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Secretary Shinseki Addresses the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans National Conference

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Yesterday, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Eric K. Shinseki addressed the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans National Conference (NCHV) at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City in Arlington, Virginia.

“President Obama has made it clear that homelessness among Veterans is unacceptable,” Secretary Shinseki said. “We have a moral duty to prevent and eliminate homelessness among Veterans.”

The NCHV is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Veteran-specific service organization whose 250-plus member organizations represent a variety of homeless providers in 45 states and the District of Columbia. It was organized in 1990 by a small group of community-based service providers who were troubled by the disproportionately large percentage of homeless people who are Veterans. It serves as the primary liaison between the nation’s care providers, Congress and the executive branch agencies charged with helping them succeed in their work.

This year, President Barack Obama is being awarded NCHV’s highest award, the Jerald Washington Memorial Founders’ Award. Shinseki said the president’s “early work as a community organizer provided him first hand experience about the devastation that is homelessness—for individuals, for families and for communities. Now, as our president and as our commander-in-chief, he is committed to combating this stain on the American conscience.”

Speaking to the NCHV attendees, Shinseki said, “We look forward to working with this coalition. Your community-level experience has helped tens of thousands of Veterans with a variety of problems. Your expertise is respected, and I look forward to being your partner as we eliminate homelessness among Veterans. ”

During the conference Secretary Shinseki announced that VA is creating a national center on homelessness among Veterans. The center is VA's first opportunity to develop, promote and enhance policy, clinical care, research and education to improve homeless services, so that Veterans may live as independently as possible in a community of their choosing. The center will be co-located with the Philadelphia VA Medical Center and the Tampa VAMC with the support of host-site academic affiliates, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of South Florida.

Secretary Shinseki applauded NCHV for the work they are doing and highlighted some of the programs VA has to assist homeless Veterans:

- Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program -- Established since 1987, the program now has 132 sites with extensive outreach, physical and psychiatric examinations, treatment, referrals and on-going case management services.
- Domiciliary Care for the Homeless (DCHV) Program -- Started with 13 medical centers, and has grown to 2,000 operation beds at 40 sites today. Rehabilitative residential services are offered on VA medical center grounds or in the community to eligible Veterans.
- Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program -- Authorized in 1992, it provides grants and per diem payments to help public and nonprofit organizations establish and operate supportive transitional housing and service centers. Today, VA partners with more than 500 community organizations and has authorized 15,000 beds through the GPD program.
- Stand Downs for homeless Veterans are one- to three-day events designed to provide homeless Veterans and their families a variety of services. In 2008, more than 30,000 Veterans and 4,500 family members received outreach services from Stand Downs aided by 24,500 volunteers.

- Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans -- Started in 1993, a nationwide initiative in which VA works with other federal, state, local agencies and nonprofit organizations to assess the needs of homeless Veterans. The last estimate of the number of homeless Veterans on any given night was 131,000, a reduction of over 47 percent from previous estimates of 250,000 used six years ago.

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