



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONICA DIAZ

As Executive Director of the Homeless Programs Office (HPO), I am proud to present the Veterans Health Administration Homeless (VHA) Programs Office Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Annual Report.

Since 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has helped more than 920,000 Veterans and their families avoid or exit homelessness. Additionally, the overall decline in Veteran homelessness over the past 12 years points to HPO's ability to effectively implement the Housing First approach; innovate service delivery; and collaborate with cross-agency, interagency, and community partners. Major accomplishments over the years include:

- **Dramatically reducing the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness since 2010.** The commitment of VA and the federal government to ending Veteran homelessness has led to a nearly 50% reduction in the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness on any given night.
- **Finding housing or preventing homelessness for nearly 70,000 Veterans and their family members.** VA's array of housing and prevention programs assist with swiftly placing Veterans into permanent, stable housing, or preventing episodes of homelessness whenever possible. These Veterans were placed in permanent housing from any of VHA's homeless programs.
- **Proving that ending Veteran homelessness is possible.** With the introduction of the Mayors' Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness and the use of federal criteria and benchmarks that gave communities a complete picture of their response to Veteran homelessness, 82 communities and 3 states effectively ended Veteran homelessness. This proves that with a commitment from leadership, the dedication of resources, and active coordination of VA and community services, it is possible to end Veteran homelessness.
- **Helping more than 10,300 Veterans obtain employment.** To support housing stability, VA connects Veterans experiencing homelessness with a range of employment services and job opportunities. In FY 2021, this resulted in over 10,300 Veterans being employed upon exit from all VHA homeless programs and services.
- **Providing prevention assistance and hotel placements.** In FY 2021, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program provided rapid rehousing and prevention assistance to more than 114,000 Veterans and their families. Between March 2020 and September 2021, SSVF placed nearly 32,000 Veterans in hotels or motels. 20,000 of these Veterans have since moved on to permanent housing.
- **Launched a Racial Equity Improvement Initiative.** Our Racial Equity and Racial Justice Workgroup launched a nationwide initiative to ensure equitable access and outcomes for Veterans served by homeless programs. This was supported by the creation of a Racial Equity Dashboard that visualizes homeless programs performance measures and outcomes data, broken out by race and ethnicity.

In FY 2021, the COVID-19 Delta variant presented many new challenges to ensuring the health and safety of Veterans and their families. In addition to the comprehensive suite of strategies initiated during the previous year to stave off a spike in Veteran homelessness and protect the most vulnerable from the virus, in May 2021, HPO provided guidance to the field on the use of flexible funding assistance made possible through the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (PL 116-315). Section 4201 of the Isakson-Roe Act temporarily authorizes VA to use appropriated funds for life-saving food, shelter, goods, and services for homeless Veterans or those participating in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program during the Coronavirus pandemic and other public health emergencies.

By the end of FY 2021, VA Medical Centers across the United States had helped more than 15,700 Veterans using nearly \$900,000 in funding through the Isakson-Roe Act's expanded flexibilities. The Act also led to the creation of a nationally coordinated rideshare program, which provides support to Veterans who need transportation to meet health, housing, legal, and employment needs. This service has provided over 6,700 rides to more than 2,700 Veterans.

With the passage of the American Rescue Plan, HPO received additional funding to support program enhancements such as:

- **Expanding SSVF's Shallow Subsidy initiative**, which allowed grantees serving homeless and at-risk Veteran families in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands to offer 2-year rental subsidies to eligible Veteran families.
- **Expanding available legal assistance through SSVF** so every SSVF grantee now offers a legal assessment for every enrolled Veteran.
- **Addressing legal barriers to housing identified by the Project CHALENG** (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) report as a critical unmet need.
- **Expanding existing and establishing new Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)** residential contracts to effectively serve Veterans during the pandemic.
- **Providing an additional \$95 million in Grant and Per Diem (GPD)** funds to support grantee costs associated with providing personal protective equipment (PPE), deep cleaning of facilities, use of motels for isolation and quarantine, and more.
- **Awarding \$64.2 million in GPD** capital grants to transform congregate transitional housing spaces into individual rooms with bathrooms, with a second round of capital grants to be awarded in FY 2022 to continue to improve additional transitional housing units.

Additionally, HPO's Clinical Operations Business Intelligence section procured and distributed over 40,000 disposable smartphones with 1-year unlimited data plans to ensure that homeless Veterans or those at-risk of homelessness remain connected with caregivers and supports, participate in telehealth, and have access to employment and housing resources, especially during the current public health emergency.

This annual report highlights each HPO program's accomplishments in providing case management and other services — housing, financial, physical and mental health, and employment — to prevent Veteran homelessness or ensure that it is rare, brief, and nonrecurring.



REPORT OVERVIEW

Through HPO's collaboration with multiple VA administrations and offices, other federal agencies, and numerous community-based partners, thousands of Veterans and their families have successfully exited homelessness. In addition to delivering program services directly to Veterans, HPO provides grants to organizations to fill critical gaps in transitional housing, case management support, permanent housing, and other services. The breadth and impact of HPO's programs and services are illustrated in the following sections of this report:

- **Housing Programs**
- **Employment Services**
- **Health Care Services**
- **Veterans Justice Programs**
- **Community Programs**
- **Interagency Programs and Services**
- **Research**

Each section provides a brief description of specific programs and services along with data that shows the impact on and value to Veterans.



HOUSING PROGRAMS

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT-VETERANS AFFAIRS SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (HUD-VASH) PROGRAM

VA's housing programs are guided by the Housing First approach, which is based on the premise that when Veterans have a place to call home, they are better able to benefit from supportive services.

The key principles of Housing First as they are applied under VA's housing programs are respect, warmth, and compassion for all Veterans; Veteran choice and self-determination; recovery orientation focused on individual well-being; and use of harm reduction strategies. Housing First features rapid, streamlined entry into a housing program with no preconditions such as sobriety or completion of alcohol or drug treatment for obtaining tenancy. As Veterans achieve their goals, establish recovery, and gain independence, the services they receive are continually adjusted to meet their needs.

HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA that combines HUD housing choice rental vouchers with VA case management services. Congress has appropriated funds for over 105,000 housing choice vouchers for HUD-VASH. The program has served nearly 200,000 Veterans and their families since FY 2012. The HUD-VASH program is targeted to Veterans experiencing homelessness who have the greatest need for case management and supportive services to maintain permanent housing. This includes Veterans with serious mental illness, physical health diagnoses, and substance use disorders. Once a Veteran and their family members find permanent housing, they agree to participate in case management services designed to help them recover from the physical and mental health problems and other issues that contributed to or resulted from their homelessness. These services, delivered by VA, may include mental health and substance use disorder treatment, primary health care, support for integration into the community, and employment assistance.

Eligibility for the HUD-VASH program was expanded by Section 9103 of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (P.L. 116-283), which became law on January 1, 2021. P.L. 116-283 extended eligibility for HUD-VASH vouchers and VA case management services to any individual meeting the definition of "Veteran" defined as "a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, regardless of length of service, and who was discharged or released therefrom," excluding anyone who received a dishonorable discharge from the Armed Forces or was discharged or dismissed from the Armed Forces by reason of the sentence of a general court-martial. 38 U.S.C. § 2002(b). Over 350 Veterans meeting this expanded eligibility were enrolled in HUD-VASH in FY 2021.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/hud-vash.asp.



More than **13,000** Veterans moved into HUD-VASH housing in FY 2021.



Over **81,000** Veterans who had experienced homelessness were stably housed at the end of the fiscal year.

TRIBAL HUD-VASH

According to the 2010 Census, more than 150,000 Veterans identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) alone. Because many tribal members sheltering in the homes of family or friends do not consider themselves “homeless” but “houseless,” most tribes do not have homeless shelters, safe havens, or other homeless resources. The Tribal HUD-VASH program seeks to house AI/AN Veterans who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness on or near their home reservations so they can live near their families and have access to culturally appropriate and traditional healing practices. Through a hybrid Indian Housing Block Grant, Tribal HUD-VASH provides rental assistance from HUD in the form of a grant instead of vouchers. AI/AN Veterans enrolled in the program receive tailored VA case management and clinical services to help them exit homelessness.

In FY 2021, the Tribal HUD-VASH program continued to house and provide case management and supportive services to AI/AN Veterans who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. In addition to maintaining the existing grant awards with 26 tribes and Tribally Designated Housing Entities (TDHEs), Tribal HUD-VASH expanded in FY 2021 with additional grants awarded by HUD’s Office of Native American Programs. These awards were announced on September 22, 2021, and expanded program capacity to ultimately serve up to 585 AI/AN Veteran households across 28 tribal partners. Three of the expansion grantees were existing Tribal HUD-VASH partners (Tlingit and Haida with the VA Alaska Health Care System; Muscogee [Creek] with the VA Eastern Oklahoma Health Care System; and Lumbee in North Carolina with VA Fayetteville Coastal Health Care System) and two were new tribes (Fort Hall Reservation with VA Salt Lake City Health Care System and Apsaalooke [Crow] with VA Montana Health Care System).

In total, Tribal HUD-VASH served 474 AI/AN Veterans over the course of the fiscal year, with 80 new placements in permanent housing. At the end of FY 2021, six tribes were utilizing 100% of their grant awards. Three tribes were utilizing 95% of their grant awards, one tribe was utilizing 85%, and three were utilizing 80% percent. The remaining thirteen tribes were utilizing 75% or less of their grant awards, with housing stock being the most significant barrier to full utilization. Additionally, many tribes and TDHEs continued to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic during FY 2021, resulting in tribal, TDHE, and community closures, which created barriers to serving new Veteran households.

For more information, visit hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/ih/tribalhudvash.



More than **350** Veterans were housed with a Tribal HUD-VASH rental subsidy at the end of the fiscal year.



Nearly **150** disposable smartphones with 1-year pre-paid data plans were distributed to Tribal Veterans to ensure access to telehealth and remain connected to caregivers and support teams.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR VETERAN FAMILIES (SSVF) PROGRAM

SSVF is designed to rapidly rehouse and provide guidance and case management services to Veteran families (defined as a single Veteran or a family in which the head of household or the spouse of the head of household is a Veteran) who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. VA grants funds to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives to help Veteran families access a full range of community benefits designed to prevent homelessness. Through SSVF, Veterans can obtain VA and other benefits that may include health care, daily living services, financial planning services, transportation, legal services, childcare, and housing counseling. Time-limited payments to landlords, utility companies, moving companies, and licensed childcare providers may also be provided to help Veterans stay in or acquire permanent housing. SSVF's unique blend of services has kept families together, successfully meeting the needs of women and dependent children.

On August 5, 2021, VA announced a national expansion of SSVF's Shallow Subsidy initiative. This national expansion will allow grantees serving homeless and at-risk Veteran families in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands to offer 2-year rental subsidies to eligible Veteran families. The expansion is being funded in part through the American Rescue Plan. A total of \$350 million has been committed to SSVF's Shallow Subsidy initiative.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.



More than **114,000** Veterans and family members served.



Of those Veterans discharged from the SSVF program, **77%** obtained permanent housing.



Over **10,400** women Veterans served (13% of the 80,049 total Veterans served), with the service rate exceeding the 8-9% of women found in the homeless Veteran population.



Approximately **\$418 million** in grants awarded to more than **260** non-profit organizations.



More than **19,200** children in over **10,500** households served.



Over **7,000** disposable smartphones have been allotted to SSVF grantees for distribution to homeless or at-risk Veterans receiving services through the SSVF program, which ensures Veterans remain connected to healthcare opportunities, caregivers and support teams, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

HOMELESS PROVIDERS GRANT AND PER DIEM (GPD) PROGRAM

The GPD program awards grants to community-based agencies that provide transitional housing and supportive services to help Veterans who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and income, and achieve greater self-determination. VA also provides per diem payments to nonprofit organizations to help offset the operational costs of these programs. GPD grantees are free to choose the housing models that will best meet the needs of Veterans who are homeless in their communities.

Transitional housing grants usually consist of a capped per diem payment from VA to community organizations. However, GPD provided approximately \$95 million in CARES Act funding to support enhanced per diem rates of up to 3 times the State Home domiciliary care rate (\$152.73) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In FY 2020 and FY 2021, VA was thus able to help GPD grantees provide all needed emergency housing and supportive services to Veterans, including emergency placement for those who needed physical isolation for their safety or for the safety of others.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp.



More than **8,250** Veterans exited GPD to permanent housing.



Over **22,660** Veterans were served by GPD grants.

DOMICILIARY CARE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS (DCHV) PROGRAM

The DCHV program provides intensive residential care for Veterans with complex, co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, medical conditions, and psychosocial needs. Veterans receive medical, mental health, vocational, educational, and social services from interdisciplinary teams to help them overcome the conditions that inhibit their ability to exit homelessness. The program emphasizes self-care and personal responsibility and provides long-term support throughout each Veteran's transition to stability and housing independence.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/dchv.asp.



Over **3,400** Veterans served.



More than 1,900 operational beds at **44** sites in support of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

Note: DCHVs typically serve over 6,000 Veterans each year. The reduction in the number of unique Veterans served in FY 2021 reflects COVID-related interruptions in care. In response to the pandemic, admissions were curtailed, with programs closed or operating at significantly reduced capacity during the year.

COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY/TRANSITIONAL RESIDENCE (CWT/TR) PROGRAM

The CWT/TR program is a unique residential mental health program that provides beds in a therapeutic community and focuses on active rehabilitation to aid Veterans in community integration. The work program offers multiple vocational options leading to job development and placement.

At the end of FY 2021, there were 41 CWT/TR programs with 545 operational beds. The number of unique Veterans served in CWT/TR during FY 2021 was just over 650, and the average length of stay was approximately 178 days.

Of the Veterans discharged from the CWT/TR program during FY 2021, 55% of those eligible for employment had secured competitive employment. In FY 2021, 62% of Veterans discharged from CWT/TR were discharged to permanent housing. An additional 3.4% were discharged to another Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program.



463 admissions.



454 discharges.



653 unique patients served.

Note: CWT/TR typically serves more than 1,000 Veterans each year. The reduction in the number of unique Veterans served in FY 2020 reflects COVID-related interruptions in care. In response to the pandemic, admissions were curtailed, with programs closing or operating at significantly reduced capacity during the year.

ENHANCED-USE LEASE (EUL) PROGRAM

The EUL program, managed by VA's Office of Asset Enterprise Management, provides a mechanism for non-VA entities to develop and operate supportive housing for homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families on VA property. Through this program, VA out-leases underutilized real estate under its jurisdiction or control to the private sector for up to 75 years for the purpose of developing supportive housing for homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families. In addition to providing Veteran residents with close proximity to VA physical and mental health care, EUL housing often offers onsite computer and laundry facilities, fitness centers, haircuts, and supportive services such as financial management and job training.

The 52 housing EULs that have been executed to date have housed 2,548 Veterans.

For more information, visit va.gov/assetmanagement/.



16 HUD-VASH EUL housing projects were established on VA property providing **621** units of permanent supportive housing for Veterans and their families.

EMPLOYMENT

HOMELESS VETERANS COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (HVCES)

Employment can be a key element in helping Veterans avoid or exit homelessness. VA's employment services help Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness secure and maintain jobs in their communities.

HVCES staff, who are embedded in homeless programs at VA Medical Centers (VAMCs), complement medical center-based employment services and create a bridge to employment opportunities and resources in the local community. HVCES is staffed by Vocational Development Specialists, who function as Community Employment Coordinators (CECs) and Employment Specialists. CECs are funded at each VAMC. The HCHV and HUD-VASH programs have funded Employment Specialists at a limited number of VAMCs based on local needs. HVCES staff work with VA homeless program and employment services staff, including those working in the CWT and Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) programs, to identify employment resources for Veterans who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including those who have experienced chronic homelessness. They also collaborate with external community, state, and federal partners to provide training and support services that are not available within VA, and help employers and Veterans address any issues with workplace adjustment.

For more information on employment services for Veterans experiencing homelessness, visit va.gov/homeless/employment_programs.asp.



Approximately **5,069** Veterans exited residential homeless programs with competitive employment (GPD, Low-Demand Safe Haven, and HCHV Contract Residential Services).



The rate of employment for Veterans housed through HUD-VASH was **48.5%**.



There were more than **13,768** newly documented, unique instances of employment for Veterans who engaged in or exited from VA homeless programs or services.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

HEALTH CARE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS (HCHV)

Quality health care services are immensely important in the effort to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. Veterans whose health is successfully managed can direct their attention to other life needs and goals, including employment, education, caring for their children, and more.

HCHV's mission is to reduce homelessness among Veterans by connecting them with healthcare and other needed services. Through outreach, case management, and Contract Residential Services (CRS), HCHV helps place Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness — especially those with serious mental health diagnoses or substance use disorders — in VA or community-based programs that provide quality housing and services that meet their specific needs.

In FY 2020, \$10 million was allocated to HCHV through the CARES Act to provide emergency shelter and supportive services during the COVID-19 pandemic. These supportive services included placements for Veterans needing emergency shelter or isolation to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. In February 2021, an additional \$10 million in CARES Act funds was allocated to HCHV.

For more information about HCHV, visit va.gov/homeless/hchv.asp.



Over **3,700** Veterans exited HCHV CRS programs to permanent housing.



More than **116,200** Veterans received HCHV outreach services.



77 days was the average length of stay in an HCHV CRS program.



Over **11,000** Veterans received HCHV case management.



61% of Veterans exiting CRS programs continued to receive outpatient VA mental health services and **76%** received ongoing VA medical services.

HOMELESS PATIENT ALIGNED CARE TEAMS (HPACTS)

HPACT is an innovative treatment model that VAMCs across the country are implementing to provide a coordinated “medical home” specifically tailored to the needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness. Selected VA facilities assign Veterans to an HPACT that includes a primary care provider, a nurse, a social worker, homeless program staff, and others who provide medical and mental health care, case management, housing, and social services. This team provides and coordinates Veterans’ health care along with the services they need to obtain and stay in permanent housing.

Five core elements distinguish HPACT from traditional primary care models: (1) reducing barriers to care, (2) providing one-stop, wraparound services that are integrated and coordinated, (3) engaging Veterans in intensive case management, (4) providing high-quality, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive care, and (5) being performance-based and accountable using real-time data.

Veterans enrolled in HPACT experience, on average, 19% fewer emergency room visits, have an average of 35% fewer hospitalizations, receive care at \$9,379 less per year than a homeless Veteran enrolled in a standard PACT, and report more positive patient care experiences.

For more information about HPACTs, visit va.gov/HOMELESS/HPACT.asp.



More than **87** active HPACTS were in operation at **57** VAMCs.



Over **17,200** Veterans were enrolled in HPACT, receiving primary care services.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND REFERRAL CENTERS (CRRC)

VA’s CRRCs operate in collaboration with community-based homeless providers and federal and state partners that provide services to Veterans experiencing homelessness. CRRCs provide one-stop access to housing, physical and mental health care, job development programs, and other VA and non-VA services in a central, community-based location with the lowest possible barriers to access. There are currently 32 CRRCs in strategically selected areas across the country.

For more information, visit va.gov/HOMELESS/CRRC.asp.



Over **61,400** Veteran visits to 32 CRRCs.

HOMELESS VETERANS DENTAL PROGRAM (HVDP)

HVDP provides dental care to Veterans through VA programs such as Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment, GPD, CWT/TR, HCHV (CRS and Low Demand Safe Haven), and Community Residential Care. Dental care ranks as one of the top 3 unmet needs of Veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

For more information about dental care for Veterans, visit va.gov/homeless/dental.asp.



Approximately **10,000** Veterans served.

NATIONAL CALL CENTER FOR HOMELESS VETERANS (NCCHV)

Veterans who are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or facing a housing crisis can reach VA 24/7 by contacting the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID VET (1-877-424-3838). The hotline also takes calls from VAMC staff; federal, state, and local partners; community agencies; service providers; and others in the community who want to make referrals or get more information.

For more information, visit va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp.



Over **145,300** total actionable contacts.



VAMC homeless program staff have responded to more than **72,100** referrals from the call center.

VETERANS JUSTICE PROGRAMS (VJP)

Incarceration is one of the most powerful predictors of homelessness. VA's Veterans Justice Programs serve Veterans at any point in their involvement in the criminal justice system, including their reentry into the community following incarceration. The goal of VJP is to provide these Veterans with resources, services, and mental health and other clinical treatment to prevent homelessness and ensure a lasting rehabilitation. VJP staff conduct outreach in prison, jail, and court settings. They work with local law enforcement to identify and contact justice-involved Veterans and facilitate their access to VHA mental health, substance use, and homeless services, as well as to other VA services and benefits as appropriate.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp and va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp.



Over **38,900** justice-involved Veterans received services.



170 pro-bono on-site legal clinics were hosted by VAMCs through partnerships with legal providers.



601 Veterans Treatment Courts and other Veteran-focused court programs were supported.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Office of Community Engagement serves as a trusted resource and catalyst for the growth of effective partnerships at the national, state, and community levels. It also serves as a facilitator and access point for public and private entities interested in partnering with HPO to enhance supportive services and resources for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Community Engagement works with VA's Office of Strategic Partnerships, the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, and a contractor to develop communication tools, partnership referrals, and strategic messaging to make Veterans who are homeless aware of services available to them. This approach also targets VA employees; national, state, and local organizations; and other interested stakeholders.



The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America helped 6,793 Veterans.

Elks National Veterans Service Commission provides help to homeless and at-risk Veterans and has partnered with us in several ways. They have a Welcome Home Kits program that has provided 6,793 kits to Veterans transitioning into permanent housing. Those kits contain move-in essential items as well as small appliances, groceries and even furniture. The Elks have also begun an Emergency Assistance Fund in 10 cities, providing \$4,460,804 to more than 2,700 Veterans. They have also awarded \$374,557 in Focus Grants, distributed amongst 39 Elks Lodges to help nearly 2,000 Veterans in our programs with needed items such as furniture, household supplies, holiday meals, and stocking food pantries for homeless Veterans.



Bombas donated 50,000 pairs of socks to Veterans. Bombas donates and distributes socks to VA homeless programs every year to provide comfort and more positive health outcomes to Veterans as they work to achieve housing stability and independence. In FY 2021, Bombas donated 50,000 pairs of socks to VAMCs and community partners.



Community Solutions helped house 6,038 Veterans through Built for Zero. Built for Zero is a movement of more than 90 communities working to end homelessness measurably and equitably — and proving it is possible. In FY 2021, Built for Zero helped house 6,038 homeless Veterans. Additionally, since 2015, 14 communities have reached Functional Zero and 85,210 Veterans have been housed.



Veterans Matter helped 1,167 Veterans. Veterans Matter provides deposit or down payment assistance to HUD-VASH Veterans. They operate in 28 states, including Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas, and have helped over 5,170 Veterans to date. In FY 2021, they helped 1,167 Veterans.

SQUARES

Status Query and Response Exchange System (SQUARES) is a VA web application that provides external homeless service organizations with reliable, detailed information about Veteran eligibility. Users submit identity attributes for homeless individuals, and SQUARES returns information regarding their Veteran status and eligibility for homeless programs. The tool facilitates quick and simple access to care for homeless and at-risk Veterans.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/squares/.



Over **2,300** active users.



Over **150,000** queries processed.

To watch our SQUARES video that provides an overview of how this application is making a major impact in the homeless community, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTDw4Lh7Kso>.

STAND DOWNS

Stand Downs are 1- to 3-day events held by community agencies in partnership with VA to provide Veterans experiencing homelessness with essential services and support, including health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other services, such as housing, employment, and substance use disorder treatment.

For more information, visit va.gov/homeless/events.asp.



153 Stand Downs served over **30,000** Veterans.

PROJECT CHALENG (COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENT, LOCAL EDUCATION AND NETWORKING GROUPS)

Project CHALENG brings together VA, community agencies, and other federal, state, and local government offices that provide homeless services, to assess and develop plans to meet the needs of Veterans who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. CHALENG includes two components: CHALENG meetings and the CHALENG survey, which includes the perspectives of Veterans and those of VA and community service providers.

In 2020, 2,690 individuals completed a CHALENG Participant survey. This included 947 homeless Veterans and 1,743 providers and other stakeholders (VA staff, state and public officials, community leaders, volunteers). Nine percent of the Veteran participants were women. Thirty-seven percent of the Veteran participants were between the ages of 45 and 60, and 44% were 61 or older. The 2020 survey results revealed that Veteran needs that have been met primarily involve services that VHA can provide directly, whereas most unmet needs require community partnership support to fulfill.

To find more information about the project, see full details of the top 10 unmet needs for Veterans, and learn the demographics of survey participants, visit va.gov/homeless/challeng.asp.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION AND SERVICES

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA) OUTREACH PROGRAM

VBA funds Homeless Veterans Outreach Coordinators (HVOCs), who work full-time at 20 regional offices to provide access to VA benefits and information for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. VBA also has Homeless Veterans Claims Coordinators (HVCCs) in its other 36 regional offices. HVCCs label, control, and expedite the processing of claims by Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, including those involved with the criminal justice system. HVCCs also report on the prioritization of homeless claims activities. In FY 2021, VBA personnel participated in over 1,176 events to assist Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Additionally, VBA contributed to the development of a memorandum of understanding between VA and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The memorandum provides a framework by which VA can provide information and access to services to BOP inmates who are Veterans as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 101(2), or who have submitted a claim to VA for a benefit for which status as a Veteran is required.



Expedited **21,398** compensation claims for Veterans experiencing homelessness (average completion time of 104 days).



Expedited **1,960** pension claims for Veterans experiencing homelessness (average completion time of 40 days).

EXCESS PROPERTY FOR HOMELESS VETERANS INITIATIVE

This program provides the distribution of the federal government's excess personal property, including sleeping bags, hats, coats, and footwear, to Veterans experiencing homelessness. Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) distributes the majority of this surplus property, requisitioned by HPO, at Stand Downs conducted by community partners.



VA approved 5,366 total clothing requisitions.

MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE ASSISTANCE

VA works with loan servicers to help borrowers with VA guaranteed loans from the Loan Guaranty Service avoid foreclosure.



Saved approximately **203,890** borrowers from foreclosure, avoiding over **\$4.57 billion** in potential claim payments.



Program staff made over **701,000** calls to Veterans and their servicers.



RESEARCH

NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS (NCHAV)

NCHAV, established in 2009 and codified by section 713 of the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016, conducts research, model development, education, and policy analysis to promote recovery-oriented care for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Activities include assessing the effectiveness of programs; identifying and disseminating best practices to integrate into policies, programs, and services for Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and serving as a resource for all research and training carried out by VA and other federal and nonfederal entities with respect to Veteran homelessness.

RESEARCH



Expanded our pool of affiliated researchers from **36 to 40**. Through these partnerships, NCHAV provides a forum for researchers focused on the causes of homelessness to network and discuss opportunities to partner on research projects.



Generated **25** peer-reviewed research publications on homelessness among Veterans, and 7 research briefs.



Administered **5** intramural grants. Their titles are:

- “Increasing Use of VA Video Connect among Veterans Experiencing Homelessness — During COVID and Beyond”
- “Enhancing VA’s Preparedness for Disease Epidemics That Impact Homeless-Experienced Veterans: A Unique Cohort Study”
- “Combining Medical, Social Determinants of Health, and Suicide Data: Enhancing Understanding of Suicide Risk among Homeless and Justice-Involved Veterans through Latent Class Analysis”
- “Changes in Primary Care and Health for Veterans who have Experienced Homelessness During the COVID-19 Pandemic”
- “COVID-19 Social Risk Screening and Referral: Empowering Homeless Veterans with Resource Guides and Digital Health”



Presented **15** research-focused educational events to various stakeholder groups across the country, which included Connecting Research to Practice webinars and Homeless Evidence and Research Synthesis Forum.



Maintained a Veteran research engagement panel of **12** Veterans with lived experiences of homelessness to advise and provide input on ongoing research projects.



Oversaw **19** studies covering a range of topics from epidemiology of eviction, predictive analytics of program exits, dementia and long-term care, money management, and suicide.

EDUCATION & MODEL DEVELOPMENT:



Provided **11** national educational events that were attended by over 3,100 participants. Event topics included:

- “Gambling Among Veterans: Screening, Treatment, and its Association with Homelessness”
- “Mindfulness and Compassion with Veterans: Paying Attention to What Really Matters”
- “Virtual Outreach: Expanding Access for Veterans through VA-Issued Video Telehealth Tablets”
- “Whole Health Coaching with Veterans Experiencing Homelessness”; “Rural Veterans: Dealing with Isolation”
- “Establishing a Care Environment for Homeless Housing Settings: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic”
- “Best Practices for Addressing Substance Use Disorder”
- “Connecting Research to Practice: Unsheltered Homelessness among Veterans”
- “Peer Specialists in Homeless Programs – Screening for Suicide Risk in the Community”
- “Homeless Evidence and Research Synthesis Forum – Where are we with Housing First”
- “Me in the Room: How Personal History and our Understanding of Societal Systems Impact our Work”



Recorded and produced, in collaboration with VHA’s Employee Education System (EES), **two** podcast series. The first, “Battling Two Frontiers: Substance Use Epidemic During a Pandemic,” is an eight-part series featuring various subject matter experts discussing access to naloxone, treatment, aftercare, and other relevant issues of substance use and addiction. The second series is entitled “VHA Homeless Programs – Conversations about Racial Equity,” featuring interviews with homeless program staff, Veterans, subject matter experts, and women homeless program leaders from diverse backgrounds.



Launched a new webinar series, “Exploration-Innovation-Technology (E.I.T.),” in partnership with the VHA Innovation Ecosystem, to provide a platform to showcase and foster innovative approaches to health care for Veterans. The theme is virtual care, with a particular focus on the needs of vulnerable populations and the issues of equity and access.



Initiated a pilot in partnership with the HUD-VASH Program and the Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services to create a best-practice model to increase consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness in the structuring and delivery of HUD-VASH occupational therapy services.



Developed recommendations for promotion of a trauma-informed approach to care in VHA Homeless Programs based on a review of trauma-informed approaches to care for vulnerable populations outside VA and efforts previously made or underway in VHA Homeless Programs. As a result, NCHAV plans to pilot the replication of 2 linked promising practice models that are operating in the VA Boston Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program – the Trauma-Informed Care Integration Initiative and the Care Coordination, Advocacy, Treatment, and Connections to Housing (CATCH) program. CATCH serves Veterans who are at highest risk using trauma-informed principles of care.



CONCLUSION

Despite the many challenges faced during FY 2021, HPO continued to work tirelessly to ensure that all Veterans and their families have a safe, stable place to call home, and access to essential services to promote healthy lives. The steady increase in the number of communities effectively ending homelessness among Veterans is proof that preventing and ending homelessness for all Veterans is achievable.

Throughout FY 2021, HPO's collaborations with interagency offices and external stakeholders brought to light many promising practices, and significantly contributed to VA's ability to move the needle toward preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans, even during the ongoing pandemic. These strategic partnerships remain essential, as there are critical needs and gaps in services that VA legally cannot fulfill.

As this report shows, each HPO program demonstrated its commitment to preventing and ending Veteran homelessness by delivering high-quality services while also addressing COVID-19-related guidelines, policies, and practices.

