

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Homeless Programs Office

*Strategic Plan 2021-2025,
Winter 2022 Update*

EXTERNAL



**TOGETHER,
WE CAN END
VETERAN
HOMELESSNESS!**

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration

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Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



I am Monica Diaz, Executive Director of the Homeless Programs Office (HPO) of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). I am grateful to have the opportunity to serve our nation's Veterans in a capacity that promotes a holistic approach to the restoration of their health. My office is dedicated to finding solutions to increase access to permanent housing and offering programs and services that provide a sense of dignity, belonging, personal empowerment, and independence. I have made it my mission to ensure that HPO is able to meet the changing needs of Veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

HPO has evolved since its inception in 1987. Through the amendment of the Hearth Act in 2009 and partnerships with 19 other federal agencies, we have established a unified and formalized approach to addressing homelessness. To date, results of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annual Point-in-Time Count show a nearly 50% reduction in homelessness among Veterans. We believe that our network of partnerships, the implementation of evidence-based Housing First approaches, the establishment of innovative initiatives, and the relentless dedication and hard work of the VA staff have contributed to this reduction.

This is our first update to the HPO strategic plan, and it reflects changes based on the current priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration as well as key lessons learned from our ongoing efforts to serve Veterans during the coronavirus pandemic. As you read through the objectives and strategies outlined in the updated plan, consider what steps you can take to help us achieve our goals. We cannot achieve our goal of ending Veteran homelessness alone; the support from our community partners and stakeholders is critical. Together, we are committed to refining and realigning our objectives and strategies to take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure that every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home.

I invite you to join my team and me on this journey. Together, we can end Veteran homelessness.

Monica Diaz, MBA, BA, L-NHA

Senior Executive Director, Homeless Programs Office
Veterans Health Administration
Department of Veterans Affairs

CONTRIBUTORS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HPO would like to acknowledge the following groups and organizations whose contributions were vital to the development of this strategic planning document:

- **Homeless Programs Office Staff.** Staff from HPO's various sections and programs who provided information and insight.
- **VA Stakeholders.** Countless VHA Network Homeless Coordinators and other VA and VHA leadership participants who helped create content.
- **Strategic Decision and Coordination Team (SDCT).** SDCT is a collaborative decision-making body representing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Together, these agencies execute activities necessary to prevent and end Veteran homelessness.
- **Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ACHV).** ACHV is authorized by statute and operates under the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. ACHV advises and makes recommendations to the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress on the provision of benefits and services to Veterans experiencing homelessness and on other issues affecting this population.
- **National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH).** NAEH is a nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to end homelessness in the United States. NAEH uses research and data to find solutions to homelessness, works with federal and local partners to create a solid base of policy and resources that support those solutions, and helps communities implement them.
- **National Coalition on Homeless Veterans (NCHV).** NCHV is a nonprofit organization that serves as a resource and technical assistance center for a national network of community-based service providers and local, state, and federal agencies that provide emergency and supportive housing, food, health services, job training, placement assistance, legal aid, and case management for homeless Veterans.



**Working together, we
can end and prevent
Veteran homelessness.**

Section 1: Mission, Vision, Values

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to assist Veterans and their families in obtaining **permanent and sustainable housing** with access to high-quality health care and supportive services, and to ensure that **Veteran homelessness is prevented or otherwise rare, brief, and nonrecurring.**

VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to **end homelessness for all Veterans and their families** using evidence-based, innovative practices and partnerships to provide access to permanent housing, and deliver services that are Veteran-centered, equitable, and inclusive, leading to personal empowerment and increased independence.

HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE (HPO) CORE VALUES

HPO's core values — **H.P.O. C.A.R.E.S** — embrace VA's I-CARE values and are embodied in everything we do in pursuit of our mission.

HOME: We believe that ending homelessness starts by providing a **safe, affordable, and stable place to call home** using a holistic and inclusive approach that is responsive to the needs of each Veteran and their family.

PARTNERSHIPS: We **engage in meaningful partnerships** at the federal, state, and local levels that enhance access to care, improve service coordination, and support the use of resources, ensuring partners share HPO's values.

OWNERSHIP: We believe that our **work reflects our values**. We practice integrity through each one of our actions, and we do what we say we will do.

COMMITMENT: We commit to identifying new and better ways to accomplish our goals through **intelligent risk-taking, creativity, collaboration, continual research, and education**.

ADVOCACY: We advocate **immediate and long-term solutions for Veterans and their families at risk of or experiencing homelessness**, propose and implement policy changes, challenge policies that create racial disparities in homelessness, and seek out resources and partnerships to carry out our mission.

RESPECT: We treat all people with dignity and respect, with the continual understanding that **we are all part of one mission**. We **respect the right to self-determination** among Veterans and their families by demonstrating a high regard for their individual values, preferences, and needs.

EXCELLENCE: We achieve excellence by **understanding our mission, our values, our goals, and our roles** in the organization. We attain excellence through the pursuit of **data and research-driven decisions, continual quality improvement, accountability**, and integration of **best-practice approaches**.

SERVICE: We provide exceptional **mission-driven customer service** to all whom we interact with including Veterans and their families, stakeholders, community partners, colleagues, and staff.



We are all part of
one mission.

Section 2: HPO Practices and Pillars

HPO PRACTICES

HPO's ability to achieve targeted outcomes relies on the integration of services and programs, and 3 essential practices:

- **Conducting** coordinated and preventive outreach by proactively seeking and identifying Veterans in need of assistance.
- **Connecting** homeless and at-risk Veterans with [housing solutions](#), [health care](#), [community employment services](#), and [other supportive services](#).
- **Collaborating** with federal, state, and local agencies; employers; housing providers; faith-based and community nonprofits; and others to expand employment and affordable housing options for Veterans exiting homelessness.

HPO PILLARS

HPO's practices, programs, and services center on our commitment to ending homelessness among Veterans and are based on 8 pillars: outreach, health care treatment, housing solutions and supportive services, community employment, community partnerships, administrative operations, data business intelligence and research.

The pillars are foundational to the many homeless programs and services HPO established over the years that have evolved to meet the needs of homeless Veterans and their families. HPO programs that fall under each of the pillars are described in the following section. Details regarding these programs can be found in the [HPO Fact Sheet](#).

Outreach

Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), established in 1987. The primary goal of HCHV's 2 programs is to reduce homelessness among Veterans by connecting them with health care and other needed services. Through outreach, case management, and contract residential services, chronically homeless Veterans — especially those with serious mental health diagnoses or substance use disorders — are provided with quality VA or community-based housing and services that meet their special needs. For more information, visit www.va.gov/homeless/hchv.asp.

- **Stand Downs, established in 1989.** Stand Downs are collaborative events organized by local VA medical centers (VAMCs) with support from community agencies, other government agencies, and community groups that serve people who are homeless. For more information, visit www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp.
- **Community Resource and Referral Centers (CRRCs), established in 2010.** CRRCs are a collaborative effort of VA, communities, service providers, and agency partners to provide both a refuge from the streets and a central location to engage homeless Veterans in services. When Veterans enter these centers, they are referred to physical and mental health care resources, job development programs, housing options, and other VA and non-VA benefits. For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/CRRC.asp>.

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (NCCHV), established in 2009-2010. This hotline provides free 24/7 access to VA staff who can assist homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families. The hotline also serves VAMCs; federal, state, and local partners; community agencies; service providers; and others. For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp>.

Veterans Justice Programs (VJP), authorized by law in 2001. 2 prevention-focused programs were established between 2007 and 2009:

- **Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV), established in 2007.** The HCRV program addresses the needs of Veterans who are returning to their community following a period of incarceration. For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>.
- **Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO), established in 2009.** The goal of the VJO program is to prevent homelessness among formerly incarcerated Veterans and avoid the unnecessary criminalization and extended incarceration of Veterans with mental illness. For more information, visit www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp.

Health Care Treatment

Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams (HPACTs), established in 2011. HPACTs provide a coordinated “medical home” designed around the unique needs and distinct challenges homeless Veterans face both accessing and engaging in health care. The HPACT provides and coordinates health care and other related services that Veterans may need while helping them obtain and stay in permanent housing. For more information, visit https://www.va.gov/homeless/h_pact.asp.

Housing Solutions and Supportive Services

Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD), established in 1992. Through the GPD program, VA awards grants to community-based agencies to provide transitional housing and supportive services with the goal of helping Veterans experiencing homelessness achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income, and attain greater self-determination. Additionally, the GPD Program offers Case Management grants to support housing retention for previously homeless Veterans transitioning to permanent housing. GPD-funded projects offer communities a way to provide housing and other services to homeless Veterans and helps VAMCs by augmenting or supplementing the services they provide.

For more information, visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp>.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), established in 1992. Through this collaborative program, HUD provides eligible homeless Veterans with a housing choice rental voucher, and VA provides case management and supportive services.

For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/homeless/hud-vash.asp>.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), established in 2012. SSVF provides prevention and intervention services for Veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. SSVF awards grants to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that provide outreach and case management services to eligible Veteran families and assist them in obtaining VA and other benefits, including legal assistance, childcare, vocational counseling, transportation, housing, and referrals to health care. For more information, visit www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.

Community Employment

Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services (HVCEs), established in 2014. HVCEs deploys more than 150 Vocational Development Specialists, who serve as Employment Specialists and Community Employment Coordinators in VA homeless programs across the country to improve employment outcomes for homeless Veterans. For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/HVCEs.asp>.

Community Partnerships

Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups), established in 1993. This project brings together service providers, advocates, Veterans, local officials, and other concerned citizens to identify and meet the needs of homeless Veterans through planning and cooperative action. For more information about the project, including the demographics of the participants and full details of the top 10 unmet needs for Veterans, visit www.va.gov/homeless/chaleng.asp.

Office of Community Engagement, established in 2014. The Office of Community Engagement serves as a trusted resource and catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community levels. VA establishes partnerships to enhance supportive services and resources for Veterans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. For more information, visit <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/>.

Administrative Operations

HPO Business Operations Team, established in 2012. The HPO Business Operations Team provides management and quality assurance oversight of HPO's products, processes, and operations. Through its work, this team guides the overall direction, facilitation, and accomplishment of program office goals and objectives, with a focus on providing quality services in human resources, correspondence, office action and deliverable tracking, inventory management, space management, and overall administrative support.

Business Intelligence

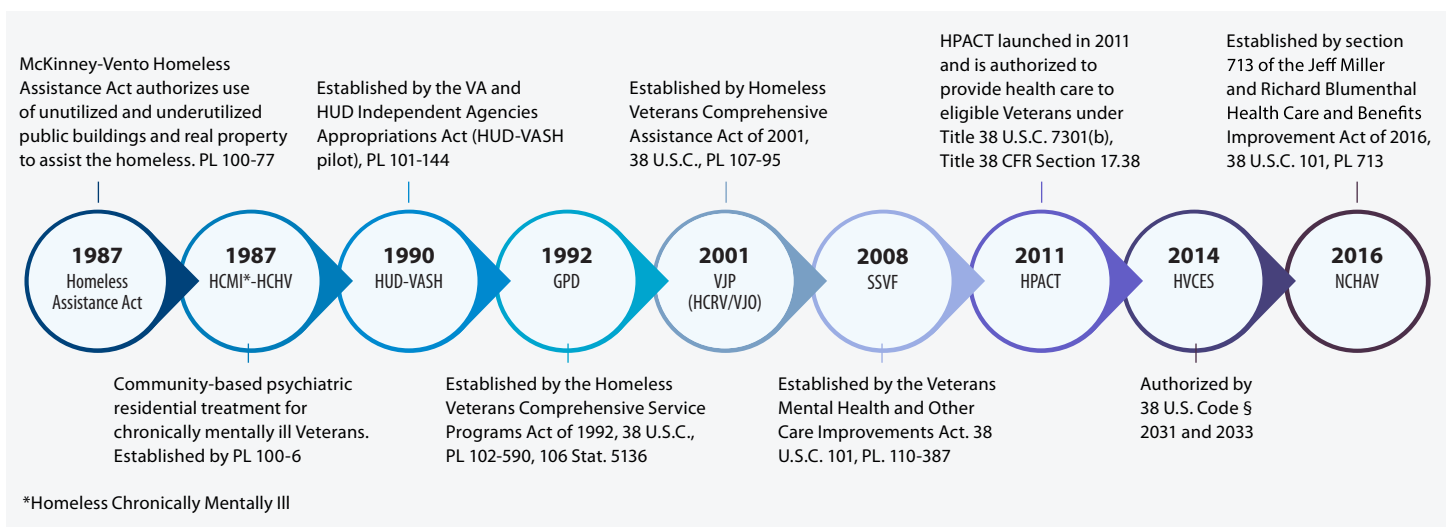
Clinical Operations Business Intelligence (BI), established in 2016. HPO's BI section provides visibility and insights into homeless program operations, with the goal of improving program performance, strategic management, and operational efficiency. This is achieved by developing strategies and leading national initiatives that support data-driven, enterprise-wide decisions and actions. The BI team leads program evaluation, technical assistance, field support, data collection and management, operational analysis, and performance improvement efforts across HPO.

Research, Model Development, and Education

National Center on Homelessness among Veterans (NCHAV), established in 2009 and authorized through federal legislation in 2016. NCHAV promotes recovery-oriented care for Veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness by conducting and supporting research; assessing the effectiveness of programs; identifying and disseminating best practices; and informing policymakers. NCHAV serves as a resource center for all research and training activities. For more information, visit www.va.gov/homeless/nchav/index.asp.

Legislative Timeline of Homeless Programs

The graphic below shows VHA's legislative timeline for the authorization of HPO's different programs and services.





**Our work reflects
our values.**

Section 3: Objectives and Strategies

HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The following 6 objectives and associated strategies were identified to propel HPO's vision and mission forward. These objectives and strategies will be re-assessed annually and updated as appropriate.

OBJECTIVE 1: Expand and increase housing stock.

Strategies to achieve objective:

- 1.1** Provide access to a variety of housing options.
- 1.2** Strengthen and build partnerships across federal, state, and private entities to expand housing stock availability.

- Collaborate with the Office of Asset Enterprise Management to develop an Enhanced Use Lease guide for developers interested in providing housing for the homeless.
- Promote the utilization of HUD-VASH vouchers for project-based development and work with HUD, public housing authorities, VAMCs, and other partner agencies to promote this effort.
- Collaborate with communities to expand capacity and repurpose existing housing stock (e.g., converting of hotels/motels to permanent housing, expanding shared housing opportunities).

OBJECTIVE 2: Prevent and resolve returns to homelessness.

Strategies to achieve objective:

- 2.1** Increase case management for Veterans by ensuring adequate staffing. In areas where ensuring adequate VA staffing is difficult, HPO will utilize contracts and grant-funded programs to deliver quality supportive services.
- 2.2** Enhance income and financial stability to ensure that homeless and at-risk Veterans can afford to obtain and sustain housing.

- Expand access to employment opportunities and/or vocational training opportunities (e.g., through linkage to Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program).
- Assist Veterans and their family members with obtaining entitlements and other benefits, as appropriate. To this end, continue to promote the use of SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) among homeless programs.
- Develop opportunities that empower Veterans to become more financially independent (i.e., budgeting and financial management).

- 2.3** Expand the SSVF Shallow Subsidy initiative to provide housing rental assistance to extremely low and very low-income Veteran households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Facilitate the full integration of the local coordinated entry system (CES).
- 2.4** Optimize identification and outreach efforts to justice-involved Veterans.
- Enhance outreach through VJO peer specialists.
- 2.5** Increase Veterans' access to legal services through additional grants and partnerships.
- 2.6** Enhance coordination with DoD to ensure that transitioning service members who identify as having post-separation housing needs receive referrals to VA and assessments for VA benefits and homelessness prevention assistance.
- 2.7** Develop a comprehensive homeless prevention strategy to identify and engage Veterans at risk of homelessness using specific homelessness risk factors informed by evidence-based research and Veterans with lived experience.
- Implement a new Homeless Prevention Screener.
- 2.8** Enhance call center referral duties, particularly at facilities with high utilization, to provide dedicated wrap-around prevention coordination.

OBJECTIVE 3: Enhance targeted services to address the needs of high-acuity and vulnerable populations (e.g., Veterans who are older, have a history of opioid misuse, or are at risk for suicide).

Strategies to achieve objective:

- 3.1** Develop initiatives that support the integration of geriatric services with VA homeless programs to address the needs of aging Veterans.
- Develop housing models to address the needs of the frail and elderly homeless Veteran population.
 - Work with HUD to promote project-based voucher development, specifically targeting senior housing development opportunities (serving Veterans aged 55 and above).
 - Work with the Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC) program office to implement specialized programs that facilitate program development through collaboration within and outside VHA.

3.2 Collaborate with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) to develop initiatives or approaches that will provide meaningful Veteran-centered interventions for Veterans at risk of suicide while receiving care from VA Homeless Programs.

3.3 Provide a holistic and person-centered approach to homelessness by adopting evidence-based methods designed to motivate Veteran participation in programming.

3.4 Pursue a targeted technical assistance strategy in communities with the highest prevalence of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

- Implement an integrated approach across HPO programs and services to assist the communities with high numbers of Veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Collaborate with stakeholders in the communities with high Point-in-Time Counts or large unsheltered populations to assess processes that will promote local planning efforts.

3.5 Make health care accessible to all Veterans virtually and in person.

- Increase telehealth options for Veterans through the expansion of technology.
- Increase access to care through Mobile Medical Unit Expansion.

3.6 Facilitate the full integration of the local Coordinated Entry System (CES).

- Support the VAMCs' adoption and implementation of all HPO guidance regarding CES participation.

3.7 Enhance residential homeless programs (e.g., Grant and Per Diem, Health Care for Homeless Veterans Contract Residential Services, and Low Demand Safe Haven) to increase access and decrease barriers for women, transgender, and gender non-conforming justice-involved and aging Veterans.

- Publish a GPD capital grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) that will provide funding to grantees with congregate settings to remodel or develop individual living units to facilitate social distancing.

3.8 Update NOFOs and contract language or pursue regulatory changes that will target current needs and strategically prioritize the unsheltered homeless population.

OBJECTIVE 4: Support the development of a highly skilled workforce.

Strategies to achieve objective:

- 4.1 Promote a workplace culture that accepts and celebrates diversity and inclusion.
- 4.2 Create a comprehensive staff development plan supporting a succession pipeline of homeless program staff.
- 4.3 Launch a self-directed curriculum and certificate program based on the competency model specific to the homeless population in the VA Talent Management System (7-domain course).

- NCHAV will identify existing and needed curriculum, training, education, and technical assistance related to the competency model.
- NCHAV will review, catalog, and make available or develop content as necessary, using multiple modalities and consulting researchers and experts on homeless populations.

- 4.4 Identify and address the causes of burnout among staff working in homeless programs.

OBJECTIVE 5: Use research and state-of-the-art analytical data, evaluation tools, and processes to make informed and timely decisions.

Strategies to achieve objective:

- 5.1 Develop, modernize, and sustain tools to streamline processes and provide VAMC homeless program managers with the necessary insights to make data-driven decisions.
- 5.2 Incorporate HPO leaders' and staff's insights into program operations to improve program performance, strategic management, and operational efficiency. In support of this, provide training, education, and tools to HPO leaders and staff to use data internally and with community partners.

- Improve program performance by evaluating policies, procedures, and operations, and incorporating feedback from stakeholders and Veterans with lived experience and expertise.
- Increase efficiencies by using data to determine if resources can be realigned to better support the needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

- 5.3 Lead initiatives that support data-driven, enterprise-wide decisions and actions.
- 5.4 Promote research that provides a comprehensive understanding of homeless programs and the Veterans they serve, and enables the identification, evaluation, and rapid implementation of evidence-based strategies to end and prevent homelessness and improve treatment and Veteran services.

5.5 Support the development of a nationwide, real-time Veteran by name list.

OBJECTIVE 6: Provide equitable services and outcomes through all homeless programs and services.

Strategies to achieve objective:

6.1 Ensure equitable homeless program services by ensuring that programs operate equitably through continuous evaluation of current policies and developing new strategies that address disparities in access and outcomes based on race, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and legal history.

- Provide training and resources to further systemic knowledge and expertise in building and maintaining a culture of competency around race, gender, and equity issues.
- Analyze data and study explicit and implicit factors and patterns that perpetuate disparities and inequalities, and develop and implement national strategies for making positive, measurable, and equitable changes within HPO and at the field level.
- Develop strategies to solicit and incorporate feedback from Veterans with lived experience routinely.

6.2 Enhance grant applications and guidelines to demonstrate a commitment to racial equity design and outcomes.

6.3 Assess and combat the stigmatization of justice-involved Veterans, including stigmatization based on multi-group identities (including but not limited to race, gender identity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, and legal history).

6.4 Promote research focused on homeless programs and services, including studying racial disparities in domains that impact the homeless Veteran program population.

6.5 Coordinate with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), USICH, HUD, and the White House Council on Native American Affairs to identify how current programs that address Native Veteran homelessness could be strengthened, and whether new programs or deliverables are needed.

The background of the image is a close-up, slightly blurred view of the American flag. The top portion shows the blue field with white stars, while the bottom portion shows the red and white stripes. The text is centered in the upper-middle part of the image.

**Mission-driven
customer service.**