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Policy Statement: HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program

WASHINGTON, Jan. 1, 2014- 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 designed to end chronic homelessness for veterans and their families. The men and women who enroll in the program achieve independent living by way of veteran-specific HUD Section 8 housing vouchers, which are linked to comprehensive VA case management and counseling services.

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 use disorder histories, 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 and income needs.

Through FY 2014, HUD has approved funding for more than 68,000 HUD-VASH vouchers. Nationwide, more than 300 Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) have participated in the program. The President’s budget request for FY 2015 would fund an additional \$75 million in new HUD-VASH vouchers, bringing the total number of vouchers to more than 78,000. While this is a historic investment in the national campaign to end veteran homelessness, it is still a relatively small percentage of the total federal investment in Section 8 housing.

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 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.

With its focus on veterans who need intensive case management to maintain their housing, there is a need for project-based vouchers in services-enriched multifamily developments in areas with a large concentration of chronically homeless veterans.

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 veterans, the HUD-VASH Program enables communities to effectively end 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,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki 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?

NCHV recommends that Congress fund \$75 million in new HUD-VASH vouchers for FY 2015, and fund a separate 5,000-voucher allocation for project-based VASH in states with the highest concentration of chronically homeless veterans – (California, Florida, New York and Texas).

Continuing the build-out of HUD-VASH will be the cornerstone of efforts to house last of the nation’s chronically homeless veterans. Most of the remaining veterans on the streets at the end of the Five-Year Plan will be the hardest to serve – chronically homeless with a need for high intensity case management. These are the veterans for whom HUD-VASH was designed. In addition to the \$75 million worth of vouchers in FY2014, a further 5,000 vouchers should be created. These should be allocated as project-based vouchers to provide services-enriched communities for chronically homeless veterans in the four states where half of them live – California, Florida, New York and Texas.

Congressional initiative is largely responsible for the noteworthy success of the 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 treat the most severely impacted segment of the homeless veteran population. Ending chronic veteran homelessness by 2015 is contingent upon Congress' continued investment in and subsequent oversight of the HUD-VASH Program.

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