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Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I am Monica Diaz, Executive Director of the Homeless Programs Office (HPO) of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). I am grateful to have the opportunity to serve our nation’s Veterans in a capacity that promotes a holistic approach to restoring and maintaining their health. My office is dedicated to finding solutions to increase access to permanent housing and offering programs and services that provide a sense of dignity, belonging, personal empowerment, and independence. I have made it my mission to ensure that HPO can meet the changing needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

We have established a unified and formalized approach to addressing homelessness. As a result, the 2022 Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annual Point-in-Time Count, one of the ways VA estimates the homeless population nationwide, showed a 55.3% reduction in homelessness among Veterans since 2010. It also revealed an 11% decline in Veteran homelessness overall since 2020. This progress is magnified by the context that while Veteran homelessness decreased significantly from 2010-2016, for several years, the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness remained virtually unchanged.

HPO has evolved since its inception in 1987. Our most recent shift happened at the end of 2022 when the Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2022 (Cleland Dole Act) was signed into law under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (P.L. 117-328). The law, based on more than 30 bills on Veteran issues, addresses health care, benefits, and homelessness, among other topics. Thanks to the Cleland Dole Act, HPO will have new and enhanced programs for homeless Veterans that align with VA’s commitment to preventing and ending Veteran homelessness. We can expect to see much growth this year.

Our network of partnerships, the implementation of evidence-based Housing First approaches, the establishment of innovative initiatives, and VA staff’s relentless dedication and hard work have contributed to this reduction. To help accelerate progress, VA announced new goals for the calendar year 2023, which include an ambitious housing goal and other goals that focus on preventing and resolving returns to homelessness and improving engagement with unsheltered Veterans.
The HPO strategic plan aligns with the Biden-Harris Administration’s current priorities and incorporates key lessons learned from our ongoing efforts to serve Veterans. As you read through the objectives and strategies outlined in the updated plan, consider what steps you can take to help us achieve our goals. We cannot end Veteran homelessness alone; support from our community partners and stakeholders is critical. Together, we are committed to refining and purposing our objectives and strategies to take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home.

I invite you to join my team and me on this journey. Together, we can end Veteran homelessness.

**Monica Diaz, MBA, BA, L-NHA**  
Senior Executive Director, Homeless Programs Office  
Veterans Health Administration  
Department of Veterans Affairs
CONTRIBUTORS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HPO would like to acknowledge the following groups and organizations whose contributions were vital to the initial and ongoing development of this strategic planning document:

- **Homeless Programs Office Staff.** Staff from HPO’s various sections and programs provided information and insight.

- **VA Stakeholders.** Countless VHA Network Homeless Coordinators and other VA and VHA leadership participants helped create content.

- **Strategic Decision and Coordination Team (SDCT).** SDCT is a collaborative decision-making body representing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Together, these agencies execute activities necessary to prevent and end Veteran homelessness.

- **Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ACHV).** ACHV is authorized by statute and operates under the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. ACHV advises and makes recommendations to the Secretary of VA and Congress on providing benefits and services to Veterans experiencing homelessness and other issues affecting this population.

- **National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH).** NAEH is a nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to end homelessness in the United States. NAEH uses research and data to find solutions to homelessness, works with federal and local partners to create a solid base of policy and resources that support those solutions, and helps communities implement them.

- **Community Solutions.** Community Solutions is a nonprofit that leads Built for Zero, a movement of more than 80 cities and counties to use data to radically change how they work, achieve impact, and prove it is possible to make homelessness rare and brief. To propel this movement to end homelessness, partners work with communities to solve the most persistent challenges that stand in the way.

- **National Coalition on Homeless Veterans (NCHV).** NCHV is a nonprofit organization that serves as a resource and technical assistance center for a national network of community-based service providers and local, state, and federal agencies that provide emergency and supportive housing, food, health services, job training, placement assistance, legal aid, and case management for Veterans experiencing homelessness.
Each Veteran is our collective responsibility.

Section 1: Mission, Vision, Values

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to ensure that Veterans and their families obtain permanent and sustainable housing with access to supportive services that are Veteran-centered, equitable, and lead to personal empowerment.

VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to end homelessness for all Veterans and their families using evidence-based, innovative practices and partnerships to provide access to permanent housing and deliver Veteran-centered, equitable, and inclusive services, leading to personal empowerment and increased independence.
HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE (HPO) CORE VALUES

HPO’s core values — **H.P.O. C.A.R.E.S** — embrace VA’s I-CARE values and are embodied in everything we do in pursuit of our mission.

**HOME:** We believe that ending homelessness starts by applying *Housing First principles* and supportive services responsive to the needs of each Veteran and their family.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** We engage in meaningful federal, state, and local partnerships that enhance access to care and improve service coordination.

**OWNERSHIP:** We practice integrity through each one of our actions, and we do what we say we will do.

**COMMITMENT:** We commit to *Housing First approaches and eliminating barriers* to housing.

**ADVOCACY:** We advocate for immediate and long-term solutions that challenge the status quo and correct policies that create racial disparities in homelessness.

**RESPECT:** We respect the right to self-determination among Veterans and their families by demonstrating a high regard for their values, preferences, and needs.

**EXCELLENCE:** We achieve excellence by understanding that each Veteran is our collective responsibility and by applying a One Team approach toward the common mission.

**SERVICE:** We provide exceptional mission-driven customer service to all we interact with, including Veterans and their families, stakeholders, community partners, colleagues, and staff.
Until no Veteran experiences the tragedy and indignity of homelessness — and every Veteran has a safe, stable, accessible, and affordable home.

Section 2: HPO’s Pillars

HPO’s practices, programs, and services are centered on three pillars: outreach, housing solutions, and supportive services. Each pillar has three key foundations: equity, data and research, and community partnerships.

These pillars are foundational to the many homeless programs and services HPO established over the years to meet the needs of homeless Veterans and their families. HPO programs that fall under these pillars are described in the following section. Details regarding these programs can be found in the HPO Fact Sheet.
One Team: Improving the quality and speed of delivery of services for our Veterans.

Section 3: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

**HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE GOALS**

VA established its 2023 enterprise-wide goals for preventing and ending Veteran homelessness. In 2023, VA will:

- Place at least 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.

- Ensure that at least 95% of the Veterans housed in 2023 do not return to homelessness during the year. And of those who return to homelessness, VA will ensure that at least 90% are rehoused or on a path to rehousing by the end of 2023.

- Engage with at least 28,000 unsheltered Veterans to help them obtain housing and other wraparound services. This goal represents a more than 10% increase in unsheltered Veterans reached during 2022.
To achieve these goals, HPO is deploying an all-hands-on-deck, One Team\(^1\) integrative approach through strategic partnerships and strengthened collaborations with internal VA and external partners. Notably, these goals were approved by VA’s Executive Board, which serves as VA’s top decision-making body by establishing strategic direction for VA and making key decisions regarding VA’s overall strategy, policy, and major investments.

**HPO OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

The following seven objectives and associated strategies were identified to achieve VA’s calendar year 2023 goals to end and prevent Veteran homelessness and propel HPO’s vision and mission forward. These objectives and strategies will be reassessed annually and updated as appropriate.

**OBJECTIVE 1: Accelerate and increase permanent housing placements.**

Strategies to achieve the objective:

1.1 Increase program integration between the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs to increase voucher use and accelerate housing placements.

1.2 Promote effective interagency policy developments and implementations that increase rental housing affordability and alleviate the cost burden for homeless Veterans and their families.

1.3 Promote and advance the availability of affordable housing through the utilization of HUD-VASH vouchers for project-based development.

1.4 Ensure that all VA homeless programs provide a coordinated response that prioritizes permanent housing placements using Housing First principles.

**OBJECTIVE 2: Prevent and resolve returns to homelessness.**

Strategies to achieve the objective:

2.1 Increase Veterans’ access to legal services, including eviction prevention and landlord mediation, through legal services grants and community partnerships.

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\(^1\) HPO’s One Team integrative approach refers to coordinated, united actions among programs toward a joint mission. The principles of breaking down siloes and encouraging cross-skilled work yield demonstrable benefits in the quality and speed of delivery of services for our Veterans.
2.2 Enhance income and financial stability to ensure that homeless and at-risk Veterans can afford to obtain and maintain housing stability while achieving their highest level of independence.

2.3 Leverage and apply national flexibilities through the SSVF Shallow Subsidy to meet the needs of extremely low-income Veterans and their households.

2.4 Apply a One Team integrative approach toward delivering homeless programs and services that provides an agile and comprehensive response to prevent and resolve Veteran homelessness.

2.5 Lead initiatives and efforts in partnership with law enforcement, prisons, jails, and other VA stakeholders to reduce the risk of returns to homelessness for justice-involved Veterans.

OBJECTIVE 3: Enhance targeted services to address the needs of vulnerable and underserved populations.

Strategies to achieve the objective:

3.1 Optimize coordinated outreach to identify and engage with unsheltered Veterans living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, encampments, or the streets, and streamline services to move these Veterans into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

3.2 Provide immediate access to interim housing and supportive services through the elimination of unnecessary barriers and by using Housing First principles that do not impose preconditions to immediate access to permanent housing.

3.2.A Enhance residential homeless programs to increase access and decrease barriers for women, transgender, gender non-conforming, justice-involved, rural, and aging Veterans and other vulnerable populations.

3.2.B Eliminate administrative burdens and lower barriers to immediate access to housing.

3.3 Facilitate the full integration of VA resources into the local coordinated entry system (CES) to provide an agile homeless response in collaboration with community stakeholders.

3.4 Support effective housing and supportive services prioritization through community by-name lists and data sharing.

3.5 Conduct targeted local housing surge events to facilitate immediate enrollment into homeless programs, streamline access to interim housing, and accelerate permanent housing placements for Veterans.
3.6 Increase access to housing programs and services for American Indians and Alaska Natives through enhanced engagement and technical assistance.

3.7 Increase coordination and integration with VA’s Office of Geriatric and Extended Care and Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to develop approaches to address the service and housing needs of aging Veterans and those at risk of suicide and substance use disorder.

3.8 Develop and implement strategies that support Veterans whose incomes exceed income limits for program participation but who still need supportive services to resolve their homelessness.

OBJECTIVE 4: Use research and data to make informed and timely decisions.

Strategies to achieve the objective:

4.1 Develop, modernize, and sustain tools to provide the necessary insights to make data-driven decisions that positively impact Veterans’ outcomes and improve program performance.

4.2 Incorporate research and data insights into homeless program operations by providing training, education, and tools to homeless program staff to utilize data internally and with community partners.

4.3 Promote research and evaluation that provides a comprehensive understanding of homeless programs and the Veterans served and enables the identification and rapid implementation of evidence-based strategies to end Veteran homelessness.

OBJECTIVE 5: Provide equitable services and outcomes through all homeless programs and services.

Strategies to achieve the objective:

5.1 Ensure equitable programs and services by continuously evaluating current policies and developing new strategies that address disparities in access and outcomes based on race, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and legal history.

5.2 Combat the stigmatization of justice-involved Veterans, including stigmatization based on multi-group identities (including but not limited to race, gender identity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, and legal history).

5.3 Conduct targeted analyses of regions facing a disproportionate number of Veterans from racial and ethnic minority groups who return to homelessness.
OBJECTIVE 6: Provide national technical assistance for strategic actions.

Strategies to achieve the objective:

6.1 Provide remote and on-site technical assistance and training to VA medical center homeless programs to implement objectives and effective strategic actions within their local communities.

   6.1.A Provide training, technical assistance, and resources to encourage promising practices related to effective outreach, preventing and resolving returns to homelessness, and accelerating permanent housing placements.

6.2 Collaborate and provide Interagency Technical Assistance with federal partners directly and through the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) on targeted efforts to decrease common barriers and enhance integrative services to end Veteran homelessness.

OBJECTIVE 7: Ensure adequate homeless programs staffing resources and support the development of a highly skilled workforce.

Strategies to achieve the objective:

7.1 Implement a national staffing initiative and apply innovative approaches to accelerate adequate nationwide staffing resources within homeless programs.

7.2 Provide and prioritize education and technical training skills on homeless programs office strategies in alignment with Housing First principles.

7.3 Identify and address the causes of burnout among staff working in homeless programs.

7.4 In partnership with VA’s Office of Operations, Security & Preparedness, develop a robust, targeted national strategy to address the safety and well-being of all community-based VA staff, including homeless programs outreach and case management teams.

7.5 In collaboration with Human Capital Management/Workforce Management, develop immediate strategies that target specific homeless program positions to increase staffing resources that can conduct outreach and provide case management to prevent returns to homelessness.
Providing mission-driven customer service to support America’s Veterans.