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SNAPS In Focus: Increasing Housing Placements of Homeless Veterans

For the last few years, you have heard me talk about [Housing First](#) as a best practice approach for permanent housing and a key strategy for meeting the goals of [Opening Doors](#). In 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) made Housing First the official policy of the [HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\)](#) program. A community-wide Housing First approach can ensure that veterans experiencing homelessness move into permanent housing as quickly as possible and receive the right level of supportive services, regardless of their substance use or criminal history, poor credit, or other challenges.

Assisting veterans to find units to rent with these subsidies is particularly difficult in tight housing markets, where there is little access to affordable housing, employment opportunities, and other essential supports. [Engaging landlords](#), property managers, developers, and real estate professionals is essential. Having a diverse and large number of housing partners is key to the success of HUD-VASH and other programs using Housing First approaches, especially when affordable housing options are limited. These partnerships reduce delays in housing placement, decrease time spent homeless, and increase housing choice for veterans. Landlords can also benefit through more stable rental income, reduced vacancy rates due to quick connections with renters as soon as units become available, and access to staff who can address any issues.

One successful strategy for developing housing partners is finding real estate professionals to be your champions and partners in this effort. For example, the [Atlanta Real Estate Collaborative \(AREC\)](#) is a group of private individuals with extensive real estate experience who have united to share their professional expertise in housing to improve local efforts to end homelessness in Atlanta. Their [Open Doors](#) initiative is centered on two key elements: landlord engagement and using technology to increase housing placement. Open Doors develops relationships with property owners and managers to expand the inventory of available units for persons experiencing homelessness. Open Doors also partnered with key technology partners to build a live feed of information showing daily updates of unit availability, allowing service providers to spend less time gathering information and more time identifying housing options for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Continuums of Care (CoCs), homeless service providers, and philanthropic organizations can play a critical role in improving utilization of HUD-VASH by [helping reduce the administrative burden on Public Housing Agencies \(PHAs\) that administer these vouchers](#). Specifically, CoCs and homeless service providers can assist PHAs with applications and briefings, housing navigation, and inspections. PHAs can also get help with these costs by requesting Extraordinary Administrative Fees (EAF) as discussed in a [letter](#) from HUD to PHAs highlighting strategies to improve HUD-VASH voucher utilization. Philanthropy can also play a role by funding activities such as [creating a rent mitigation fund](#) that landlords can draw upon to reduce risk or by helping fund the cost of a landlord recruitment campaign.

Communities across the country are making tremendous progress, demonstrating that achieving this goal is very possible. We know the strategies that work – however implementing these strategies may look very different in different places. To help communities reach this goal, CoCs may request technical assistance through [Vets@Home](#). Many communities are already receiving technical assistance related to ending veteran homelessness through other HUD or VA initiatives. Vets@Home is not a new initiative; instead it is intended to expand upon the efforts already happening and support more communities with reaching this goal.



HUD, USICH, and the VA are working on developing additional tools and resources to help communities increase housing placements of homeless veterans. Below is a list of resources currently available (including those referenced in this message):

- Resources for CoC and PHA Collaboration to End Homelessness - <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/resources-for-coc-and-pha-collaboration-to-end-homelessness/>
- A Letter from HUD to PHA Executive Directors on Increasing HUD-VASH Utilization - <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4693/letter-from-hud-to-pha-executive-directors-on-increasing-hud-vash-utilization/>
- FAQs on Payment Standards and Fair Market rents (developed by the HUD Oregon Field Office) - <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4694/payment-standards-and-fair-market-rents-faqs/>
- Joining Forces *Private Landlords Partnering to End Homelessness* - http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/SUM_Private_Landlord_Engagement_FINAL.pdf
- The [Landlord Liaison Project](#) is a project of King County, Washington that creates incentives for landlords to relax screening criteria for people experiencing homelessness who have barriers to accessing permanent housing. - http://usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/landlord_liaison_project
- The [Tenancy Preservation Program of Massachusetts](#) prevents homelessness among persons with disabilities by acting as a neutral intermediary between landlord and tenant to address lease violations that might otherwise result in eviction. - http://usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/tenancy_preservation_program_of_machusetts
- The [Community Engagement Program](#) (CEP) works in partnership with the Portland Housing Authority to provide rent subsidies and with the local Rent Well program to mitigate landlord risks through a landlord guarantee fund. - http://usich.gov/usich_resources/solutions/explore/community_engagement_program
- A Message from USICH on Partnering with Landlords to End Homelessness - <http://usich.gov/blog/partnering-with-landlords-to-end-homelessness>
- A Message from USICH on Fully Utilizing HUD-VASH to Achieve the National Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness - <http://usich.gov/blog/fully-utilizing-hud-vash>

As always, thank you for your commitment and hard work.

Ann Oliva
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