

History of Continuums of Care

In 1987, Congress passed the McKinney Act (later McKinney-Vento Act), which established the first federal community-homelessness relief program. Homeless-serving agencies and programs could apply for funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that was specifically allocated for homeless populations including families, unaccompanied youth ages 14 to 24, and military veterans.

Starting in 1995, the structure of those grant awards changed. New language in the McKinney-Vento Act required HUD to award funding to entire communities that submitted comprehensive plans to address homelessness collectively. These collective entities are called HUD Continuums of Care (CoCs). They are a way for HUD to streamline and manage the more than 7,000 homeless projects that it funds every year at more than \$2 billion.

Each HUD CoC receives a different level of funding, which is dictated in part by Point in Time (PIT) counts. PIT counts are typically biennial events intended to measure a community's homeless population through a one-night volunteer canvassing operation in late January. Volunteers literally walk the city all night and perform a head count and, when possible, conduct interviews with unhoused individuals. This is one important baseline measurement for the total homeless population of a given city, limited though it may be. Other measurements may include shelter records, social services data, or local/community counts beyond HUD requirements.



CoCs and Homeless Veteran Services

HUD defines CoCs as “multi-year strategic planning and networking tool[s] for the homeless services system. Well-established continuums conduct multi-year, strategic planning for homeless programs and services that are well integrated with planning for mainstream services.” CoCs serve four main goals:

1. Planning homeless assistance according to a long-term strategic plan;
2. Coordinating homeless assistance through Coordinated Entry software that connects the intake data and processes of multiple local systems;
3. Collecting and reporting non-individualized data on their services and population through a qualified Homeless Management Information System (HMIS); and
4. Applying for funding through the CoC application.

A federal homeless CoC should include multiple agencies and providers working together to address homeless people's needs from initial emergency outreach through their eventual attainment of independent, stable housing. CoCs must incorporate four distinct components of comprehensive homeless services for veterans:

1. **Outreach, intake, and assessment** in order to identify service and housing needs and provide a link to the appropriate level of both;
2. **Emergency shelter** to provide an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the streets, especially for homeless families with children;
3. **Transitional housing with supportive services** to allow for the development of skills that will be needed once individuals and families are permanently housed; and
4. **Permanent supportive housing** to provide individuals and families with an affordable place to live with services if needed.

For veterans and the agencies serving them, a CoC allows for collaboration and data-sharing between and among the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), mental and physical health, employment, housing, and adult educational systems. A CoC also guarantees an emphasis on data collection to assess program effectiveness.

Connecting with Your CoC

If you or your program are looking to contact or participate in your local CoC, HUD has made it easy:

1. The [Grantee Contact Information](#) page lists every existing HUD CoC and the points of contact for each.
2. The [Program Eligibility Requirements](#) page lists detailed information on what CoC grantees need to provide to receive a grant.
3. Additional information on laws, funding appropriations, and more is available at [HUD's CoC homepage](#).
4. The [National Coalition for Homeless Veterans](#) [PDF] offers the following advice for becoming involved in your CoC:

- Contact the local HUD office for information about your local or regional CoC. The Director of the Office of Community Development and Planning administers the CoC process. Find out who the lead agencies are and contact those agencies for CoC meeting dates and locations.
- Attend monthly or bi-monthly CoC meetings to ensure homeless veterans have a voice in the planning process and their needs are addressed. Join a committee or participate in data collection.
- Networking within your community should be an organizational priority. Seek out partnerships and collaborate with local veteran and non-veteran organizations to increase capacity and the range of services available to homeless veterans.
- Learn about the type of services that are most likely to receive funding priority and develop an understanding of how veterans' issues fit into the need/service gaps identified in your community.
- Develop a strong base knowledge and keep current statistics about homeless veteran numbers and needs.
- Take a leadership role among homeless service providers. Become an activist for homeless veteran issues and provide outreach and education to your local community about serving the needs of homeless veterans.

Resources

The following federal departments, interagency initiatives, and programs provide a range of valuable resources that can assist homeless veteran services, especially in the context of a federal CoC.

CoC-specific resources

- HUD's [Continuum of Care 101](#): Helpful overview for starting and managing CoCs
- USICH's [CoC Strategies for Success](#): USICH webinar on responding to the 2018 CoC NOFA
- [HUD Point-In-Time homeless veterans estimates](#): Overall and state-specific publications available

Other resources for homeless veterans

- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\) Program](#): Through public housing authorities, HUD provides rental assistance vouchers for privately owned housing to veterans who are eligible for VA healthcare services and are experiencing homelessness.
- SAMHSA's [Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families TA Center](#): The SMVF TA Center works with states and territories to strengthen their behavioral health systems for service members, veterans, and their families.
- VA's [Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program](#): Annual grants from the VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program for community agencies that provide services for homeless Veterans. These funds promote the development and provision of supportive housing and/or supportive services in order to help homeless Veterans achieve stable housing, job and earning skills, and greater self-determination.
- VA's [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\) program](#): This program provides services to very low-income veteran families to allow them to transition to (or stay in) permanent housing. Funds are granted to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that serve this population and helps them achieve stability.