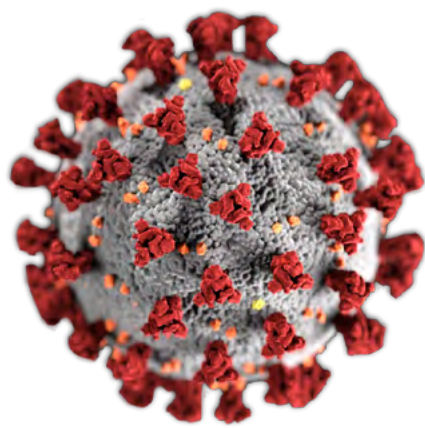


VHA Homeless Programs Office

Working Together to Help Veterans Exit Homelessness

Program Highlights



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

**Guidance for
Veterans Experiencing Homelessness
and Homeless Service Providers**

Veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness are vulnerable to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). To protect them and VA staff, VA personnel and grantees assigned to homelessness programs have implemented aggressive infection prevention techniques and response plans at all locations.

Because Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness experience poorer health outcomes when infected with COVID-19 than individuals in stable housing, VA is working closely with other federal agencies to limit this vulnerable population's potential to exposure.

Staff employ the following preventive methods based on guidance from [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#):

- Frequent hand-washing with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- Persistent use of 60% or greater alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Maintaining a distance of six feet from other people.
- Not shaking hands.
- Not touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

All Veterans and visitors to VA facilities are asked to adhere to the same prevention protocols as VA staff. In addition, VA staff have been instructed to stay home if they have any [symptoms](#) of COVID-19.

Protecting Veterans at VA Facilities

Each VA facility will create inpatient and outpatient zones for Veterans with possible or confirmed COVID-19. The inpatient and outpatient zones will serve as extensions of the health care continuum and isolate infected patients from uninfected patients.

VA is also identifying appropriate accommodations where Veterans who are homeless can receive treatment if they are symptomatic or screen positive for COVID-19 but do not need to be hospitalized. This precaution will reduce the possibility of transmitting the virus to uninfected people and inundating VA and non-VA medical facilities with patients who do not need hospital-level care.

In addition, VA is taking aggressive steps to prevent COVID-19 transmission by screening for the virus at VA health care facilities and implementing protective procedures for patients admitted to VA medical centers and residential programs.

Risk Factors

There are many factors that contribute to increased COVID-19 susceptibility among Veterans who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex social problem with many causes. Historically, it has been inaccurately attributed to the personal failings and shortcomings of people who lack stable housing, which has left individuals experiencing homelessness—including Veterans—marginalized and stigmatized by their situation.

The stigma of homelessness carries hidden costs—poor living conditions, increased prevalence of chronic health issues, and other physical and mental health problems that make it challenging for individuals to exit homelessness. These challenges increase the risk of contracting COVID-19 among Veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

VA is committed to protecting the health and safety of the nation's most vulnerable Veterans—those who lack stable housing. Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838) for homeless assistance. If Veterans do not have access to a phone or the internet, only then are they to visit their closest VA medical center without calling in advance.

VA Partner agencies

VA is working with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\)](#), [Health Resources & Services Administration \(HRSA\)](#), [Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#), [Department of Health and Human Services \(DHHS\)](#), and [National Health Care for Homeless Council](#).

- Additional COVID-19 informational resources for Veterans who are homeless and homeless service providers are available on the [Homeless Programs Office website](#).
- For interim guidance on how homeless service providers should plan for and respond to COVID-19, visit the [USICH website](#).
- Additional information on how to prepare your family in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in your community can be found on the [CDC website](#).

Announcements



Food insecurity resources

In 2018, approximately 11% of U.S. households experienced food insecurity—inconsistent access to nutritionally adequate food—sometime during the year. Individuals experiencing food insecurity [report](#) regularly choosing between food and other necessities, such as rent; thus, this life-threatening problem is more common among individuals who lack stable housing, including homeless Veterans, than among the general U.S. population. Veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are almost twice as likely to be food insecure as the general public.

Visit the [VA Nutrition and Food Services webpage](#) to find resources that promote food security among Veterans.

VA's evidence-based and aggressive response to COVID-19 continues to keep Veterans safe

On March 11, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) a worldwide pandemic, but VA was already preparing for this dangerous virus several weeks before.

Since COVID-19 appeared in the U.S., VA has effectively managed its resources and has cared for more than 4,500 Veterans diagnosed with the virus, and dozens of non-Veteran patients as part of its "Fourth Mission" to serve as a backstop to America's health care system.

Find out how VA prepared for this unprecedented event to protect Veterans and non-Veterans, and how VA continues to work to ensure the safety of millions of Veterans and their families [here](#).

VA Research reveals circumstances that can lead to homelessness among women Veterans

When a team of VHA researchers asked women Veterans experiencing homelessness to describe their "downward spiral" into homelessness, the common theme was trauma before, during, and after their military services concluded.

Homelessness for women Veterans may look different than it does for men. While men are more frequently on their own when homeless, women are more often accompanied by dependents. Men also are more likely to access emergency shelters or shorter-term transitional housing—programs often geared specifically for males. Women, however, tend to access VA homeless programs such as [Supportive Services for Veteran Families](#) and [Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing](#).

Although women Veterans make up 10% of the Veteran population, their numbers have nearly doubled in the past decade, making them the fastest-growing segment of the Veteran population. VA research found that women Veterans are more than twice as likely to become homeless as women who did not serve in the military. [Read more](#).

Communicate with us

We value your feedback about the work underway to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. Please share your comments by clicking the blue "Contact Homeless Outreach" button on the [VHA Homeless Programs website](#).