



A History and Case Study of the Effort to Effectively End Veteran Homelessness in Philadelphia

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Number of Homeless Veterans in Philadelphia

Number of Homeless Veterans Housed in Permanent Housing in Philadelphia

(Note: The CMCVAMC placed 410 homeless Veterans into HUD-VASH prior to the start of the Bootcamp effort. These 410 individuals are not included in the subsequent data collections.)

In **late 2009**, President Obama first challenged the nation to end Veteran homelessness by December 2015. In June 2010, USICH released *Opening Doors*, the nation's first ever federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. Corporal Michael J. Cresenz VA Medical Center (CMCVAMC) answered the President's call and began working collaboratively with community partners to redouble the efforts already in place to address Veteran homelessness.

In **March 2011**, following the city's urging to create a Veterans Coalition of local non-profits dedicated to ending Veteran homelessness, Project HOME led a successful, collaborative effort to secure Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) funds for Philadelphia. The program, the Philadelphia Alliance for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (PASSVF), was funded by the VA to provide rapid re-housing and prevention services to Veterans and their families and brought together the strengths of three local Veteran homelessness service agencies: Project HOME, the Veterans Multi-Service Center (VMC), and Impact Services Corporation.

Philadelphia already had in place a strong street outreach presence, both through the VA and through teams funded by the City's Department of Behavioral Health.

Around the same time, Philadelphia's Office of Supportive Housing (OSH) — the Collaborative Applicant for the Continuum of Care — along with the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHIDS), Project HOME, Bethesda Project, Horizon House, Mental Health Association, Homeless Advocacy Project, Pathways to Housing PA (Pathways), the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) participated in the 100,000 Homes Campaign. Following a 3-day outreach blitz in **May 2011**, in which 300 volunteers identified and assessed over 500 individuals living outdoors using the VI (Vulnerability Index), a collaborative team, assisted by a HUD CoC award of 50 vouchers, committed to engaging and housing individuals on the basis of their vulnerability scores, one by one. This process resulted in 250 individuals in Philadelphia becoming housed, making an important contribution to the national goal achieved on June 10, 2014, when a total of 101,628 vulnerable Americans experiencing homelessness were housed since July 2010.



2142 Estimated
(Note: This number was derived by the Rapid Results Institute (RRI) as part of the Bootcamp effort.)

Re-started at 0

The major catalyzing effort to end to Veteran homelessness in Philadelphia occurred in **August 2013**, when Philadelphia was one of approximately 40 communities selected to participate in a Rapid Results Veteran Bootcamp. This HUD-funded effort focused on setting ambitious 100-day goals around housing placements and improving timeframes for different housing resources, especially for HUD-VASH. Early efforts to reduce processing times for HUD-VASH applicants were successful through coordinated efforts between the VA’s HUD-VASH staff and the staff at the Philadelphia Housing Authority. The level of cooperation and streamlined, co-located efforts between the VA and PHA became a bright spot model for other Rapid Results Bootcamp communities.



The Bootcamp Team - August 2013

100 Housed



In **October 2013**, the Bootcamp team adopted the name “Philly Vets Home 2015” and started a weekly meeting that lasted through subsequent 100-day challenges until December 2015. Each week, the team came together to track progress, build relationships, and problem solve. During the first 100 days, the team started tracking every permanent housing placement to measure progress.

250 Housed

Adding to the resources available for the effort, UESF received a second SSVF grant in Philadelphia in **October 2013** to rapidly re-house Veterans experiencing homelessness and prevent homelessness among Veterans. In **March 2014**, the VA requested proposals for a “surge” in funding for the SSVF efforts to end Veteran homelessness. Impact Services applied for “Priority One” funding in order to bring additional efforts to the Philly Vets Home work. On this grant, Impact was the lead, and Project HOME, VMC, and UESF were collaborative partners. This grant was funded in October 2014 and provided funding for a traditional SSVF program, in addition to increased outreach efforts and an “Air Traffic Controller” at the VMC.



In **March 2014**, Philadelphia was invited to be part of the **VA, HUD, USICH initiative, 25 Cities**, to build upon the efforts to track placements, measure progress, and improve timeframes in order to build a system that ensured homelessness among Veterans was rare, brief, and non-recurring. The 25 Cities assistance created a system framework that included outreach and assessment, using navigators to assist clients, and matching clients to the right resource.

325 housed In **June 2014**, Philadelphia joined the **Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness**, which served to focus leadership support around effective strategies for ending Veteran homelessness, including prevention and rapid re-housing services, coordinating outreach and assessment, and prioritizing Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness.

400 housed After various attempts to implement the new systems, the Philly Team decided not to use the VI-SPDAT as an assessment tool and to continue using the VA's Homelessness Risk Assessment Tool. There was a technology platform offered but Philadelphia did not choose to pursue this. Rather, the Philly Vets Home Team developed a spreadsheet of Veterans currently experiencing homelessness through a combination of lists from various agencies including the VA, OSH, and private non-profit agencies serving Veterans. The creation of a living, breathing by-name list in the early months of 2014 gave the laser focus of coordinating around clients and tracking whether the monthly inflow was less than the monthly outflow.

578 homeless (actual)
(Note: This is the actual number on Philadelphia's by-name list.)

521 housed

In **January 2015**, the team decided to create a separate team and meeting to solely focus on the by-name list in order to coordinate outreach, engagement, and assistance to Veterans experiencing a housing crisis. The Veterans Outreach and Navigation Team (VONT) was born, and a bi-weekly VONT meeting started and continues to this day. It combines case conferencing for Veterans on the VONT list, the by-name list, and outreach efforts to Veterans newly experiencing or returning to homelessness.



Rounding the Bases - May 2015

533 homeless (actual)

716 housed

In **May 2015**, the Philly Vets Home team held a "Rounding the Bases" convening to strategize for a final push to end



510 homeless (actual) 1000 housed

Veteran homelessness in Philadelphia. Held at the studios of WHYY, the local public television station, the meeting featured the involvement of then Mayor Michael Nutter. The team focused on three areas: doubling down on the by-name list, communication, and sustainability. At this time, the team introduced and explained the definition of success, a term known as “functional zero.” It was recognized that there would still be Veterans experiencing homelessness at any given time in Philadelphia due to the reality of inflow and outflow but that there would be a system to ensure the experience would be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

294 homeless (actual) 1200 housed



Rally for Zero in Love Park

In **October 2015**, Philly Vets Home 2015 held a rally in support of “Zero” at Love Park in Philadelphia. The rally served to galvanize the final efforts to achieve functional zero in Philly.

165 homeless (actual) 1400 housed

On **December 15, 2015**, after years of dedication and hard work, USICH, HUD, and VA confirmed that the City of Philadelphia effectively ended homelessness among Veterans. The infrastructure and systems built by the coalition of VA and its federal and community partners ensure that any Veteran experiencing a housing crisis

in Philadelphia will get the support they need to quickly obtain a permanent home and that homelessness in Philadelphia for Veterans is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

193 homeless (actual) 1500 housed

Following the achievement, the Philly Vets Home Team continues to work together while focusing on sustainability. In **March 2016**, Philadelphia received an SSVF program waiver, which has allowed Philadelphia to serve up to 70% of enrolled clients through prevention services rather than rapid re-housing. Philadelphia is in the process of developing a rent payee-ship program for Veterans experiencing homelessness at the VMC, modeled on a similar successful effort in San Francisco developed by Swords to Plowshares.



Former Mayor Michael Nutter declares an effective end to Veteran Homelessness in Philadelphia.



195 homeless
(actual) 1650 housed

The team is working to integrate Veterans into the CoC's HMIS and Coordinated Entry systems as they develop. In addition, various agencies have secured resources to continue to serve Veterans who have been housed through our efforts and are again at risk for homelessness.

In July 2016, the VA will host a CHALLENG Report Meeting which will kick-off a new 100-day challenge to sustain the Veteran efforts in Philadelphia.

The Philly Vets Home Team credits the success of our efforts to four main components:

1. **On-going Collaboration:** From the August 2013 Rapid Results Bootcamp to the present, the non-profit agencies, OSH, VA, PHA, and DBH have worked intensely together in a collective impact approach that started with agreement on the numerical take-down target. Team members were willing to push the envelope at their own agencies (bringing resources, streamlining process, sharing information) towards the higher goal of ending Veteran homelessness. From very early in the effort, the team focused on use of the "by-name" list, which closely tracked the housing status and whereabouts of each homeless Veteran.
2. **System-Driven Response with Data:** The team figured out how to create policies and procedures across programs in order to build a system that was monitored with key data points: placement rates, timeframes, available resources, and number of people currently experiencing homelessness.
3. **Perseverance:** The collaborative agencies "kept coming back" to the weekly meetings for years and focused on measures and actions in order to achieve the goals.
4. **Commitment to the Veteran:** Philly Vets Home has consistently reiterated and demonstrated a commitment to the needs of the individual Veteran, in order to make sure they are fully met.