

# 2023 VA Permanent Housing Conference Atlanta, Georgia

Coordinated Outreach and Access to Emergency Services

# Agenda

- Defining Coordinated Outreach
- Assessing your Local Outreach Response
- Integrating Best Practices to Build Relationships
- Using Outreach to a Mechanism to Move Veterans to Permanent Housing

# Who is in the room?

- **SSVF Staff**
- **HUD-VASH Staff**
- **VA leadership**

# System Basics: What is Coordinated Outreach?



# System-Wide Infrastructure to Support Engagement with Veterans

- **Outreach** - a systematic, coordinated process to identify households (including Veterans), who are unsheltered or exiting institutions, to engage them around interim and permanent housing based on needs and wants.
- **Coordinated Entry (CE)**– required process to identify, assess, prioritize and match people experiencing homelessness to crisis response and permanent housing programs.
- **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** - required web-based data collection system that gathers data on people experiencing homelessness as they move through programs and the system. Used to identify areas for performance improvement.
- **Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation System (HOMES)** - the online data collection system that tracks homeless Veterans as they move through VA's system of care.

# Core Elements of Coordinated Outreach

- **Coordinated Outreach is Systematic**

Requires collaboration between agencies and stakeholders- outreach is conducted on *behalf* of the community rather than one *agency*.

- Street outreach is coordinated among providers- various providers with multiple funding streams engage in street outreach, coordination makes these efforts successful and outcomes positive for those being served.
- All street outreach contacts and housing placements are shared- this can be in HMIS, other data systems or the By-Name List (BNL).
- Intentionally includes persons with lived experience to provide feedback on the approach and to participate in coordinated outreach.

- **Coordinated Outreach is Housing Focused**

- Street outreach should utilize Housing First approaches.
- The goal is connections to stable housing with tailored services.
- Street outreach does not require people to enter Emergency Shelter (ES) or Transitional Housing (TH) to access housing but offers it as an immediate option.



# Why is Coordinating Street Outreach Efforts Important?

- Ensures a first line of defense to keep people experiencing unsheltered homelessness alive, particularly in extremely hot or cold weather.
- A coordinated approach allows outreach teams to expand their reach.
- Reaches vulnerable Veterans who won't seek services on their own.
- Reaches Veterans who can't or won't stay in shelter, including those who may refuse shelter because of past discriminatory experiences due to their race, sexual orientation, disability status etc.
- Reduces confusion and information sharing request to Veterans who may otherwise be engaged multiple times by different outreach teams and asked to complete duplicative assessments.
- Provides a more seamless connection to Coordinated Entry and VA services, including interim and permanent housing.
- Allows for real time engagement at entry for Veterans who may utilize shelters infrequently or only during weather emergencies.

# Assessing your Local Community Response





## Questions for Consideration

- Does your community coordinate outreach efforts between VA and community programs, and between Veteran specific programs and other community outreach?
- Is the path to connect Veterans to VA services clear for outreach workers who may engage with Veterans? And is this documented in writing?
- Is there same-day access to interim housing if a Veteran is agreeable to enter GPD, HCHV or other shelter programs?
- Does engagement with outreach lead to permanent housing? Specifically, are programs connecting and using BNLs and case conferencing to identify housing plans based on Veterans needs and wants?

# Collaborative Strategies



Using a BNL and case conferencing for the purposes of service coordination



Disaggregating data to understand disparities in who is unsheltered (by race, ethnicity, gender, age)



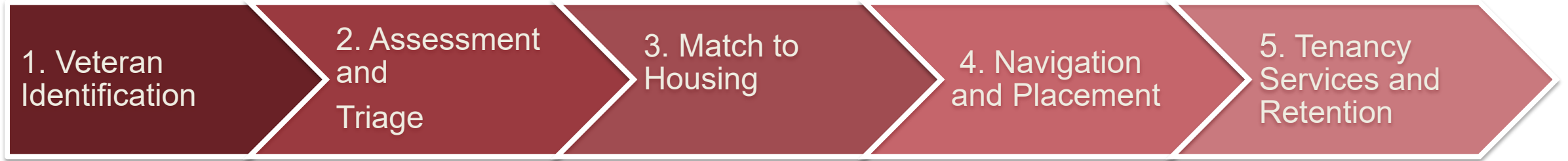
Coordinating outreach logistics



Reaching partners outside the homeless services community

# Create One, De-Duplicated By Name List (BNL) of Veterans

- A key strategy to ending homelessness is to know exactly who is experiencing homelessness in your population and track client-level progress to permanent housing.
- Set up the BNL as a tool to move Veterans through the different stages of a housing search.



- Consolidate multiple lists of Veterans in a community into one.
- Leverage Coordinated Entry Specialists to reconcile the list between HOMES and HMIS.
- Review [VA privacy and security policies](#) related to Veteran BNLs; engage VA and partner privacy officers as needed to streamline data sharing activities.

# Implement Frequent, Action-Oriented Case Conferencing

- Case conferencing can ensure holistic, coordinated, and integrated assistance across providers for all Veterans, if it is inclusive of all partners.
- Case conferencing should include all participating programs working together to meet Veterans' needs, rather than each program or staff person having to help resolve all the housing barriers a Veteran faces.
- When Veterans who are unsheltered are having contacts with multiple programs, case conferencing can clarify roles and responsibilities and reduce duplication of services.
- Use Case Conferencing to review progress and barriers related to each Veteran's housing goal;
  - To identify and track systemic barriers and strategize solutions across multiple providers;
  - To identify and intervene when a Veteran is at risk of returning to homelessness.

# Data Can Help You Understand and Address Disparities

- A great starting point to refine existing processes can be to jointly review system-level data to understand disparities in who is served by your system and what their housing outcomes are.
- Pay attention to whether the demographics of those served match the overall demographics of your community.
- Are there disparities in outcomes (entries into shelter or GPD, exits to PH, returns to homelessness) by race or ethnicity? This can help ensure your collaboration efforts and any process changes are informed by data and driven to emphasize equity across programs, including those targeted to Veterans.
- In addition to data available in HMIS and HOMES, two tools that can help support these efforts are:
  - The HPO Racial Equity Dashboard (based on HOMES data and available to VA employees)
  - The SSVF Equity Report (available to all SSVF grantees)

# Potential Coordination Points for Outreach Teams



SCHEDULE



LOCATIONS



DATA  
COLLECTION



ENCAMPMENT  
PROTOCOLS



EMERGENCY  
WEATHER  
PROCEDURES

# Coordinating Logistics

- Programs serving Veterans should participate in coordinated outreach with other community providers.
- There should be a plan for how to connect Veterans with same-day shelter and permanent housing resources when Veterans are engaged by any community programs. In many communities SSVF providers may fill this immediate role.
- Programs serving Veterans should also active participants of larger outreach planning to resolve encampments or any severe weather protocols.

# Coordinated Outreach and Re-Engagement Efforts

- Ensure that outreach efforts are comprehensive—covering a full geographic area and the multiple settings within it—and coordinated across all teams and providers.
- Collaborate with outreach providers beyond the CoC and VA systems to increase the likelihood of finding Veterans who are not regularly engaging with programs or services.
- Sharing information across outreach teams and sites, and in coordination with other systems, including law enforcement, hospitals and emergency departments, prisons and jails, libraries, and job centers.
- Partnering with law enforcement, prisons, jails, and hospitals to conduct both in-reach and outreach to reduce the cycle between homelessness and criminal justice system involvement.



# Expanding Partnerships: Connecting With Community Resources

## Public systems

- Common public systems- Police and Sheriff's offices, jails, libraries, schools
- Uncommon systems- County road crews, game wardens and conservation agents.

## Non-profits

- Common non-profits- Food banks, Community Action Agencies, shelters
- Uncommon- Churches and religious organizations, Veteran Service Organizations (VFW, AM Vets etc.),

## Site based outreach

- Common- drop-in centers, day programs, meal locations, shelters
- Uncommon- Truck stops/gas stations, laundromats, liquor stores

# Cast a Wide Net With Information

- **Distribute information broadly**
  - Provide flyers, brochures, and contact information to all organizations you work with
  - Place information in shelters, gas stations, laundromats etc. to ensure visibility
- **Make contacting outreach teams easy**
  - Phone numbers, email, social media etc.
  - Schedules of locations and times of outreach
  - Work with partner agencies to ensure that homeless Veterans can use their phone to make the call
- **Be as responsive as possible**
  - Ensure someone has 24/7 phone coverage
  - Go to Veterans if safe and possible
  - Be proactive

# Discussion: What is the Current State of Affairs in Your Community

*Turn to your neighbor for a brief discussion.*

***After introductions, share:***

- How do these processes square with the efforts in your community?
- What changes could be most impactful to your local efforts?
- Are there any lessons learned or success stories that could benefit other communities?

# Coordinated Outreach Best Practices



# Principles of Effective Street Outreach

- **Outreach is Person Centered, Trauma Informed and Culturally Responsive**
  - Focuses on the person and their strengths and resources
  - Does not make assumptions about what a person might need or want
  - Is respectful and responsive to individual beliefs, identities and preferences
  - Looks to local data to evaluate equity and disparities and tailors' responses to address inequities
- **Provides people the opportunity to say, ‘No’ multiple times while respectfully attempting to engage again**
- **Utilizes problem-solving and Rapid Resolution techniques to explore safe housing options**
- **Emphasizes Safety and Harm reduction**
  - Accepts that some individuals may not initially accept offers of shelter or housing
  - Outreach providers have protocols to ensure safety of all individuals seeking assistance

# Understanding Military Culture to Support Engagement

- Clearly Defined Rules and Expectations-
  - What to wear, where to live, when you can travel, who you can associate with
  - Family and personal issues may get superiors involved- This may include financial issues, domestic violence or disputes, childcare and children's behavior
- Warrior Ethos-
  - Overcoming challenges on your own
  - Fear of appearing weak
  - Can impact Veterans' comfort level in seeking assistance

[Understanding Military Culture: A Guide for Professional School Counselors – The Professional Counselor \(nbcc.org\)](http://nbcc.org)

# Consider that Military Values Could be a Barrier to Accepting Services

- Active-duty service members are often ostracized or for complaining about physical or mental health needs. Verbalizing suicidal ideation can result in removal from duty, and loss of military career.
- Internalized values can remain a barrier to willingness to accept help but can be converted to a strength. Although some veterans reject any association with their military experiences, culture, and values, they remain below the surface.
- By understanding military culture, providers can help veterans use their military values as a strength and be motivated to seek the care they need without feeling like a “failure”.

# Recommendations for Outreach Providers

- Assess your own level of ability and comfort working with untreated serious mental illness, substance use, and serious medical issues.
- Outreach efforts must remain non-judgmental and non-coercive.
- Understand and accept that engagement may take years before there is detectable momentum and celebrate small successes.
- Redefine “success” as this may not always be an outcome of housing.
- Practice good self-care, some situations you encounter in outreach may be very intense and disturbing.



# Best Practices for Success

- Dress appropriately
- Be prepared with enrollment materials in case this is the day the Veteran is interested in engaging
- Build relationships over time, but be persistent yet respectful
- Vary times of day for engagement
- Consider seasonal variations
  - Outreach during cold weather is essential
  - Summer may require a more intentional focus to separate those camping vs. those unhoused

# Safety

## Safety considerations for Outreach:

- Prioritize YOUR safety. You can't help anyone if you are hurt or incapacitated.
- Address safety issues first before attending to any other business. This keeps you and Veterans safe and can reinforce appropriate boundaries.
- If you don't feel safe meeting with a Veteran or going to a location alone, go in teams or ask to meet the Veteran somewhere nearby.
- Always make sure someone knows where you are and when you're expecting to be done.
- Process with colleagues to maintain perspective on safety issues.

# Privacy & Confidentiality

- There is a general lack of privacy for individuals who are experiencing homelessness.
- Privacy can be especially difficult to maintain in group living situations such as shelters or campsites.
- Veterans in a group living situation may not feel comfortable asking to meet in private in front of their peers.
- Whenever possible, offer to meet with a Veteran in private or at least out of earshot from others.

# Boundaries

- The disturbing nature of witnessing homelessness may tempt workers to cross boundaries with Veterans by:
  - Providing personal assistance outside of that offered by your agency.
  - Putting yourself in more risky or unsafe situations for Veterans you are working with.
  - Tolerating inappropriate language and behavior.
  - Others?

# Connections to Emergency and Permanent Housing Services



# Exploring Housing in Outreach

- Is the Veteran currently open to housing? This discussion should include their interest in permanent housing as well as placement in interim housing programs such as HCHV, GPD or shelter.
- Does your community have processes for same day placements in interim shelter? If not, have you explored how to change that?
- How does your community strategically utilize Emergency Housing Assistance or non-congregate shelter settings?
- What are the Veteran's permanent housing preferences, regardless of their interest in a temporary placement?



# VA Funded Interim Shelter Models

	Program Descriptions
<b>HCHV Contract Beds</b>	Beds are prioritized for Veterans transitioning from street homelessness, institutions, and those who need a safe place to sleep.
<b>Grant &amp; Per Diem</b>	Provides transitional housing to help Veterans achieve housing stability, increase income, and develop a pathway toward permanent housing.
<b>SSVF Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA)</b>	Temporary housing assistance for Veterans experiencing literal homelessness, actively participating in a housing plan, and awaiting permanent housing.

# Goals for Interim Housing

Immediately shelter Veterans who need to come inside using the lowest barrier processes possible. Triage, connect and assist with a Veteran's housing and service pathways.

- Same Day Access: Work to create same-day access to open interim housing opportunities.
- Lowest Barrier Admissions: Ensure access to beds has the lowest barrier admissions criteria possible.
- Minimize all process steps to ensure a Veteran can come inside immediately.
- Offer Veterans housing options upon entry and triage to a housing pathway as soon as the Veteran chooses.
- Provide assistance with housing navigation activities such as getting document-ready, gathering documentation to offset housing barriers, transporting, or accompanying to appointments and calling landlords



# Discussion 3: Takeaways and Immediate Actions

Turn back to the colleague you met earlier to share:

- What was something interesting you learned in this session?
- What is the one thing you are most likely to implement upon your return home to improve your local outreach approach?

# Report Out and Wrap-Up