

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Re-implementation of SSVF Homelessness Prevention Stage 2 Screener Requirement

In response to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the SSVF Program Office issued [guidance](#) in April concerning modified regulatory and policy requirements in order to ensure the safety of Veterans experiencing homelessness. The guidance gave SSVF grantees far broader flexibility in delivering SSVF services to maximize newly available CARES Act funding. These flexibilities included suspending the requirement for SSVF grantees to use Stage 2 of the Homelessness Prevention (HP) screener and allowing grantees to enroll and assist Veterans in HP before an eviction moratorium is lifted to mitigate economic fallout and housing loss resulting from the pandemic.

Effective January 1, 2021, SSVF grantees are required to use the SSVF HP Stage 2 screener again in anticipation of growing demand for limited HP resources as eviction moratoria expire. The Stage 2 screener is an important tool for prioritizing eligible Veterans in a standardized and equitable manner when demand for HP assistance exceeds available program capacity or temporary financial assistance (TFA) funding. For additional information on SSVF HP screening, please refer to the [SSVF Homelessness Prevention Screening Companion Guide](#).

In addition to considerations outlined in the previously issued [SSVF Homelessness Prevention During the Public Health Crisis](#) guidance, below are some considerations and reminders related to Stage 2 and related HP enhancements.

- Use data to target and provide SSVF assistance with an emphasis on increasing equity.** Leading with equity requires SSVF grantees to continually develop and expand access to targeted HP for Veterans most at-risk of homelessness, including those affected by structural racism or who otherwise disproportionately experience homelessness (e.g., disabled Veterans). There are multiple data resources grantees may use to identify and target locations where Veterans are at greatest risk of eviction, overcrowded housing, and ultimately literal homelessness. At minimum, grantees should be using available HMIS data to identify the types of living situations and locations where Veterans were staying just prior to entering shelter or GPD or engaging with street outreach. Grantees should also use other available data to identify where people experience greater housing instability, concentrated poverty, or other social vulnerabilities, such as from the U.S. Census [American Community Survey](#), the CDC's [Social Vulnerability Index](#), Princeton University's [Eviction Lab](#), and The Urban Institute's [Emergency Rental Assistance Priority Index](#). Once targeted areas are identified, grantees should strive to identify and engage any partner who might encounter an imminently at-risk Veteran and ensure information is available at any location where an imminently at-risk Veteran might learn about SSVF (such as a corner store or laundromat bulletin board).

Grantees should also closely examine program length of stay, assistance amounts, and outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender, etc., and adjust as needed to ensure *equity in outcomes*. Program practices should also be grounded in equity by ensuring HP assistance is flexible, progressive, and able to provide the type and maximum allowed amount and duration of assistance, *as needed and desired*, to assure similar successful housing outcomes for every Veteran no matter the challenges or complexities they face.

- SSVF funding must continue to be prioritized for Veterans who are currently literally homeless.** Even though grantees continue to have flexibility to allocate more than 40% of their TFA funding for HP use, grantees must still continue to prioritize the re-housing needs of Veterans who are literally homeless and either unsheltered or sheltered (including those in EHA

funded non-congregate hotel settings). *Veterans experiencing literal homelessness face the greatest vulnerability to COVID-19. In light of this vulnerability, SSVF funding should be used for HP only to the extent there is no unmet need for rapid re-housing (RRH) assistance among eligible Veterans (i.e., no eligible Veteran is being denied SSVF RRH when needed and desired).*

- **Rapid Resolution services remain an important tool for SSVF grantees.** In all cases, grantees should use a progressive approach to aiding Veterans, beginning with problem-solving and Rapid Resolution approaches that support Veterans in identifying creative, more cost-effective alternatives to literal homelessness. All grantees are expected to use Rapid Resolution and housing problem solving strategies as part of HP screening and prior to committing to full HP services and payments. Additionally, grantees should actively partner with other community resources to support Veterans, such as when a Veteran has significant rental arrears, so that SSVF resources are used only as needed to avoid literal homelessness.
- **Review and update your Stage 2 threshold score based on current conditions, Veteran needs, and program capacity.** Prior to re-instituting Stage 2 screening, SSVF grantees will need to re-establish their Stage 2 threshold score. The threshold score is a minimum score eligible Veterans must meet to qualify for SSVF TFA and can be adjusted as program resources and capacity allow. SSVF grantees serving the same Continuum of Care (CoC) geography or sub-region of a CoC are expected to collaborate and use the same Stage 2 threshold score for local consistency. When examining and updating the score, grantees should consider how recently served Veterans would score, and what alternative resources Veterans can be linked with when they're unlikely to meet the threshold score but need additional assistance beyond what the grantee can provide to help a Veteran avoid literal homelessness.

Stage 2 threshold scores should be established based on current and expected HP demand, program funding, and capacity *after accounting for all RRH demand for all eligible Veterans expected to need assistance*. The Stage 2 threshold score is needed when there are insufficient resources to assist all eligible Veterans particularly those who require TFA or other ongoing HP assistance beyond one-time or short-term rapid resolution assistance not involving TFA. When a program has sufficient capacity to meet the prevention assistance needs of all eligible Veterans, a threshold score of -0- may be used.

- **Ensure SSVF is incorporated into local coordinated entry processes.** Veterans who are diverted from emergency shelter or transitional housing often remain precariously housed and in need of support. Grantees should work closely with coordinated entry staff, including local VA medical centers and other VA staff who encounter and assist Veterans seeking shelter or transitional housing, to make sure they are familiar with SSVF eligibility criteria and can immediately connect Veterans to SSVF HP for Rapid Resolution assistance and/or other targeted HP assistance as needed. SSVF should also be familiar with and have the ability to connect Veterans to non-VA HP resources should the Veteran household not be eligible for or not want to engage in VA-funded HP services.
- **Expand efforts to reach Veterans who are imminently at-risk of homelessness now, or who will be as soon as moratoria expire.** To qualify for HP assistance, Veterans must be within 30 days of having to leave their current residence, have no other safe subsequent housing option (even if temporary) or resources to secure housing. This includes Veterans who face eviction within 30 days and those have already lost their own housing and are now doubled up. In most cases, Veterans most imminently at-risk of becoming literally homeless will already be doubled up and living in overcrowded or unsustainable situations. Eligible Veterans have extremely

limited social networks and few resources and are truly reliant on SSVF as a last resort to avoid literal homelessness. Many Veterans in this high state of risk may not yet be seeking assistance from the VA, the local homeless system, or other resources. SSVF grantees must be proactive and work with partners to identify and assist such Veterans before they exhaust all housing alternatives and require shelter.

Grantees should be actively participating in local eviction prevention efforts and networking, including with agencies administering HUD Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funded homelessness prevention assistance and/or CARES Act funded eviction prevention assistance programs, county Veteran Service agencies, Community Action Agencies, food pantries, legal aid, and other neighborhood-based non-profits serving very low-income people. Grantees should also forge partnerships with county jail and corrections system partners, inpatient behavioral health providers, and others serving Veterans who may be discharged to homelessness or precarious housing.

- **Other flexibilities remain in effect, specifically for Veterans who are in arrears and face imminent eviction and immediate or imminent literal homelessness once eviction moratoriums expire.** This includes instances where an eligible Veteran is in arrears but has not yet received a formal eviction notice. In those situations, grantees can document that the Veteran is accumulating significant debt and, due to limited or no safe alternative housing options or resources, the Veteran will experience rapid housing loss and literal homelessness within 30 days after a moratorium is lifted. In such situations, the criteria set forth in Stage 1 of the screener must still be met. *In other words, this is an exceptional situation where SSVF grantees are allowed the flexibility to address the needs of Veterans who are only sustaining housing and avoiding literal homeless because of an eviction moratorium.*

If you have questions regarding the above guidance, please contact your Regional Coordinator.