

HUD-VASH Social Isolation Care Packages

A Strong COVID-19 Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Programs Office identifies and disseminates strong, emerging practices in homeless program operations during the COVID-19 National Emergency. Homeless program staff at the Alexandria VA Health Care System (VAHCS) send care packages filled with fun activities and information on community resources to Veterans in the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to reduce social isolation, help maintain recovery, and to serve as a supplement to virtual and telephone case management delivery during the COVID-19 National Emergency.

PRACTICE OVERVIEW

In late March 2020, as stay-at-home orders were implemented in Louisiana, HUD-VASH staff at the Alexandria VAHCS were concerned about the mental health and emotional well-being of Veterans in HUD-VASH who would also be required to socially isolate. In addition to transitioning clinical encounters to telehealth, staff decided to mail each Veteran a care package that included items such as coloring pages, an 8-pack of primary crayons, Sudoku and crossword puzzle sheets, crossword puzzle sheets, word games, and garden seeds that were individually packaged by the HUD-VASH staff in 2 x 2, (small) clear, resealable Ziploc baggies. Most items were purchased using General Post Funds in partnership with the VAMC's Voluntary Service. The packet also included a resource sheet with information such as smartphone applications for self-care, information about coping with stress, information about mindful medication conference calls, and local community resources for basic essential assistance during COVID-19.

April 2020's care package included: CDC guidelines encouraging all citizens to wear masks while in public, information on eligibility for economic impact (stimulus) payments, the quarterly homeless program newsletter, money management tips for short-term financial windfalls, CDC how-to instructions for mask making, a VA-branded suicide prevention bandanna, rubber bands, a summary of non-VA resources for online and telephone-based substance use recovery support, and information on basic hand-washing techniques. As feedback from HUD-VASH Veterans about the packets was overwhelmingly positive, staff plan to send additional care packages in the coming months while stay-at-home orders remain in effect.

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