Returning Home Initiative (RHI)

Description and FAQs

Helping Homeless Veterans Find Housing in Their Community of Origin

Concept: Offer homeless Veteran households the option of returning to their community of origin or to a community where the Veteran has available supports to facilitate housing placement. These placements would be supported with resources from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and Department of Housing and Urban Development – Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) programs.

Background: An analysis conducted by the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans (NCHAV) found that 15.3 percent of all homeless Veterans migrated across VISNs in the two-year period of 2011 to 2012. Among chronically homeless Veterans, migration occurs even more frequently and comprised 20 percent of that population. Although the number of homeless Veterans who migrated within a VISN is not known, it would certainly significantly increase the percentage of homeless Veterans who have moved into new communities. For Veteran households that have migrated to metropolitan areas with low housing vacancy rates, the barriers they face to finding suitable housing may be particularly acute. With few supports, these Veterans do not have the family and friends that often offer not only social and emotional support, but are frequently the safety net that prevents these households from falling into homelessness.

According to data from the US Census, in 2017 Washington state had the lowest rental vacancy rate of any state at 3 percent. California has both the largest number of homeless Veterans and the third lowest rental vacancy rate of any state at 3.4 percent (Vermont is second at 3.2 percent). There are a number of communities in California where it is particularly difficult to find affordable rentals and even those with HUD-VASH vouchers struggle to secure housing. Communities with the lowest vacancy rates that continue to experience high numbers of homeless Veterans include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Rental Vacancy Rate, lowest quarter in 2017(%)</th>
<th>2017 Point In Time Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles/Long Beach</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco/Oakland</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1,329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Plan: As significant numbers of homeless Veteran households have migrated to communities where they have few supports and limited prospects for finding permanent housing, VA can offer these Veterans the option of returning to their community of origin with the assurance of permanent housing through SSVF, often in collaboration with
HUD-VASH and employment assistance that can be secured through Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services (HVCES).

This opportunity provides a number of benefits:
1. It will reduce homelessness.
2. It will allow Veteran households to return to communities where they are more likely to have a familial and social support network.
3. It may support family reunification.
4. It will reduce competition for scarce affordable housing for those homeless Veterans remaining in target communities with low vacancy rates.
5. It may be used to link Veterans to employment, providing the income critical to sustain permanent housing.

The Homeless Program Office recommends that this intervention be offered in the five communities identified in the table above. The opportunity would be presented to the Veteran after the assessment has been complete and history of moves is understood. It is expected that Veterans agreeing to a return home or relocation to a community where available supports can facilitate successful housing placement will fall into one of three broadly defined groups.

**Group 1:** Veterans seeking family reunification and housing with their family or other social support in their community of origin. SSVF must have direct communication with the family members offering housing to ensure the environment is safe and offers the potential for stable housing after placement.

**Group 2:** Chronically homeless Veterans, who as noted are more likely to migrate, or other Veteran households with significant and ongoing social services needs seeking independent housing in their community of origin. This may include HUD-VASH participants who have not yet been vouchered or placed in permanent housing.

**Group 3:** Veteran households who are able to identify employment either through HVCES or other resources and need only short-term social service support to facilitate their transition back to their community of origin.

For all groups, prior to supporting any move, SSVF must confirm that adequate supports exist in the community where placement is made.

SSVF will be involved to provide transportation assistance. Under 38 CFR 62.33, SSVF is able to provide such assistance to facilitate placement into permanent housing. SSVF may also support housing search efforts, provide case management, and financial assistance for security deposits, rent, and utilities as necessary. SSVF will work with community and VA partners to ensure that appropriate service linkages have been made prior to any move.

Group 2, which will compose some of the most difficult to serve households, will be served through a coordinated effort by SSVF and HUD-VASH teams. Prior to
transporting a Veteran to another community, HUD-VASH staff working with the homeless Veteran will assess and admit the Veteran, coordinating with HUD-VASH staff in the receiving community to ensure that a voucher is available and secured. In addition, HUD-VASH staff, in collaboration with SSVF, will ensure that prior to transporting the Veteran, a temporary housing plan is in place so that when the Veteran returns home no time is spent in a shelter or the street while awaiting permanent housing.

**Impact:** Homelessness will be reduced, Veterans quality of life will be better supported over the long-term, and communities with limited available affordable housing stock will be better able to serve those homeless Veterans remaining. NCHAV will evaluate the impact of this pilot to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

**FAQs**

**Q: What are the departure communities for RHI?**
**A:** Given their PIT counts, high cost and low vacancy rates mentioned above, the departure communities for this pilot are Los Angeles/Long Beach, San Diego, San Francisco/Oakland, San Jose/Santa Clara County, and Seattle.

**Q: How do we determine appropriateness of an arrival community for RHI?**
**A:** There are several factors. For Group 1, confirmation should be obtained that Veteran will be moving in with familial or social support on a permanent basis. For Groups 2 and 3, the arrival communities that the Veteran indicates must be deemed by HUD standards as having more affordable rent with higher vacancy rates. For all groups, it must be determined that the Veteran household can be placed in sustainable housing in the destination community prior to any move.

**Q: How do we determine Veteran eligibility for RHI?**
**A:** Veterans who are enrolled in SSVF for Rapid Rehousing, as well as Veterans enrolled in HUD-VASH but have yet to receive a voucher, can be considered. Please note that this pilot cannot support Veteran cases that are already placed in permanent housing nor HUD-VASH participants who are seeking to port their vouchers.

**Q: How do we determine income eligibility?**
**A:** AMI standards in the departure community will be used for SSVF program admission, but rent reasonableness of the arrival community should be considered. After the move takes place, the destination community’s AMI will be used for eligibility after recertification takes place. Until that recertification occurs, the departure community’s AMI will be used for eligibility determination.

**Q: Who provides funds for the Veteran’s move?**
**A:** The SSVF grantee in the departure community will provide funds for the Veteran’s move, security and utility deposits, and rental assistance. The SSVF grantee in the departure community can continue to provide TFA until the next recertification requirement. The SSVF grantee in the arrival community will be responsible for
completing the recertification when required and if the household remains eligible for services, the arrival grantee can continue services and TFA as needed.

Q: Can we use gift cards for gasoline, food and lodging during Veteran’s travel to arrival community?
A: Yes, gift cards for gasoline and food are allowable for RHI in the amount based on the government mileage reimbursement rate ($0.54/mile) and GSA per diem in the departure community (found here: [https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates)). If the Veteran requires an overnight stay, please reference this same website to locate the maximum allowable lodging rate for the city where Veteran will be staying. The SSVF grantee in the departure community must document participant name, amount, and purpose for issuing gift card.

The SSVF grantee in the arrival community will be responsible for obtaining receipts once the Veteran arrives, and must fax copies of the receipts to the SSVF grantee in the departure community. Please note that the purchase of gift cards is approved for RHI only and is impermissible for all other participants.

Q: How do the SSVF grantees in both the departure community and the arrival community document RHI participation?
A: The SSVF grantee in the departure community enrolls the Veteran as a RRH case in HMIS. Signed ROI to speak with Veteran’s familial or social support in arrival community should be uploaded in HMIS, as well as any other supplemental documentation. This same grantee will keep Veteran’s case open in HMIS until they are no longer providing TFA.

Upon Veteran’s arrival, the SSVF grantee in the arrival community will enroll Veteran in HMIS as a RRH case using the departure community’s AMI eligibility criteria. Depending on the Veteran’s needs, this grantee is responsible for, but not limited to: housing location services; referral to GPD or HCHV as Veteran awaits move into permanent housing; linkages to other services; and, if eligible, assisting Veteran with enrolling into local VAMC. 10 10 EZ found here: [https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/1010EZ-fillable.pdf](https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/1010EZ-fillable.pdf)

Q: Who is responsible for coordinating the move?
The SSVF grantee in the departure community is responsible for coordinating the move, solidifying a reasonably cost plan for transportation, and maintaining contact with the Veteran while they travel to the arrival community.

Q: When is the ideal time for a Veteran to be referred to RHI?
A: Early in engagement prior to placement in permanent housing.

Q: Who should we contact in SSVF Program Office if we are have a Veteran who we think could be a good fit for RHI?
A: You may email SSVF Regional Coordinators, Maxie Pulliam, at Maxine.Pulliam@va.gov and Katie Morrissett at Catherine.Morrissett@va.gov.
Example Screening Questions

Group 1:
- Are you interested in moving away from this high rent/low vacancy city?
- Do you have a friend or family member who is able to provide you with long-term, permanent housing in another city?
- Are you willing to sign an ROI so we can speak with your friend or family member to confirm that they are able to offer you long-term, permanent housing?

Group 2:
- Are you interested in moving away from this high rent/low vacancy city?
- Where do you have strong community ties? Do you have social or family connections in a city with lower rent/higher vacancy?
- If you move to that city, are there people who are willing and able to support you until you are back on your feet?
- Are you willing to sign an ROI so we can speak with them to ensure that you have solid supports upon your return?

Group 3:
- Do you have an employment opportunity in a lower rent/higher vacancy community?
- Are you currently unable to pursue that employment opportunity due to lack of funding to relocate?

For all groups:
- Do you have a HUD-VASH voucher? If yes, this is not an appropriate referral.