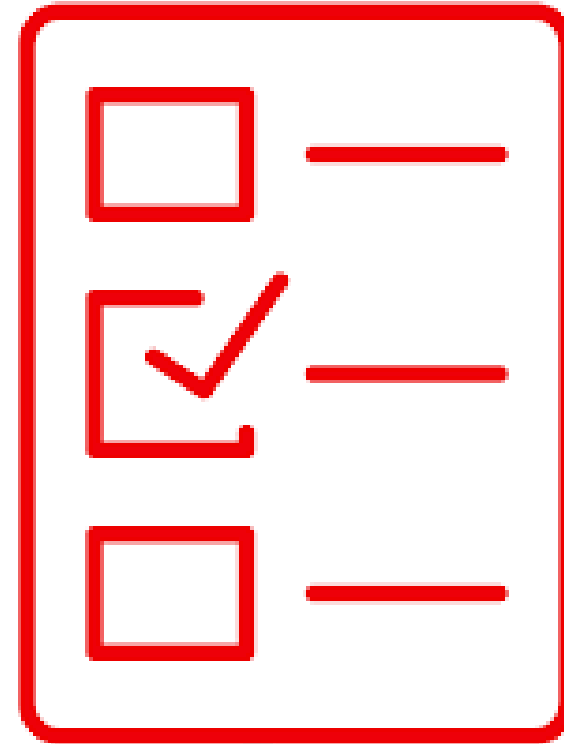


2023 Veterans Affairs Permanent Housing Conference

Equitable Service Design and Delivery

Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions
- Understanding Equity
- Equity Considerations in the Veteran Homeless Response System
- Targeted Universalism
- Centering Equity in System Design and Planning
- Q&A



Who is in the room?

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



U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs Equity Action Plan Summary

For VA, equity means intentionally committing to consistent and systematic fair, just and impartial treatment of all individuals and a just distribution of tools and resources to give veterans, including veterans who are members of underserved communities, what is required to enjoy a full, healthy life. In the 73 years since President Truman desegregated the military in 1948—making discrimination on the basis of race illegal in the armed forces – many forms of inequity persist in American society. VA is not excluded from the systemic injustices and inequities that pervade American society. For example, GI Bill and loan guaranty programs were instrumental in economic prosperity and access to homeownership for veterans in the postwar years, but many Black veterans lacked the same level of access. Additionally, exclusionary policies such as Don't Ask, Don't Tell affected LGBTQI+ service members and led to the involuntary separation and denial of benefits for many LGBTQI+ veterans. Other instances of inequities faced by underserved veterans include disparities in claim rejection rates, unequal posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compensation rates, and address discipline and discharge disparities faced by underserved veterans.

VA's current efforts focus on addressing institutional barriers that may inhibit veterans of color, women, LGBTQ+ veterans, veterans with disabilities, rural veterans who face barriers to service access in remote areas, veterans at-risk for food insecurity, and others who face persistent inequities, from receiving equitable access to the service and benefits they have earned.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/VA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

Equity Terms & Definitions

To ensure we are centering equity and centering considerations of marginalized and oppressed, diverse populations, consider the following terms for appropriate use of language.

Person with Disabling Condition(s)

A person who has been diagnosed with a physical or mental disability.

Gender

Gender Identity is how a person chooses to identify their gender.

BILPOC

An acronym used to encapsulate all persons who are Black, Indigenous, Latina/o/x, Native and/or other people of color.

AAPI

An acronym used to encapsulate persons who are Asian American and/or Pacific Islander.

LGBTQ+

An acronym used to encapsulate persons who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning. The “+” sign captures identities beyond LGBTQ; e.g., pansexual, asexual, and nonbinary identities.

Equity Terms & Definitions (continued)

Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the procedures organizations implement to integrate everyone in the workplace, allowing their differences to coexist in a mutually beneficial way. The goal of inclusion strategies is to make everyone feel accepted and comfortable, ready to share their opinions and thoughts without hesitation.

Targeted Universalism

An approach that aims to achieve universal goals by implementing targeted strategies tailored to specific groups or communities facing particular challenges or disadvantages. It recognizes that different groups may require different interventions to address their unique needs and circumstances, while still working towards a common goal of achieving equity for all.

Intersectionality

A concept that recognizes and examines the interconnected nature of various social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, and how they intersect to shape an individual's experiences and social position. Intersectionality highlights that individuals can experience multiple forms of oppression or privilege simultaneously, resulting from the intersections of different aspects of their identity.

Understanding Equity

Equality vs Equity in Practice

EQUALITY

VS.

EQUITY



**EQUALITY = SAMENESS
GIVING EVERYONE THE SAME THING**

It only works if everyone starts from the same place



**EQUITY = FAIRNESS
ACCESS TO SAME OPPORTUNITIES**

We must ensure equity before we can enjoy equality

Understanding Equity

Equality is about sameness; it focuses on making sure everyone gets the same thing.

Equity is about fairness and making sure everyone has the opportunity to achieve positive outcomes; it ensures that each person/population **gets what they need**. It addresses the differences to achieving positive outcomes.

Equity is achieved when:

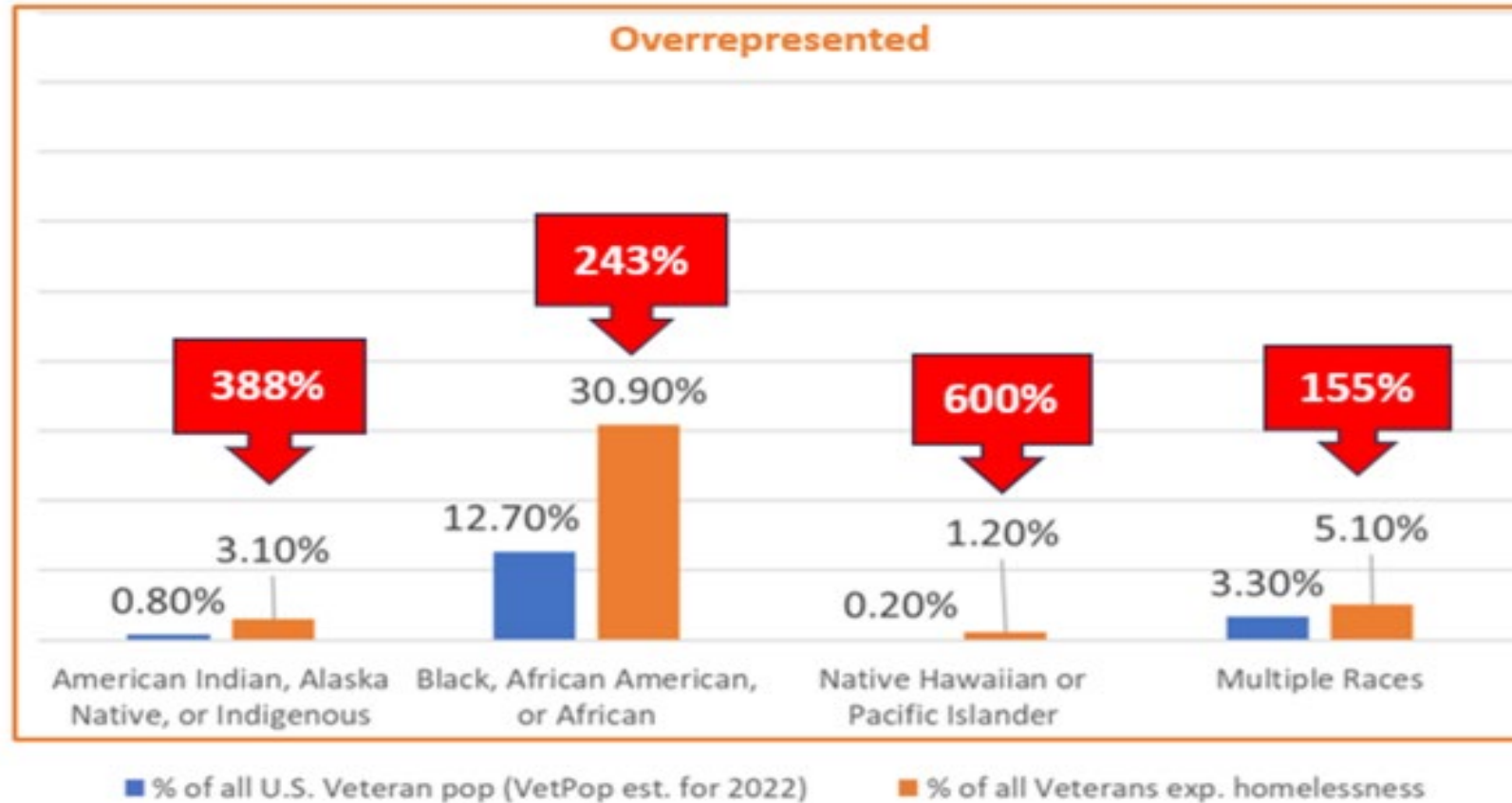
Traits such as gender, race, sexual orientation, age or disability status can no longer be used to predict outcomes.

Why is it Important to Lead with Equity?

- Allows us to be good fiscal stewards of our funding.
- Race is the single largest predictor of outcomes along the social determinants of health.
- We have an ethical responsibility to provide equitable services to all of our community members.

Equity Considerations in the Veteran Homeless Response System

Effective Services for Veterans At-Risk for or Currently Experiencing Homelessness in Addressing Racial Equity



Contributing Risk Factors in Returns to Homelessness

There is a combination of reasons why some Veterans return to homelessness, but compared to Veterans who did not return, Veterans who returned to homelessness were:

- 38% more likely to have a diagnosis of drug use disorder.
- 18% more likely to be Black.
- 16% more likely to be unmarried.
- More likely to have no VA service - connected disability.
- More likely to be less engaged in VA outpatient care and more engaged in VA acute care.

Equity is Effective Service Delivery

54 percent of those served by SSVF are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC).

“Members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus (LGBTQ+) community are more likely to become homeless, and once homeless, more likely to endure discrimination and harassment that extends their homelessness.” (HUD Exchange)

Homelessness in older adults continues to increase even as the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness overall decreases. Over 50% of all homeless Veterans are age 50+.

65% of those served by SSVF have been diagnosed with a disability.

Programs that are designed to effectively serve the most marginalized serve everyone else more effectively too.

Organizational Focus on Equity and Social Justice

Agency Policies, Procedures, and Data Collection Practices

- Making equity and social justice a part of your Mission Statement.
- Embedding an equity and social justice focus within day-to-day operations, including the tracking of equity goals.
- Prioritizing support both for the staff and populations served.

Strategic Organizational Practices

- Partnering with local and regional alliances/organizations, including persons with lived experience and expertise of homelessness.
- Engaging in the fair distribution of financial, programmatic, and informational resources.

Organizational Focus on Equity and Social Justice (Examples)

- Hiring staff who are reflective of the communities and cultures served, including diverse Veterans with lived experience and expertise of homelessness.
- Providing equitable professional development opportunities.
- Developing and delivering training on the topics of discrimination and bias.
- Ensuring safe spaces for supervision and discussion.

Targeted Universalism

Targeted Universalism

With Targeted Universalism, we recognize that different groups need targeted supports to achieve universal goals.

Five Steps for Targeted Universalism Framework



Establish a universal goal



Assess performance relative to the goal



Identify differences in performance (by population) between goal and overall population



Assess and understand the persistent drivers of inequities and disparities



Develop and implement targeted strategies to remove barriers and close disparities

Targeted Universalism: Example (data below is not actual)

Steps:	Scenario:
1. Establish a universal goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal: 90% of Veterans experiencing homelessness report satisfaction with VA services
2. Assess performance relative to the racial justice goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Average: 90% of Veterans experiencing homelessness report satisfaction with VA services• Veterans who identify as LGBTQ+: 50% of Veterans who identify as LGBTQ+ and are experiencing homelessness report satisfaction with VA services
3. Identify different performance between goal and overall population	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 40% difference from goal for Veterans who identify as LGBTQ+

Targeted Universalism: Example (data below is not actual)

Steps:	Scenario:
4. Assess and understand the persistent drivers of inequities and disparities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VA and VA funded program staff are not representative of the population most disenfranchised• Lack of accessibility to resources and services, including transportation and technology• Limitation of specialized services (rural areas)
5. Develop and implement targeted strategies to remove barriers and close gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit & hire staff that is representative of the population most disenfranchised, including Veterans with lived experiences and expertise• Develop cross-sector coordination with other service providers to provide linkages to culturally responsive services• Provide Equity, Cultural Humility, and responsiveness training to all staff• Invite Veterans with lived experiences of homelessness to share their experiences to inform targeted strategies for the full lifecycle of the project/process

Targeted Universalism

1. Lead with Equity & Convene Partners

- Ensure Veterans with lived expertise are meaningfully partnered with as a part of the process for the full life cycle
- Ensure that the system being built for the housing surge focuses on eliminating barriers to housing racially marginalized (Indigenous, Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) and historically disenfranchised Veterans (including women, LGBTQ+, person with disabling condition, criminal-legal system involved)

2. Set Racial and Social Equity Goals

- Breakdown local goal by race, ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual orientation
- Actively lead with equity

3. Identify barriers to housing for racially marginalized and historically disenfranchised Veterans

4. Implement targeted strategies to address gaps/disparities/barriers while engaging in continuous quality improvement process

Equity in System Design and Planning

Targeted Universalism in Practice

Conduct an internal assessment of your system design and planning:

- **Engage partners** as a part of your analysis team; including *Veterans with Lived Experiences and Expertise*
- **Look at data and gaps** in data *by population*
- **Map out every step that a Veteran takes** when entering/exiting your homeless response system on a *system level and an organizational level* to see where disparities may be occurring

Targeted Universalism in Practice (cont.)

Focus on internal system and organizational design processes that look at

- Access limitations
 - Inclusive processes, sites, and services
 - System decision points
 - Equality versus Equity focused approach
 - Policies, procedures, and practices
 - Community Advocacy and inclusive partnerships
- Identify and implement targeted strategies to address gaps/disparities
 - Monitor for intended (and unintended outcomes)
 - Create policies to maintain strategies, as required

Is there anything else missing from this list that could be added?

Understanding Inclusion

What is inclusion?

- Inclusion involves making sure that all employees feel a sense of belonging in the workplace. It means that all workers feel comfortable, appreciated, and supported by the company to be their authentic selves, work in a way that suits them, and deliver their organization's needs.
- For better productivity, each employee should feel valued and appreciated at work by their employer and peers. It's all about ensuring that all employees know they are welcome to the company and add value.

Why Does Inclusion Matter?

- Inclusion plays a vital role in any organization.
- Creating an inclusive workplace is a vital aspect of a high-quality, “winning” employer.
- **Note:** Even though professionalism and etiquette are vital in the workplace, employers should not bar individuals from being their authentic selves.
 - As an employer, you should not make the employees shield their identity to fit in the company.
 - Your employees should walk through the door without being afraid to express who they are.

Impacts of Diversity Equity and Inclusion

What Does Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DE&I) mean for your program?

The advantages of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace are innumerable, ranging from increased productivity to increased employee retention. More importantly, the benefits of DE&I will not just be felt by your firm but by every single employee in the organization.

These benefits include:

- Bigger talent pool
- Increased employee engagement and trust
- More innovation
- Better decision-making
- Low turnover rates
- Increased productivity

Measuring Results Within an Equitable Service System

How to Measure Results

How will you know what is or is not working with your program as far as DE&I is concerned?

- The best thing to do is to listen to your employees. You want a diverse program, which better represents the views of your employees. Talking to them will help you understand where there are opportunities for improvement.
- Revisit this question on a regular frequency and build in capacity to respond to the request of the staff, community, recipients and stakeholders.

Suggested Questions for Measuring Results

- Are there differences at different system checkpoints?
- Access to the program? To system resources?
- Outreach efforts or targeting?
- Temporary Financial Assistance Utilization?
- Length of time to lease up?
- Exits to housing?
- Returns to homelessness?
- Veteran experience?
- Are the services and approaches led with cultural humility?
- Is the environment inclusive and reflective of the community's diversity (and those in need)?

Sample Questions

- How do we hold ourselves accountable to leading with equity?
- Who are we partnered with as a part of this work? For example, grassroots advocacy groups or Veteran Advocacy groups?
- How do we message and implement our commitment to equity? For example, vision, strategic plan, etc.
- How is disaggregated data actively monitored and shared? Across agency? Across homelessness system?

Practice Scenario for your Community

Your team has engaged in an internal, agency level review of data and identified that Veterans, who have been diagnosed with disabilities, are re-entering homelessness at a rate higher than their community representation and at a higher rate than other populations.

Questions:

- What questions should you ask?
- What should your next steps be?
- What additional supports/partners should you pull in?

Scenario (cont.)

After looking even further, your team determines that a contributing factor is that Veterans, who have been diagnosed with disabilities, are taking longer to build income in the private job market.

Questions:

- What additional questions might you ask?
- What additional specialized supports/partners should you pull in?

Discussion

As discussed throughout the Permanent Housing Conference sessions **the primary purpose of SSVF & HUD VASH is to end Veteran homelessness for all Veterans.** However, we are seeing disparities in program outcomes based upon sub-population, e.g., race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+, age, disability status, and gender.

- What are some action steps- that you can possibly take now- to address disparities or gaps? System level? Organizational level?
- What additional training, supports, and resources would be helpful to understand or address this?
- In what ways has your program already been examining ways to embed and support equity? In Veteran services/system work? Within program policies/practices and staffing?
- What are some of the barriers that you see with this work? How do you address or overcome the barriers?
- What immediate questions do people have following the session today? Any immediate clarifications needed?

Questions



Resources

HUD Resources

- [CoC Analysis Tool: Race and Ethnicity](#)
- [Stella P Race and Ethnicity Analysis Guide](#)
- [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Data & Equity: Using the Data You Have](#)

VA Resources

- SSVF Equity: Focus on Race and Ethnicity presentation ([slidelinek](#); [video link](#))
- [SSVF Equity Report: Slide Link](#)
- [Analyzing Racial Disparities in the Homelessness System: What You Should Know](#)

USICH Resource

- [Emerging Strategies for Addressing Racial Inequities in our Efforts to End Homelessness](#)

CQI Resource

- [How to Guide 8 – Continuous Quality Improvement](#)