

# SSVF Emergency Housing Assistance and VA Homeless Program Coordination Fact Sheet

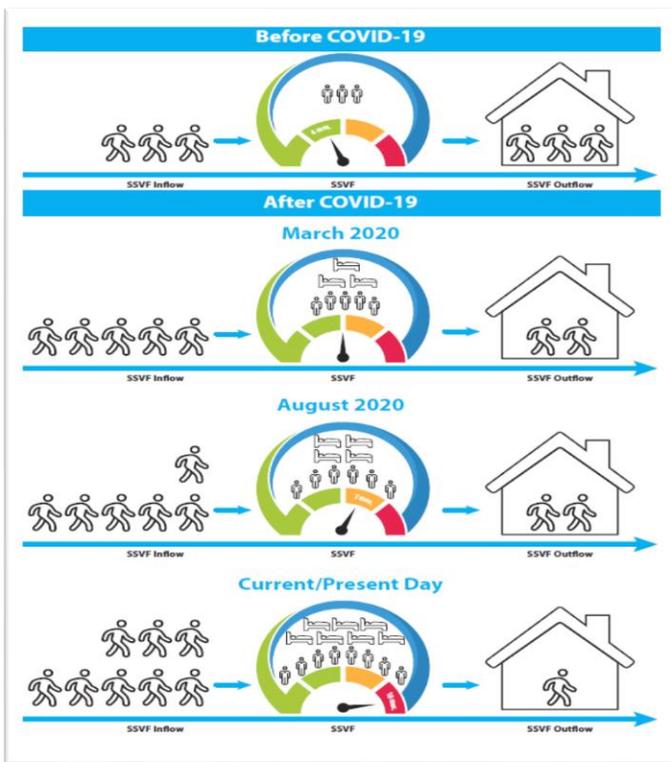
## INTRODUCTION

VA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented flexibilities and resources offered to VA programs and community partners to support homeless Veterans. These flexibilities were introduced early in the national emergency as permanent housing became more difficult to identify and obtain, and the risk of COVID-19 to vulnerable Veterans became apparent.

VA providers, grantees, contractors, and other community partners have worked tirelessly to address the urgent needs of Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness during this crisis. A primary intervention has been the utilization of emergency housing settings, typically hotels and motels, to move Veterans out of congregate environments, unsheltered settings, and other locations with high COVID-19 infection risk. Between March 2020 and November 2020, VA-funded homeless Veteran programs placed over 25,000 Veterans and their family members into hotels in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As always, the VA Homeless Program Office's primary goal is to assist Veterans in obtaining permanent housing and ending their homelessness – as ending homelessness is the best means to ensure the well-being of Veterans and their families. To accomplish this goal, coordination is needed to ensure that all VA and community resources are efficiently utilized to transition Veterans to permanent housing. Such coordination serves to ensure these Veterans do not return to homelessness, while simultaneously freeing up capacity in temporary settings for other vulnerable Veterans. Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) are a natural place to coordinate this effort with community partners and Coordinated Entry Specialists and CES points-of-contact from each VAMC are expected to be key participants in this effort.

**Challenge: There are now more Veterans and their family members in hotels than ever before and fewer Veterans moving to permanent housing, severely straining capacity.**



- The inflow of Veterans moving into hotels has remained constant every month since the start of the pandemic. **SSVF alone has made an average of 1,900 hotel referrals every month.**
- Although Veterans are being moved into safer environments, the outflow to permanent housing has become even more challenging in the current environment. **Once placed in hotels, many Veterans are remaining there much longer than the 45 days recommended by SSVF.**
- **It costs an average of \$4,500 per month** to place and support a Veteran in a hotel, and the focus of programs has been on stabilizing Veterans and families in these settings.
- As displayed on this infographic, a representation of the current needs of homeless Veterans, there is **increased demand, decreased capacity in hotel beds, and decreased movement into permanent housing.**

## **Solution 1: HUD-VASH provides the needed permanent housing resource to facilitate the move to permanent housing for Veterans and their families.**

While SSVF will move a number of Veterans from hotels into permanent housing using rapid rehousing interventions, many of the Veterans residing in hotels are also appropriate for HUD-VASH. In June 2020, the VHA Homeless Program Office released policy guidance on HUD-VASH admissions in response to COVID-19. This guidance directed HUD-VASH programs to leverage available HUD-VASH resources to quickly and efficiently meet the needs of homeless Veterans, and stated that every homeless Veteran in a temporary accommodation (e.g., hotel, congregate shelter, isolation/quarantine) in response to COVID-19 should be considered for a HUD-VASH voucher.

The SSVF and HUD-VASH programs strongly support close collaboration to expedite the movement of homeless Veterans from hotels to permanent housing. Policy guidance originally released in April 2020, and renewed in December 2020, allows SSVF grantees to provide housing search assistance, housing placements, security deposits, and rental assistance for Veterans participating in HUD-VASH and looking for housing. With these new flexibilities, local HUD-VASH and SSVF programs can increase case management capacity by flexibly deploying available resources toward the shared goal of moving Veterans and their families into safe, permanent housing.

The Grant and Per Diem (GPD) and Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Contract Residential Services (CRS) programs also utilize hotels as an option for safe placement of Veterans out of congregate settings. Veterans in these programs may also be eligible to access permanent housing through HUD-VASH. Coordination with local HUD-VASH teams is important to identify and refer appropriate Veterans to permanent housing.

## **Solution 2: Reduce inflows into hotels and motels by utilizing available capacity offered through GPD and HCHV CRS.**

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, SSVF hotel and motel placements were largely used for families so they could be placed in temporary housing together. However, at the start of the pandemic, SSVF was uniquely positioned to place Veteran households in hotels and motels to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission associated with congregate living. Since that initial period, GPD and HCHV CRS programs have significantly strengthened their capacity to provide such housing safely, reducing the need for hotel/motel placements. GPD and HCHV CRS programs should be considered first when seeking emergency housing. Only if capacity is not available, or to meet the unique needs of the Veteran household, should placement by SSVF in hotels/motels be undertaken.

## **Solution 3: GPD may be utilized for Veterans who choose not to immediately accept a permanent housing offer and are not working toward obtaining permanent housing through SSVF Rapid Rehousing.**

If Veterans prefer ongoing residential treatment or other non-permanent support, transitional housing, such as GPD or other community-based options, should be sought as long as those options can provide accommodations that meet CDC guidelines related to social distancing and reducing the risk of COVID-19. Additionally, for Veterans who have accepted a permanent housing offer through SSVF or HUD-VASH, but cannot immediately access that housing, may be considered for GPD bridge housing.

## **Action Steps: What can local programs do to support permanent housing for Veterans?**

- Local homeless program leadership (including SSVF, HUD-VASH, GPD, and HCHV-CRS) should collaborate to ensure the creation of viable permanent housing plans for Veterans currently residing in hotels, motels, or other quarantine facilities. Similarly, coordinated entry specialists and CES points-of-contact at each VAMC are well positioned to lead this collaborative effort and should be involved in this planning effort.
- Hold weekly, virtual case conferences between SSVF and HUD-VASH to ensure Veterans recently placed in hotels are rapidly assessed for HUD-VASH admission where appropriate.
- Review available guidance below to ensure all applicable program flexibilities are being utilized to move vulnerable Veterans into permanent housing.
- Work collaboratively across homeless Veteran programs to increase permanent housing placements and increase emergency housing resources (including hotels and motels) for Veterans in need.

### **Resources:\***

- [Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\) Admissions During COVID-19 Response AUSHO Memo](#)
- [SSVF Assistance for Veterans Participating in HUD-VASH AUSHO Memo](#)
- [SSVF and HUD-VASH Coordination for Co-Enrolled Veterans in Response to COVID-19](#)

If you have any questions about the content in this fact sheet you can contact the SSVF program at [SSVF@va.gov](mailto:SSVF@va.gov) or the HUD-VASH program at [VACOHUD-VASHTeam@va.gov](mailto:VACOHUD-VASHTeam@va.gov).

\*Please note, these documents are on internal VA websites not available to the public.