



June 10, 2015

## SNAPS In Focus: Strategies for Ending Veteran Homelessness in 2015

Five years ago, President Obama made a commitment to all veterans through the release of *Opening Doors* that we would end homelessness among veterans by the end of this year. Along with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Defense (DoD), the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and other agencies, HUD is “all in” to make sure we meet this ambitious—but achievable—goal. We have also partnered with Community Solutions through their Zero: 2016 initiative to provide technical assistance to 75 communities that have committed to ending veteran homelessness by 2015 and chronic homelessness by 2016.

We’ve already seen several communities who have ended homelessness for veterans or are extremely close to it. In January, the City of New Orleans announced that they had effectively ended homelessness among veterans. Phoenix and Salt Lake City have ended chronic homelessness among veterans and are on a path to end homelessness for all veterans by the end of this year. Several other cities are close to being able to announce that they too have met this goal. And across the country, mayors and other leaders have signed on to the “[Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#),” an initiative launched in June 2014 by First Lady Michelle Obama. Since June, 570 leaders, including 432 mayors, 7 governors, and 131 county officials, have committed to the challenge. It’s remarkable to see the results possible when communities rally around shared goals.

Since 2010, homelessness among veterans has decreased 33 percent, and the number of veterans who are homeless on any given night fell to under 50,000 in 2014. You should all take a moment and congratulate yourselves and the people around you that are working hard every day to make this happen. Because of you, thousands of veterans now have a place to call home.

But there is still a lot of work left to do. Over the coming weeks, I will be releasing a series of In Focus messages related to veteran homelessness and effective strategies that have been key for those communities finding success.

Before we begin with the “how,” let’s talk about what we mean when we say “end” veteran homelessness. It does not mean that no veteran will experience a housing crisis again. With changing economic realities, the lack of affordable housing, unpredictable life events, and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments veterans may experience housing instability and even homelessness. Our homeless systems are successful when they are capable of ensuring (and can measure) that when a veteran cannot avoid the street or shelter, our systems ensure that experience is rare, brief, and doesn’t occur again by providing a path to permanent housing— and no veteran is ever forced to live on the street. USICH has [published criteria](#) by which your community can measure whether that infrastructure is in place, along with a [list of questions](#) your community can ask itself to assess whether your community has achieved the goal of ending veteran homelessness.

It’s also important to be clear about the “who” when we talk about ending homelessness among veterans. The Administration’s goal is to end homelessness for *all* Veterans, not just those with honorable discharges or those who served in a particular combat theater, e.g., Iraq or Afghanistan. The goal also includes Reserve and Guard members who have established veteran status with VA following discharge from periods of active duty. If they served for our country then we need to be sure to serve them.



Continuums of Care (CoCs) just submitted their 2015 Point-in-Time (PIT) and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) data to HUD, which means that you have the data available to tell you how many veterans are experiencing homelessness in your community as of the PIT Count in January. Now is the time to have the leadership from the CoC, Public Housing Agency (PHA), and VA sit down at a table and come up with a plan for the next seven months.

Using all data sources—including the FY 2015 PIT, HMIS, and HOMES—we need to do the following:

- Figure out how many housing placements need to happen each month in order to get to zero by the end of the year and what additional resources are needed in order to make that happen.
- Establish a process for ensuring that those veterans that are not eligible for VA housing and services are prioritized for CoC Program-funded assistance.
- Monitor progress frequently and bring in your community leadership to get the resources and partnerships essential to getting to zero.

To support communities as they progress towards the goal, the federal partners have identified [ten strategies](#) that increase leadership, collaboration, and coordination among programs serving veterans experiencing homelessness, and promote rapid access to permanent housing for all veterans. These strategies include getting your Mayor to sign up for the Mayor's Challenge (if they have not already done so), identifying each veteran by name, conducting coordinated outreach and engagement efforts, and increasing connections to employment. In addition, you should also ask landlords to rent to veterans receiving assistance through HUD-VASH, SSVF, or CoC-funded programs. Joining Forces, a nationwide initiative founded by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden to rally Americans around service members and veterans, has published a [fact sheet](#) on [partnering with private landlords](#) to end veteran homelessness.

Another practice that has been critical to the success of community efforts to end homelessness is the creation and use of by-name lists of veterans, which enable communities to coordinate and track their housing placement efforts. This requires sharing and cross-referencing information between VA and CoC datasets. To support these efforts, HUD and the VA created [Best Practices: Sharing Information to End Veteran Homelessness](#), which seeks to provide guidance for local homeless veteran service providers to improve information sharing across programs and systems, strengthen the targeting of resources based on a shared prioritization system, and create more efficient systems for ending veteran homelessness within their communities.

There's no question the goal is in reach, and we are laser-focused on it. The goal of ending veteran homelessness in America is not just about hitting a number, but about communities putting a system in place that can house every veteran experiencing homelessness today and ensure homelessness among veterans is rare, brief, and non-recurring in the future. What we learn from ending homelessness for veterans will prepare us to end homelessness for all other populations in the coming years. We have a big job in front of us but I am confident that we can get there.

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