



August 12, 2013

SNAPS Weekly Focus: Collaborating to Combat Homelessness among Veterans

If you had asked me ten years ago whether I thought we could end veteran homelessness in a few years, I may have been skeptical. You may have been skeptical when you saw the Administration's bold goal to end veterans homelessness by 2015. Now, however, I feel differently. So should you. With the progress we have made, the number of veterans we have housed, the resources we have received, and the incredible partnership we have built with our colleagues at the VA, I actually think reaching that goal is within our grasp. Between 2010 and 2012, we saw an 18% decline in the number of homeless veterans, and we expect that we will see further decline in the 2013 PIT data.

We all know that ending veterans homelessness requires intense collaboration at the national, state, and local levels. HUD (including multiple offices within HUD) works closely with our partners--the VA and the USICH--through an innovative relationship we call **Solving Veterans Homelessness as One**. Even though each agency has a very different operational and program structure, we have decided that on the issue of veterans homelessness, we would work around those differences to make collaborative decisions and recommendations to our leadership. This reaches from the staff level all the way to the top – Secretary Shinseki and Secretary Donovan meet with us to discuss our progress and what we see as barriers to even better progress.

Together, we have [defined a vision for reaching this goal](#).

If we, at the Federal level - with all of the bureaucracy and barriers that come with working in the Federal government - can make the commitment to collaborative decision-making based on solid data and resource allocation based on need, so can you. In order to reach the goal, we need **local leadership** from Continuums of Care (CoCs), Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and VA Medical Centers (VAMC), and **strategic planning** to use the resources we have in the most effective way possible. We need deep collaboration across systems to address the needs of Veterans and their family members that cannot be addressed through VA programs.

This progress we have made is significant but we need to do more. Much more. I am asking that CoCs continue to search for resources and make investments in Veteran-centric housing and health programs, adopt evidence-based best practices such as Housing First, and collaborate across sectors to ensure that our nation's Veterans who do become homeless become housed as quickly as possible. Specifically, I am advocating two immediate actions:

- **HUD-VASH and VA Resources.** CoCs should be collaborating closely with their local PHAs and VAMCs to identify and prioritize VA eligible **chronically homeless Veterans** for HUD-VASH. And because not all homeless Veterans will require the intensive supports that HUD-VASH provides, CoCs must work with VAMCs to link all eligible Veterans with other VA programs (like medical services, SSVF) as quickly as possible. Close collaboration between CoCs and VAMCs allows more efficient use of limited resources and referral to the most appropriate intervention.



- **HUD Homeless Resources.** Some Veterans are ineligible for VA services due to their discharge status or because they do not meet the minimum duty requirements. For the purposes of counting homeless Veterans during the point-in-time count, discharge status is not relevant. It is estimated that 15 percent of Veterans counted during the point-in-time count are ineligible for at least some VA programs. Therefore, CoCs and homeless service providers must collaborate with the local VAMCs to identify and prioritize HUD-funded programs for Veterans that are ineligible for VA services.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness website has a briefing paper on [Five Strategies for Building a Successful Relationship with your Local VA](#). CoCs are encouraged to read this paper to learn ways to create or strengthen their relationship with their local VA Medical Center.

Lastly, in partnership with the Rapid Results Institute and Community Solutions, the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS) has funded Veterans and Acceleration Boot Camps with the 100,000 Homes Campaign. The Boot Camps are an opportunity to bring local government, CoC providers, PHAs, and VAMC staff together in order to improve Veteran housing and placement processes and increase effectiveness and efficiencies. The Veteran Boot Camps establish “take down” targets, i.e., how many Veterans need to be housed each month to end Veteran homelessness. Preliminary data indicates this approach is very successful and there are several cities currently vying for the honor of ending Veterans homelessness first. For more information on the 100K Campaign, please visit the [100k homes website](#).

Don't forget to check back to [SNAPS Weekly Focus page](#) over the coming weeks as we will continue to post related materials and TA products related to each weekly focus, as they become available.

As always, we thank you for your commitment to ending homelessness.

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