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ON-CALL:

Handbook for Homeless Veterans and Service Providers



Produced by The American Legion
in collaboration with the
National Coalition for
Homeless Veterans





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Introduction

“ON-CALL: Handbook for Homeless Veterans and Service Providers” is a brief reference guide for veterans in crisis and those who seek to help them. Whether you or someone you know is in need of housing, employment assistance, health or legal services, or any number of other supports, this handbook will allow you to take decisive action. ON-CALL – which signifies the rich resources available to help homeless veterans – also provides preliminary information on starting long-term homeless veteran programs, as well as information on The American Legion and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV)’s educational and preventive activities.

This collaboration between The American Legion and NCHV, which represents more than 2,100 community- and faith-based organizations nationwide that serve veterans in crisis, offers an unprecedented opportunity to equip Legionnaires with the tools they need to assist homeless veterans.



Immediate Assistance is Available

If you or someone you know is homeless or at risk of homelessness, there is immediate help available. Please call one of the numbers below for assistance.

Toll-free numbers:

- ◆ For 24/7 assistance, call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID VET (1-877-424-3838).
- ◆ For assistance locating services in your area, call the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans at 1-800-VET-HELP (1-800-838-4357).
- ◆ For emotional crises, call the Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1.
- ◆ For domestic violence issues, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

If you have Internet access:

- ◆ Visit NCHV's "Help for Veterans" webpage at www.nchv.org, which includes links to: locate community-based organizations, talk to mental health clinicians, find local Stand Down events, and contact Homeless Veteran Program Coordinators.
- ◆ Several housing resources may be found by visiting the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s veteran-specific webpage at www.hudhre.info/VeteransAssistance.

- ◆ FirstStep details and explains how to apply for every major benefit program designed to help people experiencing homelessness— visit the site at www.mrsh.net/firststep/firststep%20%28d%29/index.html.
- ◆ Find a local food bank at www.feedingamerica.org/foodbank-results.aspx.
- ◆ For disability and other benefits claims assistance, contact your American Legion Department Service Officer at www.legion.org/departments.
- ◆ Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers provide outreach to justice-involved veterans. For information on the Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Initiative – including a list of local specialists designated to provide direct outreach, assessment and case management for veterans in local courts and jails— go to www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp.

Overview of Veteran Homelessness

Generally, the causes of homelessness can be grouped into three categories: economic hardships, health issues and lack of affordable housing. Although these issues affect all homeless individuals, veterans face additional challenges in overcoming these obstacles, including: prolonged separation from traditional supports such as family and close friends; highly stressful training and occupational demands, which can affect personality, self-esteem and the ability to communicate upon discharge; and

non-transferability of some military occupational specialties into the civilian workforce.

Numbers and statistics

According to the most recent report from the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) – “Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress,” published in October 2011 – 76,329 veterans were homeless on a single night in January 2010. An estimated 144,842 veterans spent at least one night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program during a 12-month period (October 2009 through September 2010).

The report determined the following:

- ◆ In January 2010 four states – California, Florida, New York and Texas – accounted for 50 percent of all homeless veterans across the country, although these four states only account for 28 percent of the total veteran population.
- ◆ Women veterans are at especially high risk of homelessness. Women veterans are more than twice as likely to be homeless as women non-veterans.
- ◆ Young veterans (between ages 18 and 30) are at high risk of using the shelter system, especially young veterans in poverty. Young veterans are more than twice as likely to be homeless as their non-veteran counterparts.

Health Issues and Resources

Homeless veterans may have serious health and hygiene issues that must be addressed. Veterans who are not already enrolled in a supportive residence program should be referred to the nearest VA medical center or clinic, or a local community clinic, for assessment and treatment— call 1-877-424-3838.

In addition to a general health screening, many homeless veterans will need to address the following health issues:

- ♦ Mental health – A large percentage of homeless veterans experience depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their military service and homelessness.
- ♦ Substance abuse – Untreated psychosocial disorders often lead to self-medication with alcohol and drugs. About three-quarters of homeless veterans have substance abuse and/or mental health issues. Addiction, including prescription drug addiction, is a disease that requires treatment and follow-up supportive counseling.



- ◆ Hepatitis C, HIV and tuberculosis (TB) – All homeless people are at a higher risk of contracting these infectious diseases than the general population. Homeless veterans are at an even higher risk for hepatitis C and TB.
- ◆ Dental care – VA has a dental care program for veterans who are participating in homeless assistance residency programs.

Women veterans

VA estimates women will soon account for 10 percent of the veteran population. Many women veterans have unique needs, including reproductive health care, child care, and treatment for military sexual trauma.

Call 1-877-222-8387 to find your nearest VA medical center and request help from the following people:

- ◆ Women Veterans Program Managers are located in each VA health care facility to assist women veterans.
- ◆ Women Veterans Coordinators are located in each VA regional office.
- ◆ State Women Veterans Coordinators are located in almost all states. Check your phone book blue pages under “State Government,” “Veterans Affairs,” or go to www.naswvc.com.

Housing Issues and Resources

Stable housing offers the foundation upon which other needs, such as health care and employment, can be adequately addressed. Homeless veterans should be referred to transitional housing programs as soon as possible in order to begin this rehabilitative process. Call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-484-3838 to inquire about immediate housing opportunities. Additionally, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) can direct callers to local community service providers— call 1-800-VET-HELP (838-4357) or visit www.nchv.org.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s HUDVET National Hotline also provides information to veterans seeking answers to housing questions— call toll-free at 1-800-998-9999.

The phone book blue pages contain contact information for your local (city or county) government's department of social or human services. Your office of the mayor can provide information on homeless programs, and potentially low-income housing coalitions or other homeless advocacy groups.

Homeless veterans who are not enrolled in a homeless assistance or supportive residence program are not likely to have a fixed address. This makes it difficult to receive mail and possibly phone calls, which can adversely affect employment prospects and the receipt of VA benefits including disability payments and critical correspondence. If a stable housing situation has not been established, homeless

veterans should obtain permission to receive mail and phone calls at an acceptable location for the short term, e.g. a local shelter, VA clinic (call 1-877-222-8387 to identify a local facility), veteran service organization, or church.

Additionally, contact information for local homeless assistance programs is available at www.hudhre.info/VeteransAssistance.

Long-term or permanent housing

Public housing waiting lists are usually long, but the length of time varies among areas. Homeless veterans should apply to get on these lists, giving them as many options as possible in time. To contact a local Public Housing Agency (PHA), visit www.hud.gov/offices/pih/pha/contacts/index.cfm, or look in the phone book blue pages under “Local Government,” “Housing Authority.”



*Cabrillo Apartments, U.S. Veterans Initiative
Photo courtesy of Century Housing*

Employment Issues and Resources

The Department of Labor (DOL)'s Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) offers nationwide assistance. The agency's website features a state-by-state employment assistance map— visit www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/map.htm and click on your state to retrieve contact information for your Director for Veterans' Employment and Training (DVET).

DOL funds thousands of trained and certified Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) representatives, who identify employment opportunities and work to help veterans find and keep jobs. These specialists are located in state, municipal and county employment offices nationwide and can be reached via your state's employment service office. See the web address above, or visit www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm for your VETS employment office's contact information.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Offered by DOL-VETS, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program provides grants to service providers across the nation to help homeless veterans reintegrate into the workforce. Many organizations that receive HVRP funds also provide access to transitional housing and supportive services.

The HVRP National Technical Assistance Center – comprised of NCHV and the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University – provide lists of current

grantees. These lists can be accessed at www.nchv.org/employment_assistance.cfm or <http://bbi.syr.edu/nvtac/grantees/index.htm>.

Personal identification

Many homeless veterans do not have the personal identification documents required to obtain employment. The following may be needed:

- ◆ Photo ID – VA eligibility and veteran status confirmation cards are a form of photo identification. The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (1-877-424-3838) can direct you to your local Homeless Veteran Program Coordinator, who can provide more information about obtaining a photo ID. State motor vehicle departments also provide this service for a fee.
- ◆ DD 214 – Veterans are entitled to one free copy of their service and medical records. To submit a request, go to www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/. Additionally, a signed and dated request may be faxed to the National Archives' National Personnel Record Center (NPRC) at 314-801-9195. Requests may also be mailed to the following address: National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132-5100.
- ◆ Birth certificate – Contact the appropriate office within your state's department of health. For complete state-by-state contact information, visit the page "Where to Write for Vital Records" at www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm.

- ◆ Social Security Card – Contact your nearest Social Security office— look in the phone book blue pages under “U.S. Government,” “Social Security Administration,” or call 1-800-772-1213. For more information on replacing a Social Security card, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.

Transportation

Community-based service providers may offer or be aware of transportation services available to homeless veterans. Call 1-877-424-3838 (VA) or 1-800-838-4357 (NCHV) for referrals to local organizations.

Additionally, check the phone book yellow pages under “Homeless” or “Social Service Organizations” for listings of groups that may offer transportation services.

Legal Assistance

A clear legal record can be the foundation upon which homeless veterans secure gainful employment and independent housing. Certain service providers have special arrangements with local court systems to help clients who have restrictive legal histories. The Homeless Court Program, for instance, is a collaboration between the court and homeless service providers in which clients’ participation in program activities is recognized as “payment” for mostly minor offenses.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has strongly encouraged its medical centers to develop working relationships with the court system and local law enforcement. Each center has designated a facility-based Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Specialist, who is responsible for direct outreach, assessment and case management for justice-involved veterans. For a list of contacts, visit VA's VJO Initiative website at www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp.

The following resources can lead homeless veterans to free legal help in their regions:

- ♦ FindLegalHelp.org – Features a state-by-state listing of legal help, including basic legal information, information on the court system, lawyer referrals and directories, and free legal help.
- ♦ LawHelp.org – Helps low- and moderate-income people find free legal aid programs in their communities as well as answers to questions about legal rights. Also features a state-by-state list of legal aid referrals and information on topics including disabilities, military and veterans' affairs, and employment.



- ◆ American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Homelessness and Poverty – Coordinates with national, state and local advocates and organizations to facilitate the exchange of information and resources. For more information, including details on Homeless Courts, go to www.abanet.org/homeless.

Starting a Homeless Veteran Program

The first step in starting a homeless veteran program is to determine the need in your community. This need can be assessed by contacting the Homeless Veteran Program Coordinator at your nearest VA medical center (call 1-877-424-3838); local homeless veteran service providers (www.nchv.org/network.cfm); formerly homeless veterans; and your city, county or state's homeless coalition.

In this preliminary process, you will want to answer the following questions about your community:

- ◆ How many homeless veterans are there?
- ◆ How do these homeless veterans compare to the overall homeless population?
- ◆ What services and resources are available?
- ◆ What services and resources are missing?
- ◆ What are the short-, medium- and long-term needs?

Collaborating with community partners

For homeless veteran service providers, gaining access to services that are already provided by community-based organizations and agencies is critical in containing costs while maximizing program benefits. In order to achieve this result, organizations must engage in collaboration. Collaborative partnerships are based on a strong sense of purpose, embrace the perspectives of all team members, and require trust and shared responsibility.

Successful collaborations can be built via the following approaches:

- ◆ Define your environment – e.g. the overall need, what is and is not being provided, the value you will add, and the value of potential partners.
- ◆ Define a collective mission – Make sure all partners have the same broad objective, to fill the existing gaps in service. Be open to non-traditional community partners that share this goal.
- ◆ Be willing to compromise – Focus on your and your partners' contributions to the objective, not on your differences.
- ◆ Communicate clearly – Allow every party to have a say through both formal and informal communication channels, but have clearly defined decision makers and points of contact.

Other benefits of collaboration include broadened community support; better informed and more

creative, balanced and enduring decisions; improved outreach; and greater access to federal, state and local funding sources.

Working with federal partners

A number of federal grant opportunities are available to eligible homeless veteran service providers. The following are some of the primary federal grant programs:

Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program

Department of Veterans Affairs

The GPD Program is offered annually (as funding permits) to support community-based agencies providing transitional housing or service centers for homeless veterans. Under the “Capital” grant component, VA may fund up to 65% of a project for construction, acquisition or renovation of facilities, or to purchase vans to provide outreach and services to homeless veterans. “Per Diem” grants are available to help offset operational expenses.

For more information, go to www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Department of Labor

The HVRP is a competitive grant program to provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into the workforce. Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations, state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies, as well as for-profit/commercial entities. This is the only

federal program that focuses exclusively on the employment of homeless veterans.

For more information, go to www.dol.gov/vets/grants/hvrp.htm.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

Department of Veterans Affairs

Through this program, VA award grants to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that provide supportive services to very low-income veterans and their families residing in or transitioning to permanent housing.

For more information, go to www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.

HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program

Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs

Designed to address the needs of chronically homeless veterans, the HUD-VASH Program provides long-term case management, supportive services and permanent housing vouchers to eligible veterans. Program participants (identified by VA) rent privately owned housing and generally contribute no more than 30 percent of their income toward rent. In 2012, HUD will have awarded nearly 48,000 vouchers to public housing agencies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to date.

For more information, go to www.va.gov/homeless/hud-vash.asp.

Funding notifications

To sign up for federal grant notifications and updates, visit www.grants.gov. Additionally, NCHV newsletters feature both private and federal grant opportunities for service providers.

Legion Assistance and Preventive Efforts

The American Legion supports the efforts of public and private sector agencies and organizations that aid homeless veterans and their families. The Legion coordinates a Homeless Veterans Task Force among its departments to augment homeless service providers and fill in the gaps where no assistance programs are available. All Legion departments have a Task Force chairperson and an Employment chairperson. The two chairpersons organize activities with posts in their departments to aid homeless and at-risk veterans and their families.

Visit www.legion.org/homeless or call National Headquarters at 1-800-433-3318 for more information and resources.

Additional assistance and involvement

- ◆ Department Service Officers provide assistance to veterans seeking disability claims and other benefits within VA— visit www.legion.org/departementoicers.

- ◆ Military.com and RecruitMilitary partner with The American Legion to sponsor approximately 100 career fairs each year. The Legion also partners with Avue Technologies, which assists veterans with obtaining state and federal employment— see www.warfighterhome.us.
- ◆ The Legion sponsors two Small Business Development Workshops each year at its Washington and National Conventions. These workshops provide veterans who are establishing and/or seeking to expand their small businesses with relevant information and tools to successfully interact and contract with the federal government.
- ◆ The annual American Legion Golf Classic at Andrews Air Force Base allows wounded warriors from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) to play golf (free of charge) while networking with federal officials, employers and veteran business owners concerning employment and business opportunities.
- ◆ National Employer Awards are presented to employers across the country who have established outstanding records in the employment and retention of veterans, workers with disabilities and older workers. Exceptional members of state employment security agencies also receive awards from The American Legion.
- ◆ Through a new initiative with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Legion hosts job fairs at Legion Posts across the country, particularly in rural areas.

Services from The Legion Auxiliary

The American Legion Auxiliary has decades of experience working with service providers and linking those in the military community who are in need with assistance. The vision of The Auxiliary is to support The American Legion while becoming the premier service organization and foundation of every community, providing support for veterans, service members, and their families by fostering an atmosphere of fellowship, patriotism, peace, and security.

Similar to The American Legion's structure, The Auxiliary consists of a department for each state and the District of Columbia. On the local level, The Auxiliary boasts more than 9,500 U.S. "units." These units can be chartered just about anywhere there are people with the passion and desire to become part of the organization's mission. American Legion Auxiliary foreign units are located in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

For more information, including state department contacts, go to www.legion-aux.org.



The following are among the ways in which The American Legion Auxiliary serves homeless veterans and their families:

- ◆ Auxiliary departments and units provide grant assistance to homeless and at-risk women veterans. These grants support temporary housing, payment of security deposits and utility bills, and gift cards for food and clothing for families.
- ◆ Auxiliary units raise money for VA Healthcare for Homeless Veterans facilities by hosting events such as dinners and bake sales.
- ◆ Money and in-kind services are provided to support Stand Downs with The American Legion family.
- ◆ “Buddy Baskets” are prepared for homeless veterans moving into permanent housing. These baskets contain basic household items, including cleaning supplies, bathroom tissue, kitchenware, and light bulbs.
- ◆ Backpacks are filled with basic daily needs and delivered to homeless veterans in local shelters.
- ◆ Auxiliary units hand out small bags with basic items to homeless veterans. These basic items include washcloths, socks, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, and toothpaste.
- ◆ The American Legion Auxiliary helps The American Legion renovate homes and supply furnishings for homeless veterans.

Additional Information

Veterans Homelessness Prevention Demonstration

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in partnership with the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Labor (DOL), have implemented the Veterans Homelessness Prevention Demonstration (VHPD).

Through HUD housing assistance, VA case management services, and DOL employment counseling, this three-agency partnership provides combined services for veterans who are at a high risk of becoming homeless.

The demonstration project is in effect in five communities, selected strategically due to their proximity to a military base, concentration of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, and availability of resources.

VHPD sites

- ◆ Austin, Texas
- ◆ Seattle/Tacoma, Washington
- ◆ Utica/Watertown, New York
- ◆ Tampa, Florida
- ◆ San Diego, California

Local contact information for all five sites is available at www.hudhre.info/VeteransAssistance.

Project CHALENG

Since 1993, VA has collaborated with local communities across the United States on Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans.

The project aims to bring together homeless and formerly homeless veterans (referred to in the report as “consumers”), service providers, advocates, local officials, and other concerned citizens to identify the needs of homeless veterans and then work to meet those needs through planning and cooperative action.

Project CHALENG is the only comprehensive national effort to poll VA staff, community providers, and consumers about the needs of homeless veterans. The results help VA identify specific interventions needed to effectively assist homeless veterans.

Local CHALENG meetings, where attendees complete the Participant or Consumer Survey, represent important opportunities for VA and public and private agency representatives to meet, network, and develop meaningful partnerships to better serve homeless veterans.

For more information and to download the most recent CHALENG report, go to www.va.gov/homeless/challeng.asp.

The need for comprehensive federal and local supportive, veteran-specific programs for homeless veterans is well-documented.

These men and women answered the call to serve their country in a way increasingly few Americans ever will.

They deserve nothing less than the full measure of our support in their greatest hour of need.

