



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

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Policy Statement: HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program

WASHINGTON, Jan. 1, 2017- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program is the only federal program specifically designed to end chronic homelessness for veterans and their families. The men and women who enroll in the program become eligible for placement in permanent housing through the award of veteran-specific HUD Section 8 housing vouchers, and receive comprehensive VA case management and other supportive services to remain stably housed.

Case management is an integral part of this permanent supportive housing program. The vast majority of veterans who receive HUD-VASH vouchers have serious mental illness, substance abuse disorders, physical disabilities, and co-occurring disorders. Veterans create individualized "Housing Recovery Plans" with their case managers, focusing on long-term recovery and full integration into their communities. These plans involve health care, resolving legal and financial issues, and addressing employment needs and other income supports for which they may be eligible.

Through FY 2017, HUD has awarded more than 86,000 HUD-VASH vouchers. Nationwide, more than 300 Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) have participated in the program, and approximately 111,000 homeless veterans have been served through the HUD-VASH program since 2008. Recently, Congress made permanent a set-aside program to encourage HUD-VASH vouchers to be used on tribal lands, thereby filling an important gap in our service delivery system.

How does the program work?

When Congress funds new HUD-VASH vouchers, HUD – in consultation with VA – awards blocks of vouchers to PHAs across the country based on geographic need. When vouchers become available, VA Medical Center personnel, in consultation with community partners, determine which veterans are clinically eligible for the program before making referrals to local PHAs, which then must verify eligibility based on income limits and HUD regulations.

Veterans who receive HUD-VASH vouchers rent privately owned housing and generally contribute up to 30 percent of their income toward rent. VA case managers foster a therapeutic relationship with veterans and act as liaisons with landlords, PHAs, and community-based service providers. In some instances, these case management services are contracted through service providers who have already established relationships with participating veterans.

When a veteran no longer needs the program's supports or has exceeded its income limits, these vouchers become available for the next qualifying veteran. In 2014, 71 percent of veterans admitted to the HUD-VASH program met chronic homeless criteria and 91 percent of allocated

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vouchers resulted in permanent housing placement.
Why is HUD-VASH critical?

With its focus on housing the most vulnerable and difficult-to-serve veteran families, the HUD-VASH Program enables communities to effectively end chronic veteran homelessness. By providing a stable environment with wrap-around services, veterans and their families are able to regain control of their lives and ultimately reintegrate into society.

What should Congress do?

When the continuing resolution expires in April of 2017, Congress should include the additional HUD-VASH funding included in S. 2844 of the 114th Congress. This legislation, passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee, includes \$50 million for roughly 6,500 new vouchers.

Congressional initiative and commendable bipartisan support is largely responsible for the noteworthy success of the HUD-VASH program today. Voucher lease-up is at an all-time high, and VA and HUD leadership have renewed their focus on targeting vouchers to chronically homeless veterans. A continued investment in the program will ensure our nation has the resources needed to serve the most severely impacted segment of the homeless veteran population.

What should the Administration do?

Despite the many successes of the HUD-VASH program, some issues remain. The largest of these is the ability of VA to fill the need for experienced case managers in some areas with significant needs or in rural areas. In many locations around the country, the expertise or the capacity for case managing veterans in HUD-VASH lies outside of the VA, with local community service providers. In other locations, local community providers are poised and uniquely able to supplement VA case management with housing navigators and peer specialists. VA has the ability to contract case manager positions to these community providers, and in fact encourages its VAMC's to do so. However, the likelihood of this happening is different at every VAMC and is up to local VAMC leadership, leaving needed contracting up to a complicated and lengthy contracting process and to local leadership with several competing priorities. VA should direct its VAMC's to contract out case management positions in locations where the VA has not been able to provide sufficient case managers itself within a set period of time.

The Administration should also ramp up their efforts to project base HUD-VASH vouchers. In many tight housing markets, affordable housing is scarce if not nearly non-existent. The only surefire way to find homes for veterans through the HUD-VASH program in these communities is to create it through project basing. Especially in areas with high concentrations of homeless veterans (*i.e.* California, Texas, Florida, and New York) this is the most effective approach. NCHV was pleased that just the Administration agreed with this position, and released a round of 2,134 project based vouchers in November of 2016. NCHV encourages the Trump Administration to continue assessing the need for further rounds of project based vouchers, and to execute those rounds when necessary.

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