



On Call

Handbook for Homeless
Veterans and Service Providers

Produced by The American Legion
in collaboration with the National
Coalition for Homeless Veterans

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Introduction

The issue of homelessness among veterans is not new, however, overtime new solutions and increase resources continue to work at combatting the issue. Generally, the causes of homelessness can be grouped into three categories: economic hardships, health issues and lack of affordable housing. Although these issues affect all homeless individuals, veterans face additional challenges in overcoming these obstacles, including: prolonged separation from traditional supports such as family and close friends; highly stressful training and occupational demands, which can affect personality, self-esteem and the ability to communicate upon discharge; and non-transferability of some military occupational specialties into the civilian workforce.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has set a goal of eradicating homelessness among veterans. Data collected by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) during its annual Point-In-Time Count conducted in January 2020 showed there were 37,252 homeless veterans in the United States, a decline of 47 percent since 2010.

The pandemic has been detrimental in documenting comparable data in the past few years. However, there are still far too many veterans who are homeless.

HUD, VA, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, and local partners have used evidence-based practices like the Housing First Initiative and federal resources like HUD-VASH (the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Voucher Program) to get veterans off the street and into stable housing as quickly as possible. Since 2008, more than 105,000 vouchers have been awarded and more than 114,000 homeless veterans have been served through the HUD-VASH Program.

Pre-pandemic, HUD also has determined that:

- California has the largest number of veterans experiencing homelessness (11,401). Homeless veterans in California represented almost a third (24%) of the national homeless veterans population. One other state has at least 2,000 homeless veterans: Florida (2,436).
- In six states, more than half of all veterans experiencing homelessness were unsheltered. Those states were: California (70%), Guam (71%), Hawaii (49%), New Mexico (55%), Oregon (51%), Puerto Rico (82%).
- Women veterans are at especially high risk of homelessness. Women veterans are more than twice as likely to be homeless as women non-veterans.
- Veterans ages 18 to 30 are at high risk of using the shelter system, especially those in poverty. Young veterans are more than twice as likely to be homeless as non-veterans.

The American Legion produced and distributed this handbook in an effort to assist veterans in crisis and those who seek to help them. Whether you or someone you know is in need of housing, employment assistance, or health or legal services, this handbook will help guide you to useful information. The handbook provides resources and preliminary information on starting long-term homeless veteran programs, as well as details on The American Legion and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV)'s educational and preventive activities.

This guide is part of the collaboration between The American Legion and NCHV, which represents more than 2,100 community- and faith-based organizations nationwide that serve veterans in crisis.

Immediate Assistance and Resources

Help is available for the homeless or those at risk:

- For 24/7 assistance, call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-424-3838.
- To get help locating services, call the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans at 1-800-838-4357. Visit NCHV's "Help for Veterans" page at **nchv.org**, which has links to contact veteran program coordinators, talk to mental health clinicians and find community-based organizations.
- For emotional crises, call the Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 1-800-273-8255 and press 1. Or call 988.
- For housing resources, visit HUD's page at **hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-homeless-veterans/**.
- For disability and other benefits claims assistance, contact your American Legion department service officer at **legion.org/serviceofficers**.
- To learn how to apply for homelessness benefits, go to **mrsh.net** and click on "First Step."
- Find a local food bank at **feedingamerica.org/foodbank-results.aspx**.
- For 24/7 confidential assistance with domestic violence issues, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.
- For information on the Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) initiative, including resources designated by state that can provide help for veterans in courts and jails, go to **va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp**.



Health Issues and Resources

Homeless veterans may have serious health and hygiene issues that must be addressed. Veterans who are not already enrolled in a supportive residence program should be referred to the nearest VA medical center or clinic, or a local community clinic, for assessment and treatment. Call 1-877-424-3838.

In addition to a health screening, many homeless veterans will need to address health issues such as:

- **Mental health:** A large percentage of homeless veterans experience depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their military service and homelessness.
- **Substance abuse:** Untreated psychosocial disorders often lead to self-medication with alcohol and drugs. About three-quarters of homeless veterans have substance abuse and/or mental health issues. Addiction, including prescription drug addiction, is a disease that requires treatment and follow-up supportive counseling.

- **Hepatitis C, HIV and tuberculosis (TB):** Homeless people are at a higher risk of contracting these infectious diseases than the general population. Homeless veterans are at an even higher risk for hepatitis C and TB.
- **Dental care:** VA has a dental care program for veterans who are participating in homeless assistance residency programs.

Women veterans

Women will soon account for 10 percent of the veteran population, according to VA estimates. Many women veterans have unique needs, including reproductive health care, child care and treatment for military sexual trauma.

There is help available by calling 1-877-222-8387 to find your nearest VA medical center, where specialists can assist.

- Women veterans program managers are located in each VA health-care facility to assist women veterans.
- Women veterans coordinators are located in each VA regional office.
- State women veterans coordinators are in almost every state. Go to va.gov/womenvet or check your phone book blue pages under “State Government” or “Veterans Affairs.”

Housing Issues and Resources

Stable housing offers the foundation upon which other needs, such as health care and employment, can be adequately addressed. Homeless veterans should be referred to transitional housing programs as soon as possible to begin the rehabilitative process. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-424-3838 to inquire about immediate housing opportunities.

Additionally, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) can direct callers to local community service providers. Call 1-800-838-4357 or visit nchv.org.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s HUDVET National Hotline also provides information to veterans seeking answers to housing questions. Call 1-800-927-2891.

The phone book blue pages contain contact information for your city or county government's department of social or human services. Your office of the mayor can provide information on homeless programs, and potentially low-income housing coalitions or other homeless advocacy groups.

Homeless veterans who are not enrolled in a homeless assistance or supportive residence program are not likely to have a fixed address. This makes it difficult to receive mail and possibly phone calls, which can adversely affect employment prospects and the receipt of VA benefits including disability payments and critical correspondence. If a stable housing situation has not been established, homeless veterans should obtain permission to receive mail and phone calls at an acceptable location for the short term. For example, a local shelter, VA clinic (call 1-877-222-8387 to identify a local facility), veteran service organization or church.

Information for homeless assistance programs can be found at hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-homeless-veterans/.

Long-term or permanent housing

Public housing waiting lists are usually long, but the length of time varies among areas. Homeless veterans should apply to get on these lists, giving them as many options as possible. To contact a local Public Housing Agency (PHA), visit hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts, or look in the phone book blue pages under "Local Government" or "Housing Authority."



Employment Issues and Resources

The Department of Labor (DOL)'s Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) offers nationwide assistance. The agency's website has information on different organizations working to help employ veterans. Visit dol.gov/agencies/vets and click on the "Veterans" tab in the top left corner to open a drop-down menu of the featured organizations.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program

Offered by DOL-VETS, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) provides grants to service providers to help homeless veterans re-enter the workforce. To learn more visit, dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/hvrp.

Transportation

Community-based service providers may offer or be aware of transportation services available to homeless veterans. Call 1-877-424-3838 (VA) or 1-800-838-4357 (NCHV) for referrals.

Personal identification

Many homeless veterans do not have the personal identification documents required to obtain employment. The following may be needed:

- **Photo ID:** VA eligibility and veteran status confirmation cards are a form of photo identification. The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (1-877-424-3838) can direct you to your local homeless veteran program coordinator, who can provide more information about obtaining a photo ID. State motor vehicle departments also provide this service for a fee.
- **DD 214:** Veterans are entitled to a free copy of their service and medical records. To submit a request, go to [archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records](https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records). A signed and dated request may be faxed to the National Archives' National Personnel Record Center (NPRC) at 314-801-9195. Requests may be mailed to: National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138. Call 1-314-801-0800.
- **Birth certificate:** For complete state-by-state contact information, visit “Where to Write for Vital Records” at [cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm).
- **Social Security card:** Contact your nearest Social Security office— look in the phone book blue pages under “U.S. Government,” “Social Security Administration,” or call 1-800-772-1213. For more information on replacing a Social Security card, go to [socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber](https://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber).

Legal Assistance

A clear legal record is a valuable asset as homeless veterans aim to secure gainful employment and independent housing. Certain service providers have special arrangements with local court systems to help clients

who have restrictive legal histories. The Homeless Court Program, for example, is a collaboration between the court and homeless service providers in which clients' participation in program activities is recognized as "payment" for mostly minor offenses.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has strongly encouraged its medical centers to develop working relationships with the court system and local law enforcement. Each center has designated a facility-based Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist, who is responsible for direct outreach, assessment and case management for justice-involved veterans.

For a list of contacts, visit VA's VJO Initiative website at va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp.

The following resources can lead homeless veterans to free legal help in their regions:

- **FindLegalHelp.org:** Features a state-by-state listing of legal help, including basic legal information, information on court systems, lawyer referrals and directories, and free legal help.
- **LawHelp.org:** Helps low- and moderate-income people find free legal aid programs in their communities as well as answers to questions about legal rights. Also features a state-by-state list of legal aid referrals and information on topics including disabilities, military and veterans affairs, and employment.
- **American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Homelessness and Poverty:** Coordinates with national, state and local advocates and organizations to facilitate the exchange of information and resources. For more information, including details on homeless courts, go to abanet.org/homeless.



Starting a Homeless Veteran Program

The first step in starting a homeless veteran program is to determine the need in your community. To assess the priorities, contact the homeless veteran program coordinator at your nearest VA medical center (call 1-877-424-3838); local homeless veteran service providers (va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp); formerly homeless veterans; and your city's, county's or state's homeless coalition.

In this preliminary process, you will want to get answers to the following questions about your community:

- How many homeless veterans are there?
- How do the number of homeless veterans compare to the overall homeless population?
- What services and resources are available?
- What services and resources are missing?
- What are the short-, medium- and long-term needs?

Collaborating with community partners

For homeless veteran service providers, gaining access to services that are already provided by community-based organizations and agencies is critical in minimizing costs while maximizing program benefits.

In order to achieve this result, organizations must engage in collaboration. Collaborative partnerships are based on a strong sense of purpose, embrace the perspectives of all team members, and require trust and shared responsibility.

Successful collaborations can be built by the following approaches:

- Define your environment. Determine what the overall need is, what is and is not being provided, the value you will add and the value of potential partners.
- Define a collective mission. Make sure all partners have the same broad objective - to fill the existing gaps in service. Be open to non-traditional community partners that share this goal.
- Be willing to compromise. Focus on your and your partners' contributions to the objective, not on your differences.
- Communicate clearly. Allow every party to have a say through formal and informal communication channels, but have clearly defined decision makers and points of contact.

Other benefits of collaboration include broadened community support; better informed and more creative, balanced and enduring decisions; improved outreach; and greater access to federal, state and local funding sources.

You may want to also check with the local Continuum of Care. Visit hudexchange.info/grantees/contacts/ to contact a CoC by selecting the program choice to filter the list.

Working with federal partners

There are a number of federal grant opportunities available to eligible homeless veteran service providers. Some of the primary federal grant programs include:

Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program

Department of Veterans Affairs

The GPD program is offered annually (as funding permits) to support community-based agencies providing transitional housing or service centers for homeless veterans. Under the “Capital” grant component, VA may fund up to 65 percent of a project for construction, acquisition or renovation of facilities, or to purchase vans to provide outreach and services to homeless veterans. “Per Diem” grants are available to help offset operational expenses.

Visit va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Department of Labor

HVRP is a competitive grant program to provide services to assist homeless veterans in reintegrating into the workforce. Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations, state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies, as well as for-profit/commercial entities. This is the only federal program that focuses exclusively on employment of homeless veterans.

Visit dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/hvrp.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

Department of Veterans Affairs

Through this program, VA awards grants to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that provide supportive services to very low-income veterans and their families residing in or transitioning to permanent housing.

Visit va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.

HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program

Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs

Designed to address the needs of chronically homeless veterans, the HUD-VASH program provides long-term case management, supportive services and permanent housing vouchers to eligible veterans. Program participants (identified by VA) rent privately owned housing and generally contribute no more than 30 percent of their income toward rent.

Visit va.gov/homeless/hud-vash.asp.

Funding notifications

To sign up for federal grant notifications and updates, visit grants.gov. Additionally, NCHV newsletters feature both private and federal grant opportunities for service providers.



Legion Assistance and Preventive Efforts

The American Legion supports the efforts of public and private sector agencies and organizations that aid homeless veterans and their families. The Legion coordinates a Homeless Veterans Task Force among its departments to augment homeless service providers and fill in the gaps where no assistance programs are available. All Legion departments have a task force chairperson and an employment chairperson. The two chairpersons organize activities with posts in their departments to aid homeless and at-risk veterans, and their families.

Visit legion.org/homeless or call National Headquarters at 1-800-433-3318 for more information and resources.

Additional assistance and involvement

- Department service officers provide assistance to veterans seeking disability claims and other benefits within VA. Visit legion.org/serviceofficers.
- The Legion also works with Avue Technologies, which assists veterans with obtaining state and federal employment. Visit avuecentral.com.
- Through an initiative with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Legion hosts veterans job fairs at Legion posts across the country. To view a list of upcoming job fairs, visit legion.org/careers/jobfairs.
- The Legion sponsors Small Business Development Workshops at its annual Washington Conference and National Convention. These workshops provide veterans who are establishing and/or seeking to expand their small businesses with relevant information and tools to successfully interact and contract with the federal government.
- The American Legion sponsors Credentialing Summits to bring together key stakeholders to identify

opportunities to improve credentialing opportunities for transitioning servicemembers and veterans and to develop a sustainable plan to promote the transferability of military skills and experience through increased credentialing.

- National Employer Awards are presented to employers across the country who have established outstanding records in the employment and retention of veterans, workers with disabilities and older workers. Exceptional members of state employment security agencies also receive awards from The American Legion.

Services from the Auxiliary

The American Legion Auxiliary has decades of experience working with service providers and helping those in the military community receive the assistance they need. The vision of the Auxiliary is to support The American Legion while becoming the premier service organization and foundation of every community, providing support for veterans, servicemembers and their families by fostering an atmosphere of fellowship, patriotism, peace and security.

Similar to The American Legion's structure, the Auxiliary consists of a department for each state and the District of Columbia. On the local level, the Auxiliary boasts about 8,000 U.S. units. These units can be chartered just about anywhere there are people with the passion and desire to become part of the organization's mission. American Legion Auxiliary units are also based in Australia, Canada, China, France, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

For more information, including state department contacts, go to alaforveterans.org.

The American Legion Auxiliary serves homeless veterans and their families in many ways, including:

- Providing grant assistance to homeless and at-risk women veterans. These grants support temporary housing, payment of security deposits and utility bills, and gift cards for food and clothing for families.
- Raising funds for VA Healthcare for Homeless Veterans facilities by hosting events such as dinners and bake sales.
- Providing money and in-kind services to support Stand Downs with The American Legion Family.
- Preparing “Buddy Baskets” for homeless veterans moving into permanent housing. These baskets contain basic household items, including cleaning supplies, bathroom tissue, kitchenware and light bulbs.
- Filling and delivering backpacks containing basic daily needs to homeless veterans in shelters.
- Distributing small bags with basic items to homeless veterans. These items include washcloths, socks, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and toothpaste.
- Working with the Legion to renovate homes and supply furnishings for homeless veterans.



Project CHALENG

Since 1993, VA has collaborated with local communities across the United States on Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans.

The project aims to bring together homeless and formerly homeless veterans (referred to in the report as “consumers”), service providers, advocates, local officials, and other concerned citizens to identify the needs of homeless veterans and then work to meet those needs.

Project CHALENG is the only comprehensive national effort to poll VA staff, community providers and consumers about the needs of homeless veterans. The results help VA identify specific interventions needed to effectively assist homeless veterans.

Local CHALENG meetings, where attendees complete the Participant or Consumer Survey, represent important opportunities for VA and public and private agency representatives to meet, network and develop meaningful partnerships to better serve homeless veterans.

More details and a recent CHALENG report are available online at va.gov/homeless/challeng.asp.

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