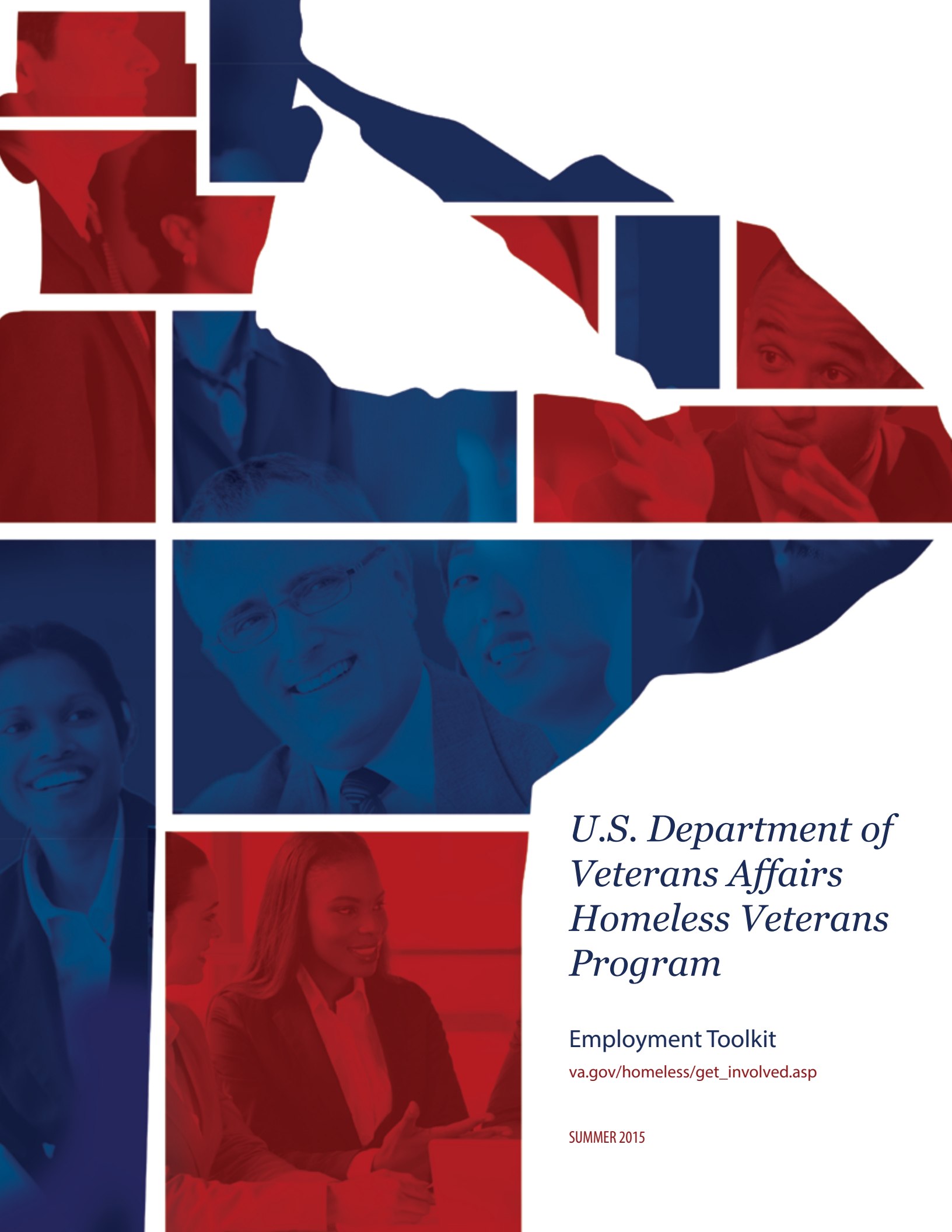

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Veterans Program

Employment Toolkit

va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp

SUMMER 2015

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Overview of VA's End Veteran Homelessness Initiative

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a comprehensive plan to end homelessness among Veterans community by community. Together with partners and supporters nationwide, VA is determined to meet this challenge through the End Veteran Homelessness Initiative, an unprecedented commitment to help those who served our nation but lack safe, secure housing.

To meet this commitment, VA launched a comprehensive, evidence-based and outcome-driven strategy consistent with the first ever federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, which was developed in May 2010. In support of this plan, VA has increased programs and funding to help Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

VA engages in strong interagency collaboration that has resulted in policies, procedures and programs critical to achieving the reductions thus far, such as Housing First, rapid re-housing, the Department of Housing and Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). In addition, collaborative endeavors such as the 25 Cities Initiative and the Mayors Challenge are invigorating efforts to aid in accomplishing the goal.

How Employers Can Help

VA realizes that government can't be the sole solution to ending Veteran homelessness—we know that community partnerships have been key to our success so far, including providing Veterans with pro bono legal services to resolve issues that impact their ability to obtain housing and non-profits who provide Veterans with move-in essentials once they secure safe, permanent housing. Now we need greater involvement from business and industry, employers and others.

To secure this involvement the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has hired a Community Employment Coordinator (CEC), for each VA Medical Center (VAMC) in order to forge partnerships and create relationships with local community organizations and employers who have the ability to hire Veterans.

While these individuals will be working hard to create partnerships and share the benefits of hiring Veterans, employers can also proactively reach out to their local CEC by visiting the CEC contact information page. CECs work with and pre-screen Veterans who offer a variety of skills and come from all education levels, and are backed by VA's entire network of services and providers.

As an employer or someone in a position to hire a Veteran exiting homelessness, we're asking you to:

- Work closely with your local CEC to recruit, interview and hire Veterans in your community.
- Create a positive work environment where Veterans will thrive.
- Advocate for the hiring of Veterans throughout all levels of your organization.
- Become VA's partner in reversing the negative stereotypes of Veterans in your communities.

How Employers Benefit

Community Employment Coordinators (CECs) facilitate hiring and on-boarding and provide employers with qualified candidates who have the skills you need. Some benefits include:

- Less training time
- Ready to work from day one
- Past military experiences applicable to civilian employment
- For federal positions, Veterans' preferences speeds hiring and meets diversity and inclusion goals

Veterans are backed with an array of support services from VA and other programs to enhance employment success. These services include:

- Support system for Veterans to lean on during stressful or difficult times
- Local point of contact at each VAMC to assist Veteran employees
- Wraparound care, including health services, housing assistance and other VA benefits
- Support that leads to greater job engagement and retention
- Veterans' support system reduces employer hiring risks

Key Messages/Talking Points (Community Employment Coordinators)

The key messages outlined below can be used and highlighted in all communications surrounding the End Veteran Homelessness Initiative, whether in-person or virtual, and in discussions with potential employers and stakeholders.

The messages speak to the diverse background of Veterans, work to educate stakeholders about the benefits of hiring a Veteran and provide background on VA services that are available to most Veterans.

Key Messages:

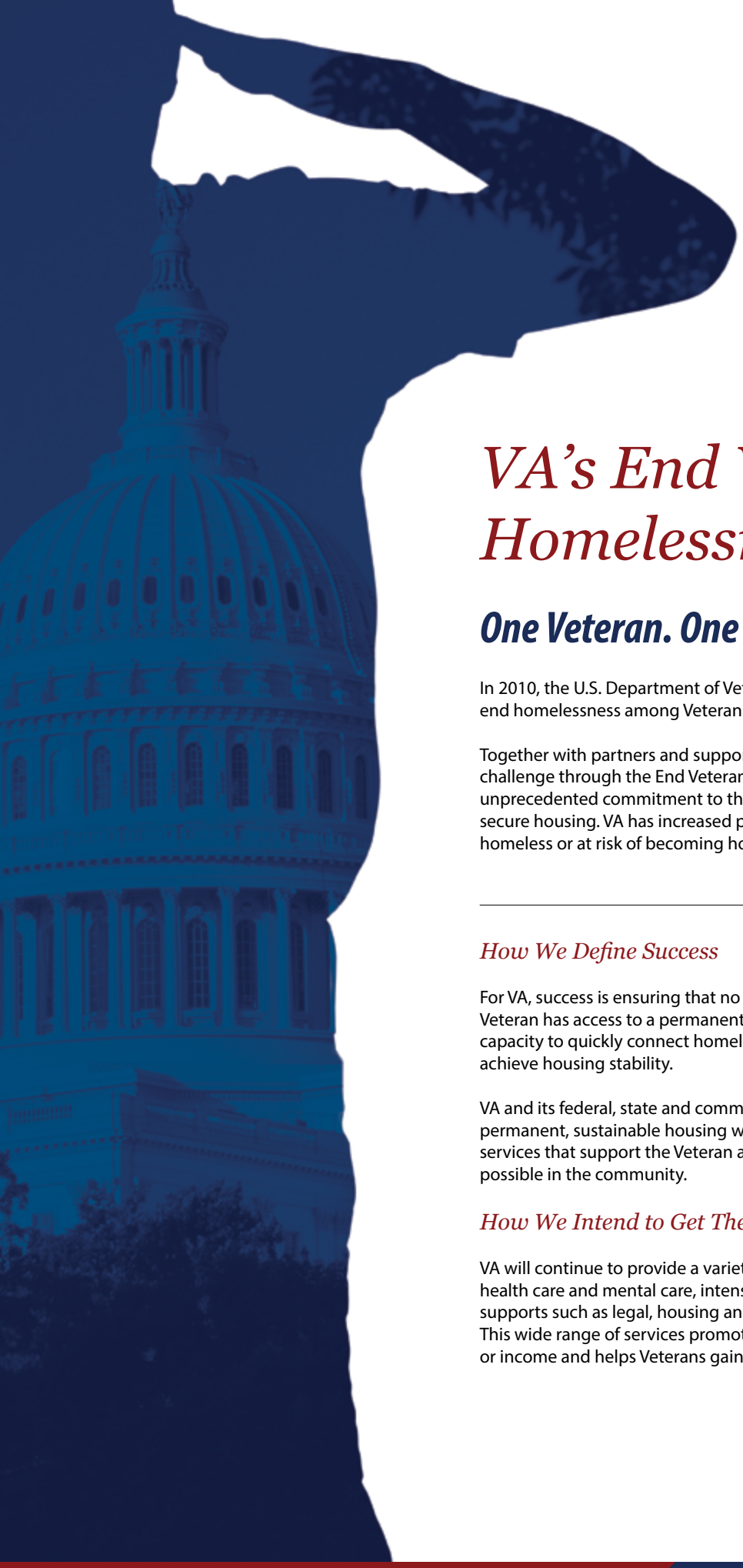
- Homeless Veterans come from all walks of life regardless of race, religion, age, sex, service experience or education level.
  - Women represent the largest growing segment of the homeless Veteran population.
- Most service-related injuries are treatable medical conditions that do not directly lead to Veteran homelessness.
- Veterans who have experienced homelessness and are currently enrolled in VA services have access to a variety of wraparound care, including health services, housing assistance, support that leads to greater job engagement and other VA benefits support to ensure their on-the-job success. Veterans offer diverse expertise that is applicable to many different fields and advanced/leadership roles within organizations. Veterans also exhibit accountability and responsibility in the work environment.
- Veterans make excellent employees, and tend to have a higher rate of retention when they are well integrated into an organization.

Key Messages/Talking Points (Employers)

The key messages outlined below speak to the diverse background of Veterans, work to educate you and your staff about the benefits of hiring a Veteran and provide background on the VA services that are available to most Veterans. These messages can be used when speaking about hiring Veterans exiting homelessness with your organization's leadership or members of the human resources team.

Key Messages:

- Veterans who have experienced homelessness and are currently enrolled in VA services have access to a variety of wraparound care, including health services, housing assistance, support that leads to greater job engagement and other VA benefits support to ensure their on-the-job success. Veterans offer expertise that is applicable to many different fields and advanced/leadership roles within organizations. These areas of expertise include leadership, management and teamwork. Veterans also exhibit accountability and responsibility in the work environment.
- Many homeless Veterans have significant educational experience.
  - Veterans are far more likely to have a college degree or higher as compared with the general homeless population.
- Veterans make excellent employees, and tend to have a higher rate of retention when they are well integrated into an organization.



VA's End Veteran Homelessness Initiative

One Veteran. One Job. You Can Help!

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a comprehensive plan to end homelessness among Veterans community by community."

Together with partners and supporters nationwide, VA is determined to meet this challenge through the End Veteran Homelessness Initiative, which provides an unprecedented commitment to those who have served our nation but lack safe, secure housing. VA has increased programs and funding to help Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

How We Define Success

For VA, success is ensuring that no Veteran is sleeping on the streets and every Veteran has access to a permanent home. Achieving this objective requires the capacity to quickly connect homeless or at-risk Veterans to the help they need to achieve housing stability.

VA and its federal, state and community partners will not stop until all Veterans have permanent, sustainable housing with access to high-quality health care and other services that support the Veteran and his or her family in living as independently as possible in the community.

How We Intend to Get There

VA will continue to provide a variety of services including transitional housing, health care and mental care, intensive case management, referral to other social supports such as legal, housing and benefits assistance and employment services. This wide range of services promotes residential stability, increases skill levels and/or income and helps Veterans gain greater self-determination in their path to

permanent housing. Community-based organizations funded by Continuums of Care (COCs) will also continue to provide shelter and transitional housing that cover a range of supportive services, including education, job training, housing searches, mental health services and trauma counseling.

VA staff, in addition to private and public partners, conduct regular outreach to those who are the most vulnerable and are not currently receiving services to engage them in treatment and rehabilitative programs. Additionally, VA engages in strong interagency collaboration that has resulted in policies, procedures and programs critical to achieving the progress.

Sustainment

Even when no Veteran is on the streets, and when stops in a shelter are rare and brief, the work is still not done. Similar to other societal and public health goals, the fight to end homelessness requires ongoing efforts to respond to needs as they arise, and to address issues before they lead to homelessness.

A sufficient supply of affordable and permanent supportive housing is necessary to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. Although VA realizes the current supply of affordable units does not currently meet the demand, we will continue to assist homeless Veterans navigating their local housing market to promote their ability to rapidly locate and secure permanent housing.

How Non-VA Entities Can Help

Government can't be the sole solution—we know that community partnerships have been key to our success so far, including providing Veterans with pro bono legal services to resolve issues that impact their ability to obtain housing. Now we need greater involvement from the housing community, business and industry, employers and others.

Therefore, we are renewing and establishing new partnerships to yield more affordable housing-unit set-asides for Veterans experiencing homelessness and more long-term gainful employment for Veterans seeking job opportunities. We are committed to ensuring that more move-in essentials are provided so that newly housed Veterans can make their house a home.

Help for Homeless Veterans
877-4AID-VET
va.gov/homeless | (877) 424-3838

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Homeless Veterans Myth-busters

One Veteran. One Job. You Can Help!

Together with partners nationwide, VA is determined to put a systemic end to Veteran homelessness through the End Veteran Homelessness Initiative, which provides an unprecedented commitment to help those who served our nation, but lack safe, secure housing and long-term gainful employment.

Many employers have questions and misconceptions about Veterans who are exiting homelessness. While Veterans may be depicted in many ways, they come from all walks of life, and may be different in race, religion, age, sex, and military service experience or educational background.

Below are several questions and common conceptions about hiring Veterans who are exiting homelessness:

What type of background and experiences do Veterans have? I don't know if the skills Veterans learn during their military experience will benefit my organization.

Not only do Veterans have diverse skillsets, but these skills are also applicable to many different fields and levels of employment within an organization. Some of these skills include leadership and management. During their military service, all Veterans learn the importance of teamwork and how to exhibit accountability and responsibility in the work environment. Veterans also tend to have higher retention rates, than other employees, when they are well-integrated into an organization.

Many Veterans who have experienced homelessness also have significant educational experience. Veterans are far more likely to have a college degree or higher as compared with the general homeless population.

Our hiring process is complicated enough, won't hiring a Veteran only complicate the process more?

Since May of 2014, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has employed a Community Employment Coordinator (CEC) at every VA Medical Center (VAMC) to support Veterans exiting homelessness.

The CECs work closely with employers to find out skills and qualifications for a particular job and prescreen Veterans to ensure they are job-ready and a good fit for the position prior to sending them to employers for interviews.

In addition, Veterans typically receive VA health care benefits, hiring a Veteran may qualify your organization for a federal tax credit and the CECs are typically available to continually follow-up to ensure the Veteran makes a smooth transition into the workplace.

I need a job vacancy filled immediately and the federal government is known to be slow moving. Does VA have the ability to fill rapid requests?

CECs are able to meet rapid turn-around requests, often within a few days, depending on the employer's timeline and the specific requirements. If a CEC isn't aware of a specific Veteran who can fit a role, they can coordinate closely with the local Veteran Employment office to attempt to fulfill the request.

How is VA finding Veterans who are interested in work?

CECs work closely with and take the recommendations of the VA treatment teams in order to identify and begin working with Veterans on employment goals. Typically this is following, and in conjunction with, other VA services.

If a Veteran was recently homeless, will they be stable enough to work a job with a regular schedule?

While some Veterans may have recently been homeless, through VA's "housing-first" policy there are no prerequisites for Veterans to receive housing, instead, permanent housing is provided as the initial service, followed by other services, such as health care and ultimately employment, when the Veteran is ready. Many Veterans participate in programs such as Compensated Work Therapy, which is meant to prepare participants for community employment.

If I'm interested in working with VA to hire a Veteran, who do I contact/work with?

Visit http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/cec-contacts.asp to contact your local CEC and to learn more about the benefits of hiring a Veteran.

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VA Services At-a-Glance Guide

Eligible Veterans enrolled in VA's benefits program have access to its transitional housing program, health care and mental health care and employment services. This wide range of services promotes residential stability, increases skill levels and/or income and helps Veterans gain greater self-determination in their path to permanent housing. Below is an overview of services for which homeless Veterans may qualify.

Program	Description
Community Resource and Referral Centers (CRRC)	CRRCs are a collaborative effort of VA, the community, service providers, and agency partners. The CRRCs are located in strategically selected areas to provide both a refuge from the streets and a central location to help homeless Veterans access services. Veterans will be referred to health and mental health care resources, job development programs, housing options, and other VA and non-VA benefits.
Compensated Work Therapy (CWT)	VA's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) is comprised of the transitional work and supported employment program, which assists homeless Veterans in returning to competitive employment. Veterans in CWT are paid at least the federal or state minimum wage, whichever is the higher.
Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV)	The DCHV program provides time-limited residential treatment to homeless Veterans with mental health and substance use disorders, co-occurring medical concerns, and psychosocial needs including homelessness and unemployment. DCHV programs provide homeless Veterans access to medical, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment in addition to psychosocial and vocational rehabilitation treatment programs.
Health Care for Home-less Veterans (HCHV)	The central goal of HCHV programs is to reduce homelessness among Veterans by engaging and connecting homeless Veterans with health care and other needed services. HCHV programs provide outreach, case management and HCHV Contract Residential Services ensuring that chronically homeless Veterans, especially those with community-based programs that provide quality housing and services that meet the needs of these special populations.
Health Care for Reentry Veterans Services (HCRV)	The HCRV program is designed to address the community re-entry needs of incarcerated Veterans. HCRV's goals are to prevent homelessness, reduce the impact of medical, psychiatric and substance abuse problems upon community re-adjustment and decrease the likelihood of re-incarceration for those leaving prison.

Program	Description
Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams (H-PACT)	H-PACT provides a coordinated "medical home" specifically tailored to the needs of homeless Veterans. At selected VA facilities, Veterans are assigned to an H-PACT care team that includes a primary care provider, nurse, social worker, homeless program staff and others who provide medical care, case management, housing and social services assistance, to provide and coordinate the health care they may need while assisting them in obtaining and staying in permanent housing.
Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD)	The GPD program allows VA to award grants to community-based agencies to create transitional housing programs and offer per diem payments. The purpose is to promote the development and provision of supportive housing and/or supportive services with the goal of helping homeless Veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income and obtain greater self-determination. GPD-funded projects offer communities a way to help homeless Veterans with housing and services while assisting VA medical centers (VAMC) by augmenting or supplementing care.
Homeless Veterans Dental Program (HVDP)	The Homeless Veteran Dental Program helps increase the accessibility of quality dental care to homeless and certain other Veteran patients enrolled in VA-sponsored and VA partnership homeless rehabilitation programs throughout the U.S.
Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services (HVCES)	In order to help improve employment outcomes and reach the most difficult to serve homeless Veterans, each VA medical center (VAMC) received funding to hire new Vocational Development Specialists (VDS) who will serve as Community Employment Coordinators (CEC) within the Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services (HVCES) framework. The new CECs are responsible for the ongoing orientation and training of the Homeless Services continuum and for providing direct assistance in connecting Veterans to the most appropriate and least restrictive VA and/or community-based employment service leading to competitive employment with appropriate supports.
Housing and Urban Development– Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program	HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA where eligible homeless Veterans receive a Housing Choice rental voucher from HUD, while VA provides case management and supportive services to sustain housing stability and recovery from physical and mental health problems, substance use disorders, and functional concerns contributing to or resulting from homelessness. HUD-VASH subscribes to the principles of the "Housing First" model of care. Housing First is an evidence based practice model that has demonstrated that rapidly moving individuals into housing, and then wrapping supportive services around them as needed, helps homeless individuals exit from homelessness, remain stable in housing, thus improving ability and motivation to engage in treatment strategies. Program goals include housing stability while promoting maximum Veteran recovery and independence in the community for the Veteran and the Veteran's family.

Program	Description
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (NCCHV)	The NCCHV was founded to ensure that homeless Veterans or Veterans at-risk for homelessness have free, 24/7 access to VA staff. The hotline is intended to assist homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families, VAMCs, Federal, state and local partners, community agencies, service providers and others in the community. The phone number is ***1-877-4AID VET (1-877-424-3838).***
National Center on Homelessness among Veterans (NCHAV)	The National Center on Homelessness among Veterans (NCHAV) works to promote recovery-oriented care for Veterans who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness by developing and disseminating evidence-based policies, programs and best practices. The Center is active in research, model development and education.
Project CHALENG (Community Homeless-ness Assessment, Local Educations and Networking Groups) for Veterans	This program unites consumers, providers, advocates, local officials and other concerned citizens to identify the needs of homeless Veterans and work to meet those needs through planning and cooperative action. CHALENG is designed to be an ongoing assessment process that describes the needs of homeless Veterans and identifies the barriers they face to successful community reentry. This process has helped build thousands of relationships with community agencies, Veterans groups, law enforcement agencies, and Federal, state, and local government. Local CHALENG meetings represent important opportunities for VA and public and private agency representatives to meet and develop meaningful partnerships to better serve homeless Veterans.
Readjustment Counseling Service's Vet Center	The Readjustment Counseling Service's Vet Center Programs feature community-based locations and outreach activities that help to identify homeless Veterans and match homeless Veterans with necessary services.
Stand Downs	Stand Downs are typically one to three day events providing services to homeless Veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other necessary services, such as housing, employment and substance abuse treatment. Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies and community agencies who serve the homeless.
Substance Use Disorder Treatment Enhancement Initiative	This VA initiative provides substance use services in the community to aid homeless Veterans' recovery.
Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)	This program was authorized by Public Law 110-387 and provides supportive services to very low-income Veteran families in or transitioning to permanent housing. SSVF is designed to rapidly re-house homeless Veteran families and prevent homelessness for those at imminent risk due to a housing crisis. Funds are granted to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives to assist very low-income Veteran families by providing a range of supportive services designed to promote housing stability.

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