

DECEMBER 2022

*The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) newsletter contains news and information about VA's ongoing effort to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.*



## Executive Director's Message | Around HPO

### Health Update | Staff Spotlight | Fact of the Month

*Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838) for assistance.*

## Message From Monica Diaz, Executive Director, VHA Homeless Programs Office



*"Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. And when he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?"*

If you've seen the film *It's a Wonderful Life*, you know the power of Clarence's message. If you have not seen it, I recommend taking a few hours this holiday season to enjoy the timeless story.

Army Air Corps and Air Force Veteran [Jimmy Stewart](#) plays George Bailey, a man consumed by his commitment to helping others. When Bailey becomes too overwhelmed by the pressures he faces, Clarence the angel appears.

With Clarence's help, Bailey can see the world from a new perspective. He learns that his life and acts of kindness, no matter how small, have impacted—and even saved—more people than he ever realized.

If we had the chance to see our lives from the same vantage point as George Bailey, I have no doubt that we would have a similar experience.

When we help a Veteran exit or avoid homelessness, we do not only help this Veteran; we help the exponential number of individuals whose paths they cross.

[Read Monica's full message.](#)

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## Around HPO

### [Homeless Persons Memorial Day](#)

On the first day of winter and longest night of each year, we recognize [Homeless Persons Memorial Day](#) to honor the people who faced tragically avoidable deaths due to homelessness. While we remember those who we lost this year, we must look forward to the progress we can make to end Veteran homelessness and ensure every Veteran has a place to call home.



If you or a loved one are a Veteran in need of housing assistance, [click here](#) for information on resources that can help. For urgent assistance, make the call to the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838), which has trained counselors ready to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



### [Ending Veteran Homelessness Podcast: 2022 Year in Review with Executive Director Monica Diaz](#)

This year, VHA's homeless programs were able to positively impact Veterans experiencing homelessness and housing instability in many ways. On the Ending Veteran Homelessness podcast, we chat with Homeless Programs Office Executive Director Monica Diaz about the major initiatives VA implemented this year, and her thoughts on how relentlessness is critical to the work we do. [Listen to the full episode.](#)

### [Former Homeless Veteran Billy Truesdell's True Colors Shine Through](#)

When Navy Veteran Billy Truesdell realized his alcoholism was out of control after being charged with driving under the influence, he committed to participating in a Veteran's Treatment Court. These don't seek to determine whether a defendant is guilty of an offense but rather to ensure that Veterans receive treatment to address unmet



clinical needs, such as addiction. What began as a consequence of his DUI turned out to be an important step toward changing his life. [Read Billy's story.](#)



### [Online Medical Debt Relief Application Now Available](#)

For many Veterans, medical debt can be overwhelming and can contribute to financial instability that leads to homelessness. However, it is now easier than ever for Veterans to apply for and receive medical debt relief. If you are concerned about your medical copayment debt and want to seek relief, you can now apply online at VA's new [online debt access page.](#)

### [Bombas, Veterans United Increase Number of Socks Donated to Homeless Veterans](#)

Last year, VA joined forces with Bombas and Veterans United Home Loans to donate 50,000 pairs of socks to Veterans experiencing homelessness across the country.



This year, the collaboration was even more successful, distributing nearly 146,000 pairs of socks to those who need them most. [Read the full story.](#)



### [Innovative Practices: Montgomery County Veterans Response Team](#)

The VA Coatesville Health Care System in Montgomery County, PA has been using an innovative practice involving collaboration with community partners to develop a Veterans Response Team aimed at connecting justice-involved Veterans to voluntary treatment and other supports before being arrested or involuntarily committed. This approach enables Veterans to resolve clinical and other issues without exposure to traumatizing criminal justice processing and incarceration, or the loss of civil liberties. [Read the white paper.](#)

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## Health Update

If you will be traveling over the holidays, it's important to keep your health and safety top of mind. For people aged 2 years or older, [CDC recommends properly wearing a high-quality mask or respirator over the nose and mouth](#) in indoor areas of public transportation (such as airplanes, trains, buses, ferries) and transportation hubs (such as airports, stations, and seaports).



Along with staying [up to date with your COVID-19 vaccine](#), avoiding crowds, and hand-washing, wearing a high-quality mask or respirator is one of multiple prevention steps you can take to protect yourself and others.

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## HPO Staff Spotlight: Michael Boyd, LCSW



Michael Boyd serves as a regional coordinator for VA's Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program, which provides funding to nonprofit community agencies that work to rapidly rehouse homeless Veterans. These critical services are life-changing for Veterans, and Boyd's role allows him to participate in both micro and macro social work to help communities find faster, more successful approaches to housing Veterans.

[Read Boyd's full spotlight](#) to learn more about the work he does, the accomplishments he is most proud of, and his "why" for his work.

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## HPO Fact of the Month

Of the 33,136 Veterans experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2022, 13,564 of those Veterans were unsheltered, meaning they live in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, and literally on the street.



Free, confidential help is available through VA for any Veteran experiencing homelessness. Contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838), find your nearest [VA medical center](#), or visit our [National Resource Directory](#) for more resources.