

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



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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



Last month, I began this message by saying that no one's journey into homelessness is the same. Today, I'd like to focus on one of the major factors that can affect that journey—race.

There is no better time to visit this topic than during [Black History Month](#), as Black Veterans, along with other minority groups, are overrepresented in the homeless Veteran population.

We shared some of the eye-opening stats on this month's [Ending Veteran Homelessness podcast](#).

Black Veterans make up about 12% of the overall Veteran population, but 31% of homeless Veterans. That means in a room full of 100 Veterans, 12 would be Black. But if you took that same room and instead filled it with 100 homeless Veterans, 31 of them would be Black.

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We can't ignore these facts. We can't look at veteran homelessness through a colorless lens and expect equitable outcomes.

Here at VA, we need to explore ways to better serve the historically underserved and ensure that every Veteran—no matter the color of their skin—has the same access to VA services, resources, and care. If we're truly going to end Veteran homelessness, we need to do it for *all* Veterans.

[Read more.](#)

Around HPO

[VA Exceeds Veteran Housing Goal for Second Year](#)

The final numbers are in: VA topped its goal of housing 38,000 Veterans by a considerable margin. More than 46,000 Veterans were housed in 2023, and 95.9% of them did not return to homelessness. Of those who did, 96.4% were rehoused or on the path to rehousing at the end of the year.



[Read more.](#)



[Study Proves Success of Housing First Approach](#)

From 2010 to 2022, we cut Veteran homelessness by 55.3% through our Ending Veteran Homelessness Initiative, according to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. This demonstrates the success of our Housing First approach to fighting homelessness while far exceeding the 8.6% decrease in the general population over the

same period.

[See the study.](#)

[Ending Veteran Homelessness Podcast: Why Racial Equity is Critical to Ending Veteran Homelessness](#)

On this month's *Ending Veteran Homelessness* podcast, we're discussing racial equity in homeless programs. Our guests talk about what equity is, what some of the unique challenges that minority Veterans face, and why it's both critical (and okay) to center equity when providing housing and supportive services.



[Listen to the episode.](#)



[Formerly Homeless Veteran Discovers His Inner Artist](#)

Now that Army Veteran Richard Freund has a stable, permanent home, he can explore his artistic side and work toward his goal of going to art school. Freund secured housing through [Supportive Services for](#)



secured housing through [Supportive Services for Veteran Families](#), a program that helps prevent Veterans from losing their homes and works to rapidly re-house those who become homeless.

[Read Freund's story.](#)

[VA Helps Justice Involved Veterans Find Support](#)

Sean Clark, VA's director of [Veterans Justice Programs](#), appeared on the *She Wears the Boots* podcast to talk about how justice involved Veterans can get connected with VA support programs and what they can expect. [She Wears the Boots](#) is sponsored by our Office of Women's Health and focuses on the ways we partner with women Veterans to improve their health.



[Listen to the episode.](#)

[VA Secretary Reaffirms Commitment to Housing Native American Veterans](#)

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough recently met with Indian Health Service (IHS) Director Roselyn Tso to discuss their shared commitment to reducing homelessness and providing housing to at-risk American Indian/Alaska Native Veterans. A new agreement will facilitate repayment for health care and other related services that IHS provides to Veterans.



[Learn more.](#)



[Renewal Applications Available for Special Need Grants](#)

Active special need grantees may now apply for renewal funding to facilitate transitional housing and supportive services for eligible Veterans. Approximately \$5 million per year for up to two years is available under the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) special need grant program to the 16 current grantees. Renewal

applications must be received by 4:00 p.m. ET on April 15, 2024.

[Learn more.](#)

[Webinar on Straight Talk: Housing Solutions with VA](#)

The words “homeless” and “Veteran” should not exist together. The Homeless Programs Office at VA is committed to ending homelessness among Veterans because it is our nation’s duty to ensure all Veterans have a place to call home. Although significant progress has been made to prevent and end Veteran homelessness over the last decade, recently released data show that the number of



Veterans experiencing homelessness increased by more than 7% in 2023. This presentation will provide an overview of the federal response to Veteran homelessness, share updates on the latest legislative actions to support homeless Veterans, and highlight opportunities for the public to stay engaged and help.

[Register for the webinar.](#)

Health Update



During American Heart Month, make a commitment to put your heart health first. [Schedule an appointment](#) at your local VA to get a heart check-up today.

Heart disease is the [leading cause of death](#) in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Studies have shown that Veterans may be at [higher risk of heart disease](#) than the average American, and it's the [top reason for hospitalization](#) in

the VA health system.

This year, the CDC is focusing on reaching women, who may not realize their risk of heart disease. Women Veterans can visit the [VA website](#) to learn about available heart health services and how to access them.

HPO Staff Spotlight: Lucas Vrbsky

This year, we're spotlighting VA's Housing First approach through a series of interviews with VA employees and taking a look at how they're working to end Veteran homelessness through Housing First. Learn more about [Housing First](#).

Housing First is just one tool in our social justice toolbox according to Lucas Vrbsky, a Veterans Justice Program re-entry specialist in North Carolina. This approach to ending homelessness—which emphasizes finding housing before providing other services—can empower people to speak out about inequity in housing as well as broader social issues.



[Read our interview with Vrbsky.](#)

HPO Fact of the Month



We're not the only ones seeing success with the Housing First approach. Between 2008 and 2020, Finland reduced the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness from 3,500 to 1,000. Finland