

10 Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness

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The goal to end Veteran homelessness is in reach and will require accelerated efforts from all partners to get the job done. To support communities as they progress towards the goal, USICH has identified 10 strategies that increase leadership, collaboration, and coordination among programs serving Veterans experiencing homelessness, and promote rapid access to permanent housing for all Veterans. Each strategy is accompanied by additional resources to help community leaders and stakeholders understand how to implement these strategies more effectively.

1) Start at the Top: Recruit Your Mayor to Join the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness

Mayors and local leaders are essential to securing and aligning the resources and partners necessary to end Veteran homelessness in every community. If your Mayor, County Commissioner, or Governor has not yet joined the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, they should do so. Joining the Mayors Challenge is a great way to solidify partnerships and to promote coordination and ensure accountability across all partners. The Mayors Challenge also includes [criteria for success in ending Veteran homelessness](#) that can help define the vision and the goal for your community.

Resources:

- [Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness Fact Sheet](#)
- [Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#) Information (HUD)

2) Identify All Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Name

By identifying Veterans by name, a community is able to ensure that they are effectively and efficiently serving all Veterans needing housing and homelessness assistance. A best practice has been to create a shared list of Veterans experiencing homelessness, created through data-sharing, assessment processes, and communication between the local VA Medical Center, the Continuum of Care, and other stakeholders. A VA Medical Center is able to share client-level information with CoC partners by asking the Veteran to sign a release of information (ROI) form that meets VA requirements. The community can then prioritize the list to match Veterans with the appropriate housing and services as quickly as possible.

Resource:

- [Best Practices: Sharing Information to End Veteran Homelessness](#) (HUD; includes link to VA ROI form)

3) Implement a Housing First System Orientation and Response

By using a Housing First approach, a community can ensure that Veterans experiencing homelessness can move into permanent housing, with the right level of services, as quickly as possible. Individual programs and projects can help accelerate entry to permanent housing by removing as many barriers as possible for accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety or use of substances, poor credit or financial history, or past involvement with criminal justice system.

In addition, to truly embrace Housing First, a community should create strong and direct referral linkages and relationships between the crisis response system and rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing, implement a coordinated entry system for matching people experiencing homelessness to the most appropriate housing and services, and use a data-driven approach to prioritizing people with the most significant needs for housing assistance.

Resources:

- [The Housing First Checklist: A Practical Tool for Assessing Housing First in Practice](#)
- [Four Clarifications about Housing First](#) blog by Richard Cho

4) Set and Meet Ambitious Short-Term Housing Placement Goals

By setting concrete and ambitious short-term housing placement goals, your community can achieve bold outcomes around targeting Veterans experiencing homelessness and expediting entry to permanent housing. Many communities have established ambitious monthly, quarterly, or 100-day housing placement goals to break down the larger goal of ending Veteran homelessness into focused blocks of time and effort, while pushing their systems to perform with maximum efficiency and better outcomes. These goals can be met by creating and sharing a community-wide list of Veterans, using a tested and validated assessment tool and process to prioritize and target interventions, using navigators and/or guides to address individual Veterans' needs and monitoring progress rooted in access to housing on a weekly or monthly basis.

Resource:

- [Best Practices: Sharing Information to End Veteran Homelessness](#) (HUD)

5) Conduct Coordinated Outreach and Engagement Efforts

Communities experience the greatest successes in providing permanent housing to Veterans not by merely waiting for Veterans to show up for help, but by proactively seeking out Veterans in need of assistance, sharing information across outreach teams and sites, using a Housing First approach to focus on permanent housing connections, and collaborating with other systems,

including law enforcement, prisons and jails, hospitals, libraries, and job centers. Partnerships and collaborations between VA Medical Centers and Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) grantees and Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grantees may have a powerful impact on improving care coordination and optimizing resources.

In addition, communities should develop a strategy for conducting ongoing counts of people experiencing homelessness – perhaps on a monthly basis – to identify new Veterans who are either in shelters or in places not meant for human habitation.

Resource:

- [HCH-VA Collaboration Quick Guide: Joining Forces to Coordinate Care for Unstably Housed Veterans](#) (National Health Care for the Homeless Council)
- [Veterans Justice Outreach](#) Program (VA)
- [Assessing the Evidence: What We Know About Outreach and Engagement](#) (SAMHSA)

6) Implement Coordinated Entry Systems

In order to use the resources that are ending and preventing Veteran homelessness effectively, individual programs and resources need to work together as part of a coordinated entry system that matches individuals and households experiencing homelessness to appropriate housing and services, based on a common and shared assessment process performed consistently across partners. Your community should consider using housing navigators that are assigned to specific Veterans and can negotiate and expedite the entry process into housing by providing assistance with paperwork, identifications, appointments, and other critical steps to create a streamlined process for getting into housing.

Resources:

- [Coordinated Assessment Toolkit](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)

7) Deploy HUD-VASH/SSVF Effectively

Achieving the goal requires the efficient deployment and full utilization of targeted programs like HUD-VASH and SSVF. Continuums of Care can partner with VA Medical Centers, HUD-VASH and SSVF providers to ensure participation in the community's coordinated entry system, disseminate best practices, and remove barriers throughout the system so that when challenges related to the deployment of resources and performance of these programs do arise, strategies can be adjusted to increase the number of Veterans accessing permanent housing.

- [HUD-VASH Best Practices](#) (HUD)
- [HUD-VASH Resource Guide for Permanent Housing and Clinical Care](#) (VA)
- [SSVF University](#) (VA)

8) Improve Transitional Housing Performance and Consider Converting or Reallocating Resources into Permanent Supportive Housing

Communities can reach the goal of ending and preventing Veteran homelessness faster by seeking to help Veterans currently residing in transitional housing move into permanent housing as quickly as possible. Transitional housing programs can help speed up exits to permanent housing by using permanent housing and housing stability outcomes as the key measures of success, eliminating or reducing entrance eligibility criteria, and reducing lengths of stay.

Every community should also use the VA gaps analysis tool to determine the inventory of resources needed locally to end Veteran homelessness, including the amount and types of transitional housing. If your community finds that it has a larger stock of transitional housing units than are needed to house Veterans, it may wish to convert those programs into other programs such as permanent supportive housing or modify the program model to serve another function such as bridge housing. Options vary by funding source and regulations.

Resource:

- [Guide to Reallocating Funds in the CoC Program](#) (HUD)

9) Increasing Connections to Employment

As President Obama said in the 2015 State of the Union address, “If you want somebody who’s going to get the job done, hire a Veteran.” Communities should work with employers to commit to hiring Veterans, including Veterans who have experienced homelessness.

Communities should also collaborate with Workforce Investment Boards and provide seamless points of referrals and contacts between the Continuum of Care, VA Medical Center, and workforce systems. CoC and VA case managers are integral resources in building referral relationships with supportive service providers, public system and can help navigate employment services and ensure that a Veterans’ employment needs are met holistically. Some communities have utilized the Employment Navigator model, where a case management team helps families experiencing homelessness through homeless assistance and housing, workforce systems, and income supports.

Resources:

- [Partnerships for Opening Doors Summit Page](#)
- [Practice Guides for Employment and Training](#)
- [Top Ideas on Integrating Employment and Housing Strategies to Prevent and End Homelessness](#)
- [Guides for Service Providers](#) (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans)

10) Coordinate with Legal Services Organizations to Solve Legal Needs

One of the major reasons Veterans experience homelessness is due to unmet legal needs. Civil legal services attorneys are essential partners in removing barriers to housing and employment by solving civil legal problems such as preventing avoidable evictions, navigating outstanding warrants, expunging criminal records, and securing targeted and mainstream benefits. Legal

Services attorneys should also engage in systemic advocacy (to the degree allowable by law) to promote Housing First practices among public housing authorities and housing assistance programs. Your community should ensure that homeless assistance programs coordinate with legal services organization to address individual and systemic legal needs.

Resource:

- [Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable Toolkit](#) (DOJ)
- [Five Best Practices for SSVF legal services](#) (VA)
- [Homeless Experience Legal Protection](#) (Project H. E. L. P.)