U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Homeless Veterans Outreach Event-in-a-Box

Ending Veteran Homelessness,
One Event At A Time

FALL 2016

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

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Event-in-a-Box Introduction

Ending Veteran Homelessness, One Event at a Time

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) collaborates with many organizations and individuals to end and prevent homelessness among Veterans. These allies expand Veterans' access to affordable housing, well-paying employment, move-in essentials and other resources.

Organized events are a great way for our collaborators to advance this important national goal. Homeless Veteran rapid rehousing boot camps, job fairs, move-in campaigns and Stand Downs are just a few types of events that benefit Veterans who are exiting homelessness and their families.

We know event-planning is hard work, and that's why we developed this Event-in-a-Box: To make it easier for VA's collaborators to host and participate in events that get us closer to the day when no Veteran is without a permanent home. Use it to generate event ideas, execute events and publicize events and educate your audiences.

Thank you for helping end Veteran homelessness, one event at a time.

Visit www.va.gov/homeless/docs/toolkit/Homeless-Veterans-Outreach-EventBox-FINAL-0916.pdf to download, use and share the Event-in-a-Box.

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Who Can Use the Event-in-a-Box

Almost any community group can hold events that raise awareness about or showcase best practices in ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans. The following stakeholders are particularly well-positioned to plan, promote and participate in events that support this cause:

- Affordable housing providers, including property developers, housing managers and landlords that can provide Veterans with permanent housing
- Employers from both the public and private sectors that can provide job opportunities for Veterans exiting homelessness
- Organizations that can collect and distribute furniture and other move-in essentials to help newly housed Veterans make their house a home
- VA medical centers and facilities, local governments and other entities with the ability to convene people to help prevent and end homelessness among Veterans

Ways to Use the Event-in-a-Box

Whether you are hosting a boot camp, exhibiting at a conference, planning a hiring event or coordinating a move-in essentials drive, Event-in-a-Box materials can be mixed, matched and customized to help you plan, promote and run events. Pick and choose from these items:

Event planning information

- Event planning checklist
- Event ideas
- Event timing
- Messages
- Challenges and action steps

Event promotion resources

- Sample blogs and social media content
- Flyer template
- Media advisory template
- Electronic billboard messages to promote events within VA

Event hosting resources

- Presentation content
- Thank-you email template

Event handouts and other items to share onsite or online

- Fact sheets
- Frequently asked questions
- Move-in essentials checklist
- Posters and wallet cards
- Resources to end and prevent Veteran homelessness

Event Planning Information

Event Planning Checklist

Tailor this checklist for your specific event, and note that policies and procedures vary widely between offices, meeting facilities and other event venues. If you plan to host more than one event, customize the checklist based on lessons learned from each event.

GET STARTED:

- [ ] Plan three to six months in advance, depending on the size of your event.
- [ ] Identify stakeholders (i.e., any person, group or organization that has a vested interest in the event). Engage stakeholders throughout the process, including with brainstorming event concepts, understanding how best to reach audiences and more.
- [ ] Set goals that will enable you to measure success. Goals will vary depending on the type of event and intended audience, but examples include:
  - Have at least 50 employees attend
  - Collect 500 items for donation
  - Attract 15 employers and schedule 30 Veteran job interviews
  - Meet with 20 landlords accepting or interested in accepting HUD-VASH vouchers
- [ ] Plan to collect feedback during the event, or in a follow-up evaluation survey.
- [ ] Develop a schedule of milestones, deadlines and contingencies. Ensure that each task—reserving space, posting social media messages, printing handouts, etc.—is assigned.

LOGISTICS:

- [ ] Establish an event date and time as soon as possible. When selecting the event date, consider factors that may affect attendance, such as holidays or summer vacations (more timing guidance is on page 10).
- [ ] Identify and contact the facility coordinator well in advance to reserve space on the selected date/time.
- [ ] Once space is reserved, secure resources such as:
  - Audio/visual equipment
  - Badges for event staff
  - Booth display
  - Camera or photographer
  - Easels
  - Laptop(s)/tablet(s)
  - Microphone
  - Printing services
  - Pens/pencils
  - Table(s)/ tablecloth(s)
- [ ] Confirm staff/presenter availability for the selected date and time.
- [ ] Provide logistical information, outline roles and share presentations and other materials.
- [ ] Establish a means of collecting RSVPs and tracking attendance.
- [ ] Conduct a walkthrough of the space or dry run of the event, if appropriate.

COMMUNICATIONS:

- [ ] Develop a plan for communicating to prospective attendees about your event. Work with your stakeholders to determine which tactics will work best for your audiences.
- [ ] Provide messages and frequently asked questions to all event staff and stakeholders to promote consistent communications prior to and during the event (examples are included later in this Event-in-a-Box).
- [ ] If your event is at a VA facility or you are planning it with VA homeless outreach staff, ask your VA point of contact about working with VA public affairs officers to spread the word.
- [ ] Share the event date and time early and often.

DAY OF EVENT:

- [ ] Ensure that any handouts, posters, badges or other materials are printed prior to the event.
- [ ] Arrive early to address any last-minute issues. Be prepared to make on-the-spot changes!
- [ ] Set up tables, booths, audio/visual equipment and other items. Test equipment.
- [ ] Place signs or staff near entrances to welcome attendees and direct them to the event.
- [ ] If you are collecting attendee feedback using a brief survey at the event, give attendees time to fill surveys out and tell them where to turn them in.
- [ ] Account for all materials/resources before you leave the event space.

EVENT FOLLOW-UP:

- [ ] If you didn't do so at the event, distribute evaluation surveys soon after the event.
- [ ] Tally survey responses, collect feedback and review attendance/ engagement data, and use this information to measure success and identify lessons learned.
- [ ] Thank everyone involved for their participation, and be sure to send personal thank-you notes to those who contributed significant time or resources (see template in Event Hosting Resources).
- [ ] If photos were taken, upload them or post them to your organization's website in a timely manner so they can be used in follow-up communications.

Did you host a successful event about ending Veteran homelessness? VA's Homeless Veterans Outreach team wants to know about it!

Send a summary of your event and photos to homelessvets@va.gov, and we'll get in touch to discuss ways to share your success story with others.

Event Ideas

Thinking about hosting an event? Here are some ideas in key service areas:

HOUSING

- **Host a rapid rehousing boot camp** – Convene area leaders in government, housing, social services and other areas for a rapid rehousing boot camp. Design these events to help your community develop more efficient ways to house Veterans who are homeless. Guide the sessions using benchmarking criteria devised by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Find them at www.va.gov/homeless/USICHbenchmarking.asp.

- **Plan a networking event** – Share your experience developing housing for Veterans with other potential housing providers. Focus on best practices that help Veterans remain stably housed, such as co-locating housing and supportive services or building housing near jobs and transportation hubs.

- **Conduct a landlord outreach event** – Use the Event-in-a-Box to educate area landlords about the need for affordable housing and how they can get involved by setting aside units for Veterans exiting homelessness. For instance, if you accept Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers, consider an event to educate landlords about the process.

EMPLOYMENT

- **Plan hiring events** –Veteran-focused job fairs and interview events help connect employers with great candidates, and provide Veterans with invaluable interview experiences and career opportunities. Whether the event includes only your organization or several companies, be sure to engage the appropriate human resources personnel from the beginning. Contact the Community Employment Coordinator (CEC) (www.va.gov/homeless/cec-contacts.asp) at the nearest VA Medical Center (www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp) to help plan your event and encourage Veterans to attend.

- **Conduct career prep workshops** – Work with your local CEC to plan a résumé-writing/interviewing workshop or networking event to help Veterans prepare for job fairs and interviews.

MOVE-IN ESSENTIALS

- **Run a move-in essentials program** – Reach out to your local VA Voluntary Service representative(s) (www.volunteer.va.gov/directory/index.asp) and VA homeless outreach staff at the VA Medical Center to see which items are needed by Veterans exiting homelessness in your area. Then, organize a collection for your employees or your community. Only distribute new or nearly new items (see the move-in essentials checklist for guidance).

OTHER EVENTS

- **Coordinate events with a VA Stand Down** – Stand Downs connect Veterans in need with supplies and services that often lead to permanent housing. They're also great outreach opportunities. Visit this site, www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp, to see if one is happening in your community. Contact the listed organizer to coordinate outreach efforts. (VA employees who learn of organizations or individuals interested in donating money, time or goods should notify the chief of Voluntary Service at the VA Medical Center. Learn more at www.volunteer.va.gov/apps/VolunteerNow.)

- **Employee lunch and learn** – Do your employees understand how to help end Veteran homelessness? Consider hosting an informal lunch and learn session during the work day to educate employees about the issue, what your organization is doing and how they can get involved. Invite employees to bring their own lunches and eat while participating in the discussion. If possible, secure a subject matter expert to present information and guide the discussion. Build in time for questions and answers, and provide attendees with materials for distribution among their networks.

- **Internal meetings** – There may be opportunities to present information/materials to your leadership and peers at work during staff meetings (i.e., medical facility "grand rounds"), conference calls or training sessions. Contact organizers to discuss your ideas and confirm logistics.

Event Timing

Any time is a good time to host an event. But planning your event to coincide with these observances can enhance its exposure:

- New Year's Day: Jan. 1
- Women's History Month, National Social Worker's Month: March
- National Volunteer Week: April
- Women's Health Week, Mental Health Awareness Month, Memorial Day: May
- Men's Health Month: June
- Independence Day: July 4
- Labor Day: First Monday in September
- National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month: September
- National Disability Employment Awareness Month: October
- Military Family Month, National Family Caregivers Month: November
- Veterans Day: November 11
- Thanksgiving: Fourth Thursday in November
- Winter holiday season: December

Here are other potential event "hooks" to consider in timing your event:

Conferences – Check the schedule (www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp) of upcoming conferences to see if there are opportunities for you to publicize your efforts to house, employ or serve Veterans who are homeless.

Stand Downs – Review the schedule (www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp) of upcoming Stand Downs to see if you can provide support or work in coordination with VA. Stand Downs provide supplies and services to homeless Veterans, such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings and benefits counseling. Veterans can also receive referrals to other assistance such as health care, housing solutions, employment, substance use treatment and mental health counseling. They are collaborative events, coordinated among local VA Medical Centers, other government agencies and community-based homeless service providers.

Other Community Events – Does your community hold events focused on homelessness, or celebrate national holidays like Veterans Day? These are opportunities to offer services to Veterans and raise awareness of efforts to end and prevent Veteran homelessness.

Note that highly publicized, planned events could consume the attention of potential attendees for your event. If this is the case, consider planning your event at a different time.

Key Messages

Customize the following messages for event-promotion materials, talking points or other content that raises awareness and inspires action among event attendees.

Together, We Can End and Prevent Homelessness Among Veterans

- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) considers ending Veteran homelessness a top national priority.
- Following the federal government's launch of the Federal Strategic Plan to End Veteran Homelessness in 2010, the nation has made tremendous progress toward achieving this urgent goal.
- The number of Veterans experiencing homelessness has declined significantly, with states and communities leading the way. To realize the day when there are no Veterans without a permanent home, we need continued urgency and commitment from leaders and partners in every community.
- Independently and in collaboration with others, VA operates a number of programs, in the areas of health care, housing solutions, job training and education, that prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.
- Among these initiatives are the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs, which provide resources to house Veterans and their families and prevent homelessness.
- However, no one entity or program can end homelessness among Veterans. Attaining this goal is only possible with continued investments in effective interventions and strong collaborations among government, employers and community-based entities and individuals such as landlords.
- Collaborators can leverage available resources to rapidly house all Veterans in need, following the Housing First approach, which means housing Veterans as quickly as possible, without "housing readiness" preconditions.
- Additional support from organizations of all types—businesses, nonprofits, foundations and so many others—is needed to help Veterans who are homeless or are one tough break away from it secure well-paying employment, affordable housing, move-in essentials and more.
- If you know a Veteran who is homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless, refer him or her to a local VA Medical Center (www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp) where VA staff are ready to help. Veterans and their families can also call **1-877-4AID-VET** to get connected to VA services.
- No Veteran should be without a permanent home. Together, let's end homelessness among Veterans.

Challenges and Action Steps

Use your event to address the following challenges related to ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans, and encourage your attendees to take action.

Housing

- All Veterans have earned a clear, quick path to affordable housing and supportive services that can help them stay healthy and successful.
- Many Veterans live in places with extremely high costs of living and few affordable housing options. In some places, even Veterans in possession of HUD-VASH vouchers cannot find rental housing that will accept them.
- A significant number of Veterans are not eligible for Veteran-specific assistance due to their service discharge status.

Action Steps

- Develop incentives for private landlords to build and expand access to low-cost housing for Veterans. If you are a housing provider or landlord, consider renting to Veterans exiting homelessness.
- Develop and implement strategies to get non-VA eligible Veterans connected to community-based housing and other services that may promote housing stability, including mainstream housing, Social Security benefits, federal food assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and health insurance.
- Identify all Veterans experiencing homelessness by name and share that list across systems so that no one falls through the cracks.
- Coordinate outreach to and engagement among service providers, mental health and substance use treatment agencies, legal services entities, law enforcement, prisons and jails, hospitals, libraries and job centers to proactively seek out Veterans in need of assistance and in turn to connect Veterans to services that promote housing stability.

- Set concrete and ambitious monthly or quarterly goals for helping Veterans and their families get housed.
- Implement Housing First practices and approaches across every part of the homelessness services and housing system.

Employment

- Employment reduces the likelihood of poverty among Veterans and their risk of homelessness.
- With steady income from good jobs, Veterans can establish credit and earn deposits and down payments to obtain permanent housing—and remain stably housed.
- Employment of Veterans reduces societal impacts of homelessness, including alienation and increased health care and criminal justice expenses.
- With a viable shot at competitive, community-based employment, Veterans can care for their families, live independently and achieve financial stability.
- Veterans seeking employment may need assistance in finding and maintaining a job (e.g., resume-writing and online application help and transportation to and from work).

Action Steps

- Collaborate with workforce investment boards, homelessness services, housing organizations, VA Medical Centers and employers to help Veterans access job opportunities.
- Learn about VA's Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services, which connect job-ready Veterans who are exiting homeless with employment.
- Work with VA's Community Employment Coordinators (CECs), which have been hired at approximately 150 VA Medical Centers across the country. CECs help Veterans with applying for jobs and collaborate directly with employers to identify local gaps in current competitive employment services for homeless Veterans. CECs welcome opportunities to engage with community partners and employers who are committed to ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans.
- Engage non-VA partners too, such as Department of Labor grantees, community- and faith-based organizations and others that can facilitate employment of Veterans.
- Get this fact sheet (www.va.gov/homeless/docs/Transportation_Programs_FactSheet.pdf) to learn about possible transportation options for Veterans.

Move-In Essentials

- Finding permanent housing for Veterans isn't the only challenge—Veterans exiting homelessness often need mattresses, household items and other costly supplies to make their new house or apartment feel like home.
- Veterans may have the money to move into permanent homes, but little left to spare for the home essentials most of us take for granted. Veterans may not be able to get to a store to buy what they need. The risk is that Veterans will move into new housing that is far from a "home," and continue to feel isolated.
- Local VA Medical Centers often do not have the ability to collect, store and distribute donated items.
- Veterans may be one security deposit or rental fee away from moving to permanent housing.

Action Steps

- Collaborate with VA and others to donate new or gently used household items to Veterans identified as in need.
- Work with VA to learn which Veterans are exiting homelessness and require move-in essentials.
- Assist organizations that raise and distribute funds to help Veterans transition to stable housing.

Calls to Action

Make sure your event attendees know what to do next by including these relevant calls to action in your materials.

- Learn more about VA's homeless programs by visiting www.va.gov/homeless.
- Find the nearest VA Community Employment Coordinator online at www.va.gov/HOMELESS/HVCES.asp.
- Get the VA Employment and Housing Toolkits at www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp#toolkits.
- Review 10 ideas for getting involved in ending Veteran homelessness at www.va.gov/homeless/docs/Outreach-Booklet-Print.pdf.
- Download and share additional information, which is available at www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp.
- If you know a Veteran who is homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless, refer him or her to a local VA Medical Center, where VA staff are ready to help. Veterans and their families can also call **1-877-4AID-VET** to get connected to VA services.

Event Promotion Resources

Media Advisory

Customize and insert the text below into your organization's letterhead and distribute it to media outlets to earn news coverage of your event.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONTH DD, YYYY

Join <Insert Organization Name> for <Event Title>
<Insert Subhead if Needed>

CITY, STATE — Describe the event, its purpose, who is hosting it and who is invited in the first paragraph. Reporters should know from the first sentence what the event is and why it should be of interest to them. Build this paragraph using the Messaging, Challenges, Action Steps and Calls to Action content in the Event-in-a-Box.

What: Event Title
When: MONTH DD, YYYY, Start time and end time
Where: Physical location and any access details, or link/dial-in information if it is a virtual event
RSVP: Indicate RSVP point of contact (POC) and deadline, if applicable
Contact: List additional POC(s), if applicable

Additional details can be found at the event Web page: <insert link>

Blog Post

Customize the following blog post for your event.

Join Us as We Work to End Homelessness Among Veterans
No one who served this country should be without a place to call home. That's why [your organization] is hosting an event on [date] about the important issue of [affordable housing/employment/move-in essentials] for veterans. Our nation has set an ambitious goal to end Veteran homelessness. The goal is within reach, but we cannot let up until every Veteran has access to permanent housing and employment opportunities.

Led by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), tremendous progress is being made. Community by community, localities across the country are on the path to ending homelessness among Veterans. These successes show that it's possible to end homelessness among Veterans and among all Americans. But there is more work to do to ensure that every Veteran is stably housed in a furnished home and able to pursue a well-paying job. Every partner can do something to help end homelessness among Veterans. Come to our event to learn more and get involved.

What: Event name
Where: Event location
When: Event month, day, time
How: RSVP

Social Media Content

Customize the following social media content to promote your event. Include the hashtag #EndVetshomelessness to ensure that your posts are included in the national conversation. Many of these digital platforms can be used to host events online (e.g., Facebook chats, Twitter town halls or Google hangouts), and so consider using the Event-in-a-Box resources for social media-based events in addition to in-person events. Remember to abide by your organization's social media policies and obtain proper release forms for anyone appearing in publicly shared images and videos.

Facebook, LinkedIn

Post 1: No one who served this country should be without a place to call home. Join us [insert your Facebook/LinkedIn address] as we work with the Department of Veterans Affairs and others to help #EndVetshomelessness. We'll kick things off at [insert event details]. Join us then to get involved. Together, let's end Veteran homelessness once and for all.
Post 2: Let's end Veteran homelessness, one home at a time. Housing and community partners can #EndVetshomelessness with more affordable housing, more landlord involvement and more move-in help to Veterans. Join us [insert your Facebook/LinkedIn address] at [insert event details] to find out how you can support this cause.
Post 3: Let's end Veteran homelessness, one job at a time. [insert your Facebook/LinkedIn address] invites employers and Veterans to take part in our job fair on [insert event details] to connect job-ready Veterans with employment opportunities. By providing even one job to one Veteran, you can #EndVetshomelessness.
Post 4: Newly housed Veterans are more successful long term when they have all the new or nearly new items they need to make their house a home. Help #EndVetshomelessness by joining us [insert your Facebook/LinkedIn address] at [event details] to kick off our move-in essentials program.

Twitter, Instagram

Promote your event on social media with these messages and use them to caption images and videos.

Post 1: No one who served this country should be without a home. Join [insert your Twitter address] at [#event-hashtag] to #EndVetshomelessness.
Post 2: Housing and community partners can #EndVetshomelessness, one home at a time. Join [insert your Twitter address] at [#event-hashtag] to #EndVetshomelessness.
Post 3: Employers can #EndVetshomelessness, one job at a time. Join [insert your Twitter address] at [#event-hashtag] to #EndVetshomelessness.

Additional Social Media Channels

If your organization is active on other social media or sharing channels (e.g., internal corporate social media networks, Snapchat, YouTube, Vine, Storify, Upworthy, Pinterest or Google+), consider using them to publicize and share the results of your event. Video and photo content, polls and other interactive or multimedia tools are great ways to engage potential attendees or supporters before, during and after events and amplify your impact.

Electronic Billboard Messages

If your local VA facility or office building has electronic message boards in the lobby, consider using the following electronic message center screen and scrolling text to announce the date, time and location of your event and other details. These messages are usually delivered via PowerPoint slides that are inserted into display devices. Get approval to advertise in electronic billboards from the facility's chief of public affairs, public education officer or similar official.

Electronic Message Center Screen Text

Attend Our Upcoming Ending Veteran Homelessness Event! We're working to end and prevent Veteran homelessness. Will you join us?
Get involved by attending our upcoming event on [event topic]. Share Knowledge | Get Handouts | Ask Questions
Where: [Address/room no.]
When: [Date/time]
Contact: [Host/organizer's name; website; contact info]

Electronic Message Center Scrolling Text

We're working to end and prevent Veteran homelessness. Will you join us? Attend [event location, time, contact information] to learn about this initiative and find out how to get involved.

Event Hosting Resources

Presentations

Customize the following content to create slide presentations for your events.

Housing/Move-In Essentials Events

Title: Let's End Veteran Homelessness, One Home At a Time

Overview:

- The Nation's Goal: End and prevent homelessness among Veterans.
- Progress to Date: Veteran homelessness is down nationwide and has been ended in many areas.
- More Work to Do: Far too many Veterans are without a safe, stable place to call home.
- Together, we can end homelessness among Veterans—one home at a time.

Goals of the Event:

- Yield more affordable housing unit set-asides for Veterans experiencing homelessness
- Encourage landlords to rent to Veterans
- Collect and distribute move-in supplies to Veterans exiting homelessness

Why House Veterans?

- Permanent housing reduces societal costs for temporary shelters, criminal justice expenditures, emergency room visits and hospitalizations.
- Stable housing helps prevent illness among Veterans and promotes recovery of those with chronic health conditions.
- Veterans who have experienced homelessness and are enrolled in VA have access to a variety of supportive services to dramatically increase the likelihood of housing success.
- Some Veterans are homeless because they need assistance with the first month's rental deposit, turning on utilities and buying move-in furniture and supplies—items government often cannot provide.
- Some Veterans are homeless even though they have the money for housing because their histories—evictions, poor credit or justice involvement—cause landlords to deny their housing applications.

Take a break to show a video.

U.S. Army Veteran's Real-Life Journey From Homelessness to Having Safe, Stable Housing, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbjRpIRPRSU

Resources to Help House and Provide Supportive Services to Veterans:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) alone and in partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) operates a variety of specialized programs to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans, including:

- HUD-VA Supportive Housing, known as HUD-VASH
- Supportive Services for Veteran Families
- Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program
- Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans
- Healthcare for Homeless Veterans
- Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program
- Veterans Justice Outreach/Health Care for Reentry Veterans

How You Can Help:

- Make a commitment. Agree to house Veterans both eligible and ineligible for the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.
- Review your practices. Reduce "preconditions" and other barriers to housing Veterans with challenged rental and credit histories.
- Help with Veterans' security deposits and move-in costs.
- Assist Veterans in making their house a home. Collect and distribute new or nearly new items to Veterans moving to permanent housing.

Contact Slide:

- Visit www.va.gov/homeless for more information.
- Contact [insert your name/organization]

Employment Events

Title: Let's End Veteran Homelessness, One Job At a Time

Overview: Employment of Veterans can help end and prevent homelessness. Veterans who've fallen on hard times deserve the chance to earn a living wage. By employing a job-ready Veteran who is exiting homelessness, you can make a difference. Together, we can end homelessness among Veterans—one job at a time.

Goals of the Event:

- Connect Veterans with potential employers
- Create employment opportunities for Veterans
- Help Veterans sustain housing through employment

Why Employ Veterans?

- Veterans who have experienced homelessness and are enrolled in VA have access to a variety of supportive services to increase the likelihood of on-the-job success, including comprehensive health and mental health care, employment assistance, case management and social services. Veterans ineligible for VA health care have access to the Affordable Care Act.
- Veterans make excellent employees and, when well-integrated into organizations, tend to have higher-than-average rates of retention.
- Veterans are accustomed to working in positions requiring a variety of skillsets, an accountability-oriented mindset and diverse responsibilities, including team-building skills.

Take a break to show this video about how one Veteran's life was transformed through employment: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjPn2MkYwI8&feature=youtu.be

Resources to Help Employ Veterans:
Community Employment Coordinators (CEC), based at nearly every Veteran Affairs Medical Center, help link Veterans exiting homelessness with job opportunities.

Benefits to Employers Who Work with CECs:

- Pre-screen Veterans with a variety of skill sets and from all educational levels
- Provide lists of job-ready Veteran candidates for open positions
- Help facilitate hiring and onboarding
- Assist Veterans in applying their military experiences to civilian employment
- Help in meeting diversity and inclusion goals
- Connect to candidates ready to work from day one

How Employers Can Help:

- **Work with VA:** Provide VA's CECs with a list of job openings. These trained counselors will help match the right job-ready Veterans to the right positions.
- **Make a commitment:** Agree to hire a certain number of job-ready Veterans who are exiting homelessness and mentor them from day one through the first year, or host job fairs and hiring events.
- **Take action:** Review hiring practices to identify ways to hire Veterans who've experienced homelessness for positions.
- **Form a pilot program:** Create a pilot program that provides Veterans exiting homelessness with employment opportunities and mentorships.
- **Ban the box:** Remove criminal history questions from first-round job applications so that Veterans with nonviolent legal histories can get through the initial hiring process.
- **Spread the word:** Encourage others to get involved by talking about your success in working with Veterans exiting homelessness at conferences and meetings and among your networks and peers.

Contact Slide:

- Visit www.va.gov/homeless for more information.
- Locate the nearest CEC at www.va.gov/HOMELESS/cec-contacts.asp.
- Contact [insert your name/organization]

Thank-you Email Template

Customize the email message below to personally thank the volunteers, organizers, speakers and others who contributed significant time and/or resources to the planning and execution of your event.

Dear <Name>,

Thank you very much for your support of the recent <event name/description>. Photos are available at <attach or link to photos, if applicable>. We sincerely appreciated your help with <describe role/task>, and could not have done it without you. We hope to work with you again soon on other events that support our Veterans and their families.

Thank you,
<Name>

Event Handouts/Materials

Share the following fact sheets, FAQs, posters, wallet cards and other handouts at your events to educate participants about U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) resources and community-based efforts to end and prevent homelessness among Veterans. Print-ready versions of posters and wallet cards are available at http://www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp.

Fact Sheet: About the Ending Veteran Homelessness Initiative

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a plan to end Veteran homelessness. The strategy for reaching the goal was included in "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness."

Since then, as a result of VA's close collaboration with local and national organizations, success in ending homelessness among Veterans is happening community by community. Multiple states and localities across the nation have announced that they have ended Veteran homelessness. Many more communities are poised make similar announcements in the near future. The national picture is also improving—the most recent "snapshot" of homelessness on a given night in America shows that homelessness among Veterans is down.

More To Do

These gains aside, there is more work to do to address the many causes of homelessness among Veterans. These include poverty, lack of access to reasonably priced housing, isolation from family or friends and substance use or mental health challenges that may develop or worsen as a result of service-related trauma or housing instability.

Independently and with other federal agencies, VA strives to meet the needs of Veterans by providing services that help them secure permanent housing and achieve their full potential. These include housing solutions and a comprehensive continuum of supportive services, community employment, and mental health care and substance use treatment.

Take Action

VA also collaborates with many other public and private entities to expand access to affordable housing, meaningful employment, move-in essentials and other services. Our work is guided by the Housing First approach, which is based on the premise that when Veterans have a place to call home, they're best able to benefit from the supportive services they need.

Ready to get involved? Here's what you can do to get started:

- Explore VA's Ending Veteran Homelessness website, www.va.gov/homeless/index.asp, to learn about VA programs for Veterans who are homeless.
- If you have specific questions about how to get involved in ending homelessness among Veterans, email 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).

Fact Sheet: Housing Veterans Who Are Homeless

Our nation has set an ambitious goal to end Veteran homelessness. Led by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), tremendous progress is being made. Community by community, localities across the country are on the path to ending homelessness among Veterans. We can see that it's possible to end homelessness among Veterans and among all Americans.

One way to achieve this milestone is to increase access to affordable housing. For many Americans, including Veterans, safe and affordable housing is out of reach.[1] One study found that just 25 percent of families eligible for housing assistance receive it. [2]

Community-based partners hold the keys to ending homelessness among Veterans. Property developers, affordable housing providers, landlords, real estate agents, philanthropic groups and many others can expand housing and related services for Veterans exiting homelessness.

Take Action

Here are a few ways community partners can fill critical housing and service gaps:

- **Make a commitment.** Set aside a certain number of affordable housing units each year for Veterans who are homeless. Agree to house Veterans both eligible and ineligible for the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.
- **Review your practices.** Identify ways you can lease units to Veterans who are homeless, including by reducing "preconditions" and other barriers to housing Veterans with challenged rental and credit histories.
- **Help with Veterans' security deposits and move-in costs.** Join with community partners that raise funds to help Veterans secure first and last months' rent and security deposits so they can exit homelessness as quickly as possible.
- **Assist Veterans in making their house a home.** Veterans exiting homelessness may have housing but be unable to afford furniture, cookware, linens and other move-in essentials. Collect and distribute new or nearly new items to Veterans moving to permanent housing.

Learn More

VA operates many programs that are preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans in your community, including HUD-VA Supportive Housing, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Health Care for Homeless Veterans, Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem and Veterans Justice Outreach/Health Care for Reentry Veterans. Leverage these resources to end and prevent Veteran homelessness in your area.

Find out more at www.va.gov/homeless and get the housing toolkit at www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp#toolkits.

[1] "The State of Homelessness in America, 2015," National Alliance to End Homelessness, http://b.3cdn.net/naeh/458837a0513453bec1_56m6zdnl3.pdf (accessed April 2, 2015).

[2] "Out of Reach 2015," National Low Income Housing Coalition, http://nlihc.org/oor (accessed April 2, 2015).

Fact Sheet: Employing Veterans Exiting Homelessness

Employment works to end and prevent homelessness among Veterans. And it's now easier than ever for business and industry to find, interview and hire job-ready Veterans who have experienced homelessness. That's because more than 150 Community Employment Coordinators (CECs) are being deployed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to collaborate with employers ready to hire Veterans exiting homelessness. Based at VA locations around the country, CECs are recruiters' connection to potential Veteran new hires for jobs in a wide variety of sectors.

CECs Benefit Veterans

CECs work with Veterans who have access to a range of supports, from VA and the community, to lean on during difficult times and enhance employment success. These include health care, housing, social services and other government benefits.

CECs Benefit Employers

CECs benefit employers in the following ways:

- Pre-screen Veterans with a variety of skill sets and from all educational levels
- Refer job-ready Veteran candidates who are ready to work from day one for open positions
- Help facilitate hiring and onboarding
- Assist Veterans in applying their military experiences to civilian employment
- Help in meeting diversity and inclusion goals

Take Action

Consider these ways to get involved:

- Collaborate with CECs to recruit, interview and hire Veterans in your community by regularly exchanging job information.
- Streamline the referral and hiring process for job-ready Veterans who are homeless and mentor them (in tandem with CEC and VA staff support) from the day they start through the first year of employment.
- Review your hiring practices and identify ways you can hire Veterans who've experienced homelessness for full- or part-time positions.

Learn More

Find the nearest CEC online at www.va.gov/HOMELESS/cec-contacts.asp and get the employment toolkit at www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp#toolkits.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is VA's Ending Veteran Homelessness initiative?
In 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a plan to end Veteran homelessness. The strategy for reaching the goal was included in "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness".

What is VA's role in the initiative to end homelessness among Veterans?
VA operates the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country. In the early phase of the initiative, VA worked to better understand the extent of the problem of Veteran homelessness, build a network of partnerships to reach more Veterans in need and expand the capacity to deliver targeted assistance. Along the way, VA assessed its progress, improved services, implemented best practices and worked to sustain successes.

VA continues to focus on proactively reaching Veterans in need of assistance and connecting homeless and at-risk Veterans with housing solutions, health care, community employment services and other required supports. VA's reach is extended through collaborations with federal, state and local agencies; employers; housing providers; faith-based and community nonprofits; and other partners who are essential to expanding affordable housing and employment opportunities for Veterans exiting homelessness.

What programs exist to house Veterans who are homeless and prevent Veteran homelessness?
Independently and in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) VA operates a variety of specialized programs to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans, including:

- HUD-VA Supportive Housing, known as HUD-VASH
- Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)
- Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services
- Health Care for Homeless Veterans
- Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program
- Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans
- Veterans Justice Outreach/Health Care for Reentry Veterans

(Note that not all of these programs are represented at every VA Medical Center.)

How does VA define "ending" Veteran homelessness?
An end to homelessness among Veterans means that no Veteran is sleeping on our streets and that every Veteran who falls into homelessness is quickly able to access permanent and sustainable housing.

What is homelessness?
A Veteran is homeless if he or she …

- Lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence
- Uses as a primary nighttime residence a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Resides in a public or privately operated shelter or institution
- Resides in a place not designed for use as a regular accommodation for a human being

A Veteran is chronically homeless if he or she …

- Has been continuously homeless for one year or more
- Had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years
- Has a disabling condition, such as a diagnosable substance use disorder, a serious mental illness, a developmental disability or a chronic physical illness or disability or the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions

What is Housing First?
Housing First is the most effective, economical approach to reducing homelessness among Veterans. The Housing First approach aims to provide housing to Veterans without "housing readiness" requirements, other than case management and compliance with standard lease agreements. Housing is not preconditioned on Veterans becoming clean and sober or resolving mental health issues, although it is usually accompanied by supportive services.[1]

VA uses Housing First because it works. Research shows[2] that Housing First reduces costs for temporary shelters, emergency room visits and hospitalizations and ensures that limited dollars benefit the maximum number of Veterans and their families. By decreasing the frequency and duration of homelessness, Housing First means that more Veterans have a safe, stable place to call home.

[1] Ana Stefancic, "Fidelity to Housing First," Pathways to Housing presentation to the National Alliance to End Homelessness 2014, http://b.3cdn.net/naeh/270b19536a84bfd736_enm6bfht4.pdf (accessed April 7, 2015).

[2] Latricia Boone, "CHHS Study Demonstrates Housing Program Helps Save Lives, Money," Inside UNC Charlotte, March 24, 2014, http://inside.uncc.edu/news-features/2014-03-24/chhs-study-demonstrates-housing-program-helps-save-lives-money#sthash.aG0ZW6v9.dpuf (accessed April 7, 2015).

How does VA reach and serve Veterans who are homeless?
VA works with communities to coordinate assessment and entry systems to ensure that there is no wrong door for Veterans seeking help.

VA outreach staff and community partners strive to identify Veterans who are homeless and connect them to the local VA or other available services. Veterans can also call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans—**1-877-4AID-VET**—for referrals to VA homeless services. VAMC personnel also use a homeless screener to assess the housing stability of the Veterans they serve, triage their needs and refer them to appropriate services.

VA also now employs more than 150 Community Employment Coordinators (www.va.gov/HOMELESS/cec-contacts.asp), who connect community-based employers with job-ready Veterans exiting homelessness.

What are some obstacles to and solutions for ending homelessness among Veterans?
Lack of affordable housing.

- Housing developers and private landlords can use low-income housing tax credits to build and expand access to low-cost housing for Veterans, particularly in areas with extremely high costs of living and low affordable housing stock.
- More landlords can accept HUD-VASH vouchers or participate with SSVF grantees to house Veterans.
- Community resources can be used to provide down payment or move-in cost assistance and supplies to Veterans ready to move in to new housing.

Unemployment or underemployment among Veterans.

- Employers are needed to hire job-ready Veterans exiting homelessness.
- Housing developers can situate more Veteran housing near transportation and jobs.

Ineligibility for VA services.

- Communities can devise strategies for serving Veterans who are ineligible for VA services by connecting them to community-based housing, employment, health care and other resources.

How does VA determine community progress toward ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans?
VA has specific criteria to help communities determine if they've achieved the goal. VA assesses communities' progress by seeing if they are meeting the following criteria:

- Identified all Veterans experiencing homelessness in the community.
- Developed the capacity to provide shelter to any Veteran not yet permanently housed.
- Assembled the resources, a plan and a timeline to provide quick access to permanent housing to any Veteran not yet permanently housed.
- Have resources, plans and systems in place for continued efforts to identify at-risk Veterans or Veterans who fall into homelessness and to prevent and end their homelessness quickly.
- Have resources and plans to continue housing stability among Veterans.

What else can communities to do to end and prevent homelessness among Veterans?

- Share data with VA to better identify Veterans who are homeless or at risk and connect them to services.
- Engage in or increase joint outreach with VA's homeless program personnel to share information and strategies.
- Identify Veterans who are ineligible for VA health care and services, and have a comprehensive plan to serve these individuals.
- Locate community-based transitional beds where Veterans with vouchers can safely stay until their permanent HUD-VASH placements are available.
- Work with funders, businesses and organizations in your community to help Veterans pay deposits on, stock and furnish their new homes and apartments.

Where can I learn more?
Go to www.va.gov/homeless to find out how to help end and prevent Veteran homelessness.

Move-In Essentials Checklist

Newly housed Veterans are more successful long term when they have all the new or gently used items they need to make their house a home. Event planners may use this sample checklist to help develop a move-in essentials program for Veterans exiting homelessness:

Living Room/Dining Items

- [ ] Kitchen table
- [ ] Chairs
- [ ] Sofa
- [ ] Side tables
- [ ] TV stand
- [ ] Gift card to a home store or PatriotStore

Bedroom Items (full- or queen-size linens)

- [ ] Sheet set
- [ ] Comforter
- [ ] Blanket
- [ ] Pillows
- [ ] Mattress
- [ ] Mattress pad
- [ ] Laundry basket
- [ ] Gift card to a home store

Kitchen Items

- [ ] Pot and skillet with lids
- [ ] Dishware *(4-8 place settings)*
- [ ] Drinkware *(8 glasses)*
- [ ] Flatware *(4-8 place settings)*
- [ ] Serving utensil set
- [ ] Measuring cups and spoons
- [ ] Oven pan (9x13) and/or cookie sheet
- [ ] Dishcloths
- [ ] Kitchen trash can and bags
- [ ] Gift card to a home store or PatriotStore

Bath Items

- [ ] Bath towels *(4)*
- [ ] Hand towels *(4)*
- [ ] Wash cloths *(4)*
- [ ] Shower curtain, liner and rings
- [ ] Soap dish and toothbrush holder
- [ ] Bathroom rug set
- [ ] Gift card to a home store, PatriotStore or other store that sells personal care products

Posters

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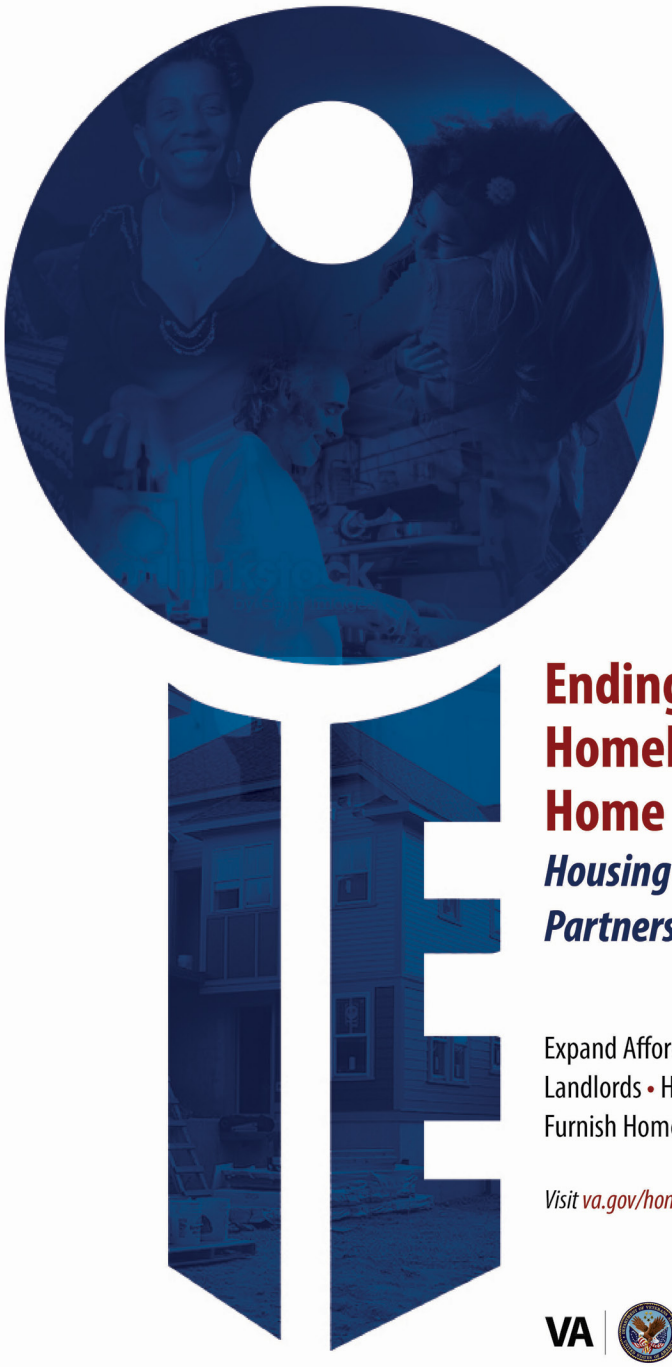
View Full Size



Ending Veteran Homelessness, One Home at a Time.

Housing and Community Partners Can Help.

Expand Affordable Housing • Enlist Landlords • Help Veterans Move In To and Furnish Homes

Visit va.gov/homeless and get involved.

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Wallet Cards

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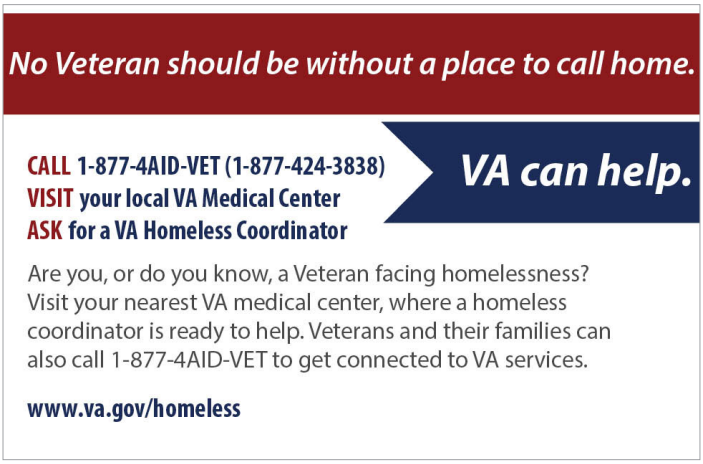

Resources to End and Prevent Homelessness

Use the following resources to learn more about and help end and prevent Veteran homelessness:

Information and Outreach Tools

- VA's homeless programs website: www.va.gov/homeless
- VA Community Employment Coordinator locator: www.va.gov/HOMELESS/HVCES.asp
- VA Employment and Housing Toolkits: www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp#toolkits
- VA homeless Veteran outreach posters, fact sheets and more: www.va.gov/homeless/get_involved.asp.
- VA Pathways from Homelessness video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eApKlyIA6mc
- VA's upcoming Stand Downs and other events: www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp

Background and Research

- National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans (NCHAV): www.va.gov/homeless/nchav/index.asp
- Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness: www.usich.gov/opening_doors
- The State of Homelessness in America, 2016, National Alliance to End Homelessness: www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/SOH2016

Additional Information

- VA's National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (NCCHV): **1-877-4AID VET** (1-877-424-3838)
- VA Veteran Canteen Service PatriotStore Locator: www.vacanteen.va.gov/PatriotStoreHome.php
- VA Medical Center Locator: www.va.gov/directory/guide