

Shared Housing:

A Toolkit for
Supportive Services for Veterans
Families (SSVF) and
Housing and Urban Development-VA
Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)
Programs

Table of Contents

- Introduction: 4
- What is Shared Housing? 5
- Shared Housing: The Basics 5
 - Who is a good fit for Shared Housing? 5
 - Shared Housing Requirements and Basic Principles 5
 - Client Choice..... 5
 - Separate Leases 6
 - Separate Security Deposits and Assistance 6
 - A Habitability/Housing Quality Review..... 6
 - Roommate Agreements 6
 - Shared Housing as it Relates to Administrative Plans 7
 - Resources: 7
- Why Shared Housing?..... 8
 - Housing and Financial Benefits 8
 - Psychosocial Benefits..... 9
 - Challenges of Shared Housing 10
- Shared Housing and Rent Subsidies 11
 - Fair Market Rent and Rent Reasonableness..... 11
 - Fair Market Rent..... 11
 - Rent Reasonableness 11
 - Determining Rental Subsidies and Contributions..... 11
 - Rent Contribution Examples:..... 13
 - Utility Allowances 13
 - Shared Housing Without A Subsidy 14
 - Resources 14
- Matching Roommates..... 15
 - What Makes a Good Match? 15
 - Keeping a Good Situation Going 16
 - Resources 16
- Working with Landlords 17
 - What Makes a Good Match? 17
 - Keeping a Landlord On Board..... 17

When a Roommate Leaves 18
Resources 18

Introduction:

Communities across the United States are struggling to find affordable housing, especially studios and one bedroom units for single persons who live by themselves. Shared housing offers one solution to this housing crisis.

While not limited to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs, shared housing easily fits into Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and, when allowed by the public housing authority's (PHA's) Administrative Plan, Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) programs, supporting Veterans who choose to live with other people as a means of affording stable housing.

Some of the benefits of shared housing are:

- Increased access to a larger, more diverse, housing market
- Reduced housing cost burden
- Reduced living expenses
- Increased social networks and decreased social isolation
- Sustain independent housing for longer
- Help with community integration

This toolkit is designed to discuss what shared housing is, why shared housing may meet the needs of the Veterans you serve, how to think through matching roommates, and how to speak with landlords about shared housing. Resources are linked within the document, as well as at the end of each section.

What is Shared Housing?

Shared housing is defined as two or more people who live in one permanent rental housing unit, sharing the costs associated with maintaining that housing, such as rent and utilities. At the most basic level, shared housing is having a roommate.

With the affordable housing crisis in the United States, VA programs are encouraged to look for creative solutions to housing Veterans experiencing homelessness. For some Veterans, shared housing offers an opportunity to be housed with another person, if they choose. Shared housing offers many social and financial benefits (see [Why Shared Housing?](#)) and Veterans should have the choice to live by themselves or with roommates.

Shared housing is not a new program. Instead, it is a way to describe a number of situations where Veterans choose to not live by themselves. Shared housing encompasses Veterans living with other Veterans, Veterans renting rooms in larger houses, Veterans choosing to live with people who are not a part of their household as defined by the SSVF Program Guide or the HUD-VASH program (depending on the program in which the Veteran is participating), as well as people they did not know previously.

Shared Housing: The Basics

Who is a good fit for Shared Housing?

All Veterans who meet the eligibility requirements for SSVF and/or HUD-VASH may opt for shared housing. Case managers should not be asking is whether or not a Veteran is “eligible” for shared housing, as shared housing is not a new program. Instead, case managers should be thinking about whether or not a Veteran wants to share housing and whether or not the Veteran is prepared to share housing with one or more individuals. Case managers should help Veterans make this decision by exploring with the Veteran his or her past rental history and living situations, and how those living situations unfolded. Case managers should also discuss what expectations the Veteran has about living with one or more people. There is not a definitive checklist of attributes that indicate whether or not a Veteran will maintain stable housing while living with another person. Veterans should be presented with the possibility of shared housing and be given an opportunity to think about whether or not it would work for him/her.

Shared Housing Requirements and Basic Principles

Client Choice

At the heart of the shared housing concept is Veteran (or individual) choice. Client choice, one of the key features of Housing First, is a Core Concept for both SSVF and HUD-VASH, and any shared housing must be consistent with that principle. Veterans seeking assistance through SSVF or HUD-VASH must choose whether they want to share housing with a roommate or not. Shared housing cannot be a requirement of program participation and receiving housing assistance, though in some cases Veterans may be limited in other housing options given the cost of housing in many markets.

In addition to choosing to participate in a shared housing arrangement, Veterans must have the opportunity to choose with whom they share housing. Programs and staff should work to set up a process by which Veterans can communicate their roommate preferences and expectations and be matched with a roommate (see more info in [What Makes a Good Match?](#)) if the Veteran does not already have one in mind. Matching is not simply a process of linking two roommates on paper, but rather one that includes individual preferences in whether to meet each other before a shared housing commitment is made. Sample forms for roommate expectations and matching can be found [HERE](#). SSVF and HUD-VASH can help Veterans identify and match with potential roommates, but it's important to remember that Veterans have the final say about moving in with someone. In some cases, the Veteran may already have a friend or other social connection whom they would like shared housing with. This includes persons currently paying or living in market rate housing.

In areas with limited affordable housing, Veterans should be aware of how long it may take to get a single unit if they choose not to participate in shared housing so that Veterans may make an informed choice about their housing preferences.

Separate Leases

Each Veteran must have a separate lease. Separate leases allow:

- Each person in the unit to be responsible for maintaining tenancy.
- One person to remain in the unit if his or her roommate(s) leaves for any reason.
- Veterans to take full advantage of local tenancy laws.
- Landlords to evict one roommate while allowing the other to stay (if the situation requires) and to continue to receive rent from the tenant who stays if one leaves.

Separate Security Deposits and Assistance

Regardless of how many people are living together and receiving SSVF and/or HUD-VASH assistance, security deposits and rental assistance payments must be made separately for each enrolled participant. For example, if two Veterans, both receiving SSVF Rapid Rehousing (RRH) Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA), are living together, the SSVF grantee will need to issue a separate check for each Veteran's assistance. This is required under program regulations.

A Habitability/Housing Quality Review

All units receiving SSVF and/or HUD-VASH assistance must have a completed habitability or Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection (whichever is required for that program). If multiple Veterans are living in the same unit, the unit only needs to be inspected once, but a copy of that inspection must be included with each Veteran's program documentation. If HUD-VASH is used in a unit, then an HQS inspection must be done. SSVF grantees should refer to the SSVF Program Guide for more information about habitability inspections.

Roommate Agreements

Many roommates live together without ever writing down who is responsible for what chores and/or other household responsibilities. However, some Veterans may benefit from having a written Roommate Agreement for their shared housing. This Roommate Agreement might cover quiet hours, a chore schedule, shared costs not included in the lease, and/or a list of who is responsible for taking care of public areas, among other issues. Roommate Agreements are not required in shared housing, but case managers can facilitate the development of one with the roommates if requested or if difficult conflicts arise. A sample Roommate Agreement can be

found [HERE](#). Roommate Agreements should be developed with input from all roommates and must be agreed to by all roommates.

Shared Housing as it Relates to Administrative Plans

Shared housing is often discussed as only being a possibility for programs that have tenant-based rental assistance like RRH. Shared housing is actually an eligible part of HUD-VASH as well as the Housing Choice Voucher program, as long as your local PHA's Administrative Plan allows for it. [24 CFR 982.616](#) discusses how a PHA can operate a shared housing program within the PHA. Communities interested in exploring shared housing with HUD-VASH should work with their local PHA to see if it is allowable in their community.

Resources:

- Shared Housing Fact Sheet (for sharing):
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Shared Housing Presentation from RRH Conference:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_Roommate_Matching_PowerPoint.pdf
- SSVF Shared Housing Webinar, National Webinar Series:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/SSVF_National_Webinar_Shared_Housing_03_14_2019.pdf
- Shared Housing Presentation: 2019 Permanent Housing Conference:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_2019_Permanent_Housing_PPT.pdf

Why Shared Housing?

Many communities simply don't have enough housing to give every Veteran his or her own independent unit. Shared housing offers a lot of benefits to Veterans who are open to sharing housing.

Housing and Financial Benefits

There are multiple benefits of shared housing that can improve housing sustainability for Veterans. The primary benefits include:

- *Increased Access to Diverse Housing Market with Desirable and Affordable Housing Options:* Shared housing can create an opportunity for Veterans to choose from better, more diverse housing options. These housing options might be nicer or larger because the Veteran is able to share costs with a roommate. This may also lead to the Veteran being able to live closer to a job, services, family, healthcare, and/or community amenities. Depending on how many roommates want to live together, shared housing may also open up a larger housing market from which the roommates can search for a unit. Shared housing may also be the only viable option for some Veterans if the rent burden can never be met by their current or potential income.
- *Reduced Housing Cost Burden:* Because shared housing can reduce rent and household costs, Veterans should become less [rent burdened](#). When less rent burdened, Veterans have greater control over their living expenses and a better sense of self-sufficiency. Being less rent burdened may also help them stabilize their housing crisis faster and help them exit temporary programs like SSVF with a more solid financial foundation.
- *Reduced Living Expenses:* When living in shared housing, Veterans can also share the costs of utilities and possibly other living expenses, such as groceries and household supplies. Similar to sharing in rent, this could lead to Veterans being less burdened by living expenses and help provide the Veteran with more control over their budget.
- *Increased Budget Control and Personal Savings:* When a Veteran spends less on rent, utilities, and household goods, the Veteran will have more control over his/her budget and may have an opportunity to increase their savings each month. This can help the Veteran save towards a personal goal or help pay off debts earlier. Having money in a savings account can help increase housing stability because it allows for a Veteran to better handle unexpected expenses or an emergency, giving one the ability to avoid a financial crisis that can lead back to homelessness.

Veterans should be presented with the overall benefits of shared housing when discussing housing options, either at intake or during the course of case management. Landlords considering renting multi-bedroom units or houses to Veterans and their roommates may also want to know how this type of living situation benefits Veterans.

Psychosocial Benefits

The benefits of shared housing extend beyond financial benefits. The primary psychosocial benefits may be:

- *Increased Social Networks and Decreased Isolation:* By having one or more roommates, a Veteran naturally has more social connections. A Veteran may not know his or her roommate(s) very well when first living together but may find that they have similar interests. Veterans may meet the friends or acquaintances of their roommate(s). Roommates can also provide someone with which to attend community events, decreasing social anxiety. If the Veteran is single, having someone to come home to can decrease feelings of isolation and provide social support. Increased socialization can help recently homeless Veterans have an easier transition to living in housing, further stabilizing their housing crisis and reducing chances that they will return to homelessness.
- *Sustain Independent Housing Longer:* If a Veteran has some limitations that may make it difficult to maintain independent housing, having a roommate may increase a Veteran's ability to live independently longer. For example, a roommate may be able to help another roommate with medications or encourage daily exercises and socializing. Having someone that is going to assist with chores may also help a housemate with physical limitations or challenges. Should a Veteran have a fall or other emergent need, a roommate can assist by calling 911 and providing moral support while waiting on first responders.
- *Help with Community Integration:* A roommate may know about community resources and opportunities that aren't familiar to the Veteran and help connect him or her with local groups or amenities. Having opportunities to find out about activities in the community can help the roommates socialize meet new people, find new resources, and increase their sense of being a part of the community.
- *Increased Problem-Solving Skills:* When one has one or more roommates, there will be disagreements or times when not everyone gets along, but roommates will need to work through these differences to continue to have a safe and positive home for everyone. When roommates are first preparing to move in together, it will be important for roommates, with the help of case managers if necessary, to have frank conversations about what each roommate needs to avoid misunderstandings. Roommates may decide to document these needs and collective decisions in a Roommate Agreement. When sharing housing with other people, Veterans and case managers need to think about boundaries, such as not entering another roommate's bedroom without permission. If the roommates have a problem that is not coming to resolution, roommates may choose to have an outside party help mediate the issue, such as a case manager from SSVF or HUD-VASH or another person that both agree to work with.

Shared housing offers the ability to connect with community and feel more rooted in one's neighborhood. By building these networks, a Veteran can build social and problem-solving skills that can increase self-sufficiency and independence.

Challenges of Shared Housing

There are many benefits to shared housing, but it is important for case managers, housing specialists, and Veterans to be aware of some of shared housing's limitations and challenges. Understanding and anticipating these challenges will help Veterans make an informed decision about whether or not shared housing is an appropriate resolution to their housing crisis and assist case managers in helping the Veteran navigate potential issues with roommates and landlords.

- *Roommate Conflicts:* It is nearly impossible to avoid some type of conflict when two people live together. Ideally, roommates will be able to work through these conflicts and resolve them in a way that works for all involved. However, it is also possible that the roommates will need a third party to intervene and help them resolve the conflicts. Case managers or program staff should let the Veteran and his or her roommate(s) know whether or not they are available to mediate roommate issues and should also have a plan in place in case the roommates cannot continue to live together.
- *Landlord Issues:* Dealing with landlords is discussed in more depth below (see [Working with Landlords](#)). While many landlords may be excited to give a Veteran a chance and rent to them, landlords may not want to go through the process of having separate leases for each roommate. Landlords may also be weary to rent to multiple people who do not know each other well. Case managers and/or housing specialists should mention the separate lease requirement early in discussions with a landlord and work with the landlord to help him or her understand the benefits of shared housing and the support the program offers to landlords.
- *Case Manager/Housing Specialist Involvement:* Program staff may need to spend additional time working with Veterans, helping them to match with a roommate and work with the roommate to resolve any issues that may arise while the Veteran is still enrolled in the program. Case managers may need additional training in mediation and conflict resolution to assist Veterans and their roommates when issues arise.
- *City, County, or State Regulations (code enforcement):* It's possible that some cities or counties will have limitations regarding the number of individuals who can be housed in an apartment that are not immediate family. Landlords should be aware of this when they are leasing; however, it is recommended to check the status prior to a move in to decrease any potential issues you may have with the landlord and code enforcement.

Shared Housing and Rent Subsidies

Within the SSVF and HUD-VASH programs, the process for calculating rental subsidies for shared housing is similar to calculations for non-shared housing. This section will walk you through the process of calculating rental subsidies for shared housing.

Fair Market Rent and Rent Reasonableness

Fair Market Rent

For shared housing situations supported by VA programs, shared housing utilizes Fair Market Rent (FMR) and rent reasonableness in nearly the same way that non-shared housing living situations do. SSVF grantees are required to calculate rent reasonableness using the steps outlined below prior to providing TFA rental assistance.

When calculating rental assistance for Veterans participating in HUD-VASH, the rent amount must adhere to HUD FMR limits published each year by HUD. HUD-VASH vouchers may go up to 110% of FMR, as long as the local PHA approves.

Following a few simple steps will help program staff determine what the parameters are for a Veteran utilizing shared housing. Resources related to rent reasonableness are listed at the end of the section.

Rent Reasonableness

SSVF program staff will need to determine whether or not the rent for the unit is reasonable. HUD-VASH staff will not need to complete this step.

Step 1: Find similar units

Once a unit is located for a Veteran, the SSVF program staff will need to locate units similar to the chosen unit. These units should be similar size with similar amenities in similar locations.

Step 2: Determine reasonableness of rent

SSVF program staff must compare the rents of the similar units with the chosen unit, not only for the total rent paid, but the rent per person. If the rent for one person, the Veteran, is reasonable compared to rents for one person in similar units, then the shared housing unit meets rent reasonableness standards. This should be documented just as rent reasonableness for the unit is documented.

Determining Rental Subsidies and Contributions

With shared housing, rental subsidies are also calculated based on a pro-rated calculation, since the subsidy covers only part of the housing. The process for determining how much a Veteran contributes to rent does not change if the Veteran chooses to live with one or more roommates. Regardless of whether or not the Veteran chooses to live in a shared housing situation, Veterans receiving HUD-VASH vouchers will still pay 30% of their income and

Veterans receiving SSVF rental assistance will continue to work with their case manager in a progressive manner to scale their rent subsidies.

When a Veteran shares housing, the Veteran's lease only covers the Veteran's part of the full unit's rent. The Veteran and the future roommate(s) should determine whether or not the rent will be split equally amongst roommates or divided proportionally (e.g. the person with the main bedroom pays a little more), once they know where they are living. SSVF grantees are encouraged to work with Veterans and their roommates to ensure the rent division is equitable and fair. When the Veteran knows how much rent he or she will be responsible for in their lease, case managers will need to determine how much subsidy the VA program will provide and for how long, including how much the Veteran will contribute towards rent. Rent calculations can get complicated with multiple people, especially when the rent is not split evenly. Program staff from HUD-VASH may find it easier to use a tool, such as the [Rent Analysis Worksheet](#), which helps provide a structured way to divide and document rent for shared housing. SSVF, on the other hand, should treat individual Veteran rent contributions on a case by case basis consistent with strong RRH practice; therefore, the tenant rent calculation considerations differ considerably between SSVF and HUD-VASH.

Regardless of whether or not the Veteran is roommates with one or more individuals who are also receiving a housing subsidy, each veteran receiving a housing subsidy should have:

- A separate lease
- A separate security deposit (provided by each roommate or through a program)
- Documentation of how much each roommate is receiving as a subsidy (if applicable) and how much they are contributing to rent
- Documentation of an appropriate inspection (if required)
- Roommate Agreement (if requested)

When there is more than one person receiving a rental assistance subsidy living together, each individual is responsible for working with their individual case manager or program staff to meet the documentation requirements of their enrollment. Because each subsidy or voucher is directly connected to a person, the VA has no restriction on Veterans with subsidies living with other individuals (Veteran or not) with or without subsidies.

Rent Contribution Examples:

- **SSVF:** Jennifer is enrolled in SSVF and interested in sharing housing with a roommate. Her case manager knows of a unit where a roommate has moved out and the case manager thinks that it would be a good living situation for Jennifer. The house has two other people living in it and the full rent is \$2550 a month, meaning that Jennifer's rent would be $\$2550/3$ people or \$850 per person. Jennifer meets with the roommates and everyone agrees that Jennifer would be a good fit for the house, so Jennifer and her case manager review the lease and any required documentation. The case manager determines that the rent of \$2550 for a 3 bedroom house is reasonable, so Jennifer goes ahead and signs a lease for one of the bedrooms at \$850 a month. Jennifer's case manager works with her to determine when she can begin contributing to the rent and what supports she needs to stabilize her housing crisis.
- **HUD-VASH:** Jon is participating in HUD-VASH and is interested in sharing a house with two friends who have helped him in his recovery. They have found a house on the city bus line that will meet all their needs and will allow for a pet under 50 pounds. The total rent for the three-bedroom house is \$2,379 including the electric, water, and heat. To determine John's rent, divide the total rent of \$2,379 by three (the number of roommates). In this example, Jon's rent will be \$793. Jon brings all the information and a lease to his HUD-VASH case manager, who will need to work with the local PHA to determine how much Jon's voucher is worth in this shared housing situation. The payment standard for shared housing is the lower of the payment standard for the unit size or the pro-rata share of the payment standard for the shared housing unit size. The pro-rata share is calculated by dividing the number of bedrooms available for occupancy by the individual with a voucher in the private space by the total number of bedrooms in the unit.

Utility Allowances

While many units may have utilities included with the rent, many units will need to work out how utilities will be paid. Roommates will need to decide which roommate will cover which utilities. When it comes to overall expenses, roommates should divide the shared costs along the same proportion used to divide rent, i.e. if the rent is divided equally, then shared utilities should be divided equally as well.

HUD-VASH voucher recipients should work with their local housing authority to determine the utility allowance for their unit. If the PHA has a different method of calculating utility allowances for shared housing situations, the Veteran must follow the local PHA method.

Shared Housing Without A Subsidy

Some Veterans will choose a shared housing situation, even when they are not receiving a rental assistance TFA through SSVF (all HUD-VASH participants will have a subsidy). Because SSVF includes a full suite of supportive services, of which rental assistance is one service, Veterans may be enrolling in SSVF to receive services other than rental assistance, such as a security deposit or General Housing Stability Assistance, or stay enrolled in the program for additional services once their rental assistance has ended.

A Veteran choosing a shared housing placement without a housing subsidy should receive similar case management to a Veteran receiving a housing subsidy. Case managers may still work with Veterans to choose one or more roommates and/or help set up Roommate Agreements. Once the Veteran has moved in, the case manager should assess if the Veteran would benefit from continued case management until they are no longer eligible for the program. Program staff may also work with the roommates to resolve conflicts and develop problem solving skills, especially to mediate issues that may lead to evictions or unstable housing situations. It's important to remember that, unless the Veteran is determining the roommates to formally be part of their "household", the other tenants in the unit are not eligible for TFA just because a Veteran has moved in. SSVF Rapid Resolution services may lead to Veterans entering into new shared housing situations when they sign a lease.

Veterans are not required to receive a housing subsidy to be paired with a roommate in shared housing.

Resources

- Rent Analysis Worksheet:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_Rent_Analysis_Worksheet.pdf

Matching Roommates

One of the most important aspects of a successful shared housing situation is the matching of roommates. There are many things to consider when matching a Veteran with a potential roommate. This section will discuss those considerations and provide helpful tips to matching shared housing roommates. However, it is also true that roommate matches and coordination may very well happen organically with limited input from the supportive service and case management staff.

Veterans who choose shared housing need to incorporate finding a roommate into their housing search plans. Shared housing is most successful when the roommates actively choose each other and work together to resolve issues. Case managers should help guide Veterans towards making the best choice for the Veteran, not choose their roommate for them.

What Makes a Good Match?

Most people have lived with another person at some point in their life. They either lived with their family, a spouse or partner, a school roommate, or a friend. Most have opinions on what makes a good or bad roommate based off personal preferences. After a Veteran agrees to a shared housing situation, case managers should sit down with the Veteran to discuss the Veteran's housing expectations and what the Veteran is looking for in a roommate. This conversation should include information about:

- Sleep Schedules: Is the Veteran/roommate a morning person? A night owl?
- Work Schedules: Does one roommate have the night shift? An early shift?
- Cleaning Tendencies: Is the Veteran a neat freak? A slob? In-between? How do the roommates handle cleanliness in personal space vs communal space?
- Chores Expectations: Which roommate will do which chores? What are the roommates' expectations for taking care of basic chores?
- Settling disputes: How will disputes be settled? Who should be contacted if mediation is needed? What happens if the roommate situation becomes unsafe?
- Preferred environment: Would the roommates prefer a sober household? Do either roommates smoke? Are they okay living with children in the house? Are there any severe food allergies that the roommate needs to be aware of?

There are several tools that help organize the Veteran's preferences and thoughts around potential roommates. A few examples are included [below](#).

Once a Veteran and case manager have this discussion and a roommate is found, the Veteran and the roommate should meet to discuss their expectations. Many roommates will agree, verbally, on how they want to live together. Some roommates may wish to create a more formal Roommate Agreement. The case manager(s) or program staff may work with roommates to draw up a Roommate Agreement, laying out the framework for a satisfying shared housing situation. This may also require coordination between SSVF, HUD-VASH or other programs/tenants that are not connected to via the formal program. Roommate agreements are not required, but a sample is available [HERE](#) if the roommates request one.

Keeping a Good Situation Going

Once a Veteran is matched with a roommate, and they move in together, program staff, sometimes in coordination with other service providers, can use their position as a neutral party to help keep the shared housing situation on track. This may involve stepping in to help roommates resolve an issue, working with a roommate to avoid an eviction, or mediating between the roommates and the landlord. Case managers are encouraged to help the roommates learn to resolve issues themselves and to reach out before the housing situation becomes unsafe.

Resources

- PATH Roommate Agreement Sample:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_Path_Roommate_Agreement.pdf
- Friendship Place Roommate Interest Form:
http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_FP_Roommate_Interest_Form.pdf
- PATH General Roommate Matching Questionnaire:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_General_Roommate_Matching_Form.pdf
- Housing Preferences Worksheet:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_Housing_Preferences_Worksheet.pdf

Working with Landlords

What Makes a Good Match?

Much like finding the right roommate can make or break a shared housing situation, working with the right landlord is also integral to having a shared housing situation work. SSVF grantees and HUD-VASH staff should have excellent relationships with local landlords and are encouraged to work with those landlords first to see if they have larger units available to rent in shared housing situations. Shared housing offers an opportunity for landlords to rent to Veterans and rent out their larger properties at the same time.

Landlords agreeing to shared housing situations will need to be aware that each enrolled Veteran receiving a subsidy must have their own lease and each enrolled Veteran receiving a subsidy will pay their rent separately. Leases should be standard leases and include any potential fees the roommates will need to pay or whether any utilities are included. They should also have, with the Veteran's permission, the contact information for any program staff involved with helping the persons living in the unit. Landlords will still need to provide all required documentation to receive subsidized rent payments.

Landlords are still required to follow all State and local housing laws, including housing and occupancy codes, as well as laws focused on how many unrelated individuals can live in the same unit.

Keeping a Landlord On Board

While some landlords will find shared housing advantageous, others may need some help seeing the benefits of shared housing. Some of the advantages of shared housing are:

- *Filling larger units faster:* Landlords with large units are able to start filling rooms quickly, instead of leaving the full, multi-bedroom unit empty.
- *Handling landlord/tenant issues separately:* While no one wants to deal with evictions, separate leases with each resident means that landlords dealing with problematic tenants can evict one and, if agreed up on ahead of time, work with a case manager to quickly fill the room with a new tenant.
- *Program Staff can help with conflict:* like non-shared housing situations, landlords will have contact information for case managers, who will be able to help mitigate tenant issues before they get to the level of eviction.

Case managers or housing navigators/locators should start bringing landlords on board before they have a Veteran ready for housing and before units are available so they can minimize how long the lease-up process takes when a Veteran agrees to shared housing. Case managers and landlords should discuss:

- What level of support the case manager can provide to the landlord and Veteran after move-in.
- Whether or not the program enrolling the Veteran can pay for damages and/or security deposits.
- Whether or not there is a local risk mitigation fund and what it covers.

- When can the Veteran and other roommates begin moving into the unit (especially if they are moving in at different times)

This conversation is just a variation on the conversation most case managers and housing navigators/locators are already having with landlords, but a community sample of talking points for a conversation with landlords can be found [HERE](#).

When a Roommate Leaves

Sometimes roommates live together a long time and sometimes shared housing situations do not work out. Case managers need to be prepared to switch roommates or help someone relocate if the housing situation is not successful. They should decide who is responsible for finding a new roommate. Case managers should try to find a suitable replacement for the lease as soon as they can. This might take some time, as the new roommate will need to be approved by the other roommate(s) and will need to choose to live in the unit.

Resources

- General LL Conversation:
https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/Shared_Housing_General_LL_Conversion_Process.pdf

REMEMBER
SSVF and HUD-VASH cannot provide vacancy payments when a Veteran leaves housing. Case managers will need to quickly fill vacant rooms when needed and work with landlords to keep rooms available if a Veterans is not able to move in right away.
