



# Sustaining an End to Veteran Homelessness: Strategies for Institutionalizing Your Progress

To end Veteran homelessness, every community must have a comprehensive response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can't be prevented, it is a rare, brief, and one-time experience. That vision is central to *Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, which emphasizes the need to sustain practices and systems at a scale necessary to respond to needs into the future.

While communities are continuing to work hard to effectively end Veteran homelessness, as defined by the federal [Criteria and Benchmarks](#), efforts must be undertaken with sustainability in mind. The strategies outlined below will help guide communities to support sustained success as they achieve the goal of ending Veteran homelessness and as they pursue an end to homelessness for other populations.

## 1. When you announce your achievement of the goal, be clear about the need to sustain efforts.

Announcing your community's success is an important way to continue to build support in the community for efforts to sustainably end homelessness for everyone. Make sure that the messaging is clear and coordinated across all partner agencies about the amount of effort it took to build the comprehensive system needed to end Veteran homelessness, and the importance of maintaining the investment of time and resources in that system into the future. Messaging from every partner should be clear that ending Veteran homelessness does not mean that no Veteran will ever experience a housing crisis again – rather, that the community has and must continue to have a system in place to rapidly respond to future needs, while ensuring the long-term stability of Veterans who have exited homelessness to permanent housing.

## 2. Formalize, institutionalize, and continue to cultivate leadership structures and processes, including agreements among key partners.

Tackling a defined challenge like ending Veteran homelessness focuses attention and resources toward innovative practices. To sustain those efforts over the long term, the new processes and structures must be

### TEN STRATEGIES

- When you announce your achievement of the goal, be clear about the need to sustain efforts.
- Formalize, institutionalize, and continue to cultivate leadership structures and processes, including agreements among key partners.
- Educate your local officials and partners about the importance of their continued support.
- Regularly assess system performance against the benchmarks and continue to set clear expectations and performance goals.
- Act quickly in response to any loss of progress or changing conditions.
- Use inflow data and information to craft stronger prevention and diversion strategies.
- Ensure housing stability and closely monitor any returns to homelessness.
- Work to shorten the length of time it takes a Veteran to enter permanent housing.
- Identify and increase resources for Veterans not eligible for VA housing and services.
- Increase connections to education, employment, and other income supports.

institutionalized through written policies and procedures that will endure changes in leadership and staffing. Take stock of all the changes you have made to build your system for ending Veteran homelessness and work to systematically embed them into leadership and staff training, policies and procedures, CoC Governance, data reporting and tracking processes, and partnership agreements. For example, while you are continuing to meet with key partners to review and case-conference your by-name list, you should also:

- Develop and document protocols for coordinated decision-making, data-sharing, and data-informed planning to help ensure continued progress, even when staff and leaders at individual organizations change.
- Provide ongoing training on established protocols and practices, especially if there is staff or leadership turnover, and continue to refine and strengthen the coordinated system.

The VA's [SSVF System Assessment and Improvement Toolkit](#) contains templates and sample policies and procedures that may be helpful as a starting place. Further, [HUD's Coordinated Entry](#) requirements and VA's complementary [direction for VA Medical Centers to integrate into Coordinated Entry](#) should help drive future community planning efforts and leadership structures.

### **3. Educate your local officials and partners about the importance of their continued support.**

Given all the competing priorities facing communities, local officials and partners may be inclined to move on to the next challenge after achieving this goal, shifting staff time, attention, and resources to other issues. For example, some may be eager to quickly refocus staff energy and financial resources on translating the successes of ending Veteran homelessness to other populations.

Achieving the goal of ending Veteran homelessness should be used as an opportunity to translate approaches and strategies in pursuit of goals of ending homelessness for others. Because homelessness is such a dynamic problem, however, you'll need to be attentive to ensuring that the focus and resources are not shifted at the expense of your ability to sustain your successful system for Veterans. You must continue to build the case for why sustaining an end to homelessness among Veterans will be critical to your success in ending homelessness for everyone, and how that larger success has broad implications for the well-being of your community, including school success, family stability, economic opportunity, and healthy aging.

### **4. Regularly assess system performance against the benchmarks and continue to set clear expectations and performance goals.**

Strong attention to data helped your community achieve this goal and reviewing data regularly will help you continue to maintain and strengthen your system's performance. Partners across multiple systems and sectors—including the CoC, VA, PHA, workforce system, local and county government, mainstream programs, faith-based partners, and others—should assess community level data at least every 90 days against the federal benchmarks or other community performance goals and continue to make that performance data publicly available. This ongoing data review can also identify trends that can help determine whether adjustments are needed to the types and scale of programs and services in your crisis response and housing systems. It may be helpful to use this [Master List Template and Benchmark Generation Tool](#) to determine whether the community continues to meet the criteria and benchmarks.

### **5. Act quickly in response to any loss of progress or changing conditions.**

Homelessness among Veterans is dynamic and can be expected to change over time, requiring continued system-level leadership to effectively respond to the evolving needs of Veterans into the future. As your

community reviews your system performance, you must have the right people and protocols in place to act quickly if performance starts moving in the wrong direction. For example, if data indicates that the average length of time from when a Veteran is identified to when they achieve permanent housing has climbed above 90 days, leaders should analyze the following issues, among others:

- Are referral and application processes taking longer than before?
- Are housing inspections taking longer to be completed?
- Is there a shortage of units or landlords willing to rent to Veterans exiting homelessness?
- Are Veterans staying in transitional housing longer than previously?
- Are more Veterans falling into homelessness than before?
- Are Veterans not able to retain their housing and returning to homelessness?

Once the root causes are identified, the leadership team can act quickly to identify and authorize the appropriate actions necessary to get things back on track. For instance, can the problem be resolved through training or case-conferencing, or will new resources, partners, or systems need to be brought to bear?

## **6. Use inflow data and information to craft stronger prevention and diversion strategies.**

Communities that have built effective systemic responses to Veteran homelessness have a strong foundation for improving prevention and diversion practices. A community's by-name list provides a wealth of data and information about the causes of homelessness among Veterans and can inform stronger strategies, both locally and regionally, to reduce the number of Veterans who enter homelessness.

For example, if data indicates that Veterans are entering homelessness in your community after being discharged from jail, you can contact your local [Veterans Justice Outreach \(VJO\) Program specialist](#) to brainstorm strategies or explore stronger partnerships with the justice system. If you find that a significant number of Veterans could be reunited with family or natural supports, you can explore providing financial assistance, mediation, or other supports to address barriers to successful reunification.

## **7. Ensure housing stability and closely monitor any returns to homelessness.**

It is critical to gather and analyze data on Veterans who have exited from permanent housing in order to help identify Veterans who might be at risk of returning to homelessness and to strengthen the services they need to stay successfully housed. For example, if Veterans who have exited homelessness are experiencing significant eviction rates, your community could strengthen eviction-prevention programming, such as initiating proactive communication between case managers and landlords to address emerging issues or providing access to legal services. Communities have also found success with connecting Veterans to mainstream supports, as needed, such as Medicaid, SSI/SSDI, SNAP (food stamps), employment programs, transportation assistance, and legal aid, which can support greater stability.

For some Veterans, on-going, adequate case management is essential to ensure their housing stability. Many communities use case-conferencing meetings to develop plans to address any emerging needs of Veterans who have recently entered permanent housing. For example, communities should develop protocols for transferring Veterans to programs that are better aligned with their needs (for example, from rapid re-housing to permanent supportive housing) and for relocating Veterans to new housing units to avoid eviction, loss of housing, or a damaged landlord relationship.

## **8. Work to shorten the length of time it takes a Veteran to enter permanent housing.**

As your crisis response system operates over time, you should continue to refine your processes and procedures in order to see if it is possible to reduce further the time it takes for Veterans to enter permanent housing. For example, some communities have set maximum turnaround times for paperwork or housing inspections. Others are working to strengthen processes to ensure that Veterans who chose to enter service-intensive transitional housing to appropriately address a clinical need are planning for permanent housing on day one. Still others report that having a Housing Navigator—a staff member who is dedicated to helping Veterans overcome barriers to housing and acts as a liaison with landlords and housing partners—has been essential to their progress, and to reducing the time it takes for Veterans to access housing, particularly those with higher barriers. To ensure that your community continues to have adequate resources to meet the demand for assistance, use the VA’s [Gap Analysis Tool](#) to inform your planning and implementation.

## **9. Identify and increase resources for Veterans not eligible for VA housing and services.**

Veterans can be eligible for some VA benefits or services and not others, depending on the type of discharge they received and their income level, so communities need to have sustainable protocols and procedures in place to thoroughly assess and screen Veterans for all available benefits. Meeting the needs of Veterans who prove to be ineligible for VA programs and services requires commitment and continued support from across the community, including the Continuum of Care and its affiliated non-profit organizations, business leadership, public housing agencies, and local and state governments. For example, some CoCs have created preferences for Veterans who are ineligible for VA programs for non-targeted permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing resources.

Robust and sustained landlord engagement programs, including strong partnerships with Public Housing Agencies and Multifamily Affordable Housing Operators, can also help increase the units available to VA-ineligible Veterans, particularly in communities where availability of affordable housing is a challenge. Strengthening connections to mainstream support services and benefits, including Medicaid, behavioral health care resources, and SSI/SSDI, is also essential.

## **10. Increase connections to education, employment, and other income supports.**

Stable housing provides a solid platform for Veterans to pursue their goals, including goals related to education and employment. To support Veterans as they continue to stabilize in housing, communities must ensure they are able to access the benefits Veterans are entitled to and the services they need, including disability compensation, pension, education and training, health care, vocational rehabilitation, and employment. Communities can also work directly with employers or employment networks to encourage them to commit to hiring Veterans who have experienced homelessness.

Communities should be working across partners and the VA to identify vocational training and college opportunities supported by the [Post-911 GI Bill](#). Strengthening coordination between housing programs and the workforce system, and with programs like the [Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program \(HVRP\)](#), will increase opportunities for employment, financial stability, and economic mobility for Veterans who have exited homelessness. Many communities have a dedicated employment specialist or navigator to assist Veterans access opportunities in line with their strengths, desires, and needs.