



10 Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness

We know how to end homelessness for Veterans. A [growing list](#) of states and communities have proven that our approach is working. However, ending Veteran homelessness nationally takes political will, leadership, collaboration, and coordination among multiple federal, state, and local programs. With our goal in reach, we must redouble our efforts until every community has a sustainable system in place to end Veteran homelessness once and for all.

This second update of our original February 2015 publication fine-tunes our thinking around the strategies that can make Veteran homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring, and provides additional resources for communities to implement them. Federal partners have also developed [Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness](#) that can help drive progress in your community. And [these case studies](#), from communities that have ended Veteran homelessness, may also help you craft your own strategies.

1. Start at the Top: Get State and Local Leaders to Publicly Commit to and Coordinate Efforts on Ending Veteran Homelessness

Public support from your state and local leaders is essential to securing and aligning the resources and partners you need to end Veteran homelessness in your community. Joining the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, for example, is a great way to promote coordination and ensure accountability across all your partners.

Tools:

- [Resources for Mayors](#) (USICH)
- [List of Officials Who Have Signed on to the Mayors Challenge](#) (National League of Cities)
- [List of Communities that Have Effectively Ended Veteran Homelessness](#) (USICH)

2. Implement a Housing First System Orientation and Response

To ensure that Veterans experiencing homelessness can move into permanent housing with the right level of services as quickly as possible, communities must shift to a Housing First system orientation. Individual programs and projects within the system should remove as many barriers to their housing and services as possible, accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety or use of substances, poor credit or financial history, or past involvement with the criminal justice system. Staff in shelter, outreach, and housing settings should be trained that substance use, criminal history, or motivation are not obstacles to successful tenancy in housing.

Tools:

- [The Housing First Checklist: Tool for Assessing Housing First in Practice](#) (USICH)
- [Four Clarifications about Housing First](#) (USICH)
- [It's Time We Talked the Walk on Housing First](#) (USICH)
- [Using Shelter Strategically to End Homelessness](#) (USICH)

3. Implement a Coordinated Entry System

In order to use resources effectively, individual programs must work together as part of a coordinated entry system. That system should match individuals and households experiencing homelessness to appropriate housing and services based on a common assessment process performed consistently across partners. It should also use a data-driven approach to prioritizing people with the most significant needs. Housing navigators can then be assigned to specific Veterans to help negotiate and expedite the entry process into housing by providing assistance with paperwork, identifications, appointments, and other critical steps to getting into housing.

Tools:

- [Coordinated Entry CoC Toolkit](#) (HUD)
- [Coordinated Assessment Toolkit](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)
- [Enhancing Coordinated Entry Through Partnerships with Mainstream Resources and Programs](#) (USICH)
- [Lessons Learned from Developing Coordinated Entry Systems: Richmond and Los Angeles](#) (USICH)

4. Set and Meet Ambitious Short and Long-Term Goals by Deploying All Resources Effectively

Ending Veteran homelessness requires the efficient deployment and full utilization of targeted programs like HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). Continuums of Care should partner with VA Medical Centers and HUD-VASH and SSVF providers to ensure they are participating in the community's coordinated entry system, to disseminate best practices, and to remove barriers throughout the system. Communities must also work together to identify resources to serve Veterans who cannot be served through targeted programs. Many communities commit to ambitious monthly, quarterly, or 100-day housing placement goals to break down the larger goal into focused blocks of time and effort, while pushing their systems to perform with maximum efficiency.

Tools:

- [HUD-VASH Best Practices](#) (HUD)
- [HUD-VASH Resource Guide for Permanent Housing and Clinical Care](#) (VA)
- [SSVF University](#) (VA)
- [SSVF System Assessment and Improvement Toolkit](#) (VA)
- [Innovative Ways the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles is Working to End Veteran Homelessness](#) (USICH)

5. Improve Transitional Housing Performance and Consider Adopting Different Models and/or Converting or Reallocating Resources Into Supportive Housing

Ending homelessness requires providing permanent housing opportunities to people as quickly as possible. In most cases, transitional housing should be used as a “bridge” to permanent housing, and communities should seek to help Veterans currently residing in transitional housing move rapidly into their own home. To ensure that focus, communities should adopt measures of success for transitional housing that include outcomes around housing placement and stability, eliminating or reducing entrance eligibility criteria, and reducing lengths of stay.

To determine the amount and types of transitional housing your community needs, conduct a gaps analysis. If you have a larger stock of transitional housing units than are needed, consider converting those programs into bridge or supportive housing. Options vary by funding source and regulations.

Tools:

- [Guide to Reallocating Funds in the CoC Program](#) (USICH)
- [Grant and Per Diem Program Resources](#) (VA)
- [Open Letter to Grantees of VA’s Grant and Per Diem Program regarding Bridge Housing](#) (VA)

6. Engage and Support Private Landlords as Partners

Creating partnerships with private market landlords is critical for moving people out of homelessness quickly and fully utilizing local, state, and federal subsidies. In high-cost, low-vacancy markets, the challenge of finding available rental units is great. Cities across the country are undertaking landlord engagement strategies, like recruitment campaigns and risk mitigation, as ways to increase housing options and secure units quickly.

Tools:

- [Core Components of Centralized Landlord Engagement Programs and Community Landlord Engagement Initiatives](#) (USICH)
- [Risk Mitigation Funds Community Profiles](#) (USICH)
- [Engaging Landlords to End Veteran Homelessness: Seattle/King County Shares What They’ve Learned](#) (USICH)
- [Engaging Landlords: Tips for Housing Veterans](#) (VA)
- [Landlord Engagement Toolkit](#) (Community Solutions)
- [Lessons Learned From Landlord Engagement Events](#) (National League of Cities)

7. Identify and Be Accountable to all Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

We can only solve Veteran homelessness if we are able to locate and identify every Veteran or Veteran family in need of assistance, and track their progress from initial engagement to housing placement in real time. Through data-sharing agreements, assessment processes, and communication between the local VA Medical Center, the Continuum of Care, and other stakeholders, communities should create a master list of Veterans experiencing homelessness. By tracking person-level data, communities can better monitor progress and hold themselves accountable to housing outcomes. Communities can also use the HMIS Repository and the Veteran Status Query and Response Exchange System (SQUARES) to identify people who have served in the military through a real-time query of a client’s personal identifying information.

Tools:

- [Best Practices: Sharing Information to End Veteran Homelessness](#) (HUD)
- [HMIS Repository and the Veteran Status Query and Response Exchange System](#) (SQUARES)
- [VA National Guidance Regarding HMIS Access Requests](#) (VA)
- [Privacy Guidance on Authority to Make Disclosures to Community Partners](#) (VA)
- [VA Request for Release of Medical Records Form](#) (VA)
- [Master List Template and Benchmark Generation Tool for Ending Veteran Homelessness](#) (HUD)

8. Conduct Coordinated Outreach and Engagement Efforts

Persistent, coordinated, and creative outreach efforts are vitally important to the ability to not only identify, but engage, Veterans experiencing homelessness and to link them to the housing and services interventions available in your community. That involves:

- Ensuring that outreach efforts are comprehensive—covering a full geographic area and the multiple settings within it—and coordinated across all teams and providers
- Sharing information across outreach teams and sites, and in coordination with other systems, including law enforcement, hospitals and emergency departments, prisons and jails, libraries, and job centers
- Partnering with Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) and Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grantees, who can improve care coordination and optimize resources
- Partnering with law enforcement, prisons, jails, and hospitals to conduct both in-reach and outreach to reduce the cycle between homelessness and criminal justice system involvement

These efforts should seek to reach and connect with all people who are unsheltered within your community, including people living in encampments or tent cities, as well as people in institutional settings, such as jails and hospitals. All outreach should be person-centered and emphasize building rapport and trust as a means of helping people obtain housing with appropriate services.

Tools:

- [Guide to Identifying and Referring Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#) (USICH)
- [HCH-VA Collaboration Quick Guide: Joining Forces to Coordinate Care for Unstably Housed Veterans](#) (National Health Care for the Homeless Council)
- [Veterans Justice Outreach Program](#) (VA)

9. Increase Connections to Employment

Communities should collaborate with Workforce Investment Boards to provide seamless referrals between the Continuum of Care, VA Medical Center, and workforce systems. Some communities have projects funded by the Department of Labor - Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, which are dedicated to working with Veterans experiencing homelessness. CoC and VA case managers are also integral in building referral relationships with supportive service providers and can help navigate employment services. Some communities have utilized the Employment Navigator model, where a case management team helps families experiencing homelessness through homelessness assistance and housing, workforce systems, and income supports.

Communities should also work directly with employers to encourage them to commit to hiring Veterans who have experienced homelessness.

Tools:

- [DOL-VETS Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program](#) (DOL)
- [Technical Assistance for Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program Grantees](#) (DOL)
- [Homeless Veterans Employment Assistance Guide for Service Providers](#) (DOL)
- [HVRP Best Practice Profiles of Employment Assistance Programs](#) (NCHV)
- [Employment Guides and Resources for Service Providers](#) (NCHV)
- [Partnerships for Opening Doors Final Report](#) (USICH)

10. Coordinate With Legal Services Organizations To Solve Legal Needs

Veterans experiencing homelessness often have unmet legal needs. Civil legal services attorneys are essential partners in removing barriers to housing and employment by preventing avoidable evictions, navigating outstanding warrants, expunging criminal records, and securing targeted and mainstream benefits. Legal services attorneys can also engage in systemic advocacy (to the degree allowable by law) to promote Housing First practices among public housing authorities and housing assistance programs. Your community should ensure that homelessness assistance programs coordinate with legal services organization to address individual and systemic legal needs.

Resources:

- [Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable Toolkit](#) (DOJ)
- [Five Best Practices for SSVF Legal Services](#) (VA)
- [Homeless Experience Legal Protection](#) (Project H. E. L. P.)
- [Engaging Legal Services in Community Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness](#) (USICH)

For additional information and strategies to end Veteran homelessness, visit [usich.gov/goals/veterans](https://www.usich.gov/goals/veterans). For our guidance on ending chronic homelessness, please see [10 Strategies to End Chronic Homelessness](#).