

Delaware Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness

Plan to End Veteran Homelessness in 2015

May 4, 2015

Too often, the return to civilian life can bring a cascade of challenges which can lead to homelessness for Veterans. Causes of homelessness among Veterans are similar to causes of homelessness among non-Veterans: interrelated economic and personal factors and a shortage of affordable housing. However, Veterans experiencing homelessness are more likely to be unsheltered and to experience homelessness for longer periods of time. About half of Veterans experiencing homelessness have serious mental illness, half have a history with the criminal justice system, and nearly 70 percent have substance abuse disorders. All of these factors contribute to challenges to resolving homelessness.

Nationally, focused effort from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to end homelessness for Veterans has led to a 30% decrease in homelessness among Veterans in the past four years. But still, on any given night 50,000 Veterans are homeless in our country, 100 of them here in Delaware. In 2015, an estimated 280 Veterans will experience homelessness in Delaware.

Even one Veteran homeless in our state is one too many. This is a problem that can be solved, and indeed has been solved in several cities around the country. By bringing together state and local partners, service providers and the community around this shared, highly focused goal, we can end Veteran homelessness in Delaware. In addition to directly benefiting Veterans, this initiative will also benefit the broader homeless system in the state as a pilot of a focused, collaborative effort to end homelessness for a specific population using evidence-based practices.

The Challenge

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. One of the specific goals identified in this plan is to end Veteran homelessness in the United States before the end of 2015. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have both directed resources to address Veteran homelessness, namely the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing

(VASH) program, which combines HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA. VA provides these services for participating Veterans at VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics.

In June of 2014 First Lady Michelle Obama encouraged mayors and local leaders to join a coalition of leaders committed to ending Veteran homelessness in their communities by the end of 2015. This effort, known as the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, seeks to eliminate Veteran homelessness by ensuring that Veterans who are homeless are able to become stably housed quickly in permanent housing

and that those who are at risk of becoming homeless are quickly identified and provided with appropriate resources to prevent them from experiencing homelessness. With strong support from the National League of Cities, the initiative advances a community-based model of local working groups and cross-sector collaboration with the VA, nonprofit service providers, local government and housing agencies.

The Challenge in Delaware

On May 4, 2015, Governor Jack Markell is joining seven other Governors in signing on to the Challenge as a State, honoring Delaware’s commitment to ensure that Veterans have every opportunity to live full, healthy lives in our state. As of April 2015, New

Roles and Responsibilities	
State Working Group	Local Working Groups
Data Collection & Tracking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use statewide data to inform the setting of targets and outcomes • Receive and compile local data • Track and report outcomes at state level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and track local data and housing outcomes • Report local data to state group
Housing Homeless Veterans	
<p>Planning & Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to local groups about strategies utilized successfully in other communities (research, best practices) • Develop solutions to policy and process issues that may be preventing or making access to housing challenging for homeless Veterans • Identify/map housing resources 	<p>Direct Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local working group • Set local housing and outcome targets • Identify local housing and supportive services for homeless Veterans • Develop and implement local strategies to achieve housing goals • Report any policy and process issues to the state group
Coordination	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together primary partners at executive and state level to ensure coordination and shared goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve essential partners in local efforts (VA staff, homeless service providers, SSVF staff, etc.)

Castle County, the Cities of Wilmington, Newark and Dover, and Town of Georgetown have signed on to the Mayors Challenge, and several other jurisdictions may soon sign on.

Achieving the goal of ending Veteran homelessness in Delaware will require collaborative work across jurisdictions, service providers, and state and federal agencies. Local working groups are already up and running at various stages of their efforts. In January, a summit on veteran homelessness was held in Dover, followed up by a "boot camp" planning session and development of a working group committed to housing 22 veterans in Dover in 100 days. A collaborative group of New Castle County, the City of Wilmington and City of Newark are working together to host a Summit to kick off a similar 100-day challenge in northern Delaware.

These groups bring together local providers, volunteers, and officials to engage in the direct action of assembling local resources, conducting outreach, and housing Veterans. A state working group will provide statewide support in coordinating data-sharing, advancing state-level strategies, and supporting the local efforts. The local working groups' on-the-ground direct experience will help identify challenges and inform further state strategies.

Defining the Goal

Our goal is both an immediate and systematic end to Veteran homelessness, which means there are no Veterans sleeping on the streets and every Veteran has access

to permanent housing. If a Veteran is homeless in Delaware, the resources exist to quickly re-house the Veteran and streamlined and efficient processes are in place to do so. Residing in an emergency shelter or transitional housing is still considered homeless. While there may still be veterans counted as homeless while they are in shelter, the number should be reduced dramatically and stays in shelter should be brief.

We will measure our progress with the 2016 Point-in-Time count, an annual report which identifies the number of people homeless on one night in January. We will also engage in ongoing measurement through the Community Management Information System (CMIS), which tracks individuals served in the homeless assistance system, of Veterans in the system, lengths of stay, and exits to permanent housing.

What is the definition of homeless?

The Challenge is focused on those who are "Literally Homeless" as defined by HUD. This means an individual or family who lacks a regular and adequate residence. Living in a public or private place not meant for human habitation or in a shelter or other temporary living arrangements is considered homeless. This includes individuals who are exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less who was homeless immediately prior to entry into the institution. This also includes an individual fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking.

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A chronically homeless individual is someone who has experienced homelessness for a year or longer, or who has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years and has a disability. A family with an adult member who meets this description would also be considered chronically homeless.

Who is considered a Veteran?

For purposes of the Challenge, a Veteran is anyone who has been a member of the armed services for any length of time. This includes Veterans who may not be eligible for VA services due to discharge status or length of service, and Veterans of the National Guard.

Need and Target

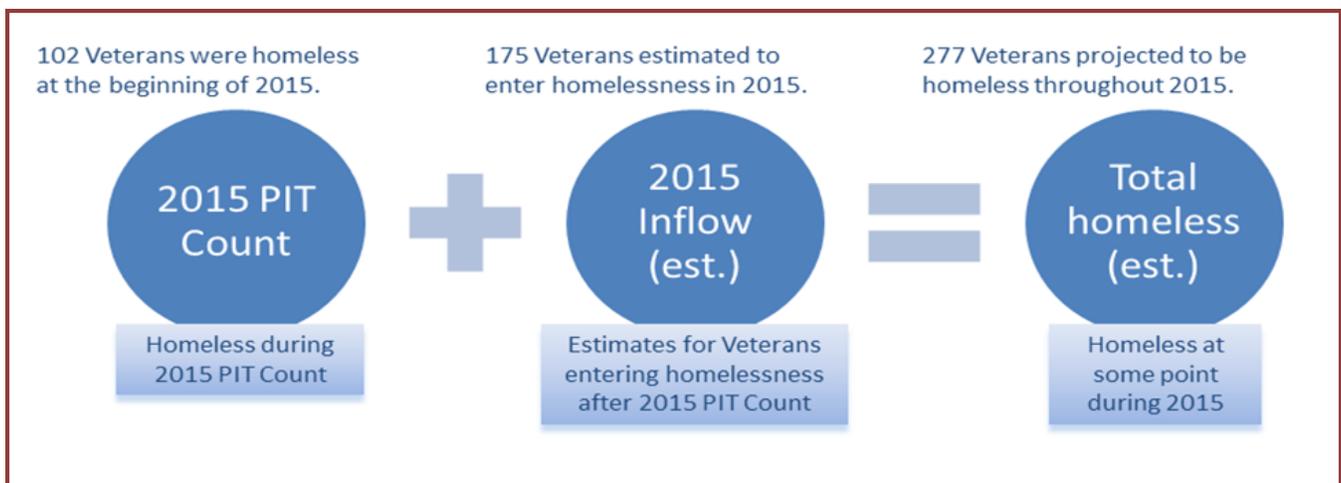
The 2015 Delaware Point-in-Time Count reported that 102 Veterans were homeless on that night in January, 2015. We know many more Veterans and their families at risk of homelessness are served by the SSVF program, and that many Veterans go uncounted as Veterans because they are not eligible for VA services due to nature of their discharge, time of service or otherwise do not

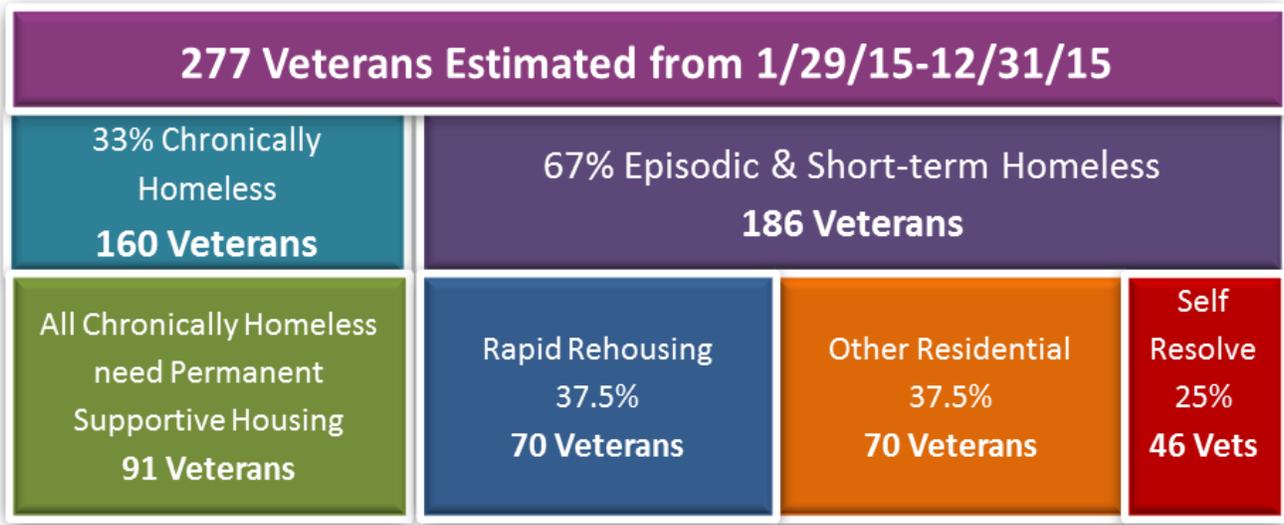
consider themselves Veterans despite military service.

Using methodology established by the VA and used in communities across the country based on the 2015 Point-in-Time count, 277 Veterans are estimated to become homeless in Delaware over the course of 2015. The estimated distribution is 60% in New Castle County, 24% in Kent County, and 16% in Sussex County. However, it is common for people experiencing homelessness to be concentrated in areas where there are services and facilities.

Based on national estimates, 33% of these Veterans (91) are estimated to be chronically homeless and need permanent supportive housing and 67% (186) experiencing episodic or short-term homelessness. These Veterans may need shorter-term housing; assistance to avoid becoming homeless such as utility payments, short-term rental assistance; or assistance securing housing such as security and utility deposits.

Some of the assistance needed could be addressed by mainstream programs. Dela-





ware’s Continuum of Care has a number of emergency shelters, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing resources. However, most are overtaxed and high demand for these resources may lengthen the time a Veteran experiences homelessness. Comparing these needs to both the Veteran-specific and mainstream resources available, the primary gap is for permanent supportive housing.

Veteran Housing Resources

The main resources available for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are:

HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH): The VASH program provides a permanent rental subsidy and long-term case management for homeless Veterans with greater needs for longer-term supports. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA where eligible homeless Veterans receive a Housing Choice Voucher paired with VA-provided case management and supportive services to sustain housing stability. HUD-VASH subscribes to the prin-

ciples of the Housing First model of care, an evidence-based best practice for assisting people experiencing chronic homelessness focused on getting clients into permanent housing as quickly as possible. Once housed, a team of caseworkers and clinicians work with clients to help them maintain their housing and improve their health and quality of life. In Delaware, HUD-VASH assistance is available via the Wilmington VA Medical Center’s Social Work Services.

Other VA Homeless Services: The Grant and Per Diem (GPD) and other Residential Rehabilitation programs provide short-term or transitional housing to Veterans experiencing homelessness with structured supports and a focus on completing treatment and exiting to permanent housing. In Delaware, these services are available via the Wilmington VA Medical Center’s Social Work Services.

Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF): The SSVF program provides short-term assistance with a focus on making connections to mainstream assistance

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to prevent homelessness for at-risk Veterans and rapidly re-house Veterans experiencing homelessness. SSVF is funded by and overseen by the VA and operated by community-based nonprofit organizations. SSVF providers in Delaware include Connections CSP and the Veterans Multi-Service Center.

Veterans Trust Fund: The Delaware Veterans Trust Fund, administered by the Delaware Commission for Veterans Affairs (DCVA), assists Veterans in need of help with reintegration, housing, utilities, and incidental expenses for health and welfare. The Veterans Trust Fund is often combined with SSVF or other resources.

Veteran Specific Housing Resources			
Permanent Housing or Housing Resources	Estimated Total Available	Estimated Avail. for Homeless Veterans	Estimated Need 2015
Permanent Housing			
HUD- VASH ¹	145	24	91
Delaware Center for Homeless Veterans	10	10	
Rapid Rehousing²			
SSVF—Connections	200	70	70
SSVF—Veterans Multi-Service Center	70	30	
Emergency Shelter, Transitional, or other Short-term³			
Home of the Brave	23	10	70
Connections Transition in Place	50	25	
VA Grant Per Diem contract beds - various	50	25	
Identified Units or Assistance	548	194	231⁴
Notes			
1) VASH vouchers administered by the Wilmington VAMC serve all of Delaware as well as three counties in New Jersey. Therefore, the total allocation is not available for Veterans in Delaware. The estimate here is based on assumed turnover and the typical distribution of vouchers in Delaware.			
2) These programs offer Prevention and Rapid Rehousing based on clients' needs. It is difficult to project how much will be rapid rehousing.			
3) As these are shorter-term placements, turnover of 50% is assumed. An additional up to 50 beds are currently under development at various stages.			
4) 25% of the 277 Veterans (46) estimated to enter homelessness in 2015 are estimated to have episodic or short-term homelessness that will self-resolve. This is based on national methodology provided by the VA.			

Strategies

To end Veteran homelessness in Delaware, we must both ensure that Veterans who are currently homeless are placed in permanent housing, and make policy and other changes to ensure that Veterans who present as homeless or at risk of homelessness in the future are housed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Strategies

To house Veterans who are currently homeless in Delaware, we will:		Responsible Entities
1	Use CMIS and Point in Time study to identify Veterans currently homeless or at high risk of homelessness and share this information with local groups for outreach.	HPC, VA, local groups and providers
2	Consolidate data from the VA and local groups to ensure all Veterans are tracked in CMIS.	HPC, VA, local groups & providers
3	Increase cooperation between the VA, SSVF, and Continuum of Care on connecting Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to the most appropriate resource to meet their needs. Permanent supportive housing resources such as VASH will be targeted to Veterans with the greatest needs for long-term support.	VA, HPC, SSVF providers
4	Create an additional up to 20 vouchers to serve Veterans through the State Rental Assistance Program, which provides rental assistance in conjunction with supportive services.	DSHA, DHSS
5	Make changes to the delawarehousingsearch.org website to increase visibility for Veteran housing resources.	DSHA

To ensure Veterans in the future are housed as quickly as possible, we will:		Responsible Entities
1	Work with the VA and local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to increase "graduations" from the VASH program to regular Housing Choice Vouchers for those no longer needing the more extensive VASH services.	DSHA, VA, local groups and PHAs
2	Improve connections and coordination between Veteran-specific and mainstream resources for homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing.	DHSS, SSVF providers, HPC
3	Offer targeted trainings on mainstream housing resources for VA, SSVF and others who work with Veterans.	DSHA
4	Develop consistent guidance on housing resources and referrals to ensure Veterans in need of housing can make the right connection to resolve their housing crisis, to be uniform across all the various housing and Veteran resource websites, guides, and points of entry.	DSHA, DCVA, DHSS, 211
5	Use CMIS to track Veterans entering and exiting the homeless system and long-term outcomes.	HPC

Partners and Providers

Connections CSP

Delaware Commission on Veterans Affairs

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services

Delaware State Housing Authority

City of Dover

Town of Georgetown

Homeless Planning Council of Delaware

City of Newark

New Castle County

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Multi-Service Center

City of Wilmington



Delaware State Housing Authority

<http://www.destatehousing.com>

(888) 363-8808