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## **Policy Statement: Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 1, 2014— The Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is the only national, veteran-specific program available to help at-risk veterans from ever becoming homeless. The program is also the most suitable resource for homeless veterans who are able to quickly transition out of homelessness into permanent housing.

SSVF grantees are nonprofit, community-based organizations that provide very low-income veterans and their families with services in the following areas: health, legal, child care, transportation, fiduciary and payee, daily living, obtaining benefits, and housing counseling. The program also allows for time-limited payments to third parties – such as landlords, utility companies, moving companies, and licensed child-care providers – to ensure housing stability for veteran families. SSVF funds are leveraged with local Continuums of Care and other community partners at no extra cost to the federal government.

In FY 2013, VA awarded \$100 million in 319 individual SSVF grants to organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In FY 2014, the SSVF program received a funding increase to \$300 million, including grant renewals. About 120,000 homeless and at-risk veterans and their families are expected to be served with these funds.

### *Why is SSVF critical?*

Modeled after HUD’s Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), the SSVF Program serves low-income veterans and their families residing in or transitioning to permanent housing. HPRP, however, was a one-time infusion of funds whose distribution demonstrated what many in the veteran service provider community long suspected – veterans are not well served by “mainstream” homeless programs. The HUD-published report “HPRP: Year 1 Summary” shows that only 2% of adults served by the program were veterans, even though veterans accounted for 16% of the adult homeless population in that year.

The vast majority of VA’s homeless programs are necessarily geared toward rehabilitation—more than half of the homeless veteran population suffers from physical disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse, or co-occurring disorders. The SSVF Program is critical because it serves an at-risk veteran population that is ten times larger than the homeless veteran cohort, yet has no other dedicated funding source for the homelessness prevention services it needs. In addition, it is a highly successful program, with 86% of all veterans served in FY2012 exiting to positive housing outcomes.

At the 2012 NCHV Annual Conference, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki explained the “two-fold challenge” of ending veteran homelessness: “rescuing veterans who are already homeless while simultaneously preventing those at risk of homelessness from slipping into that downward spiral.” VA’s prevention efforts are dependent upon the SSVF Program— the core of

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*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.*

the department's future homeless veteran service delivery system.

*How many veterans are at risk of homelessness?*

More than 1.4 million American veterans live in poverty and are more vulnerable to becoming homeless than their civilian counterparts. VA research shows that one in 10 veterans living in poverty is likely to experience homelessness. In October 2011, VA and HUD released "Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress," which found the following:

- Young veterans (between ages 18 and 30) in poverty are almost four times more likely to become homeless than their non-veteran counterparts in poverty.
- Women veterans in poverty are more than three times more likely to become homeless than women non-veterans in poverty.
- More than 26% of poor African American, American Indian, and Alaska Native veterans were homeless at some point during 2010.

*What should Congress do?*

**NCHV recommends that Congress reauthorize and fund the SSVF Program at no less than \$500 million through the maturity of the Five-Year Plan (FY 2015).** The program is currently authorized at \$300 million through FY 2014, and has received a matching appropriation.

At the current level no new programs can be funded, and no further progress can be made in geographic regions of the nation that are currently under-served. With a growing and unpredictable population of at-risk OEF/OIF veterans and significant troop draw downs, SSVF will be the foundation of VA's veteran homelessness prevention strategy long after the maturity of the Five-Year Plan. To properly conduct this mission, the authorization cap for SSVF should be removed, allowing the Secretary to move funds into the program from other areas of the Department at his discretion. An increase of appropriations to \$500 million should be approved for FY 2015, with future adjustments made as risk of veteran homelessness data indicates is appropriate.

An increased investment in the SSVF Program would address the severe lack of veteran access to assistance under HUD's Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, while making sure the great successes of the Five-Year Plan to End Veterans Homelessness continue well into the future.