

JANUARY 2022

The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) newsletter contains news and information about VA's ongoing effort to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.



Executive Director's Message | Around HPO

COVID-19 Response | Staff Spotlight | Fact of the Month

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838) for assistance.

Message From Monica Diaz, Executive Director, VHA Homeless Programs Office



Each new year, society asks us how we will commit to become a better version of ourselves. Will we promise to comply with a healthier diet, exercise daily, or perhaps take more breaks from our screens? Along with research demonstrating most New Year's resolutions are abandoned sooner than most would care to admit, many Americans are likely forgoing such goal-setting this year, wary of making yet another plan dependent on unpredictable circumstances. From the limited preview that we have seen of 2022, those opting to reject resolutions may be correct in anticipating another year filled with contingency plans and learning more letters of the Greek alphabet.

However, there is one commitment that I will keep and that I do not believe is optional for any of us – progress towards ending Veteran homelessness. The pandemic requires us not to shy away from our goals, but rather to adjust our targets, aim even higher, and push beyond the boundaries of our comfort zones. Instead of greeting this year with apprehension, let us set a collective resolution to work together to meet the demands of these turbulent times with more determination, creativity, and fortitude than in any years past. If we maintain this resolution in 2022, I have confidence that we soon can reach a year when no Veteran is forced to live on the streets of the country they so nobly served.

[Read Monica's full message.](#)

Around HPO

[2022 Point-in-Time Count](#)

The 2022 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Americans experiencing homelessness is right around the corner. Are you ready to take part? Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and all staff from VA are encouraged to participate in this important nationwide event to estimate the number of Americans, including Veterans, who lack safe, stable housing. Although this effort is led by HUD, VA's participation demonstrates our commitment to reaching, counting, and serving every Veteran who is homeless. For more information, click [here](#).



[Los Angeles VA exceeds Secretary's promise to house 500 homeless Veterans](#)

When Secretary McDonough visited Los Angeles in October 2021, he challenged local leaders with the goal to house 500 Veterans who were experiencing homelessness by the end of the year – and we're proud to announce that the goal was surpassed.

Between October 1 and December 31, 2021, VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System housed 705 Veterans, 590 of which were in Los Angeles County, through a variety of temporary, transitional, and permanent housing programs. Veterans also enrolled in supportive programs that help with the transition to permanent housing. VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System's focus on Veteran homelessness in Los Angeles will add momentum to VA's ongoing work to address Veteran homelessness across the country. [Read the full story.](#)

[Newly Created VA Post to Coordinate Veteran Homelessness Effort in Greater Los Angeles](#)

VA named Keith Harris as senior executive homelessness agent for Greater Los Angeles to represent the Office of the Secretary in the implementation of the [West LA Master Plan 2022](#).

Harris, a licensed clinical psychologist, will serve as the liaison between VA Central Office and GLA VA Medical Center, providing support, consultation, and strategic direction across 3 major areas related to Veteran homelessness in Los Angeles. [Read the full press release](#).



[Flexible Assistance for Homeless Veterans](#)

Section 4201(a) of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (PL 116-315) authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use appropriated funds for life-saving food, shelter, goods, and services for homeless Veterans or those participating in the HUD-VASH program during the COVID-19 pandemic public health emergency. In December 2021, VA sent \$20 million in American Rescue Plan funds to VA Medical Centers across the country to maximize the number of Veterans assisted under this authority. Read the press release [here](#).

Learn how this time-limited authority has directly provided life-saving support to these Veterans:

- [Army Veteran Elden Branch](#)
- [Army Veteran Ronald Probst](#)

[USICH Releases Voting Guides for Homeless Providers and People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

By some estimates, less than 10% of people vote while experiencing homelessness, even though 60% of the homeless population was eligible to vote as of 2008. To help more Americans exercise their right to vote, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) created step-by-step voting guides for homeless providers and people experiencing homelessness. This guidance is part of the Biden administration's effort to [enable all eligible Americans—regardless of their housing status—to fully participate in our democracy](#). Read more about this effort [here](#).





[VBA Certification of Evidence for Proof of Service](#)

As of November 17, 2021, VA has amended its adjudication regulations concerning the nature of the evidence that VA will accept as proof of military service and character of discharge. This change allows VA to accept uncertified copies of service documents as evidence of military service if VA is satisfied that the documents are free from alteration. The intended effect of this amendment is to streamline and improve the timeliness of adjudication and claims processing for VA benefits — without compromising program integrity. For more information, click [here](#).

[VA Nurses Making a Difference – High Reliability Organization \(HRO\) in Action](#)

In this video from HRO, the value of Learn, Inquire and Improve is artfully demonstrated by VA Southern Arizona Health Care System’s HUD-VASH team. Following an engagement with a Veteran at a local shopping center, watch how this multi-disciplinary team of highly dedicated social workers and nurses rapidly transition a Veteran lacking home and clinical care to obtaining both with dignity and respect. [Watch this episode](#) to hear the Veteran describe how meeting VA Southern Arizona Health Care System’s HUD-VASH team changed his life.



[Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

This month, we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. not only for his extraordinary achievements in civil rights, but also for his approach to tolerance, kindness, and equity for all. To quote Dr. King, “Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve.” Everyone, including those facing housing instability, deserves to have a voice. We strive to minimize the inequalities faced by Veterans experiencing homelessness by helping them obtain permanent and sustainable housing, while also providing access to high-quality health care and supportive services. We are honored to continue a small piece of Dr. King’s legacy by prioritizing compassion and dignity in everything we do.

Learn about the VA programs offered for homeless Veterans [here](#).

[HPO COVID-19 Response and Updates](#)

As we enter the new year, HPO continues to acutely monitor and track COVID-19 transmission rates. With the recent increase of COVID-19 cases from the Omicron variant and CDC’s current understanding of the disease trajectory, we must continue to prioritize clinical care as our primary focus across VA Homeless

Programs. This means taking an agile and responsive enterprise-wide approach as the situation emerges.

Please know that HPO is vigorously tracking VA and CDC guidance, in addition to various internal and external data sources to monitor impact. As things unfold, we will continue to share new guidance, update existing guidance as appropriate, reduce administrative barriers where possible, leverage resources to help manage operational challenges, and create flexibilities to support our staff and Veterans.

VA's doors are open for booster shot appointments and many sites offer walk-ins during hours when vaccine clinics are operational, where COVID-19 vaccines are available. Please remember to bring your vaccine card with you. You can find a VA vaccine site [here](#).

I GOT THE **VACCINE**

because I lost both my parents within a week of each other to COVID-19.

Craig V.
U.S. Navy, 7 Years of Service



HPO Staff Spotlight: Sandra Stolfi



As a coordinated entry specialist, Sandra Stolfi serves as a liaison between VA staff and community providers, ensuring effective coordination of community-wide services for Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. She has worked at VA for nearly 3 years, providing advice and education on programs and procedures from VA health care and the community.

As she works to build partnerships with community providers that facilitate the development and integration of programs that directly reduce barriers to housing, Stolfi is instrumental in helping VA achieve its goal of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness. [Learn more](#) about how Stolfi's role impacts work across VA.

HPO Fact of the Month

Did you know that in fiscal year 2021, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program held 153 Stand Down events that served more than 30,000 Veterans across the country?

Stand Downs are typically 1-to-3-day events, during which VA staff and volunteers provide food, clothing, and health screenings to homeless and at-risk Veterans. In addition, Veterans also receive referrals



for health care, housing solutions, employment, substance use treatment, mental health counseling and other essential services.

To learn more about how to get involved with upcoming Stand Downs, [visit this link](#).