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Ways To Get Involved in Ending and Preventing Veteran Homelessness

The company that hires a formerly homeless Veteran. The landlord who accepts her housing voucher. The faith-based group that helps furnish her new apartment. The foundation that shores up her finances. And the civic group that pays a visit to welcome her home.

These are just a few ways that community-based organizations provide a fresh start to Veterans who are exiting homelessness. These collaborators are essential to the nation's success in making sure every Veteran has a permanent home.

Communities across the United States count on the support of organizations of all types—businesses, nonprofit service providers, foundations and so many others—to help Veterans who are homeless, or one tough break away from it, secure meaningful employment, affordable housing, move-in essentials and more. Here are 10 community-based efforts that can get us closer to the day when no Veteran is without a place to call home.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

1 BOOST ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING
Encourage property owners and landlords to house Veterans exiting homelessness, whether or not they're eligible for the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program and other VA services. Consider incentives (e.g., risk-mitigation funding) to encourage housing providers to get involved.

Aid your efforts with these resources, www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/engaging-landlords-risk-mitigation-funds-community-profiles.

COORDINATE HOUSING EFFORTS

2 Pool resources and staff to develop coordinated assessment and entry systems to ensure that there is no wrong door for Veterans seeking help and housing.

Identify all Veterans experiencing homelessness by name and share that list across systems so that no one falls through the cracks. Guide your efforts with resources at www.va.gov/homeless/USICH/benchmarking.asp.

HELP VETERANS NAVIGATE HOUSING OPTIONS

3 Take a page from New Orleans—the first city to achieve an effective end to Veteran homelessness on Jan. 2, 2015—and pair Veterans with housing navigators.

These dedicated staff and peer support professionals help Veterans define which housing and other services they need, fill out paperwork and complete other complex tasks to promote the rapid transition to permanent housing. Learn more by viewing this toolkit at www.va.gov/homeless/nchav/research/Navigator_Toolkit%20PDF.pdf.

4 COLLECT AND DISTRIBUTE MOVE-IN ESSENTIALS
Veterans exiting homelessness often need mattresses, household items and other costly supplies to make their new house or apartment feel like home.

Check with VA Voluntary Service (www.volunteer.va.gov) and the local homeless coordinator to see if there are specific ways to help.

5 SUPPORT MOVE-IN COSTS
Even Veterans who have located a permanent home may be one security deposit or rental fee away from being able to move in. Work with community partners who have programs that raise funds to help Veterans secure their first and last months' rent and security deposits so they can exit homelessness as quickly as possible.

6 PROMOTE VETERAN EMPLOYMENT
Employers can work with VA community employment coordinators (CECs)—based at nearly every VA Medical Center—to share position openings and set up interviews with qualified Veterans. CECs pre-screen Veterans who have a wide variety of skill sets and all levels of education to facilitate hiring and onboarding.

Find the nearest CEC online at www.va.gov/homeless/cec-contacts.asp. Other agencies can promote Veteran employment. Collaborate with workforce investment boards, faith-based groups, homelessness services, housing organizations, VA Medical Centers and employers to help Veterans develop résumés, polish interviewing skills and access job opportunities.

7 SHARE LEGAL SERVICES INFORMATION

Expanding Veterans' access to free and low-cost legal services can be a critical way to end and prevent homelessness among Veterans.

Here are a few ways to help:

- Share videos about how legal services professionals can assist Veterans at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKbu5C1tx2w and www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGVpwfcGufU.
- Visit VA's Legal Help for Veterans page (www.va.gov/OGC/LegalServices.asp) to find out if a pro bono Veterans' legal clinic exists in your community, locate a VJO specialist and identify other resources.

8 EXPAND TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Transportation services help Veterans keep stable housing. Transportation links Veterans to steady work, regular health care and support services vital to success in housing.

Directly or in partnership with others, many states and communities provide discounted or free transit trips for Veterans. Veterans service organizations and nonprofits may offer discounted or free bus and train passes for Veterans. Ridesharing and bike sharing are other options to get Veterans where they need to go.

For more ideas and resources, view the fact sheet at www.va.gov/homeless/docs/Transportation_Programs_FactSheet.pdf.

9 PARTICIPATE IN A STAND DOWN

Stand Downs are outreach events where Veterans can get access to immediate, on-site services and VA health care and benefits. They are local, collaborative events, coordinated among local VA Medical Centers, other government agencies and community-based service providers.

Contact your local VA Medical Center (www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp) to sponsor or participate in a Stand Down.

10 TAKE THE CHALLENGE

VA needs your input in a planning process called Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups). This ongoing assessment unites homeless service providers, advocates, Veterans and citizens toward the goal of identifying and meeting the evolving needs of Veterans who are homeless.

Visit www.va.gov/homeless/challeng.asp to take up the CHALENG today.

LEARN MORE

- Get more detailed information about VA's programs for Veterans who are homeless or at risk at www.va.gov/homeless.
- Ask specific questions about how to get involved in ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans by emailing VA's homeless Veterans' outreach team at HomelessVets@va.gov.
- If you encounter Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless, encourage them to call or visit their local VA Medical Center (www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp), where VA staff are ready to assist. Veterans and their families can also access VA services by calling **1-877-4AID-VET** (1-877-424-3838).