

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: March 9, 2021

From: Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services/CMO (11)

Subj: Protocol for Placing Homeless Veterans in Emergency Housing (VIEWS 4666560)

To: Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Directors
VISN Homeless Coordinators
Medical Center Directors

Thru: Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations (15) *TC*

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to issue guidance to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers (VAMC) and their VA-funded community-based partners regarding the triage and assessment of unsheltered homeless Veterans seeking assistance, ensuring that whenever feasible, placement in appropriate VA and community emergency housing (EH) is provided the same day that services are sought. Access to immediate EH is essential to the health and safety of our homeless Veteran population. The expectation of the national Homeless Program Office (HPO) is that VAMCs will make every effort to provide homeless Veterans with same day access and placement into an EH bed during regular business hours. It is also expected that VAMCs have policies and procedures in place outlining the process for assisting Veterans with access to EH during off-tour hours, ensuring that placement into EH occurs as expeditiously as possible.

2. VA Homeless Services rapidly responded to the COVID-19 health crisis by making critically needed resources available to homeless and at-risk Veterans as VA sought to stem the spread of the disease. This effort required temporarily changing the focus of some programs to protect the lives of this vulnerable group. Specifically, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program, a permanent housing program, used its unique authorities to create urgently needed EH beds in hotels and motels. Between April 2020 and February 2021, SSVF made more than 25,000 placements in hotels and motels, significantly reducing potentially severe health impacts for these Veterans. However, SSVF is principally a permanent housing program and with the development and new EH resources and the ongoing rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations, SSVF hotel and motel placements should be considered only after other VA or community options have been considered.

3. Since the onset of this pandemic, other VA programs having significantly expanded their capacity to meet the needs of this unsheltered population. The Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) and Contract Residential Services (CRS) program is VA's primary gateway to low-barrier EH services. Grant and Per Diem transitional housing options may also offer access to low-barrier transitional

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housing. Additionally, Continuums of Care have developed Coordinated Entry (CE) Systems that offer pathways into EH, however, if local CE cannot provide same-day access to safe EH, VA needs to utilize available VA resources for placement.

4. Assessment and intake processes must not be a barrier for accessing same day EH. Long-term housing assessments should be completed after EH entry with only basic eligibility screening needed at initial entry. These EH placement decisions, particularly those that occur during off-tour hours, may result in program transfers to an alternate EH program after initial placement once a more complete assessment has been made. Furthermore, it is expected that Veterans will be seen and assessed for EH services regardless of their ability to provide specific eligibility documentation such as a DD-214. If a Veteran presents with a Veterans Health Identification Card (VHIC), then their eligibility for VA health care has been verified and there should not be any reason for homeless program staff to further verify Veterans status or enrollment in VA health care.

5. It is expected that any local protocols developed by the VAMC prioritize program resources designed to provide on-demand EH, such as the HCHV and CRS (Attachment) or community-based emergency shelter, before other EH options.

6. Should you have further questions regarding the creation of your local EH protocol, please contact Eileen Devine, National Director HCHV, by email at Eileen.devine@va.gov.



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Date

Attachment