

# SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR VETERAN FAMILIES (SSVF) PROGRAM

## NATIONAL WEBINAR

### EXPIRATION OF THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY (PHE) AND STAFFORD ACT FLEXIBILITIES

March 24, 2023

[Link to Audio](#)

# HOUSEKEEPING

- This call will last for 60 minutes.
- Slides and handouts are in the “handout” section.
- The recording, handouts and slides will be sent via email following the call.
- Submit questions in the question box or any time by email to [ssvf@va.gov](mailto:ssvf@va.gov).
- Grantees strongly encouraged to review the [March 9th webinar](#) discussing the expiration of the PHE.

# AGENDA

- Welcome and Introductions
- Review of Major Changes Due to the Expiration of the COVID-19 PHE
- Review of Question and Answer Responses from SSVF's March 9, 2023 Webinar
- Open Question and Answer

## PRESENTERS AND FACILITATORS

- Rico Aiello, SSVF Compliance Office
- Cynthia Spencer, Supervisory Regional Coordinator, SSVF Program Office
- Jennifer Colbert, Supervisory Regional Coordinator, SSVF Program Office
- Douglas Tetrault, Technical Assistance Collaborative
- Meghan Takashima, Abt Associates

# REVIEW OF MAJOR CHANGES DUE TO THE EXPIRATION OF THE COVID-19 PHE

## TIMELINE

- **March 2020:** The COVID-19 PHE was declared, creating new flexibilities for SSVF and other programs via the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law 100-707, also known as the Stafford Act.
- **January 30, 2023:** President Biden announced that the COVID-19 public health emergency will expire at the end of the day on May 11, 2023.
- **May 11, 2023:** The COVID-19 PHE declaration expires at the end of the day, sunsetting Stafford Act flexibilities for SSVF.
- While there will be no 90-day grace period, the timeframes for Veterans in the program will be “reset.” This will allow full, traditional support as if they had just enrolled, based on their income level at their next recertification.

## MAJOR CHANGES

- Limits on the number of months of rental assistance are going back into effect.
- Limits on the number of months of utility assistance are going back into effect.
- Limits on Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA) timelines are going back into effect.
- The two-year cycle limitation on certain payments is going back into effect.
- The \$500 limit on food as part of General Housing Stability Assistance (GHSA) is going back into effect.

# RECERTIFICATIONS

- SSVF grantees must follow the standard recertification process (i.e., recertify every 90 days from the date of enrollment) per the [SSVF Program Guide](#).
- After May 11, 2023, the level of assistance Veterans receive will be based on their income as of their next normal recertification.
- Veterans receiving Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) as of May 11, 2023, will have their TFA limits reset, with an effective start date of June 1, 2023.
- EHA limitations reset for Veterans in hotels or motels as of May 11, 2023. The 60-day time limit will apply moving forward beginning on May 12, 2023.
- For Veterans who enroll in SSVF after May 11, 2023, SSVF grantees must follow the traditional guidelines and TFA limitations.
- Veterans participating in Shallow Subsidy do not need to be recertified until month 24 of service from the date of enrollment.



## OTHER PERMANENT SERVICE ADDITIONS

- Shallow Subsidy:
  - Shallow Subsidies should continue to be explored for all Veterans.
  - Shallow Subsidy can provide a maximum of 50% of the unit's monthly rent cost.
  - Veteran households between 30-80% of Area Median Income (AMI) may receive up to 2 years of Shallow Subsidy rental assistance minus X months of traditional rental assistance received.
  - Veterans at or below 30% AMI are eligible for a full 2 years of Shallow Subsidy rental assistance regardless of how much traditional rental assistance they received.
- Health Care Navigation (HCN) Services:
  - HCN is available to all Veterans who need or want health care access support.
  - This position must be embedded directly into the program.
- Contracted or Direct Legal Services:
  - Direct legal representation for Veterans related to non-criminal housing issues can be either direct hire or subcontract. Regardless, these services must be paid for by SSVF.

# REVIEW OF QUESTION AND ANSWER RESPONSES FROM SSVF'S MARCH 9, 2023 WEBINAR



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# RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND UTILITY DEPOSITS

## RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND UTILITY DEPOSITS

**Question:** With the increase to 80% AMI, what are the TFA limitations for those Veterans who fall between 51-80% of AMI?

**Answer:** Veterans with incomes between 51-80% of AMI are eligible for the same amount of assistance as those Veterans whose income falls between 31-50% of AMI. Of note, SSVF grantees should only provide assistance that is necessary to support Veterans in obtaining or retaining permanent housing. Veterans with higher incomes may not need as much or as frequent rental assistance as Veterans with lower incomes.

## RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND UTILITY DEPOSITS

**Question:** Would TFA payments made for the June 2023 rent period count as the first month of TFA for the purposes of calculating TFA limits?

**Answer:** Yes. Since the TFA reset has an effective start date of June 1, 2023, TFA payments made for the June 2023 rent period will count as the first month of TFA provided, regardless of when those funds are disbursed. For example, if an SSVF grantee disburses payment on May 25, 2023, for the June 2023 rent period, this payment would count as the first month.



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## RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND UTILITY DEPOSITS

**Question:** For Veterans whose income drops below 30% AMI at the time of recertification, does the number of months TFA we can provide also change?

**Answer:** For Veterans whose next recertification occurs prior to the end of the day on May 11, 2023, there is no limit to the number of months of TFA that SSVF grantees can provide, regardless of income level, if it is necessary to help Veterans retain their housing.

For Veterans whose next recertification occurs after May 11, 2023, and whose income was above 30% AMI at the time of enrollment, but fell below 30% AMI, they can then be provided additional months of TFA as if they entered below 30%.

## RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND UTILITY DEPOSITS

**Question:** Are limits on the amount of TFA spent on security deposits included in the TFA reset?

**Answer:** No. As security deposits were not covered by the Stafford Act, the limits on the amount that SSVF grantees may provide do not reset. SSVF grantees may only provide one security deposit in a two-year period, regardless of an active PHE declaration.

## RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND UTILITY DEPOSITS

**Question:** How should we calculate TFA allowances for Veterans who receive TFA prior to the expiration of the PHE at the end of the day on May 11, 2023?

**Answer:** After May 11, 2023, the limits of TFA are reset, with an effective start date of June 1, 2023. Any TFA provided to Veterans prior to June 1, 2023, does not count toward the TFA allowances.

Additionally, Veterans who enter SSVF with incomes above 30% AMI are eligible for the following TFA allowances:

- Maximum of 10 months in a 2-year period.
- No more than 6 months in any 12-month period.



# EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE (EHA)



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## EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE (EHA)

- Veterans can receive one instance of EHA, for stays in hotels or motels lasting for up to 60 days, during a two-year period.
- Emergency housing through SSVF must be a last resort.
- VA policy prioritizes Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), Grant and per Diem (GPD) and community beds first. For more information, read the [Emergency Housing Assistance Guidance](#).
- EHA limitations reset for Veterans in hotels or motels as of May 11, 2023. The 60-day time limit will apply moving forward beginning on May 12, 2023.
- EHA verification will be required after May 11, 2023. The SSVF Program Office will provide an updated EHA verification form on April 13, 2023, replacing the current version in the [SSVF Program Guide](#).

## EHA

**Question:** Can SSVF use EHA for any Veteran who is unsheltered or who desires a hotel stay while working toward housing, regardless of the rationale?

**Answer:** No. EHA should be the last resort when identifying safe shelter options for Veterans. VA policy states that communities should first try to help Veterans access Health Care for Homeless Veterans Contracted Residential Services, Grant and Per Diem or community shelter beds before using SSVF for EHA. For more information, read the [Emergency Housing Assistance Guidance](#).

SSVF grantees may use EHA when other safe shelter options are not immediately available. Additionally, EHA must be linked directly to efforts to move Veterans out of homelessness into permanent housing.

# EHA

**Question:** For EHA, can the maximum of 60 days of assistance be broken up into different instances? For example, if a hotel only permits guests to stay for a maximum of 28 days, can a Veteran be placed into a different hotel during the same instance?

**Answer:** No, EHA is limited to one instance in a two-year period for a maximum of 60 days. Veterans may only access EHA one time in two years and cannot remain in EHA for more than 60 days. Veterans who access EHA and stay less than 60 days they cannot access EHA again during that two-year period.

However, per the question above, SSVF grantees are permitted to move Veterans from one hotel to another during the same EHA instance, for a total maximum of 60 days of assistance.



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# EHA

**Question:** When will SSVF grantees be required to complete EHA verification forms?

**Answer:** EHA verification will be required after May 11, 2023. The SSVF Program Office will provide an updated EHA verification form on April 13, 2023, replacing the current version in the [SSVF Program Guide](#).

# EHA

**Question:** If a Veteran is currently receiving EHA, or has already received EHA in the past, will the limits on their EHA also be reset after May 11, 2023?

**Answer:** Yes, Veterans who are currently receiving or have received EHA prior to the end of the day on May 11, 2023, will have their limits on EHA reset. Starting on May 12, 2023, they will be eligible for an additional 60 days of EHA assistance as long as such assistance is appropriate based on other VA guidance and the Veteran's housing and service needs. This is regardless of how much EHA they have already received or their household composition.



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## EHA

**Question:** What documentation is needed for SSVF grantees to provide EHA for Veterans who can access other shelter options but decline to do so?

**Answer:** SSVF grantees have discretion in providing EHA to Veterans who decline other shelter options. However, the Veteran's preference alone is not sufficient justification to provide EHA, and the SSVF grantee must perform due diligence to ensure that EHA would provide the Veteran with the support needed to move them into permanent housing.

EHA verification will be required after May 11, 2023. The SSVF Program Office will provide an updated EHA verification form on April 13, 2023, replacing the current version in the [SSVF Program Guide](#).

# SHALLOW SUBSIDY



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## SHALLOW SUBSIDY

**Question:** How does the expiration of the PHE at the end of the day on May 11, 2023 impact Shallow Subsidy assistance?

**Answer:** The expiration of the PHE at the end of the day on May 11, 2023, and the associated resets on limitations, do not impact Shallow Subsidy assistance. Veterans receiving Shallow Subsidy assistance as of May 11, 2023, will continue on the current timeline based on the initial two-year Shallow Subsidy commitment. Additionally, for Veterans between 30%-80% AMI, TFA provided prior to June 1, 2023, does not count toward the TFA allowances.

## SHALLOW SUBSIDY

**Question:** How many months of Shallow Subsidy assistance can we provide for Veterans who transition from traditional TFA?

**Answer:** Veterans who transition from traditional TFA to Shallow Subsidy prior to the end of the day on May 11, 2023, may receive the full two-year Shallow Subsidy commitment regardless of income level and as long as they are income eligible.

Veterans who transition from traditional TFA to Shallow Subsidy after May 11, 2023, may receive Shallow Subsidy commitments based on their income at the point of that transition:

- For Veterans at or below 30% AMI, the full two years.
- For Veterans between 30%-80% AMI, two years minus X months of TFA provided after May 11, 2023.



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**Question:** How should SSVF grantees calculate the number of months that a Veteran can use a Shallow Subsidy if the Veteran temporarily needs traditional TFA?

**Answer:** Veterans at or below 30% AMI, may receive a full 2-year of Shallow Subsidy commitment, regardless of the number of months they temporarily received traditional TFA.

Veteran households between 30-80% AMI receive 2 years of rental assistance minus X months of TFA received after May 11, 2023.

## SHALLOW SUBSIDY

**Question:** Are Veterans whose income exceeds 80% AMI able to participate in Shallow Subsidy?

**Answer:** Shallow Subsidy is designed to allow Veterans to increase their income without the risk of exceeding the income limits while they are enrolled. Veterans whose income exceeds 80% AMI at the time of recertification are no longer eligible for SSVF services and would need to be discharged.

# GENERAL HOUSING STABILITY ASSISTANCE (GHSA), INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

## GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** When did the increase to the maximum General Housing Stability Assistance (GHSA) amount become effective?

**Answer:** The increase to the GHSA maximum amount of \$1,948 went into effect on January 1, 2023. This cap will be adjusted annually based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U).

## GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** Will food and GHSA limits be adjusted to account for inflation?

**Answer:** The SSVF Program Office does not currently have plans to increase the \$500 limit on food. GHSA limits are adjusted over time based on increases in the cost of living. The SSVF program office will communicate those changes when they occur.

## GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** Are landlord incentives limited to one-time assistance for a two-year period? Is the use of landlord incentives limited by the Veteran's income?

**Answer:** No. Landlord incentives may be used more than once in a two-year period for the same Veteran household. However, landlord incentives can only be utilized once per unit. For example, SSVF grantees may use multiple landlord incentives for the same Veteran if the Veteran is required to relocate to a new or different unit.

Veterans' income does not affect eligibility for landlord incentives. However, grantees must prioritize incentives and use them only when necessary for a Veteran to obtain housing. Higher-income may be less likely to require a landlord incentive to obtain a housing unit.



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# GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** What specific services are being reset after May 11, 2023?

**Answer:** After May 11, 2023, the following TFA costs are reset, with an effective start date of June 1, 2023:

- Rental assistance
- Utility assistance
- EHA (effective start date of May 12, 2023)

All other assistance, including Shallow Subsidy, will follow the SSVF standards and guidelines.

## GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** Does the \$1,000 tenant incentive allow for the purchase of household items such as furniture, linens, and cookware?

**Answer:** While tenant incentives (i.e., other move-in costs) can be used to purchase these items, these items are usually purchased under traditional GHSA. Tenant incentives are an additional eligible cost above typical GHSA and with much wider flexibility than traditional GHSA.

SSVF grantees are encouraged to prioritize tenant incentives for the purchase of other items not permitted under GHSA such as computers, televisions, rugs, comfort items and other costs not typically allowed under traditional GHSA limits.

## GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** What limits will there be on food purchases and how will these purchases count towards the GHSA limits?

**Answer:** After May 11, 2023, food purchases (which are allowable up to a maximum of \$500), contribute toward the total allowable GHSA limit of \$1,948.

## GHSA, INCENTIVES AND OTHER COSTS

**Question:** Are internet access fees an eligible utility cost?

**Answer:** Yes. Internet access fees are now an eligible utility cost for SSVF. All Grantees are required to pursue the Affordable Connectivity Program and any other resources to assist the Veteran household. For more information, visit:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/getinternet>



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# QUESTIONS

