

## Service Directed Housing Interventions (SDHI)

[Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#) includes a focus on ending homelessness among Veterans —and by every measure, progress has been significant. More and more communities are developing the coordinated systems and targeting resources that can [effectively end homelessness among Veterans](#). A key driver in this achievement has been the VA [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\)](#) program’s Rapid Re-housing and Homelessness Prevention services.

Individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, or facing the prospect of imminent homelessness, need immediate assistance. By the time they have been approved for SSVF services, most have exhausted their support systems and their financial resources. In the majority of circumstances, an SSVF-assisted Veteran family needs and receives an individualized mix of Supportive Services and Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA). However, in some cases, the housing crisis may be resolvable without SSVF TFA through a **Service Directed Housing Intervention (SDHI)**.

Consistent with a progressive approach, TFA is treated as a “tool in the toolbox”. Sometimes, a family’s housing crisis can be resolved through case management advocacy, mediation and/or linkages to community resources. And when the family can exit or avoid homelessness without using TFA, SSVF programs should take this approach.

### **There are cases when the Veteran is eligible for the SSVF program but cannot receive TFA:**

- A Veteran may be eligible for SSVF Homelessness Prevention assistance, but does not meet the grantee’s targeting threshold score for prioritizing SSVF TFA resources.
- Verification of VA discharge status has not yet been obtained.
- The Veteran family has already reached the limits of TFA under SSVF regulation.

### **There are also situations where the Veteran may be eligible for SSVF services, including SSVF TFA, but strategies have been identified for resolving the crisis without utilizing SSVF TFA. Examples include:**

- Case management, advocacy, mediation and/or connection to a community resource such as legal services or credit counseling can resolve the housing crisis and stabilize housing.
- Financial assistance is necessary but SSVF staff are aware of another source of funds for which the Veteran is eligible and can be accessed immediately in order to exit or prevent homelessness.

### **What is a Service Directed Housing Intervention (SDHI)?**

Previously known as “Light Touch Services”, a SDHI offers any or all of the supportive services available under SSVF, including outreach, case management, assistance with housing referrals or landlord interventions, legal assistance, and/or referrals for VA, public and community benefits and resources. *The only difference is that TFA is not provided by SSVF* (other community resources may offer financial assistance when needed) as part of the initial housing stability plan. It may be that these SSVF services are not “Light” at all, but are both comprehensive and intensive.

Grantees may initially provide SDHI to eligible Veteran families as part of a progressive engagement approach, whether or not they are allowed to receive SSVF TFA. And while it may be that the initial service plan does not include TFA, the housing plan can evolve to include TFA at a later time, once it is clear that SSVF financial assistance is necessary and the Veteran family meets SSVF criteria.

## When Are Veterans Eligible for SSVF But Cannot Receive SSVF Temporary Financial Assistance? (See SSVF Program Guide for further detail.)

- **Veteran is Eligible for SSVF but Does Not Meet the Program's Targeting Threshold Score (HP only).** Each SSVF grantee has established a "homelessness prevention targeting threshold score" to prioritize service requests for Homelessness Prevention. Scores are based on factors that suggest which Veterans would have the most difficulty being rehoused or whose health or well-being would be most affected by homelessness. It may be the case that a Veteran household's situation changes over time and, during SSVF enrollment or recertification, additional risk factors are identified that would lead to a higher score that meets the grantee's targeting threshold score.
- **Veteran Status is Not Yet Confirmed (both HP and RRH).** Along with specific criteria for a very low-income and eligible housing situation, SSVF requires documentation of Veteran status (see SSVF Program Guide for eligibility details). In some cases, it can take weeks to obtain appropriate documentation for Veteran status. If a Veteran who meets all the other eligibility criteria completes and signs an Affidavit of Veteran Status, the program can provide SDHI. However, *until documentation of an eligible Veteran discharge status is secured*, the program cannot provide TFA. (Note: Veterans should not be entered into HMIS until **all** eligibility documentation is secured.)
- **Veteran is eligible for SSVF but has exhausted allowable TFA limits.** SSVF regulation includes limits on the number of uses of housing start-up costs or months of rental/utility subsidies within defined time periods. In some situations, a Veteran family may be eligible for SSVF but may have already exhausted the TFA available to them in that time period. In this case, an SDHI may help resolve or prevent the Veteran household's homelessness without using SSVF TFA.

## Can a Service Directed Housing Intervention Resolve or Prevent Homelessness?

A housing crisis may be resolved without financial assistance; supportive services can be sufficient. For instance, a Veteran may have the necessary financial resources available to obtain and sustain housing but, due to poor landlord references and a criminal record, the Veteran has been unable to find a landlord who will rent to him or her. With SDHI, staff could provide housing placement assistance, referring the Veteran to a partner landlord and providing landlord and tenancy supports until the Veteran has demonstrated that s/he can be a reliable tenant.

The following examples could apply to a Veteran who is:

- Eligible to receive SSVF homelessness prevention services but the Veteran's threshold score does not meet the program's targeting threshold score to receive TFA as part of the housing stability plan (Example A);
- Eligible to receive SSVF homelessness prevention services but facing a housing crisis that can be resolved without TFA (Example A); or,
- Waiting for documentation of Veteran status (Example B).

**Example A. Preventing Homelessness****(Veteran does not meet targeting threshold OR Veteran's housing crisis can be resolved without TFA)**

*A Veteran has been living in his brother's apartment without landlord approval and has caused conflict with other tenants. After several warnings, the landlord filed for eviction. While the brother can pay the rent, neither has the money to secure a new apartment. Despite filing for eviction, the SSVF case manager convinced the landlord to rescind the eviction proceeding and allow the brothers to stay for a trial period of two months. If there are no problems during the trial period, the Veteran will be added to the lease. In return, the case manager will provide supports to both the tenants and the landlord for three months, including responding to any complaints the landlord might receive from other tenants. The case manager also assisted the Veteran and his brother to identify ways to resolve existing conflicts with other tenants and prevent future problems.*

**Example B. Rapid Re-Housing, Securing New Housing****(Waiting for Documentation of Veteran Status)**

*The case manager received a referral for an unemployed female Veteran with a small child staying in a family shelter. The Veteran talked to her family and friends, but none could offer a place to live. The case manager has contacts at the County Social Services Department and helped the Veteran fill out applications for TANF Emergency Assistance, which offers housing start-up costs, three months of rental assistance, childcare assistance, and employment services. The application was immediately approved. Ongoing TANF was also approved\*. The case manager connected the family with a partner landlord and they signed an initial month-to-month lease on a one-bedroom apartment. The case manager also found a nonprofit that offers free furniture to homeless families. She continued to work with the Veteran family until she was assured that all the resources were working effectively.*

\*Note, in this circumstance, the emergency assistance was immediately available through a non-SSVF source. If not immediately available, staff would have to find another non-SSVF funding source to help the family secure housing—at least until the Veteran's discharge status is documented.

**Can you more effectively use SDHI in your SSVF Program?**

Every SSVF-funded program has the tools and ability to provide SDHI to Veteran families who do not meet the criteria for receiving SSVF Temporary Financial Assistance and to those whose housing crisis can be resolved without SSVF TFA. This requires a detailed understanding of the other federal, state, local and private sources of funding that can be quickly accessed for housing start-up costs, arrears and rental subsidies, as well as knowledge of other non-financial services available that SSVF may not be able to provide. Having a comprehensive directory of a wide array of free and low-cost goods and services can also be helpful in crafting creative solutions. Staff training can include "case scenario" problem-solving to identify solutions to Veteran housing crises via a combination of SSVF supportive services and connections to other community resources.

While SSVF Temporary Financial Assistance is a critical tool for SSVF programs, it is not the only option. Supportive Services alone can overcome many of the barriers to keeping or obtaining housing. It is important for SSVF grantees to regularly assess the range of services they offer to participants to ensure that DSHI interventions can be effective. Legal services, employment assistance, benefits counseling, housing specialists, and case management can all play critical roles in resolving a crisis without the use of SSVF TFA. Grantees must also recognize that TFA can only provide short-term monetary relief and therefore assist Veterans in accessing longer-term, sustainable income sources available through employment and entitlement resources (such as SSI/SSD, VA SC and NSC pensions, and SNAP).