



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Fact Sheet

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

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Health Care for Homeless Veterans

Overview

VA offers a wide array of special programs and initiatives specifically designed to help homeless Veterans live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible. VA is the only federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to Veterans experiencing homelessness, and our homeless-specific programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless treatment and assistance services in the country.

Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)

The HCHV program was developed out of the Homeless Chronically Mentally Ill (HCMI) program, a 6-month pilot project established by Public Law (Pub. L.) 100-6 on February 12, 1987. Recognition of VA's ability to quickly launch HCMI prompted an extension of funding and authorization of the program by subsequent legislation (Pub. L. 101-237).

After several years of successful operation, it became apparent that the program's principles and scope needed to be better defined. This redefining, coupled with the potentially stigmatizing label of "chronically mentally ill," led to the program being renamed Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV).

The program's central goal is to reduce Veteran homelessness by conducting street and community outreach to those who are the most vulnerable and who are not currently receiving VA services. Once Veterans are engaged through outreach, the goal is to connect them to treatment and rehabilitation services, as well as to VA and non-VA community programs that provide prevention, supportive services, and permanent housing.

HCHV programs are a frequent entry point to VA services, offering homeless Veterans an "open door" to the continuum of care VA offers. HCHV programs provide care, treatment, and rehabilitative services, including case management and therapeutic transitional housing assistance, by contracting with community providers.

HCHV Outreach Services

HCHV staff conduct street and community outreach to identify unsheltered Veterans in encampments, shelters, drop-in centers, and other locations. The intent is to provide Veterans with information on resources—such as housing assistance, medical and psychiatric inpatient and outpatient treatment programs, other community-based

residential programs, or social services—and encourage Veterans to assess and engage with these services.

HCHV works to lower barriers and maintain easy access for Veterans to receive services at VA and in the community.

Stand Downs

Stand Downs for homeless Veterans are an effective outreach strategy to engage Veterans experiencing homelessness and present them with a wide range of supportive services and housing opportunities.

Stand Downs are typically one- to three-day events held by community agencies in partnership with VA. They offer a chance to provide Veterans with referrals to other services including permanent housing, medical care, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, and employment resources.

Community Resource and Referral Centers (CRRC)

CRRCs serve as a primary access point in community settings for Veterans experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless. CRRCs are designed to provide services with the lowest barriers possible to enhance access to services for Veterans who are reluctant or unable to seek assistance at a VA medical facility.

A collaborative effort of VA, the community, service providers, and agency partners, these sites are located in 33 strategically selected areas to provide both a refuge from the streets and a central location to engage Veterans experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless. Veterans are referred to health and mental health care resources, job development programs, housing options, and other VA and non-VA benefits.

HCHV Case Management Services

HCHV homeless case management is initiated through outreach, with a focus on providing access to housing resources and monitoring Veteran involvement with appropriate VA and community-based providers throughout the continuum of services. Homeless case management is generally short-term in duration.

HCHV Contract Residential Services Programs (CRS)

Under 38 U.S.C. 2031, VA can contract for care, treatment, and rehabilitative services for eligible Veterans with community-based facilities. The HCHV CRS program provides funding directly to VA medical centers (VAMCs), enabling them to award local contracts to community-based agencies. The VAMC has direct oversight so they may create a contract that fills service gaps for the homeless Veterans in their specific community.

Each contract provides short-term residential care and supportive services to eligible Veterans who need immediate housing as they seek permanent housing. Because these

contracts are established between the VAMC and the selected provider, the VAMC ensures that these programs comply with the contract terms and the current HCHV authority.

The CRS program features three unique program models: Contracted Emergency Residential Services (CERS), Medical Respite within CERS, and Low Demand Safe Havens (LDSH). In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, HCHV funding supported 265 contracts with over 3,500 available beds in 49 states, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

There are two distinct levels of HCHV CRS:

- Contract Emergency Residential Services (CERS) programs target and prioritize homeless Veterans transitioning from literal street homelessness; Veterans being discharged from institutions, including those in need of medical respite; and Veterans who recently became homeless and require safe and stable living arrangements while they seek permanent housing. Lengths of stay in CRS typically range from 30 to 90 days with the option to extend based on clinical need. There are 314 CRS programs with more than 3,000 beds nationally.
- Low Demand Safe Havens (LDSH) are 24-hour staffed transitional residences with private or semi-private accommodations that target hard-to-reach, chronically homeless Veterans with mental illness and/or substance use problems who require a low-demand environment. The low-demand or non-intrusive environment is designed to re-establish trust and motivate Veterans to seek needed treatment services and transitional and permanent housing options. Lengths of stay are typically six months with the option to extend based on clinical need. There are 20 LDSH programs with 434 beds nationally.

Coordinated Entry (CE) Initiative

HCHV is the lead program within the national Homeless Program Office for VA's Coordinated Entry Initiative, which provides guidance to VAMCs regarding their roles and responsibilities in each of their local Continuums of Care (CoC) and CoC's CE systems. CE is designed to facilitate access to care and assignment of the appropriate level of intervention necessary to resolve homelessness.

The CoC framework promotes a community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness, including Veteran homelessness, making local VA support and participation essential to the CoC's CE system. All VAMCs are expected to be fully engaged with each of their local CoCs in several key areas:

- Case conferencing
- Maintenance of the by-name lists
- Assessment, prioritization and referrals of homeless Veterans

- Data sharing

HCHV has detailed expectations and requirements for each of these areas of the initiative in addition to providing technical assistance to sites.

VA's expectation is that homeless Veterans eligible for VA services can access care as quickly as possible and are expeditiously assigned to an intervention consistent with the department's goal of ending homelessness among Veterans.

As the status of CE implementation varies, when working toward full integration of VA services and resources in CE, it is imperative that timely access to care is prioritized by both the CE process and VA programs—delayed care leads to unacceptable mortality and morbidity risks. VA recognizes that CE processes may still be in early stages and that the CE process itself could be causing delays in care. After consultation with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), VA expects that VA programs should take necessary steps to resolve delays in care in the immediate term, while working with the CoC(s) to resolve delays occurring within the CE process in a sustainable way.

Brief Overview of Numbers:

- HCHV FY24 President's Budget: \$268,457,000
- Number of HCHV-funded positions nationally in FY24: 935
- Outreach to Veterans in FY24: 23,900
- Stand Downs in FY24: 261

Contact Us

Find the VA facility nearest to you: www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp

Get more detailed information on VA's programs for homeless Veterans:
www.va.gov/homeless

If you or a Veteran you know are at risk of homelessness, please contact VA's National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at **1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838)** to speak to a trained VA responder.

Steven Tillman, LCSW
National Director of HCHV
Steven.Tillman@va.gov