

VA Palo Alto Health Care System – Permanent Supportive Housing Veterans with a History of Sexual Offense

An Innovative Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

White Paper

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

Developed by
VHA National Homeless Program Office

INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Program Office identifies and disseminates innovative practices in homeless program operations. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS), in partnership with the Santa Clara County Continuum of Care (CoC), has been identified as a site with an innovative practice for their ability to provide permanent supportive housing (PSH) to Veterans who must register as having a history of sexual offense.

PRACTICE OVERVIEW

PSH units, subsidized through flexible funds, are effective in serving Veterans on State lifetime sex offender registries.

Identifying housing solutions for Veterans who are on State lifetime sex offender registries has been a consistent challenge for VA homeless programs. The barriers to housing that these Veterans face often feel insurmountable due to the various legal restrictions on where they can live. Additionally, programs such as the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, ideal for chronically homeless and vulnerable Veterans, cannot serve lifetime registered sex offenders due to HUD statutory limitations prohibiting program participation. Regardless, communities seeking to achieve the goal of ending Veteran homelessness must address the housing needs for these and all other Veterans. The VAPAHCS, in partnership with the Santa Clara County CoC, is one site that has created a unique housing opportunity for Veterans on State sex offender registries through the use of flexible funding.

The Care Coordination Project (CCP) is a PSH intervention administered by the County of Santa Clara's Office of Supportive Housing, which oversees and operates the local CoC. Consistent with traditional PSH programs, it pairs intensive case management and wrap around services with housing subsidies. What makes CCP unique is that the housing subsidies are funded through a mix of sources including County general funds, Mental Health Service Act funds, HUD CoC grant dollars, and traditional Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. This mix of funding allows CCP to be extremely flexible and provide housing for people experiencing homelessness who may not be able to access traditional services. Homeless leaders in the community stress that CCP was not primarily designed for, nor exclusively serves, Veterans with a history of sexual offense and that its flexibility also works for undocumented immigrants, people who need higher levels of care but do not meet criteria for a skilled nursing home facility, and others.

The most flexible funding source for CCP housing subsidies is the County general fund. In 2012, the County of Santa Clara's Board of Supervisors approved \$2 million in pilot funding for housing subsidies to allow the CCP to demonstrate the community benefit of flexible housing subsidies for chronically homeless people. The

success of the program led the county to increase its investment in CCP over the years such that the County's general fund budget for fiscal year 2019, not including supportive services, is \$7 million.

It was not until 2014 that the full potential of CCP's flexibility became known to VA. A service gap was identified by one of VAPAHCS's Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Contract Emergency Residential Services (CERS) programs that, at the time, was serving an ever-increasing number of Veterans on California's lifetime sex offender registry. Needing options for these Veterans, the VAPAHCS's HCHV Program Manager initiated conversations with the Santa Clara CoC to utilize CCP. After almost a year of planning, policy reviews, and program development, in the Summer of 2015, a partnership was finalized whereby VA would provide the intensive case management and wrap around services for up to 80 Veteran households subsidized by CCP. These resources could not only be used for Veterans on sex offender registries, but also for any homeless Veterans with unique housing barriers. Two HCHV social workers were contracted by VAPAHCS to support the partnership. These positions were eventually converted to full-time VA positions in 2016, and two additional full-time HCHV social workers were added to assist. To track program admissions and subsidy use, the social workers had edit-level access to the CoC's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database.

"If you want to increase access to housing for registered sex offenders, you don't go out to create housing for consumers on sex offender registries. Instead, you need to build housing that is flexible and that can serve a wide variety of participants. Then you can connect people who happen to be on the sex offender registry to homes."

**Shelly Barbieri,
PSH Program Manager
Santa Clara County**

Since the CCP partnership began in 2015, 28 Veterans on California's lifetime sex offender registry were housed through the program. Of those served, nine have either graduated or have discharged from the program, with only two of the nine doing so for negative reasons. Though they have made much progress, improvements are still taking place, particularly in how referrals occur.

CONCLUSION

When paired with the robust supportive services offered by the VA health care system, flexible housing subsidies can fill the gaps in a homeless service system, ensuring that all Veterans have a safe place to call home. We would like to thank the dedicated staff at the VAPAHCS for sharing this practice with us. If you have questions about this practice, please contact Jennifer Knapp, Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator at Jennifer.Knapp@va.gov.