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SNAPS In Focus: Ending Veteran Homelessness and What it Means for Zero: 2016 Communities

In October, HUD and its Federal partners, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), released Federal criteria and benchmarks associated with what it means to end veteran homelessness locally. As of today, we have been able to celebrate victory with 23 communities and 2 states that were able to demonstrate to the interagency review team that they had met these benchmarks and criteria. And we know that in the months to come, even more communities will be able to claim success.

I'm excited to share that so far this year, four communities participating in the HUD-supported [Zero: 2016](#) initiative have taken what it means to end veteran homelessness even further, not only meeting the Federal criteria and benchmarks, but also meeting the Zero: 2016 definition of "functional zero." In Zero: 2016, functional zero is reached when the number of veterans experiencing homelessness within a community is less than the average number of veterans being connected with permanent housing each month. In achieving this measure, a community has demonstrated the system and capacity to quickly and efficiently connect people with housing and ensure that veteran homelessness within the community will be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

I wanted to take a few minutes today to congratulate Arlington County, VA, the Gulf Coast Region of Mississippi, Montgomery County, MD, and Rockford, Winnebago, and Boone Counties, IL for reaching an extraordinary standard in ending veteran homelessness. "These communities have proven and documented that fewer veterans are now experiencing homelessness on their streets and in their shelters than they routinely house each month," explained Beth Sandor, director of Zero: 2016. "In doing so, they have defined themselves as leaders in the national effort to end veteran homelessness, demonstrating that a sustainable end to veteran homelessness is possible and showcasing the power of a coordinated system complete with a by-name list."

You may ask, "Why two definitions for what it means to end veteran homelessness?" The communities that signed up to participate in Zero: 2016 in late 2014 took on the challenge of meeting the initiative's rigorous goal of functional zero. These communities are leading the way in mapping out a measurable and sustainable end to veteran homelessness, and are receiving significant investments of federally-funded technical assistance in order to do so. The Federal criteria and benchmarks were created to take into consideration community context and allow Federal partners to confirm that communities have reached the goal of ending veteran homelessness as set out in the [Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#). The four communities that have reached functional zero in Zero: 2016 have also all met the Federal criteria and benchmarks. While these measures of success are slightly different, they both ensure that communities have a system in place to end, not just manage, veteran homelessness.

The strategies that are key components of Zero: 2016 are also incorporated into the Federal criteria and benchmarks. Communities that meet both, such as these four communities, have proven that they have the system and capacity to not just house all veterans that are currently experiencing homelessness, but also to sustain these gains by quickly



identifying and housing veterans who may fall into homelessness, ensuring that homelessness among veterans is rare, brief, and non-recurring. These communities have created systems of unparalleled efficiency through the implementation of new strategies and proven best practices. These include adopting a community wide Housing First orientation, the development of a by-name-list, implementation of a coordinated entry system, and prioritization of those veterans with the highest levels of need.

I want to congratulate Arlington County, VA, the Gulf Coast Region of Mississippi, Montgomery County, MD, and Rockford, Winnebago, and Boone Counties, IL for serving as a model for other communities in their efforts to end homelessness among veterans. Thank you for sharing the bright spots and best practices that have helped you to meet the goal of ending veteran homelessness.

Ann Oliva
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs