



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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Fact Sheet

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VA Programs for Homeless Veterans

One-third of the adult homeless male population and nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of all homeless adults have served their country in the armed services. While there is no true measure of the number of homeless veterans, it has been estimated that more than 200,000 veterans may be homeless on any given night and that twice as many veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year. Many other veterans are considered at risk because of poverty, lack of support from family and friends and precarious living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing. Almost all (97 percent) homeless veterans are male and the vast majority is single. About 45 percent of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and slightly more than 68 percent suffer from alcohol or drug abuse problems. Thirty-three percent have both psychiatric and substance abuse disorders.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the only Federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless persons. During the last reporting year, VA treated over 77,000 veterans in its specialized homeless programs. Although limited to veterans and their dependents, VA's major homeless programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country, offering a wide array of services and initiatives to help veterans recover from homelessness and live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible. Nearly one-quarter of homeless veterans have said they have used VA homeless services and 57 percent have said they have used VA health-care services.

VA, using its own resources or in partnerships with others, has secured more than 7,000 transitional and permanent beds for homeless veterans throughout the nation. VA spends several billion dollars from its health care and benefit assistance programs to assist tens of thousands of homeless and at-risk veterans. To increase this assistance, VA conducts outreach efforts to connect more homeless veterans to both mainstream and homeless-specific VA programs and benefits. These programs strive to offer a continuum of services that include:

- Aggressive outreach to veterans living on the streets and in shelters who otherwise would not seek assistance.
- Clinical assessment and referral for medical treatment of physical and psychiatric disorders, including substance abuse.
- Long-term transitional residential assistance, case management and rehabilitation.
- Employment assistance and linkage with available income supports and permanent housing.

VA has awarded more than 300 grants to public and nonprofit groups to assist homeless veterans in 45 states and the District of Columbia to provide transitional housing, service centers, and vans to provide transportation to services and employment.

VA sponsors and supports national, regional and local homeless conferences and meetings, bringing together thousands of homeless providers and advocates to discuss community collaborative planning strategies and to provide technical assistance in such areas as transitional housing, mental health and family services, and education and employment opportunities for the homeless.

Homeless Specific Programs

VA's Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program (HCHV) operates at 134 sites, where extensive outreach, physical and psychiatric health exams, treatment, referrals, and ongoing case management are provided to homeless veterans with mental health problems, including substance abuse. This program assessed more than 40,000 veterans annually.

VA's Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) Program provides medical care and rehabilitation in a residential setting on VA medical center grounds to eligible ambulatory veterans disabled by medical or psychiatric disorders, injury or age and who do not need hospitalization or nursing home care. There are more than 1,800 beds available through the program at 35 VA medical centers in 26 states. The program provides residential treatment to nearly 5,500 homeless veterans each year. The domiciliaries conduct outreach and referral; admission screening and assessment; medical and psychiatric evaluation; treatment, vocational counseling and rehabilitation; and post-discharge community support.

Veterans Benefits Assistance is provided at VA Regional Offices by designated staff members who serve as coordinators and points of contact for homeless veterans. Homeless coordinators at VA regional offices provide outreach services and help expedite the processing of homeless veterans' claims. The Homeless Eligibility Clarification Act allows eligible veterans without a fixed address to receive VA benefits checks at VA regional offices. VA also has procedures to expedite the processing of homeless veterans' benefits claims. Last year over 20,000 veterans received services from VBA staff members.

Acquired Property Sales for Homeless Providers Program makes properties VA obtains through foreclosures on VA-insured mortgages available for sale to homeless provider organizations at a discount of 20 to 50 percent. To date, more than 180 properties have been sold and 9 properties have been leased to provide housing for the homeless. These properties have been used to provide homeless persons including veterans with nearly 400,000 sheltered nights in VA acquired property.

Readjustment Counseling Service's Vet Centers have homeless coordinators who provide outreach, psychological counseling, supportive social services and referrals to other VA and community programs. In FY 2001, 130,000 veterans made visits to VA's 206 Vet Centers. An estimated 13,000 homeless veterans may be seen at Vet Centers during the course of the year.

Veterans Industry/Compensated Work-Therapy (CWT) and Compensated Work-Therapy/Transitional Residence Programs Through its CWT/TR program, VA offers structured work opportunities and supervised therapeutic housing for at-risk and homeless veterans with physical, psychiatric and substance abuse disorders. VA contracts with private industry and the public sector for work to be done by these veterans, who learn new job skills, re-learn successful work habits and regain a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Veterans are paid for their work and, in turn, make a payment toward maintenance and upkeep of the residence.

VA operates 54 community-based group homes with more than 425 beds in transitional residences. Nine program sites with 14 houses serve homeless veterans exclusively. Two-thirds of all CWT/TR

beds serve homeless veterans. There are more than 100 individual CWT operations associated with VA medical centers nationwide. Approximately 13,000 veterans participate in CWT programs annually.

VA's National Cemetery Administration and Veterans Health Administration have formed partnerships at national cemeteries, where formerly homeless veterans from the CWT program have received therapeutic work opportunities while providing VA cemeteries with a supplemental work force.

HUD-VA Supported Housing (VASH) Program, a joint program with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provides permanent housing and ongoing treatment services to homeless mentally ill veterans and those suffering from substance abuse disorders. HUD's Section 8 Voucher Program has designated 1,780 vouchers worth \$44.5 million for chronically mentally ill homeless veterans, and VA personnel at 34 sites provide outreach, clinical care and case management services. This approach significantly reduces days of homelessness for veterans plagued by serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

VA's Supported Housing Program VA personnel help homeless veterans secure long-term transitional or permanent housing. They also offer ongoing case management services to help the veterans remain in housing they can afford. VA staff work with private landlords, public housing authorities and nonprofit organizations to find housing arrangements. Veteran service organizations have been instrumental in helping VA establish these housing alternatives nationwide. VA staff at 24 Supported Housing Program sites helped homeless veterans find 1,700 transitional or permanent beds in the community.

Stand Downs are 1-3 day events that provide homeless veterans a variety of services and allow VA and community-based service providers to reach more homeless veterans. Stand downs give homeless veterans a temporary refuge where they can obtain food, shelter, clothing and a range of community and VA assistance. In many locations, stand downs provide health screenings, referral and access to long-term treatment, benefits counseling, ID cards and access to other programs to meet their immediate needs. Each year, VA participates in more than 100 stand downs run by local coalitions. Surveys show that more than 20,000 veterans and family members attend these events with more than 10,000 volunteers contributing annually.

VA Excess Property for Homeless Veterans Initiative provides Federal excess personal property, such as clothing, footwear, sleeping bags, blankets and other items, to homeless veterans through VA domiciliaries and other outreach activities. This initiative has been responsible for the distribution of more than \$100 million worth of material and currently has \$7 million in inventory. This initiative employs formerly homeless veterans to receive, warehouse and ship these goods to homeless programs across the country that assist veterans.

The Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program provides grants and per diem payments to help public and nonprofit organizations establish and operate new supportive housing and service centers for homeless veterans. Grant funds may also be used to purchase vans to conduct outreach or provide transportation for homeless veterans. Since the program's inception in FY 1994, VA has awarded more than 300 grants to faith and community-based service providers, state or local government agencies and Native American tribal governments in 45 states and the District of Columbia.

When all current VA homeless grants are completed, nearly 6,000 new community-based beds will be available for homeless veterans. More than 10,000 homeless veterans are provided supported housing under this program annually.

Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans is a nationwide initiative in which VA works with other Federal, state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations to assess the needs of homeless veterans. CHALENG groups have held conferences, developed directories of local resources available to homeless veterans and established partnerships to fight homelessness and prepare strategies for future actions.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation conducted by the Northeast Program Evaluation Center (NEPEC) at the VA Connecticut Health Care System, VA Medical Center, provides important information about the veterans served and the therapeutic value and cost-effectiveness of the VA's specialized homeless programs. Information from these evaluations also helps program managers determine new directions for expanding and improving services to homeless veterans. VA conducted a one-day census to determine the extent of homelessness among veterans in VA's acute inpatient programs (1995-2000) and found that one-quarter of all veterans in VA beds were homeless.

New Initiatives

The Multifamily Transitional Housing Loan Guarantee for Homeless Veterans Program may provide up to 15 loan guarantees with an aggregate value of \$100 million to establish as many as 5,000 housing units for formally homeless veterans.

VA established a 15 member Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the provision of benefits and services to homeless veterans.

The Interagency Council on the Homeless has been reactivated to help focus attention on and coordinate efforts aimed at ending homelessness.

For more information, visit the VA website at www.va.gov or contact VA's Homeless Veterans Programs Office at 202-273-5764, or e-mail VA at homelessvets@mail.va.gov

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