

Facility Implementation Guide



CONNECTING WITH VHA HOMELESS PROGRAMS

HOW VHA CAN HELP YOU NAVIGATE HOUSING INSTABILITY

VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Inside this guide, you'll learn about this new tool, how it should be distributed and who should receive it.

1. What is this booklet for?

Connecting with VHA Homeless Programs is an educational (graphic medicine) booklet developed by a team of researchers, VHA Homeless Program staff, clinical partners, and Veterans. The aim of the booklet is to provide Veterans who are experiencing housing instability—including those who report homelessness or imminent risk on the Homelessness Screening Clinical Reminder (HSCR)—with key information about VHA and community resources that may be available to help them resolve their housing issues and local contacts who can help them learn more about available services.

Why use Graphic Medicine?

Graphic medicine is “the use of comics and related visual communication literacies for communication and storytelling in health care.” The field has emerged over the past decade out of the recognition that novel approaches are needed to engage patients in their own health care and facilitate understanding of complex medical experiences—in this case, navigating VHA and community resources to address housing instability—through visual representations and simple narrative.⁹⁻¹¹ Graphic medicine booklets have been used within VHA in prior projects to improve Veteran patients’ understanding of non-medication approaches to pain management and to encourage participation in health services research; they are a low-cost method of educating and informing patients.

The development of this project was inspired by interviews with clinicians, veterans and VHA Homeless Program staff, conducted in the HSR&D-funded study named “Identifying and Measuring Risk for Homelessness Among Veterans” (Montgomery, et. al), it was found that:

- Addressing patients’ questions about screening may improve follow-up and linkage to needed services.
- Veterans who screened positive had questions about what would happen after screening and available services, information which most clinicians were unable to provide.
- Veterans expressed frustration and said they wished they had been provided with materials to educate them about what to expect.
- Staff raised concerns about unintended negative consequences of screening, suggesting the HSCR raised expectations for housing assistance which could not always be met due to eligibility requirements, regional variation, or other limitations.

2. Who is this booklet for?

- a. **Veterans** who receive this booklet from their provider can use it as a resource. A Veteran who screens positive on the HSCR may not want to be immediately referred to Homeless Services, so this booklet can help them later.
- b. **Providers** may not be aware of all the available resources that both the VHA and community can offer. This booklet can help the provider get to know these resources and allow more time to focus on physical or mental health-related issues that are presented during the Veteran’s visit.

3. When should it be used?

When the provider accesses a Veteran's record in CPRS, they will be prompted once per calendar year with the Homeless Clinical Screening Reminder, which asks the following questions:

- *In the last 60 days, have you been living in stable housing?*
(*"No" indicates homelessness*)
- *Are you worried that in the next 60 days you may NOT have stable housing?*
(*"Yes" indicates imminent risk*)



If the Veteran is currently homeless or at risk for homelessness, providers ask if they'd like to speak with someone from VHA Homeless Programs. The knowledge of the provider along with this booklet can help the Veteran understand what services and benefits may be available, and where to find assistance when they are ready for it.

Sharing is easy!

For your convenience, an informational one-page guide for providers and clinicians is located on the final page of this document, and titled **"Instructions for Providers, Clinicians and Staff."** This sheet can be copied and should be included with each stack of booklets distributed. For example, if 10 booklets are to be distributed to each staff member, wrap the one-pager around the stack with a rubber band. **No TMS training required.*

Instructions for Providers, Clinicians and Staff

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How to use this booklet:

This booklet was designed for Veterans who report housing instability on the HSCR. The HSCR is a two-question screener, which asks:

1. *in the last 60 days, have you been living in stable housing?*
(*"No" indicates homelessness*)
2. *Are you worried that in the next 60 days you may NOT have stable housing?* (*"Yes" indicates imminent risk*)

We understand that care providers are busy individuals and may not have immediate access to resources that are responsive to diverse patient needs. This booklet can help fill in the gap when patients have questions about how VHA can help them overcome housing challenges.

If a patient reports housing instability during the HSCR, you can briefly review this booklet with the Veteran and refer them to the local contacts on the back cover. We have affixed a label identifying the local VHA Homeless Program contact and a local community/Coordinated Entry contact, so the Veteran knows where to turn to next, even if they decline an immediate referral to VHA Homeless Services. We have also worked to make the booklet easily accessible, so if you do not have time to review the booklet with the Veteran, you can simply give them a copy.

This project was funded by **The National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans**, for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

4. How do I get these booklets printed?

The booklets are designed to be printable on any legal-sized paper, but professional printing is recommended. A **high-resolution PDF of the booklet is available for download at <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Connecting-with-VHA-Homeless-Services-Booklet-HiRes.pdf>**. VHA facilities across the country are structured differently, so printing services may not be available on site. Your first point of contact to get these printed should be your facility's Communications & Public Relations office or Medical Media office.



Recommendations for Professional Print-shops:

Paper Size: 8.5"x14" (Legal)

Paper Type: 32# Laser paper, opaque, smooth finish, foldable.

Layout: The document contains a .25" white border around each page to account for the available printing area. No bleed. (No adjustments are necessary to print)

Page Flip: On short edge

Color: CMYK

5. How do I customize booklet for my facility?

The booklet was designed to be customized for each facility by leaving a space for a printable label to be fixed to the back. Each label should list two points of contact for entry into services. An example is provided below. The first person listed should be the individual or office that VA staff members go to when they encounter a Veteran who is experiencing homelessness. The second point of contact should be a community social services office or shelter that provides **Coordinated Entry** into care. **Please add this information before handing booklets to providers!**

Norman Jones, LSCW

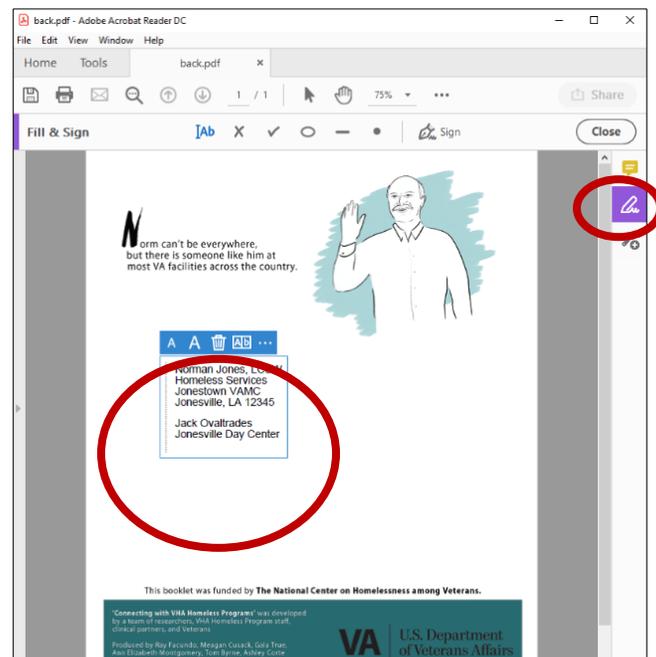
Homeless Services
Jonestown VAMC
Jonesville, LA 12345
987-654-3210

Jack Ovaltrades

Jonesville Day Center
Coordinated Entry
Jonesville, LA 12345
987-321-0564

These labels should be printed on **Avery 5164 (3-1/3" x 4") Labels**. Templates for MS Word and instructions for printing can be found on the Avery website: www.avery.com/templates/5164

Alternatively, the information above can be typed directly onto the page using the editing tools [Fill and Sign] in **Adobe Acrobat Reader**. (shown) or Adobe Acrobat DC.





What is Coordinated Entry?

Coordinated entry is a process that ensures that all people experiencing a housing crisis in a defined geographic area have fair and equal access, and are quickly identified, assessed for, referred and connected to housing and homeless assistance based on their needs and strengths, no matter where or when they present for services. It uses standardized tools and practices, incorporates a system-wide Housing First approach, participant choice, and coordinates housing and homeless assistance such that housing and homeless assistance is prioritized for those with the most severe service needs.

6. Thank You!

We are incredibly grateful for your participation in this project, and hope that it helps both Veterans and healthcare workers. This booklet was developed by a team of researchers, VHA Homeless Program staff, clinical partners, and Veterans, to include:

Advisory Committee:

Jeremy Berggren
Allison Bond
John Bradley
Jennifer Colbert
Willie Fields
Michael Frederick
Cecelia Glaviano
Katie Juhasz
Nita McGee

Study Team:

Thomas Byrne
Meagan Cusack
Ray Facundo
Ann Elizabeth Montgomery
Gala True

Illustration:

Tyler Thompson



Special Thanks to:

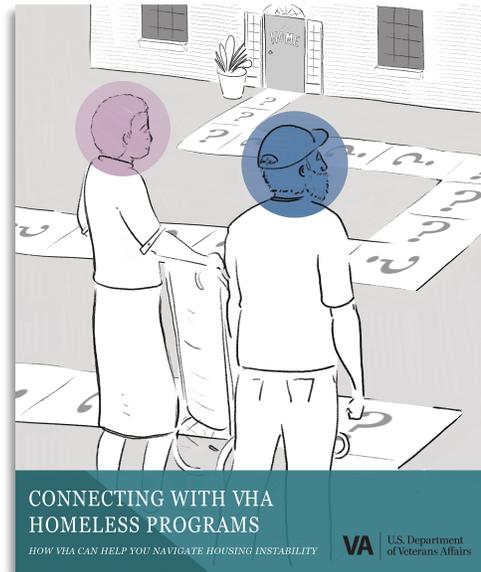
Michael Taylor for helping us bring this to you!

This project was funded by **The National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans**, for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. 2019.

7. Instructions for Providers, Clinicians and Staff

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1. *In the last 60 days, have you been living in stable housing? ("No" indicates homelessness)*
2. *Are you worried that in the next 60 days you may NOT have stable housing? ("Yes" indicates imminent risk)*

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