Reinforce adherence to the Housing First approach in program implementation and community-level efforts to address Veteran homelessness.
 - Increase VJP and HCHV outreach efforts to ensure that homeless or at-risk Veterans are quickly engaged in services and placed on pathways to housing.
 - Effectively utilize HCHV CRS and GPD programs by immediately identifying barriers and engaging in proactive planning with grantees and contractors to coordinate increased engagement with HUD-VASH, SSVF, and other prospective housing opportunities.
 - In consultation with NHCs or HPO, VAMC homeless program leadership must establish procedures requiring increased collaboration across homeless programs to rapidly refer Veterans to services and to secure permanent housing, including outreach teams, GPD, HCHV, HUD-VASH, SSVF, and other VAMC

services (e.g., social work, emergency department, MHR RTP, and inpatient units).

- Achieve 90% staffing rates for all Special Purpose (SP) funded homeless program positions.
- Utilize ARP funds to provide goods and services that support rapidly housing Veterans, including purchasing move-in kits for Veterans.
- Ensure housing search and placement resources are available to all Veterans engaged in HUD-VASH.
- Increase collaboration with PHAs to improve timelines for HUD-VASH voucher issuance and housing.
- Ensure that minimum visit standards are met according to Veterans' HUD-VASH Case Management Stage as documented in the VA Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES) to promote housing stability, minimize evictions, and prevent loss of housing.
- Increase connections to employment services, VA and non-VA benefits, and community resources for obtaining and sustaining housing including utilities, deposits, and furniture, etc.
- Collaborate with coordinated entry system partners to ensure that all local BNLs are fully reconciled and remain current.
- Work with VA and community partners to develop a plan to increase housing options for special populations.
- Incorporate feedback and guidance of Veterans with lived experience in plans to improve housing placement performance to ensure that Veterans have equitable access to and successful placement in permanent housing.
- Routinely review the Homeless Screening Clinical Reminder Follow-up Report and the HOMES OR6: Assessments and Pre-Engagements Report to identify opportunities to engage homeless and at-risk Veterans in homeless programs.

Op Plan Updates

- VAMCs are required to submit strategic plans in the [Homeless Programs Hub](#) using the Op Plan feature. All plans must:
 - Include clearly defined priorities and actions used to implement the strategies listed in the memo.
 - Be updated monthly by the last calendar day of the month.
 - Be developed in collaboration with all local homeless program leads, including SSVF Regional Coordinators (RC), and reviewed monthly by the NHC.
- Upon review of each plan, NHCs and SSVF RCs will provide feedback directly to VAMCs.
- NHCs must address concerns regarding program performance, identified barriers, or resource limitations with the HPO.
- The HPO will conduct ongoing reviews of plans and performance and engage VAMC Medical Center Directors, Network Directors, VHA leadership, and Office of the Secretary (OSVA).

Monitoring

- VAMCs, NHCs, and SSVF RCs, must routinely utilize the 38k Goal Permanent Housing Placement (PHP) Dashboard to provide updates to local strategic planning efforts, and track individual process to meet VAMC-level targets.
 - To maintain compliance with the HOMES Reporting Policy, all homeless program assessments, admissions, housing updates, and program exits must be documented within three (3) business days of occurrence. VAMCs not in compliance with this reporting policy must develop and implement a plan to ensure compliance.
 - Program leads and NHCs must ensure the Homeless Staffing Database (HSD) and HUD-VASH Project-Based Voucher Registries are updated monthly and that reconciliation processes are in place to ensure data is accurate and current.

Mandatory Data Reconciliation

- VAMCs and SSVF RCs must conduct mandatory data reconciliation on a minimum of a monthly basis to monitor the accuracy and timeliness of documentation of permanent housing placements and service engagement.
 - For GPD, HCHV, and HUD-VASH, this includes a review of the HOMES: OR7 Current Program Census to ensure that current program participation and HUD-VASH move-in dates are accurate, as well as the OR8: Exit forms Completed to ensure that all exits are documented timely and to confirm the accuracy of Veterans' housing status at program exit.
 - For SSVF, this includes review of "Missing Data" on the SSVF Dashboard and coordination of edits with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) with grantees monthly, in addition to requiring full compliance with SSVF data standards.

Communication

- Meetings will be scheduled by the HPO with VA leadership and Network Directors for VISNs not on track to meet quarterly PH goals.
- VA recognizes these efforts are critical for the mission of ending Veteran Homelessness and the importance of ensuring best practices are shared and outcomes are recognized. Therefore, at the end of CY 2022, VA will provide special recognition and announcement of VAMCs that successfully contributed to this goal by meeting or exceeding VAMC targets to increase permanent housing placements for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

Rehousing Lessons Learned During the Pandemic

- Communities have organized collectively around housing surges to quickly place homeless individuals and families in community-based housing.
- Communities across the country have stood up centralized unit acquisition efforts to gather as many units as possible for people experiencing homelessness with a voucher or rapid re-housing assistance. Strategies they used include:
 - Surveying landlords to design landlord incentives responsive to your market (both financial and supportive service provisions).

- Creating and advertising a standard service package landlords can expect to receive; ensuring quality control and deliver on that package.
- Using a database to track open units, geography, screening criteria- create a culture of sharing units among teams.
- Uncovering creative advertisement venues to reach landlords: social media groups, neighborhood newspapers, quick store bulletin boards.
- Leveraging political support to ask landlords for units.
- In partnership with VA homeless program staff, SSVF and GPD community-based providers have effectively used temporary hotel stays (e.g., EHA) to outreach and engage unsheltered homeless Veterans.
- Enhanced coordination among VA homeless programs between HUD-VASH, GPD and SSVF during the pandemic has demonstrated success (e.g., HUD-VASH SSVF Pilot, Use of EHA).

How HPO will Help

Addressing Barriers and Identifying Bright Spots

- Supporting the development and implementation of strategic plans to place more Veterans into permanent housing.
- Addressing systemic barriers that emerge nationally and at the local level.
- Providing broad technical assistance for all programs.
- Identifying and disseminating strong, innovative, emerging, and best practices.

Technical Assistance and Support

- Hosting bi-weekly office hours to support local strategic planning efforts.
 - First Call on Friday, April 8th at 3:00pm Eastern / 12:00pm Pacific
 - Opportunity to surface additional needs for national support.
 - Opportunity to highlight strong and innovative practices.
- Developing tools to assist your efforts including:
 - A resource page on the VHA Homeless Programs Operational Planning Hub.
 - Regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list.
 - Dedicated VA HPO email address to support communications
 - Housing Placement Dashboard.
- Prioritizing and updating support throughout the calendar year.

Engaging Federal Partners and National Organizations

- Engaging national organizations like National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, National Alliance to End Homelessness, and others to amplify the goal and strategies through their communications platforms and to challenge their stakeholders to partner with VA.
- Connecting local VAMCs with House America Initiative Mayors.
- Engaging with mayoral, county officials, and other elected associations.
- Collaborating with interagency partners to engage with hard-to-reach Veterans
- Talking points and calls to action in VA senior leadership speeches.

