



NATIONAL COALITION for HOMELESS VETERANS

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Policy Statement: HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program

WASHINGTON, May 30, 2018- 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 the permanent supportive housing program. The vast majority of veterans who receive HUD-VASH vouchers have serious mental illness, substance abuse disorders, physical disabilities, or 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 approximately 93,000 HUD-VASH vouchers. Nationwide, more than 300 Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) have participated in the program. 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 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% 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% of veterans admitted to the HUD-VASH program met chronic homeless criteria and 91% of allocated vouchers resulted in permanent housing placement.

Mission: The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, promoting collaboration, and building the capacity of service providers.

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.

“The HUD-VASH voucher remains the most flexible and responsive housing option we have, thanks to our partnership with HUD and the leadership of Secretary Donovan,” then Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki said it best at the 2012 NCHV Annual Conference. “Chronically homeless veterans face a complex set of issues that only the HUD-VASH Program can successfully and swiftly address.”

What should Congress do?

Congress should fully fund the case management costs associated with the 5,500 vouchers appropriated for FY 2018 in PL 115-141. This appropriation only supplied HUD vouchers to the program, but none of the required concomitant VA case management money. Report language in the explanatory statement directed VA to case manage these new vouchers and quickly submit a budget to Congress which details the increased funding need caused by the new vouchers. Congress and VA should continue to work together to ensure the speedy, quality provision of case management services to these, and all, HUD-VASH vouchers.

Furthermore, Congress should create an additional 5,000 vouchers through appropriation in FY 2019. A recent NCHV survey of its members indicated that 86% had waitlists for HUD-VASH and had a desperate need for more of this resource in their communities.

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 case managers. In many locations around the country, the expertise or the capacity for case managing HUD-VASH vouchers lies solely outside of the VA, with local community service providers. VA has the ability to “contract out” 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 not always most likely where it is most needed. VA should direct its VAMC’s to contract out case management positions in locations where the VA has not been able to provide 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 Administration to continue assessing the need for further rounds of project based vouchers, and to execute those rounds when necessary.

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