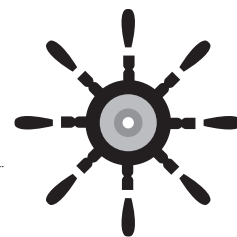


Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Vouchers



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Administering agency: HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Year program started: Formally in 1992; most active since 2008

Number of persons/households served: over 100,000 veterans since 2008

Population targeted: Homeless veterans meeting VA health care eligibility, with a focus on chronic homelessness.

FY16 funding: \$60 million in HUD-VASH vouchers (no case management funding in FY16)

See also: *Housing Choice Voucher Program, Veterans Housing, Homeless Assistance Programs, Interagency Council on Homelessness*

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH) combines Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA. It is a key program in the goal of ending veteran homelessness.

Through FY16, HUD has awarded more than 86,000 HUD-VASH vouchers. Nationwide, more than 300 Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) have participated in the program. In recent years, Congress created a set-aside pilot program to encourage HUD-VASH vouchers to be used on tribal lands, thereby filling an important gap in our service delivery system.

The HUD-VASH program is jointly administered by the VA and PIH. Because the vouchers are allocated to local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) with referrals from the nearest VA Medical Center (VAMC), program administration is largely on the community level. Administration of HUD-VASH is conducted by the PHA and clinical services are provided by the VAMC, or contracted VAMC case management provider.

HISTORY

HUD estimates that 47,725 veterans were still homeless as of January 2015. This number represents a 35 percent decline in veteran homelessness since 2010. Major declines in veteran homelessness have occurred among the unsheltered population, thanks in large part to the HUD-VASH program and national efforts to end chronic homelessness.

The Obama Administration announced in late 2009 that it was setting a goal of ending homelessness among veterans within five years. These efforts have gained traction through the implementation of the VA's Five Year Plan to end veteran homelessness, which wrapped up in December 2015, and the roll-out of the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, which focuses on ending all homelessness, starting with veterans. HUD-VASH has been and will continue to be a critical tool for achieving an end to homelessness for veterans and sets the stage for ending homelessness for all populations.

Advocates originally identified approximately 60,000 chronically homeless veterans who were in need of the comprehensive services offered through a HUD-VASH voucher. These advocates encouraged Congress and the administration to set this as a target for the number of vouchers on the street. This target has since been revised upwards, as additional target populations beyond those veterans experiencing chronic homelessness, including homeless female veterans, homeless veterans with dependent children, and homeless veterans with significant disabling and co-occurring disabling conditions, have received assistance through HUD-VASH.

Congress began funding these special purpose vouchers in earnest in the 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 110-161) with an allocation of \$75 million for approximately 10,000 vouchers. Since FY08, Congress has allocated \$75 million to HUD for approximately 10,000 new vouchers each year, with the exception of a \$50 million award in FY11, a \$60 million award

in FY16, and a 0.2 percent drop in 2013 due to sequestration. As of the end of FY15, 78,133 vouchers had been distributed to local communities with 71,155 HUD-VASH vouchers in use.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

HUD-VASH is a cornerstone in efforts to end veteran homelessness, providing a particularly effective resource because it combines both housing and services into one resource. 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 HUD regulations.

Veterans who receive HUD-VASH vouchers rent privately owned housing and generally contribute up to 30 percent 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 and with local landlords.

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. When a veteran no longer needs the program's case management support, these vouchers can become available for the next qualifying veteran.

Initially, the HUD-VASH program faced some roll-out challenges that have improved and been addressed in more recent years. The initial voucher allocation was not geared towards chronically homeless veterans, and voucher allocations in subsequent years were not exclusively targeted toward the 60,000 chronically homeless veterans with the highest need. According to the HUD Office of Inspector General, the HUD-VASH program faced challenges because of lack of suitable housing, lack of resources for move-in expenses, staffing challenges for PHAs and VAMCs, and challenges overcoming lengthy approval processes to get leases executed. In subsequent years, targeting of HUD-VASH to chronically homeless veterans improved dramatically, lease-up rates have improved, and

the time it takes to lease up vouchers has dropped significantly across the country.

Project-based vouchers (PBV) are needed for services-enriched multifamily developments in areas with a large concentration of chronically homeless veterans and in high-cost, low-vacancy markets. PHAs may designate a portion of their total HUD-VASH allocation as project-based vouchers. HUD has established PBV set-asides to competitively award a total of more than 2,200 project-based HUD-VASH vouchers, most recently in 2014 under Notice PIH 2014-3.

Eligible Participants and Voucher Allocation

To be eligible for HUD-VASH, veterans must pass through two separate eligibility processes. Income targeting requirements do not necessarily apply to HUD-VASH vouchers, though PHAs will still be required to prohibit admission if any member of the household is subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a state sex offender registration program.

To be eligible, a veteran must:

- Be VA health care eligible.
- Meet the definition of homelessness defined in the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act as amended by S. 896 The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009.
- Be in need of case management services for serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability in order to obtain and sustain independent housing.

Veterans with high vulnerability are prioritized, but veterans must be able to complete activities of daily living and live independently in their community. Case management is a requirement of participation in HUD-VASH.

The allocation for HUD-VASH vouchers has been a collaborative, data-driven effort conducted by HUD's Offices of Community Planning and Development and PIH, and the VA. Three major data sources help drive local allocations, including: HUD's point-in-time data, performance data from both PHAs and VAMCs, and data from the VAMCs on their contacts with homeless veterans.

After determining which areas of the country have the highest number of homeless veterans,

the VA Central Office identifies VA facilities in the corresponding communities. HUD then selects PHAs near to the identified VA facilities by considering the PHAs' administrative performance, and sends the PHAs invitations to apply for the vouchers. There is at least one site in each of the 50 states, in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

FUNDING

HUD-VASH vouchers are funded by both the VA and HUD. On the HUD side, \$60 million was provided for 8,000 new vouchers in FY16. Unfortunately, the VA received no additional funding for HUD-VASH case management services to match the HUD-VASH vouchers allocated to HUD in FY16. In FY08 through FY10, and FY12 through FY15, HUD was awarded \$75 million for 10,000 vouchers, and VA was awarded case management dollars to match those vouchers. In FY11, \$50 million was provided for approximately 7,500 vouchers. HUD-VASH voucher renewals are lumped into the general Section 8 tenant-based rental assistance account, and Congress has provided sufficient funding in recent years to renew all VASH vouchers.

FORECAST

HUD-VASH vouchers are an incredibly important resource in ending veteran homelessness. Congress should continue to provide adequate funding in the tenant-based Section 8 account to renew all existing HUD-VASH vouchers, and should continue to provide HUD-VASH vouchers to house all chronically homeless veterans.

VA and local service providers have identified additional priority groups for service through HUD-VASH. VA has set a target of 65 percent of HUD-VASH voucher recipients being chronically homeless, with the remaining 35 percent of vouchers being available for other vulnerable high priority groups including veterans with families, women, and Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom homeless veterans. As we move to end all homelessness starting with veterans through the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, Congress and the administration along with interested community partners and homeless advocates will need to reassess what resources are needed to end homelessness for both the chronically homeless as well as other homeless veterans.

TIPS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS

Continue working with the VA to increase referrals to the HUD-VASH program. Continue efforts to find consistent additional resources for move-in costs. Work with PHAs to support landlord outreach and engagement to improve lease-up rates and time. Encourage your PHA to apply for Extraordinary Administrative Fees, when available, to help with these sorts of outreach and engagement efforts. Evaluate the need for contracted case management in your area. Evaluate if, due to exceptionally expensive or tight rental markets, your local PHA should consider applying for Exception Payment Standards. Identify gaps in service and fill them with other Continuum of Care resources.

WHAT TO SAY TO LEGISLATORS

For those policymakers whom advocates have found difficult to approach for support on more broad affordable housing and homelessness issues, advocates may find success in discussing the need for resources to end veterans' homelessness.

Advocates should speak to Senators and Representatives, particularly if they are on the Appropriations or VA Committees, and urge them to provide \$75 million for 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers to help end homelessness among veterans, while full-funding all existing vouchers through the regular Section 8 account. It is imperative that, at the very least, Congress provide the case management funding that was not appropriated during last year's cycle; as stated above, 8,000 vouchers were created last year with no matching VA Supportive Services dollars. The president's budget requested these funds in the VA section of his request.

Advocates should also encourage Congress to make HUD-VASH work more seamlessly with the battery of other veteran homelessness relief programs, including employment programs and bridge housing options. Currently, legislative vehicles for these fixes exist in both the House and Senate Veteran's Affairs Committees.

Data regarding the prevalence of homeless veterans is available in HUD's *Annual Homeless Assessment Report*, through the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, or from the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

NLIHC, 202-662-1530, www.nlihc.org

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans,
202-546-1969, www.nchv.org

Corporation for Supportive Housing,
212-986-2966, www.csh.org

National Alliance to End Homelessness,
202-638-1526, www.endhomelessness.org

HUD's HUD-VASH Webpage:
<http://1.usa.gov/AgrU2z> ■