

SSVF Homelessness Prevention During the Public Health Crisis

The COVID-19 public health crisis, resulting regulatory relief and funding increases for the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program provide an opportunity to expand homelessness prevention services for Veterans at risk of becoming literally homeless. The SSVF Program's top priority continues to be ensuring that the immediate housing needs of literally homeless Veterans who are either unsheltered, or residing in emergency shelter or congregate settings are met. The SSVF Program also strongly encourages SSVF Grantees to be proactive in homelessness prevention outreach as the economic impact of COVID-19 begins leading to potential losses of housing for Veterans. The SSVF Program Office has released guidance stating that SSVF grantees can enroll Veterans in homelessness prevention (HP) even before a state or local eviction moratorium is lifted and that Stage 2 of the Homelessness Prevention Screener is no longer required.

Below are some considerations and opportunities for grantees to ensure SSVF resources are available to help Veteran families avoid becoming literally homeless.

Planning and Program Considerations

- **Conduct periodic spending projections to account for arrears and ongoing financial assistance for HP households.** SSVF grantees are strongly encouraged to keep HP households enrolled and to continue providing assistance while the regulatory relief is in effect; this will help Veteran families gain further housing stability over the medium term and provides more assistance than traditional HP services allowed.
- **SSVF grantees should continue to work closely with their community partners.** HP Planning should be inclusive of the Continuum of Care (CoC), Coordinated Entry Access Points (including 211 lines) Emergency Solutions Grant recipients, Veteran Work Groups/Subcommittees, the VA Medical Center healthcare and homeless programs, GPD grantees, their SSVF Regional Coordinators and other community partners/relevant stakeholders.
- **Consider systems of care in which the whole family, or other parts of the family, interact.** SSVF HP services during COVID-19 may see more cases with children or multi-generational households. Consider how your services and outreach efforts need to adapt to meet this reality, and what that means for service and financial assistance planning.
- **Grantees should spend time assessing and evaluating staff's capacity to engage and support HP households.** As outreach is targeted to engage and enroll more Veterans, the intensity and demand for service needs may be less among some prevention households than traditional SSVF clients. This may mean that staff can work to support more households with higher caseload ratios. Also, consider specialization where some staff have smaller caseloads of more complex households while others focus on households who generally only need the financial assistance.

Homelessness Prevention and Eviction Moratoriums

- **Know if your community has an eviction moratorium and when it expires and if there might be an extension.** Prepare for a potential influx of homeless prevention cases. Coordinate with key partners (legal aid, tenant rights groups, courts, etc.) and fellow SSVF grantees in your area, legal aid and other groups that work on homelessness prevention.
- **Do not wait until eviction moratoriums are lifted to identify and enroll at-risk Veterans.** By enrolling Veterans who are severely debt burdened by their rent before an eviction moratorium lifts, SSVF is better positioned to intervene and coordinate a resolution to the housing crisis with the Veteran and landlord. While grantees should still do their best to document – via the landlord or problem solving conversations with the Veteran - that the household will become homeless once the moratorium is lifted, they do not need to wait until the eviction notice is formally offered to make that enrollment.
- **Understand your local tenant laws related to eviction.** Eviction means different things in different communities. Make sure you understand the timelines associated with housing loss from eviction and how that impacts the SSVF intervention.

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- **Know your court system's current operations and when they plan to reopen if they have not opened already.** Find out who to contact in your court system to alert them to the SSVF resources and how SSVF can help prevent homelessness for eligible Veterans. Make sure you establish a relationship and close coordination with local legal aid and similar groups.

Targeting and Outreach

- **Implement outreach to a broader audience than typically targeted with traditional homelessness prevention. Consider more mainstream outreach or marketing tools that reach audiences who have not traditionally engaged with social services or other housing programs.** Examples include local and social media, employment assistance offices, HVRP programs, VA benefits offices, local/state COVID-related resource pages, VA Healthcare department and programs within the VAMC (medical, clinical, dental, etc), athletic groups, colleges and universities, unions, State and Municipal Departments of Veterans Services, apartment/housing associations, law enforcement, the local chamber of commerce, VFWs, American Legion, tribal groups and social media pages that Veterans may frequent.
- **Ensure an eye toward equity.** Grantees should keep in mind and plan to proactively outreach to people who are traditionally marginalized, including people of color, different ethnic groups, those who speak different language and places of worship. This could include greater partnerships with eviction courts, marketing to certain zip codes, connecting with other interest groups and other activities that proactively reach minority households.
- **Outreach broadly** and to systems and services such as Human Resource Departments and Unions in industries disproportionately affected with layoffs by COVID-19. Conduct Outreach to previously housed clients that may be behind on rent, have experienced significant income loss due to COVID-19, or have significant debt.
- **Target outreach to neighborhoods and with landlords that have histories of higher levels of evictions.** Hanging posters and pull-tab flyers with contact information on them on telephone poles and community billboards in places like laundromats, convenience and tobacco stores and post-offices.
- **Work with other SSVF grantees in your area to design uniform outreach talking points** and program information, including one-page fliers and any relevant considerations when there are multiple grantees serving the same geography.
- **Link with local funding systems and public marketing.** For instance, many jurisdictions will be administering Emergency Solution Grant funds via HUD; connect with your CoC and ESG partners to create a rapid referral line to SSVF for anyone who identifies as a Veteran seeking prevention assistance from other funding systems.

Important Resources and Partners

- **Grantees should be coordinating with employment assistance** such as local career centers; disabled veteran outreach programs (DVOPS) and employment services to support veterans in finding employment.
- **Let your local legal aid group know about SSVF and work with them to make sure SSVF is known in your court system and with other community partners working on homelessness prevention.** Timing can be very important with it comes to civil/legal matters, so having a timely and efficient referral procedure to legal aid will help to aid more households.
- **Connect with schools and educational institutions** who may know students or families who are struggling and provide basic referral information. This include summer learning programs, library programs, virtual camps and other places where children may be interacting outside of the home, virtually or otherwise.
- Note the [Eviction Lab](#) from Princeton University for local information related to eviction laws and prevalence.